



POPE BENEDICT XVI

Speech welcoming Pope Benedict to the BIG ASSEMBLY

17 September 2010

Pope Benedict, It is my honour to welcome you to this celebration of Catholic Education in England, Scotland, and Wales. You can see for yourself what joy your visit brings to our hearts.

Today we celebrate generations that were educated in Catholic schools and colleges who have taken their place in society to serve the common good. We celebrate the wonderful sense of faith and community that characterises our schools. And we also want to show you how happy and joyous are young people are. We want to celebrate with you our faith, our love and our hope for the future.

At the heart of Catholic Education is our understanding that the child or student 'shall, have life, and have it to the full'. That is our theme today. They are Christ's words and they guide us as we strive to educate our children, because we believe that true fulfilment of the human person can only come through a close friendship with Christ. So it follows that with Christ at its centre, all that happens in Catholic Education is based on our belief that a human person is made in the image of God, and this is most fully expressed in the desire to know and to love. Focusing our attention on the growth of the child's intellect and expanding its capacity for love, we believe is the right perspective, as the child grows to love God and its neighbour. The resultant development of the whole human person – body, spirit and mind – drives us on to work harder for future generations. At the present time there are 2200 Catholic schools in England which represents 10% of school provision, and this figure does not include Scotland or Wales. There are also thousands more students, young and of more mature years receiving further and higher education in our colleges. Holy Father, you will see featured in this Big Assembly some aspects of life in our schools and colleges: faith, friendship, community and sport.

Achieving this aim for so many young people would not be possible without the relationship with the State which has been established in the law of our countries. This unique relationship with our government, which we value very much, has enabled Catholic Schools and University Colleges to develop and flourish, and has made an enormous contribution to the life of our society. We are also assisted by many members of staff and governors who are not Catholics who subscribe to the ethos of Catholic Education. Some are Christians, others are people of non-Christian faiths or have no recognised religion, yet they all contribute to the success of Catholic Education. I wish to take this opportunity, in your presence Holy Father, to thank them on behalf of the Catholic community. We are also grateful to those parents, especially parents who are not Catholic, who send their children to Catholic schools. Their trust in us to educate their children humbles us, and makes us renew our efforts to deliver only the best education to all our young people.

Our schools and colleges do not exist in a vacuum. They are integrated, for example into parish communities and into the local networks of schools and local authorities. They take part with community schools in many joint initiatives, sharing expertise and facilities as they serve civil society together. You have already been greeted by many schoolchildren from Richmond upon Thames and neighbouring boroughs. This shows just how well we get on together.

Holy Father, through the internet and television, this Big Assembly will be joined by many young people, and indeed their families and parish communities throughout our countries who are celebrating this occasion with you. You can be sure that this celebration will hold a special place in their lives. They will remember this day for years to come, and you can be assured, Holy Father, that they will remember you in their prayers as you continue your visit to the United Kingdom.

Finally, I want to announce that following your historic visit, in England and Wales, we will be celebrating a Year of Catholic Education so that we might not only recognise what we achieved in the past but look forward to a future where we will ensure that only the best education is delivered to our young people.

Holy Father, welcome to the Big Assembly!

+Malcolm McMahon