



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS
OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC TEACHERS**

Saturday, 5 January 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am happy to offer a cordial welcome to each one of you, for having wanted to pay me a visit on the occasion of the National Congress of your Association.

I greet your President and thank him for his courteous words of respect. Through you, I would like to show my support for all the Catholic teachers in Italy, who put their skills and passion for teaching at the service of their students and their families.

Dear brothers and sisters, with you I thank God for the activity the Association of Catholic Teachers has carried on for more than 50 years for the good of Italian schools and of the new generations. As an ecclesial association, your society rightly considers itself a "portion of the Church", part of the ongoing life of the Church, that witnesses to the Gospel values of gratuity and service, in the exercise of their profession and in relations with all who share the same common ideals.

2. For your Congress, you chose the theme: *"Dialogue with uncertainty, shaping life"*, to stress the two dimensions that distinguish this period in your Association; the awareness of the complicated age we live in and your will to carry on your educational planning in the climate of uncertainty that affects daily life.

In view of the necessary stages of the reform of the school, your Association desires to promote the perennial human values that derive from the Gospel vision of life, to bring about a school that reaches your students and is attentive to those most in need. In this way, you help the scholastic

institution and those involved in the process of formation to devote themselves to the service of the person, and to become an educational community in a dialogue that is open and also critical of the surrounding reality.

In the light of Christ's teaching, may each one of you be ready in your relationships and in your collaboration with your colleagues to make the most of the opportunities to share expertise and to renew your common motivation so that the school may become a privileged place that promotes culture and so can recover social esteem and credibility. Aware that you are privileged witnesses of Christ's love for his little ones, you seek to hand on the content of the Catholic religion with competence, working out educational programmes that recognize the formational needs of the students and respect the nature and goals of the school.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, your Association has always considered the spiritual and professional formation of teachers as one of its chief aims. Indeed, through a solid and continuous formation, the teacher is better able to respond to his mission and to contribute to the construction of a peaceful and just human society, founded on dialogue among the cultures and on the acceptance and appreciation of differences. At the same time, your effort will encourage a renewed allegiance to the main characteristics of the Association; professionalism, understood as the ability to anticipate educational needs and to work out adequate responses; democracy, seen as the constant exercise of co-responsibility and participation in building a more human society; and belonging to the Church, considered as a basic element of your service to the school.

I invite you, dear friends, to look to God, the "Educator" *par excellence*, who in the mystery of Christmas shows his graciousness to human beings, in order that appreciating divine goodness, they may continuously find their true dignity and salvation.

May this extraordinary divine pedagogy, that you contemplate in study and prayer, impress on each of you renewed enthusiasm, so that you can move beyond the daily fatigue, and find greater energy and motivation to fulfill your educational responsibilities.

4. I now greet the group of disabled boys and girls connected with the Centre for Volunteers of Suffering of the Diocese of Bergamo (*Centro per i Volontari della Sofferenza della diocesi di Bergamo*).

Dear young people, you have come to see me together with your parents and assistants. Thank you for this visit and for the affection that you wanted to show me by coming. May the birth of Jesus that we celebrate at Christmas bring each one of you great joy and give you the strength to face with serenity every problem and difficulty. May it also help you to realize that you are privileged witnesses of his love for life, especially among your peers, who are often bewildered and incapable of appreciating this great gift of the Lord.

I also greet you warmly, dear parents, assistants and members of the Diocesan Centre of Volunteers of Suffering (*Centro Diocesano dei Volontari della Sofferenza*), who carry out an exemplary and loving service for so many persons in difficulty. I encourage you to persevere in this wonderful work, and I invoke upon you abundant heavenly gifts and the consolation promised by Jesus to those who generously serve their brothers and sisters.

5. To everyone present with us today, I entrust you to the heavenly protection of Mary, whom we venerate at the beginning of the year as Mother of God and our Mother. May the Blessed Virgin accompany you with her providential care during the year that has just begun.

With this wish, I warmly impart to each one a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to your loved ones.