

FOCUS SECTION

PRESENTATIONS OF THE VATICAN DOCUMENT: CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THEIR MISSION IN SCHOOLS

In releasing the document *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools*, the leadership of the Congregation for Catholic Education offered introductory remarks to contextualize the official publication.

HIS EMINENCE ZENON CARDINAL GROCHOLEWSKI
Congregation for Catholic Education

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education: *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines*, which the Holy Father has approved and whose publication he has authorized.

The title clearly describes the objectives of the document and the persons to whom it is addressed. With this contribution, the Congregation wishes to help consecrated persons to reflect on their educational presence in schools and to offer guidelines that should serve to motivate them and sustain them today in their educational mission. The document also wants to be an expression of gratitude to the consecrated persons who dedicate their life to the service of the education of the young generations. Indeed, as the Holy Father recently said, “The Church is indebted to consecrated persons for the marvelous pages of holiness and dedication to the cause of education and evangelization they have written, especially, during the last two centuries” (*Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Catholic Education*, 4 February 2002, n. 5; *L’osservatore romano*, 13 February 2002, p. 2). The fruitful meeting of consecrated persons and the world of education has produced a wise and effective pedagogical tradition which, in the light of the Gospel, serves the overall growth of the human person. The educational wisdom of Don Bosco, the attraction to the poor of Joseph Calasanz, the educational work of John Baptist de la Salle, the concern for the education of girls and young

women of Domenica Mazzarello and Lucia Filippini, to quote just a few of the best known names, are present in the treasure that consecrated persons bring with them to schools at the beginning of the third millennium.

In my presentation I aim to place the document in its proper context: schools and their needs; I will leave it to Archbishop Pittau to illustrate the educational commitment of consecrated persons in the Church and to Sr. Antonia Colombo, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, a congregation with an educational charism which is present in many places, to go into the text in detail.

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The document opens on to a panorama of the situation of the school in the third millennium. In fact, it deals with educational concerns and hopes that come from every part of the world. The field of education and the school is truly immense: there are more than a billion school-age children with their families, 58 million teachers, let alone non-teaching school personnel (UNESCO, *Rapport sur l'éducation 2000*, Paris 2000, pp. 119-121). In these references are included Church scholastic institutes, over 250,000 schools with 42 million students (data supplied in 1994 by the Office international de l'enseignement catholique [OIEC]). We must also mention the thousands of Catholic teachers, including a great many consecrated persons, who carry out their mission in State schools.

Besides the immensity of the specific sector of schools, I want to point out the growing interest in educational topics on the part of public opinion and the international community. In the last decades of the 20th century, people have become more convinced of the importance of education. In many world conferences, for example, at Jomptien (1991), Dakar (1998), etc., the international community placed an emphasis on the role of education for the future of humanity, for peace, for sustainable development, for the dignity of peoples. Here I would like to mention a single result of the interest in education: the report edited by Jacques Delors (*L'éducation, un trésor est caché dedans*, Report to l'UNESCO, Paris, 1996), in which the essential pillars of education of the 21st century are identified: "Apprendre à connaître" (learning to know); "Apprendre à faire" (learning to do); "Apprendre à vivre ensemble" (learning to live together) and "Apprendre à être" (learning to be). This is a global vision of education which, unfortunately, outside the context of official statements, is not concretely accepted. Indeed, the daily reality which school and education must confront is complex and difficult.

Even though the general view varies from place to place all over the world, there is agreement on some common elements. The most important of them is without a doubt globalization. In economics, globalization is spread-

ing at an incredible pace and alongside undeniable benefits, it is giving rise to new problems with regard to employment, work and the distribution of wealth. Globalization is also a cultural, political and educational phenomenon. It encourages meetings and exchanges between individual peoples, but can produce a dangerous cultural homogenization.

The application of new technologies, widespread computerization and the rapidity of communications make the adaptation of the scholastic and educational task so necessary that there is talk of a radical transformation of the traditional processes of teaching and learning. In addition, on the horizon there are threatening problems that profoundly affect human life: ecological and bioethical issues.

ROLE OF EDUCATION, THE SCHOOL IN AN EVER MORE COMPLEX WORLD

In so complex a world, it is natural that education and the school should assume a crucial role. Education is required to bring the new generations to a dynamic way of knowing that can prepare them to manage complex systems and enable the person to acquire new aptitudes for work.

In this same world in which the processes I have mentioned have increased the possibility for each individual to have access to information, there are still many places where access to primary education is denied. The data provided by UNESCO (*op. cit.*, pp. 26-53) say that 135 million children between the ages of six and eleven years do not go to school and that more than 280 million children and young people are illiterate or have had no more than minimal schooling. The vast majority of illiterate adults, more than 800 million, and of young people who have not been to school is to be found in the developing countries, which widens the gap between the north and the south of the world.

PROBLEMS WITH EDUCATION, THE SCHOOL TODAY, LOSS OF SENSE OF MISSION

In addition to this kind of problem, the context of school today is marked by great trouble. In the school world, especially in the West, a widespread weariness can be perceived on the part of teachers, who feel unmotivated and frustrated in their educational task. Another very disturbing sign is the increase in violence at school and among adolescents; and in addition, the families, that we accept as primarily responsible for the education of the children, find it difficult to take an active part in the educational scholastic community. I believe I can say that the core of the problems of the school today is the obscuring, I hope not the loss, of the meaning of education. Such a loss of meaning is closely linked to the loss of values, especially those that support the decisions of life: the family, work, morals in general. Thus education is also suffering

from the evils afflicting our societies: widespread subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. Schools are often asked to be merely instructive, that is, capable of providing cognitive instruments and of making human resources function in the complex economic system of our world. The Catholic pedagogical tradition, instead, forcefully reaffirms the centrality of the human person in the educational process.

A correct educational approach must aim at the integral formation of the individual, bringing him into direct contact with culture and reality. The deepest demands of a society marked by scientific and technological development, which can result in depersonalization and standardization, require adequate responses and have underlined the need for an education which can form strong and responsible personalities that are capable of making free and responsible moral choices. Education must be able to make young people gradually more open to reality and help them to develop a strong healthy concept of life to which the spiritual, religious and human values are not foreign. An education that is purely technical and functional can lead to enabling the young generations, to use an image from the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* in the famous orchestral piece by Paul Dukas (a French composer [1865-1935]; *L'apprenti sorcier* [1897] was his most celebrated work), to conjure up spirits but not to control them. A formation that excludes wisdom and ignores the human being, and consequently his necessary moral conduct, would jeopardize the future of humanity.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Catholic schools, through the educational project based on the person of Jesus Christ and on the values of the Gospel, want to contribute to refocusing on the human person as the center of the educational experience. This means that the educational project must consider all the dimensions of the human person. Today people are experiencing in their lives a flood of contradictions, they are fragmented persons who find it difficult to accept and bring values into a synthesis. It is undeniable that along with progress in so many areas, people are finding it difficult to respond to the questions life places before them. Christian pedagogy and Catholic schools have a rich patrimony to put at the service of everyone. Therefore the person is not only the sum total of his horizontal dimensions, but also the harmonious composition of the ethical, spiritual and religious aspects of human reality.

Thus the work of education has a spectrum of 360°. The proprium (specificity) of the Catholic educational project is to encourage an integral humanism, which finds in Christ its model and inspiration and seeks to develop the inner life, intelligence and will of the students, and to guide them in their decisions. In this context of all forms of education, the role of consecrated persons

is not only important but indispensable, as they bring to bear “on the world of education their radical witness to the values of the Kingdom” (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 25 March 1996, n. 96).

THE ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

The historical circumstances in which the document comes into being are important. It is published shortly after the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council; it is significantly dated 28 October, the publication date of the conciliar Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis*. This is intended to express, even symbolically, the spirit in which we have published this document. The Council ushered in a new season for the world of education, offering precious guidelines and inaugurating a period of reflection on the Church’s educational mission. This document is another piece in the mosaic of the process of reflection and study that began with *Gravissimum educationis*. Indeed, it is a service proper to the Congregation of which I am Prefect, to develop fundamental principles concerning Catholic education (cf. Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis*, Preface). In fidelity to this institutional task, in the 70s and 80s the Congregation promoted certain documents for the renewal of Catholic schools and the examination of relevant problems. The first was *The Catholic School*, published 25 years ago (19 March 1977; *L’osservatore romano*, 14 July 1977, p. 6 [part I], 21 July 1977, p. 4 [part III]). It can be said that the identikit [identity] of a school that claims to be Catholic was pieced together in this document (15 October 1982; *L’osservatore romano*, 25 October 1982, p. 6 [Part I], 1 November 1982, p. 6 [Part II] 8 November 1982 [Part III]).

In 1983, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* was published (1 November 1983; *L’osservatore romano*, 5 December 1993, p. 5). The text responded to the need to offer clear guidelines on the topic of sex education, which must include the anthropological and moral as well as biological aspects, combined with pedagogical prudence and collaboration with families. In 1988 the document: *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Rome, 7 April 1988 in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. II, pp. 262-313). This document treated a subject of fundamental importance for Catholic schools, but also for all school education. Indeed, the religious dimension of knowledge and of the human person is all too often a missing link in the chain of school education, with resulting harm for the formation of the young generations. Recently, in 1997, with the approach of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 a circular letter was published entitled *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (*L’osservatore romano*, 22 April 1998, p. 4) which reflected on the identity and mission of Catholic schools in the contemporary educational context.

PRESENT DOCUMENT

This document, conceived as complementary to that on Catholic laity, comes in continuity with the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, the result of the Synod on the consecrated life, as a deepening of the reasons for the indispensable presence of consecrated persons in the context of the school today. In fact, consecrated persons make an essential contribution to developing the vertical dimension in educational and school activities, namely, openness to God, along with the horizontal dimension, an education for living responsibly with others. Indeed, through the evangelical counsels and the experience of community life they witness to an all-embracing, definitive commitment, a response of love to Christ, Teacher and Lord, who opens them to the gift of self to others. Their presence in the school, is a concrete and effective help in achieving the integral education of the young generations which today is so strongly needed and desired.

CONCLUSION

We hope the document will serve as an incentive to consecrated persons so that even in the present circumstances, with the decreasing number of vocations, despite the temptation to leave the service of education, the complexity of the world of education and school, they may continue to be aware of the nobility of educational service, “aimed at giving reasons for life and hope to the new generations, through critically processed knowledge and culture, on the basis of a concept of the person and of life inspired by the evangelical values” (*Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines*, 28 October 2002, n. 84).

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HIS EXCELLENCY MONSIGNOR GIUSEPPE PITTAU

Congregation for Catholic Education

Brothers and Sisters,

With this presentation of the document *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, I would first of all like to say a few words on the situation of consecrated persons in Catholic schools today. Although there are no statistics on the exact number of religious who teach in schools, I think it is possible to offer a general view, seen from various parts of the world.

DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN SCHOOLS IN THE WESTERN WORLD

First and foremost, as you know, in the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council, the number of men and women religious teachers fell sharply. As an example, I can mention the situation in the United States of America. In 1970 more than half the 200,000 teachers in Catholic schools were consecrated persons or priests (51%). In 10 years the proportion had fallen to 30%; in another 10 years to 15% and after a further 10 years, that is, in the year 2000, it had dropped to 7.5% with a few more than 12,000 teachers (cf. *Official Catholic Directory*).

In the short period of 30 years, the presence of consecrated persons has fallen drastically, radically changing the features of the Catholic school, and making it much more difficult to preserve the Catholic identity. While this example represents only one nation, it is likely to be an example of what happened in the majority of countries in the Western world.

Some news reports on the world situation show us that in the academic year 1999-2000, in the school sector in Spain, there were 11,000 consecrated persons out of a total of 79,000 teachers; that is, 14% of the teaching staff. These teachers belong to 240 women's congregations and 53 men's institutes.

ZIMBABWE: NUMBERS OF MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS

A glance at the Church of Zimbabwe in Africa, shows us that in 1997 there were 74 Catholic elementary schools and 56 secondary schools, with 23 priests, 18 religious brothers and 142 sisters, that is 7% of the teaching staff, with 8% in secondary schools and the remaining 5% in the elementary schools (cf. 1997, *Annual Report of ZCBC Education Commission*, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference).

SOUTH KOREA HAS MANY MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN SCHOOLS

To take an example from Asia, we can look at South Korea, one of the nations where vocations are the most numerous. In South Korea there are 300 Catholic schools with 500 priests and consecrated persons who represent 11% of the teaching staff of 4,500 persons. On the other hand, in nursery schools, which account for 75% of the Catholic schools in South Korea, one teacher out of five is a consecrated person, and almost all are women religious (cf. *Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea: 2001*, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea).

IN ASIA, 90% OF BAPTIZED CATHOLICS COME FROM CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

From my personal experience of 29 years in Japan with visits to other Asian countries, I can testify to the vital importance of nursery schools for evangelization in the Far East. Nursery school children are still very open to the Christian values, and their parents, whose contact with school diminishes in proportion to the children's age, are often attracted to the faith or strengthened in the faith through their children. The Bishops of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and other countries testify to the importance of the Catholic school for evangelization. Many Bishops even say that 90% of the baptized had their first contact with the faith through their Catholic schooling.

Consecrated persons, men and women, can introduce children to the spirit of prayer and holiness partly by their teaching, but especially by the life they live, consecrated to the Lord and full of joy.

Allow me to make a personal confession. My first experience as a teacher was at a lower middle school that was run by the Jesuits. I taught English and social ethics. I had 180 students. About 90 of these were baptized during their school years or after they graduated.

CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

Since the Middle Ages, the Church, especially through religious communities, has been in the forefront of the field of education. The few educational institutions that existed were the schools of cathedrals and monasteries, and the ecclesial universities. The European educational system was truly born "ex corde Ecclesiae" (from the heart of the Church). The beginning of the 16th century saw the flourishing of many religious orders and congregations that were dedicated to the educational apostolate, especially the education of the children of the poor who could not receive a systematic education. In many countries, consecrated persons led the way in establishing new schools in the

spirit of their founders and foundresses who saw education as an effective means for the apostolate.

An essential element of the education imparted by consecrated persons has always been an integral formation in a context of faith, which offers children the opportunity to “develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities ... to be stimulated to make sound moral judgements based on a well-formed conscience and to put them into practice with a sense of personal commitment, and to know and love God more perfectly” (*Gravissimum educationis*, n. 1). For centuries, consecrated persons, brothers and priests, have devoted their lives, often in oppressive financial, political or religious conditions, to guiding children and adolescents in their formation, communicating to them not only a sound intellectual formation, but also a deep appreciation of the gift of faith.

FOUNDERS OF THE ORDERS FOR THE FORMATION OF YOUTH

This total dedication of men and women religious led to a great revolution in the world of education. It suffices to mention only a few founders and foundresses to understand the influence exercised by consecrated persons in the field of the formation of youth.

St. Jerome Emiliani founded the Congregation of the Somascan Fathers for the education of orphans, with a program that included “Christian doctrine, reading, writing, the abacus, music and playing in concerts” in such a way “that with the training in the various arts and virtues, each one may follow his own inclinations and honourably earn his living.” The Somascans also opened schools for the nobility.

St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria founded the Barnabites (Clerks Regular of St. Paul), who built schools and colleges and educated outstanding figures in the fields of research and the professions.

The Jesuits, founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, exercised a great influence in the period of Renaissance humanism and the Counter-Reformation. Their educational method was based on a double tradition: that of the scholastics who exalted intellectual analysis and learning as an end in itself, and that of humanists who attributed to education an important role for the entire society. The Jesuits created a synthesis of the two traditions. Both intellectual competence and the preparation for and dedication to service constitute the aim of education. Education had to enable the student to become both good and well-instructed. Both *pietas* (holiness) and *eruditio* (erudition) were necessary.

At the outset the Piarists, founded by St. Joseph Calasanz, worked almost exclusively with the children of the poor. In Trastevere, Rome, they founded the first free school for the poor in Europe. They attached great importance to teaching arithmetic, geometry, drawing and architecture. They wanted to train

boys to master the necessary tools to equip them for an activity with which they could earn an honest living.

St. John de la Salle founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a congregation dedicated exclusively to education, consisting solely of teachers who were consecrated lay religious.

Blessed William Chaminade founded the Marianists who desired to counter the de-Christianization of the French Revolution. The Marists, founded by Marcellin-Joseph-Benôit Champagnat, also sought to oppose the growing secularization in the first half of the 19th century.

Don Bosco was an innovative educator who founded the Salesians, and together with St. Domenica Maria Mazzarello, also the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. They were inspired by the principle of preventive education to form honest citizens and good Christians.

Don Bosco confronted the social problem of youth; he was concerned with the "poor and abandoned" young people, unruly as a group and being a danger to the moral and social order.

Religious and recreational activities, reading and writing classes, professional schools and job training, prevention in terms of assistance (food, clothing, lodging, instruction) and preventive education, meaning that the failings and deviations from the rules were not repressed or punished, but prevented from happening. At the same time, he fostered all that might contribute to the growth of the young people.

FOUNDRESSES OF ORDERS FOR THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

So far, I have mentioned almost exclusively male religious congregations, but the female congregations made a very great contribution to the instruction and education of girls and young women, and now also that of boys.

Since the Middle Ages, the education of women outside the family was mainly connected with the education provided in convents to whom families, especially the nobility, entrusted their daughters at an early age for their human and Christian formation.

St. Angela Merici founded the Society of St. Ursula (Ursulines) which then developed into various forms of consecrated life: communities of virgins grouped into associations, living in their own family and work place, colleges of virgins bound to God with private vows, traditional monasteries and congregations that lived a community life. All these experiences were based on Angela Merici's spiritual doctrine, which had three essential dimensions: total consecration to God, complete dedication to charitable works, including teaching and education, the fulfillment of a bond of sacred charity in personal relationships, inspired by a family style.

From this basic inspiration many religious congregations came into being, who were dedicated to the educational apostolate.

SURVEY OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS DONE BY THE CONGREGATION

Three years ago, the Congregation for Catholic Education asked the various religious communities involved in education to share their recent documents, describing the principles, guidelines and features of their educational activity. Hundreds of documents arrived from around the world from which we have been able to draw a wealth of ideas and experiences. It is important that this treasure of pedagogical knowledge, prepared by consecrated persons who in humility and generosity, in the various parts of the world, work in the educational apostolate, not be dispersed but be available for reciprocal enrichment.

TWO EXAMPLES: ST. JULIE BILLIART AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF CHRIST THE KING

I would like to mention here only two “pearls” chosen from among the many treasures that we have received. St. Julie Billiart, foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame, describes education “first and foremost as a work of faith. Seen from the perspective of faith, every job, even the most insignificant, becomes great in God’s eyes. Education is a work of hope, for hope is always a source of new courage in order not to lose heart in the face of sufferings and problems, but rather to find in our labours their salvific value. Education is a work of love, the love of Christ that impels us to love all our brothers and sisters and, in a preferential way, the neediest, by offering our lives for their salvation. It is a work of prayer. Only through prayer can our work produce fruit in the heart of the students we wish to educate.”

The second “pearl” presents us an example of the capacity of a charism, united with hundreds of other charisms, to express the magnificent diversity of the Church in her members. “What Franciscan schools contribute in the apostolate of education is the integration of faith, culture and life. An effort is made to raise the student to a completely human level open to divine grace. For us, the School Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King, education is our way of life. It is the fruit of a deep love inspired by the Gospel: a person who is a brother and sister of all because he or she lives the universal fatherhood of God. It is a human person, a builder of peace, a bearer of peace, who fully develops the talents received from God for the benefit of all” (*Inspiration: The Educational Mission of the School of Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King*, p. 11).

BENEFIT OF PERSONAL CONTACT OF TEACHERS-STUDENTS

A large part of my life, including 29 years spent in Japan, has been dedicated to education. For two years (1954-56), perhaps the best years of my life, as I have already mentioned, I taught English and social ethics in a middle school in Japan. A month before the beginning of the school year, the headmaster gave me the list of my 180 students. For each one there were two pages of information: a photo of the student, his family situation, his strong and weak points, his hobbies, etc.... I had to study all this material, and be able, from the very first day of school, to call each student by his own name and know something about his personality. This preparation required an effort, but it was necessary in order to influence deeply each student. It strengthened my conviction that an effective educational relationship between teacher and pupil passes through personal attention to each one. A consecrated educator can dedicate himself to this work without sparing time or energy with an undivided heart.

I would like to conclude my presentation with the words of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* expressing the hope of the Church:

With respectful sensitivity and missionary boldness, consecrated men and women should show that faith in Jesus Christ enlightens the whole enterprise of education, never disparaging human values, but rather confirming and elevating them. Thus do consecrated persons become witnesses and instruments of the power of the Incarnation and the vitality of the Spirit. This task of theirs is one of the most significant manifestations of that motherhood which the Church, in the image of Mary, exercises on behalf of all her children.... I warmly invite members of institutes devoted to education to be faithful to their founding charism and to their traditions, knowing that the preferential love for the poor finds a special application in the choice of means capable of freeing people from that grave form of poverty which is the lack of cultural and religious training. (*Vita consecrata*, n. 97)

The Most Reverend Guiseppe Pittau, S. J. is Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education. Our thanks to Archbishop Pittau for permission to reprint these speeches and the official document.

FURTHER READING

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