



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS GATHERED FOR THE 61st GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (CEI)**

Synod Hall

Thursday, 27 May 2010

Dear and Venerated Brothers,

In the Gospel proclaimed last Sunday, the Solemnity of Pentecost, Jesus promised: "The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14: 26). The Holy Spirit guides the Church through the world and through the course of history. Thanks to this gift of the Risen Christ, the Lord remains with us as events pass by; it is through the Spirit that we can recognise in Christ the meaning of human events. The Holy Spirit gives us the Church, communion and the community constantly convened, renewed, and sent forwards towards the accomplishment of the Kingdom of God. The origin and fundamental reason for your presence here and for my being once more, with joy, among you on the occasion of this annual appointment, lies in ecclesiastical communion. In this perspective I exhort you to consider the themes of your work, in which you are called upon to reflect: on the life and renewal of the pastoral activity of the Church in Italy. I am grateful to Cardinal Bagnasco for the strong and courteous words he has addressed to me, acting as the interpreter of your feelings: the Pope knows that he can always count on the Italian Bishops. Through you I greet the diocesan communities entrusted to your care, while I extend my thoughts and my spiritual closeness to all the people of Italy.

Sustained by the Spirit, and following the path indicated by the [Second Vatican Council](#), and in particular the pastoral orientations of the decade which has just come to an end, you have chosen to take *education* as your principal theme for the next ten years. This time scale is appropriate for the radical and broad nature of the educational question. It seems to me that it is necessary to go to the deepest roots of this emergency in order to find the appropriate answers to this challenge. I see two above all. One essential root I think consists in a false concept of man's autonomy: man

should develop on his own, without interference from others, who could assist his self-development but should not enter into this development. In reality, the essential fact is that the human person becomes himself only with the other. The "I" becomes itself only from the "thou" and from the "you". It is created for dialogue, for synchronic and diachronic communion. It is only the encounter with the "you" and with the "we" that the "I" opens to itself. Thus, the so-called antiauthoritarian education is not education but the rejection of education; thus what we are bound to impart to others is not imparted, meaning this "you" and "we" in which the "I" opens to itself. Therefore a first point seems to me to be this: to overcome this false idea of man's autonomy as a complete "I" in himself, whereas the "I" is fulfilled in the encounter with the "you" and "we".

I see the other root of the educational emergency in scepticism and relativism or, in simpler, clearer words, the exclusion of the two sources that orient the human journey. The first source would be nature according to Revelation. But today Nature is considered as a purely mechanical thing, which therefore does not contain any moral imperative in itself, any value orientation: it is purely a mechanical thing and orientation comes from being itself. Revelation is considered either as a moment in historical development, therefore relative like all historical and cultural development, or it is said perhaps there is Revelation but it does not contain content, only motivations. And if these two sources are silent, Nature and Revelation then, the third source, history, no longer speaks, because history too becomes only a conglomeration of occasional, arbitrary cultural decisions which have no value for the present nor for the future. It is fundamental to recover a true concept of Nature as the Creation of God that speaks to us; the Creator, through the book of Creation speaks to us and shows us the true values. And thus finding Revelation: recognizing that the book of Creation, in which God gives us the fundamental orientation, is deciphered in Revelation, is applied and becomes itself in cultural and religious history, not without mistakes, but in a substantially valid manner, to be further developed and purified anew. Thus, in this "concert" so to speak between Creation deciphered in Revelation, concretized in cultural history that moves ever forward and in which we always increasingly find the language of God, the indications for education also open, that are not an imposition but are really openness to the "I" to the "you", to the "we" and to the "You" of God.

Therefore the difficulties are great: to rediscover the sources, the language of the origins. While being aware of the weight of these difficulties, we must not give way to resignation and lack of confidence. It has never been easy to educate, but we must not surrender: we should fall short of the mandate that the Lord himself gave us, calling us to tend his flock with love. Let us rather reawaken in our communities that passion for teaching, which is a passion for the "I" for the "you", for the "we", for God, that is not fulfilled in didactics, in a collection of techniques and not even in the transmission of dry principles. Education means forming the new generations, so that they may know how to relate to the world, strong in a meaningful memory, that is not only occasional, but nurtured by the language of God that we find in Nature and in Revelation, in a shared interior patrimony, in that real knowledge which recognizes the transcendent purpose of life, and at the same time directs the thoughts, the affections and the judgement.

The thirst that young people carry in their hearts is a desire for meaning and authentic human relationships, that will help them not to feel alone before the challenges of life. It is a desire for a future rendered less uncertain by a sure and trustworthy companionship that stands at the side of each person with delicacy and respect, offering strong values from which to set out towards goals which are high, but not impossible to achieve. Our answer is the proclamation of God, the friend of man, who through Jesus became close to each one of us. The transmission of the faith is an inalienable part of the integral formation of the person, because in Jesus Christ the hope of a fulfilled life is realized: as the [Second Vatican Council](#) teaches, "whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 41). The personal encounter with Jesus is the key to understanding the importance of God in our daily existence, the secret of how to live it in brotherly love, the condition that makes it possible to pick ourselves up after a fall and to move towards constant conversion.

The task of educating, that you have chosen as your priority, makes use of signs and traditions, in which Italy is rich. It has need of trustworthy references: the family above all, with its distinctive and inalienable role; the school, a common horizon beyond membership of any ideological choice; the parish, "the village fountain", a place and an experience which initiates the faith in the fabric of everyday relationships. The quality of our testimony remains a decisive factor in each of these areas, a privileged path for the ecclesiastical mission. The acceptance of the Christian proposal takes place, in fact, through relationships of closeness, loyalty and trust. In a time in which the great tradition of the past risks becoming a dead letter, we are called on to stand beside each young person with an ever new availability, accompanying him/her on the journey of discovery and the personal assimilation of the truth. By doing this we too can discover anew the fundamental realities in a new way.

The wish to promote a renewed season of evangelization does not hide the wounds that have marked the ecclesiastical community, caused by the weakness and sin of some of its members. This humble and painful admission must not make us forget, however, the selfless and passionate service of many believers, the priests above all. The special year dedicated to them was intended to provide an opportunity to encourage an interior renewal, as a condition for a more incisive evangelical and ministerial commitment. At the same time, it helps us to recognize the testimony of holiness of those who, after the example of the Curé d'Ars, devote themselves without stint to educating towards hope, faith and charity. In this light, what is a cause for scandal must be translated in us into a call for "a deep need to relearn penitence, to accept purification, to learn forgiveness on the one hand, but also the need for justice" ([Benedict XVI's interview with journalists during his flight to Portugal](#), 11 May 2010).

Dear Brothers, I encourage you to take upon yourselves without hesitation the commitment to educate. The Holy Spirit will help you never to lose faith in the young, it will help you to go forth to meet them, it will lead you to go to vital spheres, including that of the new communication technologies, which now permeate every expression of culture. This is not a question of adapting

the Gospel to the world, but of drawing from the Gospel that everlasting newness that allows us in every age to discover the most fitting ways of spreading the Word that never dies, vitalizing and serving human life. So, let us once more propound to the young the high and transcendental dimension of life understood as a vocation: called to a consecrated life, whether to priesthood or to marriage, may they know how to respond with generosity to the call of the Lord, because only in this way will each person be able to gather what is essential for him/her. The frontiers of education provide space for a wide convergence of intentions: the formation of the new generations cannot but be close to the heart of all people of goodwill, calling upon the capacity of the whole of society to ensure reliable points of reference for the harmonious development of the individual.

In Italy, too, this period is marked by an uncertainty over values, which is evident from the difficulties many adults find in respecting the commitments they have undertaken: this is a symptom of a cultural and spiritual crisis, as serious as the economic one. It would be illusory I wish to emphasize this to think of confronting the one while ignoring the other. For this reason, while I renew my appeal to those responsible for public affairs and to businessmen to do whatever they can to lighten the effects of the employment crisis, I exhort everyone to reflect on the prerequisites of a good and meaningful life, which are the foundations of that authoritativeness that alone can educate and returns to the true source of the values. The Church, in fact, has the common good at heart, which commits us to share our economic and intellectual, moral and spiritual resources, learning how to face together in a context of reciprocity, the problems and the challenges of the country. This perspective, amply developed in our recent Document on the Church and the South, will be further examined during the next *Italian Catholic Social Week* due to be held in Reggio Calabria in October, where you will be able, together with the most qualified members of the Catholic laity, to draw up an agenda of hope for Italy, so as to understand the requirements of justice and to achieve them politically (cf. Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 28). Your ministry, dear Brothers, and the vivacity of the diocesan communities whom you are called upon to guide, are the best assurance that the Church will continue responsibly to offer her contribution to the social and moral growth of Italy.

Called by grace to be the Pastor of the Universal Church and of the splendid City of Rome, I carry with me constantly your worries and expectations, which in these last days I have deposited, with those of all humanity, at the feet of the Madonna of Fatima. To her goes our prayer: Virgin Mother of God and our most dear Mother, "let your presence cause new blooms to burst forth in the desert of our loneliness, let it cause the sun to shine on our darkness, let it restore calm after the tempest, so that all mankind shall see the salvation of the Lord, who has the name and the Face of Jesus, who is reflected in our hearts, for ever united with yours! Amen!" (*Act of Entrustment*, Fatima, 12 May).

I thank you and Bless you with all my heart.

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