

**CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

**EDUCATING TODAY AND  
TOMORROW**  
*A Renewing Passion*

*Instrumentum Laboris*

**Vatican City**  
**2014**

## PRESENTATION

The Members of the Congregation for Catholic Education's Plenary Assembly, meeting in 2011, accepted the suggestion of Pope Benedict XVI and entrusted to the Dicastery the task of preparing for the anniversary celebrations of the Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* (50 years) and the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (25 years), both of which fall in 2015. The aim is to give new stimulus to the Church's involvement in the field of education.

There have been two principal events that have taken place in these subsequent years of preparation. The first was a seminar that took place in June 2012, with the participation of experts from all over the world. The second was the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation's Members, which met in February 2014.

The indications that emerged in these two meetings are reflected in this *Instrumentum Laboris*, "Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion". The text recalls the essential reference-points of both aforementioned documents, the fundamental characteristics of Catholic schools and universities, going on to describe the challenges to which Catholic educational institutions are called to respond, with the development of their own specific mission.

In the years following the Second Vatican Council, Papal Magisterium has repeatedly insisted on the importance of education in general, as well as on the contribution that the Christian community is called to offer education. The Congregation for Catholic Education, too, has frequently addressed this theme in its documents. Therefore, the anniversaries of 2015 are a suitable and invaluable opportunity for taking on board the recommendations of the Magisterium and sketching out guidelines for the coming decades.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* has been prepared for just such a purpose. It has been translated into various languages, and is addressed principally to Bishops' Conferences, to the Union of Superiors General and to the International Union of Female Superiors General of Religious Congregations. The text is also addressed to national and international associations of teachers, parents, students and former students, as well as associations of those who run schools and universities. Finally, the *Instrumentum Laboris* is also addressed to Christian communities, so that they may reflect on the importance of Catholic education in the context of the New Evangelization. The text can be used to effect a pastoral evaluation of this area of the Church's apostolate; and it can also be used to promote various activities for updating and forming those who work in Catholic schools and universities.

The *Instrumentum laboris* can be found online at the following addresses:

<http://www.educatio.va/content/cec/it/documentazione-e-materiali/documenti-della-congregazione.html>

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/index\\_it.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/index_it.htm)

The *Instrumentum Laboris* concludes with a questionnaire. We invite everyone to give their answers, so as to provide the Congregation for Catholic Education with indications, suggestions and proposals that will be considered with a view to the events that are being planned, in particular the Global Convention that will take place in Rome on 18-21 November 2015. To that end, answers to the questionnaire must be sent to the Dicastery no later than 31 July 2014 (to: [educat2015@gmail.com](mailto:educat2015@gmail.com)).

Zenon Cardinal Grocholewski, Prefect

Vatican City, 7 April 2014

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary culture is affected by several problems that are causing a widespread “educational emergency”: this expression refers to the difficulty in establishing educational relations which, in order to be genuine, should convey vital values and principles to younger generations, not only to help individual growth and maturation, but also to contribute to building the common good.

Catholic education, with its many schools and universities that are scattered all over the world, provides a remarkable support to ecclesial communities that are engaged in the new evangelization, and contributes to the fostering of anthropological and ethical values in individual consciences and cultures, which are necessary in order to build a society that is based on fraternity and solidarity<sup>1</sup>.

### I. ESSENTIAL REFERENCES

Two events will be remembered in 2015: the fiftieth anniversary of *Gravissimum Educationis*<sup>2</sup>, the document on education issued by the 2nd Vatican Council on October 28, 1965, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*<sup>3</sup>, the Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities’ identity and mission, promulgated by John Paul II on August 15, 1990; irrespective of their different nature, both documents are essential references for the Congregation for Catholic Education.

This *Instrumentum Laboris* is aimed at providing guidance to particular Churches and associations in organizing their educational initiatives, as well as ecclesial and cultural events. At the same time, it also provides inspiration for future educational projects and activities.

#### 1. The Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*

The purpose of *Gravissimum Educationis* was to draw the attention of all baptized to the importance of education by providing basic guidelines on educational issues: it should be considered within the Council’s overall teachings and read together with the other texts approved by the Council. *Gravissimum Educationis*, as it is stated in the introduction, should not be seen as the ultimate answer regarding all problems related to education, but as

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a document that was supposed to be later passed on to a special post-Council Commission – which later became the Congregation for Catholic Education’s School Office – in order to further develop the principles of Catholic education, as well as to Bishops’ Conferences, so that it could be applied to the various local situations. Among the many connections that the Declaration has with other Council documents (concerning the liturgy, bishops’ ministry, ecumenism, the role of the laity, social communications ...), perhaps the most significant ones refer to the two main Constitutions, *Lumen Gentium* (which was promulgated on November 21, 1964) and *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965). *Gravissimum Educationis* often refers to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*; whereas the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the contemporary world *Gaudium et Spes*, mentions *Gravissimum Educationis* in Part II, Chapter II (dedicated to *The Promotion of Progress and Culture*). The joint reading of all three documents proves to be particularly insightful to appreciate the two dimensions that education necessarily encompasses, when it is being analyzed from the standpoint of faith: i.e the secular and theological-spiritual dimensions.

**a) Historical and Social Context. The Role of Christians.**

Since the Council, the historical and social context has changed remarkably, both in terms of world vision, as well as ethical and political concepts. The 1960s were a time of confident expectations, following the Council’s announcement and the possibility of more peaceful relations between States. Compared to that time, the scenario has deeply changed. The drive towards secularization has become more apparent. The increasingly faster globalization process, rather than favoring the promotion of individual development and a greater integration amongst peoples, seems to limit individual freedom and exacerbate conflicts between different ways of looking at personal and collective life (with positions ranging from strict fundamentalism to skeptical relativism). Other economic and political developments are equally significant: such as the encroachment on the Welfare State and social entitlements or the triumph of liberalism, with its dreadful impact on schools and education. However, all the changes that have taken place since the 1960s not only have not weakened the teachings provided by the Council on educational issues, but have actually enhanced their prophetic scope. Both *Gravissimum Educationis* and *Gaudium et Spes* (nn. 59-60) contain extremely farsighted and fruitful hints, that can help us face many contemporary challenges:

- Stating the Church’s willingness to work in order to support the edification of an increasingly humane society and personal development.
- Recognizing education as a ‘common good’.
- Claiming the universal right to education and schooling for all, which is also amply reiterated by international declarations issued by organizations such as UNESCO (EFA: Education for All).
- Implicitly supporting all individuals and international institutions who oppose rampant liberalism through their fight for the right to education.
- Asserting that culture and education cannot be subservient to economic power and its workings.

- Recalling everybody's duty – whether communities or individuals – to support women's participation in cultural life.
- Outlining a cultural context of “new humanism” (GS, n. 55), that the Magisterium is constantly addressing<sup>4</sup>.

### ***b) Theological and Spiritual Vision***

The contribution that Council teachings have given to Christian education, as the spiritual and theological formation of the baptized and their conscience, is equally important. N. 2 of *Gravissimum Educationis* and nn. 11 and 17 (in addition to nn. 35 and 36) of *Lumen Gentium* contain several interesting insights, amongst which it is worth quoting:

- The description of Christian education as a work of evangelization/mission (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 17).
- The emphasis on the necessarily sacramental character of education for the baptized: whereby it must be centered around baptism and the Eucharist (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 11).
- The need for Christian education to grow at the same time as human education, albeit respecting its Christian character, to prevent a situation in which the life of faith is experienced or perceived as being separate from other activities in human life.
- The urging to envisage Christian education within the context of faith of a poor Church for the poor (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 8), in line with one of the pivotal points of the Church's current message.

## **2. The Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae***

*Gravissimum Educationis* devoted a special attention to Catholic schools and universities, providing significant indications regarding this specific subject; the Constitution underlined the need for universities to serve societies, and not just the Church, and that “they should be noteworthy not so much for their numbers as for their high standards” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 10), because it is better to have fewer excellent Catholic Universities than many mediocre ones. In the Council fathers' reasoning, the essential purpose of Catholic higher education was to allow students to fully take on the cultural, social and religious responsibilities that would be required of them. For these reason, they believed Catholic universities had to strive to promote real academic research.

In 1990, John Paul II issued the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which aimed at drawing people's attention to the importance of Catholic universities, as a privileged instrument to gain access to the truth regarding nature, man and God in order to favor an open dialogue between the Church and men and women of all cultures. In line with

the Council Declaration, the Constitution reiterated that Catholic universities, as such, were supposed to adequately engage in research, teaching and cultural services like any other academic institution. As Catholic universities, they would have to a) be inspired by Christian values not only in so far as individuals are concerned, but also the entire university community as such; b) promote constant reflection, in the light of Catholic faith, on the processes and achievements of study and knowledge, providing their original contribution; c) be faithful to the Christian message, as it is presented by the Church; d) serve the people of God and mankind in the efforts they undertake to access truth.

Furthermore, John Paul II urged Catholic faculty members to become aware of the ethical and moral implications of their research, to foster dialogue between different disciplines in order to avoid any isolated and particularistic approach and favor the development of a synthetic view of things, albeit without challenging each discipline's integrity and methodology. A special role was assigned to the dialogue between different kinds of knowledge and theology, since the latter could help other disciplines to delve into the reasons and meaning of their activity, just like other forms of knowledge could stimulate theological research to address life issues and achieve a better understanding of the world. Therefore, he thought that every Catholic university had to include a Faculty or, at least, a chair of theology (cf. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n.19).

If we think about how fragmented academic studies are nowadays, we cannot but realize how John Paul II's idea - whereby universities should promote dialogue between the various disciplines, albeit being faithful to their original vocation - is extremely topical nowadays and might provide precious indications to people working in higher education.

## **II. WHAT KIND OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES?**

In the light of Church teachings and considering the needs and challenges of contemporary society, what should Catholic schools and universities be like?

Schools and universities are places where people learn how to live their lives, achieve cultural growth, receive vocational training and engage in the pursuit of the common good; they provide the occasion and opportunity to understand the present time and imagine the future of society and mankind. At the root of Catholic education is our Christian spiritual heritage, which is part of a constant dialogue with the cultural heritage and the conquests of science; Catholic schools and universities are educational communities where learning thrives on the integration between research, thinking and life experience.

### **1. Building an Educational Context**

Catholic schools and universities educate people, first and foremost, through the living context, i.e. the climate that both students and teachers establish in the environment where teaching and learning activities take place. This climate is pervaded not only by the values that are being expressed in universities, but also by the values that are lived out, by the quality of interpersonal relations between teachers and students and students amongst each other, by the care professors devote to student and local community needs, by the clear living testimony provided by teachers and educational institutions' entire staff.

Although cultural contexts vary, as well as educational possibilities and influences, there are a number of quality hallmarks that Catholic schools and universities must be able to ensure:

- respect for individual dignity and uniqueness (hence the rejection of mass education and teaching, which make human beings easier to manipulate by reducing them to a number);
- a wealth of opportunities that are offered to young people for them to grow and develop their abilities and talents;
- a balanced focus on cognitive, affective, social, professional, ethical and spiritual aspects;
- encouragement for every pupil to develop their talents, in a climate of cooperation and solidarity;
- the promotion of research as a rigorous commitment towards truth, being aware that human knowledge has its limits, but also with a great openness of mind and heart;
- respect of ideas, openness to dialogue, the ability to interact and work together in a spirit of freedom and care.

## **2. Introducing Students to Research**

Schools and universities are places where students are introduced to knowledge and scientific research. One of teachers' main responsibilities is to attract younger generations towards knowledge and understanding its achievements and applications. Engagement in knowledge and research cannot be separated from a sense of ethics and transcendence: no real science can disregard ethical consequences and no real science drives us away from transcendence. Science and ethics, science and transcendence are not mutually exclusive, but come together for a greater and better understanding of man and the world.

## **3. Teaching as an Instrument for Education**

Nowadays, the “way” in which students learn seems to be more important than “what” they learn, just like the way of teaching seems to be more important than its contents. Teaching that only promotes repetitive learning, without favoring students' active participation or sparking their curiosity, is not sufficiently challenging to elicit motivation. Learning through research and problem-solving develops different and more significant cognitive and mental abilities, whereby students do more than just receiving information, while also stimulating teamwork. However, the value of learning contents must not be underestimated. If *the way* students learn is relevant, the same applies to *what* they learn: teachers must know how to select the essential elements of cultural heritage that has accumulated over time and how to present them to students. This approach also applies to the study of the major questions mankind is facing and has faced in the past. Otherwise, the risk could be to provide a kind of teaching that is only focused on what seems to be *useful* now, because it is being required by contingent economic or social demands, forgetting what is *indispensable* for the human person.

Teaching and learning are the two terms in a relationship that does not only involve the subject to be studied and the learning mind, but also persons: this relationship cannot be based exclusively on technical and professional relations, but must be nourished by mutual esteem, trust, respect and friendliness. When learning takes place in a context where the subjects who are involved feel a sense of belonging, it is quite different from a situation in which learning occurs in a climate of individualism, antagonism and mutual coldness.

#### **4. The Centrality of Learners**

Schools and – even more so – universities, work to provide students with training that will enable them to enter the labor market and social life with adequate skills. Albeit indispensable, this is not enough: the measure of good schools and universities is also given by their ability to promote a kind of learning that is more focused on developing general and higher-level skills through education. Learning is not just equivalent to content assimilation, but is an opportunity for self-education, commitment towards self-improvement and the common good. It allows our students to develop their creativity, strive for constant learning and become more open towards others. Learning can also provide the opportunity to open students' hearts and minds to the mystery and wonder of the world and nature, to self-consciousness and awareness, to responsibility towards creation, to the Creator's immensity.

In particular, schools would not be a complete learning environment if, what pupils learnt, did not also become an occasion to serve the local community. Today, many students still consider learning as an obligation or an imposition: probably this depends upon schools' inability to pass on to students the passion that is absolutely required for research, in addition to knowledge. Instead, when students have the opportunity to experience how important what they learn is for their lives and their communities, their motivation does change. It would be advisable for teachers to provide their students with opportunities to realize the social impact of what they are studying, thus favoring the discovery of the link between school and life, as well as the development of a sense of responsibility and active citizenship.

#### **5. The Diversity of Learners**

Teachers are called upon to rise up to a major educational challenge, which is the recognition, respect and enhancement of diversity. Psychological, social, cultural and religious diversity should not be denied, but rather considered as an opportunity and a gift. By the same token, diversities related to the presence of particular situations of frailness, affecting cognitive abilities or physical autonomy, should always be recognized and embraced, to prevent them from turning into penalizing inequalities. It is not easy for schools and universities to be “inclusive”, open to diversity and able to truly help those who are going through difficulties. Teachers must be open and professionally knowledgeable when they are leading classes where diversity is recognized, accepted and appreciated as an educational asset that is beneficial to everyone. Those who find themselves in greater difficulties, who are poorer, more fragile or needy, should not be seen as a burden or obstacle, but as the most important students, who should be at the center of schools' attention and concerns.



## **6. Pluralism of Educational Establishments**

Catholic schools and universities fulfil their task, which is mission and service, in very different cultural and social contexts, where their work is sometimes recognized and appreciated and, at other times, stymied by serious economic difficulties and hostility, which sometimes can even turn into forms of violence. The way in which their presence in different States and world regions is experienced varies remarkably, but the basic reasons for their educational work do not change. School communities that are inspired by the values of Catholic faith transpose their personalistic vision - which is the hallmark of humanistic-Christian tradition - into their organization and syllabi, not in order to oppose other cultures and religious faiths, but to engage in dialogue with them.

It is really important for Catholic educational establishments are able to interact with other non-Catholic institutions in the countries where they are located, with a listening attitude to engage in a constructive dialogue, for the common good.

Today, these establishments are found worldwide and the majority of their students come from different religious backgrounds, nations and cultures. However, students' confessional allegiances should not be seen as a barrier, but as a condition for intercultural dialogue, helping each pupil grow in their humanness, civic responsibility and learning.

## **7. Teacher Training**

The importance of schools' and universities' educational tasks explains how crucial training is for teachers, managers and the entire staff that has educational responsibilities. Professional competence is the necessary condition for openness to unleash its educational potential. A lot is being required of teachers and managers: they should have the ability to create, invent and manage learning environments that provide plentiful opportunities; they should be able to respect students' different intelligences and guide them towards significant and profound learning; they should be able to accompany their students towards lofty and challenging goals, cherish high expectations for them, involve and connect students to each other and the world. Teachers must be able to pursue different goals simultaneously and face problem situations that require a high level of professionalism and preparation. To fulfil such expectations, these tasks should not be left to individual responsibility and adequate support should be provided at institutional level, with competent leaders showing the way, rather than bureaucrats.

## **III. CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES**

At the heart of Catholic education there is always Jesus Christ: everything that happens in Catholic schools and universities should lead to an encounter with the living Christ. If we look at the great educational challenges that we will face soon, we must keep the memory of God made flesh in the history of mankind – in our history – alive.

Catholic schools and universities, as subjects in the contemporary Church, are a place of testimony and acceptance, where faith and spiritual accompaniment can be provided to young people who ask for it; they open their doors to all and uphold both human dignity, as well as the dissemination of knowledge, to the whole of society, irrespective of merit.

First and foremost, they are places where the transmission of knowledge is key; however, knowledge too has undergone major changes that are affecting our educational approach. As a matter of fact, we are witnessing a remarkable differentiation, privatization and even expropriation of knowledge.

Schools and universities are also living environments, where an integral education is provided, that includes religious formation. The challenge will be to make young people realize the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ and of religious freedom in a multireligious universe. In every environment, whether it is favorable or not, Catholic educators will have to be credible witnesses.

People who work with faith, passion and professionalism cannot be forgotten; they deserve all our attention and encouragement. We should not also forget that, for the most part, this educational mission and professional commitment are principally sustained by women.

First of all, we must express the anthropology underpinning our educational vision for the 21st century in different terms: it is a philosophical anthropology that must also be an anthropology of truth, i.e. a social anthropology whereby man is seen in his relations and way of being; an anthropology of recollection and promise; an anthropology that refers to the cosmos and cares about sustainable development; and, even more, an anthropology that refers to God. The gaze of faith and hope, which is its foundation, looks at reality to discover God's plan hidden therein. Thus, starting from a profound reflection on modern man and the contemporary world, we must redefine our vision regarding education.

The young people we are educating today will become the leaders of the 2050s. What will religion's contribution be to educating younger generations to peace, development, fraternity in the universal human community? How are we going to educate them to faith and in faith? How will we establish the preliminary conditions to accept this gift, to educate them to gratitude, to a sense of awe, to asking themselves questions, to develop a sense of justice and consistency? How will we educate them to prayer?

Education requires a strong alliance between parents and educators to present a life that is good, rich in meaning, open to God and others as well as the world; this alliance is even more necessary, since education is a personal relationship. It is a journey that reveals the transcendental elements of faith, family, Church and ethics, highlighting their communal character.

Education is not just knowledge, but also experience: it links together knowledge and action; it works to achieve unity amongst different forms of knowledge and pursues consistency. It encompasses the affective and emotional domains, and is also endowed with an ethical dimension: knowing how to do things and what we want to do, daring to change society and the world, and serving the community.

Education is based on participation, shared intelligence and intelligence interdependence; dialogue, self-giving, example, cooperation and reciprocity are also equally important elements.

## **1. Challenges for Catholic Schools**

Nowadays education is going through rapid changes. The generation to which it is addressed is changing quickly as well, therefore each educator must constantly face a situation which, as Pope Francis put it, “provides us with new challenges which sometimes are difficult for us to understand.”<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of the global changes we are called upon to embrace, love, decipher and evangelize, Catholic education must contribute to the discovery of life’s meaning and elicit new hopes for today and the future.

### *a) The Challenge of Identity*

The redefinition of Catholic schools’ identity for the 21st century is an urgent task. Going back to the documents issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education<sup>6</sup> can be quite helpful in this respect, together with the experience that has been made over time in Catholic teaching, both in diocesan and congregational schools. This experience is supported by three pillars: Gospel tradition, authority and freedom.

Contemporary educators have a renewed mission, which has the ambitious aim of offering young people an integral education as well as assistance in discovering their personal freedom, which is a gift from God.

Spiritual poverty and declining cultural levels are starting to produce their dismal effects, even within Catholic schools. Often times, authoritativeness is being undermined. It is really not a matter of discipline – parents greatly appreciate Catholic schools because of their discipline – but do some Catholic school heads still have anything to say to students and their families? Is their authority based on formal rules or on the authoritativeness of their testimony? If we want to avert a gradual impoverishment, Catholic schools must be run by individuals and teams who are inspired by the Gospel, who have been formed in Christian pedagogy, in tune with Catholic schools’ educational project, and not by people who are prone to being seduced by fashionability, or by what can become an easier sell, to put it bluntly.

Many Catholic school students belong to a multiplicity of cultures, therefore our institutions must proclaim the Gospel beyond believers, not only with words, but through the power of our educators’ lives, which must be consistent with the Gospel. Teachers, school heads, administrative staff: the whole professional and educational community is called upon to present faith as an attractive option, with a humble and supportive attitude.

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The model is provided by Jesus Christ and his disciples in Emmaus: we must start from young people's life experience but also from that of co-workers, to provide an unconditional service. Actually, educating young people to serve and give themselves freely is one of the hallmarks of Catholic schools, in the past as well as the future.

### ***b) The Challenge for School Communities***

If we think about our societies' rampant individualism, we realize how important it is for Catholic schools to be true living communities that are animated by the Holy Spirit. The friendly and welcoming ambiance that is established by teachers who are believers – who sometimes are the minority – together with the common engagement of all those who have educational responsibilities, irrespective of their beliefs or convictions, might allow students to overcome moments of loss or discouragement and open new prospects of evangelical hope. The complex network of interpersonal relations is schools' real strength, when it expresses love of truth, and teachers who are also believers must be supported, so that they might provide the leaven and benevolent power to edify the community.

In order for this to happen, a particular attention must be devoted to the formation and selection of school heads. They are not only in charge of their respective schools, but are also Bishops' reference persons inside schools in matters of pastoral care. School heads must be leaders who make sure that education is a shared and living mission, who support and organize teachers, who promote mutual encouragement and assistance.

Another challenging terrain for Catholic schools is relations with families, many of which are going through a deep crisis and need support, solidarity, involvement and even formation.

Teachers, parents and school heads – together with students – make up a broad educational community that is called upon to work together with Church institutions. Lifelong learning must focus on the promotion of a just community based on solidarity, that is sensitive to individual needs and is able to systematically help poorer students and families.

### ***c) The Challenge of Dialogue***

The world, in all its diversity, is eager to be guided towards the great values of mankind, truth, good and beauty; now more than ever. This is the approach Catholic schools should have towards young people, through dialogue, in order to present them with a view regarding the Other and others that is open, peaceful and enticing.

Sometimes, when relating to young people, asymmetry creates a distance between educators and learners. Today, the circular character of communication between teachers and students is being appreciated a lot more: its greater openness is remarkably more favorable to mutual listening. This does not mean that adults must relinquish their role as authority figures, but a differentiation must be introduced between the kind of authority that is only linked to a specific role or institutional function, and the authority that comes from credible testimony.

Schools are communities that learn how to improve, thanks to constant dialogue among educators, between teachers and their students and amongst students in their relations.

#### *d) The Challenge of a Learning Society*

However, we should not forget that learning does not take place exclusively within schools: in the current context, which is strongly characterized by the pervasiveness of new technological languages and new opportunities for informal learning, schools have lost their traditional educational primacy. Our contemporary age has been defined as the age of knowledge. Today, people talk about the knowledge-based economy. On the one hand, young people are required to achieve unprecedented learning levels and abilities, on the other hand, schools have to deal with scenarios where information is more broadly available, in massive and uncontrollable amounts. Some degree of humbleness is necessary when considering what schools are able to do in times like these, when social networks are becoming more important, and learning opportunities outside of schools are increasingly widespread and impactful. Since schools are no longer the only learning environment for young people, and not even the most important one, and virtual communities are acquiring a remarkable importance, schooling must face a new challenge: that is, helping students develop the necessary critical tools to avoid being dominated by the power of new media.

#### *e) The Challenge of Integral Education*

Educating is a lot more than just instructing people. The European Union, OECD and World Bank highlight instrumental reason and competitiveness and have a merely functional view of education, as if it were legitimized only if it served the market economy and the labor market: all this strongly reduces the educational content of many international documents, something that we see reflected also in several texts issued by education ministries. Schools should not yield to this technocratic and economic rationale, even if they are exposed to outside forces as well as market attempts to use them instrumentally, even more so in the case of Catholic schools. We do not mean in any way to belittle the demands of the economy or unemployment's seriousness, but students need to be respected as integral persons and be helped to develop a multiplicity of skills that enrich the human person, such as creativity, imagination, the ability to take on responsibilities, to love the world, to cherish justice and compassion.

Proposing an integral education, in a society that is changing so quickly, requires a constant reflection that is able to renew it and make it increasingly rich quality-wise. Anyhow, there is a clear stance that must be taken: the kind of education that is promoted by Catholic schools is not aimed at establishing an elitist meritocracy; the pursuit of quality and excellence is indeed important, but we should never forget that students have very specific needs: they are often going through difficult circumstances, and deserve a pedagogical attention that takes their needs into account. Therefore, Catholic schools must engage in

high-level global debates about inclusive education<sup>7</sup> to provide the benefit of their experience and educational vision.

An increasing number of students have been wounded during their childhood. Poor school performance is rising and requires a preventive kind of education, as well as specific training for teachers.

Nowadays, school systems are asked to promote skill development, and not just to convey knowledge; the skill paradigm, interpreted according to a humanistic vision, goes beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge or abilities: it involves the development of students' total personal resources, establishing a meaningful bond between school and life. It is important for schooling to enhance not only skills that are related to knowing and knowing how to do things, but also skills that apply to living alongside others and growing as human beings. These are reflective skills, for instance, by which we are responsible for our actions, or intercultural, decision-making, citizenship skills, that are becoming increasingly important in our globalized world and affect us directly, as is the case with skills related to consciousness, critical thinking and creative and transforming action.

#### ***f) The Challenge of Limited Means and Resources***

Schools that are not subsidized by States are facing increasing financial difficulties to provide their services to the poorest students, at a time of dire economic crisis, when the choice to introduce new technologies becomes inevitable and costly. All schools, whether they are subsidized or not, must deal with increasing social divisions due to the economic crisis. Of course, this situation mandates diversified pedagogical approaches that are addressed to everyone; but this choice requires financial resources, in order to be feasible, as well as human resources, namely well trained teachers and leaders. Undoubtedly, missionary openness towards new forms of poverty must not only be safeguarded, but also further stimulated.

Teaching is not simply a job but a vocation that we must encourage. Nowadays, teachers have to deal with an increasing number of tasks. Some countries are having problems in finding school heads and teachers for specific subjects: many young people would rather work for businesses, hoping to receive a higher salary. Plus, teachers are not valued by society as they used to be, and their job has become more cumbersome because of increasing administrative duties. This leads many school heads to look for volunteers. The challenge will be for them to keep motivating and encouraging volunteers in their unconditional gift.

#### ***g) Pastoral Challenges***

A growing number of young people are drifting away from the institutional Church. Religious ignorance or illiteracy are rising. Catholic education is an unglamorous mission. How can students be educated to exercise their freedom of conscience and take a stance in the immense domain of values and beliefs in a globalized society?

In many countries, Catholic schools do not receive adequate pastoral guidance in the multireligious context they are supposed to evangelize.

As far as educators are concerned, “deculturation” is limiting their knowledge of cultural heritage. Easy access to information, which nowadays is broadly available, when it is not selected with critical awareness, ultimately favors widespread superficiality among both students and teachers, not only impoverishing reason, but also imagination and creative thinking.

The number of educators and teachers who are *believers* is shrinking, hence making Christian testimony more rare. How can a bond with Jesus Christ be established in this new educational context?

In some Bishops’ Conferences, Catholic teaching is not considered as a pastoral priority. But once the crisis hits, parishes realize that Catholic schools are often the only places where young people encounter the bearers of Good News. In many instances, these schools have become open to cultural and religious pluralism and, in some countries, priests and religious men and women are not present there. This is an unprecedented situation, which requires the presence of committed lay people, who are well prepared and willing to engage in a very demanding task. In many cases, this awareness has led many lay Catholics to organize their action but, quite often, their commitment is also characterized by diffidence towards the institutional Church, who has become uninterested in Catholic schools. Hence, one of the major challenges for some Bishops’ Conferences will be to urgently redefine their relations with the laity, in order to cater to the Gospel’s proclamation. Bishops must urgently rediscover how, among different modes of evangelization, an important place must be given to the religious formation of new generations, and schools are a precious instrument for this service.

#### ***h) The Challenge of Religious Formation for Young People***

In a number of countries, Catholic religion courses have been threatened and risk disappearing from syllabi. Since religion courses fall under the responsibility of Bishops, it is extremely important to always remember that this teaching cannot be neglected, although it should constantly be renewed.

Religion courses require an in-depth knowledge of young people’s real needs, because this will provide the foundation on which the proclamation can be built, although the difference between “knowing” and “believing” must be respected.

Since, in many countries, the population of Catholic schools is characterized by a multiplicity of cultures and beliefs, religious formation in schools must be based on the awareness of the existing pluralism and constantly be able to be meaningful in contemporary society. This scenario is extremely diversified, therefore religion cannot be taught in the same way everywhere: in some situations, religion classes can provide the occasion where the Gospel is proclaimed for the first time; in other circumstances, educators will provide students the opportunity to experience interiority and prayer, prepare for the sacraments, and invite them to engage in youth movements or social service activities.

Since international organizations are dealing with religious matters increasingly often, it will be important for Bishops’ Conferences to put forward their own proposals about religion courses that are able to provide knowledge and critical learning concerning

all religions in our society. And they should also be able to clearly differentiate between the specificity of religion courses and others dedicated to responsible citizenship. Otherwise, governments will come up with their own agenda to educate free citizens, who are able to be supportive, compassionate and responsible, without the contribution of Christian and Catholic views in school syllabi.

### ***i) Specific Challenges for Multireligious and Multicultural Societies***

The multiculturalism and multireligiosity of Catholic school students are a challenge for all people who have educational responsibilities. When schools' identities are weakened, several problems arise, due to the inability to deal with new situations. The answer cannot be to seek shelter in indifference, nor to adopt a kind of Christian fundamentalism, nor – lastly – to define Catholic schools as schools that support “generic” values.

Hence, one of the most important challenges will be to foster a greater cultural openness amongst teachers and, at the same time, an equally greater willingness to act as witnesses, so that they are aware and careful about their school's peculiar context in their work, without being lukewarm or extremist, teaching what they know and testifying to what they believe in. In order for teachers to interpret their profession in this way, they must be formed to engage in the dialogue between faith and cultures and between different religions.: there cannot be any real dialogue if educators themselves have not been formed and helped to deepen their faith and personal beliefs.

Promoting cooperation among students of different religious persuasions in civil service initiatives is an opportunity that should not be underestimated, where learning contexts are pluralistic. Would it not be wonderful if, as a minimum, all Catholic schools provided their students with opportunities to engage in civil service, accompanied by their teachers or, perhaps, their parents?

### ***j) The Challenge of Teachers' Lifelong Training***

In this kind of cultural context, teacher training becomes essential and requires rigour and depth; without this, their teaching would be considered as not credible, unreliable and, therefore, unnecessary. This kind of training is urgent, if we want to rely on teachers who are committed to and concerned with our Educational Project's evangelical identity and its implementation in the future. It would not be advisable to have a “double population” of teachers in Catholic schools: what is needed, instead, is unity among the teachers, who together are willing to embrace and share a specific evangelical identity, as well as a consistent lifestyle.

### ***k) Places and Resources for Teacher Training***

Who can ensure this kind of training? Can specific places be dedicated to this task and be identified? Where can these kinds of trainers be found for teachers?

Here are some possible suggestions:

- National structures and their offices.



- Diocesan structures: vicars or diocesan directors of teaching activities, in synergy or partnership with training institutions. We should really think about the opportunity to centralize the training of lay people with ecclesial responsibilities and religion teachers in one single diocesan facility. On the one hand, this choice would lead to a stronger identity, but it would not provide the answer to a difficult question: how can this kind of training be adapted to needs that are typical of learning contexts? We should not forget that teachers have specific professional identities, with their peculiar features, that should be taken into account during training.

- Religious congregations.
- Catholic universities or institutes.
- Parishes, deaneries or monasteries as centers for retreats or spiritual support for educators.
- Networking, e-learning.

### ***1) Legal Challenges***

Some governments are quite keen on marginalizing Catholic schools through a number of rules and laws that, sometimes, trample over Catholic schools' pedagogical freedom. In some cases, governments hide their animosity by using lack of resources as an excuse. In these situations, the existence of Catholic schools is not ensured.

Another threat that might emerge once again is related to rules to avoid discrimination. Under the guise of a questionable "secularism", there is hostility against an education that is openly based on religious values and which, therefore, has to be confined to the "private" sphere.

## **2. Challenges for Catholic Higher Education**

Are the challenges related to Catholic higher education, university education, any different from the ones Catholic schools must face, in primary and secondary education? For the most part, they are the same. For universities too, we must recognize that the fundamental issues education must face are mostly related, in one way or another, to the new cultural – and even sociological – contexts our societies are experiencing and Catholic university students mostly come from.

There are a number of systemic and structural differences that refer to higher education establishments' peculiarity in so far as size, history and legal frameworks are concerned, as well as governance; then there are also differences regarding plans and procedures, educational levels, research and the way in which activities are carried out. Lastly, there are differences in the status and prestige that is associated to individual institutions, as well as in the typology of students and academic staff.

Differentiation processes should be seen as a reaction to the changes and challenges that have involved higher education systems in the last three decades: during that time, access to universities stopped being limited to elites, but became generalized, while demands have increased for universities to respond to social needs and become factors for economic development. The challenge stemming from these trends is the same practically

everywhere: i.e. how can these changes affecting universities' role can be reconciled with the values that have characterized university tradition? How can the centrality of scientific research and the formation of highly-skilled human capital be restored, being aware that universities must not only be places where knowledge is processed but also shared, in order to respond to social needs, and become instruments not just for cultural and civil development but for economic growth as well?

Governments' reply to these questions was to differentiate between systems of curricula and degrees, or introduce new functions inside institutions, or structure higher education systems based on increasingly complex labor market needs.

Considering these changes - that are still happening - it is natural to redefine universities' goals and functions: in addition to engaging in scientific, research and educational activities, universities are also becoming a reference point or supporting agencies for social, political and economic decision makers.

These changes mandate a conceptual redefinition of universities, and Catholic higher education cannot elude this effort too: in this context, it is urged to better specify its identity and peculiar academic and scientific tasks.

#### ***a) Internationalization of University Studies***

In recent years, the international dimension of higher education has been enhanced, through agreements between countries and universities, supported by instruments and programs that have been introduced by continental or global international organizations. Experiences in this domain have been characterized by several aspects: broader course offerings, growing foreign student presence, innovation in educational methodologies, and in process and research management. Joint university courses involving different universities are an effective internationalization tool because they allow for the exchange of ideas and experiences, favor the encounter of various people (students, teachers and researchers, administrative staff), coming from different cultures and traditions, and allow for the development of expertise in universities that have different missions, visions and profiles. This is a new and growing development that gives rise to many questions for institutions regarding openness, teaching methods and research activities.

#### ***b) The Use of Online Resources in University Studies***

In contemporary society, web-based applications are being used increasingly frequently and ubiquitously in the management of personal knowledge. Over the last few years, digital proficiency – in its different aspects – has been at the center of growing attention. Various documents and communications, published by international organizations, have highlighted the relevance of this specific skill for *Lifelong Learning* and to participate in the so-called “information society”. But what does it mean to be a cultivated or even educated person in the 21st century? This issue goes beyond preparing young people for future jobs and challenges, but refers to being conscious citizens, irrespective of having been born or become digitally savvy individuals, who are fully autonomous in accessing and using digital society's resources, contents, relations, tools and potential. In this framework, the necessary skills to manage and enrich our knowledge, using online and offline resources, become extremely important. This set of skills, which is

defined as *Personal Knowledge Management*, coupled with personal learning and/or personal learning network concepts, should help every individual to independently select and evaluate information sources, to search for online data, and be able to store, reprocess, transmit and share such data.

Next to these skills, others are needed, such as: *connectedness*, which involves not only technological aspects but also communication, as well as relational and identity management skills in a global communication context; *critical ability*, i.e. a critical approach to the web, that refers to the ability to use the web as a resource repository, also considering the context in which such resources are used; *creativity*, that is developing creative attitudes towards Lifelong Learning in order to benefit from educational experiences where formal and informal learning situations coexist.

### ***c) Universities, Businesses and the Labor Market***

One of the main problems we are facing today is joblessness. What opportunities can universities provide in terms of future jobs and business opportunities? Businesses, professionals and universities should have occasions to meet, in order to provide inspiration and opportunities for young people who are thinking about starting their own business, and for them to test their ideas and abilities. University students need to know about possible job opportunities early on in their career, participating in projects and competitions and accessing grants and scholarship to become more specialized. In this respect, guidance and counselling activities in upper secondary schools and universities become absolutely essential.

Regarding work-related issues, unemployment and training future leaders through higher education, we must remember that universities, as it is stated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, have the fundamental mission to confidently serve “truth through their research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society.” (n. 30). Catholic universities contribute to this mission by fulfilling their ministry of hope in the service of others, forming people who are endowed with a sense of justice and profound concern for the common good, educating them to devote a particular attention to the poor and oppressed and trying to teach students to be responsible and active global citizens.

### ***d) Quality of Academic Institutions***

One of the goals that has been at the center of international attention recently, in different countries and institutions, is to ensure the quality of academic systems, identifying specific evaluation criteria and instruments to enhance individual institutions’ responsibilities and transparency. This goal has been fully accepted and shared by all and many national and international agreements have been signed with specialized agencies in order to identify and share measurement indicators that do not simply evaluate external statistical data and procedures, but also consider higher education goals and contents within a system of values.

Promoting the quality of a Catholic academic center means to highlight the value of its activities, strengthening positive aspects and, when necessary, improving shortcomings. This monitoring and evaluation activity has become indispensable and performs two major functions: first of all, a public function, making sure that the study system is reliable and

transparent, fostering awareness and a healthy emulation amongst the various teaching establishments; secondly, an internal function, aimed at helping players in the system to achieve their institutional goals and reflect on the outcome of their activities in order to improve and develop them further.

#### ***e) Governance***

The changes mentioned so far also affect Catholic universities as *institutions*, including their *governance*. Since universities are “impartial” (they do not cater to partisan attitudes) and are not linked to “people’s sovereignty” (university heads are not representatives of the people), governance can be seen from many different viewpoints, such as: conditions for student access, funding sources and mechanisms, levels of autonomy, universities’ role in modern society and governance structures in academic institutions.

What is university autonomy all about? In many countries, the State has great power while individual universities need to be able to act freely to pursue their academic goals, without being unduly influenced by the fact of receiving public funding (which, in some cases, accounts for most of or even all their financial coverage). Nowadays, since States fund universities, they are actively present in them through the control they exercise over them remotely, by defining goals and evaluation instruments and trying to increasingly involve them in ensuring financial responsibility and sustainability.

While autonomy is being emphasized, universities are increasingly urged to meet the needs of their local areas, by providing courses that favor economic and social development, within a context of *lifelong learning*, and serving communities in supporting public and private *decision makers*. This growing multiplicity of functions that universities are developing, prompted by social pressures, has led many countries to introduce different organizational models for higher education which, on the one hand, are characterized by greater autonomy and academic freedom and, on the other hand, by growing responsibilities towards States and *stakeholders* in general.

#### ***f) The Challenge of Change and Universities’ Catholic Identity***

Education must guide students to face reality, to enter the world with a sense of awareness and responsibility and, in order for this to happen, knowledge acquisition is always necessary. However, the real expected result is not the acquisition of information or knowledge but, rather, personal *transformation*. In this respect, motivation is not just a preliminary condition, but must be built: it is a result.

Catholic higher education aims at forming men and women who are able to engage in critical thinking, who are endowed with high level professionalism but also with rich humaneness, through which their skills are put to the service of the common good. “If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n. 32). Research, teaching and various kinds of services that are in line with its mission, are the fundamental dimensions that should guide university education, in a constant dialogue amongst them. Catholic education’s contribution nourishes this twofold growth: in knowledge and humanity. In Catholic universities, Christian inspiration

permeates the life of academic communities, nourishes engagement in research, by providing guidance and meaning to it, and supports the task of forming young people, to whom broader and more meaningful prospects can be offered beyond their – albeit legitimate – professional expectations.

Catholic university professors are called upon to provide an original contribution to overcome the fragmentation of specialized knowledge, favoring dialogue amongst the various disciplines, looking for a unitarian reconciliation of knowledge, which is never fixed but constantly evolving; in this task, they should be guided by the awareness of the one single underlying meaning of all things. Within this dialogue, theology provides an essential contribution.

## CONCLUSION

Nowadays, a lot of attention has been devoted to verifying the outcome of students' learning activities. International surveys draw up rankings and compare countries. Public opinion is very sensitive to these messages. Transparent results, social reporting, the drive towards improving existing standards: they all point to the current trend to improve the quality of education. However, it is important not to lose sight of one of education's fundamental aspects, which is respecting each person's readiness to adjust and the awareness that real changes usually take a long time to happen. Education, right now, is like the metaphor of the Good Sower who is busy sowing without always having the possibility to see the fruits of his work. Educating requires working with hope and confidence. Education and teaching must be concerned with constant self-improvement and verifying the effectiveness of its tools, being aware that not all expected results can always be seen or ascertained.

Each person's formation takes place within a process that is implemented over many years by several educators, starting with parents. Schooling occurs in the midst of a continuous growth process that has already started, which might have been positive and enriching, or riddled with problems and constraints, and this must be taken into account. Catholic education finds its place within a specific time in a person's history, and is all the more effective if it is able to connect to this history, build alliances, share responsibilities and build educating communities. Within a framework of educational cooperation, teaching is not only a process through which knowledge or training are provided, but also guidance for everyone to discover their talents, develop professional skills and take important intellectual, social and political responsibilities in local communities. Even more than this, teaching means to accompany young people in their search for truth and beauty, for what is right and good. The effectiveness of collective action, involving both teaching and administrative staff, is given by shared values and the fact of being a *learning* community, in addition to *teaching*.

Future challenges for Catholic schools and universities are immense. However, Pope Francis' words encourage us to renew our passion to educate younger generations: "Do not be disheartened in the face of the difficulties that the educational challenge presents! Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being; in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the

stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them. Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Teach them to see the beauty and goodness of creation and of man who always retains the Creator's hallmark. But above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate. Educators [...] pass on knowledge and values with their words; but their words will have an incisive effect on children and young people if they are accompanied by their witness, their consistent way of life. Without consistency it is impossible to educate! You are all educators, there are no delegates in this field. Thus collaboration in a spirit of unity and community among the various educators is essential and must be fostered and encouraged. School can and must be a catalyst, it must be a place of encounter and convergence of the entire educating community, with the sole objective of training and helping to develop mature people who are simple, competent and honest, who know how to love with fidelity, who can live life as a response to God's call, and their future profession as a service to society"<sup>8</sup>.

# QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire serves as a basis for reflection and suggestions. It can be used with a certain flexibility.

## 1. Identity and Mission

- In your country, how are Catholic schools and universities consistent with their nature and aims?
- What elements principally characterize the service that Catholic schools and universities offer students and their families?
- Can we say that Catholic schools and universities are concerned for evangelization, and not just for offering a quality service that is superior to that of other institutions? How does local or national pastoral care include, as one of its integral parts, the world of schools and universities?
- What place is there for the teaching of the Catholic religion in Catholic schools and non-Catholic schools?
- Do Catholic schools and universities promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue?

## 2. Subjects

- Is there provision for accompaniment in the faith for teachers, students and the families of students who attend Catholic schools and universities?
- Are students encouraged to participate in the life of the educational institution?
- Are families encouraged to participate?
- What expectations have the young people who attend high school and university, and how does the education they receive enter into dialogue with these expectations?
- Is there care for students from an economically disadvantaged background?
- Is there care for students who have learning difficulties or are physically disadvantaged?
- Are activities promoted for former students?
- How have religious congregations with a charism for education “updated” their presence in schools and universities? What difficulties have they faced and what beneficial results have they achieved?
- How does one promote the shared mission of consecrated persons and lay faithful in Catholic schools and universities?

## 3. Formation

- How does one recruit personnel, particular teachers and administrators?
- How does one organize and guarantee the ongoing formation, both professional and Christian, of administrators, teachers and non-teaching staff?
- Is there care to form also those who work in non-Catholic schools and universities?
- Is there care to form also parents?
- Is there care for cooperation among the various Catholic schools and universities?

## 4. Challenges and Outlook

- The *Instrumentum Laboris* lists many challenges that Catholic education today is called upon to face. Which of these are considered, in your context, to be the most demanding?
- How are Catholic schools and universities placed with respect to these challenges?
- Briefly, what are the best experiences of Catholic schools and universities in your country?
- What, on the other hand, are the greatest weaknesses?
- What strategies and activities have already been prepared or are being sketched out for the future?

## INDEX

INTRODUCTION .....	2
I. ESSENTIAL REFERENCES .....	2
1. The Declaration <i>Gravissimum Educationis</i> .....	2
a) <i>Historical and Social Context. The Role of Christians</i> .....	3
b) <i>Theological and Spiritual Vision</i> .....	4
2. The Apostolic Constitution <i>Ex Corde Ecclesiae</i> .....	4
II. WHAT KIND OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES?.....	5
1. Building an Educational Context .....	5
2. Introducing Students to Research .....	6
3. Teaching as an Instrument for Education .....	6
4. The Centrality of Learners .....	7
5. The Diversity of Learners .....	7
6. Pluralism of Educational Establishments.....	8
7. Teacher Training .....	8
III. CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES.....	8
1. Challenges for Catholic Schools .....	9
a) <i>The Challenge of Identity</i> .....	10
b) <i>The Challenge for School Communities</i> .....	11
c) <i>The Challenge of Dialogue</i> .....	11
d) <i>The Challenge of a Learning Society</i> .....	12
e) <i>The Challenge of Integral Education</i> .....	12
f) <i>The Challenge of Limited Means and Resources</i> .....	13
g) <i>Pastoral Challenges</i> .....	13
h) <i>The Challenge of Religious Formation for Young People</i> .....	14
i) <i>Specific Challenges for Multireligious and Multicultural Societies</i> .....	15
j) <i>The Challenge of Teachers' Lifelong Training</i> .....	15
k) <i>Places and Resources for Teacher Training</i> .....	15
l) <i>Legal Challenges</i> .....	16
2. Challenges for Catholic Higher Education .....	16
a) <i>Internationalization of University Studies</i> .....	17
b) <i>The Use of Online Resources in University Studies</i> .....	17
c) <i>Universities, Businesses and the Labor Market</i> .....	18
d) <i>Quality of Academic Institutions</i> .....	18
e) <i>Governance</i> .....	19
f) <i>The Challenge of Change and Universities' Catholic Identity</i> .....	19
CONCLUSION .....	20
QUESTIONNAIRE .....	22