

THE POPE SPEAKS

HOLY FATHER ON RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS

On November 4th, the Holy Father received in special audience, in St. Peter's Basilica, those who took part in the ninth National Congress of the Italian Association of Catholic Teachers. He addressed them as follows:

We welcome this morning with great satisfaction your outstanding group, beloved sons and daughters, which embellishes the high and demanding name of Catholic Teachers. You are about 1,000 who have taken part, with the contribution of your preparation and experience, in the ninth National Congress of the Association. Your presence recalls the many occasions on which we have been interested in the development of your Association during the pontificate of our venerated predecessor, Pope Pius XII, as We also remember the first meeting that, from this Chair of Peter, We had with you in 1965. We greet you therefore, with great kindness, happy to be able again to state to the active and well-deserving President, to the regional directors and to the whole Italian Association of Catholic Teachers, Our word of esteem, of praise, and of pleasure. In seeing you, Our thoughts go to all the teachers—not only in Italy but We may say, in the whole world—to that magnificent, generous legion of men and women who, with incomparable dedication, with fidelity and a spirit of sacrifice, with silent and often obscure effort, devote themselves to so precious and irreplaceable a work, which is that of the intellectual, civic, and moral formation of childhood. Honour to all of you, teachers! And to you, especially Catholic teachers!

We wish that the time at Our disposal would permit Us to pause with you longer than We can; your cultural qualifications, your pedagogical responsibility, your Association would merit that. But if We

are constrained by the pressure of daily duties unfortunately to curtail this happy and helpful stay in your midst, We wish at least to leave you a memory that, at the end of the work of the Congress, may provide encouragement and a blessing for you and your colleagues, so dear to Us.

And Our word of remembrance is the watchword that We love to affirm, which begins the Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium at spes*, and is adapted to your special situation: "For the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed. Hence the pivotal point of our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will" (n. 3), to be the pivot and centre of your interest and activity, that guides the pupil through his tenderest years, helps him attain that complete maturity that makes him fit to take his place, fully conscious, in society and in the Church, according to the providential plan of God.

The theme, truly stimulating and gripping, proposed this year to the National Congress, speaks of "responsibility and demands of the teaching profession today". Now, it seems to Us that such responsibility and demands ought effectively to identify with this task which cannot be renounced and which you have assumed with the choice of your noble profession. The teacher forms the man, the whole man, as the Council has frequently underlined: not one part of man, even if worthy of every attention and care, but his entirety as a person who thinks and judges, wills and loves, and develops himself in a precise social and community contest, from which he cannot and ought not to feel uprooted.

The state of uneasiness throughout the world in secondary schools, of which you have rightly taken account in this Congress, finds its original justification here: in a school (system) that is perhaps isolated, crystalized, restricted to particular branches, forgetful of the complexity of the total formation of youth.

And it is therefore right that the combined effort of educators be directed to the complete formation of man, who is contained as in a nutshell in the child who learns, and who will form the structural base of tomorrow's society. This is already the purpose of elementary school

to which also applies that particular importance attributed by the Council to schools in general, because it also "by virtue of its very purpose, while it cultivates the intellect with unremitting attention, (the school) ripens the capacity for right judgment, provides an introduction into the cultural heritage won by past generations, promotes a sense of values, and readies for professional life. By creating friendly contacts between students of diverse temperament and background, the school fosters among them a willingness to understand one another." (*Gravissimum educationis*, n. 5). All means must, therefore, be availed of; the customary teaching methods must be integrated with the new audio-visual aids which are directed to the senses eager to learn, for open and complete intellectual preparation, which while necessarily adjusted to the capacity of the pupils and to the precise demands of programmes, must not be arid and pedantic theorizing nor a hasty smattering of bundles of facts. Education should be ordered gradually, harmoniously, to all human faculties, appealing to the heart and the imagination, opening unlimited horizons on the world, stimulating the will to dedicate itself for the good of society. It should introduce the pupil to the highest levels of the religious and supernatural vision, offering help of the first order to the action which the Church, for its part, with complete autonomy, but also in loyal and active collaboration with the school, has the mission to carry out by divine mandate.

Noble duties of responsibility and of faith

Who does not see the responsibility that all this imposes on the teacher, also on the teacher of the primary school, indeed more so him who represents the first encounter of the child with the world of knowledge. To him the child commits himself with all the spontaneity and trust of his innocent soul, easily led and anxious to learn. Your responsibilities are truly grave. They range from a continual bringing-up-to-date of studies and pedagogical methods for your own cultural and spiritual preparation, to the animated work of the school, to contact with families, collaboration with colleagues, to the stimulating presence of the various forms of civic and social life that are related to educational action.

This, however, does not exhaust your generosity. In fact, you are called Catholic Teachers, and, as such, you assume responsibilities still greater and more demanding. How We should like to sing a hymn of gratitude to the teachers for all they have done and are doing in this delicate and very important sector! Who does not recall the examples, the words, the lessons of life received from his teachers? And who does not know that from them came for all of us the first invitation to a good and orderly life, founded on the necessity of study, but above all on the moral rectitude of the awareness of his duties before God and the world; the first secure attitude regarding permanent spiritual values; the first authoritative encouragement to do good, which gave so much satisfaction and joy to the child's soul? Oh, what good teachers have done and are doing, offering their pedagogical art and their prestige, predisposing the child to the gradual and sublime action of education, which the Church develops to make of frail man an "angelic butterfly" destined for the vision and kingdom of God!

Apostles of the Teaching of the Church

You are the first to be convinced of it. You do not need that We should recall the responsibility that you have in forming first yourselves in order to form others; to live the Christian vocation in filial fidelity to the Law of God and to the teaching of the Church, in order to be its vehicle and apostles; to understand the needs of the times in which we live in order not to betray them by one's own absentecism, but to guide them to the goal, to that single answer which today as always can alone satisfy them, because it alone comes from God to man, created and redeemed by Him.

Beloved sons and daughters! To accomplish all this let Our words encourage you, and Our prayer accompany you. We invoke for you the constant illumination of Christ, the Divine Master; in his Name We bless you so that he may grant to you, to your pupils, to your colleagues "according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man... that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3, 16, 19).