



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO ITALIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES**

24 November 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to address a cordial greeting to all of you who have gathered in Rome on the occasion of the 52nd National Assembly of the Federation of the Institutes of Educational Activity (FIDAE), representing primary and secondary Catholic schools in Italy.

Your meeting is another step on the path you have been following for many years in the service of human and Christian values and authentic freedom of education in Italian schools and society. You intend to strengthen, within the context of the integrated public educational system, the distinctive identity of the Catholic school and its full involvement in the Church's evangelizing mission.

In you I salute the careful, professional work of thousands of religious and lay teachers who collaborate with families in the integral formation of the younger generation. I thank you for your daily commitment and for your enthusiasm in serving children and young people, despite the difficulties and problems connected with the modern socio-cultural context and the vast changes taking place in schools. I extend my affectionate greeting in particular to the students of your institutes; I hope they will apply themselves in this essential period of their lives, to be competent and courageous leaders of society in the future.

2. Today education is often influenced by "forms of rationality" that are directed "towards the contemplation of truth and the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of life", but towards "utilitarian ends, towards enjoyment or power" (*Fides et ratio*, n. 47), with the resulting risk of tragic consequences for those who are starting out in life.

Catholic schools face a great challenge to which they must respond with a deeply Christian educational programme and then implement it in full collaboration with the family, the primary subject of every educational project. By calling

especially on the skill and witness of their teachers, Catholic schools intend to offer young people a quality formation based on acquisition of the necessary knowledge and on appreciation of what man has achieved in the course of history, but especially on mature and convinced adherence to the great values of Italian tradition and the Christian faith.

3. Every school is called to be a laboratory of culture, an experience of communion and a training ground for dialogue. These aims find a particularly fertile ground in Catholic institutes: by basing their pedagogy on the spirit of love and freedom that should mark every community inspired by the Gospel, they become significant places in today's multiethnic society for human development and dialogue between the various religions and cultures.

However, the new frontiers of the school and its openness to cultural dialogue require of those who work in scholastic institutions constant care for their own pedagogical and spiritual identity, which remains the principal guarantee of a distinctive service to believers and non-believers alike.

In a society which sometimes seems to lack sensitivity to spiritual values and is often under the illusion of creating human prosperity and happiness through science and technology alone, Catholic schools are called to form the minds and hearts of the younger generation by taking their inspiration from the model of humanity offered by Christ. By the consistent witness of teachers and parents, students will be helped to embark on the great adventure of life in the company of Jesus the Redeemer, a true friend to rely on.

4. By encouraging respect for consciences, passion for truth and love of freedom in the context of professional service, Catholic schools offer a valuable opportunity for parents, who can choose the educational model best suited to their children. This is a sure guarantee of the effectiveness of that integrated public educational system which is an essential condition if the school is to be a modern and effective means of formation and a factor of progress for all society.

I hope that by studying these matters your assembly will help to improve the quality of the school and lead to an increased appreciation of the free school for the cultural growth and democratic development of Italian society. With these wishes, I entrust your educational mission and the work of your meeting to the motherly protection of Mary, Seat of Wisdom, and, as I invoke upon the students, families, teachers and administrators of Catholic schools the light and strength of the Spirit of truth, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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