



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday 26 April, 1988

Dear brother Bishops,

1. I greet all of you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit, and cordially welcome you to this meeting which expressed our *collegial unity* as shepherds of Christ's flock. I rejoice with you and all the clergy, Religious and laity of your Dioceses at the many spiritual gifts that are yours through the loving kindness of Almighty God. These gifts of the Spirit enable the local Churches in Ontario to fulfill their mission to be a "most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race", to be "the light of the world and the salt of the earth^[1]"^[2]. This mission means bearing witness to Jesus Christ. And as the First Letter of Peter tells us, it also means being able "to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you"^[3].

It is the life-long tasks of all Christians to deepen their knowledge of Christ and hope in eternal life. At the same time Christians must recognize that the seeds of eternal life require special care and nourishment in the young. I therefore wish to reflect with you for a few moments on the *Catholic young people of your country* who will one day exercise an even greater role in the Church. I also wish to encourage you in your efforts to impart to them the message of Christ in all its richness and to deepen their participation in the Church's life.

2. It is always a joy for me to meet with young people, as I am sure it is for you. In them we see the *promise* of great things yet to be achieved, of life yet to be experienced, of enthusiasm and energy yet to be harnessed for the good of humanity. In the presence of the Church's young members we are reminded of the Lord's words, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled"^[4]. When we consider the potential of young people for holiness, self-

sacrifice, heroic virtue, chastity and love, we can take heart that these words of Christ will not lose their force in the future. However, we also know that youth is a *time for opportunities* that can be lost as well as gained. It is a time for personal growth, a time that for good or bad leaves an indelible mark on the rest of a person's life, notwithstanding freedom and the help of God's grace.

Modern society presents *special challenges* to the young. At every turn they are enticed by a concept of human freedom that is really slavery; by a relativism that robs them of the truth; and by a materialism and pragmatism that can rob them of their very souls. Yet where sin abounds, grace increases all the more[5]. We can be sure that the *gifts of the Spirit* will not be lacking in the lives of young men and women. The seeds of holiness are theirs by baptism. Our task is to hold up to them the fullness of Christ's teaching as it is known, accepted and proclaimed by the Catholic Church. We must help them to become "*witnesses*" who are able to testify to "the hope that is within them" so that they can play their full role in the Church's mission for the salvation of the world. As I said on the occasion of my pastoral visit to your country in 1984: "Young people today... are eager to find solid and enduring values... 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"[6].

3. A privileged place for the formation of young people, second in importance only to their families, is the *school* they attend. Accordingly, the Second Vatican Council said that all school should provide an education that is in accord with the moral and religious principles of *families*, that respects the right of the young to have their consciences formed on the basis of *sound morality*, and that respects their right to *know and love God* more perfectly[7]. The Council also reaffirmed the Church's right to establish her own schools, a right which is of the greatest importance for preserving freedom of conscience, for protecting parent's rights, and for advancing culture[8].

I therefore wish to commend you for your successful efforts to promote measures that uphold the Church's right to fulfill her educational mission, and that *support parents* in the free exercise of their right to educate their children in accordance with their religion. Public support for the Separate School system in Canada is a great blessing not only for Catholics; all of your national life is enriched by the intellectual and moral formation these schools provide for their students.

Even though the financial viability of Catholic schools has been guaranteed, the task remains of ensuring their *Catholic character*. As the Congregation for Catholic Education has wisely observed in these years after the Council: "More than ever before, a Catholic school's job is infinitely more difficult, more complex, since this is a time when Christianity demands to be clothed in fresh garments, when all manner of changes have been introduced in the Church and in secular life, and, particularly, when a pluralistic mentality dominates and the Christian Gospel is increasingly pushed to the sidelines. It is because of this that loyalty to the educational aims of the Catholic school demands constant self-criticism and a return to basic principles, to the motives which inspire the Church's involvement in education"[9]. And what are these *basic principles*? The

Catholic school's task "is fundamentally a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge, through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second by growing in the virtues characteristic of the Christian"[10].

L'école catholique s'efforce de préparer les jeunes à apporter une contribution positive à la société dont ils font partie en leur donnant les assises solides d'une vie personnelle profondément chrétienne. Pour être complète, leur formation doit inclure la *morale individuelle et le sens de la vie sociale*. Le grand commandement chrétien de l'amour se traduit en impératifs moraux qui régissent la vie professionnelle, la sexualité, les relations personnelles et la famille, de même qu'il comporte l'obligation de travailler pour la justice et la paix dans le monde. Une vie chrétienne de cette profondeur ne peut pas reposer seulement sur des sentiments religieux ou sur une vague identification à une tradition religieuse. Ce qui est requis, c'est *une connaissance toujours plus approfondie du mystère du salut* révélé dans le Christ et transmis par la Sainte Ecriture et l'enseignement de l'Eglise[11].

4. La *catéchèse* est un moyen important d'assurer cette formation non seulement pour les élèves des écoles catholiques mais pour tous les jeunes catholiques. Elle fait grandir la vie selon l'évangile, et elle a pour but d'éclairer et de fortifier la foi, de stimuler une liturgie vivante et priante, et d'encourager la participation active de l'Eglise[12].

Evidemment, une pareille éducation religieuse ne peut se réduire à la parole, ni non plus à la transmission méthodique d'un savoir. Pour que la formation porte ses fruits dans la vie des jeunes, garçons et filles, leurs parents et leurs maîtres doivent être imprégnés d'esprit *chrétien* dans leur *façon de penser et leur façon d'agir*. Comme "éducateurs", au sens plein du terme, les enseignants catholiques ont la responsabilité particulière de se laisser guider dans leurs activités par une conception chrétienne de la personne humaine en accord avec le magistère ecclésiastique[13]. Le deuxième Concile du Vatican n'hésite pas à parler de la beauté et de l'importance de leur vocation[14], et de leur rappeler que "c'est d'eux, avant tout, qu'il dépend que l'école catholique soit en mesure de réaliser ses buts et ses desseins"[15].

5. Through you, dear Brothers, I wish to commend the *many dedicated teachers* – priests, Religious and laity – for their invaluable contribution in Canada. I also wish to encourage you in your desire to find even better and more effective ways to *recruit and train* lay teachers for the Separate School system, so that the goals of Catholic education may be fully realized.

While all the Christian faithful have a duty to participate in the Church's educational mission, Bishops have a special responsibility to be authentic teacher and instructors in the faith[16]. We have reason to be concerned over the many temptations that young people, in particular, must overcome if they are to grow in the love and knowledge of God and his Church. At the same time we can be confident, together with all those associated in Catholic education, that if the Good News of salvation is *faithfully proclaimed* to the young, it will, achieving the end for which he sent

it[17]. With trust in him, I cordially impart to you and to your people my Apostolic Blessing.

[1] Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 13-16.

[2] *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

[3] *1 Petr.* 3, 15.

[4] *Luc.* 12, 49.

[5] Cfr. *Rom.* 5, 20.

[6] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio Terrae Novae, in templo sanctuario S. Ioannis Baptistae, ad institutores catholicos habita*, die 12 sept. 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 2 (1984) 474 ss.

[7] Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1. 7.

[8] Cfr. *ibid.* 8.

[9] The Sacred Congr. for Cath. Educ. *The Catholic School*, 66. 67.

[10] *Ibid.* 37.

[11] Cfr. *Directoire Catéchétique général*, 1972, n.24.

[12] Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1. 7.

[13] Cfr. S. Congr. pro Institutiones Cath., *Le laïc catholique, témoin de la foi dans l'école*, die 15 oct. 1982, nn. 15-24.

[14] Cfr. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 5.

[15] *Ibid.* 8.

[16] Cfr. *Christus Dominus*, 12-14.

[17] Cfr. *Is.* 55, 11.

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