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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Audience with participants in the Public Assembly of Confindustria**

Today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the public assembly of Confindustria (*Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana* – Italian Manufacturers' Association).

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear businesspeople, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President for his greeting and introduction. I am pleased to be able to meet you and, through you, to address the business world, an essential component for building up the common good, and a primary motor for development and prosperity.

This is not an easy time, for you and for everyone. The business world too is suffering a great deal. The pandemic has put many productive activities to the test; the entire economic system has been damaged. And now the war in Ukraine, with the ensuing energy crisis, has been added. In these crises the good entrepreneur, who is responsible for a company and jobs, who bears uncertainties and risks, also suffers. In the market there are "mercenary" entrepreneurs and there are entrepreneurs who are similar to the good shepherd (cf. *Jn* 10:11-18), who experience the same sufferings as their workers, who do not feel from the many wolves encircling them. People know how to recognize good businesspeople. We have seen this recently too, with the death of Alberto Balocco; the entire business and civil community grieved and expressed esteem and gratitude.

The Church, ever since the beginnings, has also welcomed merchants, the precursors of modern businesspeople, into the fold. The Bible and the Gospel speak of work, of trade, and among the parables there are those that speak of coins, of landowners, of administrators, and of valuable pearls purchased. The merciful father in the Gospel of Luke (cf. 15: 11-32) is shown to us as a wealthy man, a landowner. The good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10: 30-35) may have been a merchant: it is he who takes care of the robbed and wounded man, and then

entrusts him to another businessman, an innkeeper. The “two denarii” that the Samaritan gives in advance to the innkeeper are very important: in the Gospel there are not only the thirty denarii of Judas; not only those. In effect, the same money can be used, then as now, to betray and to sell a friend, or to save a victim. We see this every day, when the denarii of Judas and those of the good Samaritan co-exist in the same markets, in the same stock exchanges, in the same squares. The economy grows and becomes human when the Samaritans’ denarii become more numerous than those of Judas.

But the life of businesspeople in the Church has not always been easy. The harsh words Jesus uses with regard to the rich and to wealth, those of the camel and the eye of the needle (cf. *Mt* 19: 23-24), have at times been too quickly extended to every businessperson and every merchant, assimilated to those sellers whom Jesus drove out of the temple (cf. *Mt* 21: 12-13). In reality, one can be a merchant, a businessperson, and be a follower of Christ, a dweller of his kingdom. The question thus becomes: what are the conditions for a businessperson to enter the Kingdom of heaven? And let me indicate some of them. It is not easy...

The first is *sharing*. Wealth, on the one hand, helps greatly in life; but it is also true that often it complicates it, not only because it can become an idol and a ruthless master who takes your whole life, day after day. It complicates it also because wealth *demand*s responsibility: once I possess wealth, it becomes my responsibility to make it bear fruit, not to squander it, to use it for the common good. Then, wealth creates envy, malice, and not infrequently violence and malevolence around it. Jesus himself said that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. *Difficult*, yes, but *not impossible* (cf. *Mt* 19: 26). And indeed, we know of wealthy people who became part of Jesus’ first community, for example Zacchaeus of Jericho, Joseph of Arimathea, of some women who supported the apostles with their possessions. In the first communities, there existed women and men who were not poor; and in the Church, there have always been wealthy people who followed the Gospel in an exemplary way: among these also businesspeople, bankers, and economists, such as the Blessed Giuseppe Toniolo and Giuseppe Tovini. To enter the Kingdom of heaven, not everyone is required to denude themselves like the merchant Francis of Assisi; some who possess wealth are asked to *share* it. Sharing is another name for evangelical poverty. And indeed, the other great economic image we find in the New Testament is the communion of goods narrated in the Acts of the Apostles: “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and ... they had everything in common. ... There was no needy person among them” (4: 32-34).

How can we live today this evangelical spirit of sharing? The forms are diverse, and every businessperson can find their own, according to their personality and their creativity. A form of sharing is philanthropy, that is, giving to the community in various ways. And here I would like to thank you for your practical support to the Ukrainian people, especially displaced children, so that they may attend school – thank you! But in the modern world and in democracies, taxes and levies are very important, a form of sharing that is often not understood. The fiscal pact is the heart of the social pact. Taxes are also a form of sharing wealth, so that it becomes common goods, public goods: school, healthcare, rights, care, sciences, culture, heritage. Certainly, taxes must be fair, equitable, set on the basis of each person’s capacity to pay, as stipulated in the Italian Constitution (cf. Art. 53). The system of tax administration must be efficient and not corrupt. But one must not consider taxes as an imposition. They are a high form of the sharing of goods; they are the heart of the social pact.

Another way of sharing is the *creation of employment*, employment for all, especially the young. The young need your trust, and you need the young, because companies without young people lose innovation, energy, enthusiasm. Work has always been a form of communion of wealth: by hiring people you are already distributing your goods; you are already creating shared wealth. Every new job created is a slice of dynamically-shared wealth. And speaking of the young: when I meet governors, many of them say to me, “The problem in my country is that the young leave, because they have no opportunities”. Creating employment is a challenge, and some countries are in crisis because of this lack. I ask you, please: that here, in this country, thanks to your initiative, your courage, may there be jobs, may they be created especially for the young.

However, the problem of work cannot be solved if it remains anchored within the confines of the labour market alone: it is the model of social order that is to be questioned. What model of social order? And here we touch on the matter of the declining birth rate. Declining births, combined with rapid aging of the population, are aggravating the situation for businesspeople, but also for the economy in general; the supply of workers is

decreasing and pension spending on public finance is increasing. There is an urgent need to support families and the birth rate. We must work on this, to get out of the demographic winter in which Italy and other countries are experiencing as soon as possible. It is a serious demographic winter, which goes against us and prevents us from growing. Nowadays having children is, I would say, a patriotic matter, also to enable the country to advance.

Again, with regard to the birth rate: at times, a woman who is employed here or works there, is afraid to become pregnant, because there is a reality – I am not saying among you – but there is a reality that as soon as the pregnancy starts to show, they let her go. “No, no, you can’t be pregnant”. Please, this is a problem for working women: study it, see what can be done to enable a pregnant woman to go ahead, both with the child she is expecting and with work. And again, in relation to work, there is another matter to consider. Italy has a strong community and territorial vocation: work has always been considered part of a broader social pact, in which the company is an integral part of the community. The territory lives off its enterprises, and enterprises draw their lifeblood from the resources of proximity, contributing substantially to the wellbeing of the places where they are located. In this regard, the positive role that businesses play in the reality of immigration, promoting constructive integration and making the most of skills that are indispensable for the survival of the enterprise in the current context, must be highlighted. At the same time, every form of exploitation of people and negligence regarding their safety must be met with an emphatic “no”. The problem of migrants: migrants must be welcomed, accompanied, supported and integrated, and the way of integration is work. But if the migrant is turned away or simply used as manpower without rights, this is a great injustice and also harms our country.

I like to remember that entrepreneurs themselves are workers. And this is good, isn’t it? They do not live off income, they live off their work, they live working, and remain entrepreneurs as long as they are working. The good businessperson knows the workers because he or she knows the work. Many of you are artisanal employers, who share the same daily toil and beauty as the employees. One of the great crises of our time is the loss of contact between business owners and work: as they grow and become bigger, life is spent in offices, meetings, trips, conferences, and one no longer frequents workshops and factories. One forgets the “odour” of work. And this is bad. It is what happens to use priests and bishops, when we forget the odour of the sheep, and we are no longer shepherds, but officials. One forgets the odour of work, one no longer recognizes the products by touching them with one’s eyes closed; and when business owners no longer touch their own products, they lose contact with the life of their company, and often economic decline begins thereafter. Contact, closeness, which is God’s style: being close.

Then, creating employment generates a certain *equality* in your companies and in society. It is true that there is hierarchy in companies, it is true that there are different functions and salaries, but salaries should not be too different. Today the share of value that goes to labour is too small, especially if we compare it with that which goes to financial rents and the salaries of top managers. If the gap between the highest and lowest salaries becomes too wide, the business community gets sick, and soon society gets sick. Adriano Olivetti, a great colleague of yours from the last century, set a limit on the gap between the highest and lowest salaries, because he knew that when salaries and wages are too different, a sense of *belonging to a common destiny* is lost in the corporate community, empathy and solidarity are not created between everyone; and so, when faced with a crisis, the working community does not respond as it could, with serious consequences for everyone. The value you create depends on each and every one: it also depends on your creativity, talent and innovation, it also depends on the cooperation of everyone, on the daily work of everyone. Because if it is true that each worker depends on his entrepreneurs and managers, it is also true that *business owners depend on their workers*, on their creativity, on their heart and their soul: we might say that it depends on the workers’ spiritual “capital”.

Dear friends, the great challenges of our society cannot be faced without good businesspeople, and this is true. I encourage you to feel the urgency of our time, to be agents of this epoch change. With your creativity and innovation, you can bring about a different economic system, where the safeguarding of the environment is a direct and immediate objective of your economic action. Without new entrepreneurs, the earth will not withstand the impact of capitalism, and we will leave the coming generations with a planet that is too wounded, perhaps uninhabitable. What has been done so far is not enough: please, let us help each other to do more together.

Thank you for coming, and I wish all the best to you and your work. I heartily bless you and your families. And

please, I ask you, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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