



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE ITALIAN CHRISTIAN WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS (A.C.L.I.)***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 27 January 2006*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate
and in the Presbyterate,
Dear Members of the ACLI,*

We are meeting today on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Italian Christian Workers' Associations. I greet President Luigi Bobba and warmly thank him for his courteous words that truly touched me; I greet the other leaders and each one of you. I offer a special greeting to the Bishops and priests who have accompanied you and who are concerned with your spiritual formation.

The birth of your sodality is due to the far-sighted intuition of Pope Pius XII of venerable memory. He desired to form a visible and effective presence of Italian Catholics in the world of work and availed himself of the precious collaboration of Giovanni Battista Montini, then Substitute of the Secretariat of State.

Ten years later, on 1 May 1955, the same Pontiff established the Feast of St Joseph the Worker to point out to all the world's workers the way to personal sanctification through work, and thereby to restore the perspective of authentic humanization to the drudgery of daily life.

Today too, the question of work, the focus of rapid and complex changes, never ceases to call the human conscience into question and requires that workers do not lose sight of the basic principle that must guide every practical decision: the good of all human beings and of the whole of society.

Within this basic fidelity to God's original plan, I would like here to re-read briefly, with you and for you, the three "orders" or "fidelities" which in the past you have been committed to embodying in

your multiform activity.

The first fidelity that the ACLI are called to live is *fidelity to workers*. The person is the "measure of the dignity of work" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 271). For this reason, the Magisterium has always recalled the human dimension of the activity of work and has redirected it to its true aim, without forgetting that the biblical teaching on work culminates in the commandment to rest. To require, therefore, that Sunday should not be equated to all other days of the week is a civilized decision.

Other priorities derive from the primacy of the ethical value of human labour: of the person over work (cf. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 12), of work over capital (*ibid.*), of the universal destination of goods over the right to possess private property (*ibid.*, n. 14), in short, the priority of being over having (*ibid.*, n. 20).

This hierarchy of priorities shows clearly that the work environment is fully part of the anthropological issue.

Today, a new and unheard of implication of the social question connected with the protection of life is emerging in this area. We live in a time in which science and technology offer extraordinary possibilities for improving everyone's existence. But a distorted use of this power can seriously and irreparably threaten the destiny of life itself.

Thus, the teaching of beloved John Paul II, who asked us to see life as the new frontier of the social question (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 20), should be reasserted.

The protection of life from its conception until its natural end and wherever it is threatened, offended or trampled upon, is the first duty in which an authentic ethic of responsibility is expressed that should be consistently extended to all other forms of poverty, injustice and exclusion.

The second "fidelity" I would like to recommend to you is - in conformity with the spirit of your Founding Fathers - *fidelity to democracy*, which alone can guarantee equality and rights to everyone.

Indeed, there is a sort of reciprocal dependence between democracy and justice that impels everyone to work responsibly to safeguard each person's rights, especially those of the weak and marginalized.

This being said, it should not be forgotten that the search for truth is at the same time the condition for the possibility of a real and not only apparent democracy: "As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (*Centesimus*

Annus, n. 46).

From here comes the invitation to work, to increase consensus around a framework of shared references, for otherwise the appeal to democracy risks becoming a mere procedural formality that perpetuates differences and exacerbates problems.

The third task is *fidelity to the Church*. Only cordial and passionate adherence to the journey of the Church will guarantee that necessary identity which can make itself present in every social milieu of the world without losing the savour and scent of the Gospel.

It is not by accident that John Paul II addressed these words to you on 1 May 1995: "The Gospel alone renews the ACLI"; they still mark out the principal route for your Association, since they encourage you to put the Word of God at the centre of your life and to see evangelization as an integral part of your mission.

The presence, then, of priests as spiritual guides helps you make the most of your relationship with the local Church and strengthens your commitment to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

As associated Christian lay people and workers, always take pains with the formation of your members and leaders, with a view to the special service to which you are called. As witnesses of the Gospel and weavers of fraternal bonds, be present courageously in the crucial areas of social life.

Dear friends, the main theme of your 60th anniversary celebration was the reinterpretation of these historical "fidelities", doing justice to the fourth task with which Venerable John Paul II urged you to "extend the bounds of your social action" (*Address to the ACLI, 27 April 2002*; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 12 June, n. 4, p. 11).

May this commitment to the future of humanity always be enlivened by Christian hope. In this way you too, as witnesses of the Risen Jesus, Hope of the world, will help to impress new dynamism upon the great tradition of the Italian Christian Workers' Associations and be able to cooperate under the action of the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth.

May God accompany you and the Blessed Virgin protect you, your families and all your projects. I bless you with affection, as I assure you of my special remembrance in prayer.

