



The Holy See

***VIDEO-MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE THIRD FESTIVAL OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE
OF THE CHURCH HELD IN VERONA
(Verona, 21-24 November)***

I greet all of the participants at the third Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church whose theme is “Less inequality, more difference”. In a special way, I greet His Excellency Bishop Zenti, and His Eminence Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga who will introduce the proceedings. A greeting to all who are present and thanks to Don Vincenzi who for years has coordinated the festival.

“Less inequality, more difference” is a theme that emphasizes the manifold richness of individuals as an expression of their personal talents, and that stands at a distance from homologation, which kills and paradoxically increases inequality. I would like to translate the theme into an image: the sphere and the polyhedron. Take the sphere to represent homologation, as a kind of globalization: it is smooth, without facets, and equal to itself in all its parts. The polyhedron has a form similar to the sphere, but it is multifaceted. I like to imagine humanity as a polyhedron, in which the multiple forms, in expressing themselves, constitute the elements that compose the one human family in a plurality. And this is true globalization. The other globalization — that of the sphere — is an homologation.

I wish to address a second thought to the young and the elderly: the recognition of differences increases our appreciation of people, unlike homologation, which places them in the peril of being rejected because I am unable to understand their true significance. Today, the young and old are considered as dross because they do not answer to the logic of production in a functionalist vision of society, they do not respond to any profitable criteria of investment. They are said to be “passive”, unproductive; they are not subjects of production in the market economy. However, we must not forget that the young and the old each holds a great wealth: both are the future of a people.

The young are the strength to go forward; the elderly retain the memory and wisdom of a people.

There can be no authentic development, nor harmonious growth of a society if the power of the young and the memory of the old is denied. A people that fails to care for the young and the old has no future. This is why we need to do everything possible to ensure that our society does not develop social dross, and we must all commit ourselves to keeping our memory alive, with our gaze turned to the future.

Let us think of the percentage of young people who are unemployed at the present time: in some countries the figure is put at 40 percent or more for unemployed youth. This is a mortgage, it is a mortgage on our future. And if it is not resolved soon, it guarantees a rather weak future — or of no future at all.

A thought also on the Social Doctrine of the Church: the social Magisterium is a great reference point, it represents an orientation which is the fruit of reflection and of ideal employment. It is a useful guide so as not to lose one's way. Whoever works in economy and finance is surely attracted by profit, and if he is not careful he will come to serve profit itself and so become a slave to money.

The Church's Social Teaching contains a wealth of reflections and of hope which even today is capable of guiding people and preserving their freedom. It takes courage, thought and the power of faith to stay within the market, guided by a conscience that places the dignity of the person and not the idol of money at the centre.

In practice, this is not always immediately evident, but if we help each other, pursuing the common good becomes the choice that is also reflected in the results. When it is lived out the Social Doctrine generates hope. Everyone may thereby find within himself the strength to promote a new social justice through work. It could be argued that the application of Social Doctrine contains a certain mystique. I will say it again: a mystique. It seems immediately to take something out of you; it seems that by applying it you are transported away from the market, away from the current rules. Looking at the overall results, this mystique leads instead to a great gain, since it is able to create development precisely insofar as — in its overview — it requires us to take responsibility for the unemployed, for the weak, for social injustices and not to be subjected to the distortions of an economic vision.

The Social Teaching does not allow profit to belong to producer and while the social issues are left to the State or to assistance or volunteer agencies. This is why solidarity is a key word in the Social Doctrine. But today we risk removing it from the dictionary for it is an uncomfortable word. But it has also become — allow me to say it — almost a dirty word. For economy and the market, solidarity is almost a dirty word.

Also a thought on cooperation: I met several representatives of the world of cooperatives. We had a meeting here in this room some months ago. I was very consoled, and I think it is good news for

everyone to hear that in responding to the crisis net profits have gone down while the employment level has been maintained. Work is so important. Work and the dignity of the person go hand in hand. Solidarity must also be applied to guarantee work; cooperation is an important element to ensure a plurality of presence among employers in the market. Today this is the subject of some misunderstanding even at the European level yet I maintain that failure to consider this form of presence as relevant in the world of production constitutes an impoverishment that leaves room for homologations and fails to promote difference and identity.

I remember — I was a teenager — I was 18 years old: it was 1954, and I heard my father speak on Christian cooperativism and from that moment I developed an enthusiasm for it, I saw that it was the way. It is precisely the road to equality, not to homogeneity, but to equality in difference. Even economically it goes slowly. I remember that reflection my father gave: it goes forward slowly, but it is sure. When I hear some of the other economic theories, like that “of the commodities” — I don’t really know what it’s called in Italian — [the Pope is referring to an optimistic economic theory on the fall of prices of goods and the reduction of poverty]. Experience tells us that that way doesn’t work.

I hope that all of you who are committed to cooperative reform, will keep alive the memory of their origins. The cooperative forms established by Catholics such as the implementation of *Rerum Novarum* bear witness to the power of faith, which today as then is capable of inspiring concrete action to respond to the needs of our people.

Today, this is extremely topical and pushes cooperation to actively create new forms of welfare. My hope is that you will be able to reclothe continuity in newness. Thus shall we imitate the Lord, who always keeps us going forward with surprises, with newness. I accompany you with my blessing, and may you never grow weary of praying for me, because I really need it. Thank you.