My dear colleagues and friends,

I would like to thank His Eminence Cardinal Versaldi, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education and President of the Gravissimum Educationis Foundation. In his opening remarks, he has clearly outlined both the Foundation’s mission within the Congregation and the place the Foundation intends to hold among those voices speaking out today for the defence and promotion of education in view of a more just and compassionate social commitment.

I warmly greet all the directors of the 14 antennas making up the rich cultural and academic mosaic of this project that I would call without hesitation « our » project (which also means our common endeavour). Indeed, it unites us around a specific issue, rich both in its diversity and in the intellectual (academic), educational, political, and social challenges to overcome. Its relevance is already well established, and the commitment it inspires among all the colleagues from your local antennas - as well as within your academic institutions - will always remain the true promoter of future successful actions. It is a project that we are called to build together, where our competences, specific skills and initiatives are called to play a leading role in the whole enterprise. The Foundation promotes this ambitious field of research where you are the primary contributors.

I am equally delighted to welcome the members of the Scientific Committee (specifically attached to this activity) who have generously contributed to the initial theoretical elaboration of the current project, with their diverse backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives. These experts will take part in all our discussions and, if you wish, please feel free to consult any of them during this seminar. Indeed, our agenda also includes one-to-one meetings with the scientific committee members. The same are pinpointed in the programme under the term « clinic », but please do not draw any conclusions about the possibility of having sick people among us...
I wish to specify that the choice of this study on « educating for democracy » was the first priority established by the members of the Scientific Committee (this time the one of the Foundation *Gravissimum Educationis*). This is not a coincidence, as I am sure you will agree. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that democratic thought and the political-institutional forms of modern democracy have been conceived in an era and in contexts that no longer exist today. Cultural and social change has been very rapid, so that theoretical and legal-political adjustments have failed to keep pace with the changing world. It is with good reason that specialists today use expressions such as « epochal change » and even « liquid society ». The crisis affecting democracies closely relates, among others, to the widening gap between the historical understanding of democracy and the turmoil in today’s world.

The examples of this state of affairs include the emergence of new populisms, the influence of new political, economic, and financial élites, and the gap between the political class and civil society, without forgetting the return to neo-sovereignties, nationalist, and pro-independence ideologies. We venture to say that it is urgent for modern democracies to learn what they can learn from these and devise tools to help us contend with these new situations. We expect them to address the root causes of populisms through inclusive growth, heavy investment in education, and the struggle against the proliferation of violence and poverty. In addition, how about mentioning, in the same context, the urgent need to build « our common home » rooted in a *culture of international solidarity*.

Dear colleagues and friends, there are many reasons to think that the rich Christian culture and experience, in collaboration with other beliefs, should fully play their role in the current debates on democracy in a globalised, pluricultural, and plurireligious context. Do we not need to redefine the principles, the institutions, and the rules of coexistence for the 21st Century? Should not we, as university educators, rouse the new generations and give them the taste – i.e. instil in them a deep passion - for becoming involved in the service of a world that is respectfully democratic, where everyone finds his or her place and is aware of being completely responsible for the world’s destiny? In this respect, let us remember that tomorrow is already today!

Specialists agree in recognising that the true challenge to democracy is education. Pope Francis strongly affirms, « If we want to change the world, we must change education first ». This is the price to pay to establish a « good governance » for our communities, our countries, and the whole world.

Such is the path proposed by this international project, promoted by the *Gravissimum Educationis* Foundation, which unites us in full respect for our differences. We wish to achieve it together, through a process where the contribution of each person will
have value in the eyes of all. Our network - because this is what it is about - has a critical, positive, and practical spirit. In leaving behind some historical interpretations of «living together» we will propose, I sincerely hope, innovative educational paths highlighting the rich democratic potential of your communities and their possible practical applications.

My dear friends, to conclude, allow me to open a breach to the future and share with you a personal conviction. Besides the educational and democratic emergency that concern us in the first place, I am convinced that we are contributing together – although we may not always be aware of it – to the establishment of a *new politics of civilisation*. Essentially, what is at stake is much more than our idea of democracy or even our concept of modernity. It is both the idea of a *civilisation* where human beings, with their dignity, vocation, and transcendence are central to the world, and, accordingly, our idea of what we nowadays call *development*. Our project, my dear colleagues, contains the seeds for a future that together we are already contributing to bring about.

Finally, in the course of our seminar, we will also have the opportunity to put our reflection on education and democracy in the perspective of the international meeting planned for May 14, 2020, in Rome. Pope Francis, at the request of the Congregation for Catholic Education and other stakeholders, is promoting a global event where the central theme will be, «*Rebuilding the Global Pact for Education*». The aim of this event is to reignite, within an inter-religious perspective, our engagement with and for the younger generations in the service of a more open and inclusive education where listening, dialogue, and mutual comprehension play a crucial role. This afternoon, His Excellency Monsignor Vincenzo Zani, Secretary of the Congregation and Vice-President of our Foundation, will be commenting on this exceptional initiative, in support of a «*global educational alliance*» where our reflections will find ground for dialogue and application.

Many thanks for your attention and be sure that the Foundation’s whole team (Aurora, Nicola and Maximiliano) remains fully at your disposal to make your stay in the Vatican City both useful and enjoyable. Thank you for your attention.