



## Msgr. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo

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### Introduction

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Greetings to every one of you! We are very happy to open the fourth international Vatican Youth Symposium with the subject *Youth as Stewards of Our Planet for a More Fraternal and Supportive Society*.

First of all, I would like to thank Baroness Betsee Parker, Jeffrey Sachs, Anthony Annett and Gabriella Marino and her team, as well as to Siamak Sam Loni and his group, without whose work you wouldn't be here.

With the competence, professionalism and genius proper of your age, we have chosen to study a question that Pope Francis has very much at heart: that of social participation in terms of solidarity and fraternity. We can well say that society is primarily a process of participation: of goods, roles, statutes, advantages and disadvantages, benefits and charges, obligations and duties. People are partners, that is to say, "taking part", in the measure in which society distributes parts. Since society is a participatory reality, given the mutual exchange above, we must represent it, both as an irreducible whole and as a system of inter-relations between people. We must be convinced that such a project, in today's partially post-industrial society, is feasible because the majority of the people want it.

Pope Francis keeps encouraging us to find practical ways to apply *fraternity and friendship (Concordia) as regulatory principles of the economic order*. Whereas other lines of thought only mention solidarity, we speak of fraternity and friendship, given that a fraternal society is also supportive, whereas the contrary is not always true, as so many experiences confirm. Pope Francis, therefore, is calling us to remedy the mistake of contemporary culture, which has led us to believe that a democratic society can progress with two disjointed principles: the principle of efficiency and the principle of solidarity – which would regulate inter-subjective relations in the social sphere. It is this dichotomization that has impoverished our society.

The keyword that expresses better than any other today the need to overcome such a dichotomy is "*fraternity*", an evangelical word that was taken up in the ideal of the French Revolution, but which the post-Revolutionary order then abandoned – for well known reasons – until its cancellation from the political-economic lexicon.

It was the evangelical testimony of Saint Francis, with his school of thought, that gave this term the meaning that it then kept in the course of the centuries, namely, that of constituting, at a time, the complement and exaltation of the principle of solidarity. In fact, whereas solidarity is the principle of social planning that makes it possible for un-equals to become equals, fraternity is what makes it possible for equals to be different people with different vocations and roles. Fraternity enables persons that are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and in their fundamental rights, to participate differently in the common good in keeping with their capability, their plan of life, their vocation, their work or their charisma of service.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has insisted that the protocol with which we will be judged at the end of days is based on fraternity: "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me" (*Matthew 25:40*).

The 19th and 20th centuries were characterized by arduous battles, whether cultural or political, in the name of solidarity and human rights, and this was a good thing although these struggles are far from being over. What is most disturbing today is the increasing exclusion and marginalization from an equal and fraternal participation in the distribution of the goods, both market goods and non-market goods, such as dignity, freedom, knowledge, membership, integration, peace.

In this connection, what makes persons suffer most and leads to the rebellion of citizens is the contrast between the theoretical attribution of equal rights for all and the unequal and iniquitous distribution of fundamental goods for the majority of people. Even if we live in a world in which wealth abounds, many people are still victims of poverty and social exclusion. Inequalities – together with climate change and power wars – are the causes of the greatest forced migration in history, which affects more than 65 million human beings. We must not forget the growing tragedy of modern slavery in terms of forced labour, prostitution, and organ trafficking which are true crimes against humanity. It is alarming and symptomatic that today the human body, especially women and girls, is bought and sold, as if it were merchandise to be exchanged.

Almost one hundred years ago, Pius XI foresaw the affirmation of these inequalities and iniquities as the consequence of a global economic dictatorship that he called "international imperialism of money" (Encyclical

*Quadragesimo Anno*, May 15, 1931, 109). And it was Paul VI who lamented, almost 50 years later, the “new abusive form of economic domination on the social, culture and also political plane” (Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, May 14, 1971, 44).

The point is that *a participatory society cannot be content with a horizon of pure solidarity and welfarism*, because a society that is only supportive and based on welfare, without being fraternal, would be a society of unhappy and desperate people from which everyone would seek to flee, in extreme cases also by committing suicide.

A society in which true fraternity and friendship are dissolved is not capable of hope and future. It is not capable of progressing only on the basis of “right to possess” or “giving out of duty.” This is why, neither the liberal-individualist vision of the world, in which everything (or almost <everything>) is exchanged, nor the centric-state vision of society, in which everything (or almost <everything>) is distributed by the state, are sure ways to overcome that inequality, inequity and exclusion which bog down our societies today. It is about seeking a way out of the suffocating alternative between the neo-Liberal thesis and the neo-Statist thesis. In fact, precisely because the activity of the markets and the manipulation of nature – both moved by selfishness, avidity, materialism and unfair competition – at times knows no limits, it is urgent to intervene on the causes of such malfunction, especially in the financial realm, rather than limiting oneself to correct its effects.

Finally, I cannot fail to speak of the grave risks connected with the invasion, in the high levels of culture and education — at university or high school –, of the positions of *libertarian individualism* without real ethics. A common characteristic of this fallacious paradigm is that it minimizes the common good, namely, the “living well,” the “good life,” in the communal framework, and exalts that selfish ideal, which dishonestly affirms that it is only the individual that gives value to things and to inter-personal relations and, therefore, only the individual can decide what is good and what is bad. Libertarianism, which is very fashionable today, preaches that to define individual freedom and responsibility one must recur to the idea of self-causation. Thus libertarian individualism denies the validity of the common good, because on one hand it affirms that the idea itself of “common” implies the constriction of at least some individuals, and on the other hand it maintains that the notion of “good” deprives freedom of its essence.

The radicalization of individualism in libertarian and, therefore, antisocial terms, leads to the conclusion that *each person has the ‘right’ to self-fulfilment even at the cost of the exclusion and marginalization of the most vulnerable*. Individualism is synonymous with a loosening of social bonds. However, by erroneously confusing the *condition and signs* of freedom with the essence of freedom realized, they confuse bonds or relations with goods, such as family or interpersonal relationships with the excluded and the marginalized, to achieve the common good, and be open to God.

The 15th century was the century of the first Humanism in modernity, which was a revival of the great Greek humanism of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. At the beginning of the 21st century one increasingly perceives the need for a *new Humanism of which the young generations – that is YOU – must be protagonists*. The decisive engine of change was the transition from feudalism to the modern society following the Greco-Roman model after the invasion of the barbarians. Today, we are experiencing an equally radical paradigm shift: from modern to post-modern <society>, with the endemic increase of social inequalities, the migration challenge and identity conflicts. Modern slavery, the environmental crisis, the problems of bio-politics and bio-rights are only some of today’s adversities. In the face of such challenges, the mere updating of old categories of thought and techniques of collective decision-making are not enough; new ways must be sought inspired by Christ’s message of the Beatitudes and the strength and genius of youth.

While I entrust these reflections to you, I encourage you to carry forward with renewed commitment your precious service for the contemporary world.