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THE HOLY FATHER'S ADDRESS

TO EDUCATORS AT TURIN

4 September 1988

1. ...I consider this a privileged meeting with you, dear educators employed in the work of the school. I consider it privileged because you are carrying out one of the most important and delicate tasks for the future of the Church and society. This meeting takes place during the celebrations of the first centenary of the death of Saint John Bosco, "father and teacher of the young", "the missionary to the young" (Message for the opening of the General Chapter, 10 January 1984)...

From a distance of one hundred years, the Church desires to express anew Don Bosco's witness and strength of faith in its value for addressing the pressing and immediate service of education to overcome the tragedy of the split between the Gospel and culture (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 20).

2. I have come to be among you today to attest my impassioned partiality for the young, to reaffirm, as I had occasion to do before the members of UNESCO, that "the primary and essential task of culture in general, and also of all culture is education. Education consists in fact in enabling man to become more man, to 'be' more and not just to 'have' more and consequently, through everything he possesses to 'be' man more fully" (Speech to UNESCO, 2 June 1980, n. 11).

Yes, I am here to tell you to be ever more aware of the mission given to you by parents for the education of their children! They have placed their trust in you. Moreover, the Church sees you as her coworkers in the formation of young people and the construction of the dignity of the person.

It is up to you to offer young people the truth about loving a person and teach them to examine thoroughly the new knowledge. Few challenges are as stimulating as teaching, especially when it involves religious instruction classes, and few are as difficult in the prophetic wisdom and creativity required.

3. As educators you experience the ambiguities and grave conflicts which characterize society today. As I have already observed in the letter for the centenary, "the youth situation at the present day, a hundred years after the saint's death, has changed a great deal and presents a whole variety of different conditions and aspects, as is well known to educators and pastors" (Iuvenum Patris, 6).

The profound and numerous scientific and technological changes which continue to mark our epoch have shattered its stability, presenting us with many advantages and inconveniences. In the brief space of one generation, we have seen enormous changes in social values and economic conditions. The crisis which we face is the crisis of the person uprooted from his or her environment and relationships.

Even though "today groups of young people can be found all over the world who are genuinely sensitive to spiritual values, and who are desirous of help and support in the maturing of their personalities" (ibid, 6), they

are still not strangers to the ambiguities, the antinomies, and contradictions which manifest themselves, especially when the young find themselves immersed in, threatened by, and often crushed under an amorphous, one-dimensional, dehumanizing universe. This happens when Gospel values seem to be overcome at times by poverty of relationships at all levels, by the excess of contradictory information lacking a hierarchy of values, by the lack of meaning in life and anxiety for the uncertainties of the future, by the lack of ideals, by a certain attitude of "letting things go" which can lead to crime and harmful consumerism, corroding love and making life barren.

To this picture of things which heavily influences the young people, one must add the crisis of schools which often suffer from a lack of values to give the young, are unfruitful in generating wisdom and culture, and are faced with families in which love is sometimes suffocated.

This is a challenge which presents a pressing obligation to those who work in the field of education. As teachers and instructors you must seek to face up to these changes with creative intelligence since they constitute the daily situation of your professional service and the environment of your Christian witness.

4. Christ desires to be newly present to this contemporary world with all the explosive force of his mystery of love. He wishes to meet the people of today through teachers and models who are true educators, endowed with a strong preference for the young, drawn by Christ who possesses the truth about man and imbued with a great wisdom for humanizing all the new discoveries (cf. Familiaris Consortio, 8), and for restoring the harmony of the person.

Today the world has need, on the one hand, of teachers endowed with a strong conviction that can bring the human person back to his original position, and, on the other hand, of models, rich in inventiveness, to overcome the growing distance between human civilization and Christian faith, and to reestablish the alliance of science and wisdom (ibid., 8). It will be necessary at the same time to enrich knowledge, stimulate action of solidarity and revive the interior life.

It is necessary, therefore, to recover the consciousness of the primacy of truth and perennial values of the human person as such; to face up steadfastly to the challenge of offering an education which aims rather at the person in his or her dignity than at things, more at the search for wisdom than at material things.

It is necessary for the young people in your schools to learn to raise themselves up. How is it possible to safeguard their faculty of concentration and silent maturation of the faith when they are assailed by an ever more rapid movement of external stimuli? How does one enlighten their consciences? How does one teach them to dialogue with themselves; to think of their own dignity and that of others; to cultivate still the sense of wonder and reverence, the ultimate possibility that we have at our disposal to love profoundly, devotedly and with self-renunciation? Because of all this it is necessary to reaffirm with Don Bosco the conviction that in every young person there are reserves of good and interior qualities which, if opportunely stimulated, can give wisdom.

5. In the light of this, a fundamental aspect of your mission is to guide young people to Christ.

Christ is the constant reference point of Christian teachers. Only Jesus Christ is the adequate and ultimate answer to the supreme question about the meaning of life and history; but it is not enough to answer in words alone.

Your students must perceive from the witness of your lives that the person does not have meaning outside of Christ; that Christ is your supreme option and the nucleus of all your initiatives. Teaching does not simply mean imparting your knowledge, but revealing what you are, living by the inspiration of faith.

Giving yourselves to the young and starting with them means precisely becoming capable of understanding the condition of this section of society, taking into consideration their just viewpoint and expressing the tragedy that there is a culture and society which, rather than dedicating itself to accepting the young, concentrates on other marginal interests. Begin with the young; this is the field of your missionary work and your most precious cultural workshop. Be missionaries to the young! Go out to their very hearts! Enter into their spiritual intimacy! Find there the authentic foundation of a personality which feels forced to go beyond itself, from its own limits, from its own plans, to be open to the transcendental reality of a great destiny. Try to see the young with Christ's eyes. While aware of the deficiencies young people have, foster the conviction that the Gospel, if planted within the process of their human formation, can lead them to commit themselves generously in life.

To do this, give special place to the religious education class. Give it priority among your concerns. During that time the young should be in a position to find Christ and his Gospel, feeling the fascination of Christ's person.

6. Youth today are attracted by enticements which reach them from the world; yet they desire to find solid and lasting values which can give meaning and direction to their lives. The salvific message of the Gospel will have to tell them where to find this support and the right direction throughout the educational process. This mission is certainly demanding. It demands a twofold sense of responsibility from you: to direct the conscience and experience of the young towards the mystery of Christ, showing yourselves at the same time to be true sculptors of men and women endowed with a great sense of spirituality.

This ability to direct one's attention to Christ and this spiritual sense are the hidden incentive of all education and culture. It is in this way that teaching will be able, at the same time, to cultivate thought, enrich action, and promote the interior life.

7. Don Bosco was a holy educator who "proposed holiness as the practical objective of his pedagogy" (Iuvenum Patris, 5). "An interchange between 'education' and 'holiness' is indeed the characteristic aspect of his personality: he was a 'holy educator', he drew his inspiration from a 'holy model', Francis de Sales, he was the disciple of a 'holy spiritual teacher', Joseph Cafasso, and he was able to form from among his boys a 'holy pupil', Dominic Savio" (Id., 5).

What a great demand for an educator to be able to convince each of his disciples that he is called to holiness! Be concerned, therefore, to make the Gospel visible in your daily life. Only in that way can you have an evangelical influence on the students whom you teach.

Today it is necessary to repropose the great theme of

holiness. Vatican II traces for us the specific objectives of a Christian education along these same lines. These objectives are a true challenge and clearly describe the delicate work of education: "Christian education... tends especially to make it such that the baptized, gradually initiated into knowledge of the mystery of salvation, always come to a greater awareness of the gift of faith they have received; that they learn to adore God the Father in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23); and that they might thus reach the perfect man, the height of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13), and might make their contribution towards the growth of the mystical body" (Gravissimum Educationis, 2).

I cannot but remember with deep gratitude all those educators, priests, religious or laypersons who, while confronting and overcoming difficult problems, are able to make their teaching penetrating and fruitful.

I thank such educators present here. Greeting them cordially, I wish to offer my encouragement in this initiative which aims at a renewed zeal.

The Church attributes fundamental importance to Catholic schools. Today there are no alternative forms which can effectively substitute for the quality of an education oriented towards the fullness of Christian life. Such a life should be offered by Catholic schools which give priority to translating their own specific goals into action; that is to say, to being a true cultural workshop which inspires people towards the Gospel for a Christian's journey in today's world.

In the face of an environment poor in relationships, the Catholic school transmits and strengthens a sense of community, of social concern, and of universal solidarity. Its finality, drawing continually from the sources of the mystery of Christ, is to prepare young people to see themselves as cooperators in human salvation, committing themselves concretely with an apostolic dynamism to the pressing needs, according to their own state in life.

Today more than ever, the renewed service of Catholic schools is to free young people from encroaching materialism and obsessive hedonism, to guide them with goodness and firmness towards the heights of complete truth and sacrificial love.

8. I appeal especially to parents also, the first educators and teachers of their own children.

Everyone should note what an importance "Mamma Margherita" had in the life of Saint John Bosco! Not only did she give the Oratory of Valdocco that characteristic "family spirit" which still exists today, but she was able to mould the heart of her little John into that goodness and tenderness which made him the friend and father of his poor boys.

The time of associations of Christian parents has come at last! They bring together in friendship families and educators, and help parents to understand better the present socio-cultural changes and to use the most appropriate methods of education.

Dear educators and parents: the Christian formation of the new generations is largely in your hands. Be aware of that! The Lord invites you to recognize the primary urgency of the education of the young.

May Mary Most Holy, your teacher and guide, assist you. May she enlighten you with her maternal intervention in transmitting the truth and in being teachers of goodness and of courageous witness for the faith. Furthermore, may the blessing accompany you which we, poor pastors of the Church, wish to offer you at the end of this meeting...