
SCHOOLING : A TIME OF DISCOVERY



I want to address this pastoral message to my young friends who are about to begin a new school year; this message is also for their parents, the teachers and support staff, and the school directors.

A MEASURE OF QUALITY

I am neither parent, nor teacher or minister of education, but I believe that one of the criteria by which I would know whether a child or youth has had a good school year or not would be whether that student, in elementary school or university, has developed the wonder of discovery. Far from training people who are boring, indifferent or even dull, it seems to me that our education network's general objective is to train people who can experience wonder and awe at the beautiful, the true, and the real.

A BIBLICAL REFERENCE

The very first page of the Bible tells us how the Creator marvelled at His creation: day and night, sky, stars, planets, sun, grass, trees, sea, land, living creatures... " And he saw that it was good." But when He created man and woman, "he saw that it was *very good*." It seems to me that contact with the human and social sciences, informatics, and with cultural and other sciences should bring about similar experiences of wonder, to wonder at the legacy received from other generations, and at all which our fellow citizens invent and develop.

A PROCESS TO EXECUTE

We have been so "spoiled" by all kinds of invention and commodities that our instinct of wonderment no longer functions at 100% capacity. We have witnessed so many world-wide sports and cultural events and tragedies that we have become emotionally dull. Whoever can no longer marvel at the beauty of a flower, at a rose or a carnation, has lost a most important human quality. Whoever can no longer marvel at a new-born baby, at a new mother gazing into the face of her first child, at a grandmother carefully listening to her grandchild talking, has lost a major human trait. Whoever can no longer marvel at a bridge builder, or an artist's painting or embroidery has lost a quality of life. Whoever can no longer marvel at the courage of a sick youth, at the determination of a handicapped person or the enthusiasm of a convalescent with a new taste for life, has lost a human quality.

A COMMON TASK

In the midst of a world more attuned to the negative aspect of things and events, in the midst of a gloomy and indifferent environment, it is refreshing to come across youths, teens and adults with enthusiasm for life. It is very uplifting to see young parents explain to their children the beauties of creation, to marvel with them over the freshness of their drinking water, over the river they walk along, the forest surrounding them and the mountain they are climbing. How great it is to see the young admire their neighbours for their goodness, their generosity, and their solidarity.

A JUBILEE YEAR

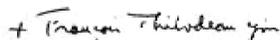
The coming school year will be lived under the sign of a "Jubilee". Such an event has three characteristics: concern for people, a redistribution of property, and rest for the earth. This tradition can still inspire believers today. It is the Lord himself who asked for such a jubilee every fifty years. If in homes and schools care were taken to show more regard for each student, especially the handicapped, what a beautiful jubilee experience this would be! If we paid closer attention to the financial situation of each student, especially to the ones the most heavily in debt, what a useful jubilee this would be! If we were more intent on preserving the environment, the land and other natural resources, what a great jubilee this would be for young and old! What the Lord prescribed in chapter 18 of the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible would still have an impact today.

THE YEAR 2000

The beginning of the school year beginning in September, 2000 cannot be like all the others. If the number 2000 fascinated so many when passing from 1999 to 2000, the number 2000 reminds every believer of the coming among us of Jesus, the Son of God who became man like us. We can read the words "2000 Years of Good News" on banners hanging from the cathedral in Edmundston, the Diocesan Centre, and a few churches. The sense of wonder can lead us to a splendid and unforgettable encounter with Jesus Christ the Living One. The grace of our times which are so concerned with what is real and concrete will have been a renewed sense of the Incarnation, of the fact that God in Jesus really took on our human condition. Vatican Council II spoke of this in no uncertain terms: *"The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as a perfect man he could save all women and men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humanity, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfilment of all aspirations. [...] Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling."* ["The Church in the Modern World," in Austin Flannery, O.P., Gen. Ed., *Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents... Completely Revised... in Inclusive Language*. Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., N^{os}. 43 and 22]

WONDER AND MARVEL

May this 2000-2001 school year be, therefore, one of marvel and wonderment. We are living a rare moment in history, in a marvellous country; despite obstacles and the cruelty of certain events, may our hearts always be in a state of thanksgiving: "You have willed, Lord, that the Gospel renew the world like a leaven: watch over all those who are called to live their Christian vocation in the world. May they always seek the Spirit of Christ, so that in carrying out their human tasks they hasten the coming of your reign." Happy school year!



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