



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND
ADMINISTRATORS OF ROME'S SCHOOLS***

Saturday, 13 February 1999

1. Welcome to the Pope's home! You are here representing the students, teachers and administrators of Rome's schools. Thank you for your visit!

I especially thank the Cardinal Vicar, the Superintendent and the young student for the words of greeting and good wishes which they addressed to me on behalf of you all.

"Open the door to Christ your Saviour": the invitation of the City Mission, which in recent years has resounded in various ways throughout Rome, is now being extended in this last year of preparation for the Great Jubilee to the areas where people work, study, suffer and live.

Even you, dear students, teachers and administrators of Rome's schools, have studied, in a special interdisciplinary course, the theme of the Holy Year, starting with its meaning and central message: the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is "God with us", the only Saviour of the world, in whom every man and woman can find an answer to the deepest questions of the heart. These are questions about the meaning of life in relation to God, man and his destiny, and about the ways to live to the full one's personal, family and social life.

It is the school's task to develop in the students an appropriate knowledge of the world, of cultures and of languages, and at the same time to help them search for the truth with an open mind, in order to form a free and responsible personality. In this journey which nourishes the mind, acceptance of the "mystery" of man cannot be lacking: it appeals to God and makes us discover his action in the world.

2. We are preparing for the Great Jubilee, which is a forceful call to conversion of heart through a change in our lives, to acknowledge and welcome the presence of "God with us", who frees man from sin, the primary source of every moral and social disorder. The Holy Year involves a strong

sense of commitment to justice and solidarity and therefore encourages concrete efforts to enable all men and women, children and the elderly, the suffering and the marginalized to find their place in the common house of mankind, to be recognized and welcomed as a brother or sister, and to be helped in achieving a quality of life that is worthy of the children of God.

In this field, the school and education in general have a decisive and irreplaceable task as ways of authentic human liberation from the slavery of ignorance. The most precious investments on the part of families, the first persons responsible for education, of State institutions and of other free members of society are without doubt the resources devoted to the school and culture of young people. The future of humanity and the social development of a nation depend to a great extent on the quality of its schools and their commitment to presenting themselves as an educational community for all their members.

3. Turning our gaze to the school situation and to the changes taking place there which the Superintendent mentioned, I hope that it plans its future with creativity and courage, drawing from Rome's heritage of tradition and culture the incentive for the renewal it has undertaken.

It is necessary to promote educational and cultural projects suited to the full development of the person, who remains the central focus of the school and to whom programmes, interventions and initiatives must be directed. In this way the school becomes a community that teaches one to search for the truth and to understand one's own personal dignity; that transmits culture and values for life; that trains one for a profession in the service of society; that opens one to encounter and to interpersonal and community dialogue; that responds to the demands for the human and spiritual, cultural and social growth of children and young people.

In particular, all the members of the civil and ecclesial community of Rome must concern themselves with school problems and promote appropriate measures for supporting the complete formation of all children and young people, with special care being given to those who are suffering hardship or neglect, which means supporting their expectations, hopes and projects so that they can find their place in society and the world of work.

I am thinking here particularly of the growing presence in Rome's schools of children and young people from immigrant families. It is the school's task to teach them mutual dialogue and respect, so that differences are appreciated as a wealth that makes it possible to work together for the civil progress of society.

4. In order to deal with these situations productively, the close collaboration of State schools with private schools, families, parishes, and the social and cultural sectors is necessary.

First of all parents, the primary and principal teachers of their children, also exercise their role in the choice of a school whose educational and cultural approach conforms to their expectations

and demands. They actively participate in school life, in close dialogue with the teachers and in respect for their distinct and complementary responsibilities.

The role that teachers and school administrators have in the formation and guidance of children and young people is crucial. Society as a whole is called to acknowledge their role by according them not only esteem and appreciation but also by adequately supporting their need for formation and continuing education. May teachers and administrators, for their part, attend to their constant spiritual and moral development, which enables them to be a referencepoint to their students, not only through an accurate communication of knowledge, but also by being effective and credible witnesses of the values they live.

Is education not a vital communication which creates a deep relationship between the teacher and student, making them both share in that truth and love which are the final goal to which every human being is called?

5. I am pleased on this occasion to present to you, teachers and administrators of Rome's schools, the Letter I wrote for the City Mission: I ask you to make it a subject of reflection and dialogue.

I address a special word to you, dear students: take the lead in your intellectual and spiritual development, be involved in your studies, love your school and bring to it the joy and generosity of your hearts.

May the Holy Year find you attentive and ready to discover in this event, which will mark the life of the city, a suitable occasion for knowing Christ better, welcoming his Gospel and faithfully following him.

The crucifix, present in your classrooms, is a concrete sign of the gift of Jesus' love for every person: may it be an invitation for each of you to give yourself generously to build a new world that is more united and just.

Prepare to welcome many of your peers who, during the Jubilee and especially on World Youth Day, will come from all over the world for the Holy Year. Open the doors of your hearts and your homes to them.

Lastly, I would like to wish the entire school community of our city ever more productive and effective work. I invoke upon you all the protection of Mary, "Seat of Wisdom" and "Salvation of the Roman People".

With affection I assure you of my prayer and my Blessing.

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