



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE
NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CULTURE IN INDIA
(BANGALORE, 9-16 MARCH 1986)**

It gives me great pleasure to send you this message, as you are gathered in Bangalore to study the theme "Cultural forces facing India today: education's response". This is a subject of great relevance for the formation of the youth who are the future of India, and for the deep involvement of all educators dedicated to her cultural and social progress. I rejoice that this Conference is organised by the All India Association for Christian Higher Education, under the leadership of the Secretary General, Sister Mary Braganza, and with the participation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, represented by its President, Cardinal Paul Poupard. I am particularly happy to address you so soon after my recent apostolic visit to this land of great religious and cultural traditions, which have deeply impressed me and which remain vivid in my memory.

EDUCATION, CULTURE, RELIGION GROW TOGETHER¹. Education is recognised as the process by which the human person develops the true form of his being as man. The result of this process is known as culture. It is a lofty aspiration of all persons, because it is through culture that we give expression to our humanity. Through culture individuals can engage their talents, interests and desires; culture is a means whereby man achieves authentic freedom of spirit – so necessary for all other freedoms. However this freedom is not without its responsibility; for man has to understand his place in the universe, he has to love other human beings and to recognise the truth and beauty of God. These are values that you wish to cultivate in your teaching mission. During my recent visit, I was happy to witness that the essential characteristic of Indian culture lies in its insistence on spiritual and moral values. As I said in my address to the representatives of the various religious and cultural traditions at Delhi: "What India offers specifically is a noble spiritual vision of man – man, a pilgrim of the Absolute, travelling towards a goal, seeking the face of God... As we proclaim the truth about man, we insist that man's search for temporal and social well-being and for full human dignity corresponds to the deep longing of his spiritual nature" . From ancient times onwards, India has tried to build her civilisation on the basis of an understanding of the nature of man and of his relation to the Absolute or to God.

KNOWLEDGE LEADING TO MORAL GROWTH². Indian culture pays keen attention to the spiritual soul, to the inner mind and to the various levels of consciousness through meditative practice. Scientific knowledge too has certainly proved productive, useful and practical; and, as educators, you have to cultivate scientific disciplines. Science can become an indispensable ally in the social and economic development of a nation. But, as we know, science has sometimes tended to ignore the deeper nature of the human spirit, and this hinders the integral development of the individual and of society. Your own culture is eminently rich for its constant striving to clarify the mystery of man. The moral dimension of the Indian culture is again evident if we consider that a cultured person in India is a disciplined

individual who has brought his natural propensities under control and as shaped himself in accordance with the ideal set before him by his moral consciousness. Besides, he is endowed with a power of discerning between the proper and improper, between good and evil. With regard to the education of the youth, Mahatma Gandhi observed: "To awaken the heart is to awaken the dormant soul, to awaken reason and to inculcate discrimination between good and evil"

.PROGRESS SHOULD ENRICH ONE'S OWN CULTURAL IDENTITY³. Each country and each community has its own peculiar culture and special needs. Every age and every society must continually apply its ancient ideals to new conditions. As experienced educators, you know that modern India must draw upon the immense intellectual, moral and cultural resources of the entire world, but the nation should do so with an awareness of its own cultural and traditional identity. You recognise that the contribution of other cultures demands a reinterpretation and adaptation, consonant with your own cultural heritage. It is well known that Rabindranath Tagore established Visva-Bharati an international University where the values of the East and the West could be combined to develop a truly universal and humanitarian outlook based on faith in man. In this process of building up a truly universal culture, "we must convince ourselves of the priority of the ethical over the technical, of the person in relation to things, of the superiority of the spiritual over the material", as I affirmed before the UNESCO Assembly.

THE COOPERATION OF ALL BELIEVERS⁴. It is one of the most appropriate duties of our times to work untiringly in order to ensure the recognition and implementation everywhere of the right of every individual to full growth and culture, in harmony with human dignity, without distinction of race, sex, nation, religion or social circumstances . This is a common challenge and responsibility for the believers of all religions, who should seek together an effective promotion of cultural growth for all men and women. Dialogue, understanding and co-operation between all religions should be a constant preoccupation of educators and religious leaders, for the advancement of cultural development, justice, peace and brotherhood. Culture becomes therefore the common ground of our service to the cause of man. Motivated by the spirit of the Gospel, the Catholic Church has for a long time committed herself to the cause of higher education in India, trying to serve students of all faiths. The Catholic Colleges are encouraged to cooperate with all similar Christian institutions and with all groups and persons of good will dedicated to the welfare and progress of this great nation.

PRIORITY TO THE EXCELLENCE OF TEACHERS⁵. With our belief in the dignity of the human person, it is natural that we should pay the greatest attention to the person of the teacher. The first educational objective is to find teachers who are qualified and dedicated. Once this has been done, the problems of syllabus, methods of teaching and discipline of students are easier to solve. The living example of the teacher is most important. Mere erudition is insufficient; but when it is fired by dedication, it gives light and warmth. Let us reaffirm the indispensable vocation of teachers in society. As the Second Vatican Council says, "Splendid and of the highest importance is the vocation of those who help parents in carrying out their duties and act in the name of the community by undertaking a teaching career. This vocation requires special qualities of mind and heart, most careful preparation and a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt the old" . It is specially incumbent on Christian educators "to work in close conjunction with their contemporaries and try to get to know their ways of thinking and feeling, as they find them expressed in current culture... so that their practice of religion and their moral behaviour may keep abreast of their acquaintance with science and of the relentless progress of technology" . Finally, as you well know, all education is to some extent self-directed. To make a study of any subject is always in some degree a self-directed operation. That is to say that educators not only have to educate others but they help others to educate themselves in a personal and critical way. This develops in the educator and in the educated a research mindedness and a capacity for continuing education, which are so important in today's changing societies. One of the most important of recent developments in education is the organisation of genuine research. One can say that research, in the natural as well as in the human sciences, has become a major function of universities in their service of modern man seeking to satisfy his material and spiritual

needs. TOWARDS A CIVILIZATION OF TRUTH AND LOVE⁶. These tasks require great intellectual commitment and spiritual perception. Modern educators are ever more aware that true culture is an openness of the mind capable of reaching for wisdom, that is, of embracing all truths concerning the universe, man and God. "Methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God". May the forces, old and new, shaping the future of India be wisely and efficiently integrated in educational programmes that will allow this great nation to develop fully according to its spiritual identity. My sincere and cordial good wishes accompany you in your work and your commitment which is of such significance for the future of Indian culture. May Almighty God, source of all Light and Beauty, whose infinite Love is our constant inspiration and strength, help us all to build together a Civilisation of Truth and Love. **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II** © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana