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Audience with participants in the International Interuniversity Conference “Women in the Church: Builders of humanity”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience the participants in the International Interuniversity Conference “Women in the Church: Builders of Humanity”, taking place at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome from 7 to 8 March 2024.

The following is the address prepared for the occasion by the Holy Father, which was read out by Msgr. Pierluigi Girolì:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I offer a cordial greeting to all of you who have come from various countries to take part in the Conference *Women in the Church: Builders of Humanity*. I thank you for your presence and for organizing and promoting this event.

Your Conference highlights in particular the witness of holiness of ten women. I would like to mention them by name: Josephine Bakhita, Magdeleine de Jesus, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Mary MacKillop, Laura Montoya, Kateri Tekakwitha, Teresa of Calcutta, Rafqa Pietra Choboq Ar-Rayès, Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi and Daphrose Mukasanga.

All these women, at different times and in different cultures, each in her own distinct way, gave proof through initiatives of charity, education and prayer, of how the “feminine genius” can uniquely reflect God’s holiness in the midst of our world. Indeed, precisely at times in history when women were largely excluded from social and ecclesial life, the “Holy Spirit raised up saints whose attractiveness produced new spiritual vigour and important reforms in the Church”. Here too, “I think of all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in her own way,

sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 12). The Church needs to keep this in mind, because the Church is herself a woman: a daughter, a bride and a mother. And who better than women can reveal her face? Let us help one another, putting aside any aggressive and divisive attitudes, and exercising careful discernment, to discover, in docility to the voice of the Spirit and in faithful communion, fitting ways for the grandeur and the place of women to be increasingly valued in the People of God.

You have chosen an eloquent title for your Conference in referring to women as “Builders of Humanity”. This expression brings out even more clearly the nature of women’s vocation as “builders”, cooperating with the Creator in the service of life, the common good, and peace. I would like to emphasize two aspects of this mission, dealing with *style* and with *education*.

First of all, *style*. Ours is a time seared by hatred, in which our human family, which needs to feel the power of love, is instead frequently scarred by violence, war and ideologies that stifle the noblest feelings of the human heart. Precisely in this context, the contribution of women is more necessary than ever. For women know how to *bring people together with tenderness*. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus said that she wanted to be love in the Church. She was right: women, in fact, with their unique capacity for compassion, their intuitiveness and their connatural inclination to “care”, are able, in an outstanding way, to be for society both “intelligence and a heart that loves and unites”, to bring love where love is lacking, and humanity where human beings are searching to find their true identity.

Secondly, *education*. You have organized this Conference in cooperation with various Catholic academic institutions. In the context of pastoral care within university communities, in addition to the academic study of the Church’s doctrine and social teaching, every effort to present students with testimonies of holiness, especially of feminine sanctity, can encourage them to aim higher, to broaden the horizons of their dreams and their ways of thinking, and to aim to pursue high ideals. Holiness can thus become a *cross-disciplinary educational path* within the greater pursuit of knowledge. For this reason, I express my hope that your educational settings, in addition to being places of study, research and learning, places of “information”, will also be places of “formation”, where minds and hearts are opened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is important to make the saints better known, especially women saints, in all the depth and reality of their humanity. In this way, education will be increasingly capable of touching each person in his or her wholeness and uniqueness.

A final word about education: in a world where women still suffer so greatly from violence, inequality, injustice and mistreatment – something scandalous and all the more so for those who profess faith in the God “born of woman” (*Gal 4:4*) –one serious form of discrimination has to do precisely with the education of women. In certain contexts it is a cause of fear, yet the way to the betterment of societies is through the education of girls and young women, which benefits overall human development. Let us pray for this and commit ourselves to this!

Dear sisters and brothers, I entrust the fruits of your Conference to the Lord and I accompany you with my blessing. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.
