

**UPDATING METHODS IN
CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

To 500 participants in the XXIII General Assembly of the Federation of Institutes under Ecclesiastical Authority (FIDAE) held at the St. Leo High School in Rome.

The Catholic school must continue

We think that you expect Us to say something on this occasion above and beyond technical and specific matters concerning your professional problems. You are looking for words of encouragement, perhaps words spoken by other lips — the most authoritative lips of the Ecumenical Council. What it had to say in its celebrated and basic Declaration on Christian Education is sufficient in itself. What did the Council have to say precisely? It said that “the Catholic schools... keeps its supreme importance in the present circumstances” (*Ib.* n. 8).

We repeat these words because a doubt is spreading about whether the Catholic school still has a proper function in our time. The question is raised because the public or State school — that founded by the civil authorities — has developed so much and has so much to offer in the way of satisfying society's schooling need, that it undoubtedly deserves praise and trust.

Is there still room for the denominational or private school? Our answer is Yes. We give this reply through respect for social freedom, which is so much called for today, and the complementary and to some extent competitive part which confessional schools play; but above all through respect for the originality of the Catholic school, the wealth and steadiness of religious and educational principles which it fosters, derived from the Divine Teacher, Christ, and professed by that “*Mater et Magistra*” which the Church is. Those principles are capable of giving shape to the whole of her art of teaching, of educating and training pupils logically and firmly for life.

Should schools be shut down?

The Catholic school is necessary today, even though its usefulness has fallen off from the statistical point of view, and even though we have to acknowledge sometimes quite remarkable merits in State or public schools.

The Catholic school is necessary for those who desire to obtain coherent and complete Catholic education. It is necessary as a complementary experience in the conditions of modern society. It is necessary in places where other schools are lacking (less so than in the past). We would even dare to say that it is necessary for the Church not to fall short of the effort and competence needed for exercising her fundamental ministry, which is to teach.

We know the objection. We know the difficulties which are ranged against keeping a school system going with private resources in the face of needs for building developments, economic and assistential facilities and increases in organizational structures such as the public funds are able to provide for public schools.

Fresh sacrifices will be needed. Some Institutes and special courses will have to be reduced. Will there have to be closures? God forbid. We hope that your constancy will enable the Catholic school to go on its honourable way and through its merits provide justification for its existence. Its existence not only benefits the Church: it also benefits families which give it their trust; it benefits the State, and gives it loyal service.

But this reference to the necessity for Catholic schools and their increasing difficulties suggests a warning. It is a bold and difficult thing that We are going to suggest, yet it has already been raised in your enthusiastic programmes. Our schools have to be renewed. The troubles which they are experiencing should not be allowed to slow down plans for future activity. We give Our encouragement, to this effort towards renewing programmes and methods. Guidelines towards this hoped for renewal will be suggested by new legislation and experimentation in both your own and other countries, by trust in your own educational traditions, by watchful social sense, and finally by study of the youthful mind and how it is developing under the influence of modern life.