

USG-UISG meeting  
**“Rebuilding the Global Pact on Education”**

Videoconference, November 12, 2020

Dear Father Pedro, Most Reverend Superiors General, I thank you very much for the invitation to participate in this telematic meeting which is of extraordinary importance for the world of education in general and especially for Catholic education. Together with the Prefect of our Dicastery, Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, I extend cordial greetings to all those who are connected, religious men and women, superiors, laypeople, teachers and leaders of Catholic schools.

The theme chosen for your meeting is: *"Rebuilding the Global Pact on Education"*. You will, in these days, deepen a topic that has become known throughout the world after Pope Francis announced it in his first message on September 12, 2019, and which he later resumed on several occasions (he gave at least four other speeches<sup>1</sup>), but which he re-launched with a more articulated video message on October 15, 2020.

The meeting on October 15 last year was not the point of arrival or the final event initially wanted by the Holy Father: it was a restart that now opens a new season of essential commitments. The Pope addressed his message to everyone: to politicians, economists, men of culture, scientists, artists, sportspeople and the world of communication to emphasize the importance of the education of the younger generations, especially in this time marked by the tragedy of the pandemic. Therefore, Pope Francis wanted to speak not only to Catholics but to the whole world, without distinction of cultural and religious affiliations, to invite all of them to commit themselves.

Since October 15 a new stage has begun that sees us all involved in the study of projects and initiatives of medium and long duration. It opens, therefore, a perspective of work for all to be developed in the coming years. The Congregation for Catholic Education is entrusted with the task not so much of centralizing or monopolizing as of accompanying this commitment.

In this path, Catholic schools have an absolutely priority and a privileged place. Indeed, I must say that the Holy Father's proposal finds its most significant root in the first World Congress in 2015, promoted to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Council Declaration *Gravissimum educationis*. That was a fundamental event for all

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Il Patto educativo globale. Una passione per l'educazione* (with an introduction by A. V. Zani), Editrice Morcelliana-Schol , Brescia 2020.

our institutions. And from there, in the following years, many initiatives have developed up to those that are emerging from the proposal of the Pact.

Your meeting of these days is in the wake of the commitment made on that occasion to "*renew the educational passion*". But above all, today's meeting is the first significant event that takes place after the launch of the educational Pact by the Pope and which involves in particular, all the Catholic schools in the world.

To emphasize its importance, Pope Francis wanted to address a special message to Fr. Pedro Aguado Cuesta and all of you, taking up the contents with very valuable and useful suggestions for educational planning. I would like to take up the content of the message with some brief comments. I will try to emphasize the contents with a premise and some short comments.

### **Rebuilding.**

The premise is to explain the term "rebuilding" that the Pope uses on many occasions. You reconstruct something that has broken, that has gone into crisis. This draws our attention to the deepest fractures that education is called to heal; among the many existing **divisions**, I would like to mention four.

The first division concerns *the person in his/her inner being, his/her interiority*: it is the fatigue that the human being experiences in overcoming the inner fragmentations between the world of desires and will, between material aspects and spiritual aspirations, between mind, heart and hands. Beginning in the spring of this year, the effects of the unexpected and threatening phenomenon of the Covid-19 virus have highlighted an anthropological fact that we had forgotten: that the human being is mortal and life can be abruptly interrupted by a catastrophe, whether it be health, ecological or war. Therefore, lives lived are *vulnerable* lives: every life brings with it a world that seeks to preserve, develop and repair. We have not to hide vulnerability and limits; on the contrary, we have to recognize them because they are a detector of the fragility present in the human condition. Education must accompany people to enter into reality and become aware of all its expressions reflected in the inner life of the human person.

The second **division** is that which *separates reality from Transcendence*. The greatest crisis of education, in general, is the closure to Transcendence. If it is true that the human being is not limited only to the temporal horizon but, living in history preserves his eternal vocation in its entirety, then education must be based on an integral anthropology, which does not erase the transcendent, spiritual and religious dimension. If we take away this horizon from education, we fall into pure relativism, where the fundamental points of reference are lost. It is why the Catholic school has the mission to open people to Transcendence, through knowledge and experience.

The third division is the one that concerns the *relationship between generations and between different subjects*, between different cultures and affiliations. In other words, it is a matter of recomposing an educational Pact with the family, with people who bring different socio-cultural and religious visions, with those who are in economic, social and moral difficulties, and to make them discover that in diversity there are growth opportunities.

The fourth division to be reconstructed is the one between the *human being, society, nature and the environment*. The person, educated according to a healthy anthropology, is a subject who loves the world in which he/she lives, the history, who makes culture, who takes responsibility for public life; therefore, he/she will not only cultivate the subjective and personal dimension, but also the political, social and economic one, the good of nature and the environment. Therefore, education must aim to make people more and more aware of the seriousness of the cultural and ecological crisis and must above all help, with concrete educational projects, to take on new lifestyles, respecting nature and the environment to give future generations a world that is not disfigured but renewed.

### **Finding the center.**

Pope Francis continually returns to this point which constitutes the indispensable pillar of education and even more so of Catholic education. And he quotes the first of the seven objectives of the message of October 15: to put the person at the center with his value, his dignity, his beauty, his singularity, his ability to relate.

In the face of the dramatic reality, caused by the health crisis of the pandemic, with its economic and social consequences, educational systems around the world - including those of Christian inspiration - are also suffering at school and academic level. The Pope has defined this situation as an "educational catastrophe" that considerably increases the already alarming educational gap. We need a new cultural model capable of generating and showing new ways of humanization, and this can be done by finding the center in the person.

For this reason, the first objective of the message highlights the need to put at the base of every educational action a solid anthropological foundation, a healthy and precise vision of the person. Already in previous messages, Pope Francis affirmed that every change needs an educational journey, to rebuild the fabric of relationships, make a new universal solidarity mature and give life to a more welcoming society. For this, it is necessary to compose a new humanism for which it is essential to overcome the cultural and anthropological metamorphosis of today's society. This makes it possible to give consistency to the identity of each person, taking care of all his or her dimensions, consolidating his or her psychological structure, thus preventing it from fragmenting and disintegrating in the face of ongoing and rapid change. For Catholic

schools, the educational project that identifies and characterizes them is centered on the centrality of the person to be placed at the basis of programs and educational choices.

### **Welcoming.**

On this second aspect the pedagogical paradigm of the Catholic school must be built and developed. Pope Francis clearly specifies it in the second of the seven objectives indicated and articulates it in the following steps: a) listening to the voice of children, young people and young people; b) transmitting values and knowledge; c) building together a future based on justice and peace; d) giving true dignity to every person. In addition, in the fifth objective he adds: we need to educate and educate ourselves to welcome, opening ourselves to the most vulnerable and marginalized.

### **Involving.**

This last point of today's message is another of the specific aspects that must distinguish Catholic education and school. Listening to the needs of the child and the young person cannot be a simple hearing and then forget, but it is only the starting point that allows everyone to take part in educational action actively. It is about setting up work with the younger generations as a commitment to look together at the world in which we live and always have a critical eye. To build the future together, not just one educator but a community that educates is indispensable. In the community (which the Pope in another message calls "the educational village") it is necessary to awaken the educational vocation of all (family, school, territory) to build together a different society, which in the message of October 15 he defines as "*civilization of harmony, civilization of unity*". It is the goal of the common good that constitutes one of the essential points of social doctrine to which the Pope refers and which has been clearly explained in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.

The critical message that the Pope addresses to you today is programmatic; it is very rich in pedagogical perspectives for Catholic schools. Along with this message, you will also have in a while the more in-depth commentary on the objectives indicated in the message of October 15: these are guidelines that will help the educational activities of our institutions in the coming months and years. I ask your Commission to accompany the work and collect the experiences that will be put in place to make them known and stimulate good. With the Committee for the Rebuilding of the Educational Pact, which is being created in our Department, we are studying a plan of initiatives for the next few years, indicating some stages of work.

In renewing my warm thanks for the invitation, on behalf of the Dicastery I wish all participants the warmest wishes for a good job.

+ A. Vincenzo Zani