An International Congress entitled “ON CATHOLIC EDUCATION, CULTURES, AND RELIGIONS: A POST-PANDEMIC CONVERSATION”, organised by the same university with the LUMSA University and SOPHIA, concerning the fifth thematic area of the Global Compact on Education: Cultures and Religions, was held at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila on 28-29 April 2023. The Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, Card José Tolentino de Mendonça, addressed the opening message to the participants through a video-message, where he spoke about the crisis of rationality and religiosity and the contribution of religions on the issues of sustainability and education.

The conference was attended, among others, by Prof. Maria Cinque and Prof. Carina Rossa from LUMSA and members of the Committee for the Global Compact on Education, and Prof. Roberto Catalano from SOPHIA University and his university’s GCE contact person.

We extend our dearest and most affectionate greetings to all.

We would also like to offer our apologies for not being able to be present in person at this important event. However, we did not want to leave you without a word of our own as a contribution, even if only virtual, to this conversation on education.

Since Pope Francis nominated me Prefect of the New Dicastery for Culture and Education, in our discourses on education we frequently refer to the Global Compact on Education, the educational project launched by the Holy Father in September 2019. As you well know, the aim of this project is to create an educational alliance between different stakeholders from the world of schools and universities, international institutions and major religions, culture, entertainment and sport, with the aim of educating the whole of humanity in universal brotherhood.

We would like to thank your university for accepting the invitation to be the lead university, together with Sophia University in Loppiano (Italy), for the research of the thematic area ‘Culture and Religions’. This international conference is a
special opportunity to together develop this area entrusted to you of ‘Culture and Religions’. Pope Francis in May of last year (2022), speaking to the Rectors of the Universities of the Roman region, reminded them how in this time of crisis we must learn, together with the young students of our universities, how to live the crisis and overcome it together1. In this way the crisis, which as we know means growth, can be transformed into a kairós, an opportune moment that opens up new paths full of hope.

To cope with this ‘general crisis’2 everyone must do their part.

*On Catholic Education, Cultures, and Religions: A Post-Pandemic Conversation*

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

Jose Tolentino Cardinal de Mendonça

Pope Francis, in his address to the Rectors of the Universities of the Roman region, noted how the crisis, which as we know means growth, can be transformed into a kairós, an opportune moment that opens up new paths full of hope.

The crisis of rationality.

If institutions such as schools, international organisations and the great religions have the task of guiding and pointing out paths to overcome the educational, humanitarian and spiritual crisis, we believe that universities have the task of guiding man through the modern crisis of rationality. We find ourselves, in fact, in a widespread crisis of reason, where man in trying to solve problems does not allow himself to be led by confrontation and reasonable dialogue, but allows himself to be carried away by arbitrariness and ideologies that inevitably lead to conflicts and wars, as we have seen with the recent Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

In modern times, as Pope Benedict XVI recalled3, the Church has had to fight *ad intra* against attempts to diminish the reasonableness of faith by reducing it to voluntarism or a mere moral message. So today the Church must also fight *ad extra* against the irrational present in society; the nihilisms, relativisms and positivisms that delegitimise reason, or reduce it to the narrow spaces of empiricism.

This task of the Church to be the guardian of reason, (despite the irrational currents into which it has fallen at times in the past), is legitimised by the fact that it is not only founded on faith in a God who from the beginning is the logos (‘Logos means both reason and word - a reason that is creative and capable of communicating itself but, precisely, as reason’4), but also because in its mission over the centuries it has always accompanied evangelisation with instruction and education, even placing itself “at the very origin of the University as an institution, and has always revealed itself to be an incomparable centre of creativity and irradiation of knowledge for the good of humanity”.5

The universities, claiming their academic autonomy to free themselves from all political and economic power, have a duty to be the critical conscience within society, unmasking the ideologies that disguise themselves as programmes of liberation and progress. Faced with the tyranny of political and economic powers that impose themselves by force of arms and money, the university has the duty to call man back to reason, because "not acting according to reason is contrary to the nature of God".6 How sad it is to see how, in the past, men of great intelligence have been guilty of irrational attacks on humanity, making man the guinea pig of absurd experiments or the victim of weapons of mass destruction, and in the present, how great luminaries put themselves at the service of selfish interests.

Universities must therefore know how to educate to a 'more human rationality', always in search of the truth, the whole truth, and continuously open to confrontation and dialogue. A 'broader reason' that recognises and understands the underlying rationalities of every culture and is open to the Transcendent, because 'every reason, which in the face of the divine is deaf and rejects religion in the sphere of subcultures, is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures'.7

In confrontation and dialogue with other universities and with society, the Catholic university presents itself in its clear identity as an interlocutor of equal dignity, and with a precise idea of the university.

Our age, marked by this crisis of rationality, a consequence of the crisis of humanity, where technicism and consumerism have reduced beings to users and consumers, becomes the propitious moment (kairós) for a new evangelisation that re-proposes the meaning of man, of life, of the world,

---

1 PAPA FRANCESCO, Address of the Holy Father Francis to the Rectors of the Universities of Lazio, 16-5-2022.
3 BENEDICT XVI, Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and reflections. Meeting with representatives of science. Regensburg, 12-9 2006
4 Idem.
5 JOHN PAUL II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, n.1. In n.8 Pope John Paul II recalls the Church’s ‘long and fruitful experience in the university sector’.
6 BENEDICT XVI, o.c.
7 Idem.
recovering the centrality of the person who is not a mere user or consumer, but a divine being created in Christ Jesus in the image and likeness of God. We are the custodians of the highest anthropology that has ever appeared on the face of the earth, which sees man created by God in his image and likeness. This is the greatest truth of which we are the bearers and which we have the duty to proclaim even in our universities, because as the Pontiff reminded his brothers and sisters representing world religions, ‘We cannot keep from the new generations the truths that give meaning to life’.\(^8\) And taking up this idea a few months later, he ironically stated that to want to silence the truths about God out of respect for those who do not believe, would be like burning books out of respect for those who do not think, cancelling art out of respect for the blind, or turning off music forever out of respect for the deaf.\(^9\)

3) Educating in the service of others, welcoming above all those most in need, being open to welcoming others while respecting nature, educating to a more sober and dignified life for all. To this end, we urge you to reactivate and revive university pastoral work in your university in accordance with the indications of Saint Pope John Paul II.\(^10\) Soon our Dicastery will be organizing a conference for the revitalisation of university pastoral work in Catholic universities throughout the world.

The university must not run away from its responsibility to evangelise culture, since ‘every Catholic university offers an important contribution to the Church in its work of evangelisation’ as a ‘primary and privileged place for a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture’, between ‘Christian thought and modern sciences’, between ‘faith and reason’.\(^11\)

We warmly invite you, in light of the new vision launched by Pope Francis with the creation of a single Dicastery encompassing Culture and Education\(^12\), to rethink research in your subject area in the light of this new perspective.

Now, as a ‘conversation’ on education, as the title of this International Conference indicates, we want to ‘converse’ with you on some related topics:

The crisis of religiosity.

The crisis of rationality mentioned above is accompanied by the crisis of religiosity. A religiosity that is not rational becomes irrational; magic, superstition.

Modern society seems to have unilaterally decided to banish the discussion of religious issues from public debate. "It must be recognised that 'among

\(^{9}\) POPE FRANCIS, Address of the Holy Father Francis. Meeting on the Global Educational Pact "Religions and Education", 5-10-2021

\(^{10}\) POPE FRANCIS, Greeting to participants at the conference "Lines of Development of the Global Educational Pact", 1 June 2022.

\(^{11}\) Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Ex corde Ecclesiae, n.41 and General Norms Art. 6.

\(^{12}\) POPE FRANCIS, Praedicate Evangelium, 19 March 2022.
the most important causes of the crisis of the modern world are an anaesthetised human conscience and the estrangement from religious values, as well as the predominance of individualism and materialistic philosophies that deify man and put worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendent principles” (FT 275).

The non-involvement of the world’s great religions in the shaping of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has come as quite a surprise. Yet the vast majority of humanity is composed of believers who base their view of reality on their religious faith. “The majority of the inhabitants of the planet declare themselves believers, and this should push religions to enter into a dialogue with each other oriented towards caring for nature, defending the poor, and building a network of respect and fraternity.” (LS 201). Religions are still relegated to a subjective level and limited to matters of faith. Even Pope Francis in the encyclical Fratelli Tutti emphasises that “It is not acceptable that only the powerful and THE scientists have a voice in public debate. There must be a space for reflection that proceeds from a religious background that gathers together centuries of experience and wisdom. (FT 275).

Faced with the logic of consumption and disposability, religions propose a sobriety of life and solidarity, to avoid waste and thus allow greater sharing of the earth’s goods: “we know that approximately one third of the food we produce is wasted” (LS 50). The capitalist world will never propose the ideal of sobriety and simplicity because this naturally goes against its logic and interests. The lifestyle of the richest part of the planet contributes with its insensitivity to this problem of waste and dehumanisation.

Religions have always played the role of prophetic denunciation of the evils present in society, the world, nature, etc. without subjecting themselves to the forces of political or economic power. Above all, they raise their voice in defence of the poorest and most fragile. Pope Francis points the finger at the weakness of international politics: “the submission of politics to technology and finance is shown in the failure of world summits on the environment. There are too many particular interests, and very easily economic interest comes to prevail over the common good and to manipulate information so as not to see its projects affected” (LS 50). The Pope repeatedly denounces the environmental crisis as being a consequence of the social crisis: “There are not two separate crises, one environmental and another social, but a single and complex socio-environmental crisis”. (LS 139)

The same concept had already been addressed earlier in the encyclical Laudato Si’: “One cannot claim that the empirical sciences completely explain life, the intimate essence of all creatures, and the totality of reality. This would mean unduly overstepping their limited methodological boundaries” (LS 199). “The Church ‘has a public role that is not exhausted in its activities of assistance or education’ but is committed to the ‘promotion of man and universal brotherhood’. It does not aspire to compete for earthly powers, but rather to offer itself as "a family among families - this is the Church - open to witness [...] to today's world faith, hope and love towards the Lord and towards those whom He loves with predilection, a house with open doors’ (FT 276).

The world’s various religions can join efforts to contribute to today’s world in various fields:

The contribution of religions on the issue of sustainability.

Religions defend nature as God’s creation and a sign of God’s presence in the world, therefore sacred. “For the Judeo-Christian tradition, to say creation means saying more than nature, because it has to do with a project of God’s love, where every creature has value and meaning” (LS 76). Creation is entrusted as a gift to human custody. Disproportionate exploitation of nature is therefore a sin.
The Holy Father also warns: 'A crime against nature is a crime against ourselves, and a sin against God' (LS 13).

**The contribution of religions on the subject of education.**

Religions have always accompanied the spread of faith with the widespread dissemination of charitable and social structures among which educational institutions stand out in particular. The first universities emerged from the very heart of religions.

The world religions, in harmony with the **Global Compact on Education** project, emphasise three fundamental aspects of education that we wish to reiterate:

- **Educating as regards the centrality of the human person** through a custom tailored education that aims at an integral formation, where the spiritual dimension has its due importance.

- **Investing the best energies in the education of** the younger generations, through quality education for all.

- **Educating the sense of community service**, sobriety and special attention to those most in need.

To achieve these goals of the **Global Compact on Education**, Pope Francis indicates seven paths or commitments that we can summarise as:

1. Putting the person at the centre
2. Seeing in the family the first and indispensable educator who helps the school to form its students in the art of welcoming others, especially the most fragile.
3. Renewing economics, politics, and the idea of progress in the service of society and the environment in the perspective of an integral ecology.

Adhering to the ideal of fraternity means:

- Recognising the **equal dignity of every human person** by defending the rights of all, especially the most fragile.
- Accept **diversity as an asset** and a gift by promoting the value of encounter and dialogue, and recognising the other as a partner of equal dignity.
- Putting the **we before the I**, overcoming the culture of individualism in favour of solidarity.

In conclusion, we would like to urge you to courageously pursue the mission that your beautiful university has been carrying out for centuries for the growth of the Asian world, by continuing to be a point of reference and excellence for the entire Continent and beyond. May your University always remain an inspiring University.

The Holy Father, in view of the Jubilee of 2025, which is already just around the corner, invites us all to be ever attentive ‘pilgrims of hope’, with the special task of keeping society vigilant. Catholic universities must always be vigilant, in order to be a critical conscience within society that helps by producing rationality, because as history unfortunately still teaches us today, from the sleep of reason only monsters are generated.

May the “Angelic Doctor” St. Thomas, patron of your University, bless you and all the Catholic universities of the world. Thank you.

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça
Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education

Vatican City, 19 April 2023

---

Another contribution of religions is on the theme of fraternity (and I am nearing the end).

The ideal of fraternity belongs to the DNA of every religion insofar as they all believe in the one Creator God, from whom all his children come, who, having all the same Father, are consequently all brothers.

Universal brotherhood, which was the ideal of ‘fraternité’ of the French Revolution, of the ‘spirit of brotherhood’ of the 1st article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and of ‘human brotherhood’ of the Abu Dhabi Document of 4-02-2019, is the main objective of the **Global Compact on Education** in which the great religions have always recognised themselves, even if over the centuries, deformed visions of their faith have led them not a few times to engage in fratricidal wars.
Video message from the Undersecretary of the DCE to the participants of the X Semitas Seminar - Peru

HUMANISING EDUCATION BY EXPLORING NEW PATHS

The Undersecretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, Monsignor Melchor Sanchez de Toca, sent a video message to the 10th “Semitas” Seminar of the Peruvian-German school Reina del Mundo. This Seminar entitled “Humanising Education: the Challenges of the 21st Century”, which was held on 21 April, had as its objective the adherence of this educational organisation to the Global Educational Pact.

Good morning dear friends. A very cordial greeting from the Dicastery for Culture and Education. It is a source of satisfaction and pride for me to address these words to the participants of the 10th Semitas Seminar “Humanising Education”. I was pleased to note the name you have given to this Seminar: “Semitas” meaning, ‘paths’, a name with biblical evocations. Our Lord Jesus Christ defined Himself as the path (the Senda) to arrive at Truth and Life. "Semitas" are the paths that the righteous must tread, this is how the book of Psalms begins: “Blessed is the man who walks in the ways of the Lord”.

The task you set yourselves in this seminar is to explore new paths through which humanity can pass. The theme you have chosen, ‘Humanising Education’, is highly topical. As you know, the last Pontiffs have recalled that we are faced with an educational emergency. We are also facing a climate emergency, as we can all easily understand. We are going through a time of climate change with extreme phenomena. We understand that everyone’s contribution is needed to improve the climate. Likewise, culture is like the spiritual climate that surrounds us, like the atmosphere we breathe and in which we move. If this atmosphere is toxic, people will suffer infirmities and their consequences. We must all help to change and improve this ‘spiritual atmosphere’, just as all countries and individuals must make an effort to preserve and protect the environment, as Pope Francis asks us to do in his Encyclical Laudato Si’, on the care of the common home.

The task of evangelising culture, therefore, can be simply to condemn and destroy, but to save. To save sometimes it is necessary to amputate, it is necessary to cut in order to achieve health. There is no cultural field more important than anthropology where the great questions of what it means to be a man and a woman, to be a creature living God’s call, to be in a mutual relationship between male and female, to be intelligent in the face of artificial intelligence, and the proposal of human rights for animals is settled. The effort to rethink what the human person is and to communicate this to our contemporaries is fundamental. It is in this context that I want to remind you of the Educational Pact that Pope Francis launched to the whole world and especially to the Church. The Educational Pact stems from the conviction that we must all work for the future of humanity, and for this we cannot act alone. No one is saved alone, the Pope repeated many times, quoting an African proverb that says that ‘to educate a child you need a whole village’. Translated concretely, this means that the effort to educate the new generations and transmit the values that will make tomorrow’s world a better world cannot be delegated to schools alone. Not even families alone can take on this task, not even the parish or the religious community where one is brought up in the faith.

A joint effort is needed. This is why the Pope invites us to create alliances between all those who have the responsibility and task of educating young people: schools, families, parishes, cultural associations, sports clubs, town halls, local organisations, all must contribute to the effort of education, because at the end of the day the recipient of education is always the same, the family, the parish and the school. The goal is to create alliances not only within the Church but with all people of goodwill who share our ideals. I wish you all the best for the work you are about to begin on the day of Saint Anselm, Doctor of the Church. From the tomb of the fisherman of Galilee I invoke upon you the blessing and protection of the Blessed Virgin. Many graces.

The effort to rethink what man is and tell it to contemporary man is fundamental. It is in this context that I want to remind you of the Educational Pact that Pope Francis launched to the whole world and especially to the Church.

translated in environmental terms as the effort to sanitise the surrounding cultural atmosphere of our environment with the light of the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ said of himself that he was sent ‘not to condemn, but to save’. Our task therefore is not
The 5th of October 2021 was an historic day for the world of education. For the first time, the leaders of the world’s great religions came together to talk about education. The invitation came from the Holy Father Pope Francis, who wanted to dialogue with his brothers and sisters of other religions in order to make an Educational Pact together to safeguard and to protect the originality of each religious tradition. Each of the 20 participants, among whom Prof. Stefania Giannini, UNESCO's Director for Education, was a special envoy, expressed some thoughts on education starting from their own religion, and these contributions were collected last year in a beautiful publication by the Vatican Publishing House in a bilingual volume (Italian and English). A year and a half later, OIEC, with the collaboration of the Holy See's Dicastery for Culture and Education, published a booklet in four languages, with a summary of the participants’ speeches, to keep the memory of that historic day alive. This dossier can be downloaded from the site:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Lt46mYwjlZ9vdwv09Cp52PX0kmucfY6V?usp=share_link

Publication of the Pamphlet commemorating the GCE Meeting of Representatives of Religions

REMEMBERING IS LIVING

A famous saying goes: ‘To remember is to live’. Certainly remembering makes one live and relive when the remembrance concerns something beautiful and important, which must not be forgotten. As is the case with the ‘Meeting of Representatives of Religions’ that took place in the Vatican on 5 October 2021. For the first time, the spiritual leaders of the major religions sat around a table, together with Pope Francis, to talk together about education. All of them, as in an orchestra where each one plays his or her own instrument, took part, creating an unexpected symphony, a hymn to education, as Unesco’s Deputy Director General Stefania Giannini also stressed in her speech at that meeting: ‘Today we have heard a common language from the world’s spiritual traditions on the fundamental role of education in promoting the universal values of care, respect and solidarity. An event like this cannot and must not be forgotten, which is why this booklet aims to keep alive (revive) that symphony whose sounds echo in these pages.

In the introduction to the beautiful volume commemorating this event published in 2022 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana entitled Religions and Education, Towards a Global Compact on Education, we read: ‘This world meeting of the Representatives of Religions takes on historical significance. It is a further step in a long journey of dialogue and participation towards unity. We are all invited to put ourselves at the service of the common good by promoting an open and inclusive education.

In his speech, Pope Francis uttered the phrase that has become a slogan taken up several times since then: ‘We cannot hide the truths that give meaning to life from the new generations’. This booklet is intended as a further and humble response to the invitation to remember, to relive, not to be silent.

Vatican City, February 28, 2023

José Tolentino Card. de Mendonça
"ARTIFICIAL 'INTELLIGENCE' AND EDUCATION

During the Lifelong Learning (Adult Education) course I am teaching this semester at university, a student asked me to my surprise: "Professor, explain to us what Chat-GPT is". Throughout the course I had in fact referred several times to Chat-GPT, taking it for granted that my students, all digital natives and millennials, knew better than I. (who am a BBT: Born Before Technology), what it was. This is the new and revolutionary linguistic tool launched last November (2022) called ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer, translatable into 'pre-instructed transformer generator of dialogue programmes') capable of dialoguing with humans to such an extent that it is almost impossible to recognise whether the person interacting is a human being or a machine (this is an exponential evolution of artificial intelligence that began with the first rudimentary experiments in the 1950s by Turing, the 'father' of computer science). This new tool of so-called 'Intelligence * Artificial Intelligence about which a lot is being said in recent months, and also inappropriately, is rapidly changing various sectors of society and especially the world of education. Some educators, see it more as a threat rather than an opportunity, an extraordinary opportunity to improve teaching and learning. What we need to fear is in fact not this tool (which is only a machine) but the man who will use it. As educators, we must be attentive and open to the novelties of our time, and be able to grasp the positive aspect of each new discovery in order to know how best to exploit the new technologies for the growth of people.

Chat-CPT is the continuation of a revolution that started decades ago with the appearance of the first computers and the Web. Search engines (Google, Yahoo, Safari, etc.) had already revolutionised the way we learn and do research. In fact, before computers and the Internet, our studies and research required us to spend a lot of time going to libraries and scrolling through the various books and encyclopaedias in search of the necessary information. Moreover, our research was limited to the volumes that were available in the library, with the consequence that the best universities were those that had the most books (such as Harvard with its sixteen million books). With search engines, on the other hand, anyone, anywhere in the world, can access an immeasurable amount of sources in a very short time, which can be easily selected, with an enormous saving of time (one no longer has to go to libraries and search through thousands of books) and access to an infinitely greater range of data than a physical library can offer us.

Now with this new Chat-GPT tool, it will take even less time because it not only offers a list of bibliographic documents to consult (as search engines do), but even produces complete and well-crafted texts that evolve ('generative chats') in dialogue with us. I must admit that I have been very surprised by the quality of the texts produced (in spite of the limitations encountered) and I am making increasing use of them in my work with a view to improving the quality of my teaching more and more. Various sectors feel threatened, such as language translators, journalists (there are newspapers and magazines with articles written entirely by Chat-GPT) and even teachers who fear being replaced by this tool. Teachers will also have to review the way they assess students: will it still be appropriate to give written homework when one cannot distinguish whether a text was written by a living being or a robot? Another issue concerns the 'digital divide': will the advancement of Artificial Intelligence close the digital divide, both geographically and internally, or will it increase the differences even more? Likewise, would it not be appropriate to include in the Global Compact on Education the topic of globalising the benefits of Artificial Intelligence? We are still at the beginning of this new challenge, the performance of this instrument is amazing and constantly being improved, and all future developments are not yet foreseeable. However, we are confident in the wisdom of man who will be able to capitalise on this incredible opportunity for the development of all of humanity.

Fr. Ezio Lorenzo Bono, CSF
of the Secretariat for the Global Compact on Education

* I put 'intelligence' in brackets because I consider it inappropriate to call intelligent what is merely the result of data processing, achieved by digital circuits 'mechanically' performing operations, without any intentionality. There is very little 'intelligent' in this. So rather than 'Artificial Intelligence' I would call it 'Complex Data Processing'. 