

# We Need Catholic Schools!



## Vatican prefect makes the case for Catholic schools during a U.S. visit

Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski

**L**ast May, Fordham University presented the Catholic School Leadership Award to Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Education, during the university's 14th annual Catholic School Executive Leadership celebration. During his visit to New York City, the cardinal noted that after his more than eight years of experience as head of the office, he was "well aware of the important role that Catholic schools play: for the good of the church, for the good of young people, for the good of the country and for the good of humanity."

*Here are the cardinal's remarks from the presentation ceremony.*

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS have a fantastic history in all continents. They are even more necessary today, when we consider the manifold crises that education is currently going through.

Thus, for example, while cultural globalization, in the sense of a meeting and exchange of cultures, is certainly a good thing, in practice this phenomenon (of globalization) often takes the form of a kind of colonization by one culture; as an imposed levelling out of cultures; a unification, on the world level, of a culture devoid of values.

Therefore, we need Catholic schools that turn globalization toward a spirit of solidarity, of real help for the needy, of respect toward every culture. Schools that

teach solidarity, indeed love of neighbour, in our everyday lives. Only a globalization realized on such a basis will truly build up the good of all humanity. Yes, we need Catholic schools!

The weakest area of education today is the crisis of values. This is at the root of all education's problems. The cause of this crisis is diffused moral relativism, as well as relativism concerning the essential truths of the lives of men and women. With that goes subjectivism and, sometimes, also nihilism. If moral truths are presented as relative, the basis of education is destroyed—education, for which the principal question is: to educate for what? According to what ideal? Without a clear answer to these questions, one cannot speak of true education. Thus teach-

ers become ever more confused and demotivated, and consequently their work becomes little effective.

Therefore, we need Catholic schools that build on values; on solid, firm values; values that can renew the face of the earth. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council, followed by Pope John Paul II, insisted that Christ is the key to understanding the fundamental truths about the human person: his dignity, vocation and destiny. In Christ, we have the most perfect ideal of the human person and, at the same time, the answer to the question: to educate for what? How must the student turn out? I think that only Christian anthropology has seriously taken this question into consideration, and only it gives a coherent answer. This is extremely important in view of education. Therefore, we need Catholic schools!

A secular education only takes into consideration life in this world, the deceptive happiness here on earth. Yet, we know that life does not finish with physical death, but that it goes on. We are destined for eternal life; we are called to eternal happiness.

Therefore, we need Catholic schools that situate us within the full truth of our existence, and prepare us for beatitude in the eternal dimension.

One of the crucial problems of education today is, without doubt, the crisis of the family, which ought to carry out a primary and essential role in education. Sometimes, one hears of children who, although they have both parents and live with

them, are “orphans” in the sense that within the family they do not find an educational atmosphere. The parents offload this duty onto the schoolteachers, who, for their part, without the cooperation of the parents, cannot achieve much and feel frustrated.

**“We need Catholic schools that concern themselves with the integral education of the human person in all his or her dimensions: human, intellectual, spiritual and religious, cultural and professional. That is to say, we need schools that concern themselves with forming humanly and spiritually mature persons—persons who critique; and who want, and are able, to use what they have learned only for good.”**

Therefore, we need Catholic schools that make a priority of the family; schools that keep in mind the family’s needs, and defend its dignity as well as the values on which to build its happiness. Such schools do not only teach people to build strong, responsible and long-lasting families; but also seek to be an effective help for families in their weighty task of education. Yes, we need Catholic schools!

We often hear complaints that the school restricts itself to handing on knowledge and skills. Yet, knowledge and skills can be used either for good or for evil. In fact, the fantastic conquests of science and technology have also been abundantly used for ever more-terrible wars, for terrorism, and for ever-sharper forms of injustice.

Therefore, we need Catholic schools that concern themselves with the integral education of the human person in all his or her dimensions: human, intellectual, spiritual and religious, cultural and professional. That is to say, we need schools that concern themselves with forming humanly and spiritually mature persons—persons who critique and

who want, and are able, to use what they have learned only for good. Yes, we need Catholic schools!

Faced with so many true slaves among young people—slaves to drugs, to sex and to other weaknesses, from which they do not know how to free themselves, and which

destroy their personalities and their relationships with others—we need Catholic schools that make the effort to form free persons—persons, that is, who are able to choose good, and not be bound by the chains of evil.

In today’s world—full of so much terrorism and hate; full of so many wars, conflicts, absurd struggles, which have not in the least been diminished by technical progress, but rather, on the contrary, made more severe—we need Catholic schools that teach respect toward each person; that teach love, forgiveness, reconciliation and dialogue.

Therefore, I thank you with all my heart for the Catholic School Leadership Award. I am delighted by this honor. But, even more, I thank you for Catholic schools! I thank you for your work, for your dedication, for your sacrifices, for the love with which you seek to enrich young people and to hand on to them true values, to build a future for your beloved country based on solid foundations. May God reward you!

I thank you as prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, but, even more, I thank you as a devoted friend of Catholic schools. ■

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**Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski** has been prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education since 1999. A native of Poland, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1963 and was ordained a bishop by Pope John Paul II in 1983. He was elevated to cardinal in 2001. He holds a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical Gregorian University.