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Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the Fourth Annual Meeting of The Economy of Francesco

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Fourth Annual Meeting of *The Economy of Francesco*, held online from Assisi from 6 to 8 October 2023:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear young people,

It is good to see you one year after the Assisi event, and to know that your work to *revive* the economy is continuing with fruitfulness, enthusiasm and commitment.

You have often heard me say that reality is superior to the idea^[1]. And yet ideas inspire and there is one that, ever since I was a young theology student, has fascinated me. In Latin it is called the *coincidentia oppositorum*; that is, the unity of opposites. According to this idea, reality is made up of opposite poles, of pairs that are in opposition to each other. Some examples are big and small, grace and freedom, justice and love, and so on. What does one do with these opposites? Certainly, one can try to choose one and eliminate the other. Or, as the authors I was studying suggested, in an attempt to reconcile the opposites, making a synthesis, avoiding the elimination of one pole or the other, in order to resolve them in a higher plane, where, however, the tension is not eliminated.

Dear young people, every theory is partial, limited; it cannot claim to completely incorporate or resolve opposites. So is every human project. Reality always eludes. So, as a young Jesuit, this idea of the unity of opposites seemed to me an effective paradigm for understanding the Church's role in history. If you think about it, however, it is useful to understand what is happening in today's economy. Big and small, poverty and wealth and many other opposites are also present in the economy. The economy consists of market stalls, as well as the hubs of international finance; there is the concrete economy made up of faces, looks, people, of small banks and businesses, and there is the economy so big that it seems abstract, of multinationals, states, banks,

investment funds; there is the economy of money, of bonuses and very high salaries next to an economy of care, of human relations, of salaries too low to be able to live well. Where is the coincidence between these opposites? It is found in the authentic nature of the economy: to be a place of inclusion and cooperation, a continuous generation of value to be created and circulated with others. The small needs the big, the concrete the abstract, the contract the gift, and poverty the shared wealth.

However, let us not forget, there are oppositions that do not generate harmony at all. The economy that kills does not coincide with an economy that makes a living; the economy of enormous wealth for the few does not harmonize from within with the many poor who have nowhere to live; the gigantic arms business will never have anything in common with the economy of peace; the economy that pollutes and destroys the planet finds no synthesis with the one that respects and preserves it.

It is precisely in this awareness that the heart of the new economy to which you are committed resides. The economy that kills, that excludes, that pollutes, that produces war, *is not an economy*: others call it an economy, but it is only a vacuum, an absence; it is a disease, a perversion of the economy itself and its vocation. The weapons produced and sold for wars, the profits made at the expense of the most vulnerable and defenceless, such as those who leave their homeland in search of a better future, the exploitation of resources and peoples who steal land and health: all this is not economics, it is not a good pillar of reality, to be maintained. It is merely bullying, violence; it is just a predatory structure from which to humanity must be freed.

I would like to propose a second idea that is very close to my heart, related to what I have just said to you about the tensions within the economy: the *economy of the land* and the *economy of the path*. The economy of the land comes from the first meaning of the word economy, that of caring for the home. Home is not only the physical place where we live, but it is our community, our relationships, it is the cities we inhabit, our roots. By extension, home is the whole world, the only one we have, entrusted to all of us. By the mere fact of being born, we are called to become custodians of this common home and, therefore, brothers and sisters of every inhabitant of the earth. Practising economy means taking care of the common house, and this will not be possible if we do not have eyes trained to see the world starting from the peripheries: the gaze of the excluded, of the last. Until now, the view of the home that has been imposed is that of men, males, in general western and from the north of the world. For centuries we have excluded – among others – the view of women: if they had been present, they would have made us see fewer goods and more relationships, less money and more redistribution, more attention to those who have and have not, more reality and less abstraction, more substance and less talk. We cannot continue to exclude outlooks that diverge from economic praxis and theory, also from the life of the Church. Therefore, it is a special joy for me to see how many young women are protagonists of The Economy of Francesco. The integral economy is what is made *with* and *for* the poor – in all the ways in which one can be poor today – the excluded, the invisible, those who do not have a voice to make heard. We must be there, on the fault lines of history and existence, and for those who devote themselves to the study of economics, also at the peripheries of thought, which are no less important. So, ask yourselves: what are the peripheries of economic science today? It is not enough to think *about* and *for* the poor, but *with* the poor, *with* the excluded. Even in theology, we have too often “studied the poor” but we have rarely studied “with the poor”: from being the object of science, they must become subjects, because every person has stories to tell, a thought about the world: the first poverty of the poor is to being excluded from having their say, excluded from the very possibility of expressing a thought that is considered serious. It is about dignity and respect, too often denied.

Here, then, is the *economy of the path*. If we look at the experience of Jesus and the first disciples, it is that of the “Son of man [who] has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58). One of the most ancient ways of describing Christians was “those on the road”. And when Francis of Assisi, so dear to us, began his revolution, also economic, in the name of the Gospel alone, he returned a beggar, a wayfarer: he set out walking, leaving the home of his father Bernardone. Which path, then, for those who want to renew the economy from its roots! The pilgrim's path has always been risky, interwoven with trust and vulnerability. Those who undertake it must soon recognize their dependence on others along the way: thus, you understand that economics too is a borrower of other disciplines and knowledge. And just as the pilgrim knows that his journey will be dusty, so you know that the *common good* requires a commitment that involves getting your hands dirty. Only dirty hands know how to change the earth: justice is lived, charity is embodied and, in solidarity with the challenges, you persevere courageously in them. Being economists and entrepreneurs “of Francesco” today necessarily means being

women and men of peace: do not give rest until there is peace.

Dear young people, do not be afraid of tensions and conflicts; try to inhabit them and humanize them, every day. I entrust to you the task of *preserving the common home and having the courage to walk*.

It is difficult, but I know that you can do it, because you are already doing so. I know it is not immediate to insert your efforts and share your dreams within your Churches and amid the economic realities of the places where you live. Reality seems already configured, often impenetrable, like ground on which it has not rained for too long. May you not lack the patience and resourcefulness to let yourselves be known and to establish gradually more stable and fruitful connections. The desire for a new world is more widespread than it appears. Do not shut yourselves away: the oases in the desert are places to which everyone must have access, crossroads where you can stop and from which you can start out differently. So, remain open and seek out your colleagues, your bishops, your fellow citizens with determination and enthusiasm. And in this, I repeat, may the poor be with you. Give voice and form to a people, because the reality of the economy and the solutions you are working on and testing involve the lives of everyone. There is more space for you than it seems today. I ask you, therefore, to stay actively united, building real bridges between the continents on operational issues, which will definitively bring humanity out of the era of colonialism and inequalities. Give faces, content and projects to a universal fraternity. Be pioneers from within the economic and entrepreneurial life of integral human development.

I trust you and, never forget: I care about you very much.

FRANCIS

[1]EG 217-237
