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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with participants in the Extraordinary Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Evangelization – Section for First Evangelization and the new particular Churches

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Extraordinary Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Evangelization – Section for First Evangelization and the new particular Churches, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet Cardinal Tagle and all present, and I thank you for the help you are providing in these days. From every continent, you have come to Rome to reflect on the identity, mission and future prospects of the Pontifical Urban University. There is some plan afoot to “blend” it with other universities; no, this is not right. I compliment you on the synodal procedure that you adopted, by first gathering the contributions coming from the Bishops’ Conferences of the countries within the competence of the Dicastery.

For my part, I would like to offer a few thoughts in this regard, starting from the context in which the Urban University responds to the authority and activity of the Dicastery for Evangelization, in accordance with the organizational plan laid down by the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*. The *Urbaniana* has an identity of its own.

First, the relationship between *identity and mission*. Given the vocation of the Urban University, its identity has always coincided with its mission. The formation, teaching, research and daily life of the University are all part of the mandate we have received to proclaim the Good News to all peoples (cf. *Mk 16:15*). Their concrete form, however, can never be considered definitive. Always moving forward! In this sense, they are open-ended, and need to be guided constantly by the breath of the Holy Spirit who directs history and who calls us to read the signs of the times in which we live. And to do so with proper criteria.

The inspiration and needs that led to the foundation of the University remain as timely as ever, as we see from the four centuries of its growth from the original Urban College. Yet this heritage needs to find contemporary expression in efforts to respond to the challenges presently facing the Church and our world. “Ecclesiastical studies cannot be limited to passing on knowledge, professional competence and experience to the men and women of our time..., but must also take up the urgent task of developing intellectual tools that can serve as paradigms for action and thought, useful for preaching in a world marked by ethical and religious pluralism” (*Veritatis Gaudium*, 5). We do not live in a Christian society, but we *are* called to live as Christians in today’s pluralistic society. As Christians and open to others.

Second, the relationship between *present and future prospects*. Reflection in this area is part of the discernment demanded of University institutions in Rome, which are dependent in a particular way on the Apostolic See.

This calls both for improving the quality of education and research, and the judicious use of human and economic resources. It requires a vision capable of looking beyond the present and of assessing the contemporary ecclesial and social context, the vitality of our ecclesiastical structures and their sustainability, the needs of the local Churches, vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, and the demographic indices of the different regions. We all know that “a proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 33). A healthy creativity will be needed to come up with suitable plans and projects. Never be afraid of creativity; we need a healthy creativity. At my meeting with the Pontifical Universities and Academic Institutions in Rome in February last year, I encouraged everyone to “sing as a choir”. This involves more than devising merely technical solutions. A renewed model of the University, as a community of knowledge and learning, must ensure that courses of study are never reduced to a mere accumulation of lectures, credits and exams.

Making an academic institution attractive and competitive requires dedicated instructors, scientific research and the means needed to make a significant contribution to scholarship. Making good use of resources entails eliminating duplication, sharing lecturers across the six institutions, eliminating unnecessary spending, planning activities wisely and abandoning outdated practices and programmes. For this, I want to thank the Cardinal and the Secretary who are working hard to avoid these ugly, dirty things that I just mentioned. Thank you for what you are doing.

In the particular case of the *Urbaniana*, it is important that its missionary and intercultural specificity be seen even more clearly in the quality of the formation that it offers, so that its graduates can be creative in mediating the Christian message vis-à-vis other cultures and religions. How greatly we need priests, consecrated persons and lay people filled with missionary zeal for evangelizing cultures and thus inculturating the Gospel! These two things always go together: the evangelization of culture and the inculturation of the Gospel.

It is my hope that, as has already happened in places in Asia and in China, more research centres can be set up for the different geographical and cultural regions, while strengthening those already existing. Encouragement should also be given to affiliating the seminaries and schools of theology present in missionary territories. Where this is not possible, a different yet constant form of accompaniment ought to be ensured.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for the work you are doing in these days, and for your commitment in the various ecclesial settings in which you work. May the Holy Spirit guide your reflections with his gift of wisdom. And may the Virgin Mary, Queen of Mission, accompany you with her maternal intercession. I pray for you, but please pray for me, because this work is entertaining, but not easy!
