



# The Holy See

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## *ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE RECTORS OF ECCLESIASTICAL COLLEGES IN ROME*

*16 March 1979*

*Beloved Brothers!*

At the conclusion of your annual Meeting you wished to meet the Pope, to receive from him a word of encouragement and guidance. I must tell you that I, too, have desired this meeting in order to get to know you personally, to express to you my deep gratitude for the delicate ministry you carry out as Rectors of the Ecclesiastical Colleges of Rome, and to communicate some reflections to you, simply and sincerely.

1. In these two days of your Meeting you have meditated on, and studied together, the subject: "Our young people in the context of youth today", analyzing it from various aspects.

Let the students of your Colleges

—seminarians or young priests—coming from all the Continents, be formed first and foremost to a deep *sense of the Church*. They must love the Church intensely as "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (cf Eph 5:25). The Second Vatican Council did not fail to inculcate this fundamental element for the priest's formation: "The students should be thoroughly penetrated with a sense of the Mystery of the Church, which this holy Council has set particularly in relief. Their sense of the Church will find expression in a humble and filial attachment to the Vicar of Christ and, after ordination, in their loyal cooperation with the bishop, in harmony with their fellow-priests. By this means they will bear witness to that unity which draws men to Christ." ( *Optatam Totius*, 9). Love for the Church, our Mother, which is manifested concretely in responsible and effective personal action, in order that she may show herself, and always be, "in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). The holier the seminarians and the priests are, the holier the Church will be.

2. Your students come from all over the world to this city of Rome, the geographical centre of Catholicism. They bear within them their temperament, their original culture, their diversified

historical experiences, their desire to prepare themselves, in the diocese of Peter's Successor, for the future ministry. This they will carry out in their dioceses and in their nations, after having enriched themselves with the great religious and cultural values which the City has accumulated in the centuries and continues to offer to souls desirous of truth, goodness and beauty. The experience of the stay in Rome is for a seminarian or for a young priest a real gift of Providence: the prayerful visit to its splendid Basilicas, to the Catacombs, to the tombs of the innumerable Martyrs and Saints, to the monuments of its age-old history, specialized study at the Pontifical Universities, the stay in the Ecclesiastical Colleges: all this has a deep impact on the personality and development of a young man.

I hope that your students will be able, with sound discernment, to collect and treasure all these elements for their own human and priestly formation. But, on the other hand, I also hope that Rome will always be able to offer these spiritual riches and never disappoint the expectations and hopes of these young people, and not distort or destroy the image they had formed of it. May they be able to make their own, and repeat of the diocese of Rome, the words that St Ignatius of Antioch addressed to it with fervent enthusiasm: "The Church beloved and illuminated in the will of him who willed all things that exist, ...worthy of God, veneration and praise" (*Letter to the Romans*, Introd.).

3. I would like, finally, to express the sincere hope that the community life practised in the Ecclesiastical Colleges is not reduced to a mere set of exterior relations, but that it will imitate the spirit that animated that of the Apostles and of the first disciples in the Upper Room: "All these...devoted themselves to prayer, together with...Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14). This is just what the Seminaries, Colleges, and Ecclesiastical Boarding Schools of Rome must be; real Upper Rooms, in which a life of intense personal and community prayer is breathed; a life of reciprocal, active and hard-working charity; a life of mutual spiritual aid to be always faithful to one's vocation and to the sacred commitments assumed before God, the Church, and one's own conscience.

And let the young be able to perceive and discover in you Rectors not only the Superior who must concern himself with the smooth, orderly, and disciplined running of a house, but the serene guide, the father, the brother, the friend, and above all the Priest, who, in his behaviour, irradiates the presence of Christ (cf. Gal 2:20).

With these wishes, I willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to the young people of your Colleges.

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