



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COUNCIL, STAFF AND STUDENTS
OF THE INSTITUTE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION***

Melbourne (Australia), 28 November 1986

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*¹ It is a great joy for me today to be with you, the representatives of Catholic tertiary institutions in Australia, and particularly the Council, staff and students of the Institute of Catholic Education. I am grateful for the warm welcome which you have extended to me. And I very much appreciate having this opportunity to pay tribute to the educational achievements of the Church in this beautiful country, and to urge you to continue in this vital work. The Church here is young. From her very foundation, she has been very active in developing organizations and the structures needed in order to provide a true Catholic education for her people, and at the same time to serve the needs of Australian society as a whole. When I heard the history of Catholic education in this country, I thought of the words of Saint John who wrote: "It was a great joy to me when some brothers came and told of your faithfulness to the truth, and of your life in the truth. It is always my greatest joy to hear that my children are living according to the truth". For many years, the chief organizational and teaching burdens for Catholic education here were shouldered by men and women religious. They met the challenge splendidly, and the whole Church and all of Australian society will be for ever in their debt. Even though their numbers have decreased in recent years, it is my heartfelt prayer that the Lord will call many young people today to the religious life, so that their public witness to the Gospel will not be lacking in our schools but will in fact increase and flourish. The very composition of this gathering is a clear sign that the Australian laity are generously responding to the need for Catholic teachers in our time. It is important to remember that all groups in the Church are responsible for Catholic education. Clergy, religious and laity all have a vital contribution to make in the one mission of Christ and the Church. I acknowledge with gratitude and admiration the increasingly prominent role that the Church is playing in tertiary education in Australia. Surely, this is due in large part to the vigorous and dynamic unity of the Catholic laity with the clergy and religious in pursuing educational objectives. I am mindful of the special contributions of the bishops, of certain priests and religious, of the Chairman of this Institute, Sir Bernard Callinan, who is also Chairman of the National Catholic Education Commission. Yet I am also aware that no individual, no group of priests, bishops, religious or parents, however dedicated, could have achieved all this without the collective insights, generosity, and energy of all the Catholic people. I wish to pay tribute to this long tradition of unity and service I pray that both now and in the future you will do all in your power to preserve and strengthen the Australian tradition of Catholic education, which

has contributed so much not only to the Church but to the whole of Australian society. I pray too that all difficulties will be resolved through perseverance and good will. I am pleased that in our meeting today there are so many people from the Institute of Catholic Education. This Institute plays an important part in serving the needs of the Catholic community, especially in the Catholic schools of the State of Victoria, and also in providing nurses for a number of hospitals. I express my support for the splendid aims that this Institute embodies and I am grateful to all those who work together with such dedication to attain these aims.² I would now like to speak more particularly to those of you who will be graduating from the Institute of Catholic Education. You are entering a distinguished profession. More importantly, you are following a Christian calling. Today, not only have you welcomed me with a warmth that has moved my heart, but in another sense I welcome you. I welcome you into that chosen group called by the Church to educate young Catholics in the faith. In a very special way, you share in the Church's mission of proclaiming the Good News of salvation. Not all of you may be teaching catechetics, but if you are on the staff of a Catholic school, it is expected, and it is of the utmost importance, that you should support the whole of the Church's teaching and bear witness to it in your daily lives. The life of a teacher, as I know from personal experience, is very challenging and demanding, but it is also profoundly satisfying. It is more than a job, for it is rooted in our deepest convictions and values. To be intimately concerned in the development of a young person, of hundreds of young people, is a highly responsible task. As teachers, you kindle in your students a thirst for truth and wisdom. You spark off in them a desire for beauty. You introduce them to their cultural heritage. You help them to discover the treasures of other cultures and peoples. What an awesome responsibility and privilege is yours in the teaching profession.³ Yet teachers in a Catholic school do not merely follow a worth profession. Certainly your work demands professionalism, but it also demands something more. Your profession as teachers involves tasks that are linked to your baptism and to your own commitment in faith. I repeat that in a very special way you share in the mission of the Church. No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibility to lead your pupils more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living tradition of the Church. Baptism is a call from Christ, a call which affects our whole life, the way we act and think. It moulds our attitudes and behaviour. This is seen very clearly in the work of a Catholic teacher. The impact you have upon your students and especially upon their faith in Christ will depend on the vitality of your own Christian life, and on the motives, attitudes and principles which shape your behaviour. Your attitude towards Christ and your personal closeness to him are fundamental. Closely linked to this are your attitude towards the Church and your sense of having a special mission within her. You are not isolated agents in an impersonal bureaucracy. You are not merely professional educators. You are called to be faith-inspired collaborators in the heart of the Christian community. The Christian attitude becomes particularly important when you face the important questions of teachers' rights and academic freedom. It is appropriate for Catholic teachers to be concerned about their personal rights and to join educational associations, when these are in harmony with Catholic educational principles. Your personal rights and professional interests merit respect. At the same time, respect is also due to the kind of commitment you accept when you ask to serve in Catholic education and when you freely accept the Church's call to teach. Thus for the teacher in a Catholic school the Church is always more than a mere employer. The Church is the Body of Christ in history, carrying out the mission of her Redeemer; and her teachers are privileged to share in that mission. How important, then, that each teacher, and all the teachers together, should work in harmony with others in the Church in the great task of Catholic education. This collaboration will always require generosity and self-sacrifice.⁴ Not only are the attitudes of teachers crucial for the success of Catholic education but also the attitudes of Catholic parents. Parents must set themselves very definite priorities, such as the determination to have schools in which their children's faith will be respected, fostered and enriched; schools in which their children learn the value and beauty of the Church's teaching. They must also see to it that their own homes are places in which these values are first fostered and lived. Parents' own practice of the faith, their

own love for Christ, is of course fundamental. Catholic parents in Australia have held to these priorities for many years. That is why, when State funding was withdrawn in the 1880s, the Catholic schools continued to function. They even spread more widely across the country. This came about through the strong leadership of the bishops and clergy, together with the generosity of large numbers of religious, many from Ireland and other parts of Europe. But it also came about because parents wanted a solid Catholic education for their children and were willing to make great sacrifices to obtain it. After eighty years, successive Governments recognized the principle of the right of parents to choose schools for their children and to have a share of the public purse to help fund those schools. Despite a decreasing number of religious to staff schools, the Catholic education system continues to grow. Parents still want it and need it. A solid tradition has been established. You have truly taken to heart the words of the Second Vatican Council which said: "Catholic parents are reminded of their duty to send their children to Catholic schools whenever this is possible, to give Catholic schools all the support in their power, and to cooperate with them for the well-being of their children".⁵ The parish primary school, where younger children receive their early lessons in the faith, remains a cornerstone of the pastoral care of Australia's Catholic people. Here the community of faith hands on the timeless message of Jesus Christ to its youngest members. More difficult challenges face the Catholic secondary school. Here students must be helped to achieve that integration of faith and authentic culture which is necessary for believers in today's world. But they must also be helped to recognize and reject false cultural values which are contrary to the Gospel. Both primary and secondary schools must work closely with the family and the parish if they are to foster effectively the Christian formation of the pupils. This is a noble work in which parents, teachers and clergy all collaborate. Parents need to keep in close touch with their children's education through such groups as parent friends associations and through other means. And precisely because teachers represent parents, they must be aware of the limits of their authority over the students, and must work in harmony with parents. Success in this field will mean more dedicated members of society and the Church, more young men and women who are deeply committed to Christ. The extent to which Catholic schools contribute to the continual renewal of the Church depends on how successfully they foster continual conversion of heart.⁶ And now, permit me to say a few words to the secondary school students who are present. Dear students: from what I have said and from your own experience, you know how hard the Church is trying to provide you with a Catholic education. The Church wishes to entrust to you a great treasure, which is the mystery of Christ and his Gospel. Very often I have spoken to young people in words like these: "Dear young friends: do not allow this treasure to be taken from you! ... Love 'rejoices in the truth'. Seek out this truth where it is really to be found! If necessary, be resolved to go against the current of popular opinion and propaganda slogans! Do not be afraid of the love that places clear demands on people. These demands – as you find them in the constant teaching of the Church – are precisely capable of making your love a true love". Remember that the truth leads to Christ, for he alone is "the Way, the Truth and the Life". To all of you, teachers, administrators and students, I say with Saint Paul: "Be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy". *May our Lord Jesus Christ give you truth and wisdom! May he fill your hearts with his love!* © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana