



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRINCIPALS AND FRIENDS OF THE METROPOLITAN SEPARATE SCHOOL BOARD
OF TORONTO**

*Hall of Popes
Friday, 18 March 1994*

*Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I extend a warm welcome this morning to the *Principals and friends of the Metropolitan Separate School Board of Toronto*. Catholic educators offer an irreplaceable service to the People of God, a service for which the Church is extremely grateful, and I take this occasion *to express, in the Church's name, my thanks to each one of you*: for your love for the Mystical Body of Christ, for your loyalty to her Pastors, and for your faithful witness to the liberating "truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:14).

If Catholic schools are to remain authentically Catholic – and that is their vocation and grace – they must encourage a living encounter with Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 2:14). *Promoting the genuinely Catholic character of your schools* requires a willingness on the part of everyone involved to find ways of promoting the institution's ecclesial mission and of building a community of life and solidarity based on the saving word of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of the persevering efforts of Ontario Catholics, you are blessed in having an extensive system of separate schools justly proud of their own identity and their specific contributions to "the Canadian mosaic". Catholic schools help parents to carry out their obligation to be "the first and most important educators of their own children" (John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 16). A genuinely free society recognizes the "irreplaceable and inalienable" right of parents to oversee their children's schooling (cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 36). In this view, *the responsibility of the State for education is always complementary* and should never replace the fundamental

competence of parents. I am pleased to recall that, in keeping with its traditions of democracy, the pursuit of justice and the defense of human rights, the Province of Ontario recognizes its duty "to ensure that public subsidies to schools are so allocated that parents are truly free to select schools for their children in accordance with their conscience" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 6).

Dear friends: as you return to Canada, it is my hope that you will be strengthened in faith and renewed in joy and enthusiasm for the great work entrusted to you. With this prayer, I commend all of you to the intercession of Saint Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer and Patron of Canada, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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