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Audience with editors and collaborators of the Journal “Aggiornamenti Sociali”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the editors and collaborators of the Journal “*Aggiornamenti Sociali*” on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of its founding.

After handing to those present the address prepared for the occasion, the Pope gave an impromptu address to the participants in the meeting.

The following is the address prepared for the occasion by the Holy Father:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you and I thank the editor, Fr. Giacomo Costa, for his introduction. I also greet Fr. Bartolomeo Sorge, who for many years has been, and continues to be, a point of reference for the Journal and, more generally, for commitment to the common good.

Helping readers to “orientate themselves in the changing world”: this is the motto that you have chosen. You carry out a valuable service, especially in a time of accelerated change, which leaves many people bewildered and confused. I thank you for having done this with fidelity and constancy for seventy years. It takes energy and commitment, and it certainly takes effort. But the work done also gives satisfaction. I extend my thanks to all those who are not here, but who have worked during these decades: Jesuits and lay people.

1. Discerning in society

Orientating oneself means understanding where we are, what the points of reference are, and then deciding in which direction to move: it is a wasted effort to orient oneself and then stay still. It therefore has a meaning very

close to that of discernment: indeed, even in society's journey, we need to learn to recognize the voice of the Spirit, interpret His signs and choose to follow that voice and not others (cf. Apostle Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 51).

This challenges us on a personal level, but also as a civil and ecclesial community, because the Spirit is mysteriously at work in the dynamics of society. Discernment here is anything but simple. It is not enough to train our spiritual sensitivity, which remains indispensable; we need specific skills and analyses, those to which you give space on your pages, thanks to the contribution of many experts. You deal with complex and controversial issues: from the impact of artificial intelligence on society and on work at the frontiers of bioethics; from migration to the problems of inequality and inequity; from a vision of the economy attentive to sustainability and care for the environment to the construction of the common good in the reality of the current political scenario. In these areas, *Aggiornamenti Sociali* has the task not only of providing reliable information, but also of accompanying readers in learning how to form judgments and act with greater responsibility and not only by hearsay, perhaps carried by the wave of fake news.

With regard to the scientific analysis of social phenomena, you continue to cultivate the correct balance: its importance must be reiterated, but without falling into the temptation of an aseptic outlook on reality, which is impossible. The view of reality always depends on the gaze of the observer and the position in which it is placed. Thus, one of the tasks of a Journal like yours is to help welcome the results of scientific research with the gaze of the disciple, assuming the compassion that Jesus, the Master, feels and shows for the suffering people, for the poor who cry out to Him, and, together with them, for "the earth herself, burdened and laid waste" (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 2).

For Christians, the discernment of social phenomena cannot be separated from the preferential option for the poor. Before rushing to their aid, this option requires that we be on their side, even when we look at the dynamics of society. And the poor have so much to teach us about it, its values and its contradictions! (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 197-201). Among the strengths of *Aggiornamenti Sociali* is also that of giving space to the perspective of the "discarded". Continue to be with them, listen to them, accompany them so that their voices may speak. Even those who research and reflect on social issues are called to have the heart of a shepherd who carries the odour of his sheep.

2. A road to travel together

One cannot carry out the discernment of social phenomena alone. No one – not even the Pope or the Church – can embrace all the relevant perspectives: we need a serious and honest confrontation, involving all the parties involved.

Saint Paul VI has already taught that the analysis of the social situation and the identification of the efforts to be made in order to transform it are a task that belongs to communities as a whole and in their structures, under the guidance of the Spirit (cf. Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, 4). Today we can add that they require a synodal method: it is a matter of building a relationship, made up of words and gestures, setting oneself a common goal and trying to achieve it. It is a dynamic in which everyone speaks freely, but also listens and is willing to learn and change. To dialogue is to build a road on which to walk together, and, when necessary, bridges on which to meet and reach out to one another. Divergences and conflicts must not be denied or concealed, as we are often tempted to do, even in the Church. They must be assumed, not remain blocked from within – conflict can never be the last word – but to open new processes (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 226-227).

This synodal way of proceeding also calls for a Journal, which can use its pages to allow positions and points of view to converse; but it must beware of the temptation to be abstract, to limit itself to the level of ideas, forgetting the reality of acting and journeying together. Avoid this risk when publishing words rooted in social experiences and practices, nourished by that reality. Serious intellectual research is also a journey made together, especially when dealing with frontier issues, making different perspectives and disciplines interact and promoting relationships of respect and friendship between the people involved, who discover how the encounter enriches

everyone. This is all the more true in initiatives that require the creation of networks, participation in events, and the activation of research groups. I know that you are involved in many such experiences, some even here in the Vatican, and I encourage you to continue.

Three areas seem to me to be particularly significant. The first is the integration of those parts of society which, for various reasons, are situated on the margins, and in which the victims of the throwaway culture are more easily found. They are bearers of an original contribution indispensable for the construction of a more just society: they see things that others cannot see.

A second area concerns the encounter between the generations, whose urgency we recognized at the Synod of Young People. The acceleration of social change risks tearing young people away from their past, projecting them into a future without roots and making them easier to manipulate, while exposing older people to the temptation of imitating youth. To counter these risks we need to strengthen pacts of trust and solidarity between generations.

Finally, the third area is the promotion of opportunities for encounter and common action between Christians and believers of other religions, but also with all people of good will. To do so requires dealing with atavistic fears and very deep-rooted tensions: some concern inter-religious relations, others refer to the clashes between “laity” and “Catholics” that run through Italian history, others – and we must not forget them, indeed they require special attention – are internal to the ecclesial body. But if we do not succeed in uniting the whole human family, it will be impossible to proceed in the search for sustainable and integral development (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 13).

3. The joy of social commitment

Finally, I urge you not to be discouraged: the commitment to justice and to the care of the common home is associated with a promise of joy and fulfilment. Many can testify to this and certainly you too have the opportunity to experience it in your work: putting yourself on the side of the poor is an encounter with suffering and injustice, but also with genuine and contagious happiness. Our commitment to justice makes us enter into the dynamic of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (*Mt* 5: 6). Continue to cultivate this hunger and transmit it to others: together we will experience the gift of being satisfied.

Thank you once again for your work. I ask God our Father to accompany and bless you, to fill you with His love and the power of hope. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
