



The Holy See

PRESENTATION TO THE DIOCESE OF ROME OF THE "LETTER ON THE URGENT TASK OF EDUCATION"

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*St Peter's Square
Saturday, 23 February 2008*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am grateful that so many of you have accepted the invitation to this Special Audience at which you will receive from my hands the Letter I have addressed to the Diocese and City of Rome on the urgent task of education. I greet with affection each one of you: priests, men and women religious, parents, teachers, catechists and other educators, children, adolescents and young people, including those who are watching this Audience on television. I greet and thank in particular the Cardinal Vicar and everyone who has spoken, representing the various categories of people taking up this great educational challenge.

We are gathered here, in fact, because we are motivated by our common solicitude for the good of the generations to come and for the growth and future of the children the Lord has given to this city. We are also motivated by a worry: the perception of what we have called "a great educational emergency". Educating has never been an easy undertaking and seems to be becoming increasingly difficult today; thus, many parents and teachers are tempted to give up their task and do not even succeed in understanding what the mission entrusted to them truly is. Indeed, too many uncertainties, too many doubts are circulating in our society and our culture, too many distorted images are transmitted by the media. It thus becomes difficult to propose to the new generations something valid and reliable, rules of conduct and worthwhile objectives to which to devote one's life. We are here today, however, also and above all because we feel sustained by a great hope and strong trust: by the certainty, that is, that the clear and definitive "yes" which God in Jesus Christ has said to the human family (cf. II Cor 1: 19-20), is also valid for our boys and girls

and young people, valid for our babies who today are at the beginning of life. Therefore, it is also possible to teach goodness in our time; it is a passion we must carry in our hearts, a common enterprise to which each one is called to make his own contribution.

Indeed, we are here today because we wish to respond to that educational question felt by parents who worry about their children's future, teachers who are living the school crisis from within, priests and catechists who know from experience how difficult it is to teach the faith, and the children, adolescents and young people themselves who do not want to be left on their own to face life's challenges. This is why I wrote this Letter to you, dear brothers and sisters, which I am about to present to you. In it you will find some simple and practical guidelines concerning fundamental and common aspects of the task of education. Today, I address each one of you in order to offer you my affectionate encouragement to take on joyfully the responsibilities the Lord entrusts to you, so that the great heritage of faith and culture which is the truest treasure of this beloved city of ours may not be lost in passing from one generation to the next, but on the contrary, be renewed and invigorated and serve as a guide and incentive on our journey towards the future.

In this spirit I address you, dear parents, to ask you first of all to remain firm for ever in your reciprocal love: this is the first great gift your children need if they are to grow up serene, acquire self-confidence and thus learn to be capable in turn of authentic and generous love. Further, your love for your children must endow you with the style and courage of a true educator, with a consistent witness of life and the necessary firmness to temper the character of the new generations, helping them to distinguish clearly between good and evil so they in turn can form solid rules of life that will sustain them in future trials. Thus, you will enrich your children with the most valuable and lasting inheritance that consists in the example of a faith lived daily.

In the same way, I ask you, teachers at different kinds of schools, to have a lofty and great conception of your demanding work despite the difficulties, misunderstandings and disappointments that you meet with all too often. In fact, teaching means satisfying that desire to know and understand that is inherent in man and which in the child, adolescent and young person is expressed in its full force and spontaneity. Your task, therefore, cannot be limited to providing notions and information, leaving aside the important question concerning truth, above all that truth which can serve as one's guide in life. Indeed, you are properly qualified educators: the noble art of forming the person is entrusted to you, in close sympathy with parents. In particular, those who teach in Catholic schools bear within them and express in daily action that educational project centred on the Lord Jesus and his Gospel.

And you, dear priests and Religious, catechists, leaders and teachers in parishes, youth groups, ecclesial associations and movements, prayer and recreation centres, sports and leisure activities: always seek to feel for the children and young people around you the same sentiments that were in Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 2: 5). Be trustworthy friends, therefore, in whom they may

tangibly feel Jesus' friendship for them, and at the same time be sincere and courageous witnesses of that truth which sets us free (cf. Jn 8: 32) and points out to the new generations the path that leads to life.

Education, however, is not only the work of educators: it is a relationship between people in which, as they grow older, the freedom and responsibility of those who are educated comes increasingly into play. I therefore turn with deep affection to you, children, adolescents and young people, to remind you that you yourselves are called to be the architects of your own moral, cultural and spiritual growth. It is up to you, therefore, to freely accept in your hearts, your minds and your lives, the patrimony of truth, goodness and beauty which has taken shape in the course of centuries and whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ. It is up to you to renew this patrimony and develop it further, liberating it from the many falsehoods and ugly things that often make it unrecognizable and give rise to diffidence and disappointment in you. In any case, know that you are never alone on this difficult journey: close to you are not only your parents, teachers, priests, friends and formation teachers, but above all the God who created us and is the secret guest of our hearts. It is he who illumines our intelligence from within and directs to goodness our freedom that we often feel is frail and unsteady; he is the true hope and the solid foundation of our lives. In him, first and foremost, can we trust.

Dear brothers and sisters, as I symbolically present to you the *Letter on The Urgent Task of Education*, let us together entrust ourselves to the One who is our true and only Teacher (cf. Mt 23: 8), to work with him, with trust and joy, in that marvellous undertaking which is people's formation and authentic growth. With these sentiments and hopes, I impart my Blessing to you all.