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Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontifice Foundation

PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

“Rethinking Key Features of Economic and Social Life”

25-27 May 2015

New Synod Hall (Vatican City) and the Palazzo della Cancelleria (Rome)

“Rethinking key features of economic and social life” is the theme of an international conference being held by the *Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontifice Foundation* from 25 to 27 May 2015 in the New Synod Hall (Vatican City) and the Palazzo della Cancelleria (Rome).

“This conference continues the work of the Foundation which endeavours to promote a series of clearly defined and wide-ranging topics. These indicate a tangible and feasible way forward concerning the reforms needed in the market economy, from the perspective of an economy that is at the service of human development”. Domingo Sugranyes Bickel, president of the Foundation indicated this when presenting the objectives of this year’s conference. He added that “if these issues are to be fully developed, they require reflection and inspiration that are rooted in the Faith”.

The conference will be centred on three topics that relate to some key features of current social and economic changes.

The first topic (*1st session – Can growth continue without compulsive consumption?*) is often mentioned by Pope Francis when he refers to consumerism and the economy as being a “throwaway” economy. Here the questions that the Foundation poses are formulated in economic terms: can we continue to maintain growth even without uncontrolled consumption? An upturn in consumption is urgently required in Europe to facilitate job creation. Can we criticise voracious and unnecessary consumption which can lead to dangerous addiction, while at the same time speak of the need for new employment? The argument is economic, but also cultural and psychological. In a market economy, it is primarily the consumers, families and opinion groups who create the demand for goods which companies subsequently produce and sell. However, we are already seeing an evolution in public opinion that is preparing for a major change in the direction being taken by vigorous growth, but is equally satisfying because of the content and quality of the discussions. In order to focus the issues as well as possible within their own context, one needs to reflect on the power of advertising and the important role of example that can be given by families and institutions of Christian education. All of this will be the subject of reflection in the first session.

The second topic (*2nd Session – The future of employment and the informal economy*) is linked to a phenomenon that nowadays we constantly come across although there is no formal statistical evidence. This is the so-called *informal economy*. In point of fact it comprises the greater part of all economic activity in poor countries. It is a multifaceted sector that is also present however in rich economies. There are ventures to provide social and family relief that have proved to be essential in the current crisis, but there are also those that critically touch on the area of illegality, like the “black” economy and unfair or criminal competition. Here the question is how to create awareness of this almost unknown fact? How can we protect the legitimate rights of everyone involved and how can we recognise in practice the dignity of those who have no access to formal employment?

The third topic (*3rd session – An urgent message for today’s world: can Catholic Social Teaching be extended even without the Christian faith?*). This is of special interest to those who are convinced of the reliability of the philosophy and beneficial influence of the principles of the Church’s social doctrine but who live in an environment where the majority are not Christian, or where any religious reference is regarded as sectarian.

In this case, these are the questions to which answers must be found: why is it that we Catholics do not know how to be more convincing? Why is it that many listen and understand when Pope Francis speaks? Are we the cause of these obstacles because of our lack of humility and sincerity as well as our insufficient scientific and practical knowledge of the ideas that inspire the Church in social matters?

This last fact led the *Centesimus Annus - Pro Pontifice* Foundation to introduce the Economy and Society International Award. It was established to recognise works that represent a breakthrough in the development and application of social doctrine. The award is biennial. This year the award will go to the Catholic economist and financier Pierre de Lauzun (France) for his book entitled *Finance: un regard Chrétien. De la banque médiévale à la mondialisation financière*. It will also be granted for two doctoral theses that are not yet published. Their authors are Arturo Bellocq Montano (Uruguay) and Alexander Stumvoll (Austria).

Those attending the Conference are business people, entrepreneurs, professors and high-level officials. The speakers include Prof. Enrico Giovannini, former Italian Minister of Labour; Paul Kenny, a leading British trade unionist; Sally Blount, dean of the prestigious Kellogg School of Management in Chicago; Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva; Rev. Antonio Spadaro, editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*; Prof. Franco Gallo, former president of the Italian Constitutional Court, and several other specialists from various countries. Cardinal Reinhardt Marx, Archbishop of Munich and chairman of the selection panel will be present at the Economy and Society International Awards Ceremony which will be chaired by the Cardinal Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin.

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- *Journalists, photographers and video operators are kindly informed that, in order to attend the two events of the international conference to be held in the New Synod Hall and in the Palazzo della Cancelleria, they will need **authorisation from the Holy See Press Office** by filling out an application form for accreditation available on the website: www.vatican.va. The request, accompanied by identification documents, must be sent by the management of the news organisation represented to: accreditamenti@pressva.va at least 48 hours before the event. For information please contact the Holy See Press Office: tel. (39) 06698921, fax (39) 066868810.*
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