



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN UNION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS,
MANAGERS, EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS [UCIIM]**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 14 March 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Colleagues,

Allow me to address you as such, given that I too have been a teacher like you and I have fond memories of my days spent in the classroom with students. I cordially greet you all and thank the President for his kind words.

Teaching is a *beautiful profession*, it's a pity teachers are poorly paid... because it is not just about the time they spend in school, then the time they spend preparing, the time they spend on each individual student: how to help them move forward. It's true. It's an injustice. I think of my own country, which is what I know: there many unfortunate teachers have to work double shifts just to be able to earn a decent income. But what state is a teacher in after working a double shift? It is a poorly paid job, but it's beautiful because it allows us to see the people who are entrusted to our care grow day after day. It is a little like being parents, at least spiritually. It is a great responsibility!

Teaching is a serious commitment that only a mature and well- balanced person can undertake. Such a commitment can be intimidating, but remember that no teacher is ever alone: they always share their work with other colleagues and the entire educational community to which they belong.

Your association is 70 years old: what a beautiful age! It is only right to celebrate, but you can also begin to take stock of this lifetime. When you were born, in 1944, Italy was still at war. You have come a long way since then! Schools have come a long way too. And Italian schools have moved forward with the help of your Association, which was founded by Professor Nosengo Gesualdo, a

religion teacher who felt the need to gather together the secondary school teachers of that time, who acknowledged with the Catholic faith, and who with this inspiration worked in the schools.

Throughout these years you have helped the country to grow, you have helped to reform schools, you have especially contributed to educate generations of young people.

Over the past 70 years Italy has changed, schools have changed, but there are always teachers willing to engage in their profession with that enthusiasm and willingness that faith in the Lord gives us.

As Jesus taught us, the Law and the Prophets are summed up in two commandments: love the Lord your God and love your neighbour (cf. Mt 22:34-40). We can ask ourselves: who is a teacher's neighbour? *Your students are your "neighbour"!* It is with them that you spend your days. It is they who await guidance, direction, a response — and, even before that, good questions!

Among the UCIIIM's tasks, which cannot be lacking, is the call to enlighten and motivate *a just idea of the school*, sometimes overshadowed by discussions and reductive positions. School is certainly comprised of valid and qualified instruction, but also of human relations, which for us are welcoming and benevolent relations, to be offered indiscriminately to all. Indeed, the duty of a good teacher — all the more for a Christian teacher — is to love his or her more difficult, weaker, more disadvantaged students with greater intensity. Jesus would say, if you love only those who study, who are well educated, what merit do you have? And there are some who make us lose our patience, but we must love them even more! Any teacher can do well with such students. I ask you to *love the "difficult" students more...* those who do not want to study, those who find themselves in difficult situations, the disabled and foreigners, who today pose a great challenge for schools.

If a professional association of Christian teachers wants to bear witness to their inspiration today, then it is called to persevere *in the peripheries of schools*, which cannot be abandoned to marginalization, exclusion, ignorance, crime. In a society that struggles to find points of reference, young people need a positive reference point in their school. The school can be this or become this only if it has teachers capable of giving meaning to school, to studies and to culture, without reducing everything to the mere transmission of technical knowledge. Instead they must aim to build an educational relationship with each student, who must feel accepted and loved for who he or she is, with all of his or her limitations and potential. In this direction, your task is more necessary now than ever. You must not only teach content, but the values and customs of life. There are three things that you must pass on. A computer can teach content, but to understand how to love, to understand values and customs which create harmony in society, it takes a good teacher.

The Christian community has many examples of *great educators* who are dedicated to addressing the shortcomings of the educational system or to establishing schools in their own right. Let us

think of, among others, St John Bosco, the bicentenary of whose birth is this year. He advised his priests: teach with love. The first attitude of an educator is love. You too, Christian teachers, can look to these figures to animate from within a school, which, regardless of whether it is state-run or not, needs credible educators and witnesses of a mature and complete humanity. Testimony. This is not bought, it is not sold: it is given.

As an Association, you are by nature *open to the future*, because there are always new generations of young people to whom you may pass on your wealth of knowledge and values. On a professional level it is important to *refresh your teaching skills*, especially in light of new technologies, but teaching is not just a job: teaching is a *relationship* in which each teacher must feel fully involved as a person, in order to give meaning to the task of educating their students. Your presence here today is proof that you have the motivation that the school needs.

I encourage you to renew your passion for humanity — you cannot teach without passion! — in the process of formation, and to be *witnesses of life and hope*. Never, never close a door, open all of them wide, in order for the students to have hope.

I also ask you, please, to pray for me, and I cordially bless you all.