

Ref ► **Speech - Reverend José Miguel Fraga Cardoso**, Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See, at the occasion of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe Seminar part of [iLEGEND III](#): “Reinforcing global competences of education practioners to manage intercultural and interfaith dialogue in contemporary society”, Lisbon, 18 May 2023

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TRADUZIONE IN LINGUA INGLESE

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

a cordial greeting to you and to all the authorities present here. I express my sincere gratitude for the kind invitation to this Seminar organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe entitled “*Reinforcing global competences of education practioners to manage intercultural and interfaith dialogue in contemporary society*”. This topic will certainly stimulate deep reflection, helping us to share our ideas and engage in fruitful dialogue at the service of peace. In this talk, I will briefly outline the current challenges faced and a possible response that can be realized through concrete and shared action.

There is no doubt, *firstly*, that the presence of different cultures is an essential and common aspect of every geographical context. This fact is also constantly evolving due to both increasing human mobility and the disruptive influence of the so-called “information society”. It is a process, not a static reality, and is characterised by a continued development and movement to the extent that it involves personal and collective life in a profound way. It touches the very soul of peoples, namely the anthropological conception and psychology of individuals, but also groups.

All of this contributes to nurturing an ever-changing, interwoven social fabric, resulting in visible challenges and completely new scenarios for education. Unexplored cultural perspectives present themselves in all their richness, including with their historical, artistic and spiritual heritage, each to be discovered without prejudice. At the same time, not infrequently, the coexistence between cultures is difficult and can lead to conflictual structures in which a certain preconceptions of the other are exaggerated and may even give rise to *a sense of threat*. For that reason, especially young people, with the help of well-prepared educators, “should be so trained to take their part in social life that properly instructed in the necessary and opportune skills they can become actively involved in various community organizations, open to discourse with others and willing to do their best to promote the common good”¹.

It is the *nature of education* to build foundations for peaceful dialogue and for diversity to contribute to the primary objective of building a better world. An aim which is “closely linked to the Church’s evangelizing mission, which flows from her very identity as completely committed to promoting the authentic and integral growth of the human family towards its definitive fullness in God, is the vast multidisciplinary system of ecclesiastical studies. This system has developed over the centuries from the wisdom of the People of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in dialogue with, and discernment of, the signs of the times and diverse cultural expressions”².

One of the emergencies we face today is, not surprisingly, the formation of “new citizens” in a post-modern and trans-human context influenced by individualism and relativism. In the face of such fragmentation, “critical universalism” is as an

¹ POPE PAUL VI, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, n. 1.

² POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, 27 December 2017, n. 1.

approach that can help unite people under a common set values, encourage social cohesion and also unite “autonomy” with “responsibility”.

It is also a project of *integral inclusion* that overcomes the persistent risk of standardization or tendency toward parochialism and fundamentalist retreat. All these factors contribute to generating the so-called “crisis of citizenship” with the consequent weakening of the social bond between citizens in the face of growing inequalities among different geographical areas, rapid technological transformations and the ongoing repositioning of the international geopolitical chessboard.

Education is, therefore, entrusted with the arduous task of combining the role of civil society with the strengthening of an active, participative and substantive understanding of democracy. Today, more than in the past, this is the only way forward. In schools and other educational places, it is urgent to promote civic education, providing young people with spaces for discussion and personal engagement and, above all, giving them the means to deepen the culture of dialogue. Through this proposal of openness and sharing, interest in participation and in encountering others is encouraged.

In order to initiate this *virtuous path*, it is necessary, first of all, to propose a single, unitary synthesis that - in the face of an excessive fragmentation of knowledge - can become a common basis of understanding and collaboration. In the current international context, which is anything but easy and marked by the shadows of war, one way forward is the return to the essential, as the decisive point of any pedagogical approach. This approach starts from the centrality of the human. It is, therefore, a matter of ordering, through specific training courses, other disciplines in a way that nurtures a real *culture of dialogue, listening and peace*. In other words, a culture that is capable of expressing itself in a dynamic way, responding to both old and emerging challenges not through imposition and arrogance but with meekness, empathy and mutual understanding.

This applies both to the encounter between cultures and to the dialogue between faiths. It is a path that is certainly tiring and as Pope Francis argues, “it entails patient soul-searching. It requires the capacity to stop, to deactivate the autopilot, to acquire awareness of our way of acting, of the feelings that dwell within us, of

the recurrent thoughts that condition us, and often unconsciously. It also requires that we distinguish between emotions and spiritual faculties.”³

This personal exercise allows one not to accept “superficial statements, giving rise to stereotypes and preconceptions”⁴ but to “tip-toe toward the other without stirring up the dust that clouds one’s vision”⁵. Accepting the differences that exist in each culture does not mean denying the existence of objective values and principles common to human nature itself, “without which one is transported into the cultural relativism that deliberately forgets any ultimate question of truth and opens the door to the oblivion of memory, nihilism and radicalism”⁶.

This is the daily experience in Catholic schools⁷. The very dimension of interdependence and interculturality is part of the heritage of the Church and manifests itself through an active and proactive dialogue with the world. Indeed, the exercise of listening is fundamental. It is not only a necessary condition in a process of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, but it is also a pedagogical duty in order to “acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs.”⁸

If we are to embrace a *culture of fraternity* together, it is necessary to form men and women capable of mediation and reconciliation, of building a social fabric marked by encounter and solidarity. In order to build the solid foundation needed for embarking on meaningful educational pathways, it is first of all necessary to recover that dimension of knowledge and understanding which is informed by the humanities, extending reason to philosophical wisdom and the light of faith, but in particular it is desirable to enter into a dimension where reason includes love. In other words, it is a matter of moving from a cold soliloquy to the warmth of dialogue, since the human person is only realised in truth and love⁹.

³ POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, 5 October 2022.

⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the Participants in the Meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies on the 50th anniversary of its establishment in Rome*, 24 January 2015.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ P. PAROLIN, “La Chiesa Cattolica e l’educazione. Discorso all’UNESCO”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 4 giugno 2015, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Cfr CONGREGAZIONE PER L’EDUCAZIONE CATTOLICA, *Educare al dialogo interculturale nella scuola cattolica. Vivere insieme per una civiltà dell’amore*, Città del Vaticano 2013.

⁸ POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 novembre 2013, n. 253.

⁹ Cfr CONGREGAZIONE PER L’EDUCAZIONE CATTOLICA, *Educare all’umanesimo solidale. Per costruire una “civiltà dell’amore” a 50 anni dalla Populorum progressio*, Città del Vaticano 2017.

In this sense, education fully achieves its purpose when along with the mind it involves the heart and hands, educating our reason, emotions and life. Education is at its best then, when promotes the “communal” dimension, a culture of encounter, and wonder in front of dialogue and the creativity of each person.

Thank you for your attention.