



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDIES CENTRE
OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (CEI)***

Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 25 September 2008

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Today's meeting is taking place on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the Catholic School Study Centre (CSSC), founded by the Italian Bishops' Conference as an expression of the responsibility of Bishops for Catholic schools, including formation centres of Christian inspiration. It is therefore a happy occasion to renew my esteem and encouragement for all that has been done so far in this important sector of civil and ecclesial life. My most cordial welcome to you, dear brothers and sisters who are present here, who represent in a certain way all those who, at every level - CEI, USMI, CISM, institutes for religious education, universities, federations, associations, lay movements and other organizations - are at the service of Catholic schools in Italy. To each one I offer an affectionate greeting and the Church's gratitude for the valuable service to the evangelization of youth and of the world of culture that is carried out by Catholic schools.

I address a special greeting to Archbishop Agostino Superbo, Vice-President of the Italian Bishops' Conference; to the Bishops who are members of the Episcopal Commission for Catholic Education, Schools and Universities, and especially to its President, Bishop Diego Coletti, who has expressed your common sentiments. His words enable me to be better acquainted with the goals achieved and the prospects that await the Catholic School Study Centre. I next extend my greeting to the participants in the special congress organized to commemorate this anniversary whose theme is: "Beyond the educational emergency, Catholic schools at the service of youth".

The importance of the Catholic School's role has been reaffirmed on various occasions by my

venerable Predecessors and taken up in important documents of the Italian Bishops' Conference. The CEI's document "The Catholic school in Italy today", states, for example, that the Church's saving mission is carried out in close connection with the proclamation of faith and the promotion of the human being. It thus finds special support in that privileged instrument, the Catholic school, which aims to provide the human being with an integral education" (cf. n. 11). Immediately afterwards it adds: "The Catholic school is an expression of the right of all the citizens to freedom of education, and of the corresponding duty of solidarity in the construction of civil coexistence" (n. 12). It was thus with a view to the consolidation of the twofold ecclesial and civil perspective that 10 years ago the Italian Bishops became aware of the need to set up a Study Centre dedicated to Catholic schools. The Catholic school's pedagogical direction must be recognized and appreciated to recommend its selection. It must have a mature awareness not only of its ecclesial identity and cultural project but indeed also of its civil importance, which should not be considered as a defence of private interests, but as a precious contribution to building up the common good of the entire Italian society.

In the first decade of its activity, your Study Centre has rendered a truly precious service to the Church and to Italian Society. This is due to the effective collaboration that has been established between the CEI and its offices with the Catholic School Federations and Associations, with the Faculty of the Sciences of Education of the Pontifical Salesian University, with the Ministry for Public Instruction, with the Scientific-Technical Committee in which the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and LUMSA are represented and with all those who have collaborated in any capacity with its activities.

Thanks to this constant understanding, the Study Centre has succeeded in carefully monitoring the situation of Catholic schools in Italy, following with special interest the vicissitudes concerning parity and reforms in Italian schools. In this regard, attention has been drawn to the fact that attendance in Catholic schools in some regions of Italy is increasing, in comparison to what it was in the previous decade, although difficult and sometimes even critical situations persist. In this context of renewal to which those who have the good of the youth and the country at heart aspire, it is necessary to encourage that effective equality between state schools and officially recognized schools that allow parents the freedom to choose which school to send their children to.

Dear brothers and sisters, the anniversary you are commemorating is certainly a favourable opportunity to continue with renewed enthusiasm the service you are carrying out with good results. I encourage you in particular to focus your commitment, as is already your intention, in five sectors, namely: the dissemination of a culture destined to improve the quality of pedagogy in Catholic schools for the purpose of Christian education; monitoring the quality and the collection of data on the situation of Catholic schools; introducing new research to understand the educational, cultural and organizational emergencies that are considerable today; the pursuance of the culture of parity, not always appreciated, when it is not marked by equivocal interpretations; the increase in fruitful collaboration with Catholic School Federations and Associations with respect for their

reciprocal competences and goals.

I entrust your activities and future projects to the motherly intercession of Mary, Queen of the Family and Seat of Wisdom, while I thank you for your visit and bless you all with affection.

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