



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Friday, 18 January 2002

*Your Eminences, Colleagues in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am happy to welcome you at the end of the Plenary Session of your Congregation. In cordially greeting each one of you, in particular, I would like to thank your prefect, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, for expressing your sentiments of respect and devotion.

I have listened to what the Cardinal has said about your work during these intense days of reflection. In this regard, allow me to offer you some of my own reflections and convictions about this meeting. The Church needs and lives on continuing fraternal debates, on their give and take, for it is the only way she can find more efficient and effective ways of collaboration among the offices of the Roman Curia, with the Episcopal Conferences and with the Superiors General of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. However, without an ability to work together, that a common love for the Church makes happen, the Church cannot be her true self: the community of those who are brought together by the closest of bonds, born of the communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To seek unity and collaboration and to be faithful to the convictions that must guide our common witness as Christians at this moment of history is our first obligation of fidelity to the Lord, a fidelity that gives meaning to our lives. An ever more intense communication and collaboration among the congregations, councils, episcopal conferences and superiors general, is therefore the first fruits that we must together envision in our meeting today.

2. With regard to the subjects explained to me by the Cardinal Prefect, I consider it appropriate to take first of all the problem of the reception of doctrinal documents, that your Congregation,

valuable organism at the service of my ministry as universal Pastor, is gradually publishing.

The principal problem you face is the assimilation of their content and collaboration in the dissemination and application of their practical consequences. The same is true of all the offices of the Roman Curia, precisely, united by the same faith and the same desire to announce it and witness to it. Indeed, it is the aim of the whole Church to proclaim Jesus Christ Our Saviour.

However, you then have the problem of transmitting to all the faithful, indeed to men and women everywhere, and to theologians and men and women of the world of culture, the fundamental truths that these documents recall. Here the matter becomes more complicated and needs attention and thought. How much can you blame the difficulties of reception on the dynamic of the mass media? How much does it derive from current historical situations? Or, simply, how much can it be blamed on the difficulty of accepting the demands of the Gospel that can be severe yet have the power to set free? Your plenary assembly has certainly reflected on these ideas for they obviously need time and study.

For my part, I only wish to recall how listening to one another is extremely helpful, so that you can take into account and reflect on the suggestions that may enable the message to reach the greatest possible number of people in its full integrity. Also there is an obvious need for greater involvement of the Episcopal Conferences, of the individual bishops and, through them, of all the preachers of the Gospel, in the work of knowing how to present the more difficult topics of the faith today.

Lastly, there is a problem of life style, of coherent life style that creates an obstacle. The resistance is also a challenge and an invitation to witness with your holiness of life, to the centrality of Christ's love in our lives, to counter other short-lived themes that reduce its persuasive power.

3. Coming now to the theme of the Eucharist and Church, I want to stress the centrality of the Eucharist for the life of the world to which the Lord has sent us as the seed of renewal. If the Church returns to her Eucharistic source, she will recover her authentic nature and strength, and that will relativize the urgent debates over organizational issues while it will highlight consecration to God and fraternal sharing that will enable her to overcome fragmentation and division. Moreover, the powerful presence of the sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist keeps the Mass from being reduced to a gathering for a convivial meal. The Sacrifice stands for ever as a sign of contradiction, and is the place where we can verify the degree of our conformity to the radical message of Christ, in our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters.

Taking a look at the other subject, the study of how we lost sight of the relevance of the natural law, I want to recall, what I said in my Encyclical Letters *Veritatis splendor*, *Evangelium vitae*, and *Fides et ratio*, that with the natural law we are in the presence of a doctrine that belongs to the great patrimony of human wisdom, purified and brought to its fullness by the light of Revelation.

Natural law is the rational creature's participation in the eternal law of God. On the one hand, we depend on the new law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus in order to grasp it, on the other hand, the natural law itself offers a basis for dialogue with persons who come from another cultural orientation or formation in the search for the common good. In a time of great world-wide threat to the welfare of many nations, communities and peoples, especially the weakest, I can only rejoice in the work you have undertaken to rediscover the value of this doctrine that will even be helpful for Christian legislators in the challenges they face as they uphold human dignity and human rights.

4. Finally, I thank you for undertaking as a Congregation, to collaborate in dealing with several serious moral problems, that demand your special competence and knowledge. In facing these problems, over and above indispensable therapeutic procedures, you will need to propose satisfactory methods of education including spiritual and other forms of direction that will result in better formation.

"Duc in altum!" - Put out into the deep!": Jesus said to Peter and his companions on the shore of Galilee. By taking up such subjects, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at the dawn of the new millennium, is "putting out into the deep", namely, setting out on a deep reflection that will enable the whole Church to have a greater impact on the hearts and minds of all the members of the human family, to lead them all back to our single origin, the Father who so loved us that he gave his beloved Only Son, to redeem the world.