



Post Milan Consultation Survey

Reactions and actions implemented to address the coronavirus emergency

Summary of answers

The summary covers 14 answers to questions posed by the questionnaire all received by July 2, 2020 from representatives of universities, businesses and religious organizations. The 14 answers represent about one third of the participants in the Milan Consultation, held at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore on January 30 and 31, 2020 on *“Ethos, Education and Training Avenues toward equality and ethical behavior in the digital era”*

The questions were meant to help identify the reactions and actions implemented by the different organizations participating in the Consultation to address the coronavirus emergency.

It was preferred to report in the summary the content of the answers to the questions as formulated even if some aspects were highlighted several times in response to various questions.

Question #1 What are the main educational measures adopted by your institution in order to continue working under Covid 19?

The answers indicate widespread and prompt adoption of short term measures to address the health emergency and the consequent lockdown.

Both universities and businesses state they have adopted tools to facilitate forms of remote working and learning.

Universities addressed several aspects of their work:

- ✓ lessons, seminars, exams and doctoral theses were held on line. In some case transition to e-learning required temporary suspension of activity (for a limited time). It was underlined that e-learning is based on three pillars: learning on one’s own, digital campus, teaching via digital platforms. Teachers worked very hard to reprogram lessons in digital format, use and coordinate the full set of different teaching activities to ensure harmonious functioning of the educational process. It has been highlighted that from the beginning the priority was both to give value to the students’ learning and personal development needs and provide students and their families with a clear sign of quality and reliability.

- ✓ Reinventing the four pillars of learning set out in the Delors Report, i.e. learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. It was remarked that the last two are particularly difficult to practice on line.
- ✓ Maintaining contact with students with every possible instrument.
- ✓ Intensive training of faculty, students and administrative staff was promptly organized to help their transition to digital work.
- ✓ Online access to libraries
- ✓ Adoption of Covid-19 protocols to provide a safe environment for those who could not work from home.

Implementation of the above measures had a considerable cost. One university stated it would have to start cutting down on costs and overhead expenses to be able to fund pandemic related investment.

It seems businesses took much the same steps as universities, i.e.:

- ✓ Massive use of work from home; many of them commented that Covid-19 had accelerated the transformation of traditional activities into digital ones
- ✓ Ad hoc educational sessions on the risks and ways of fighting the pandemic and on use of e-learning and digital communication instruments. The number of employees who followed these courses is impressive.
- ✓ Adoption of Covid-19 protocols to provide a safe environment for those who could not work from home.

Some big companies reported having supplied their employees with the digital equipment they needed to work from home.

Some of the respondents view the use of digital instruments favorably and consider it a form of education/work/communication to be maintained in the future. Most, however, highlight the necessity to resume on site work both in businesses and universities given the importance of personal contact and interlocution for the growth of people and also for business productivity growth.

Some academics stated that "...education is per se a form of relating. It is more than a dry communication of course contents". Accordingly, at some university some teachers have tried to "personalize and energize" online courses through analysis of their students' situation both as individual group and individual person.

Many businessmen have highlighted the importance of onsite work and the urgency of resuming it as soon as possible in order to preserve contact with employees and between employees. They emphasized that direct personal interaction is indispensable to become familiar with and process corporate culture, to learn from others, to avoid the negative psychological consequences of a lack of contacts. In fact, some businesses have put together ways to keep up interaction even when working from home.

Representatives of the Anglican Church have stressed the difficulties the lockdown imposed on theological students/researchers because of the impossibility to access specialized libraries. They

reported that “so far, the amount of digitalized material covers basic teaching requirements but not the needs of doctoral students, many of whom also need to travel as part of their research”.

Question #2 Does your institution (be it a university, a public or religious body or a business firm) plan specific action to prepare employees/pupils/target groups/customers for change in the after Covid period?

Some universities are looking into a profound reform of teaching modes. Some are thinking of continuing to use forms of on line teaching after the present emergency is over, increasing investment in digital infrastructure. They say it will be necessary to develop “new teaching modes to ensure a personal connection with lecturers and students”.

Many universities have highlighted the importance of personal contact, as others have done in reply to question #1: “the most traditional face to face teaching is by far the most effective way to educate students. Sharing the same physical space with other fellow students is an essential component of social learning: learning to be and learning to live together. Learning should be also a social experience requiring learning with and through others”.

The Catholic University of Costa Rica stressed the need to adopt a wide range of measures covering educational inclusion, socioeconomic support, student services, maintaining their ties with the university, human resources management.

Business firms have reported to have adopted a wide range of measures to prepare employees for a safe return to the office, taking into consideration all the changes they will have to face in the after Covid-19 period: webinars for managers and e-training for employees, reorganization of workspace to ensure social distancing, medical testing of employees who cannot work from home, free supply of surgical masks. Some big companies have also activated psychological support in an anonymous and confidential way for those who need it.

There is widespread agreement on the importance of “formation” (education + training) not merely to meet contingencies. “Forming means giving form and this is what we should do for the new generations, ensuring they have all the tools necessary to address these and other unforeseen scenarios that life will reserve”.

Some companies put in place training courses to prepare employees to a new mode of work and/or tasks brought about by the adoption of new business models. Whenever and wherever possible retooling to manufacture medical equipment has taken place.

Many big businesses have given visible proof of solidarity: donations of medical equipment, support to suppliers and clients, help in retraining workers who had lost their jobs.

The answers indicate the pandemic has substantially changed the ways people relate and interact in the fields of education, work and leisure. And that individuals, institutions and businesses are much more capable of reacting and adapting than anticipated.

Somebody commented that the pandemic did trigger a powerful reaction but also evidenced and worsened already existing fragilities. The frailest, the poorest, the most lonely do not have a smartphone, don't know how to use it or use it poorly: they are the elderly and ailing but also children from underprivileged families. They risk further marginalization, need daily assistance and should not be forgotten. The risk of digital divide is overwhelming.

Anglican Church representatives fear life will be very different for many years to come. They worry about the financial situation: their central structure is having a hard time trying to help parishes and dioceses whose income has drastically diminished, to support organization and jobs. They also reported that financial problem is delaying investments to combat climate change. Working groups have been set up by the Bishops on issues such as quick economic rebound, finance, liturgy, etc.

Question #3 What positive/negative consequences do homework and e-learning entail as regards broadcasting Catholic Social Teaching? Same question as regards equality, poor situation and women.

Positive and negative aspects of work from home and e-learning can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ **Positive aspects:** less exposure to contagion; greater flexibility; no commuting means greater productivity and fewer expenses; more time for one's family; increased capability of working and studying on one's own (the negative side is that people could show insufficient commitment); encouraging the creation of supporting corporate, institutional and interdepartmental networks to support the use of new ways of studying and working; incentive to creative thought about how to follow the distance learning process of students and employees' work.
- ✓ **Negative aspects:** many people do not have the needed digital tools and therefore many students are likely to be unable to continue schooling; work from home has often resulted in a heavier workload, especially for women who had to juggle job, children care and educational support 24/7, and for teachers; some employees have seen their contractual working hours and salary cut; difficulty in helping children, especially the youngest ones, through the e-learning process. All respondents have highlighted the risk of losing the feeling of belonging to a community, the importance of being together and sharing ideas and projects.

The vast majority of universities said they tried to maintain a sense of community focusing on their students' needs and ample recourse to live sessions to foster interaction with and within the class group. In other words, the primary objective was to promote person and community, CST two fundamental values. Some universities set aside special funds to meet the needs of students worse affected by the pandemic's economic impact. (For example the Agostino Gemelli Fund at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan; and several initiatives of the Catholic University of Costa Rica).

Some survey respondents believe the crisis will result in the end of *laissez-faire* and blind trust in the market and that policies will be more justice oriented thanks also to a greater presence of the State. At the same time however it was noticed a growing support to forms of populism at times hidden behind seemingly religion inspired behaviors.

One respondent remarked that “CST is a crucial corrective to some of these trends (liberal capitalism, populism, state economy, nationalism) as it does not make an idol of either the State or the market – but we may all need to be more alert to how different sorts of populism work as they can clothe themselves in religious habits...”.

How all of the above affects the economic model is a moot question.

Behaviors appear to be just as controversial: on one side there is growing respect and helpfulness (social distancing, education, great appreciation of what doctors, nurses, etc. are doing for their patients); on the other aggressions, rioting especially in the US and the UK, increase of domestic and child abuse.

A further negative factor most respondents worry about is unequal access to digital tools and to a good connection, that is bound to increase the digital divide (see answers to Question #2) and inequality. Fears have also been expressed about the situation of ethnic minorities.

Parents working from home are under stress: working hours are no longer well defined and they also have to help their children with e-learning. This is especially hard on women, including teachers.

Some respondents feel that shielding at home has made spiritual life more intense. But at the same time many highlighted the risk of isolation and loneliness related to the lack of personal contact: teachers/students and students with each other; managers/employees and employees with each other; parents with children and grandchildren, etc. (see also answers to Question #2).

All respondents highlighted the importance of personal relations for a full life, creative thinking, project making.

There are doubts about the post lockdown future but all agree there will be major social changes though it is not clear in which direction: will people continue to fear contact with others, limiting interaction within family and with intimate friends, or will they go to the other extreme losing all sense of discretion and decorum?

Whether solidarity and cooperation will continue to be practiced once the pandemic is over has been questioned.

Somebody regretfully pointed out that CST is not part of the curriculum of universities; there are only some seminars or specific events that had to be suspended during the lockdown.

In general there is growing consensus on the need to intensify CST education. One respondent stated: “I have not seen much about CST broadcast in my country, neither before nor during the crisis. I mean in front of a large public”.

This brings into play the Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice Foundation, that will have to intensify its work of CST diffusion. A significant step in this direction is the global Alliance with Catholic Universities that will promote multidisciplinary research on how to implement a new model of socio economic progress inspired by integral ecology.

Question #4 Do you think Catholic educational institutions are sending a specific message in the context of the pandemic? Please explain your answer.

Answers are quite diversified.

- ✓ Some respondents highlighted the great job done by Catholic schools to allow continuation of lectures, courses, exams, theses, etc. via web and the message of solidarity and hope they sent by their care for the students, especially the more vulnerable ones, to help them pursue their educational goals. The clear message to students was: “avoid infection, overcome illness and recover from the virus whenever possible” and “It’s a compelling moral obligation to avoid actions, behaviors and attitudes which permit the virus to spread and threaten the life and health of others”.
- ✓ They have listed the many steps taken: rapid response, closeness to students, range of hardware/software investment, all kinds of student support, prompt implementation of reliable e-learning procedures (including exams and theses discussion). All these actions were introduced to encourage students and provide whatever was necessary to carry on the educational process at this difficult time.
- ✓ They also mentioned the great efforts made to put in place an almost daily communication schedule via web and telephone, carried out by rectors, professors and teachers to inform, reassure and motivate students.
- ✓ Many highlighted that “Catholic education was able to become a vehicle to the diffusion of hope and strength we all have but not always put into practice”. Catholic universities have proved, with great sense of responsibility, that educational work is not halted by a pandemic but can reinvent itself and continue to unfold with new goals and strength in order to meet people’s needs.
- ✓ A few respondents had not noticed specific messages or action by Catholic schools during the pandemic.
- ✓ Yet others have underlined the importance of the Holy Father’s messages, addressed to all of us through his daily homilies during the Holy Masses in Santa Marta, that offered precious support to the faithful.

One university stated that CST is its constant source of inspiration and in the current critical circumstances is of the greatest help in identifying the right message to send to students. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II, "CST offers us *principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, guidelines for action*".

Differing answers reflect diversity of the respondents' countries.

Question #5. How do you think the present health emergency can be linked to the "care of our common home" and to the whole message of Laudato Si'?

This is the question that appears to have most profoundly touched respondents. All of them highlight the importance of the message of Laudato Si' and the necessity to look into the causes behind the pandemic.

The answers indicate that the pandemic has dramatically evidenced that:

- ✓ Human beings do not control but can negatively impact the planet, and pandemics, not just health related ones, are themselves the consequence of our behaviors. Some respondents reminded us that the Covid-19 pandemic can be linked to climate changes that are causing disruptions potentially more harmful than the pandemic itself. It was pointed out that "According to recent research, something like 75% of emerging infectious diseases come from the animal world. Covid-19 first arose from bats, in 2007 scientists warned that the presence of these viruses in bats was a time bomb, especially taken together with the increasing practice of destroying natural habitats and wildlife trading, which reduces the natural barriers that would otherwise separate us from these animals".
- ✓ There is something wrong in our way of interacting with nature; we cannot continue along this road. We must change our lifestyle because we cannot be healthy as humans if the planet is sick. "When we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of the nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it." (LS, 139)
- ✓ The pandemic is closely linked to the environmental catastrophe and is an acute expression of the socio-environmental crisis, as Pope Francis tells us in Laudato Si': "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature (LS, 139).
- ✓ We are all interconnected, the virus knows no borders and we share the same problems. "We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference. (LS, 52). "Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined

to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.” (LS, 91).

- ✓ Institutions must be able to function well and capable of operating for the common good and the interest of all.
- ✓ Caring is back in the limelight: there are countless examples of how important it proved during at the peak of the emergency. Caring of the other has been long undervalued, also economically, in favor of other sorts of work. These days we see many conversions, unfortunately we don't know if they will last.
- ✓ All respondents highlighted the importance of solidarity and cooperation, as Pope Francis constantly advocates, to address the pandemic and its negative socio-economic consequences effectively.
- ✓ Some say that it is not enough to address the Covid-19 pandemic and its grievous socio-economic impact, we must also address the many other pandemics that afflict us: violence, injustice, racism, xenophobia, pollution, idolatry of money.
- ✓ Many underline that despite the many uncertainties, we choose today our future, because “tomorrow will be shaped by what we do today”.
- ✓ Only one respondent questioned the link between the health crisis and previous economic, social and environmental problems, maintaining that the health crisis is nothing new, what is new is the preoccupation to save human lives. “Trying to save all the lives at any cost” must be positively appreciated by Christian people, but I fear that the social consequences of the lockdown may have worse human impact than the virus”.
- ✓ The crisis, both economic and social, triggered by the lockdown worries the Anglican Church too, that highlights the need to continue the ecological conversion of its churches, a process interrupted by the lockdown, and at the same time the need to muster sufficient financial resources to do so.

Most respondents believe that “human beings have the duty to understand and manage the consequences of their behaviours, pursuing sustainable solutions, avoiding behaviours whose consequences are at the moment unpredictable (principle of precaution)”. In other words what is needed is an ecological conversion.

They consequently underline the responsibility, especially of financial organizations and institutions, to operate with care for our common home.

Some respondents believe the reconstruction will be marked by stronger presence of the green economy and wider implementation of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards by the corporate world, also in view of the preference shown by investors for companies that respect such criteria.

Many reminded us of how powerful is the message of *Laudato Si'*: it makes us understand that ecological issues have a strong impact on the Earth's and people's life and, most of all, on social justice. It shows us the direction we must follow. It is our responsibility to translate its message into concrete action.

To identify and implement such action we, as Christians, must necessarily go through a conversion to Christ that will transform us "making us capable of operating to protect human life and dignity, to practice solidarity and accept responsibility, and to pursue the common good.

I believe that we all have to make any efforts to be up to the words of Pope Francis: "*To the pandemic caused by the virus, we want to respond with the universality of prayer, of compassion, of tenderness. Let us remain united.*" (Angelus, Library of the Apostolic Palace - 22 March 2020)

Anna Maria Tarantola