

APOSTOLIC LETTER

DRAWING NEW MAPS OF HOPE

**BY POPE LEO XIV ON THE OCCASION OF THE
60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONCILIAR DECLARATION
*GRAVISSIMUM EDUCATIONIS***

1. Introduction

1.1. Drawing new maps of Hope. 28 October 2025 marks the 60th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* on the extreme importance and relevance of education in the life of the human person. With that text, the Second Vatican Council reminded the Church that education is not an accessory activity, but forms the very fabric of evangelisation: it is the concrete way in which the Gospel becomes an educational gesture, a relationship, a culture. Today, in the face of rapid change and disorienting uncertainties, that legacy shows surprising resilience. Where educational communities allow themselves to be guided by the word of Christ, they do not retreat, but are revitalised; they do not build walls, but bridges. They respond creatively, opening up new possibilities for the transmission of knowledge and meaning in schools, universities, professional and civic training, school and youth ministry, and research, because the Gospel does not grow old but makes “all things new” (Rev 21:5). Each generation hears it as something new that regenerates. Each generation is responsible for the Gospel and for discovering its seminal and multiplying power.

1.2. We live in a complex, fragmented, digitised educational environment. Precisely for this reason, it is wise to pause and regain our focus on the “cosmology of Christian paideia”: a vision that, over the centuries, has been able to renew itself and positively inspire all the multifaceted aspects of education. From its origins, the Gospel has generated “educational constellations”: experiences that are both humble and powerful, capable of reading the times, of preserving the unity between faith and reason, between thought and life, between knowledge and justice. In stormy weather, they have been a lifeline; in calm weather, they have been a sail unfurled. A beacon in the night to guide navigation.

1.3. The Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* has lost none of its bite. Since its reception, a constellation of works and charisms has been born that still guides the way today: schools and universities, movements and institutes, lay associations, religious congregations, and national and international networks. Together, these living bodies have consolidated a spiritual and pedagogical heritage capable of crossing the 21st century and

responding to the most pressing challenges. This heritage is not set in stone: it is a compass that continues to point the way and speak of the beauty of the journey. Today's expectations are no less than those the Church faced sixty years ago. Indeed, they have expanded and become more complex. Faced with the many millions of children around the world who still do not have access to primary education, how can we fail to act? Faced with the dramatic educational emergencies caused by wars, migration, inequalities and various forms of poverty, how can we not feel the urgency to renew our commitment? Education, as I recalled in my Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te*, "is one of the highest expressions of Christian charity"¹. The world needs this form of hope.

2. A dynamic history

2.1. The history of Catholic education is the history of the Spirit at work. The Church is "mother and teacher"² not for supremacy, but for service: she generates faith and accompanies the growth of freedom, taking on the mission of the Divine Master so that all "might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). The educational styles that have succeeded one another show a vision of man as the image of God, called to truth and goodness, and a pluralism of methods at the service of this calling. Educational charisms are not rigid formulas: they are original responses to the needs of each age.

2.2. In the early centuries, the Desert Fathers taught wisdom through parables and apophthegms; they rediscovered the way of the essential, of discipline of the tongue and of guarding the heart; they transmitted a pedagogy of the gaze that recognises God everywhere. St Augustine, grafting biblical wisdom onto the Greco-Roman tradition, understood that the authentic teacher arouses the desire for truth, educates freedom to read the signs and listen to the inner voice. Monasticism carried on this tradition in the most inaccessible places, where for decades the classical works were studied, commented on and taught, so much so that without this silent work in the service of culture, many masterpieces would not have survived to the present day. Then, "From the Heart of the Church", the first universities were born, which from their origins proved to be "an incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity"³. In their classrooms, speculative thought found, through the mediation of the Mendicant Orders, the possibility of structuring itself solidly and pushing itself to the frontiers of science. Quite a few religious congregations took their first steps in these fields of knowledge, enriching education in a pedagogically innovative and socially visionary way.

2.3. It has expressed itself in many ways. In *the Ratio Studiorum*, the richness of the scholastic tradition blends with Ignatian spirituality, adapting a curriculum that is as articulated as it is interdisciplinary and open to experimentation. In 17th-century Rome, St Joseph Calasanaz opened free schools for the poor, realising that literacy and numeracy are

¹ LEON XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* (4 October 2025), no. 68.

² Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961).

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (15 August 1990), n. 1.

a matter of dignity even before they are a matter of competence. In France, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, "realising the injustice caused by the exclusion of the children of workers and peasants from the education system"⁴, founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools. At the beginning of the 19th century, also in France, Saint Marcellin Champagnat devoted himself "with all his heart, at a time when access to education continued to be the privilege of a few, to the mission of educating and evangelising children and young people"⁵. Similarly, Saint John Bosco, with his "preventive system", transformed discipline into reasonableness and closeness. Courageous women such as Vicenta María López y Vicuña, Francesca Cabrini, Josephine Bakhita, Maria Montessori, Katharine Drexel and Elizabeth Ann Seton opened doors for girls, migrants and the marginalised. I reiterate what I clearly stated in *Dilexi te*: "The education of the poor, according to the Christian faith, is not a favor, but a duty"⁶. This genealogy of concreteness testifies that, in the Church, pedagogy is never disembodied theory, but flesh, passion and history.

3. A living tradition

3.1. Christian education is a choral work: no one educates alone. The educating community is a "we" where the teacher, the student, the family, the administrative and service staff, the pastors and civil society converge to generate life⁷. This "we" prevents water from stagnating in the swamp of "it has always been done this way" and forces it to flow, to nourish, to irrigate. The foundation remains the same: the person, image of God (Gen. 1:26), capable of truth and relationship. Therefore, the question of the relationship between faith and reason is not an optional chapter: "religious truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge"⁸. These words of St John Henry Newman – whom, in the context of this *Jubilee of the World of Education*, I have the great joy of declaring co-patron of the Church's educational mission together with St Thomas Aquinas – are an invitation to renew our commitment to knowledge that is as intellectually responsible and rigorous as it is deeply human. We must also be careful not to fall into the enlightenment of a *fides* that is exclusively paired with *ratio*. We need to get out of the doldrums by recovering an empathetic and open vision to understand ever better how man understands himself today in order to develop and deepen his teaching. For this reason, desire and the heart must not be separated from knowledge: it would mean breaking the person. Catholic universities and schools are places where questions are not silenced, and doubt is not banished but accompanied. There, the heart dialogues with the heart, and the method is that of listening, which recognises the other as a good, not as a threat. *Cor ad cor loquitur* was the cardinal's motto of St John Henry Newman, taken from a letter by St Francis de Sales: "Sincerity of heart, not abundance of words, touches the hearts of men".

⁴ LEON XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* (4 October 2025), n. 69.

⁵ LEON XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* (4 October 2025), no. 70.

⁶ LEON XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* (4 October 2025), n. 72.

⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Instruction "*The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*" (25 January 2022), no. 32.

⁸ JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *The Idea of a University* (2005), p. 76.

3.2. Educating is an act of hope and a passion that is renewed because it manifests the promise we see in the future of humanity⁹. The specificity, depth and breadth of educational action is that work – as mysterious as it is real – of “making the being flourish...taking care of the soul”, as we read in Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* (30a–b). It is a “profession of promises”: it promises time, trust, competence; justice and mercy are promised, the courage of truth and the balm of consolation are promised. Educating is a task of love that is handed down from generation to generation, mending the torn fabric of relationships and restoring the weight of promise to words: “Every man is capable of truth, but the journey is much more bearable when one goes forward with the help of another”¹⁰. Truth is to be sought in community.

4. The compass of *Gravissimum educationis*

4.1. The conciliar declaration *Gravissimum educationis* reaffirms the right of everyone to education and points to the family as the first school of humanity. The ecclesial community is called to support environments that integrate faith and culture, respect the dignity of all, and dialogue with society. The document warns against reducing education to functional training or an economic tool: a person is not a "skills profile," cannot be reduced to a predictable algorithm, but is a face, a story, a vocation.

4.2. Christian formation embraces the whole person: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, and physical. It does not contrast manual and theoretical, science and humanism, technique and conscience; rather, it asks that professionalism be imbued with ethics, and that ethics not be an abstract word but daily practice. Education does not measure its value solely on the basis of efficiency: it measures it on the basis of dignity, justice and the ability to serve the common good. This integral anthropological vision must remain the cornerstone of Catholic pedagogy. In the wake of the thinking of St John Henry Newman, it goes against a purely mercantilist approach that often today forces education to be measured in terms of functionality and practical utility¹¹.

4.3. These principles are not memories of the past. They are fixed stars. They say that truth is sought together; that freedom is not caprice, but response; that authority is not domination, but service. In the educational context, one must not "claim to possess a monopoly on truth, either in its analysis of problems or its proposal of concrete solutions"¹². Instead, "knowing how best to approach them is more important than providing immediate responses to why things happen or how to deal with them. The aim is to learn how to confront problems, for these are always different, since every generation is new, and faces

⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Instrumentum laboris Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewed Passion* (7 April 2014), Introduction.

¹⁰ CARDINAL ROBERT F. PREVOST, O.S.A., *Homily at the Catholic University of Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo* (2018).

¹¹ See JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *Writings on the University* (2001).

¹² LEON XIV, *Audience with the Members of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation* (17 May 2025).

new challenges, dreams and questions"¹³. Catholic education has the task of rebuilding trust in a world marked by conflict and fear, reminding us that we are children and not orphans: from this awareness comes fraternity.

5. The centrality of the person

5.1. Putting the person at the centre means educating to the long view of Abraham (Gen. 15:5): helping people discover the meaning of life, their inalienable dignity, and their responsibility towards others. Education is not only the transmission of content, but also the learning of virtues. It forms citizens capable of serving and believers capable of witnessing, men and women who are freer and no longer alone. And formation cannot be improvised. I fondly remember the years I spent in the beloved Diocese of Chiclayo, visiting the Catholic University of San Toribio de Mogrovejo, and the opportunities I had to address the academic community, saying: "No one is born a professional; every university career is built step by step, book by book, year by year, sacrifice after sacrifice"¹⁴.

5.2. Catholic schools are environments where faith, culture and life intertwine. They are not simply institutions, but living environments where the Christian vision permeates every discipline and every interaction. Educators are called to a responsibility that goes beyond their employment contract: their witness is as valuable as their teaching. For this reason, the training of teachers – scientific, pedagogical, cultural and spiritual – is decisive. In sharing the common educational mission, a common path of formation is also necessary, with “an initial and permanent project of formation that is able to grasp the educational challenges of the present time and to provide the most effective tools for dealing with them [...]. This implies that educators must be willing to learn and develop knowledge and be open to the renewal and updating of methodologies, but open also to spiritual and religious formation and sharing”¹⁵. Technical updates are not enough: we need to nurture a listening heart, an encouraging gaze and a discerning intelligence.

5.3. The family remains the primary place of education. Catholic schools collaborate with parents, they do not replace them, because the "duty [...] devolves primarily on them, namely education and especially religious education"¹⁶. The educational alliance requires intentionality, listening and shared responsibility. It is built with shared processes, tools and assessments. It is hard work and a blessing: when it works, it inspires trust; when it is lacking, everything becomes more fragile.

6. Identity and subsidiarity

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ CARDINAL ROBERT F. PREVOST, O.S.A., *Homily at the Catholic University of Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo* (December 2016).

¹⁵ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Circular Letter Educating Together in the Catholic School* (8 September 2007), n. 20.

¹⁶ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes* (29 June 1966), no. 48.

6.1. *Gravissimum educationis* already recognised the great importance of the principle of subsidiarity and the fact that circumstances vary according to different local ecclesial contexts. However, the Second Vatican Council articulated the right to education and its founding principles as universally valid. It highlighted the responsibilities placed on both parents themselves and the state. It considered it a "sacred right" to offer an education that enables students to "appraise moral values with a right conscience"¹⁷ and asked civil authorities to respect this right. It also warned against subordinating education to the labour market and to the often harsh and inhuman logic of finance.

6.2. Christian education is presented as a choreography. Addressing university students on World Youth Day in Lisbon, my late predecessor Pope Francis said: "Be protagonists [...], bring about a new 'choreography', one that respects the 'dance' of life by putting the human person at the centre"¹⁸. Forming the "whole" person means avoiding compartmentalisation. When faith is true, it is not an added "subject," but a breath that oxygenates every other subject. Thus, Catholic education becomes leaven in the human community: it generates reciprocity, overcomes reductionism, and opens up to social responsibility. The task today is to dare to embrace an integral humanism that inhabits the questions of our time without losing sight of the source.

7. Contemplation of Creation

7.1. Christian anthropology is the basis of an educational style that promotes respect, personalised accompaniment, discernment and the development of all human dimensions. Among these, spiritual inspiration is not secondary, and it is realised and strengthened through the contemplation of Creation. This aspect is not new in the Christian philosophical and theological tradition, where the study of nature also had the purpose of demonstrating the traces of God (*vestigia Dei*) in our world. In *Collexiones in Hexameron*, St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio writes that "The whole world is a shadow, a path, a footprint. It is the book written from the outside (Ezekiel 2:9), because in every creature there is a reflection of the divine model, but mixed with darkness. The world is, therefore, a path similar to opacity mixed with light; in this sense, it is a path. Just as you see how a ray of light entering through a window is coloured according to the different colours of the different parts of the glass, the divine ray is reflected differently in each creature and takes on different properties"¹⁹. This also applies to the plasticity of teaching tailored to different characters which, in any case, converge on the beauty of Creation and its preservation. It requires educational projects that are "inter- and trans-disciplinary, exercised with wisdom and creativity".²⁰

¹⁷ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration *Gravissimum educationis* (28 October 1965), n. 1.

¹⁸ POPE FRANCIS, Address to university students on the occasion of World Youth Day (3 August 2023).

¹⁹ ST BONAVENTURE OF BAGNOREGIO, *Collexiones in Hexameron*, XII, in *Opera Omnia* (edited by Peltier), Vivès, Paris, t. IX (1867), pp. 87-88.

²⁰ POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* (8 December 2017), no. 4c.

7.2. Forgetting our common humanity has led to divisions and violence; and when the earth suffers, the poor suffer most. Catholic education cannot remain silent: it must combine social justice and environmental justice, promote sobriety and sustainable lifestyles, and form consciences capable of choosing not only what is convenient but what is right. Every small gesture — avoiding waste, choosing responsibly, defending the common good — is cultural and moral literacy.

7.3. Ecological responsibility is not limited to technical data. Such data is necessary, but it is not enough. We need an education that involves the mind, the heart and the hands; new habits, community styles, virtuous practices. Peace is not the absence of conflict: it is a gentle force that rejects violence. An education for peace that is “unarmed and disarming”²¹ teaches us to lay down the weapons of aggressive words and judgemental looks, in order to learn the language of mercy and reconciled justice.

8. An educational constellation

8.1. I speak of a "constellation" because the Catholic educational world is a living and pluralistic network: parish schools and colleges, universities and higher education institutions, vocational training centres, movements, digital platforms, service-learning initiatives, and school, university, and cultural pastoral programmes. Each "star" has its own brightness, but together they chart a course. Where there was rivalry in the past, today we ask institutions to converge: unity is our most prophetic strength.

8.2. Methodological and structural differences are not burdens, but resources. The plurality of charisms, if it is well coordinated, forms a coherent and fruitful picture. In an interconnected world, the game is played at two tables: local and global. We need exchanges of teachers and students, joint projects between continents, mutual recognition of good practices, and missionary and academic cooperation. The future requires us to learn to collaborate more and grow together.

8.3. Constellations reflect their light in an infinite universe. As in a kaleidoscope, their colours intertwine, creating further chromatic variations. This is what happens in Catholic educational institutions, which are open to meeting and listening to civil society, political and administrative authorities, and representatives of the productive sectors and work categories. They are called to collaborate even more actively with them in order to share and improve educational paths so that theory is supported by experience and practice. History also teaches us that our institutions welcome students and families who are non-believers or of other religions, but who desire a truly human education. For this reason — as is already the case — we must continue to promote participatory educational communities, in which lay people, religious, families and students share responsibility for the educational mission together with public and private institutions.

²¹ LEON XIV, *Greeting from the Central Loggia of St. Peter's Basilica after his election* (8 May 2025).

9. Navigating new spaces

9.1. Sixty years ago, *Gravissimum educationis* opened a season of trust: it encouraged the updating of methods and languages. Today, this trust is measured against the digital environment. Technologies must serve the person, not replace them; they must enrich the learning process, not impoverish relationships and communities. A Catholic university and school without vision risks soulless efficiency, the standardisation of knowledge, which then becomes spiritual impoverishment.

9.2. Pastoral creativity is needed to inhabit these spaces: strengthening the training of teachers, including in the digital sphere; enhancing active teaching; promoting service-learning and responsible citizenship; avoiding any technophobia. Our attitude towards technology can never be hostile, because "technological progress is part of God's plan for creation"²². But it requires discernment in educational design, assessment, platforms, data protection and equitable access. In any case, no algorithm can replace what makes education human: poetry, irony, love, art, imagination, the joy of discovery and even learning from mistakes as an opportunity for growth.

9.3. The decisive point is not technology, but the use we make of it. Artificial intelligence and digital environments must be oriented towards the protection of dignity, justice and work; they must be governed by criteria of public ethics and participation; they must be accompanied by theological and philosophical reflection at the appropriate level. Catholic universities have a decisive task: to offer "diaconia of culture", fewer chairs and more tables where people can sit together, without unnecessary hierarchies, to touch the wounds of history and seek, in the Spirit, wisdom that springs from the lives of peoples.

10. The guiding star of the Educational Pact

10.1. Among the stars that guide the way is the Global Compact on Education. I gratefully accept this prophetic legacy entrusted to us by Pope Francis. It is an invitation to form an alliance and network to educate for universal fraternity. Its seven pathways remain our foundation: placing the human person at the centre; listening to children and young people; promoting the dignity and full participation of women; recognising the family as the first educator; opening ourselves to acceptance and inclusion; renewing the economy and politics in the service of humanity; and caring for our common home. These "stars" have inspired schools, universities and educational communities around the world, generating concrete processes of humanisation.

10.2. Sixty years after *Gravissimum educationis* and five years after the Compact, history challenges us with new urgency. Rapid and profound changes expose children,

²² DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH AND DICASTERY FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION, *Nota Antiqua et nova* (28 January 2025), n. 117.

adolescents and young people to unprecedented fragility. It is not enough to preserve: we must relaunch. I ask all educational institutions to inaugurate a season that speaks to the hearts of the new generations, recomposing knowledge and meaning, competence and responsibility, faith and life. The Compact is part of a broader Global Educational Constellation: charisms and institutions, though diverse, form a unified and luminous design that guides our steps in the darkness of the present time.

10.3. To the seven paths, I add three priorities. The first concerns the interior life: young people seek depth; they need spaces for silence, discernment, dialogue with their conscience and with God. The second concerns the human digital: let us train them in the wise use of technology and AI, putting the person before the algorithm and harmonising technical, emotional, social, spiritual and ecological intelligence. The third concerns unarmed and disarming peace: let us educate them in non-violent language, reconciliation, bridges and not walls; “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt 5:9) becomes the method and content of learning.

10.4. We are aware that the Catholic educational network has a unique reach. It is a constellation that spans every continent, with a particular presence in low-income areas: a concrete promise of educational mobility and social justice²³. This constellation demands quality and courage: quality in pedagogical planning, teacher training and governance; courage in guaranteeing access to the poorest, in supporting fragile families, in promoting scholarships and inclusive policies. Evangelical gratuitousness is not rhetoric: it is a style of relationship, a method and an objective. Where access to education remains a privilege, the Church must push open doors and invent new paths, because “losing the poor” is equivalent to losing the school itself. This also applies to universities: an inclusive outlook and care for the heart save us from standardisation; a spirit of service revives the imagination and rekindles love.

11. New maps of hope

11.1. On the sixtieth anniversary of *Gravissimum educationis*, the Church celebrates a fruitful educational history, but it also faces the imperative of updating its proposals in light of the signs of the times. Catholic *educational constellations* are an inspiring image of how tradition and future can intertwine without contradiction: a living tradition that extends towards new forms of presence and service. Constellations are not reduced to neutral and flattened concatenations of different experiences. Instead of chains, we dare to think of constellations, their intertwining full of wonder and awakening. In them lies the ability to navigate challenges with hope but also with courageous revision, without losing fidelity to the Gospel. We are aware of the difficulties: hyper-digitalisation can fragment attention; the crisis of relationships can wound the psyche; social insecurity and inequalities can extinguish desire. Yet, it is precisely here that Catholic education can be a beacon: not a

²³ Cf. *Statistical Yearbook of the Church* (updated 31 December 2022).

nostalgic refuge, but a laboratory of discernment, pedagogical innovation and prophetic witness. Drawing new maps of hope: this is the urgency of the mandate.

11.2. I ask educational communities: disarm your words, lift up your gaze, guard your hearts. Disarm your words, because education does not advance through controversy, but through meekness that listens. Lift up your gaze. As God said to Abraham, "Look up at the sky and count the stars" (Gen. 15:5): know how to ask yourselves where you are going and why. Guard your hearts: relationships come before opinions, people before programmes. Do not waste time and opportunities: "to quote an Augustinian expression: our present is an intuition, a time we live and must take advantage of before it slips through our fingers"²⁴. In conclusion, dear brothers and sisters, I make my own the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: "shine like lights in the world, as you hold on to the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16).

11.3. I entrust this journey to the Virgin Mary, *Sedes Sapientiae*, and to all the holy educators. I ask pastors, consecrated persons, lay people, leaders of institutions, teachers and students: be servants of the world of education, choreographers of hope, tireless seekers of wisdom, credible creators of expressions of beauty. Fewer labels, more stories; fewer sterile contrasts, more harmony in the Spirit. Then our constellation will not only shine, but it will also guide us: towards the truth that sets us free (cf. Jn 8:32), towards the fraternity that consolidates justice (cf. Mt 23:8), towards the hope that does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5).

St Peter's Basilica, 27 October 2025

Vigil of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*

LEON PP. XIV

²⁴ CARDINAL ROBERT F. PREVOST, O.S.A., Message to the Catholic University of Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo on the occasion of its 18th anniversary (2016).