



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OF EUROPE**

Saturday 28 April 2001

*Your Excellency,
Dear Friends,*

1. I extend a cordial welcome to you on the occasion of the *International Congress of the Catholic Schools of Europe, organized by the European Committee for Catholic Education*. Joining you in a fervent prayer, I hope that your meeting may be the source of a new awareness of the specific role and mission of the Catholic school in the European historical and cultural sphere. By basing yourselves on the richness of your pedagogical traditions, you are invited to seek courageously for suitable answers to the challenges presented by the new ways of thinking and acting of young people today, so that the Catholic school may be an area of total education with a clear educational programme whose foundation is Christ. The theme of your Congress, "*The educational mission: a witness to a hidden treasure*" places at the centre of the educational programme of Catholic schools the basic requirement of every Christian educator: to transmit the truth not only with words, but also by explicitly testifying to it with one's life.

By assuring high quality teaching, Catholic schools present a Christian vision of man and of the world that offers young people the chance for a fruitful dialogue between faith and reason.

Likewise, it is their duty to transmit values to be assimilated and values to be discovered, "with the awareness that all human values find their fulfilment and consequently their unity in Christ" (Congress for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter*, 28 December 1997, n. 9).

2. Cultural upheavals, the relativization of moral values and the worrisome weakening of the family bond generate a sincere anxiety in young people, which is inevitably reflected in their way of living,

learning and planning their future. Such a context invites European Catholic schools to propose an authentic educational programme that will permit young people not only to acquire a human, moral and spiritual maturity, but also to commit themselves effectively to the transformation of society, while also being concerned about working for the coming of the Kingdom of God. They will thus be able to spread in European cultures and societies, as also in the developing countries where Catholic schools can offer their contribution, the hidden treasure of the Gospel, to build the civilization of love, of fraternity, of solidarity and of peace.

3. In order to accept the numerous challenges that they must face, educational communities must place an emphasis on the formation of both religious and secular teachers, so that they may acquire an increasingly vivid awareness of their mission as educators, combining professional skill with a freely made choice to testify coherently spiritual and moral values, inspired by the Gospel message of "*freedom and love*" (*Gravissimum educationis*, n. 8). Conscious of the nobility but also of the difficulties of teaching and educating today, I encourage in their mission all the personnel involved in the Catholic educational system, that they may nourish the hopes of the young people, with the desire to "propose simultaneously the most extensive and deep acquisition of knowledge possible, a demanding and persevering education to true human freedom and the introduction of the children and adolescents entrusted to them to the highest ideal that there is: Jesus Christ and his Gospel message" (*Speech to the Council of the World Union of Catholic Teachers*, 1983).

The experience acquired by the educational community of the Catholic Schools of Europe, in a "*creative fidelity*" to the charism experienced and transmitted by the men and women founders of the religious families involved in the world of education, is irreplaceable. It allows teachers to keep together pedagogical and spiritual programmes and to adapt them to the overall development of young people. How can we fail to insist also on the close relations of cooperation that must unite schools and families, especially in this time when the family life is more fragile? Whatever the scholastic structure, it is the parents who remain primarily responsible for the education of their children. It is the task of the educational communities to promote cooperation so that parents may become newly aware of their educational role and be assisted in their basic task, but also so that the educational and pastoral programme of the Catholic school is adapted to the legitimate aspirations of families.

4. Catholic schools must, finally, accept another challenge that regards a constructive dialogue in the multicultural society of our time. "Education has a particular role to play in building a more united and peaceful world. It can help to affirm that integral humanism, open to life's ethical and religious dimension, which appreciates the importance of understanding and showing esteem for other cultures and the spiritual values present in them" (*Message for the 2001 World Day of Peace*, 8 December 2000, n. 20). In this way the effort made to welcome young people belonging to other religious traditions into the hearts of Catholic schools must continue, without, however, weakening the typical character and Catholic specificity of the institutes. By permitting the acquisition of skills within the same educational sphere, the social bond is formed by acceptance

and mutual knowledge is favoured in a serene confrontation, making it possible to plan the future together. This concrete way of overcoming fear of the other undoubtedly constitutes a decisive step towards peace in society.

5. The Catholic schools in Europe are thus called to be dynamic communities of faith and evangelization, in close contact with diocesan pastoral activity. By being at the service of the dialogue between the Church and the community, undertaking to promote man as a whole, they remind the people of God of the central point of their mission: to permit every man to give meaning to his life by making the *hidden treasure* that is his flow, thus inviting mankind to join in the plan of God manifested by Jesus Christ.

In entrusting the fruitfulness of your Congress to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, I invite you to allow yourselves to be instructed by Jesus Christ, receiving from Him, who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14: 6), the strength and joy to fulfil your exciting and delicate mission. To you all, organizers and participants in this Congress, as also to all your families, to all the personnel within the Catholic educational sphere and to the young people that they follow, I sincerely impart my Apostolic Blessing.