



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI
TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL ECCLESIASTIC ACADEMY ****

Monday, 22 February 1971

It is a real joy for us, an enjoyable interlude, as it were, in our work, to receive you today and spend some time in your midst, beloved Pupils of the Pontifical Ecclesiastic Academy. We are happy to see you in such a numerous group, thirty-seven, as we well know, some of whom are already about to leave the beloved centre of their studios and this Alma City, where they have received their scientific and diplomatic preparation, to take up their postings where they will begin their new work. And we are particularly happy to see here, together with you, the new President, Archbishop Felice Pirozzi, to whom we extend our greetings and our best wishes. Once more we tell, him of the hope we place in him, in his gifts as a zealous and experienced servant of the Church, in his culture and doctrine, in his knowledge and experience of men and things, for the high task to which he has been called, that of guiding wisely the formation of the pupils with a view to their future responsibilities.

Your presence brings back to our mind – and it could not be otherwise – the personal memory of our stay at the Academy, during our youth, from November 1921 to 1926. It is a grateful, loving memory, on account of all the benefits we derived from meeting such worthy persons. They gave us guidance, an example and comfort along the new path on which we had started with a certain hesitancy, characteristic of the youthful soul to whom Providence shows a way hitherto unexpected, unforeseen, certainly not desired. Among them, let us recall the venerable President, Most Rev. Giovanni Zonghi, the professors, the colleagues, so kind and dear, particularly the late Most Rev. Mariana Rampolla del Tindaro, Antonio Riberi, later Nuncio and Cardinal, Carlo Emanuele Toraldo, and others, to whom we owe so much.

As we said on the occasion of our visit to the renovated Academy, on 17 January 1965, it was for us a providently hospitable house... a family of warmhearted friendships... a centre of youthful conversations, but not critical, ambitious or caustic, about the persons and events of those distant

days. These conversations were extremely useful as a training in vigilance, judgment, love for things of the time, an initiation into observation of real life, thoughtful and conscious classification of events and of their protagonists, and into the desire and the resolution to use our forces in militant service of the kingdom of God. It was a centre of ideas, discussions, above all readings and meditations, in which it seemed to us . that our vocation became deeper, our modest culture was completed, and, there matured in us, in this preparatory period so rich in thought, and aspirations, the illuminating and progressive awareness, which was never to abandon us, of what the Church is, in herself, for the world and for each of us" (Paolo VI e la Pont. Accademia Ecclesiastica, Vatican Polyglot Press, 1965, pp. 13-1

And, finally, the Academy was a training-ground for study, even though, unfortunately, the curriculum was not very demanding at that time. But these studies contributed their share to giving what was necessary for the complete preparation of the pupils at that time.

The memory of our personal experience allows us, therefore, to see clearly, and to ask ourself together with you, what it means for a pupil to belong to the Ecclesiastic Academy, what value it has; what responsibility it entails, in order to have a clear vision of the duty to be carried out.

And in the first place we must ask ourselves what the Academy gives you today, in the historic moment in which you live, and which the Church and humanity are traversing, at a time full of progress, changes, new problems, expectations and hopes. It implies an act of confidence, by calling you to be the close collaborators. of the Holy See in the work it accomplishes in the world. This work is the encouragement of the Bishops and of the ecclesial communities entrusted to them, the defence of religious values, the safeguarding of man and of his intangible rights, the promotion of real peace. This is the "diplomacy" that the Church carries on in the world today. This work, it must be said, is not well-known since it sometimes arouses objections even among members of the clergy and the laity, while it is indispensable and precious on account of the opportunities it offers to safeguard and carry out the mission of the Church in the midst of even the most alien and distant situations.

For the purposes of this service, the Academy puts the most suitable instruments at your disposal: a curriculum of careful, organic studies, wide and necessary information on the problems of the universal government of the Church, an environment deeply imbued with solid piety and authentic ecclesial life. In this connection we wish to congratulate your President because, following the line traced by his predecessors, he provides the opportunity in the Academy for a life of study and prayer, by means of particular specialized courses, and initiatives of spirituality, which cannot but leave their mark on your personality, now in course of formation. All these aids, which are offered to you in addition to the normal courses, are intended, in fact, to open up before you wider and wider horizons of work and commitment for the present-day necessities of the Church, in such a way that you can abandon yourselves with glowing confidence to Providence, which indicated to you, on the decision of the Superiors, that this was the way for you.

But to be called to such a responsibility requires a generous response: and this is what the Academy asks of you. On the occasion of our visit, which we have already mentioned, we recommended the pupils "to have a clear concept of the mission awaiting them, to pay attention to what is essential in it, the kingdom of God, the service of the Church: to become immune right now, and with pride, against external trappings and appearances, to adopt clear, strong, personal, profound, and authentically Christian thoughts, virtues, and resolutions, in order to be able to make their activity, whatever is asked of them by the most severe ecclesiastical discipline, a ministry, a noble offering of charity, a living heartfelt testimony, to Christ our Lord" (Op. cit. pp. 19-20)

If the "diplomatic- service is, particularly today, solely for the purposes outlined above, that is, complete dedication to the mission of salvation carried out by the Church on behalf of Christ and on his authority, what the Academy asks of you is precisely to "understand the Church". This was the purpose of Vatican Council II, and this is the justification of the impetus of our post-conciliar period. To understand the Church in her salvific reality, in her mysterious sacrality, in the richness of the life that she dispenses, in her purpose, which is the complete salvation of man; to understand her in her longing to reach all men to begin a frank and sincere dialogue with them, to set before them their responsibilities and their grandeur as sons of God, redeemed by Christ, brothers among brothers in his Mystical Body; to understand her in her endeavour to establish Christ's peace, which is the only real, lasting peace, in the world.

For this reason there is demanded of you the specific preparation you are receiving. But, in addition, you use this period intensively for your moral and spiritual formation, to gain intimacy with Christ, to establish a living contact with Him which, far from slackening, will become more and more deep and consolidated. We address to you priests the words of the great St. Ambrose to his priests: "Cur non illa tempora; quibus ab Ecclesia vacas, lectioni impendas? Cur non Christum revisas, Christum alloquaris, Christum audias? Illum alloquimur cum oremus; illum audimus cum divina legimus oracula" (De Off. min. 1, 20, 88; P.L. 16, 50). This time of preparation gives you these oases of peace, where the spirit eager to know Christ better can find nourishment for its intimate striving towards holiness and the giving of one's self to souls. Take advantage of them, especially to pray and to meditate on the Scriptures, according to the exhortation of the Council (Dei Verbum, n 25), so that you will always have the spiritual strength necessary to carry out the mission that the Church entrusts to you, whatever it may be.

[...] We follow you with particular care in this important period, as we will follow you in your first steps in the service of the Holy See; we pray for you, that the Lord may, lavishly bestow his help on you and find in you the soil properly prepared to yield all his fruit. And with these fatherly wishes, we bless you all.

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