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Audience with the participants in the Plenary of the Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions)

Today, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary of the Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions), to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Gentlemen Cardinals,

Dear brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood,

Dear brothers and sisters!

I thank Cardinal Versaldi for his kind words of introduction, and I cordially greet you all. Your meeting in the Plenary Assembly has given you the opportunity, in these days, to review the dense work carried out over the past three years, and to outline future commitments with an open heart and with hope. The field of competence of the Dicastery engages you in the fascinating world of education, which is never a repetitive action, but the art of growth, of maturation, and for this reason it never stays the same.

Education is a dynamic reality, it is a movement that brings people to the light. It is a peculiar kind of movement, with characteristics that make it a dynamism of growth, intent on the full development of the person in his individual and social dimension. I would like to dwell on some of its typical traits.

One aspect of education is that it is an *ecological movement*. It is one of its driving forces towards the aim of complete formation. Education that has at its centre the person as a whole has the purpose of bringing him to the knowledge of himself, of the common house in which he is placed to live, and above all to the discovery of fraternity as a relationship that produces the multicultural composition of humanity, a source of mutual

enrichment.

This educational movement, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, contributes to restoring “the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God”. This naturally requires educators who are “capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (210).

With regard to method, education is an *inclusive movement*. An inclusion that reaches out to all the excluded: those who are excluded by poverty, by vulnerability due to war, famine and natural disasters, by social selectivity, and by family and existential difficulties. An inclusion that is made tangible in educational action in favour of refugees, victims of human trafficking, and migrants, without distinction on the basis of sex, religion or ethnicity. Inclusion is not a modern invention, but it is an integral part of the Christian salvific message. Nowadays it is necessary to accelerate this inclusive movement of education to counter the throwaway culture, which originates from the denial of fraternity as a constitutive element of humanity.

Another typical aspect of education is that of being a *peace-making movement*. It is harmonious – I will speak about this, but they are connected – a peaceful movement, a bringer of peace. Young people themselves are witnesses to this; with their commitment and their thirst for truth they constantly remind us that “hope is not utopian and that peace is always a good that can be attained” (*Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 9 January 2020). The peace-building educational movement is a force to be nurtured against the “egolatry” that generates non-peace, rifts between generations, between peoples, between cultures, between rich and poor populations, between men and women, between economy and ethics, between humanity and the environment (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Global Educational Pact. Instrumentum laboris*, 2020). These fractures and oppositions, which ail relationships, conceal a fear of diversity and difference. For this reason, education is required, with its pacifying force, to form people capable of understanding that diversity does not hinder unity; on the contrary, it is indispensable to the richness of one’s own identity and that of all people.

Another typical element of education is that of being a *team movement*. It is never the action of a single person or institution. The Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* affirms that school “establishes as it were a centre whose work and progress must be shared together by families, teachers, associations of various types that foster cultural, civic, and religious life, as well as by civil society and the entire human community” (5). For its part, the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the thirtieth anniversary of whose promulgation falls this year, affirms that “A Catholic University pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ” (21). But every university is called to be a “community of study, research and formation” (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, art. 11 § 1).

This team movement has long been in crisis for several reasons. Therefore, I felt the need to promote the *Global Educational Pact Day* this coming 14 May, entrusting the organization to the Congregation for Catholic Education. It is an appeal to all those who have political, administrative, religious and educational responsibilities to rebuild the “village of education”. The aim of being together is not to develop programs, but to find the common step “to revive the commitment for and with the younger generations, renewing the passion for a more open and inclusive education, capable of patient listening, constructive dialogue and mutual understanding. The educational pact must not be a simple order, it must not be a “reconstitution” of the positivisms we have received from an Enlightenment education. It must be revolutionary.

Never before has there been such a need to unite efforts in a broad *educational alliance* to form mature people, capable of overcoming fragmentation and opposition and rebuild the fabric of relationships for a more fraternal humanity. To achieve these goals takes courage: “The courage to place the human person at the centre [...]. The courage to capitalize on our best energies [...]. The courage to train individuals who are ready to offer themselves in service to the community” (*Message for the launch of the Educational Pact*, 12 September 2019). The courage to pay educators well.

I also see in the making of a global educational pact the facilitation of the growth of an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary alliance, which the recent Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* indicated for ecclesiastical studies, as the “vital intellectual principle of the unity in difference of knowledge and respect for its multiple, correlated and convergent expressions, [...] also in relation to the fragmented and often disintegrated panorama of contemporary university studies and to the pluralism – uncertain, conflicting and relativistic – of cultural beliefs and cultural options” (Foreword, 4 c).

In this broad perspective of education I hope you will continue fruitfully in the implementation of the programme for the coming years, in particular in the drafting of a Directory, in the establishment of a World Observatory, and in the qualification and updating of ecclesiastical studies and in a greater concern for university pastoral care as an instrument of the new evangelization. These are all commitments which can contribute effectively to consolidating the pact, in the sense taught to us by the Word of God: “the covenant between God and men, the covenant between generations, the covenant between peoples and cultures, the covenant – in school – between teachers and learners – and also parents – the covenant between man, animals, plants and even the inanimate realities which make our common home beautiful and colourful. Everything is related to everything else, everything is created to be a living icon of God Who is the Trinity of Love!” (*Address to the Academic Community of the Sophia University Institute of Loppiano*, 14 November 2019).

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for the work you do with dedication every day. I invoke upon you the gifts of the Holy Spirit to give you strength in your delicate ministry of education. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
