



Fondazione Centesimus Annus
Pro Pontifice

2020 CAPPF International Conference **The milestones of the integral ecology for a Human Economy**

30th October 2020 - II Session: Education and Training

Opening Remarks

by Giovanni Marseguerra¹

Good afternoon and on behalf of the Foundation's Scientific Committee a warm welcome to all of you for joining us in the second session of the 2020 Centesimus Annus International Conference devoted this year, as you know, to the milestones of the integral ecology for a human economy. In the today session, the focus will be on Education and Training - an issue of vital importance at a time in which for the second time in a few months many governments around the world are forced to adopt drastic measures leading to many businesses being shut down, to widespread restrictions on travel and mobility, and to close educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic – and I would like to warmly thank all the distinguished guest speakers that will analyse this crucial topic from different stances and perspectives, and in particular His Eminence Cardinal Turkson that will open the session and His Excellence Monsignor Galantino that will conclude.

We are here today to reflect together on the role of education and training to promote a more sustainable and more just society. Pope Francis in the *Laudato si* is very clear on the importance of education: “*Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life* (LS, n. 213) and “*change is impossible without motivation and a process of education*” (LS, n. 15).

Education is a long-term process. It requires personal motivation and commitment and it is the crucial element to trigger change. We need to change inside if we want the outside to change. Education is meant to be transformative. Social and economic interaction are today required to acquire – at all levels - a stronger ethical dimension but ethics cannot be imported from outside in social life. It must arise from within. And the key element to succeed in this process is education, which is the crucial engine for building an inclusive society based on authentic values and integral human development. As clearly indicated by Pope Francis in the recent Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (n. 167): “*Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and for enabling society itself to react against injustices, aberrations and abuses of economic, technological, political and media power*”.

Education and training from one hand, and learning and skills from the other, are key contributing elements to the development of society and the economy. Moreover, as modern societies and economies are changing as a result of globalization and technological progress, a major transformation of education and training throughout the world is needed to provide society with the skills which are essential for employment, participation and true human development. The fourth industrial revolution is profoundly changing jobs the

¹ *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, and CAPP Foundation Scientific Committee Coordinator.*



Fondazione Centesimus Annus
Pro Pontifice

way we know them, and digitalization is disrupting labor markets. Some jobs are being lost by automation whilst others see their nature change. New completely different jobs are emerging and therefore new skills are required to perform them. All this process is changing labour supply and demand, employment patterns and the demand of skills associated to jobs, both existing and new. Thus, it becomes now crucial to fully understand what type of skills workers need as the digital transformation unfolds. New skills and competences are emerging and are acquiring increasing importance. Creativity, entrepreneurship, learning-to-learn, digital competences are becoming more and more important for innovation and participation in the digital society. What is today strongly required then is that supply and demand for these new skills and competences are matched. This is a key challenge for research and policy.

The Covid-19 crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems – from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education to the misalignment between resources and needs. Just a few months ago, during the recent Centesimus Annus Consultation in Milan at Catholic University, when the COVID 19 pandemic was still unrevealed, the Governor of the Bank of Italy Ignazio Visco made a number of reflections which today, in the light of the subsequent pandemic, acquire a special importance: *“An appropriate education would also contribute to limiting the “digital divide”, that is the lack of opportunities available to people without access to the internet. As the diffusion of digital devices is becoming more global and their complexity grows, access to opportunities will depend not simply on having the information and communication tools, but also on having the skills needed to use them”*. It is now clear that the Covid driven sharp disruptions in schools around the world mostly affected the poorest and more vulnerable share of population, drastically reducing their education opportunities and making more likely for them poverty conditions when adults. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in the educational system as school closures had the most negative impact on the already most disadvantaged students. Current income inequalities therefore are doomed to persist and even to widen as a consequence of disparity in educational opportunities.

During the first wave of the pandemic, hundreds of millions of students have had their education disrupted. According to OECD data, at global level, for only half of these students distance learning was a concrete opportunity as half of them have instead been excluded from distance learning. The goal of digital inclusion remains far to be achieved.

Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and eager and able to learn, could find their way to benefit from alternative learning opportunities. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds could not. For example, the schools that children from better-off families attend are more likely to provide learning activities that involve active engagement between teachers and students than the schools attended by children from the most deprived families. These activities are not only expected to be best suited for supporting home learning; they are also less reliant on parental time and ability to be completed. In sum, school shutdowns are likely to accentuate the socio-economic divide in educational attainment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a severe impact on higher education as universities had to close their premises and many countries shut their borders in response to lockdown measures. Higher education institutions were quick to replace face-to-face teaching with online learning but these closures affected



*Fondazione Gentesimus Annus
Pro Pontifice*

students in many other ways as the value offered by university education includes networking and social opportunities as well as educational content. The challenge for Universities is now to reinvent their learning environments so that the sophisticated tools provided by digitalization may effectively complement student-teacher and other relationships.

Education must prepare young people to commit themselves to operate in the world through a more active and transformative approach, and therefore more training processes based on transformation are needed whereby imagination, intellectual curiosity, constant commitment, collaboration, resilience and self-discipline may emerge and consolidate.

There is today an urgent demand for a change of direction in the evolution of the world's economy, rediscovering and promoting the concepts of solidarity and fraternity to achieve true human development. Human development is a multidimensional concept and it requires to focus on the whole person and on all persons. It includes, of course, economic development, which arises from the cooperation of entrepreneurs and employees directed at the common good and is promoted by the mutual and fruitful interactions of enterprises, institutions and society; human development also consists of social development, which promotes cohesion through the unity of society and territories, and is fueled by the non-profit sector increasing role; and, finally, subsumes intergenerational development, based on sustainable social security systems, which lead to the enhancement of the needs of the young generations and promotes the role of the family as the essential actor of the society. In all these dimensions of human development, education is the key element. It's not just individuals who benefit from education. Entire communities benefit from education and when a community doesn't value education, the people who become educated often leave. This leads to the well known brain drain effect, which can impact the socio-economic prosperity of entire regions.

Education can help people develop economically, socially, and intellectually. For example, from the economic point of view, individuals with more skills are more capable to adapt to technological changes. In a period of profound crisis - as the one we currently live in – it is essential to rediscover and promote creativity and imagination through education. In this respect, human capital and investment in knowledge are crucial as they provide a return both to the individuals and to the community as they have not only a direct impact on productivity but also produce positive indirect effects, which arise in the interaction between individuals, in the increase in social capital, in the respect for law and justice. In sum, investment in knowledge constitutes a crucial factor in social cohesion, welfare, development.

On all these issues, we are called to reflect today in our meeting with the help of our distinguished guest speakers. The Holy Father is asking us to think and work together to generate a new model of social life. Education and training are the fundamental building blocks to shape the path towards a more human economy. I am sure that our reflections will contribute to respond the Holy Father's call.

Thank you.