



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF WESTMINSTER
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 29 February 1988

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. I cordially welcome you today on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. Your presence here strengthens the bonds of unity, charity and peace that unite us in the Episcopal College. It is also a sign of the deep love and fidelity that the faithful of your Dioceses have for the Successor of Peter. Through you I wish to greet all of them, in particular the clergy, who are your faithful collaborators, and the Religious, whose consecration makes them a special sign in your midst of the Kingdom to come. I also wish to commend you, their pastors, for the vitality of ecclesial life in your local Churches and for the zeal with which you govern the flock entrusted to your care.

An important part of that ecclesial life is Catholic education, particularly Catholic schools. I know that *concern for education* has always marked the life of the Church in your Ecclesiastical Province and indeed throughout your country. The Second Vatican Council itself, in the Declaration on Christian Education, notes the work of the first Provincial Council of Westminster held in 1852 (Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, adn. 25).

2. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, the primary responsibility for the education of children rests with their parents. Education begins in the home, where family life is meant to impart social virtues and a love for God and neighbour. At the same time the Council also recognizes that parents clearly need the *help of society* as a whole in order to fulfil their responsibility to educate their children. For her part, the Church has always provided this help to parents so that the lives of the faithful, from their earliest years, might be inspired by the spirit of Christ. It is the Church's firm conviction that a complete education necessarily includes a religious dimension. If religion is neglected or set aside in the educational process that forms a nation's heart and soul, then a

morality worthy of man will not survive; justice and peace will not endure. It is also the Church's belief that in providing Catholic education she is promoting "the full development of the human person for the welfare of earthly society and the building of a more human world" (Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, adn. 3).

While this educative function takes many forms, the *Catholic school* is of outstanding importance to the Church's mission. For this reason diocesan Bishops have a special *right and responsibility* to watch over and inspect Catholic schools in their territories, and to issue directives concerning the general regulation of these schools (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 806). At a time when radical revision of the educational system is under consideration in your country, and Catholic schools are facing new challenges of their own, I commend you for the leadership you are endeavouring to give, and for your vigilance in ensuring that Catholic schools not only survive but flourish, in accordance with all the principles of Catholic education described by the Council and enshrined in the history of Catholic education in Britain.

3. The challenges today are many, and they require co-operation both within society and within the Church for the sake of the common good. Catholic schools in particular are affected by the changing circumstances that have an impact on both human and financial resources. At this period of Catholic education in your country, your local Churches are engaged in a reorganization that entails some closures, mergers and transfers. It is understandable that parents become anxious for their children, and teachers become anxious for their jobs and future prospects. It is therefore essential that Bishops give proper leadership in this phase of reorganization in order to secure a Catholic education for as many of the Church's young members as possible, and in order to ensure justice and wisdom in the location and allocation of schools and of teaching appointments within them. Everyone involved in the provision and management of Catholic schools is required to cooperate under the leadership of the Bishops so that these schools may fulfil their mission both now and in the future. For some people this will mean the sacrifice of personal preference in favour of the common good.

When difficult decisions must be made with regard to human and material resources, it is also necessary to keep in mind the words of "*Gravissimum Educationis*": "Pastors of the Church and all the faithful are earnestly entreated to spare no sacrifice... in showing special concern for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world, or who are strangers to the gift of faith". This special concern is fundamental to the Church's firm commitment to promote a more just society. It is also fundamental to her mission of *evangelization*.

4. Bishops exercise their leadership not only by ensuring the provision of an adequate number of schools and their proper distribution, but also by promoting an understanding of the nature and importance of these schools. They must also safeguard their Catholic character, as well as promote and supervise the specifically religious teaching which is carried out in them.

The satisfactory progress of Catholic schools also requires that parents, teachers, priests, Religious and all those who are involved in the running of Catholic schools should keep informed about developments in civil legislation. I commend the many initiatives that have been taken in this regard, especially by your diocesan schools commissions. The commitment to continuing formation should not be limited to the study and application of developments common to all schools. It must also include the study and application of what is distinctively Catholic in the Church's educational endeavours. In a pluralistic society, Catholic institutions must strive to make a contribution that is clearly and recognizably Catholic.

In order to play their crucial role in fulfilling these goals, Catholic teachers need their Bishops' support and encouragement, and not only to improve their professional knowledge and skills. A relationship must be fostered which promotes the teachers' understanding of Catholic education, ensures their appropriate pastoral care, and perfects their knowledge of the faith. Training is essential, and in this the Colleges of Education have a very important part to play to the extent that it is not only teachers whom they are forming but specifically Catholic teachers. It is also important to find ways of completing the formation of those who come from the universities, so that they may be truly Catholic teachers. I also encourage you to promote the vocation of Catholic teachers, and to recommend it to young people in the important years when they are considering and choosing a career.

5. Catholic schools should be excellent in every way, not only in the curriculum of regular studies and in the network of relationships that constitute them, but above all as communities of faith. Religious education is more than just one subject in the curriculum. In Catholic schools it is the core of the "core curriculum". Nor can religious education be allowed to become only a superficial veneer. For as the Council reminds us, the aim of Catholic schools is "to create an atmosphere... enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity; to enable young people, while developing their own personalities, to grow at the same time as the new creatures they have become by Baptism; and... to so orient the whole of human culture to the message of salvation that the knowledge which students acquire of the world, of life and of mankind is illumined by faith" (Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 8). These aims can only be realized by a living witness to the Catholic faith on the part of parents and teachers, priests and Religious, and all those associated with Catholic schools.

6. Dear Brothers: Catholic schools thrive best when there is good, sound partnership between home and parish, between parents and teachers, between ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and between all those directly engaged in the management of individual schools. I join you and your people in giving thanks to Almighty God for all that has been accomplished by Catholic education in your country, and in asking for God's help in guiding the enterprise of Catholic schooling in the future.

With fraternal affection in our Lord Jesus Christ I impart to you and to all the faithful of your

Dioceses my Apostolic Blessing.

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