

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE SECOND WORLD CONGRESS ON ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND NEW
COMMUNITIES

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

While we look forward to the Meeting with the members of more than 100 Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, scheduled for Saturday, 3 June, in St Peter's Square, I am pleased to offer you, the representatives of all these ecclesial associations gathered at Rocca di Papa for your World Congress, a warm greeting with the Apostle's words: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom 15: 13).

The memory of the previous World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, held in Rome from 26 to 29 May 1998, is still vivid in my mind and in my heart. In my capacity as the then-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith I was asked to speak at it, with a lecture on the Theological locus of Ecclesial Movements.

That Congress culminated in the memorable Meeting with beloved Pope John Paul II on 30 May 1998 in St Peter's Square, during which my Predecessor expressed his approval of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, which he described as "signs of hope" for the good of the Church and humanity.

Today, aware of the ground covered since then on the path marked out by the pastoral concern, affection and teachings of John Paul II, I would like to congratulate the Pontifical Council for the Laity in the persons of Archbishop Stanisław Ryśko, President, Bishop Josef Clemens, Secretary, and their coworkers, for the important and worthwhile initiative of this World Congress.

Its theme: "The beauty of being Christian and the joy of communicating it", is inspired by something I said in the Homily inaugurating my Petrine Ministry. This theme is an invitation to reflect on what the essential features of the Christian event are: in fact, we encounter in it the One who in flesh and blood visibly and historically brought to earth the splendour of God's glory.

The words of Psalm 45[44]: 2 apply to him: "You are the fairest of the sons of men". And paradoxically, the Prophet's words also refer to him: "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Is 53: 2).

In Christ the beauty of truth and the beauty of love converge; but love, as people know, also calls for the willingness to suffer, a willingness which for those who love one another can even extend to the sacrifice of life (cf. Jn 15: 13)! Christ, who is "the beauty of every beauty", as St Bonaventure used to say (Sermones Dominicales, 1: 7), is made present in the hearts of men and women and attracts them to their vocation which is love. It is thanks to this extraordinary magnetic force that reason is drawn from its torpor and opened to the Mystery. Thus, the supreme beauty of God's merciful love is revealed and at the same time, the beauty of the human being who, created in the image of God, is regenerated by grace and destined to eternal glory.

Down the ages Christianity has been communicated and disseminated thanks to the newness of life of persons and communities capable of bearing an incisive witness of love, unity and joy.

This force itself has set a vast number of people in "motion", from generation to generation. Was it not perhaps the beauty born from faith on the saints' faces that spurred so many men and women to follow in their footsteps?

Basically, this also applies to you: through the founders and initiators of your Movements and Communities you have glimpsed the Face of Christ shining with special brightness and set out on your way.

Christ still continues today to make resound in the hearts of so many that "come, follow me" which can decide their destiny. This normally happens through the witness of those who have had a personal experience of Christ's presence. On the faces and in the words of these "new creatures", his light becomes visible and his invitation audible.

I therefore say to you, dear friends of the Movements: act so as to ensure that they are always schools of communion, groups journeying on in which one learns to live in the truth and love that Christ revealed and communicated to us through the witness of the Apostles, in the heart of the great family of his disciples.

May Jesus' exhortation ceaselessly re-echo in your hearts: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5: 16). Bring Christ's light to all the social and cultural milieus in which you live. Missionary zeal is proof of a radical experience of ever renewed fidelity to one's charism that surpasses any kind of weary or selfish withdrawal.

Dispel the darkness of a world overwhelmed by the contradictory messages of ideologies! There is no valid beauty if there is not a truth to recognize and follow, if love gives way to transitory sentiment, if happiness becomes an elusive mirage or if freedom degenerates into instinct.

How much evil the mania for power, possession and pleasure can spawn in the lives of people and nations! Take the witness of the freedom with which Christ set us free (cf. Gal 5: 1) to this troubled world.

The extraordinary fusion between love of God and love of neighbour makes life beautiful and causes the desert in which we often find ourselves living to blossom anew. Where love is expressed as a passion for the life and destiny of others, where love shines forth in affection and in work and becomes a force for the construction of a more just social order, there the civilization is built that can withstand the advance of barbarity.

Become builders of a better world according to the *ordo amoris* in which the beauty of human life is expressed.

Today, the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities are a luminous sign of the beauty of Christ and of the Church, his Bride. You belong to the living structure of the Church. She thanks you for your missionary commitment, for the formative action on behalf of Christian families that you are increasingly developing and for the promotion of vocations to the ministerial priesthood and consecrated life which you nurture among your members.

She is also grateful to you for your readiness not only to accept the active directives of the Successor of Peter, but also of the Bishops of the various local Churches who, with the Pope, are custodians of truth and charity in unity. I trust in your prompt obedience.

Over and above the affirmation of the right to life itself, the edification of the Body of Christ among others must always prevail with indisputable priority.

Movements must approach each problem with sentiments of deep communion, in a spirit of loyalty to their legitimate Pastors.

May you be sustained by participating in the prayer of the Church, whose liturgy is the most exalted expression of the beauty of God's glory, and in a certain way a glimpse of Heaven upon the earth.

I entrust you to the intercession of the One whom we invoke as the *Tota pulchra*, the "All Fair", an ideal of beauty that artists have always sought to reproduce in their works, the "Woman clothed with the sun" (Rv 12: 1) in whom human beauty encounters the beauty of God.

With these sentiments, I extend a special Apostolic Blessing to you all as a pledge of my constant affection.

From the Vatican, 22 May 2006

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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