



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE SEMINARY COMMUNITY
OF THE CAPRANICA COLLEGE**

Consistory Hall
Friday, 19 January 2007

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers,
Monsignor Rector,
Dear Students of the Capranica College,*

I am pleased to welcome you just before the Feast of your Patroness, St Agnes. I greet you all with affection, starting with the Cardinal Vicar, Camillo Ruini, and Archbishop Pio Vigo, who form the Episcopal Commission in charge of the College. I greet the Rector, Mons. Ermenegildo Manicardi. I extend a special welcome to you, dear students, who belong to the community of the oldest ecclesiastical college of Rome.

Five hundred and fifty years have passed since that 5 January 1457 when Cardinal Domenico Capranica, Archbishop of Fermo, founded the College that was named after him. He bequeathed to it all his property and his palace near Santa Maria in Aquiro, so that it could house young students called to the priesthood.

The newborn institution was the first of its kind in Rome; initially reserved for young Romans and young men from Fermo, it later extended hospitality to students from other regions of Italy and of different nationalities.

Cardinal Capranica died less than two years later, but his foundation had already started on the way it has followed until today, undergoing only 10 years of closure from 1798 to 1807 during the so-called Roman Republic.

Two Popes studied at the Capranica: Pope Benedict XV, whom you rightly consider "*Parens alter*" because of the special affection he always felt for your house, and then, if for a shorter period, the

Servant of God Pius XII. My venerable Predecessors, some of whom visited you on special occasions, have always demonstrated their benevolence towards your College.

Our meeting today also takes place not only close to the Memorial of St Agnes but also in the context of an important anniversary for your institution. In this historical and spiritual perspective, it is useful to ask what motives impelled Cardinal Capranica to found this provident work, and what value they still have for you today.

It is necessary, in the first place, to remember that the founder had direct experience of the colleges of the Universities of Padua and of Bologna where he himself had been a student, as well as those of Sienna, Florence and Perugia. These institutions had developed in order to house young scholars who did not belong to wealthy families.

By altering several elements of these models, he conceived of one that would be exclusively destined to training future priests, with preferential attention to less well-off candidates. Thus, he anticipated by more than a century the establishment of "seminaries" decreed by the Council of Trent.

However, we have not yet focused on the basic reason for this provident initiative: it was the conviction that the quality of the clergy depends on the seriousness of their formation.

Now, in Cardinal Capranica's time, there was no careful selection of aspirants to sacred Orders: they were sometimes examined in literature and song, but not in theology, morals and canon law, with foreseeable negative repercussions on the Ecclesial Community.

This is why, in the Constitutions of his College, the Cardinal imposed on theology students knowledge of the best authors, especially Thomas Aquinas; on law students, the doctrine of Pope Innocent III, and on them all, Aristotelian ethics.

Further, not content with the lessons of the *Studium Urbis*, he guaranteed supplementary lessons provided by specialists directly within the College itself.

This curriculum was integrated into a framework of integral formation centred on the spiritual dimension. It was supported by the pillars of the Sacraments of the Eucharist - daily - and of Penance - at least monthly - and sustained by the pious practices prescribed or suggested by the Church.

Great importance was given to charity, both in ordinary fraternal life and in assistance to the sick, as well as to what today we call "pastoral experience". Indeed, it established that on feast days, students would serve in the cathedral and in other local churches.

An effective support in the students' formation was also provided by the style of the community itself, including strong participation in decisions concerning life in the College.

Here we find the same fundamental disposition that was later to be made by the diocesan seminaries, of course, for the latter with a fuller sense of belonging to the particular Church; the choice, that is, of a serious human, cultural and spiritual formation, open to the requirements proper to the time and place.

Dear friends, let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy and St Agnes, that the *Almo Collegio Capranica* may continue on its way, faithful to its long tradition and to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

Dear students, I hope that every day you will renew your offering to God and to the Holy Church from the bottom of your hearts, conforming ever more closely to Christ, the Good Shepherd, who has called you to follow him and to work in his vineyard.

I thank you for this pleasant visit and, as I assure you of my prayers, I impart with affection a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.

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