



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Members of the Italian Catholic Primary School Teachers' Association

At midday today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Italian Catholic Primary School Teachers' Association (AIMC), at the end of the 21st National Congress of the AIMC on the theme: *"Memory and future. Peripheries and frontiers of professional knowledge"* (Rome, 3 – 5 January 2018).

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you, representatives of the Italian Catholic Primary School Teachers' Association, on the occasion of your National Congress, and I thank the President for his words.

I would like to offer you three points for reflection and engagement: the culture of encounter, the alliance between school and family, and ecological education. And also an encouragement to associate.

First of all, I thank you for the contribution you give to the Church's commitment to promoting the *culture of encounter*. And I encourage you to do so, if possible, in an even more grass-roots and incisive way. In fact, in this cultural challenge the foundations laid down over the years of primary education for children are decisive. Christian teachers, whether they work in Catholic schools or in state schools, are called to stimulate in the pupils the openness to the other as a face, as a person, as a brother and sister to know and respect, with his or her history, merits and defects, riches and limits. The challenge is to cooperate to train young people to be open and interested in the reality that surrounds them, capable of care and tenderness – I think of bullies – free from the widespread prejudice according to which one must be competitive, aggressive, and hard towards others, especially towards those who are different, foreign or in any way seen as an obstacle to one's own affirmation. This unfortunately is the "air" that our children often breathe, and the remedy is to make sure that they can

breathe a different, healthier, more human air. And for this purpose, the alliance with parents is very important.

And here we come to the second point, that is, to the *educational alliance between the school and the family*. We all know that this alliance has long been in crisis, and in some cases completely broken. Once upon a time there was significant mutual reinforcement between the stimuli given by teachers and those given by parents. Today the situation has changed, but we can not be nostalgic for the past. We must take note of the changes that have affected both the family and the school, and renew the commitment to constructive collaboration – or rather, rebuild the alliance and the educational pact – for the benefit of children and young people. And since this synergy no longer occurs in a “natural” way, it must be promoted in terms of planning, also with the contribution of experts in the pedagogical field. But first we must encourage a new “complicity” – I am conscious in my use of this word, a new complicity – between teachers and parents. First of all, by avoiding thinking of each other as opposing fronts, blaming each other, but on the contrary putting ourselves in the shoes of each other, understanding the objective difficulties that each encounters in education today, and thus creating greater solidarity: complicity in solidarity.

The third aspect that I want to underline is *ecological education* (see Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 209-215). Naturally it is not just a matter of providing some notions, which must however be taught. It is about educating to a lifestyle based on an attitude of care for our common home, which is creation. A lifestyle that is not schizophrenic, that for instance takes care of animals in extinction but ignores the problems of the elderly; or that defends the Amazon forest but neglects workers' rights to a just wage, and so on. This is schizophrenia. The ecology in which we must educate has to be holistic. And above all, education must aim at a sense of responsibility: not to transmit slogans that others should implement, but to inspire the pleasure of experiencing an ecological ethic, starting from choices and gestures in daily life. A style of behaviour that in the Christian perspective finds meaning and motivation in the relationship with God the creator and redeemer, with Jesus Christ, centre of the cosmos and of history, and with the Holy Spirit, source of harmony in the symphony of creation.

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, I want to add a word about the value of *being and making an association*. It is a value not to be taken for granted, but always to be cultivated, and institutional moments like the Congress serve this purpose. I urge you to renew your will to be and to make association, with the recollection of your inspiring principles, in reading the signs of the times and with an open outlook towards the social and cultural horizon. Do not be afraid of differences and also of the conflicts that normally exist in lay associations; it is normal for them to exist, it is normal. Do not hide them, but face them with an evangelical style, in the search for the true good of the association, evaluated on the basis of statutory principles. Being an association is a value and a responsibility, that is entrusted to you right now. With the help of God and the pastors of the Church, you are called to make this talent that has been placed in your hands bear fruit.

Thank you. I thank you for this meeting and I warmly bless you, all the association and your work. You too, please, pray for me.
