



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING OF
“THE ECONOMY OF FRANCESCO”**

[Assisi, 6-8 October 2023]

Dear young people,

It is nice 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 (EG 217-237). And yet ideas inspire, and there is one that has fascinated me ever since I was a young theology student. In Latin it is called *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, one could integrate them, thus 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 to be 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 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 that is so large as to seem abstract, of multinationals, states, banks, investment funds. There is the economy of money, of bonuses and very high salaries, alongside

an economy of care, of human relations, of salaries that are too low to be able to live well. Where is the meeting point between these opposites? It is in the authentic nature of the economy: being a place of inclusion and cooperation, a continuous generation of value to be created and shared with others. The small needs the big, the concrete needs the abstract, the contract needs the gift, and poverty needs shared wealth.

However, do not forget that there are opposites that do not bring about 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 is not in harmony with the many poor who have nothing to live on; the gigantic arms business will never have anything in common with the economy of peace; the economy that pollutes and destroys the planet has no connection with the one that respects and preserves it.

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

I would like to suggest a second idea that is very close to my heart, related to what I just said to you about the tensions within the economy: the *economy of the land* and the *economy of the journey*. 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 home, and this will not be possible if we do not have eyes that are trained to see the world, starting from the peripheries: the gaze of the excluded, of the least ones. Until now, the gaze on the home that has established itself is that of men, males, generally western and from the global north. 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 and from the life of the Church. This is why 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 themselves heard. We have to be there, on the fault lines of history and

existence, and for those who are committed to studying economics, also to 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 each person has stories to tell, a thought about the world. The first poverty of the poor is being excluded from having a 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 journey*. 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 also economic revolution in the name of the Gospel alone, he returned to being a beggar, a wayfarer. He set out walking, leaving his father Bernardone’s home. Which is the path, then, for those who want to renew the economy from its roots? The journey of pilgrims 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 pilgrims know that their 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, with them, one can persevere with courage, in solidarity with the challenges. Being economists and entrepreneurs “of Francesco” today necessarily means being women and men of peace: not resting 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 you with the task of *preserving the common home and having the courage to walk*.

It is difficult, but I know you can do it because you are already doing it. I know that including your efforts within your Churches and sharing your dreams, amid the economic realities of the places where you live is not immediate. 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 seems. Do not close yourselves in: the oases in the desert are places to which everyone must have access, crossroads in which to pause and from which to set out again, different. 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 that will definitively bring humanity out of the era of

colonialism and inequality. Give faces, content and projects to a universal fraternity. Be pioneers of integral human development from within the economic and entrepreneurial life.

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

Francis

L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English, Fifty-sixth year, number 41, Friday, 13 October 2023. p. 5.

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