

Note to the International Conference by FCAPP Bologna Group

session 1: Dealing with the scandal of youth unemployment: opportunities and educational processes in the digital age

Introduction

The development of a civilization comes from the passing on of knowledge from one generation to another. This means not only knowledge but also the ideas, values and social ethics underlying behaviour¹ mainly as stated by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura: mortals live by mutual trade and as runners passing on the torch of life.*²

According to Karl Polanyi,³ the civilization of the nineteenth century, which was founded on four institutions: the system of balance of power between European States, the basic international aura that symbolized a unique organization in the world economy, the self-regulating market, source of economic prosperity, and the liberal state, all collapsed following the outbreak of the First World War, which put an end to these four institutions. Following the great transformation that took place at the turn of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, today we are living through a new major transformation, not a crisis. It started in the late eighties of the last century, with the advent of the internet and the rise of globalization, an ongoing financial and economic crisis exploded a decade ago at the same time as awareness of a potential environmental crisis. The political and economic - financial institutions are striving to find answers to the current economic crisis, with a plan to exit from the crisis through the use of digital technology and robotics, not fully understanding the great transformation now taking place. In fact, the increased use of robotics and digital technology is accelerating this transformation, with permanent effects on future social systems, production and consumption. What can be seen more and more is the emotional state of the individual especially in Western economies, a fear of what is new and of hope, not in the future, but in a return to the glories and *status quo* of the past, where the entrenched landmarks reassured the individual : an affirmation of the principle of identity as an element of stability. There is a risk

¹N. Ferguson, *The decline of the West*, 2013

²*Inter se mortales mutua vivunt et quasi cursores vitae lampada tradunt*

³Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation*, 1944

that democracies and politics today fail to grasp the great changes of our time: their vision is tied to the localised and short term, to election deadlines and they find it hard to acknowledge that the world is changing. The relational model remains the same. The politician chases after the masses and promises to fulfill their demands and this raises hopes. We have to understand that over the last century what has emerged is a growing conviction of the right to wellbeing. Already *"in the eighteenth century some minorities discovered that every human individual by the mere fact of being born, possessed certain fundamental political rights, those which today are called human and civil rights. Strictly speaking, these common rights for everyone are the only legitimate ones. Any other right linked to special conditions was condemned as a privilege. This premise was developed in the nineteenth century and later took root in the twentieth century not as an ideal, but as a reality, not in democratic laws, but in the ego of every individual, whatever their ideas. The sovereignty of the individual has become a juridical idea or ideal, one man's "psychological constituent state."*⁴

Since the first industrial revolution, the development of science and technology has led to a more structured wellbeing and has obviously strengthened this concept. *" In fact, today's man has an original and fundamental impression that life is easy without tragic limitations, so each individual discovers in himself a feeling of power and success leading him to exert an act of supremacy."* The philosopher Ortega y Gasset describes this individual as, "mass-man" the spoiled child of human history, the heir who behaves as an heir where *the inheritance is civilization, comfort, safety, in short, the benefits that science and technology have given the world"*. If in the last century technological innovation nourished wellbeing, today the development of digital technology and robotics is causing a major social crisis where the first signs can already be seen, and this is a problem.

On the other hand, today's mass-man sees and believes that welfare belongs to him. *" Let us imagine that in the public life of any country a problem or a difficulty arises: the mass-man will claim immediately that it is up to the state to solve it."* *"When the masses become aware of some impending misfortune, there is the great temptation of this permanent and safe possibility to obtain everything without effort or struggle, without doubt or risk; the masses say, I am the state."* The fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of relativism, put an end to the strong link with the sacred

⁴Ortega y Gasset, "The Revolt of the Masses", 1933

simultaneously with the collapse of the opposing ideology - communism-liberalism. The lack of these reference points, should have been offset by an economic system with social fluidity which should have enabled any potential aggressiveness to be controlled. The process however put the economy but particularly finance on a pedestal. They were viewed as the new faith and economists and bankers as the new prophets of the right to wellbeing. Prophets who only reason with the logic of numbers, using the numerical aspect simply as a paradigm of assessment: it all comes down to cheaper models, but the economy is not yet science, reality is more complex while cultural and sociological models are party to this behaviour.

Innovative and reactionary elite vie for the consent of the masses who are more and more populist, and more and more influenced by the media, fake news, anxiety and stress. They reassure with the hope of returning to the past, achieving broad consensus as in the last US elections, or reassure with the hope of the future of technology and innovation. In short, global progress as a winning solution to current problems. The issue must be addressed from a cultural point of view, that is the basis of the thinking of civilizations, protagonists of globalization. In fact what is now involved is a huge modification of structures and social values. Technical know-how is the expression of man's reaction to the changing environment and the problems created by his peers.⁵ In a nutshell, it is the propensity towards "*a change of culture.*" A culture that is rooted in the capacity to listen, observe, experiment and be curious about the future. Obviously these attitudes and activities are not divorced from the social context and therefore from existing institutions, which themselves must adapt to new requirements. The development process is complex and must be multi-faceted, if it wishes to develop slowly and harmoniously.⁶ What is certain is that in global communication, where information circulates immediately from one part of the planet to another, (just think of the Internet phenomenon and data, documents, images, video, etc.); slow progress as an independent variable to the harmonious growth of a community, is no longer feasible. This is a *vulnus*. The speed of technological development creates confusion and uncertainty of identity: the external effect of the single market, globalization, first affects the old certainties, the old codes of belonging to a territory, a story, a faith, then acts as a reaction to the change taking place.⁷ Everyone needs centres of

⁵A. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, 1949

⁶C.M. Cipolla, *vele e cannoni*, 2003

⁷G. Tremonti, *La paura e la speranza*, 2008

stability, each functioning according to his own dharma and extremely important to our way of life. And everybody is terrified of losing those centres, mainly for selfish and material reasons.⁸ Man remains anchored to the Thomistic view of the world, he is the measure of all things and his way of life must conform to his social class, to his environment, to his traditions.⁹ One of the causes of today's social instability in the Western world is the fear of losing one's social status. The 4.0 digital revolution will fuel instability following the disjunction between man and work as the source of his satisfaction: in other words, it weakens the self and the confirmation of his human dignity in his hard work as recognized by others. The loss of manual jobs for unskilled classes, the most fragile, will have a psychological and behavioural impact. We cannot understand the social effects of this. What will these people who are forced out of work do? How will they be reabsorbed into society? And in the future, will the number of employed increase or decrease? Can they adapt to working less? Will this great transformation have a negative impact on current generations alone or equally on those of the future? And finally: the man of the future, absorbing experience that will dominate digital robotics, can he still affirm *mensura omnium rerum homo*?¹⁰.

A final comment. Some contemporary historians¹¹ believe that for several reasons the present digital technological revolution is not the way out of the economic crisis. They point out that the combination of the technological breakthroughs of the past quarter of a century and the opening of Asian markets to capitalism, was a mix not repeatable in the future. Productivity gains will decrease; expectations of the innovations in medical science must also include interest in the medical and scientific discoveries in neuroscience, it must lengthen the life of the mind and not merely that of the body. Otherwise we will have more old people who are not self-sufficient with negative economic and financial consequences. In short, more information, more digitization, more automation, more speed is not always good in itself. Knowledge is not always a cure. The effects of the web are not always positive. There had been great progress in the Thirties of the last century, but these were not enough to exit the Great Depression. What was needed was a war, What is to be done? In the short to medium term - about twenty years - the problem will manifest itself in all its gravity. Who will be excluded from social life and from work will be those who do not adapt to the

⁸R. Girard, *Origins of Culture and the end of history*, 2003

⁹W. Sombard, *Modern Capitalism*, 1994

¹⁰Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 1265-1273

¹¹N. Ferguson, *Civilization on Trial*, 2013social

environment, probably today's 30-40 years old generations, not those of 10/25 years if they seize the opportunity. The beginning of the last century for example, saw the invention of the internal combustion engine, which put an end to the blacksmith's trade, but today no one is concerned about the lack of this professional skill, others, such as the car mechanic, have replaced it. This simple observation shows that those who are excluded from work are those who live doing that job, and become obsolete because of technological innovation, but not their offspring. When the child or grandchild enters the working world, other professional skills will be present or required in the labour market. The critical period, ultimately, is the moment of generational transition in working life, not innovation as such.

Conclusions

The proposals of the Centesimus Annus-Pro Pontifice Foundation are spelled out in the 2017 Declaration.¹² The Bologna Group, agreeing with its contents, suggests focusing on policies for education and professional training. This focus must be on the formation of the new generations, with a clear emphasis on the culture of change already analysed in the introduction. Dissemination of knowledge of the major transformation now taking place will help young people to accept the anxieties of the future logically, and not go chasing after backward-looking solutions, such as defence of income or fixed employment. The new entrepreneurial forms should not be opposed by corporations working against change such as the lockout of Italian taxi drivers. It should stimulate politicians to get out of the electoral vote trap, stretch their gaze towards the common good of future generations, inculcate awareness among the aged and privileged elite who absorb resources from earned revenues but which are now anachronistic. In other words, politics must find solutions to include what is new, and anticipate the effect, by including programmes of educational formation in a rapidly changing economic model that offers no safeguards, not hiding problems or postponing them, but instead favouring meritocracy and not relationship. *"When you look more at individual virtues rather than at assets or blood relationships, more at good deeds than words, more at merits than at the vain ostentation of the family tree or family wealth, only then will each person receive their proper due. The poor and those without blue blood, can then hope to make progress, they can take heart from the stimulus of honour and reward, doing wonderful things for the common good."*

¹²The attached appendix contains the most significant passages from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church on the theme of work

And finally, at least in Italy - the inability of the scholastic system, especially universities, to adapt formation programmes to the new demands of the labour market, are creating a problem. Even today there are degree programmes with outdated specialisations, which wrongly persuade young people into training courses with no outlets and no working prospects within the next decade. As part of specialised professions - such as radiology technicians or medical laboratory technicians - new high digitization technologies and substantial reduction in occupational hazards, will mean a radical review of their role in the production processes, for the benefit of technical or professional figures more consistent with the new ways of computerized and robotic management. One needs answers to these and other questions from short-sighted and self-regarding academic and political elites. In other words - recalling one example already mentioned - you cannot invest in the education of a blacksmith when the internal combustion engine requires a car mechanic. In conclusion, one must look up, otherwise the future will always be behind us.

Appendix

The Social Doctrine of the Church (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, chapter VI)

287. Work is a fundamental right and a good for mankind, a useful good, worthy of man because it is an appropriate way for him to give expression to and enhance his human dignity. The Church teaches the value of work not only because it is always something that belongs to the person but also because of its nature as something necessary. Work is needed to form and maintain a family, to have a right to property, to contribute to the common good of the human family. In considering the moral implications that the question of work has for social life, the Church cannot fail to indicate unemployment as a “real social disaster”, above all with regard to the younger generations.

288. *Work is a good belonging to all people and must be made available to all who are capable of engaging in it. “Full employment” therefore remains a mandatory objective for every economic system oriented towards justice and the common good. A society in which the right to work is thwarted or systematically denied, and in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, “cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace”. An important role and, consequently, a particular and grave responsibility in this area falls to “indirect employers”, that is, those subjects — persons or institutions of various types — in a position to direct, at the national or international level, policies concerning labour and the economy.*

289. *The planning capacity of a society oriented towards the common good and looking to the future is measured also and above all on the basis of the employment prospects that it is able to offer.*

¹³Fr. Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Le virtù del principe cristiano*, cap.vi.1590

The high level of unemployment, the presence of obsolete educational systems and of persistent difficulties in gaining access to professional formation and the job market represent, especially for many young people, a huge obstacle on the road to human and professional fulfilment. In fact, those who are unemployed or underemployed suffer the profound negative consequences that such a situation creates in a personality and they run the risk of being marginalized within society, of becoming victims of social exclusion. In general, this is the drama that strikes not only young people, but also women, less specialized workers, the persons with disabilities, immigrants, ex-convicts, the illiterate, all those who face greater difficulties in the attempt to find their place in the world of employment.

290. Maintaining employment depends more and more on one's professional capabilities. Instructional and educational systems must not neglect human or technological formation, which are necessary for gainfully fulfilling one's responsibilities. The ever more widespread necessity of changing jobs many times in one's lifetime makes it imperative that the educational system encourage people to be open to on-going updating and re-training. Young people should be taught to act upon their own initiative, to accept the responsibility of facing with adequate competencies the risks connected with a fluid economic context that is often unpredictable in the way it evolves. Equally indispensable is the task of offering suitable courses of formation for adults seeking re-training and for the unemployed. More generally, people need concrete forms of support as they journey in the world of work, starting precisely with formational systems, so that it will be less difficult to cope with periods of change, uncertainty and instability.

302. *Remuneration is the most important means for achieving justice in work relationships. The "just wage is the legitimate fruit of work".*

They commit grave injustice who refuse to pay a just wage or who do not give it in due time and in proportion to the work done (cf. *Lv* 19:13; *Dt* 24:14-15; *Jas* 5:4). A salary is the instrument that permits the labourer to gain access to the goods of the earth. "Remuneration for labour is to be such that man may be furnished the means to cultivate worthily his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents, in view of the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good". The simple agreement between employee and employer with regard to the amount of pay to be received is not sufficient for the agreed-upon salary to qualify as a "just wage", because a just wage "must not be below the level of subsistence" of the worker: natural justice precedes and is above the freedom of the contract.

303. *The economic well-being of a country is not measured exclusively by the quantity of goods it produces but also by taking into account the manner in which they are produced and the level of equity in the distribution of income, which should allow everyone access to what is necessary for their personal development and perfection. An equitable distribution of income is to be sought on the basis of criteria not merely of commutative justice but also of social justice that is, considering, beyond the objective value of the work rendered, the human dignity of the subjects who perform it. Authentic economic well-being is pursued also by means of suitable social policies for the redistribution of income which, taking general conditions into account, look at merit as well as at the need of each citizen.*

317. *Given these impressive "new things" in the world of work, the Church's social doctrine recommends first of all to avoid the error of insisting that the current changes take place in a deterministic manner. The decisive factor and "referee" of this complex phase of change is once more the human person, who must remain the true protagonist of his work. He can and must take on in a creative and responsible fashion the present innovations and re-organizations, so that they lead to the growth of the person, the family, society and the entire human family. Enlightenment for all can be found in the appeal of the subjective dimension of work, which according to the teaching of the*

Church's social doctrine must be given due priority, because human work “proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth”.

318. Mechanistic and economic interpretations of the activity of production, however prevalent and influential they may be, have been outdated by scientific analysis of the problems connected with work. More today than in the past, these conceptions are seen to be completely inadequate for interpreting the facts, which everyday demonstrate more and more the meaning of work as a free and creative activity of the human person. Concrete findings should also provide the impetus for the immediate dismissal of theoretical perspectives and restrictive, insufficient operative criteria concerning the present dynamics. These prove to be intrinsically incapable of identifying the broad spectrum of concrete and urgent human needs that go well beyond merely economic categories. The Church is well aware and has always taught that men and women, unlike every other living being, have certain needs that are not restricted merely to “having”, because their nature and vocation are inextricably linked with the Transcendent One. The human person faces the adventure of the transformation of things through work in order to satisfy requirements and needs that are first of all material, but he does so in obedience to an impulse that pushes him ever further beyond the results obtained, to the quest of what will correspond most intimately to his vital inner needs.

319. *The historical forms in which human work is expressed change, but not its permanent requirements, which are summed up in the respect of the inalienable human rights of workers.* Faced with the risk of denying these rights, *new forms of solidarity* must be envisioned and brought about, taking into account the interdependence that unites workers among themselves. The more substantial the changes are, the more decisive the commitment of intellect and will to defend the dignity of work needs to be, in order to strengthen, at different levels, the institutions involved. This perspective makes it possible to orient the current transformations for the best, in the direction — so necessary — of complementarities between the local and the global economic dimensions, the “old” and the “new” economy, technological innovation and the need to safeguard human work, as well as economic growth and development compatible with the environment.

320. *Men and women of science and culture are called to make their particular contribution to solving the vast and complex problems connected with work, which in some areas take on dramatic proportions. This contribution is very important for coming up with the proper solutions.* This is a responsibility that requires that they identify the occasions and risks present in the changes taking place, and above all that they suggest lines of action for guiding change in a way that will be most beneficial to the development of the entire human family. To these men and women falls the important task of reading and interpreting the social phenomena with wisdom and with love of truth, leaving behind concerns imposed by special or personal interests. Their contribution, precisely because it is of a theoretical nature, becomes an essential point of reference for the concrete action prescribed by economic policies.

321. The present scenarios of profound transformation of human work call even more urgently for an authentically global development in solidarity that is capable of involving every region of the world including those less advantaged. Regarding these less advantaged regions, the start of a process of wide-ranging development in solidarity not only represents a concrete possibility for creating new job opportunities, but is also seen as a genuine condition for the survival of entire peoples. “Solidarity too must become globalized”.

Economic and social imbalances in the world of work must be addressed by restoring a just hierarchy of values and placing the human dignity of workers before all else. “The new realities that are having such a powerful impact on the productive process, such as the globalization of finance, economics, trade and labour, must never violate the dignity and centrality of the human person, nor the

freedom and democracy of peoples. If solidarity, participation and the possibility to govern these radical changes are not the solution, they are certainly the necessary ethical guarantee so that individuals and peoples do not become tools but the protagonists of their future. All this can be achieved and, since it is possible, it becomes a duty”.

322. *There is an ever greater need for a careful consideration of the new situation of work in the present-day context of globalization, in a perspective that values people's natural tendency to establish relationships.* In this regard it must be affirmed that universality is a dimension of human beings, not of things. Technology may be the instrumental cause of globalization, but the universality of the human family is its ultimate cause. For this reason, work too has a universal dimension, insofar as it is based on the relational nature of human beings. Technology, especially electronics, has allowed the relational aspect of work to spread throughout the world, giving to globalization a particularly rapid rhythm. The ultimate foundation of this dynamism is the working person, who is always the subjective — and never the objective — element. Therefore, globalized work too originates in the anthropological foundation of the inherent relational dimension of work. The negative aspects of the globalization of work must not damage the possibility opening up for all people: *that of giving expression to a humanism of work on a planetary scale*, to solidarity in the world of work on this same level, so that working in similar contexts, spread throughout the world and interconnected, people will understand ever better their one, shared vocation.

FCAPP Disclaimer: This paper has been prepared at the request of the Foundation Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice. The paper will be circulated under the author's responsibility to elicit comments and to encourage debate ; the views therein expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the CAPP Foundation.