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**Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Luxembourg and Belgium (26 to 29 September 2024)
– Meeting with university students of the Université Catholique de Louvain**

This afternoon, the Holy Father Francis left the Apostolic Nunciature and transferred by car to the *Université Catholique de Louvain*, where he met with university students.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed at the main entrance of the Great Hall by the rector of the *UCLouvain*, Françoise Smets, the rector of *KULeuven*, Luc Sels, Archbishop Luc Terlinden of Malines-Bruxelles, in his capacity as Grand Chancellor, the mayor of Ottignies-Louvain-la Neuve, and the governor of the province. A youth offered him a floral tribute, and a group of students with flags welcomed the Pope, who then entered the Great Hall where some members of the Rector's Council were present to welcome him. The Holy Father then signed the Book of Honour and proceeded to the Theatre of the Great Hall on the first floor.

After the rector's welcome greeting and the projection of a video, a letter addressed to Pope Francis was read out by the students. The Holy Father then delivered his address.

At the end, after a musical interval, the Pope was given a plant which, in a symbolic gesture, represents the *tree of wishes* produced by the university on the occasion of the upcoming six-hundredth anniversary of its founding. Pope Francis also left the following message: "In the great university community of Louvain, may the young become impassioned seekers of the truth, beauty and goodness, with open minds and hearts and industrious hands, to give the form of service to their dreams". After the final blessing, Pope Francis proceeded to the terrace adjacent to the Great Hall, where he received the gift of a "*calotte*" (student beret) from the rector and two students. He then bade them farewell and boarded a golf cart for a tour among the many people who awaited him outside the university.

The Pope then transferred by car to *Saint-Michel* College for the private meeting with members of the Society of Jesus present in Belgium.

Following the meeting, Pope Francis went to greet the approximately six thousand students gathered for the *Hope Happening* in the building near the Stadium.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during his meeting with university students at the *Université Catholique de Louvain*:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Thank you, Madame Rector, for your kind words. Dear students, I am pleased to meet you and listen to your reflections. I can sense in your words passion and hope, a desire for justice and the search for truth.

Among the issues you raised, I was struck by the one concerning *the future* and *anxiety*. It is easy to see how a violent and arrogant wickedness is destroying people and the environment. It seems to know no limits and is most brutally expressed by war – in a country that I will not name, the investments that provide the most profits come from the production of arms, it is terrible! – and it shows no signs of stopping: war is a brutal thing; but also by corruption and modern forms of slavery. War, corruption and new forms of slavery. Sometimes these evils even corrupt religion itself, turning it into an instrument of domination. Be careful! Yet this is blasphemy, whereby the union of men and women with God, who is saving Love, is turned into slavery, and even the name of Father, a revelation meant to heal, becomes an expression of arrogance. However, God is Father, not overlord; God is Son and Brother, not dictator; God is the Spirit of love, not of domination.

As Christians, we know that evil never has the last word. We must be firm on this: evil does not have the last word. We could even say that its days are numbered. Far from lessening our commitment, evil actually strengthens it, for *our responsibility is hope*. It is a responsibility that we must assume since hope never disappoints. This certainty wins over the pessimistic conscience, the style of Turandot... Hope never disappoints!

And now, three words: *gratitude*, *mission* and *fidelity*.

Our first attitude must be *gratitude*, because our home has been entrusted to us. We are not masters but guests and pilgrims on the earth. God is the first to care for it, just as he cares for us. In the words of Isaiah: God “did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!” (*Is* 45:18). And Psalm 8 is full of grateful wonder: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (v. 3-4). The prayer from the heart that comes to mind is: Thanks be to our Father, for the starry sky and for our lives in this universe!

The second attitude is *mission*. While we are in this world, we are meant to safeguard its beauty and cultivate it for the good of all, especially keeping in mind those who will come after us. This is the Church’s “ecological programme”. Yet no development plan will ever succeed as long as arrogance, violence and rivalry are on our consciences and in our society. We need to go to the source of the matter, which is the human heart. It is because of the human heart that ecological issues have become increasingly urgent: from the arrogant indifference rooted in the hearts of the powerful, who so often give preference to economic interests. Economic interests: money. I remember something that my grandmother always said: “Be careful since the devil enters through the pockets”. Economic interests. As long as the situation remains like this, every appeal will be silenced or accepted only in a way that is convenient for the markets. This is the “spirituality” of the markets. As long as markets are given pride of place, then our common home will continue to suffer injustices. Yet, the beauty of the gift of creation summons us to a great responsibility, for we are guests, not despots. In this regard, dear students, I invite you to consider culture as the cultivation not just of ideas, but also of our world.

Herein lies the challenge of integral development, which requires the third attitude: *fidelity*. Fidelity to God and fidelity to every man and woman. Indeed, such development concerns all people in the physical, moral, cultural and socio-political aspects of their lives. Moreover, this type of development is contrary to all forms of oppression

and rejection of others, and the Church denounces these abuses, committing herself above all to the conversion of each of her members, each one of us, to justice and to truth. In this sense, integral development calls us to holiness, to the vocation of a just and happy life.

And now, the choice to be made is between manipulating nature or cultivating it. The choice is to manipulate nature or cultivate nature. And we must begin with our own human nature, including questions of eugenics, cybernetic organisms and artificial intelligence. Yet the choice between manipulating or cultivating also concerns our interior lives.

Reflecting on human ecology brings us to an issue close to your hearts, as well as to mine and that of my predecessors: the *role of women in the Church*. I liked what you said. There is much involved here, including the questions of violence and injustice, as well as ideological prejudices. This is why we must go back to what is essential: *who is woman* and *who is the Church*? The Church is woman, female and not male. She is female, a wife. The Church is the People of God, not a multinational corporation. A woman within the People of God is a daughter, a sister, a mother, just as a man is a son, a brother, a father. These are all *relationships*, which express the fact that we have been made in the *image of God*, as men and women, together not separately! In the Church, men and women have been called from the beginning to love and to be loved. This is a vocation, and also a mission that then gives rise to their roles both in society and in the Church (cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1).

What characterizes women, that which is truly feminine, is not stipulated by consensus or ideologies, just as dignity itself is ensured not by laws written on paper, but by an original law written on our hearts. Dignity is a priceless good, an innate quality, which no human law can give or take away. Based on this common and shared dignity, Christian culture, in its varied contexts, seeks to develop ever fresh understandings of the mission and life of men and women and their mutual being for each other in communion. They are not meant to be rivals. That would be feminism or chauvinism. Instead, man for woman and woman for man, together.

We must remember that women are at the very heart of salvation history. It is thanks to the “yes” of Mary that God himself came into the world. Womanhood speaks to us of fruitful welcome, nurturing and life-giving dedication. For this reason, a woman is more important than a man, but it is terrible when a woman wants to be a man: no, she is a woman, and this is “heavy” and important. Let us be more attentive to the many daily expressions of this love, from friendship to the workplace, from studies to the exercise of responsibility in the Church and society, from marriage to motherhood, or from virginity to the service of others and the building up of the kingdom of God. Let us not forget. I will repeat, the Church is woman, not male, the Church is woman.

You yourselves are here in order to grow as women and as men. You are on a journey, a process of human formation. That is why your academic studies encompass different fields: research, friendship, social service, civic and political responsibility, artistic expression, and so on.

Reflecting on your day-to-day experience here at the Catholic University of Louvain, I would like to mention three simple yet decisive aspects of your formation: *How to study? Why study? For whom to study?*

How to study? As with every science, there is no single method, but there is a *style*. Each person can develop his or her own style. Indeed, study is always a gateway to knowledge of self and of others. Yet, there is also a *common* style that the whole *university community* can embrace. We study together with others, and should be grateful to those who have gone before us, and to both faculty and more advanced students studying alongside us in the classroom. Culture understood as taking care of oneself must, therefore, involve care for others. There is no conflict between students and professors. There is dialogue. It is more intense at times but there is dialogue and dialogue allows the university community to grow.

Second, *why study?* There is a motivation that drives us and a goal that draws us on. Yet these factors need to be good, for they determine what study means to us and give direction to our lives. Sometimes we study in order to discover a new kind of work, but end up living for our work. We become the “commodities”. We live for our work. We should not live to work; instead we should work in order to live. This is easy to say, but it takes

consistent effort to put it into practice. The word “consistency” is important for everyone, especially for students. You must learn to be consistent.

Third, *for whom to study?* For yourselves? In order to be accountable to others? We ought to study in order to be able to educate and serve others, and to serve others with competence and confidence. Before asking ourselves if studying is useful for something, we should first make sure that it is useful for someone. It is a beautiful question for a university student to ask: whom can I serve, myself? Or do I have a heart open for another type of service? A university degree will then indicate a capacity for serving the common good. I study for myself, for work, to be useful, for the common good. This requires a great deal of balance.

Dear students, it is a joy for me to share these thoughts with you. And as we reflect, we can see that there is an even greater reality that enlightens us and transcends us: *the truth*. What is truth? Pilate asked this question. Without truth, our life loses its meaning. Studying makes sense only when it seeks the truth with a critical mind. Finding truth requires critical thinking. This is the way for moving forward. Do not forget that studying makes sense when it seeks the truth. When seeking it we understand that we are made in order to find it. Truth is meant to be found, for it is inviting, accessible and generous. But if we renounce the search for truth, then study becomes an instrument of power, a way to control others; it no longer serves but dominates. I must confess that it makes me sad when I discover a university that only prepares students to make money or gain power. It is overly individualistic, without community. *Alma mater* is a university community that helps to shape society, to create fraternity. Studying is not useful if it does not include a communal search for the truth. It is not helpful. It dominates. Whereas the truth sets us free (cf. *Jn 8:32*). Dear students, do you want freedom? Then seek and bear witness to the truth! And try to be credible and authentic in the simple and daily choices you make. In this way, your university will become, each day, exactly what it is meant to be: a *Catholic University!* Move forward, move forward, and do not enter into conflicts over ideological dichotomies, no. Do not forget that the Church is woman. This will help us a great deal.

Thank you for this meeting. Thanks to you. You were good! Thank you! I impart my heartfelt blessing upon you and your formation journey. And, I ask you, please, to pray for me. If someone does not pray or does not know how to pray, send me at least good thoughts. I need them! Thank you!
