

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCEINT, EVER NEW
REFLECTIONS UPON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL: PRESENTATION 12:
THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

I. Gravissium Educationis, the Vatican II Declaration on Christian Education, began as a document specifically on Catholic schools and then reemerged as a general statement affirming the goals of education generally and of Catholic education in particular.

- A. This document built upon Pope Pius XI's encyclical on Catholic education, and in general the increasing emphasis on education in the modern world.
1. Public education was becoming universal in the developed world, and in most cases even developing world. The broad availability of education was in itself good, but the question arose of how the values of public schools, and the government generally, would affect the Catholic Church.
 2. The United States was a pioneer in making education generally available, and the American experiment of broad public education, with a strong Catholic school system parallel to it, was apparently working as well as any other. There was a running debate, especially in America, about the interaction between the Church and public schools. Central to the debate was the Third Synod of Baltimore in 1884, which called for all parishes to establish Catholic schools and on Catholic parents, if possible, to send their children there.
 3. In 1929, Pope Pius XI published Divini Illius Magistri, in which he described the interaction of three societies, the family, civil society and the Church. While recognizing the importance of civil society in uniting people and providing for goods that individual families cannot attain alone, he emphasized the centrality of the family and the Church in education. As with Pope Pius IX's letter Nobis et Nobiscum 80 years earlier, he warned against the corrupting influences of atheistic and socialistic assumptions in much of public education.
- B. Responding to calls for a document on Catholic education, the Preparatory Commission initially drafted a schema specifically on Catholic schools. This document was put to the side but then emerged as a shorter Declaration on Christian Education.
1. The letters sent by the bishops in the lead-up to the Council frequently cited Catholic schooling as an issue that should be addressed. And the Preparatory Commission drew up a lengthy document entitled On Catholic Schools.
 2. However, due to the debates over the Constitutions on Revelation and the Church, which took much more time than almost anyone anticipated, this document received little attention during the first two years of the Council. And in fact, as part of the plan promoted by Cardinal Julius Dopfner to get through the Council's work more quickly, seven documents including this one, were shortened to a few paragraphs.

3. However, when the document came up for debate during the Third Session in 1964 the bishops again wanted a more extensive coverage of education. And in particular, several bishops, including Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, Cardinal Joseph Ritter of St. Louis and Bishop Jules Daem of Antwerp, Belgium, made speeches arguing that the focus should be broader, including public schools, education in secular fields, and religious education outside of schools.
 4. The Commission then revised the document to involve a dialogue with the world about the standards and goals of education generally. The title was changed to reflect this focus. The initial vote was 1813 – 185 and there were several calls to simplify the instructions on the grounds that the situations regarding education vary widely throughout the world. After further revisions, the final document was approved on a vote of 2287 – 35.
- C. The Declaration has four parts: an introduction, six sections on education generally, six sections on Catholic education, and a conclusion.
- D. The introduction is generally positive, celebrating the expansion of educational opportunities, which enable people to participate in cultural, economic and political spheres more. There is a caution that this education, which is becoming more necessary, is often not available to many. Likewise, the introduction makes clear that true education should “inculcate simultaneously truth and charity” and that the Church has a central role in defending the fundamental principles of education, especially Christian education. As the declaration will at the end, this introduction calls for a Vatican office and the bishops of each nation to give further guidance.
- E. Sections 1 through 6 outline the overall principles of education, including the right to a broad education, religious instruction and the centrality of families in education.
1. Section 1 affirms the universal right to education, which should focus, not only on the intellect, but also upon moral and even physical qualities and all aspects that help people play their role in society and attain our final end. The development of conscience, the understanding of the faith, and ability to dialogue with others are central to this goal.
 2. Section 2 affirms strongly the right of all Christians to a Christian education. Such an education includes understanding the faith, being able to participate in the liturgy and training to take up their vocation in the Church and promote faith in the world.
 3. Section 3 affirms that parents are the primary educators of their child, with the support of the Church and society also needed. As it says, “the task of imparting education belongs primarily to the family, but it requires the help of society as well.” In particular, the parents, by creating a “family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God” can make the home “the principle school of social virtues” and the foundation of children’s faith. Civil society should defend the right of everyone to education and if

needed provide its own schools. And the Church is the guarantor of the highest truths, those of salvation, and thus must defend their proclamation and promote education that a “well balanced perfection of human personality.”

4. Section 4 describes positively the need for trained catechists and catechetical instruction “which illumines and strengthens the faith, develops a life in harmony with the spirit of Christ, stimulates a conscious and fervent participation in the liturgical mystery, and encourages people to take an active part in the apostolate.”
 5. Section 5 then describes the centrality of schools, not only for learning subjects, but also for: (1) developing people’s intellect and capacity for judgment; (2) helping people appreciate their culture; (3) fostering values and preparing people for professions; (4) helping people for friendships and mutual understanding; and (5) providing a place for various elements of society to gather together.
 6. Section 6 then turns back to the roles of parents and the government. It says that parents should have the “fullest liberty in their choice of school” and supports subsidies to enable parents to exercise this right. In this context, the section does support the authority of the government to ensure that schooling is up to standard, but without creating a “monopoly of schools.” It also says that schools should encourage parents to be involved in the school and with each other.
- F. Sections 7 through 12 focus on Catholic education in particular and on how it joins faith and reason together and helps the Church in cooperate with the best aspects of non-Catholic faiths and all of society. There is thus a refutation of the argument that Catholic education is meant to create a separate society, and an affirmation of the role of such education to ennoble society.
1. Section 7 begins the discussion with a focus on Catholic students in non-Catholic schools and says that both the Church and parents have a grave responsibility to ensure their training in the faith. Clergy and laity involved in education hand on not only knowledge, but also training in spiritual devotions and the example of their own lives. The document also supports public schools allowing religious education in their spaces.
 2. Section 8 then turns to Catholic schools in particular, emphasizing their role in joining the faith with culture at large. It says that Catholic schools are no less involved in promoting culture and general learning than other schools, but seek to unify all knowledge with the saving message, which shines light upon all fields. The section says that, by joining secular and religious learning, Catholic schools should be a bridge between the Church and the world. The section strongly defends the right to establish Catholic schools (and by implication for other religions to have their schools.) To achieve the ends of

Catholic schools, both the training of teachers and the involvement of parents is critical. The section also calls for Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools when possible and for all of the faithful to support Catholic schools.

3. Section 9 presents an expansive notion of schooling, building upon the traditional primary and secondary schools, but going further. It says that there should be a special effort in areas where the Church can offer education to non-Catholics, especially in mission countries. And it calls for an increased effort at building Catholic professional and technical schools, as well as Catholic training for who minister to the disadvantaged. It also calls for Catholic schools to make efforts on behalf of the poor and of those who lack faith.
4. Section 10 then turns to Catholic universities as places where faith and reason can be joined together in the great tradition of the Catholic faith, especially personified by St. Thomas Aquinas. The section supports developing all fields “consonant with their own principles, their own methods, and with true liberty of scientific inquiry” but also making sure graduates can both “undertake responsible duties of society and to be witnesses in the world to the true faith.” There is also a call to make sure that Catholic universities should be affordable to qualified candidates and a call to ensure the spiritual welfare of Catholic students in non-Catholic universities, particularly through the formation of Catholic residences and centers.
5. Section 11 argues for the great value study and research in “sacred sciences” not only for priests but also for all who will be involved in teaching and research and the “intellectual apostolate” in general. Such study leads to a greater appreciation of the faith, better dialogue with non-Catholics and non-Christians, and the ability to address the issues raised by modern discoveries.
6. Section 12 promotes greater cooperation, both among Catholic schools and universities and between Catholic educational institutions and non-Catholic ones.

G. The conclusion then commends educators and calls for them to join bring about in their students “the spirit of Christ” and a “zeal for learning” both for the Church and for the world.

II. Inter Mirifica, the Decree on Social Communications, was promulgated early in the Council and seeks to guide the use of the rapidly increasing technology so that it benefits the faith, culture, and human interaction.

A. Inter Mirifica was promulgated by the Council as a response to the modern issue of mass media and its ever increasing presence in the world. The decree seeks both to guide the rightful use of mass media and to caution against excesses.

1. The rapidly growing availability of technology had already made the issue of mass media a central issue in the modern world and in the Church. Previous Popes had published encyclical letters, both warning against the dangers of mass media and describing the potential benefits. See Pope Pius XI, Vigilanti Cura (With Watchful Eye) (1936) (on movies); Miranda Prorsus (Remarkable Inventions) (1957) (on movies, radio and television.) In the United States, for example, the American bishops had strongly supported the standards of decency for movies promulgated by the Hays Office to limit decadence in movies, an effort specifically commended in Vigilanti Cura. On the positive side, Fulton Sheen had made great use of radio and television to promote the faith.

2. The Commission on Communications took an initial draft of 114 paragraphs and reduced it to a quarter of its length in July 1962. It then presented the revised document to the First Session of the Council in late November, after the debates surrounding the constitutions on the liturgy, revelation and the church. There were three days of generally positive comments; and the text was sent back for minor revisions. But when the Committee presented the revised text to the second session of the Council in 1963, many bishops expressed the view that the Declaration did not express enough theology or new insights to be a conciliar document. On a vote of 1598-503, the bishops voted to go ahead with consideration. And on December 4, 1963, the last day of the Second Session, the declaration was passed with 154 negative votes and over 2000 in favor.

B. Similar to Gravissimum Educationis, there is an introduction, one chapter on general principles of mass media, one chapter on the Church's use of media, and a conclusion. Overall, the decree tries to give a positive presentation on the advantages that mass media can provide for the world and for the Church. But there are also cautions that, like all technology, it can be used as well for ill, and that people can rely too much on it.

C. The introduction, which consists of sections 1 and 2, describes the benefits and problems that can come from mass media.

1. Section 1 sets up the issue in terms of the "marvelous inventions" that enable us to communicate with vast audiences and in fact all of humanity, especially the press, cinema, radio and television.
2. Section 2 recognizes that such media can be "of considerable benefit" for relaxation, for culture and for the Church. But the media can also be damaging to morals and to the faith. The decree is meant to guide the rightful use of the media for the Church and for the world.

D. Chapter 1 outlines the overall callings of people involved in the media, of the general public, of families and public authorities to ensure that mass media is in fact helpful to the promotion of a decent society supportive of the common good and individual development.

1. Sections 3 sets up the chapter by stating that the Church should be free to use the media to promote the faith and pastoral work. It calls for the laity to bring

the Christian and moral spirit to the media and so fulfill God's law for authentic development.

2. Section 4 calls for those involved in media to consecrate the field through the moral law. It recognizes that different circumstances call for differing levels of discernment, with particular regard to media that appeals to those who are inexperienced and impressionable. Part of the idea is that people involved in media that tends to be more passive (e.g., television and movies then and internet news and entertainment now), and those who appeal to children, have a particularly important obligation to discern the effects that images may have.
3. Section 5 focuses on the press, commending modern developments that enable people to have access to information so that they can "contribute effectively to the common good" and "to the prosperity and progress of society as a whole." But the very importance of this information makes it all the more crucial that there be a dedication to truth, completeness, charity and a presentation that is decent and appropriate.
4. Section 6 turns to standards of art and argues for the moral law as raising up and guiding art. It critiques "a false sense of ethics and aesthetics" that would deny the role of morals in art. One thinks of the phrase "art for art's sake." Instead the moral order is precisely what enables art forms to be ennobling of the human spirit.
5. Section 7 recognizes that media must portray evil in order to promote understanding of humanity and goodness generally. But it warns against portrayals that instead tend to increase evil desires or interests.
6. Sections 8 and 9 recognize the importance of public opinion in increasingly democratic and market based cultures. This situation makes it all the more important for those in the media to use their talents to promote decent and noble views.
7. Section 10 then turns to the audience and reminds people of the importance of discernment in the sorts of media that they use. The section reminds parents of their duty to see that media and entertainment "that might endanger faith and morals do not enter the home."
8. Section 11 calls for associations and guilds of those involved in media and entertainment to join together in upholding the moral law, including common pledges if needed. It also calls for them to "ensure that religious features are entrusted to serious and competent persons." Then, and even more now, the media presentation of religion is often ignorant at best and often even hostile or condescending.

9. Section 12 then describes the role of public authorities in promoting good culture, especially with regard to promoting helpful projects, particularly for the young that “otherwise could not be attempted.” It adds that there should be laws ensuring “that public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered by the misuse of the media.” It says that such means do not violate freedom of the media, especially when the media will not govern itself.

E. Chapter 2 then turns to the Church’s use of the media.

1. Section 13 says that all members of the Church should both assist in the promulgation of the faith by the media and oppose uses of the media that are destruction of morals or religion.
2. Section 14 supports the idea of having Catholic media outlets. It says that there should be a Catholic press that both promotes faithful views and gives news about the Church. It also supports Catholic film-making, television and “the noble and ancient art of theater.” This media can either be run by the Church, independently, or with cooperation between the Church hierarchy and other groups.
- 3.. Sections 15 and 16 call for training of priests, religious and the laity in the use of the media. Section 15 describes specifically Catholic technical training for those involved in the press, cinema, radio television, and other forms of the media. Section 16 encourages training in uses of the media in Catholic schools. One thinks of school plays, films and the like.
4. Sections 17 and 18 encourage Church support of the media. Section 17 describes the church and laity giving financial support and attention to the Catholic media and Catholic professionals lending their help. Section 18 calls for a day each year for promoting this apostolate. In the United States we do not have a day yet for this purpose, although there is a second collection for the support of Catholic media.
5. Section 19 calls for a Vatican office that supports Catholic media and communications. There is now the Pontifical Council for Social Communication, in addition to the Vatican Press Office.
6. Sections 20 – 22 call for each diocese and national conference of Catholic dioceses to set up offices for the media to guide the right use of the media and to encourage the use of media for the Church.

F. The conclusion then states that there should be further guidance by the Vatican on the use of media. The final section of the declaration calls for the laity to use the media so that “like salt and light, [they] add savor to the earth and light to the world.” And it calls upon “all people of good will” to engage in the media such that “[t]he name of the Lord will thus be glorified by those modern inventions as it was in former times by the masterpieces of art.”

- The call for further guidance was fulfilled with the 1971 publication by the Pontifical Council for Social Communication entitled Communio et Progressio. In 1999, Pope Saint John Paul II publishes his famous “Letter to Artists” which outlined a theology of beauty in art and, by extension, other aspects of culture.