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**2022 CAPPF General Assembly**  
**Inclusive growth to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable  
development and peace.**

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**Short summary of Local Groups' Work**

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We have overall received from Foundation's Local Groups 17 documents, 8 from Italian chapters (Roma, Bergamo, Padova, Sardegna, Torino, Trento, Reggio Calabria and Milano) and 9 from non-Italian chapters (US, Malta, Madrid, Australia, Canada, Slovakia, Madrid, Barcelona and France).

All papers are interesting, all provide substantial food for thought and all together reveal the great effort made by local groups for this General Assembly. This is a sign not only of great vitality and creativity but also of deep commitment and strong group identity.

Let me first point out that the assignment of a paper in a given session does not have a particular meaning as many of the papers of one session could have equally been placed in the other. I will now briefly introduce the main findings of the submitted papers – with the exception of course of the new Chapter presentations and of the Canadian Group's very touching description of the Holy Father Penitential Pilgrimage. More anyway will be added by the authors themselves or by the groups' representatives in the debate to follow. My aim is not so much to provide a full summary of each contribution (impossible of course in a few minutes, as I have less than a minute per paper!). Instead, my hope is to arouse your interest and encourage to read yourselves the papers.

As far as the eight papers of the first session, they offer both interesting reflections and proposals as to how tackle poverty and concrete examples of best practices.

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Both the **French** Chapter and the **Sardegna** Chapters elaborate interesting reflections on the impact of digital poverty in a world characterized by growing digitalization.

Specifically, the **French Group's** argument is that while this massive digitalization process creates great opportunities for material growth and improved working conditions, it poses at the same time new ethical risks as it produces yet another form of poverty. The point here is that digitalization contributes to a higher efficiency and increased profits but we risk to forget that our companies are above all communities of human persons. This divide between human and digital calls for an urgent effort to include the victims of digital poverty: those who adapt less quickly due to a lack of skills or a form of digital illiteracy, but also, and there are many of them, those who are poor due to excessive digital consumption. The key to gain the full potential of the digital transformation of the production system rests in our capacity to include all left behind. In this respect, digital inclusion should require, for example, new rules for living together in the workplace. The crucial question to ask is the following: In the use of new technologies, what makes us grow in humanity and what makes us regress? The final part of the paper of the French group make use of the CST as a moral compass allowing self-diagnosis on the use of technology in business. The conclusion is that in order for innovation to be an integral progress, each one of us has both a role of vigilance on the technologies adopted and a duty of support for those for whom we are responsible. The contribution of the **Sardegna** Chapter is exactly in the same spirit, as it is acknowledged that the digital divide is yet another factor of inequality and, moreover, pre-existing inequalities are in fact exacerbated by this new form of discrimination. According to the data reported in the paper, 12,3% of young Italians does not hold a pc or a tablet at home and more than 32% of those possessing a pc or a tablet acknowledge of not knowing how to insert an interactive link or how to attach a file to an email text, and 67% of elderly families do not even know how to use the Internet. Such situation has a strong and negative impact on the whole population and is rapidly disseminating uncertainty and further economic and cultural disadvantages. Equal opportunities for all are crucial as learning poverty has become today a real emergency.



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The Chapters of **Milano** and **Padova** describe several interesting best practices in fighting poverty offered by their communities.

Specifically, the Group of **Padova** will show a video to present a very significant local institution, the Cucine Economiche Popolari (Popular economic kitchens), founded in Padova on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1882 and which have therefore just celebrated 140 years of life and activity. In that year, the area was plagued by intensive floods, and the situation was rather critical, especially for the many poor people in need. In that context, the figure of Stefania Etzerodt Omboni stands out. She was an Anglo-Belgian philanthropist and activist for women's rights whose very clear and inspiring motto was: "love, work, hope". Stefania started the popular economic kitchens to support the poorest population, further tested by the consequences of the flood. It was the beginning of an exemplary story of help and support to the poor lasting from more than 140 years and which is still playing a very active role in fighting poverty within the community of Padova.

The Chapter of **Milano** examines another crucial dimension of poverty, educational poverty which can be broadly defined as a level of education which falls below a threshold, this threshold being defined as a minimum in a given society. In other words, educational poverty reflects an unacceptable state in a society, which requires social interventions. Of course poverty and education are inextricably linked, because people living in poverty may stop going to school so they can work, which leaves them without literacy and numeracy skills they need to further their careers. Education and training represent the key elements for achieving economic and social objectives and so when considering educational poverty, the focus is on the precarious social situations in which seriously educationally deprived individuals face greater difficulties participating in different economic, social and cultural activities. The Chapter of Milano present a number of important and very well known institutions operating in the Milan area and dedicated to combat and to prevent educational poverty: Save the Children, the Salesians of Don Bosco (the Salesian family) and others.



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The contribution of the Chapter of **Bergamo** is devoted to present a very interesting initiative, that will be officially launched on the next 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, to fight poverty by promoting development: A financial help desk for entrepreneurial projects. With this initiative, the Chapter intends to provide the local community with a concrete and effective tool to support youth entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs, professionals and academics have been involved in this initiative which has the capacity to promote at the same time economic, social and intergenerational development.

Sustainable investments are the focus of the contribution of the Chapter of **Trento**. As it is well known, sustainable finance generally refers to the process of taking due account of environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations when making investment decisions in the financial sector, leading to increased longer-term investments into sustainable economic activities and projects. In this respect, addressing poverty at the macro level requires to focus on the link between investment and development and, the role of financing in fighting poverty becomes crucial. Finance can and should be mobilised to support sustainable development and poverty eradication. This is critical when the funding gap for delivering the SDGs even before Covid-19 was estimated to be over US\$ 3 trillion per year until 2030. Financing to end poverty cannot be provided through aid alone. All resources – public, private, local, national and international – and all the actors who control those resources can and should play a role. As indicated by several empirical studies, firms actively engaged in sustainability practices and which consider environmental, social governance factors as crucial elements of their strategic planning, are more efficient and more oriented to innovate, and for this reason are highly appreciated by investors and thus have a lower cost of capital.

The Chapter of **Torino** focus on the link between digital divide and human development. More specifically, the contribution analyses the relationship between access to information technologies and human development, trying to go beyond the mainstream narration which consider the bridging of the digital divide as the ultimate goal, sufficient as such to guarantee economic and human development. The point here is that the standard UN definition of human development lacks a proper



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consideration of the impact that new technologies exert both with respect to the concept of human development and with respect to the role of the human factor as a counterbalancing value that should pervade any affirmation of technological and algorithmic power. Moreover, while the 2030 Agenda's framework depicts technology as instrumental and servant with respect to the goals that have been set, we now know that technology is far from being environmentally neutral. The truth is that technology is today becoming a goal in itself and far from being merely servant, is instead dominant and transformative. What is required is some form of governance at the universal level: a governance that should be clearly aimed both at human development and at environmental sustainability.

The document of the Group of **Reggio Calabria** is an interesting and original reflection on Blockchain and charity, the former being considered as a systemic opportunity to create social value. Blockchain technology is well known for its crucial role in cryptocurrency systems, such as Bitcoin, for maintaining a secure and decentralized record of transactions. Its link with charity, however, is not immediately obvious. In general terms, it could be said that in any donation, the critical problem is the lack of trust between the parties involved in the process, that is the donor and the recipient. In principle, blockchain technology may solve this problem as it is a data structure consisting of linked blocks of data, e.g. confirmed financial transactions, with each block pointing/referring to the previous one forming a chain in linear and chronological order. This decentralised technology enables the participants of a peer-to-peer network to make transactions without the need of a trusted central authority and at the same time relying on cryptography to ensure the integrity of transactions. According to the analysis of the Group of Reggio Calabria, by integrating charity and blockchain it would be possible to obtain, inter alia, certification of the donors and certification for the donors, financial transparency and accountability.

We now move on to the six papers of the second session which analyze different forms of poverty (as poverty is indeed a polysemic word) and discuss the challenges posed by these many dimensions of poverty.



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Spiritual poverty is addressed by three Chapters (US, Germany and Madrid), though each by a different angle.

The **US** Chapter document present an update of a project started in 2019 and devoted to evangelizing via electronic media (that is, in the digital sphere) the principles and application of CST. The initial experience of this project (referring to the first year of activity) was presented during the 2020 International Conference of the Foundation. This now more than three years activity of the US Chapter is based on the simple observation that the world today clearly suffers from spiritual poverty, as a culture of radical secularization has taken hold in much of society and thus “freedom of religion” has become “freedom from religion”. The goal of the CA US website has been since the beginning to target Catholic leaders in business, the professions, academia, the arts and, especially, young people, in order to show them how CST has answers to their pressing concerns. To further enhance the growth of users, in the last two years a new strategy has been launched based on the (ex post correct) belief that brief paid advertisements (ads) on social media would be able to attract more attention by virtue of getting more prominent placement online. The experience of these two years validated this approach and striking data on impressions, hours spent viewing, etc. will be reported in the presentation of the Chapter. In sum, having started as a relatively smaller online entity, ads that connect CST with current topics of concern have proven to be effective in driving traffic to the website and hopefully this will ultimately translate into a deeper understanding and appreciation of CST and its application.

The analysis of the **German** section of the Foundation moves from recognizing that even a rich and wealthy country as Germany suffers of poverty: Germany’s poverty is spiritual poverty, as what is missing in the country is a solid and pervasive process of evangelization. German society is in desperate need of the richness that is in Catholic social teaching (CST) and this treasure needs to be communicated with more power of speech. The contribution analyzes the challenges and chances, strategies, and tactics for a proper dissemination of CST among the people in the current German environment, with the intention to develop further initiatives in order to promote CST



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in the young generation. As regards the challenges, the paper argues that the current Christian church crisis is a German phenomenon, as the Catholic church in Germany is in a defense mode while worldwide the Catholic church is growing. In the final part of the paper, a rich multi-project/program/initiative significantly called "Lighthouse" is proposed as a concrete format with specific recommendations of actions, differentiated in the usual three levels (macro level, meso level, micro level). Let me here just mention the first very important Lighthouse for CST in Germany: The development of a certified training course on CST to promote leadership and management competences in private and public corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and church institutions in close cooperation with a German university and CAPP. The paper is very rich in its in-depth analysis of the current situation of the Catholic Church in Germany and more on this will be revealed during the Chapters' session.

In a similar vein as that of the German paper, the contribution of the Chapter of **Madrid** is as well focused on spiritual poverty. The analysis is based on the impact on our lives of the well-known characteristic of "rapidification" of the world today, which refers to Laudato sì n. 18: *"The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called "rapidification"*. According to the authors, rapidification is one of the clearest symptoms of the current widespread indifference about God: we are so busy that there is no room for a dialogue with God in our day-to-day activity. And indifference about God is sign of spiritual poverty, which however should not be confused with poverty of the spirit, in the sense of the Sermon on the Mount (Gospel of Mathew, 5-7) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", when Jesus is declaring that it is a blessing to recognize our need to be filled by God's grace. Those who are poor in spirit are the real rich. The analysis of the Group of Madrid is a thorough reflection on whether being poor of spirit can be compatible with being relatively wealthy in material goods. The idea of the common destination of goods at a time of rapidification is examined with reference to the challenges posed to our societies by current fast digitalization. But how this rapidification is taking place? Many activities have benefitted from technology but there are several



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examples where the consequences of the use of technology are speeding up things at a pace that is producing unwanted consequences: the misuse of algorithms, the creation of a throwaway world, the spread of a cancel culture, and many others. The point is that today we suffer a great sense of loneliness. Being closely connected should bring us together but the effect is often the opposite. We feel lonely because we are not able to find the answers that we are looking for. Spiritual poverty in the end originates from this inability. Rapidification adds further load to current spiritual poverty and makes it more difficult for us to be poor in spirit. As Catholics, we should reflect on how we are contributing to overcome the rapidification that the world is witnessing and we should above all listen more to the word of God.

The analysis of poverty of the Chapter of **Roma**, based on an interdisciplinary view of Economics, Neuroscience-Psychology and Pedagogy, is both interesting and original. As fighting today poverty has become an emergency in both developed and developing countries, what is required is a new line of attack. The proposed approach is based on the enlarged humanistic view that a complete unfolding of the dimensions of a human being should transcend purely individualistic and material contents to encompass instead also relational, immaterial and spiritual contents along with the stewardship of empowered emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional Intelligence refers to an intelligence construct that involves the ability to read and access emotions to regulate oneself and others, and to use emotional information in successfully dealing with life, especially situations that involve social complexities. According to the Group of Roma analysis, within such enlarged humanistic view, empowered EI would promote a shift of consumption patterns from individualistic and material goods to relational and immaterial goods. It would then be possible to fight poverty in various ways, for example because a society populated by human beings endowed with more EI would be more compassionate and merciful or because the generalised shift in society from individualistic and material to relational and immaterial goods would indirectly provide an advantage for the poor who could then more easily escape their monetary budget constraints.



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In recent years, the **Barcelona** Chapter has worked in depth on several interesting issues (from consumption lifestyles to the circular economy, from the response that religions can offer to the eco-social challenges to how *Laudato Si* can be introduced in schools). Specifically, with regard to consumption lifestyles, in a paper of the Chapter sent to the Foundation and translated in several languages, consumption is opposed to consumerism following the analysis of the pedagogue and member of the Chapter, Carles Armengol, author of the book “Changing consumption to change lives: a proposal for an educational and ecological conversion”. As it is well known, consumerism is a social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts. Consumerism impoverish people and drives them to existential doubt. Against this deleterious practice, the paper suggest to rethink the way we consume and the way we interact with the world around us. We should respect the rythms and integrity of nature and protect the environment, using efficiently the limited available resources. The proposal is to rethink our models of development and progress, trying to influence - as consumers - economic reality to fit our moral demands.

The **Malta** Chapter elaborate an interesting reflection on the compartmentalization of ethics. According to this analysis, one of the principal causes of the current socio-economic crisis lies in the compartmentalized way in which people treat ethics. Compartmentalization can be roughly defined as the separation of technique from ethics. In the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* Pope Francis makes clear that “..when technology disregards the great ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit. ... a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power” (LS., 136). Moral responsibility requires us to move away from a role-based behavior which leads us to compartmentalize and forget who we are and what is the ultimate goal of our life, that is the common good. The prevalence of roles (the manager or the scientist or the technologist) at the expense of ‘real’ people in organisations, jeopardizes our ability to exercise full moral agency. In many areas of business or science, theoretical developments are introduced without explicit consideration of ethics, apparently on the assumption that such consideration can be separated from the specific economic issue or scientific issue. But we know that



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beyond and above any text there is a context and it is this context that allows to properly define the text. We understand the text only when it is framed within its context. Whilst the reality of near-infinite power might give us the impression that we are in absolute control of our lives on an individual and communitarian level, Pope Francis in LS (107) also warns us that contrary to underlying assumption of the separation thesis, *“technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build.*

At the end of this report on the Groups’ works and after reading all contributions, let me say in sum that Pope Francis’ teaching – in particular of course the two Encyclicas *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* – is clearly of fundamental inspiration for all Foundation’s members. It is an essential guide in our attempt to contribute to identify a path for reshaping and regenerating the world. The present crisis should be considered an opportunity to start anew and to build a more inclusive, more sustainable, and more just world. Our duty – in such a complex situation – is to be up to the indications of the Holy Father and work together for the common good.