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# VATICAN - "The Church's mission and our concern as Bishops must be for each and all: I think this should be remembered particularly in this 50th anniversary year of the Encyclical Fidei donum of Pius XII" : Benedict XVI addresses general assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference CEI

Vatican City (Fides Service) - In his address to the participants at the 57th general assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference at midday on 24 May in the Synod Hall in the Vatican the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI told the Bishops that their ad Limina visit to him over recent months "was of great comfort and an experience of joy." And he continued: "These visits with you confirmed by certainty that in Italy the faith is alive and deeply rooted and the Church is a reality at the level of the people, very close to individuals and families. Undoubtedly there exist different situations in this country so rich in history also religious history and marked by many legacies as well as many different conditions of life, work and income"

Among present difficulties the Pope mentioned "the burden of a culture based on moral relativism, poor in certainties and rich instead in claims not rarely unjustified", while it appears necessary to "fortify Christian formation with more substantial catechesis" and "to put God always at the centre of the life of our communities giving priority to prayer, personal friendship with Jesus and the call to holiness". Pope Benedict XVI underlined the need to pay special attention to vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, to ongoing formation and the conditions of living and operating of priests, often scarce, especially in certain regions, which creates serious difficulties for pastoral care. The Pope then mentioned the recent Church Meeting in Verona: "It is most important that the same hope in the Risen Christ, spirit of communion and readiness for missionary witness which animated and sustained the preparation and then the celebration of the Meeting, may continue to nourish the life and the multiform activity of the Church in Italy".

Referring to the principal theme of the meeting - "Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world: the Church on mission ad gentes and at home" - Benedict XVI said "it is always a question of announcing Christ and bearing witness to him whether to peoples opening to the faith for the first time or to the children of those peoples who come to live and work in Italy, or to our own people who may have drifted away from the faith and in any case is pressured by the secularised tendency which wants to dominate society and culture in this country and all over Europe. The Church's mission and our concern as Bishops must be for each and all: I think this should be remembered particularly in this 50th anniversary year of the Encyclical Fidei donum of Pius XII. I am happy that as the basis of missionary commitment you wished to lay the fundamental truth that Jesus Christ is the only saviour of the world: in fact from the beginning the certainty of this truth has always given decisive impulse to Christian missionary activity." Today it is particularly necessary to have esteem and respect for other religions and cultures however "this cannot lessen awareness of the originality, fullness and uniqueness of the revelation of the true God given definitively in Christ, nor can it weaken or lessen the Church's missionary vocation. The relativistic cultural climate which surrounds us today makes it increasingly important and urgent to help the whole Church mature in the certainty that Christ, God with the human face, is truly the one and only Saviour ".

Benedict XVI then reminded the Bishops of their responsibility not only towards the Churches entrusted to their care but to the whole nation. "With full and cordial respect for the separation of Church and politics, for that which belongs to Cesar and that which belongs to God (cfr. Mt 22,21), we cannot fail to be concerned with what is good for the human person created in God's own image and likeness: in concrete, the common good of Italy". In this regard the Pope mentioned a Note "in full consonance with the continual teaching of the Apostolic See" approved by the CEI Standing Council on the family founded on marriage and legislative initiatives with regard to de facto couples. On the same subject the Pope underlined that the Family "is deeply rooted in the heart and life of the Italian people", and the family's role in society "must be understood and recognised today in the face of a culture which thinks it is favouring the happiness of persons insisting unilaterally on individual freedoms.

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Therefore all state initiatives in favour of the family as such can only be appreciated and encouraged."
The Pope ended by urging the Italian Bishops to give attention to "the real difficulties of the people … many forms of poverty, old and new, visible and hidden", so that in her service "the authentic love of Christ may be ever more resplendent". The next appointment for the Italian Church will be in Loreto, at the beginning of September for the "Forum of Young Italians", "which intends the insert young Catholics more profoundly in the path of the Church following the Meeting in Verona and prepare them for World Youth Day in Sydney next year. We are well aware - the Pope concluded - that the Christian formation of the new generations, perhaps the most difficult duty, is the most important task facing the Church". (S.L.) (Agenzia Fides 25/5/2007 - righe 60, parole 878)

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