Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to Prof. Margaret Archer, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

On the occasion of the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, entitled "Towards a Participatory Society: New Roads to Social and Cultural Integration", I address my respectful greetings to you, dear Professor, to His Excellency Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, and to each of the participants.

With your customary expertise and professionalism, you have chosen to study a topic of central importance to me: that of social participation. We might say that society is primarily a process of participation: of goods, of roles, of statutes, of advantages and disadvantages, of benefits and burdens, obligations and duties. People are partners, or rather they "take part", to the extent that society distributes the parts. Since society is a participatory reality for mutual interchange, we must, represent it as, at the same time, an irreducible whole and as a system of interrelations between people. Justice can then be regarded as the virtue of individuals and institutions, who, in respect of legitimate rights, aim to promote the good of those who take part.

1. The first point I would like to bring to your attention is the *now necessary broadening of the traditional notion of justice*, which can not be restricted to judgment at the time of distribution of wealth, but must go further, to the moment of its production. It is not enough, that is, to claim the "just goods to the worker" as recommended by the *Rerum novarum* (1891). It is also necessary to ask whether or not the production process takes place with respect for the dignity of human labour; whether or not it accepts basic human rights; whether or not it is compatible with moral norms. In *Gaudium et spes*, (no. 67,) tells us: "The entire process of productive work, therefore, must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life". Labour is not merely a factor in production that, as such, has to adapt to the needs of the production process to increase its efficiency. On the contrary, it is the production process that must be organized in such a way as to enable the human growth of people and harmony between time for family and working life.

It is necessary to be convinced that such a project, in today's post-industrial society, is feasible, as long as it is desired. That is why the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC) insistently invites us to find ways to apply, in practice, *fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order*. Where other lines of thought speak only of solidarity, the SDC speaks instead of fraternity, since a fraternal society is also typified by solidarity, while the opposite is not always the case, as so many

experiences confirm. The appeal, therefore, is to remedy the mistake of contemporary culture, which has led to the belief that a democratic society can progress by keeping separate the code of efficiency – which would be enough to regulate relationships between humans within the sphere of the economy – and the code of solidarity, which would regulate inter-subject relationships within the social sphere. It is this dichotomy that has impoverished our societies.

The key word that expresses better than any other the need to overcome this dichotomy is "fraternity", an evangelical word, taken up in the motto of the French Revolution, but which the post-revolutionary order then abandoned, for well-known reasons, up to the point of its deletion from the political-economic lexicon. It was the evangelical witness of St. Francis, with his school of thought, that gave this term the meaning it then preserved over the centuries; that is, to build at the same time the complement and the exaltation of the principle of solidarity. Indeed, while solidarity is the principle of social planning that allows the unequal to become equal; fraternity is what allows the equal to be different people. Fraternity allows people who are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and their fundamental rights to participate differently in the common good according to their abilities, their life plan, their vocation, their work, or their charism of service. From the beginning of my pontificate, I wanted to point out that "our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the Incarnation for each of us" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 179). Indeed, the protocol by which we will be judged is based on brotherhood: "As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt, 25:40).

The periods we have left behind – the 1800s and above all the 1900s – were characterised by arduous battles, both cultural and political, in the name of solidarity and rights, and this was a good thing – if one thinks of the history of the trade unions movement and the struggle to obtain civil and social rights, struggles that are in any case very far from being concluded. What is most disturbing today is the exclusion and marginalization of the majority from equitable participation in nationwide and planetary distribution of both market and non-market assets such as dignity, freedom, knowledge, belonging, integration, and peace. In that respect, what makes people suffer the most and leads to the rebellion of citizens is the contrast between the theoretical attribution of equal rights for all and the unequal distribution of goods for most people. Although we live in a world where wealth abounds, many people are still victims of poverty and social exclusion. Inequalities – along with wars for dominance, and climate change – are the causes of the greatest forced migration in history, affecting over 65 million human beings. Think too of the growing drama of new slavery, in the forms of forced labour, prostitution, and organ trafficking, which are true crimes against humanity. It is alarming and symptomatic that today the human body is bought and sold, as if it were a commodity for exchange. Almost one hundred years ago, Pius XI envisaged the affirmation of these inequalities and iniquities as the consequence of a global economic dictatorship that he called the "international imperialism" of money (Encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, 15 May 1931, 109). And it was Paul VI who denounced, almost fifty years later, the "new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level". (*Octogesima adveniens*, 14 May, 1971, 44). The point is that *a participatory*

society can not settle for the objective of pure solidarity and assistentialism, since a society that was characterised only by solidarity and assistance, without being fraternal, would be a society of unhappy and desperate people from whom everybody would try to flee, in extreme cases even by suicide.

A society in which the true fraternity dissolves is not capable of having a future; a society in which only “giving in order to have” or the “giving out of duty” exist, is not capable of progressing. That is why neither the liberal-individualist vision of the world, in which everything (or almost) is an exchange, nor the state-centric vision of society, in which everything (or almost) is a duty, are safe guides for overcoming inequality, inequity and exclusion that now overwhelm our societies. It is a search for a way out of the suffocating alternative between the neoliberal thesis and that neo-state-centric thesis. Indeed, precisely because market activity and the manipulation of nature – both driven by egoism, greed, materialism and unfair competition – at times know no limits, it is urgent to act on the causes of such malfunctions, especially in the financial field, rather than just correcting the effects.

2. A second aspect I would like to touch upon is the concept of *integral human development*. Calling for integral development means engaging in widening the space of dignity and freedom of people: freedom, however, not only in the negative sense of the absence of impediments, nor only in a positive sense as a choice. It is necessary to add freedom “for”, that is, the freedom to pursue its vocation of both personal and social good. The key idea is that freedom goes hand in hand with the responsibility of protecting the common good and promoting the dignity, liberty and well-being of others, reaching the poor, the excluded and future generations. If this perspective, in the current historical conditions, were to allow us to overcome sterile cultural diatribes and harmful political contrapositions, it would enable us to find the necessary consensus to make new plans.

It is within this context that *the question of work* arises. The limits of the current work culture have become apparent to the most, though there is no convergence of views on how to overcome them. The way indicated by the SDC begins by acknowledging that work, *even before being a right, is an irrepressible capacity and need of the person*. It is the ability of the human being to transform reality so as to participate in God's work of creation and preservation, and thus to edify himself. Recognizing that work is an innate capacity and a fundamental need is a far stronger affirmation than saying that it is a right. And this is because, as history teaches, rights can be suspended or even denied; abilities, attitudes and needs, if fundamental, no.

In this regard, one can refer to classical scholarship, from Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas, on *action*. This thinking distinguishes two forms of activity: *transitive* and *immanent*. While the first connotes the action that produces a work external to the person who acts, the second refers to an act that has as its ultimate end the acting subject itself. The first changes the reality in which the agent lives; the second changes the agent. Now, since man does not have any activity so transitive that he it is not also always immanent, it follows that *the person has priority over his actions and*

therefore his work.

The first consequence is well expressed by the classical statement *operari sequitur esse*: it is the person who decides with regard to his own labour; self-generation is the result of self-determination of the person. When work no longer expresses the person, because she no longer understands the meaning of what he or she is doing, work becomes slavery; the person can be replaced by a machine.

The second consequence calls into question the notion of the *justice of labour*. Just work is not merely that which ensures fair remuneration, but which corresponds to the person's vocation and is therefore able to develop his or her skills. Precisely because work transforms the person, the process by which goods and services are produced acquires moral value. In other words, the workplace is not simply the place where certain elements are processed according to certain rules and procedures in products; it is also the place where the character and virtue of the worker are formed or transformed.

The recognition of this powerfully *personalistic* dimension of work is a great challenge we still face, even in liberal democracies where workers have made considerable gains.

Finally, I cannot but speak of the serious risks associated with the invasion, at high levels of culture and education in both universities and in schools, of positions of *libertarian individualism*. A common feature of this fallacious paradigm is that it minimizes the common good, that is, "living well", a "good life" in the community framework, and exalts the selfish ideal that deceptively proposes a "beautiful life". If individualism affirms that it is only the individual who gives value to things and interpersonal relationships, and so it is only the individual who decides what is good and what is bad, then libertarianism, today in fashion, preaches that to establish freedom and individual responsibility, it is necessary to resort to the idea of "self-causation". Thus libertarian individualism denies the validity of the common good because on the one hand it supposes that the very idea of "common" implies the constriction of at least some individuals, and the other that the notion of "good" deprives freedom of its essence.

The radicalization of individualism in libertarian and therefore anti-social terms leads to the conclusion that *everyone has the "right" to expand as far as his power allows, even at the expense of the exclusion and marginalization of the most vulnerable majority*. Bonds would have to be cut inasmuch as they would limit freedom. By mistakenly matching the concept of "bond" to that of "constraint", one ends up confusing what may condition freedom – the constraints – with the essence of created freedom, that is, bonds or relations, family and interpersonal, with the excluded and marginalized, with the common good, and finally with God.

The fifteenth century was the first century of humanism; at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the need for a new humanism is felt ever more strongly. The transition from feudalism to

modern society was the decisive engine of change; today, there is an equally radical transition from modern to postmodern society. The endemic increase in social inequalities, migration, identity conflicts, new slavery, environmental issues, and bio-political and bio-legal problems are just some of the issues that trouble us today. Faced with such challenges, the mere upgrading of old categories of thought or the use of sophisticated collective decision-making techniques is not enough; we need to attempt new roads inspired by Christ's message.

The proposal we find in the Gospel – “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Mt. 6:33) – has been and remains a new source of energy in history that tends to inspire fraternity, freedom, justice, peace and dignity for all. To the extent that the Lord will succeed in reigning in us and among us, we will be able to participate in divine life and we will be to each other “instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God’s charity and to weave networks of charity” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, 5). This is the hope I address to you, and accompany with my prayer so that the Academy of Social Sciences may never lack the life-giving aid of the Spirit.

As I entrust to you these reflections, I encourage you to pursue your precious service with renewed commitment and, in asking you to pray for me, I heartily bless you.

From the Vatican, 24 April, 2017

Franciscus

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