



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY SESSION
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION
(FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS)**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 13 February 2014*

*Dear Cardinals,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I extend a special welcome to the Cardinals and Bishops who were recently appointed members of this Congregation, and I thank the Cardinal Prefect for the words with which he introduced this meeting.

The topics on your agenda are challenging, indeed, such as updating the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, strengthening the identity of Catholic universities and preparing for anniversaries that are coming in 2015, such as the 50th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* and the 25th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Catholic education is one of the most important challenges for the Church, engaged as she is today in implementing the new evangelization in a historical and cultural context which is in constant flux. In this perspective, I would like to draw your attention to three aspects.

The first aspect concerns the *importance of dialogue in education*. Of late, you have developed the theme of an education for intercultural dialogue in Catholic schools with the publication of a specific document. In fact, Catholic schools and universities are attended by many non-Christian students as well as non-believers. Catholic educational institutions offer everyone an education aimed at the integral development of the person that responds to right of all people to have access to knowledge and understanding. But they are equally called to offer to all the Christian message

— respecting fully the freedom of all and the proper methods of each specific scholastic environment — namely that Jesus Christ is the meaning of life, of the cosmos and of history.

Jesus began to preach the Good News in the “Galilee of the Gentiles”, a crossroads for people of different races, cultures and religions. In some ways this context is similar to today’s world. The profound changes that have led to the ever spreading multicultural societies requires those who work in schools and universities to become involved in the educational programmes of exchange and dialogue, with a bold and innovative fidelity able to bring together the Catholic identity to meet the different “souls” existing in a multicultural society. I think with appreciation of the contribution which religious institutions and other ecclesial institutes offer through the foundation and management of Catholic schools in contexts strongly marked by cultural and religious pluralism.

The second aspect is the *quality preparation of formators*. We cannot improvise. We must take this seriously. In the meeting I had with the Superiors General, I underlined that today education is directed at a *changing* generation and, therefore, every educator — and the entire Church who is the mother educator — is called “*to change*”, or know how to communicate with the young people before them.

I would like to limit myself to recalling the features of an educator and his or her specific duty. To educate is an act of love, it is to give life. And love is demanding, it calls for the best resources, for a reawakening of the passion to begin this path patiently with young people. The educator in Catholic schools must be, first and foremost, competent and qualified but, at the same time, someone who is rich in humanity and capable of being with young people in a style of pedagogy that helps promote their human and spiritual growth. Youth are in need of quality teaching along with values that are not only articulated but witnessed to. Consistency is an indispensable factor in the education of young people! Consistency! We cannot grow and we cannot educate without consistency: consistency and witness!

For this, an educator is himself in need of permanent formation. It is necessary to invest so that teachers and supervisors may maintain a high level of professionalism and also maintain their faith and the strength of their spiritual impetus. And in this permanent formation too I would suggest a need for retreats and spiritual exercises for educators. It is a beautiful thing to offer courses on the subject, but it is also necessary to offer spiritual exercises and retreats focused on prayer! For consistency requires effort but most of all it is a gift and a grace. We must ask for it!

The last aspect concerns *educational institutions*, that is, schools and Catholic and ecclesial universities. The 50th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration, the 25th anniversary of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the updating of *Sapientia Christiana* lead us to reflect seriously on the many formational institutions around the world and on their duty to be an expression of a living presence of the Gospel in the field of education, of science and of culture. Catholic academic institutions cannot isolate themselves from the world, they must know how to enter bravely into the aeropagus

of current culture and open dialogue, conscious of the gift that they can offer to everyone.

Dear ones, education is a great open building site in which the Church has always been present through her institutions and projects. Today we must encourage this commitment on all levels and renew the commitment of all engaged in the new evangelization. On this horizon, I thank you all for your work and I invoke through the intercession of the Virgin Mary the perpetual help of the Holy Spirit for you and your work. I ask you to please pray for me and for my ministry. And from my heart, I bless you. Thank you!