



DICASTERIUM
DE CULTURA ET EDUCATIONE

IL PREFETTO

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By their collaborative engagement and networking with Asian Higher Education Institutions, with Catholic, non-Catholic, public and private Universities alike, Catholic Higher Education Institutions commit themselves to the mission of assisting in *“the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities”* (Ex corde Ecclesiae, 13). Catholic universities promote a Christian presence in the realm of higher education and they seek to address the great problems (*challenges*) confronting contemporary society and culture in the light of the Gospel. As centres of excellence in learning, they contribute to the growth of human knowledge by promoting research and scholarship while endeavouring to ensure that the fruits of these advancements are shared with all and serve the full development of human society. Ultimately, they embody an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life. This is a mission Catholic Universities share with other educational institutions. During his visit to Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok) in 2019, Pope Francis stated *I express my appreciation to the educators and scholars ... who work to provide present and future generations with the skills and especially the wisdom, rooted in that of their ancestors, that will enable them to play their part in promoting the common good of society.*

Catholic Higher Education institutions in Asia are privileged to be called to live their mission in this great continent which is an intricate mosaic of many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions. Asia is also the cradle of many of the world's major religions. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions, to which the Church has the deepest respect and with which it seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. Pope Francis has spoken about the importance of Catholic universities promoting dialogue on many occasions. In his 2019 address to the Catholic Universities of Asia, he said: "Catholic universities are called to be places of dialogue, where people of different faiths and cultures can come together to learn from each other and build bridges of understanding. They must be places where the search for truth is conducted in a spirit of openness and respect, and where the diversity of cultures is celebrated as a gift from God." He has also said that Catholic universities should be "committed to the promotion of peace and justice" and that they should "play a leading role in addressing the challenges of our time." In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis called for a "new dialogue between cultures" that is "based on the recognition of the dignity of every person." He said that this dialogue is essential for building a more just and peaceful world.

In the context of this general call to inter-cultural dialogue, Catholic Universities have a particular obligation to foster specifically inter-religious exchanges. The Church believes that dialogue is essential for building understanding and cooperation between people of different faiths. Catholic universities play a vital role in this dialogue by providing a space for people to come together and learn from each other. This dialogue has taken different forms of expression: the founding of

interreligious centers and institutes which provide a forum for students, faculty, and staff from different faiths to come together to learn about each other's beliefs and practices; the organizing of interfaith conferences and symposia which bring together religious leaders and scholars from different faiths to discuss common concerns and challenges; the production of interfaith publications which provide resources for people of all faiths to learn about each other's traditions; and the development of interfaith service projects which bring together people of different faiths to work together on common goals, such as providing relief to the poor or promoting environmental sustainability

In the great Asian continent, with its vast expanses of land, its ancient cultures and traditions, the Christian communities, and also their learning institutions, are indeed a *pusillus grex*, a small flock which nonetheless is charged to bring the light of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This small flock is called to be versatile and creative in her witness to the Gospel through dialogue and openness to all. Attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it must be careful of cultivating a clear sense of one's own identity and a capacity for empathy. This sense of identity and mission will ensure an open and fruitful dialogue of Catholic Universities with their counterparts in Asia. It is our living faith in Christ which is our deepest identity, our being rooted in the Lord. On the other hand, the capacity for empathy enables a true human dialogue in which words, ideas and questions arise from an experience of fraternity and shared humanity. Walking together in the spirit of openness is the heart of dialogue.

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