

Global Compact on Education

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

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THE PROJECT

1. *Introduction*

On September 12, 2019, with the *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, Pope Francis summoned representatives from around the world to Rome to sign a common pledge to build a global compact on education. This initiative is not a new and sudden idea, but the tangible translation of a vision and thinking that have been repeatedly spelled out by the Holy Father in his speeches. Moreover, this proposal is in line with the Pope's teachings which are clearly articulated in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and in the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*: two texts that have been inspired by Council and post-Council guidelines.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope invited the whole Church to be on an “outgoing” mission, as a style to be adopted in all activities. This invitation was addressed to all God's people to make a proclamation that is open “to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear”: an announcement where “no one can be excluded” (EG 23). The outgoing Church is an enterprising community (“*primerear*”), that can influence all processes of our personal and social life. And, along these lines, after having analyzed the problems of the world and of our contemporary culture, the Pope wrote that “we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a ‘mystique’ of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity...” (EG 87).

In this invitation to take care of the fragility of the people and the world we live in - an invitation that does not concern only Christians but all men and women on earth - education and formation become priorities, as they help individuals to become direct protagonists and builders of peace and the common good.

In the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us that “education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature” (n. 215). Now more than ever - in a context torn by social conflicts and lacking a common vision – there is an urgent need for a change of pace – through an integral and inclusive education, that is able to engage in patient listening and constructive dialogue – whereby unity can prevail over conflict. To this end it is highly desirable, as the Pope argues, to initiate sharing and transformation processes through all necessary initiatives, to enable future generations to build a future of hope and peace.

Based on these two important documents, with the 14 May 2020 event dedicated to the global compact on education, Pope Francis wishes to remind us of the idea that “all change, like the epochal change we are now experiencing, calls for a process of education and the creation of *a village of education* capable of forming a network of open and human relationships. That *village* should put the human person at the center, investing creatively and responsibly in long-term projects that train individuals willing to offer themselves in service to the community. What is needed, then, is an educational vision that can encompass a broad range of life experiences and learning processes, in order to enable young people, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities. Education is not limited to school and university classrooms; it is principally ensured by strengthening and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate, and the right of Churches and social communities to support and assist families in raising their children” (*Audience with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the Exchange of Greetings for the New Year*, January 9, 2020).

2. *The Compact: Openness to Others as the Foundation*

Through his *Message*, the Holy Father asks us to commit to a *global compact on education*. He does not suggest an educational action, nor does he invite us to develop a program, but he focuses on a compact or, more specifically, on an *educational covenant*. The choice of words reveals much about the style with which the Pope invites us to undertake this task: for there to be a *compact*, in fact, there must be two or more people who choose to commit to a common cause. A compact implies choosing to put our strengths at the service of the same project, albeit maintaining our mutual differences. A compact implies the ability to see others who are different from us as our travelling companions, and not as a threat to our identity, to see in them “the image of God” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, 165).

Also, the term *covenant*, in the Jewish-Christian tradition, refers to the bond of love established between God and his people – a love that, in Jesus, broke down the wall between peoples, re-establishing peace (cf. Eph. 2:14-15). On this basis, the Pope invites us to look for travelling companions on the path of education, rather than suggesting programs to follow; he invites us to establish a covenant among all those who value the uniqueness of each individual through a continuous commitment to formation. Therefore, we might say that respecting diversity is the first premise of this educational covenant. A global compact for education will primarily be based on the recognition of the indispensable character of each contribution to address the educational emergency that we have been experiencing for several decades,

as Benedict XVI himself already recognized in his *Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese and the City of Rome on the Urgent Task of Educating Young People* of January 21, 2008. And his words still ring true today: “We all have at heart the good of the people we love, especially our children, adolescents and young people. Indeed, we know that it is on them that the future of our City depends. Therefore, it is impossible not to be concerned about the formation of the new generations, about their ability to give their lives a direction and to discern good from evil, and about their health, not only physical but also moral. Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priests and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well-aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great ‘educational emergency’, confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning”.

3. *The Original Fraternity*

Fraternity is the cultural category that underpins and paradigmatically guides Francis’ papacy. Introducing fraternity into educational processes, as the Pope suggests in his *Message*, means recognizing it as a basic anthropological datum, from which all the main and positive “grammars” of a relationship can derive: encounter, solidarity, mercy, generosity, but also dialogue, exchange and, more generally, the various forms of reciprocity.

Right from the very beginning, human life is a received fact that does not originate from our own selves. On the contrary, life transcends every single man and woman, and therefore it is not something that is self-produced, but it is *given* by someone else. For believers, as pointed out in the recent joint declaration of Abu Dhabi *On Human Fraternity*, it is a matter of recognizing each other as children of the one and only Father, and therefore as brothers and sisters who are called to mutual benevolence and stewardship (cf. *Gen* 4:9). However, as Pope Francis wished to stress from the beginning of his Magisterium, the vocation to fraternal stewardship “is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone” (*Holy Mass for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry*, March 19, 2013). All humanity, in receiving life, discovers itself joined together in the bond of fraternity, which therefore manifests itself as the principle that expresses the structural reality of the human being (cf. *Laudato Sì*, n. 220). If we can choose our friends or some of our companions, we certainly cannot choose our brothers or sisters, because we are not the authors of their existence. The more fraternity is exercised, the more it does

not express primarily a moral duty, but rather the objective identity of mankind and the entire creation.

Today's throwaway culture is deeply rooted in the repeated rejection of fraternity as a constitutive element of humanity: "many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone" (*Laudato Si*, n. 202). It was precisely in this direction, in fact, that Pope Francis also framed his first *Message for the World Day of Peace* (January 1, 2014), which was aptly entitled *Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*. Today, in view of the establishment of a *global village of education*, this principle has become even more topical, becoming in a way the real point of destination of all successful educational processes. The willingness to place oneself at the service of fraternity is a testament to the full attainment of our shared humanity. We have been created not only to live "with others", but also to live "at the service of others", in a salvific and enriching reciprocity.

THE CONTEXT

1. The Breakdown of Intergenerational Solidarity

When Pope Francis presented the event of May 14, 2020 to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, he indicated what is the most serious wound that today's socio-cultural context causes to our educational commitment: "Education requires entering into sincere and genuine dialogue with young people. They are the ones who above all make us aware of the urgent need for that intergenerational solidarity which has sadly been lacking in recent years. There is, in fact, a tendency, in many parts of the world, to be self-absorbed, to defend acquired rights and privileges, and to view the world within a narrow horizon that treats the elderly with indifference and no longer welcomes the newborn. The general ageing of the world population, especially in the West, is a sad and emblematic example of this" (*Audience with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the Exchange of greetings for the New Year*, 9 January 2020).

According to Pope Francis, the ultimate roots of this tendency towards isolation and closure vis-à-vis others lies in a profound anthropological transformation, which he carefully laid out in his speech to participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life in October 2017. He stated: "Human beings seem now to find themselves at a special juncture in their history [...]. The key feature of this moment is, in a word, the rapid spread of a culture obsessively centered on the mastery of human beings – individually and as a species – over reality. Some have even spoken of an *egolatri*, a worship of the self, on whose altar everything is sacrificed, even the most cherished human affections. This approach is far from harmless, for it induces people to gaze constantly in the mirror, to the point of being unable to turn their eyes away from themselves and towards others and the larger world".

It goes without saying that it is exactly this kind of *egolatri* that generates all those fractures that our educational action is heavily affected by at all levels. We are talking about the rift between generations, between different peoples and cultures, between rich and poor parts of our population, the former increasingly richer and the latter increasingly poorer, the rift between males and females, between economics and ethics, between humanity and planet earth.

Therefore, the kind of education we need today must be able to confront this new “idolatry of the self” and find the right words to give back to all the originality and beauty of the human vocation towards others and its destiny. “Together” is the word that saves and achieves everything.

2. *Educational and Technological Times*

In his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI notes that “as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers” (n. 19). Today, one of the fundamental expressions of globalization is the development of technologies and, in particular, of technologies that pertain to people’s online life and social media, which perhaps have a deeper impact on the educational field. The use and management of these digital worlds gives rise to enormous challenges for our educational endeavors. As indicated in *Laudato Si*, although training requires constant growth and, therefore, change, “the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution” (n. 18).

New generations, in ways hitherto unknown, are forced to live with this contradiction, because the times of learning and, more profoundly, those of maturity are far removed from the times of the Internet. Hence, this often leads to a strong sense of frustration and low self-esteem and self-awareness: why can I get what I want with a “click”, but I can’t - just as quickly - become an adult person, who can make important choices and take responsibility?

Thus, the Internet and social media are radically altering both relationships between human beings, as well as individuals’ wishes and identity development, affecting different human abilities, such as memory, creativity, or the ability to focus and introspection.

We certainly do not want to ignore the fact that the web offers great opportunities to build our future, but we must not underestimate its non-neutrality, and therefore we must consider its inherent limits and possibilities: technology “in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others” (*Laudato Si*, n. 20). At the same time, by filtering any kind of reality, the virtual world, on the one hand, allows access to every corner of the planet, while on the other hand, it tends to contribute to the “globalization of indifference” which makes us slowly inured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves” (*Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2014).

Faced with the great potential and risks that the Internet embodies today, neither a constant denunciation nor a total acquittal suffices. What is needed is what Pope Francis never fails to remind us of: i.e., *discernment*. And even

more than that, we need people who can pass this attitude on to future generations. The kind of education we need today not only does not fear the complexity of reality, but strives to enable all those to whom it is addressed to dwell in this complexity and “humanize” it, in the awareness that any instrument always depends on the intentions of those who use it.

3. “E-ducating” the Question

“Psychological disaggregation”, mostly due to the previously mentioned pervasiveness of new technologies, is singled out by the Pope in his *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education* as one of the most urgent educational issues. Today our attention is constantly attracted by rapid and multiple stimuli, which make it difficult to learn to live in silence, and this is particularly true with children and young people. The time and space that youths need, to become familiar with their wishes and fears, are increasingly filled with continuous and attractive interactions that entice them and tend to fill every moment of their day. Moreover, such interactions nourish calculating, instrumental, technical rationality (rationality of *how*), and not the rationality that responds to the profound meaning of things and life (rationality of *why*). In this incredible wealth of stimuli, we experience, so to speak, a profound *dearth of interiority*, a growing difficulty in pausing, reflecting, listening to ourselves and to one another. The diversity and speed of digital stimuli often “leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant” (*Laudato Si*, n. 110). Following what various religious leaders suggested to Pope Francis, it is necessary to focus today on *educating the questions* of our youth, which are a priority compared to providing answers: it is a matter of dedicating time and space to the development of the great questions and wishes that dwell into the hearts of new generations, who from a serene relationship with themselves might fulfill the search for the transcendent.

On this subject, the *Document on the Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* reminds us of “awakening religious awareness and the need to revive this awareness in the hearts of new generations” (p. 4). For believers it is a matter of awakening in young people, with appropriate timing, the wish to delve into their inner being to know and love God, for non-believers to animate a stimulating restlessness about the meaning of things and of their own existence.

4. *Rebuilding Our Identity*

The issue of fragmented identities, or the difficulty to develop a unified vision of the self, is strongly underlined by psychologists and educators, who see an increasing emergence of suffering among young people linked to this very problem. The indications given by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* on the throwaway culture provide a useful inspiration to dig deeper into this matter; in fact, we read that “the throwaway culture affects both excluded human beings and things” (n. 22). Among the people who are most affected by the throwaway culture we find the elderly and children: within the consumerist rationale, the former are discarded because they are no longer productive, the latter because they are not productive yet. However, a society that casts the elderly aside is a society that refuses to address its past, its memory and its roots: “The elderly are wisdom. And may the elderly learn to speak with the young and the young learn to speak with the elderly. They have the wisdom of a village, the elderly” (*Address of the Holy Father to Faithful in Pietralcina*, 17 March 2018). On the other hand, casting children aside reveals a lack of hope, vision and future, since children “bring their way of seeing reality, with a trusting and pure gaze” (*General Audience*, March 18, 2015).

So, just as the present time is poor without a past and a future, so too our personal identity is empty without others, because it would lack both memory and perspective; this is why, with an impoverished soul and without hope, contemporary man is faced with insecurity and instability. It is therefore necessary to form individuals who can rebuild the broken connection with our memory and our hope in the future: young people who, aware of their roots and open to newness, know how to rebuild a more peaceful contemporary identity.

5. *The Environmental Crisis as a Relational Crisis*

The drive toward a renewed educational commitment to interiority and identity, that are increasingly prompted by our globalized and digital world, requires an unbroken connection with the wider social, cultural and environmental context surrounding it. Human beings and nature must be considered in their interdependence, because “the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation” (*Laudato Si*, n. 48). The lack of care for our inner being is reflected in a lack of care for the exterior, and vice versa: “Disregard for the

duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth” (*Laudato Sì*, n. 70). But this happens “if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world” (*Laudato Sì*, n. 11). Hence, of course, the need for an *integral ecological education*. The environmental challenge essentially refers to a more radical relational challenge, in which the future of generations and the planet itself is at stake.

According to *Laudato Sì*, considering the environmental question as inherently relational “prevents us from seeing nature as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it” (n. 139). Once again, this is an ontological and anthropological question, before being a moral one: “there can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (*Laudato Sì*, n. 118). Therefore, the integral ecology the Pope refers to should not be understood individualistically, as a sort of romantic and moral ecologism regarding nature’s disenchanted beauty, but stems from the full awareness that “everything is connected”, “everything is related”, as it is reiterated several times in *Laudato Sì* (cf. nn. 70, 92, 117, 120, 138, 142).

It is therefore only in the context of reciprocity between interior and exterior, identity and otherness, self and other, that it is possible to rediscover - as Pope Francis says - “a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things” (*Laudato Sì*, n. 233) and, thus, to cherish them through a renewed and conscious way of life.

THE VISION

1. *Unity in Difference: a New Thinking*

At the origin of today's fragmentations and oppositions, often leading to various forms of conflict, lies the fear of diversity (see also the recent *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2020). Therefore, restoring the fabric of unity and encounter requires a cognitive leap forward to radically change our usual logic. For as long as diversity and difference are considered hostile to unity, war will always be on our doorstep, ready to break out in all its destructive power. Hence, the first indispensable step to build a new humanism is to educate people to a new thought, that can reconcile unity and diversity, equality and freedom, identity and otherness. So, as *Evangelii Gaudium* states, for the flower of a new educational style to blossom, "it must reach the places where new stories and paradigms are formed" (n. 74). In a nutshell, it is a matter of understanding that not only diversity does not hinder unity, nor does it destabilize it, but - on the contrary - it is indispensable to it, it is its horizon of possibilities: unity and difference are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary they imply each other. Otherwise, we would be faced with a stifling unity, which kills otherness, making others impossible, as well as ourselves; or we would experience a chaotic disorder, in which individual identities are mutually indifferent to each other, making any encounter impossible.

Therefore, we must practice a kind of thinking that expresses unity in diversity and considers differences as a blessing to our identity and not as a cumbersome obstacle to self-fulfillment. Educators must primarily work at this level because - as Pope Francis mentioned during his visit to Roma Tre University - "wars begin within us when we are unable to open ourselves up to others, when we are unable to speak with others", when - in other words - otherness is seen as an obstacle to the affirmation of our identity.

In educational practice, this new thinking leads to a broad dialogical exercise that freely involves anyone who wishes to work towards an authentic culture of encounter, mutual enrichment and fraternal listening: "In disagreements, which are also an unavoidable part of life, we should always remember that we are brothers and sisters, and therefore teach others and teach ourselves not to consider our neighbor as an enemy or as an adversary to be eliminated" (*Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2014), because

“when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one” (*Laudato Si*, n. 92).

In this sense, the role of interreligious dialogue is of crucial importance, since “it is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 250). When we engage in dialogue, “we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation” (*ibid.*).

In the light of these considerations, we cannot but underline that this notion of dialogue and peace must increasingly enlighten and guide our elected representatives, who have been entrusted with the political and economic leadership of civil society. No genuine political action is possible outside the notion and practice of dialogue and peace.

2. *The Relationship at the Center*

Among the indispensable values to rebuild an educational covenant, it seems important to dwell on the value of the *educational relationship*. In the words of Pope Francis, we can in fact reiterate that “while not forgetting that young people look to the words and example of adults, we should also be well aware that they themselves have much to offer, thanks to their enthusiasm and commitment. To say nothing of their thirst for truth, which constantly reminds us of the fact that hope is not utopian and that peace is always a good that can be attained. We have seen this in the way many young people have become active in calling the attention of political leaders to the issue of climate change. Care for our common home ought to be a concern of everyone and not the object of ideological conflict between different views of reality or, much less, between generations” (*Audience with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the Exchange of Greetings for the New Year*, January 9, 2020).

As our schooling experience confirms, a fruitful education does not primarily depend on the preparation of the teacher or the skills of the pupil, but on the quality of the relationship that is established between them. Several education scholars have pointed out that it is not the teacher who educates the pupil in a one-way transmission, nor do pupils alone build their knowledge, but rather it is their relationship that educates both teachers and pupils in a dialogical exchange that presupposes and exceeds them at the same time.

This is, properly, what it means to put the *person*, who is relationship, at the center.

This also involves taking concrete responsibility for the initial situations in which many boys and girls in the world find themselves today. In fact, we cannot hide the fact that there is a risk that the discourse on the centrality of the person in every educational process might become very abstract if we are not willing to open our eyes to the real situation of poverty, suffering, exploitation, denied possibilities, in which much of the world's children find themselves in. And especially if we are not willing to do anything about it. As Pope Francis likes to put it, we must always act by connecting our head, our heart and then our hands.

3. *The World Can Change*

An additional and fundamental principle we should put back at the center of the educational agenda is the one whereby *the world can change*. Without this principle, human ambition, especially the ambition of our youngest brothers and sisters, is deprived of the hope and energy that is needed to transcend oneself, to lean more toward others. This issue was clearly identified in Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*. In fact, "sometimes *globalization* is viewed in fatalistic terms, as if the dynamics involved were the product of anonymous impersonal forces or structures independent of the human will" (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 42). Actually this is not the case, and the cultural, historical and economic events happening around us, however great they may be, should not be read as indisputable facts, that are determined by absolute laws.

This is the message that Pope Francis wished to convey to young people when, on January 13, 2017, on the occasion of the publication of the *Preparatory Document of the Synod on Youth*, he wrote them a letter. One of the most moving passages from that letter is the following: "In Krakow, at the opening of the last World Youth Day, I asked you several times: 'Can we change things?' And you shouted: 'yes!'. That shout came from your young and youthful hearts, which do not tolerate injustice and cannot bow to a 'throwaway culture' nor give in to the globalization of indifference. Listen to the cry arising from your inner selves!!"

Today, this invitation is addressed to all those who have political, administrative, religious and educational responsibilities: it is time to listen to the cry that rises from the depths of the hearts of our young people. It is a cry for peace, a cry for justice, a cry for brotherhood, a cry for outrage, a cry for responsibility and a commitment to change regarding all the wicked fruits generated by the current throwaway culture.

And it is exactly in the power of this cry coming from young people - which finds ever more space in the many manifestations to which they give life - that everyone, especially those engaged in education, must find the strength to nourish that revolution of tenderness which will save our world with its too many wounds.

Therefore, the need to stimulate the attractiveness of healthy risk-taking, and awaken our restlessness about reality, emerges with all its strength. To dare being restless means to risk exiting from ourselves, which entails “running the risk - as we read in *Evangelii Gaudium* - of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction” (n. 88). Only in this way will passion recover its momentum and become the protagonist of our existence, educating us to conscious and responsible lifestyles. It is precisely by using our own space of freedom well, in fact, that we contribute to personal and community growth: “We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread” (*Laudato Sì*, n. 212).

THE MISSION

1. *Education and Society*

In his *Message for the Launch of the Compact on Education*, as already mentioned at the beginning, Pope Francis strongly emphasizes the urgency of establishing a “village of education” in which efforts are made to create a network of human and open relationships. He also added that such an enterprise will not be possible without the activation, by everyone, of a triple courage: first of all the courage to put the person at the center; secondly the courage to invest our best energies with creativity and responsibility; thirdly, and finally, the courage to form people who are willing to put themselves at the service of their community.

Elaborating on the first point, that of the courage to put the person at the center, Pope Francis expressed himself as follows: “To do so, we must agree to promote formal and informal educational processes that cannot ignore the fact that the whole world is deeply interconnected, and that we need to find other ways, based on a sound anthropology, of envisioning economics, politics, growth and progress. In the development of an integral ecology, a central place must be given to the value proper to each creature in its relationship to the people and realities surrounding it, as well as a lifestyle that rejects the throw-away culture” (*Message for the launch of the Compact on Education*).

At this point we have realized that there is a profound link between the encyclical letter *Laudato Si* and the initiative of the Compact on Education. Therefore, it is a matter of courageously acknowledging that the environmental and relational crisis we are experiencing can be tackled by devoting our attention to educating those who tomorrow will be called to guard our common home.

Education, aimed at creating an “ecological citizenship” (*Laudato Si*, n. 211), can become an effective instrument to build a more welcoming society that is focused on the care of others and of creation, with a long-term outlook. In other words, our educational engagement is not addressed only to the direct beneficiaries, children and young people, but it is a service to society as a whole, which is renewed by educating.

Moreover, our educational focus can provide an important meeting ground to rebuild a network of relationships between different institutions and social realities: to educate a child, a dialogue is needed between families, schools,

religions, associations and civil society broadly speaking to pursue a common goal. Starting from the urgency of formation, therefore, it is possible to counteract the “silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion” (*Laudato Sì*, n. 46). We might say that education can now be understood as a path of formation for younger generations and, at the same time, as an opportunity to review and renew our entire society which, in an effort to transmit the best of itself to the youngest, discerns its own behavior and possibly improves it.

2. Tomorrow Demands the Best We Have Today

According to Pope Francis, the second courageous step towards a new compact on education consists in having the strength, as a (ecclesial, social, associative, political) community, to offer to education the best available energies we have. It is, of course, a courageous choice because every choice also involves favoring one aspect to the detriment of others. How many institutions today put the best they have at the service of young people?

If we think about most of our contemporary companies, we can clearly see how the most creative and proactive forces are placed at the service of production and the market. The best young graduates and the brightest minds are often employed in large profit-oriented companies, rather than in the pursuit of the common good. At the same time, prevailing consumerism requires the absence, or only the faint presence, of formed people, who are endowed with a critical spirit and a relational drive. As a matter of fact, consumerist ideology feeds on individualism and incompetence in self-management, because it is outside the community that we are most fragile, and it is in the incapacity of clear-headedness that we meekly respond to propaganda stimuli.

The courage of a real and radical reversal of course is needed: given the situation we have described, an investment is urgently required, because it is only through education that we can realistically hope for a positive change through long-term planning. Whatever will be in the future must rely on the best of what we have today. Whoever will be there in the future is entitled to the best of who is here today.

3. Educating to Serve, Educating is to Serve.

Lastly, the third act of courage Pope Francis calls for is to form individuals who are willing to put themselves at the service of the community. To be honest, this indication sheds an apt light on a truly decisive element of every educational action: educators cannot succeed fully in their educational action

unless they commit to forming and shaping – in the people entrusted to their care – a full and real openness to the service of others, of all others, of the whole human community, starting with those who find themselves in the most exhausting and challenging situations.

The true service of education is education to service.

Moreover, educational research also increasingly recognizes the central dimension of service to others and the community as a tool and as an end of education itself. Think for example about the great development of *Service-Learning*. This kind of research shows how service can be not only be a training activity among others (the importance of volunteer work in the training of young people is well recognized), but more radically how it can become the fundamental method through which all knowledge and skills can be transmitted and acquired. We could point to this process as a development from education *to service* to education *as service*, whereby our brethren are both the way and the goal of education.

Lastly, we want to dedicate a few final words to Hannah Arendt, who was able to indicate in an effective and synthetic way what is really at stake in every educational gesture. These are her enlightening words: “Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (*Between Past and Future*, The Viking Press, New York 1961, 196).

SUGGESTED THEMES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- “Mystique” of living together
- Village of Education
- Fraternity and peace
- Egotry
- Positive Internet resources
- Education to silence
- Throwaway culture
- Thoughts of unity
- Restlessness in searching
- Revolution of tenderness
- Ecological Citizenship