

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO TEACHERS AND RELIGIOUS

Chapel of St Mary's University College

*Your Excellency the Secretary of State for Education,
Bishop Stack, Dr Naylor,
Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

I am pleased to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding contribution made by religious men and women in this land to the noble task of education. I thank the young people for their fine singing, and I thank Sister Teresa for her words. To her and to all the dedicated men and women who devote their lives to teaching the young, I want to express sentiments of deep appreciation. You form new generations not only in knowledge of the faith, but in every aspect of what it means to live as mature and responsible citizens in today's world.

As you know, the task of a teacher is not simply to impart information or to provide training in skills intended to deliver some economic benefit to society; education is not and must never be considered as purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom. And true wisdom is inseparable from knowledge of the Creator, for “both we and our words are in his hand, as are all understanding and skill in crafts” (Wis 7:16).

This transcendent dimension of study and teaching was clearly grasped by the monks who contributed so much to the evangelization of these islands. I am thinking of the Benedictines who accompanied Saint Augustine on his mission to England, of the disciples of Saint Columba who spread the faith across Scotland and Northern England, of Saint David and his companions in Wales. Since the search for God, which lies at the heart of the monastic vocation, requires active engagement with the means by which he makes himself known – his creation and his revealed word – it was only natural that the monastery should have a library and a school (cf. [*Address to representatives from the world of culture at the “Collège des Bernardins” in Paris*](#), 12 September 2008). It was the monks' dedication to learning as the path on which to encounter the Incarnate Word of God that was to lay the foundations of our Western culture and civilization.

Looking around me today, I see many apostolic religious whose charism includes the education of the young. This gives me an opportunity to give thanks to God for the life and work of the Venerable Mary Ward, a native of this land whose pioneering vision of apostolic religious life for women has borne so much fruit. I myself as a young boy was taught by the “English Ladies” and I owe them a deep debt of gratitude. Many of you belong to teaching orders that have carried the light of the Gospel to far-off lands as part of the Church's great missionary work, and for this too I give thanks and praise to God. Often you laid the foundations of educational provision long before the State assumed a responsibility for this vital service to the individual and to society. As the relative roles of Church and State in the field of education continue to evolve, never forget that religious have a unique contribution to offer to this apostolate, above all through lives consecrated to God and through faithful, loving witness to Christ, the supreme Teacher.

Indeed, the presence of religious in Catholic schools is a powerful reminder of the much-discussed Catholic ethos that needs to inform every aspect of school life. This extends far beyond the self-evident requirement that the content of the teaching should always be in conformity with Church

doctrine. It means that the life of faith needs to be the driving force behind every activity in the school, so that the Church's mission may be served effectively, and the young people may discover the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others" (*Spe Salvi*, 28).

Before I conclude, I wish to add a particular word of appreciation for those whose task it is to ensure that our schools provide a safe environment for children and young people. Our responsibility towards those entrusted to us for their Christian formation demands nothing less. Indeed, the life of faith can only be effectively nurtured when the prevailing atmosphere is one of respectful and affectionate trust. I pray that this may continue to be a hallmark of the Catholic schools in this country.

With these sentiments, dear Brothers and Sisters, I invite you now to stand and pray.

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Bishop Stack, I would ask you, as Chairman of the Board of Governors of Saint Mary's University, to receive, on behalf of the College, this gift of a mosaic of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO PUPILS

Sports Arena of St Mary's University College

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear young friends,*

First of all, I want to say how glad I am to be here with you today. I greet you most warmly, those who have come to Saint Mary's University from Catholic schools and colleges across the United Kingdom, and all who are watching on television and via the internet. I thank Bishop McMahon for his gracious welcome, I thank the choir and the band for the lovely music which began our celebration, and I thank Miss Bellot and Elaine for her kind words on behalf of all the young people present. In view of London's forthcoming Olympic Games, it has been a pleasure to inaugurate this Sports Foundation, named in honour of Pope John Paul II, and I pray that all who come here will give glory to God through their sporting activities, as well as bringing enjoyment to themselves and to others.

It is not often that a Pope, or indeed anyone else, has the opportunity to speak to the students of all the Catholic schools of England, Wales and Scotland at the same time. And since I have the chance now, there is something I very much want to say to you. I hope that among those of you listening to me today there are some of the future saints of the twenty-first century. What God wants most of all for each one of you is that you should become holy. He loves you much more than you could ever begin to imagine, and he wants the very best for you. And by far the best thing for you is to grow in holiness.

Perhaps some of you have never thought about this before. Perhaps some of you think being a saint is not for you. Let me explain what I mean. When we are young, we can usually think of people that

we look up to, people we admire, people we want to be like. It could be someone we meet in our daily lives that we hold in great esteem. Or it could be someone famous. We live in a celebrity culture, and young people are often encouraged to model themselves on figures from the world of sport or entertainment. My question for you is this: what are the qualities you see in others that you would most like to have yourselves? What kind of person would you really like to be?

When I invite you to become saints, I am asking you not to be content with second best. I am asking you not to pursue one limited goal and ignore all the others. Having money makes it possible to be generous and to do good in the world, but on its own, it is not enough to make us happy. Being highly skilled in some activity or profession is good, but it will not satisfy us unless we aim for something greater still. It might make us famous, but it will not make us happy. Happiness is something we all want, but one of the great tragedies in this world is that so many people never find it, because they look for it in the wrong places. The key to it is very simple – true happiness is to be found in God. We need to have the courage to place our deepest hopes in God alone, not in money, in a career, in worldly success, or in our relationships with others, but in God. Only he can satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts.

Not only does God love us with a depth and an intensity that we can scarcely begin to comprehend, but he invites us to respond to that love. You all know what it is like when you meet someone interesting and attractive, and you want to be that person's friend. You always hope they will find you interesting and attractive, and want to be your friend. God wants your friendship. And once you enter into friendship with God, everything in your life begins to change. As you come to know him better, you find you want to reflect something of his infinite goodness in your own life. You are attracted to the practice of virtue. You begin to see greed and selfishness and all the other sins for what they really are, destructive and dangerous tendencies that cause deep suffering and do great damage, and you want to avoid falling into that trap yourselves. You begin to feel compassion for people in difficulties and you are eager to do something to help them. You want to come to the aid of the poor and the hungry, you want to comfort the sorrowful, you want to be kind and generous. And once these things begin to matter to you, you are well on the way to becoming saints.

In your Catholic schools, there is always a bigger picture over and above the individual subjects you study, the different skills you learn. All the work you do is placed in the context of growing in friendship with God, and all that flows from that friendship. So you learn not just to be good students, but good citizens, good people. As you move higher up the school, you have to make choices regarding the subjects you study, you begin to specialize with a view to what you are going to do later on in life. That is right and proper. But always remember that every subject you study is part of a bigger picture. Never allow yourselves to become narrow. The world needs good scientists, but a scientific outlook becomes dangerously narrow if it ignores the religious or ethical dimension of life, just as religion becomes narrow if it rejects the legitimate contribution of science to our understanding of the world. We need good historians and philosophers and economists, but if the account they give of human life within their particular field is too narrowly focused, they can lead us seriously astray.

A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints. I know that there are many non-Catholics studying in the Catholic schools in Great Britain, and I wish to include all of you in my words today. I pray that you too will feel encouraged to practise virtue and to grow in knowledge and friendship with God alongside your Catholic classmates. You are a reminder to them of the bigger picture that exists outside the school, and indeed, it is only right that respect and friendship for members of other religious traditions should be among the virtues learned in a Catholic school. I

hope too that you will want to share with everyone you meet the values and insights you have learned through the Christian education you have received.

Dear friends, I thank you for your attention, I promise to pray for you, and I ask you to pray for me. I hope to see many of you next August, at the World Youth Day in Madrid. In the meantime, may God bless you all!