

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

President Emeritus

13th Floor, Memorial Library

Dear Holy Father:

It is good and generous of you to travel the whole world, to speak to millions of people, and to make your person known to them, to inspire them with your words and blessing. All this is good.

Might I suggest that they also would like to make themselves, their hopes and their fears, known to you. Might I suggest how this might be done in my country.

You will meet with our Bishops and speak with them. Will they have a chance to speak freely with you? In our efforts to achieve fairness in our society, we often speak of "equal time."

Then there are our priests. You met and spoke with some of them in Philadelphia on your last visit. You spoke to them, but they did not have a chance to speak with you, frankly and openly. You may have thought that they agreed with everything you said to them. If not, it would have been good for you to have heard why they disagreed.

There are other groups or categories of people in America to whom you spoke, but very few who spoke to you. I was with a large group of educators in Washington to whom you said wise

words. I would have loved to have had the opportunity of responding: to tell you how it happens that we in America have the greatest part of Catholic higher education in all the world, more and better than all of the rest of the world put together.

It would be good for you to know how this happened to be, what were the conditions of its coming to be, and what is needed to continue our growth in excellence. In a word, we would like you to understand us and what we have accomplished, accomplished, I might add, without ceasing to be profoundly Catholic, despite what some in Europe think. We get the impression that you think we need juridical control by the Church to be both Catholic and great universities. We know that we are already both Catholic and great. We would like to give you evidence of this conviction.

Many other groups have important messages for you: married couples; young people; theologians and other professional groups; lawyers; doctors; teachers; journalists, and business people. You have addressed all of them on many occasions. They would honestly like to address you. They know what you have been saying. They would like you to hear what they are saying, sometimes in an honest response to your words, not always in full agreement. They are still good, faithful, and dedicated people. They deserve to be heard.

Of course, men religious and especially women religious, the core of American Catholicism as it has evolved from 25,000 in 1776 to 55 million today through our elementary and secondary educational system, have much to say. But often they have not been heard.

Lay women in America are a very special group, probably more articulate and more concerned than almost any group in our society. In a way, they are the vanguard of women everywhere. Would they like to be heard? Nobody more.

It is understandable that in your first trips around the world you have spoken hundreds of thousands of words to millions of people, and many have been inspired. We believe that on this next time around, if you could listen to the people of God, the real Church of Vatican II, you, too, would be inspired, even if you, in turn, do not agree with everything you hear. After all, God listens to us all, even though after listening, sometimes He say, "No."

(Rev.) Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
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