

## Some themes from *Drawing New Maps of Hope*

Pope Leo's Apostolic Letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope* reaffirms the crucial importance of Catholic Education. The Holy Father reminds us, quoting his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te*, that education is 'one of the highest expressions of Christian charity'. (1.3) His letter is published sixty years after the Second Vatican Council's declaration on education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, which, he says, 'has lost none of its potency'. (1.3) But he sees changes in the educational environment, 'complex, fragmented, digitised', that make it 'wise to pause and refocus our gaze on the "cosmology of Christian *paideia* [education]": a vision that, over the centuries, has been able to renew itself and positively inspire all the multifaceted aspects of education.' (1.2) He says, 'Rapid and deep changes expose children, teenagers and young people to unprecedented fragility.' (10.2).

Pope Leo gives a short survey of some of the principal schools of educational thought in the Church over the centuries, and mentions some key characters who have shaped our understanding and practice of education. From the rest of the Apostolic Letter, certain key themes emerge:

1. **Christian education as a collective task.** 'The educational community is a "we" where teachers, students, families, administrative and service staff, pastors and civil society converge to generate life' (3.1). Pope Leo uses the image of a 'constellation' of those who collaborate in the service of education. In that constellation, he says, 'each "star" has its own brightness, but together they chart a course.' (8.1)
2. **Christian education is person-centred.** 'Putting the person at the centre means... helping them discover the meaning of life, their inalienable dignity, and their responsibility towards others.' (5.1). 'A person is not a "skills profile", cannot be reduced to a predictable algorithm, but is a face, a story, a vocation.' (4.1).
3. **Christian education is holistic.** 'Christian formation embraces the entire person: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, physical.' (4.2). 'Education does not measure its value only on the axis of efficiency: it measures it according to dignity, justice, the capacity to serve the common good.' (4.2)
4. There are **serious contemporary challenges** facing Christian education.
  - a. **The digital environment.** 'Artificial intelligence and digital environments must be oriented towards the protection of dignity, justice and work; they must be governed according to criteria of public ethics and participation; they must be accompanied by adequate theological and philosophical reflection.' (9.3) 'Technologies must serve, not replace, the person; they must enrich the learning process, not impoverish relationships and communities.' (9.1)

- b. **Inequalities.** '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? Confronted 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?' (1.3).
  - c. **Environmental issues.** 'When the earth suffers, the poor suffer the most. Catholic education cannot be silent: it must combine social justice and environmental justice, promote sobriety and sustainable lifestyles.' (7.2)
5. Pope Leo offers three priorities (10:3):
- a. 'The first regards **the inner life**. Young people ask for depth; they need spaces for silence, discernment, and dialogue with their conscience and with God.'
  - b. 'The second regards **the digital human**: let us educate in a judicious use of technology and of AI, placing the person before the algorithm and harmonizing technical, emotional, social, spiritual and ecological intelligence.'
  - c. 'The third regards **unarmed and disarming peace**: let us educate in non-violent languages, reconciliation, bridges and not walls. "Blessed are the peacemakers" (*Mt* 5:9) becomes the method and content of learning.'

Pope Leo tells us that 'Catholic education has the task of rebuilding trust in a world riven with conflicts and fears, remembering that we are sons and daughters, not orphans; fraternity is born of this awareness.' (4.3) He concludes his letter by entrusting the journey of education to Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, and appeals to all those involved in education, whether teaching or learning, to 'be servants of the world of education, choreographers of hope, tireless seekers of wisdom, credible creators of expressions of beauty.' (11.3).