



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF GREAT BRITAIN
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Thursday, 26 March 1992

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am very pleased today to welcome you, the *Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Liverpool*, on the occasion of your *ad Limina* visit. The source of my joy in meeting you is the Apostolic ministry we share and the thought of the profound Christian life and vitality of the Churches over which you preside. I greet you with the words of Saint Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2). Just as Saint Paul shared with the brethren at Philippi a "partnership in the gospel" (*Ibid.*, 1:5), so are we, as successors of the Apostles, united in the marvellous call and consecration given us by the Lord to be servants of the Good News of salvation. With gratitude to Archbishop Worlock for his kind words and for the sentiments he expressed on your behalf, I assure you that I remember you daily in my prayers and concern for the Church.

2. Last week I shared with the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Westminster, Southwark and Birmingham some reflections on the various challenges facing you in your episcopal ministry. In particular I referred to the need for the Catholic community to grow strong in faith and to understand more clearly the implications of that faith in order to "make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). And not just to "make a defence", but to show forth the full truth and power of the Gospel message of salvation in Christ to a society in need of light and encouragement. This morning I wish to refer to one particular aspect of that challenge, as it affects your responsibility to be *teachers and educators in the faith*.

In this great task you are sustained by the special consecration received through the Holy Spirit at the moment of episcopal ordination. With this same assistance of the Holy Spirit down the centuries your forebears upheld an ecclesial tradition justly renowned for the great and holy

Bishops who have been outstanding teachers of the English people. Likewise, the Holy Spirit has been at work in your nation through the labours of countless priests, Religious and lay faithful who built up a Catholic identity which must not be lost or diminished, for it reflects a fundamental fidelity to the apostolic and universal communion which has its visible head in the Successor of Peter (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 18). A concrete development of this ecclesial vigour is the system of Catholic schools and colleges in your local Churches, through which you exercise in part your responsibilities as guardians of the faith, charged with passing on what you yourselves have received (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:3).

3. When I spoke to members of your Episcopal Conference on a previous occasion about your Catholic schools (John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of Westminster on their ad Limina Visit*, 29 Feb. 1988) many of you were in the process of reorganizing them. Making the adjustments necessary to ensure that your schools continue to make their essential contribution to the common good of God's People was a task requiring prudent and diligent effort. It continues to involve you, as well as parents, teachers and school authorities, in difficult choices and exacting reforms. *What is fundamental is that there should be no lack of commitment or generosity*. This is all the more important because in Great Britain you and your brother Bishops have entrusted to the schools such a significant role in the process of educating children and adolescents in the faith.

4. In our age, marked as it is with a certain confusion about the nature and purpose of education – a confusion which, quite logically, follows from conflicting understandings of the human person and of life's meaning and final end – it is indispensable to articulate clearly the goals of Catholic education and, for Bishops, to offer energetic leadership in seeking the cooperation of all those involved in achieving those goals.

In explaining to the faithful of your Dioceses the aim of Catholic education, you will be sharing with them part of the manifold riches of the Second Vatican Council. It is not necessary to repeat here all that the Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* says in this respect (Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1-2). In essence, Catholic schools must aim at bringing their pupils to that human and Christian maturity which will enable them to fulfil their calling in the Church and contribute to the common good of society. Preparing pupils to live upright lives in this world and to be worthy of the Kingdom of God, of which the Church on earth is "the initial budding forth" (*Lumen Gentium*, 5), are two facets of a single objective: namely, to help them to know, love and follow Christ, true God and true man, who is the truth of God and the truth about man (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 8).

5. It is appropriate to speak of religious education as "the core of the core curriculum". Religious education in Catholic schools refers to the integral education of the pupils, both through the religious dimension of the school as a whole and through the specific programme of religious studies which it provides. This religious education is broader than catechesis, but it must also include catechesis, *since a principal goal of the Catholic school must be to hand on the faith*. The

Gospel is the living centre which must animate and shape all that is said and done in the school. In such an environment, the pupils will be able to find the true inspiration and freedom which alone will encourage them to set out wholeheartedly on the path of service of God and neighbour.

In catechesis, making use of the pupils' experience as a point of departure cannot be set in opposition to the handing on of the Church's doctrinal tradition, for, as I pointed out in "[Catechesi Tradendae](#)", "no one can arrive at the whole truth on the basis solely of some simple private experience, that is to say without an adequate explanation of the meaning of Christ..." (John Paul II, [Catechesi Tradendae](#), 22). A clear and courageous proclamation of Jesus Christ as the one in whose name alone we are saved (Cf. Acts 4:12) is required. This is not to imply that pupils who do not share the Catholic profession of faith cannot have a place in your schools. Their parents send them to these schools knowing the religious ethos to which they will be exposed and confident that the integrity of their children's consciences will be respected. This respect, however, should not alter the fundamental nature of the school's Catholic identity.

6. I wish to encourage you in your efforts to review religious education materials in order to see that they are based on principles of sound catechesis. As the consultation of the world's Bishops regarding the *Universal Catechism* has amply shown, there is a widely felt need in the Church for a catechesis which is theologically sound and pedagogically appropriate, one which will provide pupils with a complete and systematic presentation of the doctrine of the Church as it is authentically taught by her Magisterium, while also ensuring that they are never without opportunities to make this inheritance their own. Only in this way will pupils have that education in the faith which they need and which their parents rightly expect. In this respect I am confident that the *Universal Catechism* which is shortly to be published will be seen as a further gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, a concrete expression of that extraordinary grace which was the Second Vatican Council.

As pastors you are well aware that it is the teacher's heart and soul which animates any religious text or programme. It is *the teacher* who transforms the syllabus from a dead letter into a living *experience of learning the faith*. Great is the responsibility of religious educators in Catholic classrooms and in other teaching situations! As you give thanks to God for the competence and dedication of the thousands of teachers who make your schools the excellent education centres that they are, you know that you must have teachers whose hearts and souls are shaped by the Spirit of Christ, teachers who think with the mind of the Church, teachers who look upon and love their pupils as part of the flock of Christ.

7. To those who question the continuation of a distinct Catholic school system, the Catholics of England must not fail to respond with clear and well-founded arguments, in order to raise the level of debate about education, to explain the Catholic point of view and to insist on the preservation of your schools as part of the exercise of religious liberty. While the cost of maintaining these schools is high, it must be recognized that they provide an incalculable *service to the common good*. In

them, pupils learn to evaluate the affairs of the nation and the world in the light of that moral law which is the foundation of civic peace. They are taught that in playing out their particular roles in society they should act justly, temperately and courageously. The Catholic school is a witness to the truth that genuine education seeks to do more than simply impart knowledge, or train people to perform an economically productive task. All education worthy of the name seeks to bring forth as it were a full person, a person in whom moral excellence is no less developed than are theoretical or productive abilities.

8. Dear Brother Bishops, with these thoughts I have wished to be close to you in your ministry to God's people. I also wish to thank you and your clergy, Religious and lay faithful for your zealous service of Christ and his Church. Down the centuries, the Church in your land has been enriched with an abundance of God's grace, not the least of which is the example of so many martyrs who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, lived to the very end the mystery of Christ's Passover. Now, no less than in the past, *the call to holiness must be the chief concern of all the Church's members*. It is the testimony of obedience to our Heavenly Father, filled with evangelical love, which speaks most strongly to a world in need of reconciliation with God and peace among men and nations.

The Church in England can rightly take pride in being "the dowry of Mary". Through the prayers of Our Lady of Ransom may all the Catholics of your country continue to "hold to the Catholic faith, remain devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and obedient to Peter" (Collecta "Memorial of Our Lady of Ransom"). To you and to all those entrusted to your pastoral care I impart my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of abundant divine strength and love.

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