



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Saturday, 18 May 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am happy to welcome you on the occasion of the third centenary of the presence in Italy of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Since 1702 when Bro. Gabriel Drolin arrived in Rome from France, the seed he planted at the price of heroic sacrifices has borne abundant fruit in the field of education. This field has always been particularly dear to the Church who, in her fidelity to Christ, does everything she can so that the human person might have life "in abundance" (cf. Jn 10,10). So I am glad to meet in you today the heirs of this admirable work which you intend to carry forward in the footsteps of St John Baptist de La Salle and Gabriel Drolin.

I greet with affection the Superior General, Bro. Albaro Rodríguez Echeverría, and thank him for his courteous words. I greet you all, offering my cordial welcome to each one.

2. In his spiritual testament, St John Baptist de La Salle wrote several famous recommendations that clarify the ecclesial dimension of the tricentenary year that you are observing: "I recommend that the Brothers always be fully submitted to the Church, especially in these terrible times, and as proof of their submission, that they *never be separated from our Holy Father the Pope or from the Church of Rome*; they should always remember that I sent two Brothers to go to Rome to ask God for the grace that their Society might be completely submitted to him for ever".

These words have kept their full force and timeliness and should motivate the mission entrusted to you at the service of the *integral formation of young people*, in accord with the teachings of the Church.

3. *Bro. Gabriel Drolin* was chosen by De La Salle to give proof of fidelity to the Pope during the

period of Jansenism, and to plant the tree of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools under the shadow and with the approval of the Successor of Peter. He remains for all De La Salle educators an example whose spiritual view is still valid.

On 21 November 1691, with the founder and another brother, he took what became known as the "heroic vow", to guarantee the future of the Christian Schools at any cost, and at the price of a boundless and uncalculating fidelity: "even if we three were to continue alone and were forced to go begging and to live on bread alone".

In 1702 he was prepared to leave France for an important and difficult mission: to make known a new educational, pedagogical and methodological approach, which had come into being 20 years earlier on the other side of the Alps.

4. De La Salle's ascetical and educational thought did not focus so much on "how to educate" as on "*how to be*" in order to educate, in other words, on how to interiorize the educator's vocation and method. His model is Christ, who is Teacher because he is able to listen, example because he is a witness. De La Salle aims at educating young people through *the renewal of the educator*. If the educator does not give the young person an example with his own witness and words, the school does not accomplish its purpose. He said to his followers, "*You are ambassadors and ministers of Christ in the profession that you exercise; you must therefore conduct yourselves as representatives of Christ himself. It is he who wants young people to look to you as to himself, to receive your teaching as if he himself were teaching. They must be convinced that it is the truth of Christ that you speak, that it is in his name you teach them and that it is he himself who gives you authority over them*" (Meditation III, for the retreat, n. 2).

The 26 years that Bro. Gabriel spent in Rome as the Institute's sole exponent provide a lesson of total fidelity to his religious and educational vocation. They are an example of a profound religious spirit and healthy realism in facing the unforeseen events and the fatigue of every day. Bro. Gabriel is still a model we can admire because fidelity to the De La Salle charism and mission still demands intrepid courage and strength of soul ready for any trial.

The *Christian Brothers' educational institutions* continue to be a *providential resource* for the good of youth, of the Church and of society. For this reason fidelity to the charism, more than before, calls for new inspiration and creativity, so that you can suitably respond to the needs of our world.

5. Dear friends, as I had the opportunity to write in my Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!* Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things (n. 110). These words apply to you, here in Italy and in the rest of the world. A task of great importance awaits the De La Salle family. Dear brothers, associates, teachers, parents, alumni and young people, you are called to reaffirm your path of fidelity and renewal.

In the course of three centuries, in the social and cultural context of Italian society, you *have walked beside young people, basing your educational service to them on the great values of solidarity, tolerance, pluralism, service and culture.*

6. I cordially hope that the 300th anniversary will not just be an opportunity to look back over the ground covered, but also to revitalize *a strongly dynamic project* for the human person of the third millennium.

Your venerable founder, together with Bro. Gabriel Drolin, will certainly not withhold their spiritual support. I entrust every one of your schools and religious houses to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, especially those in Italy and, in a very special way, in Rome. I thank you again for today's cordial meeting, and, as I encourage you to continue on your way with enthusiasm and generosity, I wholeheartedly bless you.