

*Address of the Cardinal Secretary of State
to the International Conference of the
Foundation Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontifice
“The Milestones of an Integral Ecology for a Human Economy”
23 October 2020*

Madam President,
Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to gather once again after our last meeting on 8 June 2019. At that time, your international Conference was devoted to the theme of “*Laudato Si’*: Turning an Ideal into Reality. The Difficult Path towards an Integral Ecology”. I regret that I cannot be present with you in person, and am limited to sending you this video message.

Much has changed in this year and a half. The world has been shaken by the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has “exposed our false securities”¹ and forced us to face our *fragility* as finite creatures. The pandemic has reaped hundreds of thousands of victims and is changing our lifestyles. It is also raising many doubts and misgivings about the economic systems of our societies.

In this regard, I think it is helpful to reflect on the significant message of Pope Francis at the extraordinary moment of prayer in time of epidemic celebrated in Saint Peter’s Square on 27 March 2020. The Holy Father invited us “to seize this time of trial as a *moment of decision*”. He continued: “It is not the time of your judgement [Lord], but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. We can look to so many exemplary companions for the journey, who, even though fearful, have reacted by giving their lives... We have come to realize that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other... We too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this... The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities... In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that

¹ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* on *Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 3 October 2020, 7.

blessed common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters”.²

This is the challenge that lies before us: to seize this time of trial as a moment of decision, to reset the course of our boat towards the Lord and towards others, by cooperating and building, recommitting ourselves and rediscovering our common belonging as brothers and sisters.³

The theme you have chosen for this Meeting, “The Milestones of an Integral Ecology for a Human Economy”, intends to be a contribution in this direction.

At the beginning of your journey, aimed at exploring these “milestones”, I would like to focus on these two important concepts: those of “integral ecology” and “human economy”. I would like to do so by highlighting three aspects of each of these concepts, aspects that, as will be seen, are closely related to one another.

Let us start with the concept of “**integral ecology**”, which is central to Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*.

By proposing an integral ecology, the Pope wants to point to a *new vision of the world* grounded in the original meaning of the word “ecology”. Derived from the Greek words “*oikos*” and “*logos*”, it means a study, a reflection on the home, on our common home, taken as a whole. Indeed, such a reflection transcends the environmental dimension alone. It calls for an “integral vision of life that can inspire better policies, indicators, research and development processes and criteria for evaluation, while avoiding distorted concepts of development and growth”.⁴ In this way of seeing things, integral ecology emerges as a complex and multidimensional concept that unfolds over time. Here, it is helpful to return to an image often employed by Pope Francis; that of a “many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which ‘the whole is greater than the part’”.⁵

This is the **first aspect** that I would like to highlight: an integral ecology should be seen as a *polyhedron that can lead us to adopt a new vision of the world* and to analyze the issues and challenges confronting humanity today.

² *Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic*, 27 March 2020.

³ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 203-205.

⁴ INTERDICASTRIAL WORKING GROUP OF THE HOLY SEE ON INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, *Journeying towards Care for Our Common Home. Five Years after Laudato Si’*, LEV, 31 May 2020, p. 9.

⁵ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 215.

The **second aspect** that I would highlight is that *this new polyhedral vision* of an integral ecology develops specifically around a pivotal point: the *centrality of the human person* and consequently the need to promote a *culture of care*,⁶ as opposed to a *throwaway culture*, in which “what is thrown away is not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves”.⁷ Discarding others “can take a variety of forms, such as an obsession with reducing labour costs”,⁸ whereby we lose the meaning of the “value” of the right and duty to work. That right is essential for the personal development of each individual and the growth of a sense of solidarity within society at large and with generations yet to come.

To be sure, the careful implementation of an integral ecology demands a number of technical, economic and social instruments that can really help to bring about a change of course in our society. Yet to limit ourselves to technical and economic aspects alone would be reductive, to say the least, and surely insufficient; this change of course must emphasize the ethical and social aspect inherent in the concept of integral ecology. To quote Pope Francis once again, “this much-needed change of course cannot take place without a substantial commitment to education and training. Nothing will happen unless political and technical solutions are accompanied by a process of education that can propose new ways of living. A new culture. This calls for an educational process which fosters in boys and girls, women and men, young people and adults, the adoption of a culture of care – care for oneself, care for others, care for the environment – in place of a culture of waste, a ‘throw-away culture’ where people use and discard themselves, others and the environment”.⁹

Consequently, the **third aspect** that I would mention is the need for *education in an integral ecology*. This represents a great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge, since it must necessarily involve an authentic *conversion* leading to a change of mentality and outlook.

Combining these three aspects, we can say that the polyhedral vision of an integral ecology – which must have as its pivotal point the centrality of the human person and the promotion of a culture of care – must be fostered through a pedagogy aimed at the mind, heart and hands of each person.

⁶ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 231; Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 17, 79, 96, 117, 143, 188.

⁷ *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 13 January 2014.

⁸ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 20.

⁹ *Address to the United Nations Office at Nairobi*, 26 November 2015.

Such an education and pedagogy can help direct both politics and the economy to a genuinely integral and sustainable human development, one that benefits all the people of our world, above all the poorest.

To speak of the need for politics and the economy to be directed to an integral ecology brings us to the second part of the theme of your Meeting: a **“human economy”**.

Here too, I would like to focus on three aspects of this concept. Let us begin with the etymology of the word “economy”, which is quite close to that of “ecology”. Economy, in fact, comes from the Greek words “*oikos*” and “*nomos*”, that is, laws or rules for the home. These rules, too, must be grounded in a vision. To describe an “economy” with the adjective “human” indicates that such a vision must likewise be guided by the polyhedral approach of integral ecology, which, as I have said, is distinguished by *the centrality of the human person and the promotion of a culture of care*.

Clearly, this calls for a moral discernment, in order to promote “*further and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its goals*”, as well as a profound and far-sighted revision of the current model of development, so as to correct its dysfunctions and deviations. This is demanded, in any case, by the earth’s state of ecological health; above all it is required by the cultural and moral crisis of humanity, the symptoms of which have been evident for some time all over the world”.¹⁰ We need, in fact, “an ‘economic ecology’ capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality”.¹¹

This is the **first aspect** I would emphasize about a human economy: integral ecology requires a more “humane” approach to the economy, based on the command to “till and keep”.¹² In other words, an economic system must be able to improve – not destroy – our world.¹³ I think for example of those *circular models of production and consumption*¹⁴ capable of opposing and inverting the perverse dynamics set in motion by the throwaway culture.

A human economy thus reminds us once more that business activity “is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world. God encourages us to develop the talents he gave us, and he has made our universe one of immense potential. In God’s plan, each individual is called to promote his or her own development, and this includes

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, 29 June 2009, 32.

¹¹ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*, 141.

¹² Cf. *Gen* 2:15.

¹³ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*, 129.

¹⁴ Cf. *op. cit.*, 22.

discovering the best economic and technological means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. Business abilities, which are a gift from God, should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty, especially through the creation of diversified work opportunities”.¹⁵

The **second aspect** that I would mention is precisely the recognition that a human economy gives to the fundamental importance of work, which is, as I have said, an element essential to a dignified human existence. It is necessary to “provide everyone with the opportunity to nurture the seeds that God has planted in each of us: our talents, our initiative and our innate resources... Political systems must keep working to structure society in such a way that everyone has a chance to contribute his or her own talents and efforts... In a genuinely developed society, work is an essential dimension of social life, for it is not only a means of earning one’s daily bread, but also of personal growth, the building of healthy relationships, self-expression and the exchange of gifts. Work gives us a sense of shared responsibility for the development of the world, and ultimately, for our life as a people”.¹⁶

A human economy will be directed to promoting a development that supports business creativity and increases rather than reduces the number of jobs. This becomes all the more important in light of rapid developments in robotics and various forms of automation. These will surely bring important advances and benefits for humanity, but they can also lead to the disturbing phenomenon of technology-driven unemployment, to which we must respond with creativity and ingenuity. It bears repeating: “Business, as a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world, can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the areas in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good”.¹⁷

A human economy marked by the polyhedral vision of an integral ecology must therefore be *directed to fulfilling the command “to till and keep” and thus to a greater appreciation of the importance and value of human labour.*

A **final aspect** of a human economy that I would highlight is that, by virtue of its concern for responsibility, gratuity and justice, it appeals to intra- and intergenerational solidarity. The range of global challenges needing to be faced in the twenty-first century – the Covid-19 pandemic being

¹⁵ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 123.

¹⁶ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 162.

¹⁷ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 129.

just the latest clear example of these – calls for a new ethics and a new dynamic in international relations that acknowledges the fact “as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers and sisters”.¹⁸ “At this critical juncture, it is our duty *to rethink the future of our common home and our common project*. A complex task lies before us, one that requires a frank and coherent dialogue aimed at strengthening multilateralism and cooperation between states”.¹⁹

In this regard, “we need to attain a global juridical, political and economic order “which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity”²⁰, in the awareness that only by a joint commitment will we be able to give effective responses to issues that transcend national boundaries. “Today, no state can ensure the common good of its population if it remains isolated.”²¹ *Building together* presupposes commitment to a *constructive dialogue* sincerely directed to the *universal common good*.

In a word, *a truly “human” economy* is one that can adopt the polyhedral vision of an integral ecology. It will respect the centrality of the human person and the promotion of a culture of care. It will be strengthened by efforts to educate to integral ecology and be guided by the command to “till and keep”. It will be committed to the enhancement of the universal common good and to intra- and intergenerational solidarity.

An integral economy can thus make an important contribution to the change of course that our human family so badly needs, one that has been made all the more evident by worldwide phenomena such as the Covid-19 pandemic and global warming. These phenomena constantly remind us that we are all members of the one human family, brothers and sisters, each with his or her own unique and essential role within this family.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share these reflections with you, and I offer my best wishes for the fruitfulness of the Foundation’s efforts to find ways of *rethinking, directing and implementing this necessary change of direction*.

Secretary of State

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 19.

¹⁹ FRANCIS, *Address to the Seventy-Fifth Meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 25 September 2020.

²⁰ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 138.

²¹ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 153.