



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS (AGESC)

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 5 December 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you all, representatives of the Associazione di Genitori delle Scuole Cattoliche on the 40th anniversary of your founding. You are here not only to confirm yourselves in your journey of faith but also to express the truth of the commitment that distinguishes you: that of having freely chosen to be educators in accordance with the heart of God and of the Church.

An important World Congress organized by the Congregation for Catholic Education took place recently. On that occasion I highlighted the importance of promoting education in the *fullness of humanity*, because speaking of Catholic education is equivalent to speaking of humans, of humanism. I called for *inclusive* education which makes room for everyone and avoids elitism in selecting the beneficiaries of its commitment.

The same challenge lies before you today. Your Association is dedicated to the service of schools and families, contributing to the delicate task of *building bridges between schools and territories, between schools and families, and between schools and civil institutions*. Restoring the educational pact because the educational pact has collapsed into ruin, because the educational pact is broken! And we must restore it. Building bridges: there is no nobler challenge! Building union where division is advancing, generating harmony when the logic of exclusion and marginalization seems to have the upper hand.

As an ecclesial association you draw from the very heart of the Church the abundance of mercy that makes your work a daily service to others. As parents, you are *depositories of the duty and of the primary and inalienable right to educate your children*, and in this regard to give the school positive and constant help with the task. It is your right to demand proper education for your

children, an education that is *integral and open to the most authentic human and Christian values*. It is also your task, however, to ensure that the school is equal to the educational role entrusted to it, particularly when the education it offers claims to be “Catholic”. I pray the Lord that Catholic schools may never take for granted the meaning of this adjective! Indeed, being *Catholic* educators makes all the difference.

And so we must ask ourselves: what are the requirements that enable a school to call itself truly Catholic? This can be a good thing to do in your Association. You have certainly done so and are doing so; but the results are never achieved once and for all. For example, we know that Catholic schools must pass on an *integral, not ideological* culture. But what does this mean in practice? And further, we are convinced that Catholic schools are called to foster *harmony in diversity*. How can this be concretely implemented? It is a challenge that is anything but easy. Thanks be to God, there are so many positive experiences in Italy and in the world which may be known and shared.

In the meeting St John Paul II had with you in June 1998, he reaffirmed the importance of the “bridge” that must exist between school and society. May you never forget the need to construct an educational community in which, together with the teachers, the various operators and students, you parents are able to be *protagonists in the educational process*.

Do not withdraw from the world but be active, like leaven in dough. The invitation I address to you is simple but bold: *may you be able to make a difference in the quality of formation*. May you be able to find the ways and means so as not to pass unobserved behind the scenes of society and culture, not to create an uproar, and not with projects packed with rhetoric. May you be able to distinguish yourselves through your constant attention to the person and in a special way to the lowliest, to those who are discarded, rejected and forgotten. May you be able to distinguish yourselves not by your “façade” but rather by educational coherence rooted in the Christian vision of mankind and of society.

At a time when the economic crisis is also making itself felt heavily in comprehensive schools, many of which are being forced to close, the temptation of “numbers” surfaces more insistently, and with it that of discouragement. Yet, in spite of all, I repeat to you: what makes the difference is the quality of your presence, and not the quantity of the resources that you can invest in this field. The quality of your presence here, by building bridges. And I am glad that you, [addressing the President], discussing schools spoke of children, parents and grandparents also. Because grandparents have a lot to do! Do not disregard the grandparents, who are the living memory of the people!

Never sell off the human and Christian values to which you are witnesses in the family, in schools, and in society. Make your contribution generously so that Catholic schools never become a “fall-back” solution or an insignificant alternative among the various educational institutions. Collaborate in order that Catholic education may have *the face of that new humanism* which

emerged from the Ecclesial Convention in Florence. Strive to ensure that Catholic schools *are truly open to all*. May the Lord Jesus who in the Holy Family of Nazareth increased in stature, in wisdom and in grace (cf. Lk 2:52) accompany your steps and bless you in your daily commitment.

Thank you for this meeting, thank you for your work and thank you for your witness. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, and please do not forget to pray for me.