



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Praised be Jesus Christ.

IT IS A JOY for me to address the members of the National Catholic Educational Association of the United States, as you assemble in the great cause of Catholic Education. Through you I would hope that my message of encouragement and blessing would also reach the numerous Catholic schools of your country, all the students and teachers of these institutions and all those generously committed Catholic education. With the Apostle Peter I send you my greeting in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Peace to all of you who are in Christ"^[1].

As Catholic educators assembled in the communion of the universal Church and in prayer, you will certainly share with each other insights of value that will assist you in your important work, in your ecclesial mission. The Holy Spirit is with you and the Church is deeply grateful for your dedication. The Pope speaks to you in order to confirm you in your lofty role as Catholic educators, to assist you, to direct you, to support you.

Among the many reflections that could be made at this time there are three points in particular to which I would like to make a brief reference at the beginning of my pontificate. These are: the value of Catholic schools, the importance of Catholic teachers and educators, and the nature of Catholic education itself. These are themes that have been developed at length by my predecessors. At this time, however, it is important that I add my own testimony to theirs, in the special hope of giving a new impulse to Catholic education throughout the vast area of the United States of America.

With profound conviction I ratify and reaffirm the words that Paul VI spoke originally to the Bishops of your country: " Brethren, we know the difficulties involved in preserving Catholic schools, and the uncertainties of the future, and yet we rely on the help of God and on your own zealous collaboration and untiring efforts, so that Catholic schools can continue, despite grave obstacles, to fulfill their providential role at the service of genuine Catholic education, and at the service of

your country"[2]. Yes, the Catholic school must remain a privileged means of Catholic education in America. As an instrument of the apostolate it is worthy of the greatest sacrifices.

But no Catholic school can be effective without dedicated Catholic teachers, convinced of the great ideal of Catholic education. The Church needs men and women who are intent on teaching by word and example – intent on helping to permeate the whole educational milieu with the spirit of Christ. This is a great vocation, and the Lord himself will reward all who serve in it as educators in the cause of the word of God.

In order that the Catholic school and the Catholic teachers may truly make their irreplaceable contribution to the Church and to the world, the goal of Catholic education itself must be crystal clear. Beloved sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, brothers and sisters in the faith: Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others.

In the expression of the Second Vatican Council, those who have been baptized must be made ever more aware of the gift of faith that they have received, they must learn to adore the Father in spirit and in truth, and they must be trained to live the newness of Christian life in justice and in the holiness of truth[3].

These are indeed essential aims of Catholic education. To foster and promote them gives meaning to the Catholic school; it spells out the dignity of the vocation of Catholic educators.

Yes, it is above all a question of communicating Christ, and helping his uplifting Gospel to take root in the hearts of the faithful. Be strong, therefore, in pursuing these goals. The cause of Catholic education is the cause of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel at the service of man.

And be assured of the solidarity of the entire Church, and of the sustaining grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his name, I send you all my Apostolic Blessing: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

From the Vatican, 16 April 1979

[1] 1 Petr. 5, 14.

[2] Address of September 15, 1975.

[3] Cf. Gravissimum Educationis, 2.

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