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The Pope: Catholic schools and universities in the service of the growth of humanity, dialogue and hope

The Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions) recently held its plenary assembly, and this morning in the Clementine Hall Pope Francis received the participants, including the members of the Gravissimum Educationis Foundation, recently constituted to relaunch the content of the Conciliar Declaration.

The Assembly took stock of the Dicastery's work during the last three years, and outlined the directions of future efforts, reflecting on various themes such as the initial and continuing formation of teachers and managers, the indispensable contribution of the religious congregations, and the support that can come from the particular Churches and organisations in the sector. A major part of its work was dedicated to the Catholic and ecclesiastical university institutions for the renovation of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*; the promotion of studies of canon law in relation to the reform of procedures for marriage annulment; and the support of university pastoral care.

"Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing [the] evangelising commitment', and 'Catholic schools ... are a most valuable resource for the evangelisation of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods", said the Holy Father, citing his apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* to indicate to those present some expectations in the field.

"Firstly, faced with an intrusive individualism, which makes us humanly poor and culturally barren, it is necessary to *humanise education*", he emphasised. "The school and the university have full meaning only in relation to the formation of the person. In this process of human growth, all educators are called to collaborate with their professionalism and with the wealth of humanity they bear, to help the young to be builders of a more fraternal and peaceful world. Furthermore, Catholic educational institutions have the mission of offering horizons open to transcendence. *Gravissimum Educationis* recalls that education is in the service of an integral humanism and that the Church, as an educating mother, always looks to new generations with the prospect of the 'formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as a man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share' (no.1)".

Another expectation is the growth of the *culture of dialogue*. “Our world has become a global village with multiple processes of interaction, where every person belongs to humanity and shares in the hope of a better future with the entire family of peoples. At the same time, unfortunately, there are many forms of violence, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, marginalisation, and approaches that restrict fundamental freedoms, creating a throwaway culture. In such a context, Catholic educational institutes are called first to put into practice the grammar of dialogue which educates in encounter and in the appreciation of cultural and religious diversities. ... In a more specific sense, schools and universities are called to teach *a method of intellectual dialogue aimed at the search for truth*. St. Thomas was and continues to be a master of this method, which consists of taking seriously the other, the interlocutor, seeking to understand fully his reasons, his objections, so as to be able to respond in an adequate rather than a superficial way. Only in this way can be truly advance together in the knowledge of truth”.

The contribution of education in *sowing hope* was Francis’ final expectation. “Man cannot live without hope, and education is a generator of hope. Indeed, education means bringing to light, nurturing, and as such is part of the dimension of life. And life that is born is the greatest source of hope. ... I am convinced that the young of today need above all this life that builds the future. Therefore, the true educator is like a father and a mother who transmits a life capable of having a future. To have this tempering, it is necessary to listen to the young: the ‘work of the ear’. Listen to the young! ... Education has in common with hope the same substance of risk. Hope is not superficial optimism, nor is it the capacity to look at things benevolently, but rather is a way of knowing how to run risks in the right way, like education”.

“Dear brothers and sisters, Catholic schools and universities make a great contribution to the mission of the Church when they serve growth in humanity, dialogue and hope”, he concluded.
