A Training-Forum on

Human Development in the Mediterranean

Christian Islamic and Jewish Approaches to Economic and Social Issues.

organized by the **Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation (FCAPP**), in cooperation with **the Catholic Institute of the Mediterranean** (Marseilles), **the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies** of the Gregorian Pontifical University, **the Antonianum Pontifical University** (Rome) and the **World Bank**.

from October 2026 onwards

Goals and background: The Training-Forum draws inspiration from the **Manifesto "For a Theology from the Mediterranean", issued in Marseilles** in September 2023, which calls for initiatives that "contribute to building networks between the Mediterranean Churches and to building a Mediterranean of peace". We wish to stimulate better mutual information, dialogue and joint studying and research based on the ethical foundations of the three Mediterranean Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam and Christianity). It also builds on the document on Human Fraternity "For World Peace and Living Together", cosigned by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi in February 2019, and on the Assisi Meetings of World Religions started by Pope St. John Paul II in 1986 in the city of St. Francis, of which year 2026 marked the 40th anniversary. Pope Leo XIV strongly supported this approach particularly in his visit to the Great Mosque of Algiers in April 2026 and in Barcelona in June 2026 on the occasion of **Med26** initiative for a **"Mediterranean of peace"**.

The **Training Forum** is both a training course with students and teachers and at the same time a Forum of mutual peer learning and studying in a multidisciplinary, multicultural and multireligious framework. The field of study covers the **social economic and policy challenges of our age, the "Rerum Novarum" of to-day, as they apply to the Mediterranean, and from the Mediterranean to the world.** It was those fundamental changes in the heyday of the 19th century industrial revolution and related conflicts that prompted Pope

Leo XIII 's Encyclical "Rerum Novarum", which started what we now call the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC). Today we are experiencing a similar period of turbulent and deep structural change posing many challenging issues. They range from competitiveness and economic performance to employment and labor force participation, from poverty and income distribution to human rights and good governance, from technological change to the environmental and energy transitions underway, from peacebuilding to intercultural dialogue, etc. The Forum should lead to more and better sharing of information and knowledge on the approach to such *problematique* developed by the three universal religions of the Mediterranean, and their significant common elements.

We refer to those common grounds as the "Social Doctrine of the Mediterranean", because we rely on the important work of interreligious dialogue carried out by theologians and philosophers of the three traditions in the recent past. In the Catholic tradition, we speak of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, i.e. the fundamental principles developed in the past and currently worked on that inspire Catholic Social Teaching (CST) on the issues concerning the economy, society and public policies. The goal of this initiative is to discuss how the other two main Mediterranean religions (Islam and Judaism) approach the "social issues" and the "Rerum Novarum", i.e. the fundamental changes underway, and what principles have been developed in that context. The objectives of the Forum are basically informative, educational, and non-political. Naturally, the ultimate goal is, in line with the 2023 Manifesto, to lay the foundations for an informed rigorous and objective inter-religious dialogue that contributes to socio-economic and policy cooperation, and through that, to peace and development in a framework of religious freedom, tolerance, mutual respect and pluralism. The Training Forum has pragmatic ambitions: it wishes to fill the knowledge gaps that divide the different approaches and point to the many elements of wisdom common to the three religions. This goal is -we believe- very important, because it is a precondition for dialogue and promotes better mutual understanding, more tolerance and moderation, thereby undermining prejudice, fanaticism and radicalism that are often at the root of conflict and violence. We are convinced that, despite growing secularization and relativism in modern societies, religions have a lot to contribute to peaceful coexistence, cooperation and human development, in the "spirit of Assisi", i.e. religious freedom, interreligious dialogue and universal brotherhood.

Even though the approach is multidisciplinary, the focus will be on social science, i.e. economics, sociology and public policies. The main speakers at the Webinars will be experts and scholars in social science that are knowledgeable in and inspired by the three religions. But great room will be given to discussion and exchange of views. The sessions will include not only talks and lectures, but also panels and possibly modern pedagogical tools and interactions.

Ultimately, we aim to build experience and expertise for developing in the future a fully-fledged **School** on the Social Doctrine of the Mediterranean ("School" in the Mediterranean sense of the word).

Steering Group and Partnerships: A Steering Group will be established to advise on the organization and the management of the Training Forum and coordinate the various activities. The Group will be chaired by **Fr. Alexis Leproux**, President of the *Institut Catholique de la Mediterranée*, and draw on experts coming from FCAPP, the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies, the Gregorian Pontifical University, the Catholic Institute of the Mediterranean in Marseille, Oikos and the Antonianum Pontifical University, but also the College of Islamic Studies of the Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, the Association of Jewish Christian Friendship and other Jewish Communities/Universities, the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), the Euro-Mediterranean Economists' Association, think tanks, academics and other possible partners in the Mediterranean.

Title and Topics. The overarching theme of the Course is "**Structural Change and Human Development in and from the Mediterranean"**. We are seeing today unprecedented changes in the context that affect the economy, society, inter-regional intercultural and international relations. They concern technology (e.g. Artificial Intelligence), the labor market, industrial restructuring, demography, trade, the environment, social and cultural interactions, etc. How do we respond to those new (and often old) challenges? What needs to be done at the level of individuals and local communities, regional and international organizations, business entities (both large conglomerates and SMEs), the private sector, public policymaking, the financial sector, NGOs, etc.?

The focus on human development is explained by the fact that economic prosperity, jobs and welfare are a necessary component of social and institutional stability and a strong driver of individual and collective engagement

and strategies. Human development includes not only economic growth and financial conditions, but also individual freedoms, human dignity, social cohesion, the quality of life, human security and human rights.

Each session of the Training Forum will present and discuss one set of issues, focusing on socio-economic principles and best practice drawn from ethical foundations related to the three religions. The list of topics to be dealt with include, among others:

1. The option for the poor and the most vulnerable: solidarity in business economics and finance, and poverty eradication.
2. Human rights, the dignity of the person, liberty, equality and fraternity
3. Economic integration and interdependence, the social market economy, competition and trade, good governance, etc. in an environment of open inter-religious exchanges and cooperation
4. Subsidiarity, the respective roles of the state and society, the welfare system, multilateralism and international law
5. The protection of nature, the environment and sustainable development
6. Employment, labor force participation, income and wage distribution, the social dialogue between employers and employees, the role of small and medium enterprises
7. Equal opportunities between men and women, the role of women in society and in the economy, access to education leadership and the professions, public policies promoting equal opportunities.

We could also explore the possibility of holding one or two of the Seminars in person rather than remotely, locating them in Rome, Marseilles, Taranto and other places in the course of the year, depending on the possibility of organizing and funding them.

Organization, Participants and the 2026-2027 Program: The Training Forum will be structured in sessions and made up of webinars. It will be organized **on an experimental basis over the academic years 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 starting at the end of 2026**. We envisage **4 Sessions, once every two months** (November-December, January- February, March, April-May) of approximately **2 hours each.** The Webinars will be convened on a virtual platform (Zoom or the like), possibly on a Monday. At the end of the Cycle of 4 Sessions, we plan to have a **Seminar in person** that could be held in Rome, back-to-back with the

FCAPP International Conference and the private audience with the Pope, in June 2027 or 2028. The Webinars will be conducted in English.

At the end of the Course, a **certificate of attendance** will be issued for the participants that followed and were actively engaged in the Sessions and the Seminars.

The cycle of Sessions is targeted to adult professionals and young leaders engaged in business, academia, policymaking, journalists, and religious officers or leaders drawn from different cultural and religious backgrounds. No a-priori specific qualification in social science or religion is required. An effort will be made by speakers and organizers to provide documentation coaching and support so that a relatively balanced eco-system of expertise and interests may be covered by the participants. **The topics** chosen for the 2026-2028 cycle will be:

1. Financing Human Development in the Mediterranean: financial players, markets and policies.
2. Artificial Intelligence, new technologies and the *Magnifica Humanitas*: challenges and opportunities for integral Human Development
3. Jobs, Labor Force Participation, Decent Work, Entrepreneurship and SME: the road to Human Dignity for All
4. Poverty, social exclusion, inequalities, and the preferential option for the poor: new approaches to solidarity, empowerment, equal opportunities and an inclusive society
5. The challenges posed by climate change and the protection of nature: new partnerships between the private and the public sector, the local and the global dimension, individual and collective rights and duties.

Funding: In the first rounds of the Course, we expect that both participants and teachers engage on a voluntary pro-bono basis, whereas the organizing institutions would provide facilities, networking platforms, reading lists and other teaching and support materials. We also expect and trust that networking for discussing and learning purposes will stimulate the progressive engagement and active collaboration of several other and different institutions, international organizations, research centers, Universities, religious associations, etc., and that through time this network can grow and reach out to different research

centers, faith communities, associations and localities across the Mediterranean, and beyond.

Registration: Registration for the Course will be open in the fall of 2026, and admissions will be decided upon depending on availability of places. We launched the Training Forum at the 2026 International Conference of the FCAPP and in the Med26 Festival in Barcelona on the occasion of the visit of the Pope there, receiving a favorable feedback and interest.

All those interested please write to:

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