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### ***Young people, ecological transition and kindness in the Spirit of the Laudato Si***

The *Laudato Si* covers alternative and renewable energies, the importance of each biological species, the correlation between pollution and exploitation of the poor, and a relational vision of the relationship between man and nature. And it is precisely from these topics that I would like to start talking about young people who seem to be placing these issues increasingly at the center of their reflections. In particular, **the value of ecological transition as an opportunity for social and professional inclusion that comes to life from the principle of integral ecology as defined in Pope Francis' Encyclical.**

The new generations are aware of the risk of climate change, which creates anxiety in them.

A major global study carried out by the International Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) on 10,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 reveals that 84% are concerned about the impacts of climate change and more than 50% consider global warming to be one of the greatest challenges facing humanity.

If we then consider that the energy sector, globally, employs around 67 million people and that according to the IEA (International Energy Agency) the transition to renewable energies could generate up to 14 million new jobs, displace around 5 million workers from the fossil fuel sector and require a skills upgrade for a further 30 million workers, we easily understand the magnitude of the impact referred to. This projected growth in employment, combined with the demand for new green skills, represents a huge opportunity, moreover, to upgrade skills, retrain those working in fossil fuel-based industries, but above all to attract a rapidly growing youth demographic. Looking at geographical areas with a large young population, such as sub-Saharan Africa where 70 percent of the population is under 30, job creation is more of a priority. But even if we look at the more economically developed countries, the opportunity is great and is an important employment opportunity.

It starts, in fact, from the thesis by psychologist Johnatan Haidt of the significant correlation between the use of smartphones and social media, from the early 2000s onwards, and the progressive increase in levels of anxiety, depression and self-harm among adolescents, professor of social psychology at New York University's Stern School of Business, and author of [\*The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness.\*](#)

Then we move on to the latest survey on the '**Global State of Social Connectedness**', conducted by Meta-Gallup in 140 countries, which yielded somewhat worrying results: on average around the world, 24% of people surveyed said they felt socially isolated. The most negative percentages are not necessarily related to economic difficulties and are to be found in the younger age groups that feel the 'loneliest'. In wealthy Silicon Valley, the perceived loneliness rate is 45%. And if we wanted to do a litmus test, i.e. use a control method, as is also used in company evaluations to check the consistency of values, the latest **World Happiness Report** identifies Finland, which also has one of the lowest rates of perceived social isolation, as the happiest nation, according to Meta-Gallup, taking into account the key determinants of healthy life expectancy, GDP per capita, social support and low level of corruption, freedom to make key decisions in one's own life, as well as the generosity of the community in which people care for each other.

Data from the study show that in the 'happiest' countries positive social connections and support for each other are twice as prevalent as in loneliness. Connections that are not only generic and emotional but also absolutely concrete and that involve different subjects: citizens, companies, associations, institutions.

At the same time, changing perspective, the younger generations aspire to make a difference, either by creating sustainable enterprises or through volunteering or activism, demonstrating that they want to contribute to a significant change in society that brings a positive impact in the world.

In such a scenario, we as adults are called upon to support young people in focusing on what are the new concrete areas in which they can make a difference, real and non-digital areas, with the understanding that motivation and passion are the strongest levers to succeed in achieving one's goals. Precisely the ecological transition can well represent this motivation that can be turned into passion, through the involvement of the new generations in processes and actions based on respect not only for the human species but also for everything that surrounds it. We thus have, at this precise moment in history, the opportunity to give young people a higher and more involving purpose, a common, tangible and concrete purpose, not only in terms of professional opportunities, but also of a human path that produces a positive impact on the world, environmentally and socially sustainable.

Of course, in this context, education and training are key factors, as the report on Europe's competitiveness by former Council President Mario Draghi pointed out lucidly.

Due to climate change, the so-called 'educational divide' is increasing. There will be a widening gap precisely in the crucial issue of education. The World Bank report shows how climate change hits education harder in low-income countries, with 10 school days lost per year on average, compared to 2.4 in richer nations. In Brazil, students in the poorest municipalities could lose as much as six months of learning due to the heat. Moreover, in America itself, the heat has had a worse effect on exam scores for children from low-income school districts.

But there are also positive influences of the younger generation's attitudes: in India, children's climate engagement resulted in 13% more virtuous behaviour by their parents; in the UK, recycling rates increased by 8.6% when students shared waste education lessons with their parents. According to a World Bank study, while 9 out of 10 children in Bangladesh want to know and act for the climate, only 3 of them could correctly answer a basic question on greenhouse gases. And knowledge of the subject (which is, moreover, in great demand everywhere in the labour market) was found to be very low in low- and middle-income countries such as Pakistan or Sierra Leone. Seven out of ten young people in these countries are calling for the subject to be studied as early as primary school. Of course, resources are needed, and worldwide only 1.5 per cent of climate funding is allocated to education.

## ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION AND THE COMMON GOOD

What better opportunity, then, to propose tools and paths of study and work through which we can actively contribute to tackling and trying to solve the climate crisis that also threatens to be the cause of the migration of tens of millions of people by 2050? I deeply appreciated the statement made by Elena Beccalli, the new Rector of the Catholic University of Milan, where I have the honour of teaching, when she said in the

interview on the occasion of her appointment that she would like the University she leads to become the best NOT OF the world but FOR the world.

And looking across the Atlantic, the Gabelli School of Business at Fordham University, a prestigious Jesuit university in New York, where I sit on the advisory board, has established the RBC a true 'Responsible Business Centre' that creates the necessary connections between businesses, institutions, the media and young people on precisely these issues. Universities and schools can certainly help the new generations on this path, but the collaboration must be systemic.

And speaking of contributing to a better world, the archbishop of Milan Monsignor Mario Delpini in a recent speech spoke of enterprise and the common good as 'generators of hope'.

***And here he outlined the path that leads from 'generators of hope' to the construction of an order of cohesion and peace within which enterprises play a fundamental role.***

#### CORPORATE FOUNDATIONS IN THE WAKE OF LAUDATO SI'

In this regard, I would like to mention two examples of corporate foundations that are certainly moving in this direction:

- the [MAIRE Foundation](#), committed precisely to affirming the value of the challenge of decarbonisation as an opportunity to build **integral human development** and, in this context, to emphasising how businesses can play a primary role in actively contributing to the construction of the common good, has just published in collaboration with IPSOS the new edition of the study '[Climate goals: winning the challenge of climate goals through the creation of skills and competences worldwide](#)', conducted in 12 countries, including the USA, China India, Italy, the UK, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Chile on 4 Continents and 2. 200 respondents. The research reveals a growing awareness of the importance of skills development to address the energy transition, especially in emerging, Asian and Middle Eastern countries, North Africa and South America, pointing to a new awareness and prominence of these regions in the ecological transition seen not only as an urgent response to the climate crisis, but also as an unprecedented opportunity for the creation of new jobs and the inclusion of women and minorities in the workforce. Investing in education and training in order to create new multidisciplinary skills for these new challenges is crucial to ensure a sustainable future for future generations, in the spirit of the Encyclical Laudato Si'.

-the Amplifon Foundation

which, through the launch of the 'Manifesto of Kindness' summarised in twelve *golden rules*, also aims at fostering inclusion and social cohesion, stimulating a collective reflection on kindness as a desired form of our actions-relationships, underlining the importance of promoting it as a habit to be cultivated and trained in everyday life and, ultimately, as a tool for peace, urgent and possible for each of us. And to confirm that kindness is a proactive and assertive concept, and not a passive one, here are some examples: 'To be kind takes courage', 'Kindness is a powerful virtue that must be trained with patience and constancy', 'Kindness is necessary and urgent'.

A final consideration and reading suggestion.

To understand what we must aim for in terms of involving the new generations, let us think of what happens at the stadium between fans of the same football team. There is an immediate feeling, a strong bond that is

created even if you do not know each other. Even if one is very different, in approach, style, social class or political or religious orientation.

We can build that same bond through the awareness of a common goal at inter-generational level and between new generations in different parts of the world, regardless of social class, cultural level, religious or political affiliation. A goal for which the commitment of everyone can also make a difference.

And the key is precisely the energy transition and the fight against climate change in the interest of all the creatures that inhabit this beautiful Earth of ours.

#### NEED FOR CRITICAL SPIRIT DEVELOPMENT

Today's reality presents a higher level of complexity than in the past. And to be able to understand structured concepts characterised by many correlations, such as ecological transition and the common good, we increasingly need to develop a deep critical spirit through which we can analyze information and data, distinguishing those that are true from those that are not.

The new generations are finding it increasingly difficult to transform information into knowledge and knowledge into what scientists call wisdom, i.e. the critical spirit, which helps us to reason and metabolize concepts that enable us to make informed choices and implement important projects.

In this regard, I recommend reading 'Reader come home', a book by Maryanne Wolf, one of the world's leading cognitive neuroscientists appointed by Pope Francis in the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, in which the author points out how studies on the brain show how digital reading media, mobile phones, Ipads and computers, through which, above all, the new generations study and inform themselves, do not facilitate this process and that we must therefore above all help the new generations to read, inform themselves and study even on the old and dear books.

In conclusion, young people, and companies, can contribute to the development of a better world, with alternative means and tools, with a common goal in mind, across the new generations, across different geographies, across different social, cultural and religious contexts.

An excellent ground, therefore, on which to build a future of inclusion, social cohesion and peace.