



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF
PARENTS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Saturday, 6 June 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am particularly pleased to meet your delegation gathered here to represent the entire Association of Parents of Catholic Schools (A.Ge.S.C.). I extend my greeting to the President, Dr Stefano Versari, whom I thank for the cordial words he addressed to me on behalf of those present. Your association serves the family and the Catholic school, promoting the values of integral education, freedom and dialogue, all of which are fundamental values for the development of an authentically democratic society.

The family and the Catholic school: these are two social realities for which the Church is constantly concerned. It could be said that your association epitomizes these realities, by seeking to guarantee young generations the necessary conditions for growing and maturing in spiritual, cultural and civil life.

Over the last 20 years in Italy, the association has contributed to a considerable extent in overcoming a long period of neglect of the Catholic school and in bringing to the attention of the political world and public opinion the problem of freedom of education. I am certain that the recent approval of the new Statutes by the Italian Episcopal Conference will encourage your commitment even more, especially regarding the formation of parents.

Attention to the formative aspect seems, in fact, to be particularly urgent, because you are asked not just to claim your rights, but above all to participate creatively and constructively in the life of the Catholic school, in its ecclesial, educational and social dimensions.

2. Yours is an *ecclesial association*. This characteristic demands that the work it does, although carried out primarily in the educational field, should never lose sight of the Church's saving message and evangelizing mission. Participation in

the life of the Christian community helps believing parents to carry out fully their educational task by making their family a “little Church”, called to bear witness to the values of God’s kingdom in human institutions.

Parents within the ecclesial community, by experiencing the superabundant wealth of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, will be able to open themselves to the horizons of the Gospel and to the needs of mankind and, as a result of a serene community discernment, they will be able to undertake specific services that foster the integral growth of the new generations.

In my *Letter to Families* I recalled that parents are “*the first and most important educators of their own children*” and as such “possess a fundamental competence in this area. They share their educational mission with other individuals or institutions, such as the Church and the State. [But the mission of education] must always be carried out in accordance with a proper application of the principle of subsidiarity”, that is, with respect for the diversity of roles and responsibilities (n. 16).

Parents are often unprepared for and perplexed by the problems that educational structures encounter, the hardship that students undergo and the signs of the school's detachment from society. In this regard the role of parents' associations becomes very useful, by helping them to fulfil their educational responsibility and to foster constructive co-operation with the scholastic institution. In the Catholic school this collaboration has Christian education as its basis and permits parents to examine their choices, and the scholastic institution to define better its identity and its cultural and pedagogical offerings.

It is therefore necessary for Catholic schools to give special care to the formation of parents, so that they can become aware of their tasks and specific responsibilities. The organized presence of parents within Catholic schools is a basic element for the realization of their formative project.

3. Parents express the sensitivity and expectations present in society; in a way they are the *natural bridge between the Catholic school and the surrounding reality*. It is therefore their duty to submit their requests to the school regarding the guidance to be given their children and to share with the teaching staff those specific formative tasks in which the family is called to co-operate responsibly.

This characteristic of being a “bridge” between the school and society also requires that parents and their associations bring to the attention of politicians the problems concerning the education of their children and the Catholic school, by intervening in the changes under way in society and in the drafting of reform projects for the Italian school system.

In this context, I renew my hope that in Italy, as in many other countries of Europe and the world, a law on parity will be approved that would acknowledge the valuable service carried out by Catholic schools and guarantee parents complete freedom in choosing the educational orientation for their children.

Dear parents, the schools that your children attend have arisen from the charism and often prophetic insight of men and women who left a luminous trail of holiness in the Church. May the rediscovery of the wonders achieved by the Holy Spirit in their lives sustain you in your daily effort to direct your children to the everlasting values of the Gospel and the

living person of Christ. I also hope that Catholic schools will welcome and value your charism as parents.

With these wishes, I entrust you to the protection of the Virgin Mary and St Joseph, model of Christian parents.

Encouraging you to continue in your praiseworthy service to Catholic schools, I bless you all with affection.

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