



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VISIT TO CANADA

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CATHOLIC EDUCATORS**

*St. John's Basilica - Newfoundland
Wednesday, 12 September 1984*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. This evening in this Basilica dedicated to Saint John the Baptist I feel very close to all of you. I feel that I belong very much to Newfoundland.

It is indeed a joy privilege to join this gathering of educators to speak to those who carry out one of the most important tasks of the Church and of society. The task of the teacher and the school is indeed a sacred trust conveyed to them by parents and families. As Catholic educators you have accepted a special responsibility given by parents. These parents and families have invested in you their precious confidence. On her part the Church looks upon you as co-workers, with an important measure of shared responsibility, in helping to fulfill Christ's mandate transmitted through the Apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (*Matth. 28, 20*).

To you it is given to create the future and give it direction by offering to your students a set of values with which to assess their newly discovered knowledge. Few challenges are more exalting and rewarding than the instruction and guidance of young people, and few more difficult. You are preparing for adulthood and Christian maturity a generation of Newfoundlanders, of Canadians, who will build the Church and the society of tomorrow.

2. As you pursue your professional and spiritual goals as teachers, or as educational administrators, you experience the ambiguities and conflicts which characterize our contemporary

society. In the span of a single lifetime, we have seen enormous changes in social values, in economic circumstances, and in technological innovation. As educators you must cope with these changes since they are the daily experience and fare of your students.

At the same time as a teacher and a school system seek to adapt continually to the new, they must affirm and preserve the meaning and importance of perennial truths and values. Educators must be ready to grasp firmly the challenge of providing a kind of education whose curriculum will be inspired more by reflection than by technique, more by the search for wisdom than the accumulation of information.

In the same way, the radically different cultural expressions and activities of our time, especially those which catch the popular attention of young people, demand that educators be open to new cultural influences and be capable of interpreting them for young people in the light of the Christian faith and of Christ's universal command of love.

It has always been difficult to be a Christian, and even more difficult to be a truly Christian teacher, especially if that teacher is called to bear witness from within a secular system. Every age presents a new set of problems as well as fresh opportunities to witness to the redemptive love of Jesus Christ.

You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching. To influence your students at this juncture of history to grow in faith and in love, you must be aware of the pressures upon them and at once respect the natural stages of their growth toward maturity. But your responsibilities make demands upon you which go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence.

3. An extremely important aspect of your role is that you are called to lead the young to Christ, to inspire them to follow him, to show them his boundless love and concern for them, through the example of your own life. Through you, as through a clear window on a sunny day, students must come to see and know the richness and the joy of a life lived in accordance with his teaching, in response to his challenging demands. To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest. En masse, the students of the world are today repeating to their Catholic teachers those words recorded in the Gospel of Saint John and originally addressed to the Apostle Philip: "We wish to see Jesus" (*Io.* 12, 21). This is indeed a vital task of the Catholic teacher: to show Jesus to the young. Saint Paul looked upon his own ministry as a prolonged travail in forming Christ in those whom he was called to serve (*Gal.* 4, 19).

4. As teachers and educators, you also share in the proclamation of the word in the service of truth. You seek to liberate the mind and spirit of those whom you teach, guiding them to maturity in faith, knowledge and understanding. By offering your students the truth of Christ you are likewise

helping them to experience his freedom. You are thus engaged in the authentic liberation of this generation of students, to whom Jesus Christ, who calls himself the "Truth", repeats his Gospel promise: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (*Io.* 8, 36). You are called to serve and spread Christ's liberating truth.

5. Young people today are buffeted in every direction by loud and competing claims upon their attention and allegiance. From around the world, they hear daily messages of conflict and hostility, of greed and injustice, of poverty and despair. Amidst this social turmoil, young people are eager to find solid and enduring values which can give meaning and purpose to their lives. They are searching for a firm place - a high ground - on which to stand. They seek a sense of direction, a goal which will give meaning and purpose to their lives.

The Gospel tells us where the high ground is to be found. It is beside our Lord, sharing in his strength and love, responding eagerly and generously to his challenge to love and serve him, as he has loved and served us. Who can show young people the way to that secure place, to that dynamic and fulfilling life, better than the teachers to whom they look for guidance? No one else will ever be where you are. No one else will ever have the opportunity you have to accompany students in the search for truth, to foster in them a thirst for justice, and an appreciation of the goodness of God, to lead them patiently and lovingly in their journey of faith.

6. Young people are hungry today for truth and justice because they are hungry for God. To respond to that hunger is the highest calling of the Christian educator. In partnership with the parents, who bear the primary responsibility for the education of their children, the teacher is called upon to reflect, in faithful and discerning fashion, God's presence in the world.

Teachers and parents must strive for a mature spirituality in their own lives, a strength and relevance of faith which can withstand the assault of conflicting values upon the home and the school. If the teaching of the Gospel is visible in your daily lives, it will have visible influence upon the young whom you teach. When young people see their teachers and parents, whom they love, as people committed to Jesus Christ, people whose lives are inspired by that commitment, the meaning and the message of faith is spontaneously communicated to them and the Good News is announced once again in and to the world.

7. The specific goals of Christian education as described by the Second Vatican Council take into account the many needs of the young. These goals are a constant challenge to you and spell out your lofty work: "Christian education . . . aims above all at ensuring that the baptized . . . may grow ever more conscious of the gift of faith which they have received; that they may learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth (*Io.* 4, 23), especially through liturgical worship; and that they may be prepared to live their personal lives according to a new nature in justice and holiness of truth (*Eph.* 4, 22-24), so that they may reach perfect maturity, the measure of the fullness of Christ (*Ibid.* 4, 13) and make their contribution to the increase of the Mystical Body" (*Gravissimum Educationis*,

2) .

8. Here in the Province of Newfoundland and in other Provinces throughout Canada, your forebears struggled over the years to have a Catholic educational system where these ideals for Catholic teachers and principles of Catholic education might best be applied. It is a precious heritage which has been confided to you, a heritage which makes a positive and valued contribution not only to the Church but to society as well.

Catholic schools can provide young people with insights and spiritual incentives badly needed in a materialistic and fragmented world. Catholic schools speak of the meaning of life, of values and of faith that make for a meaningful life. Similarly, since individualism is often alienating, Catholic schools must hand on and reinforce a sense of community, of social concern and the acceptance of difference and diversity in pluralistic societies. While professing an institutional commitment to the word of God as proclaimed by the Catholic Church, they must inculcate an attitude of profound respect for the conscience of others and a deep desire for Christian unity.

While striving for excellence in the areas of professional and technical training, Catholic schools must never forget that their ultimate purpose is to prepare young people to take up, in Christian freedom, their personal and social responsibility for the pilgrimage of all humanity to eternal life.

For these same reasons Catholic schools, while always committed to intellectual development, will also heed the Gospel imperative of serving all students and not only those who are the brightest and most promising. Indeed, in accord with the spirit of the Gospel, and its option for the poor, they will turn their attention particularly to those most in need.

9. All men and women - and all children - have a right to education. Closely linked to this right to education is the right of parents, of families, to choose according to their convictions the kind of education and the model of school which they wish for their children (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 26). Related as well is the no less sacred right of religious freedom.

In a society such as Canada's, people's freedom to associate and enter into certain group or institutional endeavours with the aim of fulfilling their expectations according to their own values is a fundamental democratic right. This right implies that parents have a real possibility to choose, without undue financial burden placed upon them, appropriate schools and educational systems for their children. Here in Newfoundland I note that you view education as a partnership between the Church and the Province. Fortunately, in other parts of Canada similar cooperation between Church and government exists. I realize that this varies from Province to Province.

Society is called to provide for and support with public funding those types of schools that correspond to the deepest aspirations of its citizens. The role of the modern State is to respond to these expectations within the limits of the common good. A state thereby promotes harmony, and,

in a pluralistic situation such as Canada, this effectively fosters respect for the wide diversity of this land. To ignore this diversity and the legitimate claims of the people within various groups would be to deny a fundamental right to parents.

Governments have the responsibility, therefore, to ensure the freedom of ecclesial Communion to have appropriate educational services with all that such a freedom implies: teacher training, buildings, research funding, adequate financing and so forth.

In a pluralistic society it is surely a challenge to provide all citizens with satisfactory educational services. In dealing with this complex challenge one must not ignore the centrality of God in the believer's outlook on life. A totally secular school system would not be a way of meeting this challenge. We cannot leave God at the schoolhouse door.

10. Dear teachers and parents, the Catholic school is in your hands. It is a reflection of your convictions. Its very existence depends on you. It is one of those privileged places, together with the family and the parish community, where our faith is handed on. The Catholic school is a community effort, one that cannot succeed without the cooperation of all concerned - the students, the parents, the teachers, the principals and pastors. As parents, you claim a special responsibility and privilege. You are the first witnesses and artisans of the awakening in your children of the sense of God. You bear the first responsibility of bringing them to the Sacraments of Christian initiation. In this work you are assisted and helped by the school and the parish.

Our world searches for a new sense of meaning and coherence. A Catholic school through the ministry of Catholic teachers is a privileged, place for the development and communication of a world-view rooted in the meaning of Creation and Redemption. You are called, dear educators and parents, to create those schools which will transmit the values which you would hand on to those who will come after you. And always remember that it is Christ who says: Go and teach!

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