



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Monday, 26 October 1998

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the plenary assembly of the Congregation for Catholic Education, which opened today and will occupy you over the coming days in completing some general guidelines to give better direction to the Church's educational work. This meeting enables me to express my gratitude to all of you who assist me in the field of education, which is so important for the life of the Church.

I thank Cardinal Pio Laghi for his address and for the best wishes he had the kindness to extend to me on the 20th anniversary of my election to the Chair of Peter. I greet the new Secretary, Archbishop Giuseppe Pittau, and express my deep appreciation to the Congregation's officials for their work, which at times can be unexciting and unnoticed, but is nevertheless invaluable for seminaries, ecclesiastical faculties, Catholic universities and schools, and vocational centres.

2. We are all convinced of the priority of the Church's educational efforts at every level. We are likewise aware of the difficulties connected with these efforts, which must deal with the technological progress and cultural changes of the present time. The application of new information technologies in the various areas of life and civil society has already caused and will cause even more noticeable changes in the processes of learning, interrelating and personality development. There have been positive results, such as easier communications, the enrichment of interaction and information, the overcoming of borders, but not without negative consequences, such as superficiality, lack of creativity and fragmentation.

In view of this situation, the Church is called to exercise her prophetic role, offering a model of the complete and well-integrated individual. St Paul wrote in his Second Letter to Timothy: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tm 3:16). The challenge is to form well-integrated individuals, harmoniously developed in all their abilities and dimensions, individuals who can rise on the two wings of faith and reason towards contemplation of the truth.

To offer this vision of man and to put the relevant pedagogical options into practice is no easy task nor can it be taken for granted. As St Paul reminds us again, “people ... having itching ears ... will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths” (2 Tm 4:5). However, like Timothy, we are called to be vigilant so that the Gospel is proclaimed in its integrity and can lead men and women to salvation.

3. In the light of these Pauline texts, I am pleased to read about all the work of your dicastery and the programme for this plenary assembly. The great concern of the Seminaries Office is to see that candidates for the priesthood are given an integral formation, attentive to the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions. In this regard, there is a particularly important relationship between human and spiritual formation. It will be your task to set forth the criteria for using the behavioural sciences in the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood. I consider it useful to employ the contribution of these sciences for discerning and fostering growth in the human virtues, the capacity for interpersonal relationships, affective-sexual development and education in freedom and conscience. However, it must remain within the limits of their specific fields of expertise and not stifle the divine gift and spiritual inspiration of a vocation or diminish the place of discernment and vocational guidance which is the proper duty of seminary educators.

Another important element of integral formation concerns the full harmony between the educational programme in the strict sense and the theological one, which has a profound impact on the mentality and sensitivity of the students and should thus be co-ordinated with the overall educational plan. I therefore recommend that, wherever possible, theological instruction should be reviewed in relation to priestly formation, and the *ratio studiorum* of seminaries should be developed in this direction. The Fathers of the Church and the great theologian saints have much to teach us in this task, “*non solum discentes sed et patientes divina*” (Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, *De Divinis Nominibus*, II, 9: PG 3, 674), individuals who came to know the Mystery by way of love, “*per quandam connaturalitatem*”, as St Thomas Aquinas would say (*S. Th.*, II-II, 9, 45, a), and who had an intense experience of their bond with the Churches in which they found themselves working.

4. The vision of a complete, well-integrated individual provides an excellent framework for the efforts that this Congregation’s Universities Office is making to improve the quality of ecclesiastical faculties and universities and to increase the Catholic universities’ awareness of their identity and

mission.

In this regard, I would like to recall that, as the Year 2000 draws near, we are also approaching the 10th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, which I meant as a sign of my special concern for Catholic universities. They undoubtedly have a specific task in bearing witness to the Church's concern to promote comprehensive knowledge, open to all the dimensions of human existence. But, over the years, it seems ever more clear that this specific role of the Catholic university cannot be properly fulfilled without an appropriate expression of its ecclesial nature, of its connection with the Church, at both the local and universal levels.

In this regard a decisive role belongs to the Bishops, who are called to take personal responsibility for the Catholic identity which must characterize these centres. This means that without neglecting the academic requirements for each university to be accepted into the international community of research and knowledge, the Bishops' role is to accompany and guide those who head the various Catholic universities in carrying out their mission as Catholic institutions, particularly in the area of evangelization. Only in this way will they be able to fulfil their specific vocation: not only to provide their students with technical skills and high-level professional training, but to lead them to human fulfilment and to a willingness to bear witness to the Gospel in society.

5. The Schools Office of your dicastery is also working on the formation of the complete person. The difficulties facing the scholastic world in recent years are obvious to all. They reflect the way of humanity, with its problems and its limitations, but also its hopes and its potential. One need only consider the attention paid to the school by international organizations, government activities and public opinion.

In the historical context in which we live, marked as it is by profound changes, the Church is called, from her own perspective, to make available the vast heritage of her educational tradition by seeking to respond to the ever new demands of humanity's cultural evolution.

I therefore encourage the particular Churches and the religious institutes responsible for educational institutions to continue investing personnel and resources in a work that is so urgent and essential for the future of the world and the Church, as was clearly reaffirmed in the recent circular letter, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*.

6. The dynamic principle of the complete and thoroughly well-integrated individual can serve as a frame of reference for the activities carried out by the Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations. This can be easily grasped, if one considers that it is only around the mystery of vocation that the various components of human life can vitally converge.

From this standpoint, contemporary reality is not without cause for concern. Many young people, without a sense of being called, are lost on a sea of information, disparate stimuli and data,

experiencing a sort of permanent nomadism without concrete guideposts. Such a situation, often causing a fear of the future and of any definitive commitment, must lead the Pontifical Work to continue resolutely on its way, supporting with appropriate initiatives those who at various levels are responsible for this delicate aspect of the Church's pastoral care.

I entrust these matters, which you will study during your plenary meeting, to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Church and Seat of Wisdom. To her I commend your daily work, dear members and officials of the Congregation for Catholic Education. May Our Lady guide you and accompany you in your service to the Gospel and to the Apostolic See. I assure you that I also follow you closely and accompany you with my prayer. Now I am pleased to impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to all seminaries and educational institutions.

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