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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Audience with participants in the International Congress “Lines of Development of the Global Compact on Education” organized by the Congregation for Catholic Education (for Study Institutes)**

This morning, before the General Audience, the Holy Father Francis received the participants in the International Congress “Lines of Development of the Global Compact on Education”, organized by the Congregation for Catholic Education (for Study Institutes), to whom he addressed the following greeting:

### **Greeting of the Holy Father**

I offer a cordial welcome to the distinguished Rectors, Professors and all those taking part in the International Congress “Lines of Development of the Global Compact on Education”. I thank Cardinal Versaldi for his kind words of introduction. This is a “grand finale”, since today the Dicasteries will be combined.

I am pleased that the proposal of a Global Compact on Education launched in 2019 has garnered interest at different levels, including universities, which have promoted studies on a variety of topics, such as the dignity of the person and human rights, fraternity and cooperation, technology and integral ecology, peace and citizenship, cultures and religions. Your Conference is meant to be an opportunity to evaluate the work accomplished to this point and to plan for the development of the Compact on Education in the years to come. It must move forward and not remain “closed”.

Recently I met with Rectors of universities in the Lazio region of Italy and observed how, in the present time, we need to learn alongside the young students in our universities how to navigate the crisis and to work together in overcoming it.[1] I consider this important. To learn and to help others to learn how to navigate crises, since crises are an opportunity for growth. Crises must be managed, we have to ensure that they do not turn into conflict. Crises pull you up; they make you grow. Conflict “closes” you; it is an alternative, an alternative without solution. To educate for crisis: this is very important. In this way, the crisis can become a “kairos”, a propitious moment that can stimulate us to set out on new paths.

An eloquent example of how to confront the crisis can be found in the epic figure of Aeneas, who amid the flames of his burning city, carries on his shoulders his elderly father Anchises and takes the young son Ascanius by the hand, leading them both to safety. This is nice: “...*et sublato patre montem petivi* (cf. *Aeneid*, II, 804). That is how to overcome a crisis. Aeneas saves himself, but not by himself. He brings with him his father, who represents his past, and his son, who represents the future. And so he moves forward.

This image can serve to illustrate the mission of educators, who are called to preserve the past – carrying our father on our shoulders – and to guide the steps of the young towards the future. It can also help us to reflect on some fundamental principles of the Global Compact on Education.

First, *the centrality of the person*. Leaving Troy, Aeneas does not bring with him property, things – aside from his household gods, the Penates – but only his father and his son. Roots and the future, promises. This reminds us that every educational process must be centred on persons and concentrate on what is essential; everything else is secondary. But never without roots and hope for the future.

Another essential element is the need *to invest all our energy, with creativity and responsibility*. The elderly Anchises represents the tradition, which must be respected and preserved. I think of what Gustav Mahler said about tradition: “Tradition is the guarantee of the future”, not a museum piece. Ascanius represents the future, which needs to be protected and ensured. Aeneas is the one who acts as a “bridge”, safeguarding the transition and the relationship between the generations. Education, for its part, is always rooted in the past, but it does not stop there: it is directed towards “forward-looking initiatives”, [2] where the old and the new converge to create a new humanism.

Opposed to this there is the fashion – in every age, but in this age in the Church’s life I consider it dangerous – that instead of drawing from the roots in order to move forward – meaning fine traditions – we “step back”, not going up or down, but backwards. This “back-stepping” makes us a sect; it makes you “closed” and cuts off your horizons. Those people call themselves guardians of traditions, but of dead traditions. The true Catholic Christian and human tradition is what that fifth-century theologian [Saint Vincent of Lerins] described as a constant growth: throughout history tradition grows, progresses: *ut annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*. That is authentic tradition, which progresses with our children.

Another fundamental element is our need *to educate for service*. Anchises and Ascanius not only represent tradition and the future but also symbolize the fragile bonds uniting society, bonds that need to be protected and defended against the temptation to discard them or set them aside. The “throwaway culture” would have us believe that, as soon as something no longer functions properly, it should be thrown out and exchanged. That is what we do with consumable goods. Sadly, it has also become a mindset that affects what we do with people. For example, if a marriage no longer “works”, you change it; if a friendship is on the rocks, you cut bait; if an older person is no longer self-sufficient, you cast him or her aside... Fragility, however, is synonymous with great value: the elderly and the young are like fragile vases, to be carefully protected. Both are fragile.

Dear friends, in our time, when technology and consumerism are turning us into users and consumers, the crisis can become an opportunity for evangelization, for preaching anew the meaning of our humanity, our life and this world in which we live. An opportunity to reassert the centrality of the human person as a creature that, in Christ, is the image and likeness of its Creator. This is the great truth entrusted to us, a truth that we must bear witness to and hand down, also in our educational institutions. “We cannot fail to speak to young people about the truths that give meaning to life”. [3] That is part of truth. Not to speak the truth about God out of respect for those who do not believe would be, in the field of education, like burning books out of respect for those who are not intellectuals, destroying works of art out of respect for those who do not see, or silencing music out of respect for those who do not hear.

I thank you for all that you do in the service of education, which is also the specific contribution that you are offering to the Church’s synodal process. Keep moving in this direction, from the past towards the future, continuous growth. Children and the elderly, all moving ahead together. And be attentive to the “back-stepping” so much in vogue today, which makes us think that by stepping back, we can preserve humanism. I encourage

you to move forward and I accompany you with my blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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[1] *Address to Rectors of the Universities of the Lazio Region* (16 May 2022).

[2] *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education* (12 September 2019).

[3] *Address to Participants in the Meeting on the Global Compact on Education "Religions and Education"* (5 October 2021)

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