



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE UNISERVITATE GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM,
“SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON EDUCATION”**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 9 November 2024*

[Multimedia]

Your Eminence, dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Your meeting is of particular interest to the Church, which [Saint Paul VI](#) liked to describe as “an expert in humanity” ([Address to the United Nations Organization](#), 1). Those words are both eloquent and demanding; they challenge us to give them concrete expression in our work as educators.

In this regard, I think of the film *Dead Poets Society*, which tells how a literature teacher with a very original method arrives at a renowned boarding school. He begins his first lesson with a small challenge: he asks the students to stand on their desks and see the class from another point of view. This episode suggests what education ought to be, not simply the transmission of content – this is just one aspect – but transformation of life. Not simply the repetition of formulas, like parrots, but training in seeing the complexity of our world. This is what education must be.

In Jesus’ own pedagogy, this “style” is quite evident: we see it in one of his favourite forms of teaching: the parables. By telling stories, the Lord did not speak in abstract language that could only be understood by the élite, but in a way that was simple and accessible to all, and everyone understood. A parable is a story that enables listeners to enter into the narrative, involving themselves and engaging with the characters. Jesus aimed to ensure that his listeners did not merely understand the message, but became personally involved in it.

As opposed to this style, today's globalization entails a risk for education, namely a process of levelling in the direction of certain programmes that are often subservient to political and economic interests. This trend to uniformity conceals forms of ideological conditioning, which distort the work of education, making it an instrument of interests quite different from the promotion of human dignity and the search for truth. Ideology always "stifles", it does not allow you to develop. It always stifles. That is why you should be careful to defend yourself against ideologies.

Since "we cannot change the world if we do not change education", [1] we need to reflect together on how to initiate and guide this change. To meet this challenge, it is interesting to see how UNISERVITATE has developed the pedagogical method of "service-learning", by fostering a sense of communal responsibility on the part of students through social projects that are an integral part of their academic programme. In this way, Catholic educational institutions live up to their name. For any school or university, being "Catholic" is more than having a distinguished adjective in its name; it signifies a commitment to cultivating a distinctive pedagogical style and teaching consistent with the teachings of the Gospel. It is not evangelical ideology. No, it is humanism according to the Gospel.

In this regard, UNISERVITATE responds in a consistent way to the intentions of the Global Compact on Education by cultivating educational processes that involve everyone. I have often repeated an African proverb that states it takes an entire village to educate a child. Let us make every effort, then, to build such an "educational village", where we can work together to promote positive and culturally fruitful human relationships.

Through these close relationships, an educational covenant can certainly arise among all those who work for the personal growth of individuals in its various scientific, political, artistic, athletic and other aspects. Education is not a process that ends once we leave the classroom or library; it continues throughout life, in our daily encounters with others and on the paths we take. Listening to each other, reflecting on dialogue: this is the way of education.

The covenant that I invite you to cultivate should produce fruits of peace, justice and mutual acceptance among all peoples and expand its positive effects in ever closer forms of cooperation. This cooperation can foster interreligious dialogue and care for our common home. We all know that the task is not easy, but it is definitely exciting! Educating is an adventure, a great adventure.

In the face of this challenge, Catholic schools of every kind and level are called courageously to make whatever changes are necessary, letting their activities be inspired by the teaching of Jesus, our common Teacher. To promote consistency between the various initiatives, I would encourage you to consider in particular two principles drawn from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Realities are more important than ideas" (*Nos. 231-233*) and always "The whole is greater than the part" (*Nos. 234-237*).

First, education programmes should bring students into contact with the realities around them, so that, starting from experience, they learn to change the world not for their own benefit, but in a spirit of service. Contact with reality in order not to get lost in ideas.

Second, Catholic education should promote a “culture of curiosity”. Have you heard of this? A wise man once said that a culture of curiosity is not the same as the culture of gossip, no, they have nothing to do with each other. Culture of curiosity values the art of asking questions. This is what children teach us in the period known as “why”: “Dad, why? Mom, why?”. I am reminded of something that deeply touched me. They took me for an operation to remove my tonsils. At that time, there was no anesthesia, and it was done in a very practical way: the nurse took you and held you down so that you could not move. They used a device to keep your mouth open, and with two forceps, pop, and that was that. Afterwards, they would give you an ice cream to make the blood coagulate. On the way out, my dad called a taxi and we went home and in the end he paid for the taxi. The next day, when I could talk, I said to him, “Dad, why did you pay?” “Because...”, and he explained what the taxi was. “But Dad, are not all the cars in the city yours?” “No!” It was a big disappointment, because my father did not own all the cars. The children’s “why” sometimes stems from disappointment or from curiosity. We listen to children’s questions, and we learn to ask them. This helps us a lot. I call this a culture of curiosity. Children are curious, in the good sense of the word. The art of asking questions.

Let us support young people in this exploration of themselves and the larger world, without reducing knowledge to mental skills, but complementing those skills with manual dexterity and the generosity born of a passionate heart. Education is not only through the mind, but through the heart and the hands. We must learn to think what we feel and do, to feel what we do and think, to do what we feel and think. This is education: it is a triple language.

Here is a good way to succeed in this urgent task. “In this ‘liquid’ world of ours, we need to start speaking once more about the heart” (Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, 9), since “it is only by starting from the heart that our communities will succeed in uniting and reconciling differing minds and wills, so that the Spirit can guide us in unity as brothers and sisters” (*ibid.*, 28). Perhaps the greatest enemies in the journey of maturation are ideologies. Ideologies do not make us grow. Every type of ideology is the enemy of maturation.

I thank you for all that you are doing. May the Lord always keep the passion for education alive within you. I bless you from the heart, and I ask you, please, to remember me in your prayers.

[1] *Address to Participants in the IV World Congress sponsored by “Scholas Occurrentes”*, 5 February 2015.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana