



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF POLAND
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 26 November 2005

Dear Brothers in the episcopal ministry,

I am pleased to be able to receive you during your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*.

I listened attentively to your reports on the life of the Church in the Dioceses for which you are responsible. I thank you for your daily efforts as Pastors of the Lord's flock, enlivening with your apostolic authority the pastoral ministry of priests, the fulfilment of the charisms of religious communities and the spiritual development of the lay faithful.

I give thanks to God for every fruit produced by this common journey towards the Father's house, in Christ's footsteps and in the light and power of the Holy Spirit. Your presence here is a sign of the spiritual bond of the Church in Poland with the Apostolic See and with the Successor of St Peter.

I remember with emotion the great prayer with which the Poles accompanied John Paul II throughout his Pontificate and particularly on the days of his passing to the glory of the Lord. I am grateful that I can count on the same prayerful support. It is a gift I deeply appreciate and continuously seek.

During our conversations we touched on many topics. For today, I have chosen from among them the question of Christian education. Indeed, it is one of the most fundamental tasks that comprise a permanent part of the saving mission of the Church and of our episcopal service.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, John Paul II strongly urged the Church on our Continent to devote ever greater attention to the education of young people in the faith (cf. n. 61).

We know that here it is not only a matter of didactics, of perfecting methods of transmitting knowledge, but also has to do with an education based on the direct, personal encounter with the person, on witness - that is, on the authentic transmission of faith, hope and charity and the values that directly derive from these - from one person to another.

Thus, it is an authentic meeting with another person who should first be listened to and understood. John Paul II was a perfect model for us of this encounter with the person.

The faithful and fruitful fulfilment of the mission of education before which the Church stands today requires an adequate evaluation of the situation of the young, who are the object of this mission in our day. In the first place it is necessary to look at their family background, for the family remains the fundamental cradle of the formation of the human person.

I am aware that financial problems, the unemployment indicators that remain high and the anxiety to guarantee material existence affect the way of life of many Polish families. It is impossible to form truly authentic attitudes without taking into account these problems which young people also encounter.

Furthermore, it is essential to see the many positive phenomena that support and help education in the faith. Young people who show a profound sensitivity to the needs of others, especially the poor, the sick, the lonely and the disabled, are very numerous. Thus, they undertake various projects to bring aid to the needy.

There is also a genuine interest in matters of faith and religion, the need to be with others in organized and informal groups, and the strong desire for an experience of God. The participation of so many young Poles in spiritual retreats and in the European Youth Meetings or World Youth Days is proof of this. All these things are a good basis for the pastoral concern of young people's spiritual development.

Education in the faith must first of all consist in developing all that is good in the human being. The development of voluntary service, inspired by the Gospel spirit, is a great opportunity for education. It might be worthwhile creating *Caritas* youth groups in parishes or schools. In the Church's educational initiatives, it would also be appropriate to respond to interest in matters of faith, favouring any initiative that serves to help children and young people to develop the taste for prayer.

Spiritual exercises, particularly those made in total silence, retreat days for different groups and also systematically organized schools of prayer in parishes afford a good opportunity for this, and spiritual retreats at school in the periods of Advent or Lent are a magnificent opportunity. It is also necessary to make every effort to establish centres for spiritual retreats and other places of prayer and recollection, so that without concern for the material cost, they may effectively become

centres of spiritual formation, accessible to all those who seek a more profound contact with God.

Among the various forms of prayer, the Liturgy deserves a special place. In Poland, many young people take an active part in Holy Mass on Sundays. It is necessary to redouble efforts so that the concern of priests for the appropriate celebration of the Liturgy, for the beauty of its words, gestures and music, may increasingly be the legible sign of the saving *Mysterium* that is fulfilled in them.

It is also necessary for youth to be integrated into liturgical action through active participation in the preparation of the Liturgy, through their involvement in Liturgies of the Word, in altar service or in the context of music.

They will then feel that they are part of the mystery that introduces them into the world of God, and at the same time directs them to the world of people attracted by Christ's love.

In the past 30 years, many young people have been formed along these lines in the environment of the activities of the "oasis" movement known as "Light and Life". This movement's spirituality focuses on the encounter with God in Sacred Scripture and in the Eucharist; hence, it is deeply bound to the parish and to liturgical life.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I beg you to back this movement as one that is particularly effective in the work of education in the faith, but without, of course, neglecting the other movements.

I know that during your last *ad limina* visit, John Paul II urged you to ensure that Catholic Action, together with the Catholic Association of Young People, was reborn in Poland. This task has been carried out at the structural level.

You should spare no effort, however, to ensure that Catholic Action and the Catholic Association of Young People have an increasingly transparent and mature programme and work out their own spiritual profile.

The formation of the young generation is a task incumbent on parents, on the Church and on the State. Therefore, with respect for their appropriate autonomy, the Church must collaborate very closely with schools, universities and other lay institutions concerned with the education of youth.

Thanks to changes that occurred in 1989 and all their consequences, this collaboration has acquired new dimensions. The Polish Directory of Catechesis and the Basic Programme for Catechesis have been compiled, and in some centres in Poland programmes and textbooks for teaching religion have been published. Although it is true that this programmatic pluralism can be useful to evangelization and religious education in schools and parishes, it is also worth

considering whether the variety of programmes and textbooks might make it difficult for students to acquire a systematic and orderly religious knowledge.

As for the teaching of religion and catechesis in schools, these subjects cannot be reduced to the dimension of "religionology" or of the sciences of religion, even if that was expected in certain milieus. The teaching of religion at school, carried out by clerical and lay teachers and sustained by the testimony of believing teachers, must keep its authentic evangelical dimension of the transmission and witness of faith.

I would like to express my appreciation to you for having undertaken the task of parish catechesis, which completes the teaching of religion at school. This is usually catechesis for children and young people who are preparing to receive the sacraments of Christian initiation. It must not, however, be limited to these groups. It means, in particular, ensuring that young people who study outside the context of their own parishes participate actively in parish life.

The collaboration of parents and other lay people in the task of education requires personal training and a continuous deepening of religious knowledge, spirituality and the correction of attitudes on the basis of the Gospel and the Magisterium. Therefore, I fervently urge you Bishops to redouble your efforts to organize adult catechesis wherever it is lacking, and to support the contexts that already undertake this type of teaching.

Such catechesis must be based on Scripture and on the Magisterium. In carrying it out, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* or the recently published *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* can prove helpful.

The abundant Magisterium of my venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, may be particularly helpful in the catechesis of adults. In his numerous pilgrimages to Poland he left a rich patrimony of the wisdom that stems from faith, which it seems has not yet been entirely assimilated. In this context, how can we fail to remember his Encyclicals, Exhortations, Letters and the many other Interventions that constitute an inexhaustible source of Christian wisdom?

The increasing number of young people who choose to go to senior high schools that offer diplomas and those who enrol for university studies challenges the Pastors of the Church in Poland to seek ever new forms of university ministry.

After years without freedom, the Church has been able to establish new universities and theological faculties of her own in Poland, most of which are now part of the State university system. Many well-known and expert theologians are employed in the theological faculties. Their research work based on Revelation is the proposal of the truth that God is Love, that the world is his gift, that human beings are not only masters of the created world but are also called to a new world in the Kingdom of God.

I exhort you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, to support ecclesial scientific milieus, to supervise the teaching and development of both clerical and lay personnel and to provide for them on an adequate material basis.

The Church's contribution to the educational process is also expressed in cultural initiatives. At the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, John Paul II said: "Culture is a specific way of man's 'existing' and of 'being'.... Culture is that through which man, as man, becomes more man.... Man, and only man, is the 'protagonist' or 'architect' of culture..., expresses himself in it and finds his own balance in it" (*Address to UNESCO*, Paris, 2 June 1980, nn. 6, 7; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 23 June 1980, p. 9).

Poland inherited from previous generations a rich cultural patrimony based on Christian values. With this patrimony it has joined the European Union. As Poland faces a process of secularization and the abandonment of Christian values which is gaining momentum, it must not lose this patrimony.

On the contrary, the negative attitudes and threats to Christian culture that can also be seen in Poland are an appeal to the Church to make a further effort for a constant evangelization of culture. This means imbuing the categories of thought with the content and values, criteria, evaluations and norms of the human behaviour of the Gospel, in both individual and social dimensions.

Today, the mass media have a special role in the world of culture. It is known that not only do they inform people but they also form the minds of those they address. They can therefore be an invaluable means of evangelization.

People of the Church, especially lay Christians, are called to promote Gospel values in an even greater outreach through the press, radio, television and internet. An important task of the Pastors of the Church, however, is not only concern for the professional training of mass media operators but also for their spiritual, human or ethical formation.

I encourage you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, to establish a positive contact with journalistic circles and with other media operators. It might be appropriate to organize a special sector of pastoral care for them.

I would also like to entrust to your special care, dear Brothers, the question of setting up and using Catholic radio and television broadcasting stations, local, regional and national, in the task of the evangelization of culture. They can carry out valuable work for the new evangelization and the dissemination of the Church's social teaching.

Let them proclaim the truth about God, sensitizing the contemporary world to the patrimony of

Christian values; their principal purpose should be to bring people close to Christ, to build the community of the Church in the spirit of the search for truth, love, justice and peace, with respect for autonomy in the political arena. In every case it will be only right, since they carry out a pastoral activity, that they have open and trusting relations with the Bishops because of their responsibility in this area.

It is impossible not to mention the national, diocesan and parish Catholic press which makes an enormous contribution to spreading the culture of truth, goodness and beauty. Concern for the development of the Catholic press means not only raising it to a higher standard, but also extending the radius of its action. Therefore, those in charge should take care to give it a high profile, worthy of the Catholic cultural tradition of Poland.

At the end of this reflection and as a conclusion, I would like to recall the words of the Second Vatican Council which taught in the Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*: "All Christians - that is, all those who, having been reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, have become a new creature, are called and in fact are children of God - have a right to a Christian education. Such an education not only develops the maturity of the human person... but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized, as they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith.... Accordingly, the Sacred Synod directs the attention of pastors of souls to their very grave obligation to do all in their power to ensure that this Christian education is enjoyed by all the faithful and especially by the young, who are the hope of the Church" (n. 2).

This exhortation is ever timely and is perhaps even more demanding today in the face of new challenges that stem from current social phenomena. I express the hope that the light of the Holy Spirit will accompany you who are present here and all the Polish Bishops in its persevering implementation.

May God's Blessing sustain you and your Dioceses in the work of the formation of human minds and hearts. May God assist you!

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