



The Holy See

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Friday, 3 November 2006

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Professors and Dear Students,

I am pleased to meet with you today. My first greeting goes precisely to you students, whom I see in large numbers in this elegant and austere interior quadrangle, but whom I know are also gathered in various halls and are in contact with us by means of screens and loudspeakers.

Dear young people, I thank you for the sentiments expressed by your representative and by you yourselves. In a certain sense, the University is truly yours. It has existed since St Ignatius founded it for you, for students, long ago in 1551.

All the energy that your Professors and Lecturers expend in teaching and research is for you. The daily efforts and worries of the Rector Magnificent, the Vice-Rectors, the Deans and the Provosts are for you. You are aware of this and I am sure that you are also grateful to them for it.

I then offer a special greeting to Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski. As Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, he is Grand Chancellor of this University and represents the Roman Pontiff in it (cf. *Statuta Universitatis*, art. 6, 2).

For this very reason, my Predecessor Pius XI, of venerable memory, declared the Gregorian University "Pontifical": "*plenissimo iure ac nomine*" (cf. Apostolic Letter *Gregorianam Studiorum*, in AAS 24 [1932], 268).

The actual history of the *Roman College* and of its heir, the Gregorian University, as the Rector said in his tribute to me, forms the basis of these very special Statutes.

I greet Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., who as Superior General of the Society of Jesus is Grand Chancellor of the University and most directly concerned with this work, which I do not hesitate to describe as one of the greatest services that the Society of Jesus carries out for the universal Church.

I greet the benefactors who are present here: the *Freundeskreis der Gregoriana* from Germany, the *Gregorian University Foundation* from New York, the *Fondazione La Gregoriana* of Rome and other groups of benefactors.

Dear friends, I am grateful to you for all that you generously do to support this institution which the Holy See has entrusted and continues to entrust to the Society of Jesus.

I greet the Jesuit Fathers who carry out their teaching here with a praiseworthy spirit of self-denial and austerity of life; with them I greet the other Lecturers and extend my thoughts to the Fathers and Brothers of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

Together with the Gregorian University, they form a prestigious academic *consortium* (cf. Pius XI, "Motu Proprio" *Quod Maxime*, 30 September 1928), since it not only covers teaching but also the patrimony of books of the three libraries, which include incomparable specialized collections.

Lastly, I greet the non-teaching personnel of the University who have wished to make their own voice heard through that of the General Secretary, whom I thank. The non-teaching staff daily carry out a hidden service, but one very important to the mission that the mandate of the Holy See requires of the Gregorian; I offer my cordial encouragement to each one of them.

I am delighted to be in this quadrangle which I have crossed on various occasions. I remember in particular the defence of the thesis of Fr Lohfink during the Council in the presence of many Cardinals and also of humble experts like myself.

I am especially fond of recalling the time in 1972 when, as Professor of Dogmatics and the History of Dogma at the University of Regensburg, I was sent by the then Rector, Fr Hervé Carrier, S.J., to give a course to students of the second cycle specializing in Dogmatic Theology. I gave a course on the Most Holy Eucharist.

With the familiarity of those times, I can tell you, dear Professors and students, that if the effort of study and teaching is to have any meaning in relation to God's Kingdom, it must be sustained by the theological virtues. In fact, the immediate object of the different branches of theological knowledge is God himself, revealed in Jesus Christ, God with a human face.

Even when, as in Canon Law and in Church History, the immediate object is the People of God in its visible, historical dimension, the deeper analysis of the topic urges us once again to contemplation, in the faith, of the mystery of the Risen Christ. It is he, present in his Church, who leads her among the events of the time towards eschatological fullness, a goal to which we have set out sustained by hope.

However, knowing God is not enough. For a true encounter with him one must also love him. Knowledge must become love.

The study of Theology, Canon Law and Church History is not only knowledge of the propositions of the faith in their historical formulation and practical application, but is also always knowledge of them in faith, hope and charity.

The Spirit alone searches the depths of God (cf. I Cor 2: 10); thus, only in listening to the Spirit can one search the depths of the riches, wisdom and knowledge of God (cf. Rom 11: 33).

We listen to the Spirit in prayer, when the heart opens to contemplation of God's mystery which was revealed to us in Jesus Christ the Son, image of the invisible God (cf. Col 1: 15), constituted Head of the Church and Lord of all things (cf. Eph 1: 10; Col 1: 18).

Since its origins as the *Collegium Romanum*, the Gregorian University has been distinguished for the study of philosophy and theology. It would take too long to list the names of the outstanding philosophers and theologians who have followed one another in the Chairs of this academic Centre; we should also add to them those of the famous canon lawyers and Church historians who expended their energies within these prestigious walls.

They all made a substantial contribution to the progress of the branches of knowledge they studied, hence, they offered a precious service to the Apostolic See in the exercise of its doctrinal, disciplinary and pastoral role. With the development of the times, outlooks necessarily change.

Today, one must take into account the confrontation with secular culture in many parts of the world, which not only tends to deny every sign of God's presence in the life of society and of the individual, but, with various means that bewilder and cloud the upright human conscience, is seeking to corrode the human being's capacity and readiness to listen to God.

Moreover, it is impossible to ignore relations with other religions, which will only prove constructive if we avoid all forms of ambiguity, which in a certain way undermine the essential content of Christian faith in Christ, the one Saviour of all mankind (cf. Acts 4: 12), and in the Church, the necessary sacrament of salvation for all humanity (cf. Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, nn. 13-15; nn. 20-22: AAS 92 [2000] 742-765).

Here, I cannot forget the other human sciences which are encouraged at this famous University in the wake of the glorious academic tradition of the Roman College. The great prestige the Roman College acquired in the fields of mathematics, physics and astronomy is well known to all.

It suffices to remember that the "Gregorian" Calendar, so-called because it was desired by my Predecessor, Gregory XIII, and currently in use throughout the world, was compiled in 1582 by Fr Christopher Clavius, a Lecturer at the Roman College.

It suffices also to mention Fr Matteo Ricci, who took to as far as distant China the knowledge he had acquired as a disciple of Fr Clavius, in addition to his witness to the faith.

Today, the above-mentioned disciplines are no longer taught at the Gregorian University, but have been replaced by other human sciences such as psychology, the social sciences and social communications.

Thus, man desires to be more deeply understood, both in his profound personal dimension and his external dimension as a builder of society in justice and peace, and as a communicator of the truth.

For the very reason that these sciences concern the human being, they cannot set aside reference to God. In fact, man, both in his interiority and in his exteriority, cannot be fully understood unless he recognizes that he is open to transcendence.

Deprived of his reference to God, man cannot respond to the fundamental questions that trouble and will always trouble his heart concerning the end of his life, hence, also its meaning. As a result, it is no longer possible to introduce into society those ethical values that alone can guarantee a coexistence worthy of man.

Human destiny without reference to God cannot but be the desolation of anguish, which leads to desperation.

Only in reference to God's Love which is revealed in Jesus Christ can man find the meaning of his existence and live in hope, even if he must face evils that injure his personal existence and the society in which he lives.

Hope ensures that man does not withdraw into a paralyzing and sterile nihilism but opens himself instead to generous commitment within the society where he lives in order to improve it. This is the task that God entrusted to man when he created him in his own image and likeness, a task that fills every human being with the greatest possible dignity, but also with an immense responsibility.

It is in this perspective that you, Professors and Lecturers at the Gregorian, are called to train the

students whom the Church entrusts to you. The integral formation of young people has been one of the traditional apostolates of the Society of Jesus since its origins; this is why the Roman College took on this mission at the outset.

The entrustment to the Society of Jesus in Rome, close to the Apostolic See, of The [Pontifical] German College, The Roman Seminary, The German-Hungarian College, The English College, The Greek College, The Scots College and The Irish College, was intended to ensure the formation of the clergy of those nations where the unity of the faith and communion with the Apostolic See had been broken.

These Colleges still send almost all their students or large numbers of them to the Gregorian University, in continuity with that original mission.

Down through history, many other Colleges have joined those mentioned above, so the task that weighs heavily upon your shoulders, dear Professors and Lecturers, is more demanding than ever!

Appropriately, therefore, after deep reflection, you have drafted a "Declaration of Intentions" which is essential for an institution like yours, since it sums up its nature and its mission.

On this basis you are nearing the conclusion of your revision of the Statutes of the University and of the General Rules, as well as of the Statutes and Rules of the various Faculties, Institutes and Centres.

This will help to define the identity of the Gregorian more clearly and allow for the drafting of academic programmes better suited to the fulfilment of your mission, which is at the same time both easy and difficult.

It is easy because the identity and mission of the Gregorian have been clear since its earliest days, on the basis of the indications reaffirmed by so many Roman Pontiffs, of whom at least 16 were students at this University.

At the same time, it is a difficult mission because it implies constant fidelity to its own history and tradition so as not to lose its historical roots, and openness to contemporary reality to respond creatively, after attentive discernment, to the needs of the Church and the world today.

As a Pontifical Ecclesiastical University, this academic Centre is committed to *sentire in Ecclesia et cum Ecclesia*. It is a commitment born from love for the Church, our Mother and the Bride of Christ. We must love her as Christ himself loved her, assuming the suffering of the world to complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions in our own flesh (cf. Col 1: 24).

In this way, it will be possible to form new generations of priests, Religious and committed lay people. Indeed, it is only right to ask ourselves what type of formation we wish to impart to our students, whether priest, Religious or lay person.

Dear Professors and Lecturers, it is of course your intention to form priests who are learned but at the same time prepared to spend their lives serving all those whom the Lord entrusts to their ministry with an undivided heart, in humility and in austerity of life.

Thus, you intend to offer a solid intellectual training to men and women religious, so that they will be able to joyfully live the consecration God has given to them and to offer themselves as an eschatological sign of that future life to which we are all called.

Likewise, you wish to prepare competent lay men and women who will be able to carry out services and offices in the Church, and first and foremost, to be leaven of the Kingdom of God in the temporal sphere.

In this perspective, this very year, the University has initiated an interdisciplinary programme to train lay people to live their specifically ecclesial vocation of ethical commitment in the public arena.

However, formation is also your responsibility, dear students.

There is no doubt that studying demands constant asceticism and self-denial, but it is precisely on this path that the person is trained in self-denial and the sense of duty.

In fact, what you learn today is what you will communicate tomorrow, when the sacred ministry or other services and offices for the benefit of the community will have been entrusted to you by the Church. What in all circumstances will give joy to your hearts will be the knowledge that you have always fostered upright intentions, thanks to which one may be certain of having sought and done the will of God alone. Obviously, all these things require a purification of the heart and discernment.

Dear sons of St Ignatius, once again the Pope entrusts to you this University, such an important institution for the universal Church and for so many particular Churches. It has always been a priority among the priorities of the apostolates of the Society of Jesus. It was in the university environment of Paris that St Ignatius of Loyola and his first companions developed the ardent desire to help souls by loving and serving God in all things, for his greater glory.

Impelled by the inner promptings of the Spirit, St Ignatius came to Rome, centre of Christianity, the See of the Successor of Peter, to found the *Collegium Romanum* here, the first University of the Society of Jesus.

Today, the Gregorian University is the university environment in which, even after 456 years, the desire of St Ignatius and his first companions to help souls to love and serve God in all things for his greater glory is being fulfilled.

I would say that here, within these walls, is achieved what Pope Julius III said on 21 July 1550 established in the *"formula Istituti"*, establishing that every member of the Society of Jesus was bound to *"sub crucis vexillo Deo militare, et soli Domino ac Ecclesiae Ipsius sponsae, sub Romano Pontifice, Christi in terris Vicario, servire"*, committing himself *"potissimum... ad fidei defensionem et propagationem, et profectum animarum in vita et doctrina christiana, per publicas praedicationes, lectiones et aliud quodcumque verbi Dei ministerium..."* (Apostolic Letter *Exposcit Debitum*, n. 1).

This charismatic specificity of the Society of Jesus, expressed institutionally in the fourth vow of total availability to the Roman Pontiff in anything he may see fit to command *"ad profectum animarum et fidei propagationem"* (*ibid.*, n. 3), is also evident in the fact that the Superior General of the Company of Jesus summons from across the world the Jesuits best suited to carrying out the task of teaching at this University.

Knowing that this might involve the sacrifice of other works and services to further the aims the Society proposes to achieve, the Church is deeply grateful to it and desires the Gregorian to preserve the Ignatian spirit that enlivens it, expressed in its pedagogical method and curriculum.

Dear friends, with fatherly affection, I entrust all of you who are the living stones of the Gregorian University - Professors and Lecturers, students, non-teaching staff, benefactors and friends - to the intercession of St Ignatius of Loyola, St Robert Bellarmine and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Society of Jesus, who is referred to in the University's coat of arms with the title: *Sedes Sapientiae*.

With these sentiments I impart the Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of an abundance of heavenly favours.

© Copyright 2006 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana