

# Brother Carlos Gómez at the International Congress on Pastoral Care in School and Universities: “University must become a house of questions”

An invitation to be stewards of the beauty of the human person, “a unique and irreplaceable work of art by God”. This was the message conveyed by Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, at the opening of the International Congress on Pastoral Care in School and Universities, taking place on 22 and 23 October in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican, under the theme “Drawing New Maps of Hope”.

## **Beauty that disarms**

The Portuguese Cardinal reminded participants that the task of education is to recognise this beauty, to accompany it and to help it shine, because “the world needs beauty”. A world, the Cardinal emphasised, “wounded by wars, because beauty disarms. A world saturated with images needs it, because true beauty teaches us to look anew. A world that lives in a hurry needs it, because beauty makes us pause and restores our capacity for wonder. Young people need it, because those who have encountered beauty are no longer satisfied with the banal: beauty educates the desire”.



Education, in fact, is not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but, as the Prefect observed, “finds its fulfilment in service”. ‘Pastoral beauty’ works ‘not through coercion, but through attraction’. ‘A pastor who seeks to educate without attracting others,’ added de Mendonça, ‘becomes a mere official. An educator who draws people towards what is good, true and beautiful becomes a witness’.

## **Builders of fraternity**



During the first day, mid-morning, the audience with Pope Leo XIV was received with great joy by the participants. The Pontiff urged pastoral care in school and universities to help young people “to be protagonists of a new way of living in the world, builders of fraternity and of a more just society”.

“It is essential that pastoral care in schools and universities knows how to respond to the aspirations of each individual and to walk together along a human and Christian path,” said the Pope, who told them that those for whom their ministry is intended “are distinguished by the enthusiasm, generosity and spirit of service so characteristic of young people”.

“In a welcoming environment, students can express their deep desire to understand and to make sense of reality,” remarked the Pontiff, who emphasised that the true vocation of schools and universities is “the shared search for the truth”; he therefore encouraged them to “stimulate young people’s intellect” and “value their questions”.

## **A university that welcomes questions**

The conference then continued with presentations by the speakers. Among them, Brother Carlos Gabriel Gómez Restrepo, Vicar General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, spoke of his many years’ experience living on the margins of Colombian society to remind the audience that, in the face of profound changes in the university system, he explained, two models stand in opposition: that of Babel, founded on competitiveness and a vision of the human person reduced to mere functionality, and that of fraternity, in which knowledge is at the service of the common good and the person is at the centre.



From this perspective, Brother Carlos added, pastoral care “is not just another post”, but a relationship that lies at the heart of university life and creates Christian communities, rather than merely academic ones, which are often characterised by competition and rivalry. A pastoral ministry called above all to listen to vulnerable young people, because ‘even silences cry out’, and to become a ‘Good Samaritan’: the option for the poor is not charity, but a commitment to studying the roots of poverty.

The university — continued the Lasallian religious — must become a “house of questions”, because education is not about providing answers, but about teaching how to ask questions: if you teach economics, ask for whom; if you teach artificial intelligence, ask yourself what it means to remain human.

### **Accompanying: the pastoral verb par excellence**

Once again, Brother Carlos urged us to move from merely talking about peace to educating for peace, reconciling without losing our memory. Welcoming, listening, preaching, discerning, building relationships, serving, and having hope: these are the seven verbs we must put into practice for an authentic university ministry. He summarised them as ‘the pastoral verb par excellence’: accompanying.

Not just talking about God, he concluded, but becoming witnesses to Jesus, ensuring that “life is more humane, the poor are more visible, the earth is better protected, and the future is full of hope”.

*\* Article written by Paolo Ondarza, published in Vatican News. Photos: Vatican News.*

