

*Duc in altum*  
**Catholic Action.**  
Take courage  
for the future!

**International Congress  
on the Catholic Action**

Rome - Loreto  
31<sup>st</sup> August - 5<sup>th</sup> September 2004

**DOCUMENTS**

We would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the Congress with their prayer and their organizational and financial support. A special word of thanks to the Italian and to the Spanish Episcopal Conferences.

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## PRESENTATION

“*Duc in altum*, Catholic Action. Take courage for the future!”.

The International Congress on the Catholic Action brought together pastors, lay people, priests and religious to search and find ways and means as to how they could answer to this invitation from the Holy Father (26<sup>th</sup> April 2002). They also wished to get to know this gift from the Holy Spirit better and together commit themselves to answer to this call with a faithful dedication and face the challenges, which the new millennium brought with it, with hope and courage.

This was the first International Congress on Catholic Action after the Council. The Second Ecumenical Vatican II has collected the new indications and the exigencies of our times and has called for a deep renewal within the Church. At the same time it has placed Catholic Action at the heart of this missionary communion dynamism by defining its conciliar character with the four specific characteristics - its ecclesial, lay and organic nature and its collaboration with the Hierarchy (cfr. AA 20) - characteristics which all the associations with this name or any other name should bear simultaneously.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30<sup>th</sup> December 1988) John Paul II expresses the teachings of the Council on the laity very clearly. He speaks about traditional and new lay associations and movements, as well as about Catholic Action, whose members are called to “be of service through their faithfulness and good works, in a way proper to their vocation and with some special method, to promote the growth of the entire Christian community, pastoral activities and infusing every aspect of life with the Gospel spirit” (CFL 31).

These last few years, the Holy Father has stressed with great emphasis, Catholic Action’s charism as a gift from the Holy Spirit. He affirmed that: “The Church needs Catholic Action”. In view of this, the IFCA Secretariat, the Italian Catholic Action National Presidency and the Pontifical Council for the Laity have undertaken to organize this Congress, with joy and responsibility, so as to promulgate and propagate Catholic Action’s identity and vocation in the third millennium.

Catholic Action needs to push forward towards the future and to live its tradition - as Pope Paul VI said - like a driving force: your history is like an engine which drives you on.

During these last 100 years more than 60 CA members have been declared saints and blessed after a canonical process. Together with these, so many men and women, young and adult faithful witnesses of the Gospel, sustained by the fact that they were CA members, have succeeded in living their faith in their ordinary everyday life, in their particular familiar, political and social situations, in their places of work and study. They achieved this through their persistent commitment to find out the will of God and to read the signs of the time in which they happened to be living, looking upon these as being providential and as being the passing of the Lord through history.

In view of these CA witnesses, Paul VI and later John Paul II, defined Catholic Action as being a “school of sanctity”. This makes us feel more responsible to commit ourselves to strengthen our association’s pedagogy and to reaffirm our option to work on diocesan basis, that is within the local Church. While keeping in mind its unity and diversity, Catholic Action should seek to incarnate itself in the diverse cultures and involve itself in the building of a society where fraternal love and solidarity prevail.

The *Documents* give us an opportunity to go through our days in Rome and in Loreto: starting from the Holy Father’s message to participants right up to the Beatification of the three CA witnesses and the entrustment of the three “duties” to Catholic Action during the *Angelus*.

Our wish is that this publication will help pastors and lay people to grasp the lines along which Catholic Action was encouraged to work, to renew itself or to take the first steps. We also hope that it will convey them the climate which prevailed throughout the Congress: a strong experience of being a Church, laypeople and pastors in “familiar dialogue” (cfr. *Lumen Gentium* 37) and in friendship. In a simple and cordial atmosphere, together we prayed, dialogued, listened to one another, reflected and exchanged experiences.

With our gaze fixed on Christ, let us take up the three “duties” entrusted to us by John Paul II: *contemplation*, *communion* and *mission* so that we may announce “the Gospel, the word of hope and salvation for the world”.

## MESSAGGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CONGRESS

1. “*Duc in altum*, Catholic Action. Take courage for the future!”

This was the invitation I addressed to the delegates at the 11<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Italian Catholic Action on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2002. I am pleased to note that my appeal met with approval and has been adopted as the commitment and motto for the International Congress on Catholic Action that will be opening in Rome on August 31st 2004, organized by the International Forum of Catholic Action and Italian Catholic Action in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

I would like to extend my most cordial greetings to all the Catholic Action leaders and assistants from the various countries who have gathered at the Domus Pacis. I greet with special fraternal affection the Cardinals and my Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate who have wished to take part in this important event.

2. “Taking courage for the future” is an attitude that does not stem from voluntary choice but draws its consistency and dynamism from the memory of how precious a gift Catholic Action has been since it came into being. According to my Predecessor Pope Pius XI of venerable memory, it stemmed from a “providential inspiration” and was a cohesive force that gave structure and an impetus to that contemporary trend of the “promotion of the laity” that was solemnly confirmed by the Second Vatican Council. Generations of the faithful have developed their vocations in Catholic Action, through a process of Christian formation that brought them to full awareness of their co-responsibility in building the Church and fostered their apostolic zeal in all walks of life. How can we forget on this occasion that the Conciliar Decree on the apostolate of the laity recognized this praiseworthy tradition and warmly recommended it? (cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 20). The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, in addition to my numerous Addresses to the various Assemblies of Italian Catholic Action, acted enthusiastically on

the Council's recommendations, encouraging the effort to overcome certain unclear or difficult situations.

Today I am eager to repeat once again: the Church needs Catholic Action! Our memories of it must not be reduced to a nostalgic withdrawal into the past but must grow into awareness that the Holy Spirit has made a precious gift to the Church, a heritage that is called, at the dawn of this third millennium, to bring forth new fruits of holiness and of the apostolate, extending the "implantation" of the Association to many other local Churches in different countries.

3. The time has come for this reactivation, as the many forms of your presence testify. There are a wealth of signs that promise hope in the *kairós* of a new springtime of the Gospel! This great responsibility that involves all of you together with your Pastors as well as the whole Church asks for a humble and courageous decision "to start afresh from Christ", in the knowledge that you are supported by the omnipresent power of the Holy Spirit. All the lay faithful, conscious of their own baptismal vocation and of the three commitments that stem from it - priestly, prophetic and royal - may be involved in this great task. Trusting in the grace of God and sustained by a keen sense of belonging to the Church as "home and school of communion", lay people should listen to the teachings and instructions of their Pastors to be their effective collaborators in building the ecclesial communities to which they belong.

Every Christian is bound to witness to the great changes in his life, worked by grace and motivated by charity. "This will be possible if the lay faithful are able to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel" (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 34). Catholic Action has always been and must still be today a nursery for the formation of the faithful who, enlightened by the social teaching of the Church, are employed on the front line to defend the sacred gift of life, the preservation of the dignity of the human person, the achievement of educational freedom, the promotion of the true meaning of marriage and the family, the practice of charity to the neediest, the quest for peace and justice and the application to the different interactive social realities of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

4. I know that your Congress, which began in Rome, will continue with your pilgrimage to Loreto and will culminate on Sunday September 5<sup>th</sup>, with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Valley of Montorso, during which I will be pleased to add to the Roll of the Blessed some of the members of Catholic Action who consistently and convincingly modelled their life on the Gospel.

I am thus preparing once again to set out as a pilgrim to that beloved Shrine of Loreto, an international centre of Marian spirituality, where I will pray to Mary Most Holy that with the grace of the Holy Spirit you may always be disposed to say your *fiat* to God's will, making yourselves witnesses of the Mystery of Christ for the world's salvation.

As I wish you great success with the work of the Congress, with a view to an ever more effective presence of Catholic Action in the service of Christ's Kingdom, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

*Castel Gandolfo, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2004*





***Rome, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2004***

***OPENING SESSION***



## OPENING CELEBRATION

### HOMILY

H. E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi  
IFCA Ecclesiastic Assistant - ICA General Assistant

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Cardinals and brothers in the Episcopate, lay members of Catholic Action, distinguished guests; this evening we are called to receive a great gift: that of living the experience of the cenacle, here, all together.

We are in the cenacle because the Risen Christ is here with us, the living Christ who said "I am with you all days", even on the 31<sup>st</sup> August.

Mary is also with us: we venerate her, here in Italy, in a special way at Loreto and we will be visiting her in the sanctuary of the Holy House within a few days

Peter is also with us through his words, to which we will be listening soon. With us we also have the whole world, which we represent.

In the cenacle, the Risen Christ presents himself with the gift of peace. I would thus like to invite you to exchange the sign and the gift of peace: the peace of the Lord be with you.

The strongest evidence of the Lord's presence is his Word, which we have welcomed amongst us. It is the Word which the Risen Christ has suggested to Paul and inspired him to write in his letter addressed to the community in Rome.

Let us listen to a short quotation from this letter, addressed to this community, whom he greets from afar but who is very near to his heart and in the Spirit. It is a salutation, which is full of fraternal love,

*Reading of the letter of St. Paul to the Romans (16:1-16)*

*I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is (also) a minister of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need*

from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church at their house.

Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the firstfruits in Asia for Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachy. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the holy ones who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

I like to think of this long list of persons who are greeted nearly one by one, as a sort of litany of the saints.

They are the brothers and sisters who make up the community in Rome and whom Paul looks forward to meet personally.

From this long list of names I would like to single out a couple, whom Paul greets nearly at the very start: "Greet Prisca and Aquila.

We, in CA, like to look upon this couple through the eyes of Vatican II, where they are mentioned in *Lumen Gentium* and who later, in the post-conciliar teachings of Paul VI, are referred to explicitly as the first nucleus of Catholic Action.

When referring to them, I would like to highlight three points: a history, a word, an ideal.

First of all, I would like to give a glance at the life history of this couple. Here Paul greets Prisca or Pricilla first and then Aquila. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we read that the couple came from Ponto. Probably, Aquila is or was a Jew and therefore was a convert. Most probably Prisca was a Roman. This couple is mentioned four times in the *Acts* and four times in Paul's *Letters*.

Going briefly through history we note these dates: 49 AD, this couple was expelled from Rome because of a riot for a certain Creste or

Christ; all Jews and also Christians, who at the beginning were considered a variation of Hebrewism, were all expelled. Luke mentions them for the first time in Chapter 18 of the *Acts* and says: "After this, he left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. He went to visit them and, because he practiced the same trade, stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade".

They were a wealthy couple, expelled from Rome, who set up a home in Corinth and about a year later, they also went to Ephesus. They had at least three houses.

Faith is very evident in the life history of this couple. When he speaks about them in his greetings, Paul refers to them as "my co-workers in Jesus Christ". Let us reflect on the word "co-workers" used when referring to the couple. Co-workers are not dependent on the Apostles, but are co-responsible with the Apostles for the setting up of the Church. In fact, Paul did not found the Church of Corinth alone but, as he himself says in the two letters to the Christians in Corinth, he founded this community together with Aquila and Priscilla. Paul arrived in Corinth from Athens where he went through a time of uncertainty and, when he reached Corinth, he was very pre-occupied about evangelization. Maybe, in Corinth, things went on well because Paul did not work alone.

Paul evangelized together with Aquila and Priscilla: they are his co-workers, they are truly evangelizers. This is so true that Luke in the *Acts* says that Paul arrived in Ephesus with a Jew called Apollo. He is only a Christian by half - if I can say so - because he was not fully prepared. So, Paul entrusted him to Aquila and Priscilla, who introduced him to the Christian faith, to the "full", if we may say so. We never hear that this couple had any children, however they generated not only a Christian but an apostle. They are co-workers who live for and pass on an ideal and who, I repeat, we like to look upon as a sort of CA seed.

Let us see what *Lumen Gentium* says in n. 33: "The laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord". Here is the allusion which Paul VI says explicitly when he, in fact, mentions the Christian couple.

Let us therefore review the ideal which directed and animated all Aquila's and Priscilla's life. They are a couple, two lay people, who practiced their profession of tent makers, whose fate was similar to that of the other Jews who were expelled from Rome and who had to struggle and work for the good of their family. They were two lay people who collaborated with the apostle in the work of evangelization and even came to the point of setting up a Christian community nucleus. We have the pastor, Paul the apostle and two Christians, co-responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel in Corinth, as well as for the Christian formation of Apollo, a future apostle in Ephesus.

This is CA's story, this is its ideal.

Let us pray to the Lord so that during these days, this ideal may shine before us, pastors and lay people, so that this story may repeat itself in our Churches, as it did in Rome, in Corinth and in Ephesus.

## GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTION TO THE CONGRESS

Beatriz Buzzetti Thomson  
IFCA Secretariat's Coordinator

Welcome to this International Congress which has as its theme the words of the Holy Father himself: “*Duc in altum*, Catholic Action, take courage for the future!”.

This is precisely the perspective of the Congress: acknowledging the gift of the Holy Spirit and renewing our faithful commitment to the gift received, taking up the challenges of this third millennium and undertaking the construction of the future with courage.

This is the first International Congress which is being held after the Council. The Second Vatican Council has brought about a deep renewal in the Church and has put Catholic Action at the heart of this dynamic missionary communion through the definition of the four characteristic notes of ecclesiality, lay people's involvement, organicity and collaboration with the Hierarchy (cfr. AA 20) which every association under this name or any other name should bear simultaneously. In his apostolic exhortation “*On the life of lay people in the Church and in the world*”, John Paul II points out this Conciliar teaching very clearly. In the whole panorama of all the ecclesial associations and movements, he refers to Catholic Action as being that association which is called upon, “in a way proper to its vocation, with its particular methods and through its faithfulness and good works, to be of service to the Church, to promote the growth of the entire Christian community, carry out pastoral projects and imbue every aspect of life with the spirit of the Gospel.” (CFL 31).

These last years, in his teachings, the Holy Father has stressed that the charism of Catholic Action is that of being a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of the third millennium and recently he went on to add that: “The Church needs Catholic Action”.

Because of this, when the Pontifical Council for the Laity proposed the organization of this Congress to us, the IFCA Secretariat accepted this proposal with pleasure. It saw this as an opportunity to propagate and spread Catholic Action's identity and vocation at the beginning of the third millennium.

The invitation to share in the life and evangelizing mission of the Church undoubtedly calls for an authentic conversion, based on a sin-

cere acknowledgement of our strengths and weaknesses and expects of us to be faithful to our vocation.

We thus hope that this Congress may be just the opportunity for us to study as to how Catholic Action could be that living presence in the world so essential in the Church today. This entails that in certain circumstances we have to make an effort to adapt ourselves to present day needs, in other cases we have to try to consolidate that which we already have and in other situations we must show the rich contribution which Catholic Action can give to the Church and to society and that it is ready to undertake this initiative.

A presentation by Msgr. Stanislaw Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the theme: *Catholic Action, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of our times*, will precede the working sessions. This will give an orientation to all the proceedings of the Congress.

During these last 100 years the Church has recognized, through a canonical process, the holy way of living of more than 60 Catholic Action members from all over the world.

Together with these, there are countless men and women, young people and adults who are living witnesses of the Gospel and who, through their having been members of Catholic Action, have found a way of living their faith in their everyday familiar, political and social life, in their place of work and of their studies. They have tried to discover the Father's will for them in their daily lives. Interpreting the signs of the time, they have considered the fact that they are living today as being providential and as being the passing of the Lord of History.

This is why Paul VI defined Catholic Action as being a school of sanctity and the reason why we should try to intensify our associative methods. Alberto Montaner, President of the Spanish Youth Movement, will speak to us about some of these witnesses who lived in recent years.

Paola Bignardi, President of the Italian Catholic Action will share with us some reflections about the future of Catholic Action. She will speak about: *Catholic Action in the third millennium*. This will be followed by study sessions from which we expect proposals as to which characteristics Catholic Action should have so that it may be faithful to the gift of the Holy Spirit in today's world.

What is particular about Catholic Action is that it is diocesan based and is fully involved in the life of local Churches and in diocesan pastoral plans. As *Christifideles Laici* reminds us, this helps us to appreciate Catholic Action's unity and diversity, due to the fact that it is a reality in diverse cultures and in every particular Church. Alejandro Madero, President of the Argentinian Catholic Action will introduce and coordinate a presentation about the richness of this unity in diversity with the participation of different countries.



During the presentation about the services and the perspectives of the International Forum of Catholic Action we will speak about the present realities in the different countries. Following this, Guzmán Carriquiry, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, will give a presentation about the relations between his organization and IFCA.

The thematic workshops which will be held simultaneously on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> in the afternoon will give participants an opportunity to get to know about Catholic Action's various activities in the different countries. These will also make it possible for participants to share experiences, proposals and projects for today's Catholic Action. The themes assigned are: the mission and presence in the world, the programmes and prospects of formation and the promotion of Catholic Action.

A *Manifesto* on Catholic Action for the third millennium, including the results of our working sessions, will be presented at the end of our meeting.

On Friday we will proceed to Loreto where we will be joining the members of the Italian Catholic Action in their pilgrimage to the House of our Holy Mother. We will thus be answering to the invitation made to us by John Paul II on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August during his *Angelus* address, when he invited children, young people and adults, representatives of Catholic Action from different countries, to join Italian Catholic Action in the initiatives they were undertaking in Loreto.

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September, in Loreto, the Congress and the Pilgrimage will reach their climax with the Eucharistic Celebration presided over by His Holiness John Paul II, during which three Catholic Action members, Alberto Marvelli, Pina Suriano and Pere Tarrés, will be beatified.

We would like to thank, in a special way, the Bishops, priests and lay people, members of Catholic Action, as well as members of other Church movements and organizations present here, coming from about more than 50 countries from different continents, who have accepted our invitation. Together we will be living an experience of being a Church in prayer, dialogue, listening to one another, in reflections, exchange of experiences and friendship. We have no doubt that this will be a strong ecclesial experience and we look forward to living these "familiar relations", described so well in *Lumen Gentium* 37, in a simple and cordial atmosphere, to the full.

Our daily Eucharistic Celebration, the centre and the culminating point of our work, the morning and evening prayers and the Vigil of Prayer for peace in the world, will unite us together in prayer and will help to bring us closer as a community.

We entrust the sessions of our Congress to Mary - our Mother, Lady of Loreto to whose House we will proceed in pilgrimage - so that she may recommend our work to the Father and intercede with the Lord so that God may bless our work and render it fruitful for the good of the Church.

## WELCOME ADDRESS FROM THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION

Paola Bignardi  
ICA national President

Dear Friends,

in the name of the Italian Catholic Action, I would like to welcome you and wish you fruitful work during these coming days. We are gathered here not only to plan together Catholic Action's future in our countries but above all to experience living together as a Church or rather to experience a spirit of communion, a disposition to listen and an affirmation that we want to be testimonies of the Gospel.

Catholic Action, as John Paul II reminded us lately, knows its origin to a particular charism, that of being a particular gift of the Holy Spirit: a charism which has been fully explained in the Conciliar Decree on lay apostolate *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. "You are - emphasizes the Pope - lay Christians, experts in the marvelous adventure of *making the Gospel and daily life meet* and in showing how the 'good news' answers to the most profound questions in every person's heart. Also, that the Gospel is the clearest and only true light which can guide society in building a 'civilization of love'".

This is the essence of evangelization, the very same scope of CA's existence in the world and the reason why we have all gathered here from so many countries.

The grand pilgrimage to Loreto, in which we will be taking part within a few days, will be another occasion wherein we will share and proclaim the hope of the Gospel. This pilgrimage will reach its climax with the meeting with the Holy Father, who, in front of the House of Nazareth, will renew our missionary mandate which sends us to the ends of the world and among the deepest problems of today's women and men.

With Mary, we will pronounce our "here I am", ready to follow an intense and saintly daily life, following the example of Alberto Marvelli, Pina Suriano, Pere Tarrés and the other numerous witnesses of sanctity, known and unknown, who have grown up in Catholic Action.

We entrust our commitment to Mary's maternal and careful protection and ask her for the courage to be innovative. She was the one who gave the Life, the sign of renewal par excellence. We ask her to help us relish the ever new horizons which result from our being faithful to the Gospel and to history; a spirit of renewal which does not follow the capricious developments as the world does, but which is able to dedicate itself in life with the profoundness and mildness of a converted heart; a spirit of novelty, which hopefully touches each and every one of us.

We ask her to instil in our Churches and Associations a missionary spirit; which helps our countries to live together in a fraternal way, giving special attention to the weakest, showing solidarity with the poor, and aiming at a new development which gives top priority to the human person and human dignity.

These are precisely the main objectives which have guided Italian Catholic Action these last few years while we were working on the renewal of our Association. The challenge is to help people renew their mentality so that our apostolic commitment may not be regarded purely as tiring activism but as a testimony of the mercy and love which God is continually bestowing on us, that love which enlightens our existence. It is this renewed mentality which fosters new relations, especially within our association, whereby every individual feels accepted and appreciated; a mentality which accepts new structures, new casks for new wine and which provides the necessary associative structures, which embrace everybody, a real meeting place for different generations; new formative itineraries of quality which address today's people, taking their questions into consideration and trying to coordinate the various initiatives in the search of the Truth which never tires of giving itself to us wholeheartedly.

I would like to draw your attention precisely to ICA's new Formative Project which is one of the results of this renewal. A year after the updating of the Statute, we are in a position to present the new Project to the Parochial Presidents and Assistants, or rather to those who assume responsibility for the daily running of the association. We have entitled the project: *So that Christ may be formed in us*, knowing very well that the formation which is expected from Catholic Action, now more than ever, may be that which helps a person let himself be modelled by the Holy Spirit on Christ's physiognomy.

May the days which we are spending here together be to each and every one of us and to our Associations an example of this renewal.

My very best wishes for your work.

## EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: 1 CO 13:1-13; MT 5:1-16

### HOMILY

*H. E. Card. Crescenzo Sepe*  
*Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*

“In the same way, your light must shine in people’s sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.” (Mt 5:16)

In the same way that a city cannot be hidden if built on a hilltop, as a lamp that lights every corner of the house, if this is put on a lampstand.

Your Excellencies,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

it is a pleasure for me to be able to meet you and pray with you on the occasion of the International Congress on the theme “*Duc in altum, Catholic Action! Take courage for the future!*”.

I would like to thank you for your invitation and greet his Excellency Msgr. Stanislao Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity; H.E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi, Ecclesiastical Assistant of the International Forum of Catholic Action and of the Italian Catholic Action; Dr. Beatriz Buzzetti Thomson, Coordinator of the International Forum of Catholic Action, as well as Dr. Paola Bignardi, National President of the Italian Catholic Action.

The extract from the Gospel, which has been read to us, presents the well-known icons of salt and light: “You are salt for the earth” (Mt 5:13), “You are light for the world” (5:14). After presenting the Beatitudes to all “the poor, the distressed, the gentle, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, the merciful, those who hunger and thirst for uprightness”, Matthew then involves the people in front of him by

speaking directly to them: “Blessed are *you* when people abuse *you* and persecute *you* and speak all kinds of calumny against *you* falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for *your* reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before *you*.” (5:11-12)

This beatitude refers especially to those who, even in the so-called permissive climate, are not allowed to practice their own faith. Every day the missionary Church has to face insults, civil deaths in prison, or ‘re-education’ in unknown penitentiaries, somewhere in this world, if not torture and death. Those brothers and sisters are all salt and light of the world because, with their presence, they prevent the world from becoming arid. On the contrary, their heroic endurance fertilizes the world and gives it new hope. But, “blessed are *you*” if your witnessing of the Gospel requires of *you* also moments of persecution.

In reality, you are witnesses of the Beatitudes when, with an exemplary life and the courage shown through words, you become models that are alternative to those offered by the dominant culture, which promotes success, ephemeral things, pleasure and vengeance; when you make yourself witnesses and champions of peace, forgiveness, sacrifice, so that such values find a central place in the heart of man.

Matthew’s passage is an invitation to renew the *missionary responsibility* that, as the Holy Father has reminded you, validates your presence within the Christian community: “You are lay Christians, expert in the splendid adventure of *making the Gospel and life converge*, showing how well the *Good News* responds to the searching questions in each person’s heart and is the highest and truest light that can guide society in building the ‘civilization of love’” (*Speech* delivered at ICA Extraordinary Assembly, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2003).

You come from different countries but your charism, defined by the Italian Bishops’ Conference as the willingness “to live as lay people for the Church and for its global mission” (12<sup>th</sup> March 2002) is the same. It is the ideal of your life which is expressed in the organic and direct link which you establish with the diocesan community and in your commitment to help in the rediscovery of faith as a value for living “in communion”.

This Christian identity makes you witnesses of Christ and announcers of his Gospel. Through Baptism and Confirmation in fact, you participate in the fundamental mission of the Church, whose vocation and identity are reflected in evangelization. “It (the Church) - says the Holy Father - exists for evangelization”.

Every member of the Church has the duty to proclaim Christ. Therefore, since we are baptized, we are like Christ, messengers and missionaries called to diffuse the Good News about salvation to every person even to the end of the world.

Even Catholic Action, if it wants to be a “gift of the Holy Spirit to the contemporary Church” and if it wants to undertake the “way to holiness” at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, should feel that it has to be authentically “missionary”.

The field in which you have to perform your “missionary commitment” is immense and goes beyond geographical, historical and cultural boundaries. It is enough to think about the evangelization of culture, the need of infusing the power of the Gospel in the contexts of the family, work, media, sports and leisure. This mission also includes a Christian animation of both the social and the public life, on national and international levels. Moreover, the role you play enables you to exert a great influence on the contexts in which you live, thus giving people around you a greater prospect of hope, by manifesting and giving witness of “the hope that you have” (cfr. *1Pt* 3:5).

In order to live up to this identity and fulfil this “missionary” vocation, we need to receive the Holy Spirit in our heart, so that he may consecrate us and give us the gift of charity which is the source of holiness and of ecclesial communion. How could we, otherwise, enliven the contexts in which we live? Even if we possess the gifts of science, languages and prophecies but do not have charity, our faith and our commitments towards others would be useless. This teaching comes from the first Reading that we have just listened to. It is charity which gives significance to our vocation, which animates our service and which enlivens our daily efforts. In other words, we cannot be the light and salt for other people if we do not commit ourselves to holiness. If we are really saints, we are also missionaries. Holiness and a missionary spirit are interdependent.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte* the Holy Father wrote: “All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (*NMI* 30).

It would be a contradiction if one had to settle for a life of mediocrity marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. Our identity commits us to aim at a high level of ordinary Christian living, aware of the fact that it is much easier to live a saintly life rather than a mediocre one, because mediocrity makes of Christian living a burden full of grievances and bitterness. Holiness, on the

other hand, is peace, light, inner happiness and spiritual tension.

Dear friends, do not be afraid, fly high, launch out into the deep and take courage for the future!

In Catholic Action learn to live as in a school of holiness. Within a few days, the Holy Father will beatify three CA members at Loreto, two lay people and a priest. Their life highlights the need for your Association to be present in the Church and shows that holiness is within the reach of everybody because it is a free gift of the Spirit which helps and supports our daily efforts. All this perfectly coincides with your charisma and your spirituality.

I am aware that your Association is not accountable to any founder because it is centred around an ecclesiality which has attracted many young people to take their vocation as lay people seriously. In fact, Catholic Action inserts itself in the mission of the local Church and looks upon the Bishop as the visible source of unity. The only condition it asks of its members is to be baptized, to be living in a particular Church and to commit themselves to the general apostolic aim of the Church. Committed to the everyday mission of the local Church, your presence in the Church is not generic, nor far from everyday life because your work is to make sure that Christ finds a new meaning in the life of every man and woman: you should evangelize their daily joys and sufferings, their hopes and disillusion. Catholic Action lives and grows in this context. It is there that you have to put yourselves as missionaries in everyday life and as promoters of sure and long-lasting hope.

Consequently, formation for holiness is the primary commitment of Catholic Action. Literally, this formation should generate man in Christ and should lead towards a gradual conformity with him. This has however another consequence, which is, that “the ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most immediate and visible expression in the *parish*. It is there that the Church is seen locally. In a certain sense it is the *Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters*” (*Christifideles Laici* 26).

Hence, the parish and its mission are the privileged context for your actions and the place in which you express your faithful and generous dedication.

In the message sent on the occasion of last year’s ICA Extraordinary Assembly, the Holy Father wrote: “The Church cannot do without Catholic Action”. In truth, a major part of the ‘field of the Lord’

would risk infertility if it were not tilled, irrigated and fertilized by your zealous hard work.

But you too, do not do anything without the Church, the Hierarchy, the Pope and the Bishops. Continue to be missionaries and apostles in the contexts where the Lord has placed you to live. Broaden your horizon to the catholic and universal aspect of the Church. I know that Catholic Action plays an important part, especially in the newly established Churches, in the *plantatio Ecclesiae*. It guarantees the continuous presence of committed lay people who are engaged as catechists and leaders, thus assuring the pastoral life of the parochial and diocesan Communities in missionary countries. This is Catholic Action's charism and clear evidence of its apostolic vitality.

Go, therefore, to accomplish your mission with enthusiasm!

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Missions, accompany, sustain and protect you!

With these thoughts and sentiments, I assure you of my prayers, my collaboration and my cordial closeness.



***Roma, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004***

***“CATHOLIC ACTION,  
YOU BELONG TO THE CHURCH  
AND ARE CLOSE TO OUR  
LORD’S HEART”***



# EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: 1 Co 3:1-9; Lk 4:38-44

## HOMILY

H. E. Msgr. Carlos Talavera Ramirez  
National Assistant of Mexican CA

Today in the *First letter to the Corinthians*, the Word of God teaches us that the solid and consistent nourishment of Christian living is not for those who are still subjected to passion. It is only for those who are “guided by the Holy Spirit”.

This solid nourishment is charity, Trinitarian Life, intimacy with Christ and a sense of belonging to the Church and to its mission.

Jesus is this solid nourishment which makes of us the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

When we partake of this solid food, we discover the meaning of life, of our activity and of our love for humanity. It helps us remain steadfast even when this meaning becomes vague and appears doubtful and we feel disillusioned and disappointed by life’s ideals and solutions.

Those who are guided by the Spirit know the true meaning of *freedom* which is the ability to follow the truth always and to do good without being made or forced to do it either from without or from within.

Very often, many do not know this human dimension. They want to see with their own eyes how this freedom can be lived. They want to touch and feel it and see its effectiveness and results.

Those who are guided by the spirit live this truth in *justice*. True justice does justice to everybody. It does not seek revenge for injustices suffered because of others. It seeks for the truth about man, because man yearns for that which is just.

Those who are guided by the Spirit know how to *love*, that is they freely put themselves at the service of others, doing good without expecting anything in return. Their commitment towards others is without limit even unto death.

Those who are guided by the Spirit show *solidarity*. Solidarity means “a constant determination to work for the common good, for everybody’s good and for the good of each and everyone, because we are all responsible for each other” (SRS 39).

Even the world speaks of these four values but it gives them a different interpretation: for the world freedom means libertinism, justice means revenge, love means uncontrolled selfishness and solidarity is not universal but restricted to few people.

This world needs Catholic Action, the “urge for evangelization”, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Catholic Action, grateful to God for the holiness of its members, should open itself to “new fields of holiness and apostolate”.

First and foremost, I think, it should focus on the formation of lay people in our churches. There is also an urgent need for the Church to develop this major sector of its members so that their presence may be more felt in the Church and so that, the Church, the Body of Christ, may be strong in all its members. Thus they will all be able to aspire for and attain sanctity.

We have institutions for the formation of priests, religious and deacons; but I do not know of any institutions which prepare lay people to carry out their duties as Christians in the world, for whose salvation they are responsible. Maybe it is time for every parish to have a school for lay people which helps them to build a Christian community of mutual responsibility for the faith of their brethren, which familiarizes them with the Social Teaching of the Church and helps them to put it into practice and which prepares them to be precisely what they are, that is lay people.

This will help to avoid a dichotomy between faith and daily living and will be the basis for the reconstruction of the family and of society. Our daily living will thus be consistent with the values inspired by the Gospel.

The affirmation in the document of Puebla, that is: “The laity are the Church in the heart of the world and the world in the heart of the Church”, will thus become a reality.

## LECTURE

# CATHOLIC ACTION, A GIFT FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH OF OUR TIMES

*H. E. Msgr. Stanislaw Rylko  
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

The title of my talk introduces us right away to the very purpose of this Congress which is that of stimulating us to rediscover that Catholic Action is actually a gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church of our times. This is of vital importance to this outstanding ecclesial association. As we shall see, its formative and evangelizing programmes are extremely topical but we must not let ourselves fall into the temptation of being “tied to the past”, as some do. With courage and with a profetic spirit, we should instead try to project it towards the future.

1. This Congress is thus aimed at helping us to rediscover the identity of this association and its relevance to the Church. This immediately leads one to ask: does Catholic Action really has to be discovered when it is such a well known lay association, with such a long and rich history? We can think of so many generations of lay faithful, men and women, adults and youths, for whom Catholic Action has been and still is today a school of solid Christian formation. It has helped to arouse in so many faithful an urge for apostolic involvement and a great love for the Church. For many lay people it has been a school of evangelic principles and of authentic holiness. In fact the list of saints and blessed, who were Catholic Action members, is very long. So many priestly and religious vocations know their beginning to Catholic Action. Catholic Action has in fact prepared the ground for the “hour of the laity” in the Church of our times and for the renewed theology of the laity which has reached its climax in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The Popes have often written about this association and it has always had their pastoral attention. If we

browse in our libraries, we come across volumes written about Catholic Action throughout its history. In spite of all this, I am sure that at this point in time, Catholic Action needs to be rediscovered in the Church. All of us need to discover it: lay people and pastors and in actual fact even those have been CA members for numbers of years. We have to discover it precisely as a gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church of our times. Our Congress has therefore to be not only an opportunity to study, dialogue and exchange experiences but above all it has to be a time to listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit has to say to the Church (cfr. *Ap* 2:7) at this point in history, at the beginning of the new millennium of the Christian era.

2. Our reflection on Catholic Action has been written within the present context in the life of the Church, a time characterized by “a new era which is seeing the aggregation of lay people” started by Vatican II. This is a very important point to be kept in mind. In this regard, John Paul II has this to say: “In recent times, the phenomenon of lay people associating themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality. We must say that we come across lay associations throughout the Church’s history as we can see from the various confraternities, third orders and sodalities. However, in modern times, we can speak of a new era wherein lay people are showing a special drive which has resulted in the setting up of numerous and varied forms of aggregation: associations, groups, communities and movements. We can speak of a *new era of group endeavours* of the lay faithful. In fact, alongside the traditional forms of associations and at times, springing up from their very roots, we see movements and new sodalities with a specific feature and purpose coming into being. The richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes within the ecclesial community, the possibility of initiatives and the generosity of our lay people is so great” (*Christifideles Laici*, 29).

What does this reality “new associative era” actually mean? Above all, it means, a statement of fact that there is an amazing richness of new charisms, communities and lay associations which the Holy Spirit has initiated within the Church today. It is a sign of great hope, a sign of that “Christian spring” about which John Paul II never tires of speaking” (cfr. *Redemptoris Missio*, 86). However the “new associative era of lay faithful” is not only a matter of fact. It is also a challenge which all the lay associations are expected to face by living and giving witness to this “novelty”, this particular *kairós*, that is, to

rediscover the enthusiasm and the impetus of their own origin, which risks to be obliterated with the passing of time. Even Catholic Action, or rather, particularly Catholic Action, is called upon to be among the protagonists of this “new era”. This is a demanding exercise and a great challenge which Catholic Action should take up.

3. I have chosen John Paul II as the reliable guide to help us rediscover Catholic Action’s authentic and genuine features. This Pope has given great attention to this lay association. The recently published volume, which includes all his addresses to Catholic Action in his 25 years as Pope, covers more than 300 pages. (cfr. *“So che voi ci siete”. Venticinque anni di magistero sull’Azione Cattolica 1978-2003*, Ed. AVE, Rome, 2003). These speeches are addressed to the Italian Catholic Action but there is no doubt that they also apply universally. These teachings are very deep and inspiring and undoubtedly they have a strong prophetic value. They are deeply rooted in the teachings of Vatican II especially as regards the vocation and mission of lay people. John Paul II, in his teachings about Catholic Action, presents some significant novelties. Among these there is one in particular which deserves our attention. Traditionally, according to the classic paradigm, Catholic Action has always been linked with the Church’s institutional dimension, the local Church at the centre and lay people as collaborators in the hierarchy’s apostolate. However, during these last years, from the Pope’s teachings, a very important new idea seems to emerge. The Pope speaks, with a certain insistence, about Catholic Action’s “charismatic” dimension. It seems that this, so to speak “pneumatological” statement about the nature of this association, in actual fact, constitutes a new and very important aspect from the ecclesiological point of view. The Pope says: “Your long history saw its beginning from a charism, or rather from a particular gift of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, who never fails to give the Church the graces, talents and resources, which the faithful need, to be of service to the Gospel. “Remember, dear brethren... with humble pride and with deep joy Catholic Action’s charism!... I encourage you to explore the richness of your charism always more deeply...” (8<sup>th</sup> September 2003).

This point of view opens a new and profound horizon full of theological and practical consequences. First of all, it reminds Catholic Action of the original source of its vitality and dynamism which is the effect of the Holy Spirit’s continual support. From the practical point of view, this entails that we establish communication between Catholic Action and the new communities, the new charisms, which

through the work of the Holy Spirit are flourishing in the Church today.

4. “Remember... with humble pride and deep joy, Catholic Action’s charism...”. So, our task during this Congress is: to remember, rediscover and take up with fresh enthusiasm and faithfulness our association’s charism. The Pope insists: “ Open up your hearts with docility to the gifts of the Holy Spirit! With gratitude and submissiveness accept the charisms which the Holy Spirit never ceases to lavish on you! Do not forget that every charism is given for the common good, that is, for the good of the whole Church” (30<sup>th</sup> May 1998).

Let us therefore study this charism more deeply: let us find out its distinctive characteristics. Vatican II has summed them up under four distinctive main characteristics. At this point it is worth recalling them:

- a) the immediate aim of Catholic Action is the Church’s apostolic aim, that is, to make the gospel known and men holy, and to form in them a Christian conscience;
- b) the cooperation of lay people, with the hierarchy, precisely in their role as lay people and in their own proper way, by using their experience as lay people and assuming responsibilities;
- c) the laity, working together as an organic body, present the Church as a community and render the apostolate more effective;
- d) lay people work “under the higher direction of the Hierarchy”, which can sanction this cooperation by an explicit “mandate” (cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 20). The Pope summarizes all this in four words: the *missionary, diocesan, unitarian and lay aspect* (cfr. 8<sup>th</sup> September 2003).

When one reads these four characteristics, one is impressed by the simple and schematic language used. We should not however forget that, under this terminology lies hidden the deeply intense Christian life of numberless lay people, men and women, adults and youth. It reflects their authentic holiness, their unconditional faithfulness to the Gospel and their generous love for Christ and for his Church.

Although so many years have passed, Catholic Action’s charism still remains relevant to the Church even in our times. John Paul II never tires of reminding us that the Church needs Catholic Action: “The Church cannot do without Catholic Action. The Church needs a group of lay people who, faithful to their vocation as lay people, work in close collaboration with their legitimate pastors and are always ready



to play their part in the spreading of the Gospel in all spheres of life... It needs lay people who are ready to dedicate themselves to the apostolate and to establish a liaison especially with the diocesan community which leaves a deep impression on their lives and on their spiritual way of living... It needs lay people who are a testimony of the grandeur and the joy of Christian living in a concrete way in their daily lives; lay people who look upon Baptism as the root of their dignity, the Christian Community as their own family with whom they share their faith, and their Pastor as the father who guides and sustains his brethren" (26<sup>th</sup> April 2002). This statement: "The Church cannot do without Catholic Action", applies both to the Churches wherein this association has been present and has functioned for so many years as well as to those Churches - particularly those in central and eastern Europe - where Catholic Action is re-establishing itself after having been suppressed for so many years by the totalitarian system of atheistic communism. The Pope encourages this revival very strongly, in fact, during the *ad limina* visit by Polish Bishops, he told them: "Catholic Action must be revived. Without it the infrastructure of Catholic associationism in Poland would be incomplete" (12<sup>th</sup> January 1993).

The Church of our times needs Catholic Action and its expectations from this association are great. The Pope is very demanding when he speaks about this and sets targets which call for commitment. Recently he said: "The Church needs a Catholic Action which is full of life, strong and beautiful" (26<sup>th</sup> April 2002). These three adjectives are very important and are worth studying during this Congress.

5. Let us go back to two of the important characteristics of Catholic Action's charism. Among these characteristics, the "close relation with the Pope and with the Bishops" and its "diocesan character" are undoubtedly of the utmost importance. It is obvious that all catholic lay associations are called upon to live an ecclesial and hierarchical communion. It is enough to remember the criteria as regards ecclesiality laid down in *Christifideles Laici* n. 30. For Catholic Action these are the basic elements which are, so to speak, constitutional and in which it should excel. John Paul II has often highlighted this important characteristic. Already at the beginning of his pontificate he said: "I have full trust in you because Catholic Action, by its very nature, has close relations with the Pope and consequently with Bishops and Priests and this is its most important characteristic. Every 'ecclesial' group offers ways and means as to

how one can live his Baptism and Confirmation more intensely; but Catholic Action is bound to do this in a very special way, because it gives that direct help to the Hierarchy, by sharing in all its apostolic anxieties” (30<sup>th</sup> December 1978). On another occasion the Holy Father goes on to say: “This is the characteristic which should differentiate you from others, but which is also the source and the secret of the effectiveness of your work for the edification of the ecclesial community” (27<sup>th</sup> September 1980). This special relation with the hierarchy leads Catholic Action members to develop an attitude of attentive listening and of filial obedience to the Church’s Teaching and direction.

Lastly I would like to stress that this close collaboration with priests has nothing to do with the “clericalization” of lay people. Rather, it means, a deep reciprocal respect towards each others specific vocation. It does not in any way take away or limit lay people’s freedom to take initiatives or their rightful “autonomy”. It is not therefore a limitation, but a deeper and more radical way of experiencing ecclesial communion, an organic communion by which, all the different vocations and all those following various states of life, live together in a harmonious way.

The “service to the local Church” - which we have already referred to - is the second important distinctive note of Catholic Action’s charism.

It is an expression of its deep and intense feeling with the Church (*sentire cum Ecclesia*) in all its realities. It is the concrete and tangible evidence of the mystery of the Church in the diocesan and the parochial community. The Pope explains very clearly that this type of ecclesiality should express itself “in an association which commits itself to become a school of apostles and disciples who dedicate their lives to the local Church where they live and all their efforts to its pastoral projects” (9<sup>th</sup> December 1983). Through this charism, lay people develop a true love for the Church (both at diocesan and parochial level), a strong sense of co-responsibility for the local Christian community and a generous commitment to be of service in the community and to carry out the Church’s mission. I would like to quote once again the Pope’s words: “The Church needs you, because you have chosen to be of service to the particular Churches and all your apostolic commitment is directed towards the Church’s mission. Also because you have identified the parish as the place where day after day you express your faithful and zealous dedication” (12<sup>th</sup> September 2003).

One must however say that this 'diocesan' character, so strong in Catholic Action, does not in any way rule out the universal perspective. Rather, in this historical moment in the life of the Church, this openness assumes a particular importance. In concrete terms this means, among others, closer relations and contact among the various national CA Associations so that they may get to know each other better, reflect together about the identity of their associations and exchange experiences as to how the great challenges, concerning evangelization in today's world, can be faced. This sharing of experiences among CA national Associations has already brought about a greater sense of solidarity among Christians in the different countries and an awareness of the world dimension of the great problems, which modern society is facing in social, economic, political and cultural spheres.

Faced with these problems, Christians cannot remain indifferent but should give their own answer (globalization!). Faced with this situation, Catholic Action has felt the need to undertake a new initiative namely the setting up of the "International Forum of Catholic Action" (IFCA). This Forum was approved *ad experimentum* by our office before 1995 and later, in the year 2000, it was approved definitively. The Pontifical Council for the Laity has welcomed this initiative with great satisfaction because, right from its beginning, it considered this organism as a providential means of giving a new impetus to Catholic Action, which in certain countries, was showing signs of fatigue and was slackening down. It is worth pointing out that this Congress has been initiated precisely by IFCA, in conjunction with the Italian Catholic Action. To both these, we would like to extend our congratulations and gratitude.

6. Among the great challenges which the Church is facing in our times, the Christian formation of the laity is undoubtedly the most important and urgent. Without a strong educational effort, there is a great risk that speaking about "the hour of the laity" in the Church remains only empty rhetoric. John Paul II says: "In today's world, often dominated by a secularized culture which fosters and advertizes ways of life without God, the faith of numberless people is under heavy pressure and is very often suffocated and stamped out. This is therefore a warning which signals the urgent need for giving Christians a strong and profound Christian formation. Today we need people with a mature Christian personality who are conscious of their proper baptismal identity and of their proper vocation and mission in the Church and in the world! We need active Christian communities!" (30<sup>th</sup> May 1998).

Christian formation always has as its epicenter the personal meeting with the living Christ. At the very moment that he enters a person's life, that person is radically changed. So the focal point in the process of educating in faith is the rediscovery of baptism. The Pope says that: "It is no exaggeration to say that the purpose of a lay faithful person's life is to discover the radical newness of Christian life which comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge may help that person live the responsibilities which stem from that vocation received from God". (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 10).

In this context Catholic Action is seen as a special means of giving Christian formation to lay people. Formation has always been its major priority. This is how the Pope describes it: "Catholic Action is a school of ongoing formation, because it caters for all ages and conditions of life; it is a gymnasium which aims at giving an integral human, cultural and pastoral education which is the global apostolic aim of the Church. You should give priority to spiritual life in all your formative projects, which we all, as baptized, are called upon to do, in view of our fundamental call to sanctity" (24<sup>th</sup> April 1992).

At the same time the Pope puts us on our guard against the risk of withdrawing within ourselves, of feeling intimidated and escaping towards an unrealistic and uncommitted spiritualism. Thus, we must remember that the "formative dimension would be evidently interpreted in a very restricted and mistaken way if it is isolated from 'action', as the very name of your association implies, or worse still if it is nonsensically opposed to action. As formation is the source of its missionary nature, so this formation must be intrinsically missionary, that is, oriented towards apostolic action. It is this formation which gives it its very existence. Besides spiritual and theological themes, the authentic formation of CA lay people should include the Social Teachings of the Church and all that which helps to foster the redeeming force of the Gospel within all temporal realities" (25<sup>th</sup> April 1986). The Pope thus overrules the debates, typical of the seventies, between those who maintained Catholic Action's "religious choice" as against those who considered this as outdated. For the Pope, the "religious choice" in itself includes social commitment as well. This is a very important point in the actual context, when the dominant culture tries to drive religion exclusively into private spheres, depriving it of all social and public relevance.

Finally, it should be noted that formation within Catholic Action, has a strictly ecclesial character, in the sense that it is deeply rooted and interwoven with the life within the parochial community, not

near or parallel to it but within it. It is a formation which fosters a strong sense of belonging to the parochial community in lay people and which is expressed through an attitude of co-responsibility and a psychological identification with the parish (the formation of a truly and profound communitarian “we”!).

Taking into account its long and fruitful educational experience, the Pope entrusts Catholic Action with the delicate task of making itself the formative programme “model” for all the other Christians (cfr. 8<sup>th</sup> December 2001). This is not a ‘monopolistic’ pretension, but rather, a call to give its humble service, within the ecclesial community, in order to help others reach a mature faith. It means putting the association’s charism and the Christian educational pedagogy, which animates it, at the service of the particular Churches.

7. In our times, the Church lives a particular *kairós*. Among the great and dramatic challenges which the contemporary world presents to Christians, rays of hope, enkindled by the Holy Spirit are not lacking. Uninterruptedly, he carries on his work in the world and “renews the face of the world”. This reminds me of the words which God has said through the Prophet: “Look, I am doing something new: now it emerges; can you not see it?” (*Is* 43:19).

As I said at the beginning, our Congress should be a time to listen attentively to what “the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church” today (cfr. *Ap* 2:7). It should be a school of hope for all of us, not a hope which is easy, illusory and readily attainable but a hope which does not delude. This is the reason why we have chosen Pope John Paul II, the great prophet of hope of our times, as our guide for these reflections. Speaking about the signs of hope seen in the Church on the threshold of the third millennium, the Pope said: “Today the Holy Spirit is pushing the Church to promote lay people’s vocation and mission. Their participation and co-responsibility in the life of the Christian community, their manysided presence in apostolic spheres and the service they give in society, fill us with hope as we wait for a mature and fruitful epiphany of the laity at the dawn of the third millennium” (25<sup>th</sup> November 1998).

So we see the great work which unfolds itself in front of Catholic Action: to give its contribution towards this “mature and fruitful epiphany of the laity”. This is not an easy task! It means that all Catholic Action has to be continually and radically renewing itself in all its various forms and organizational aspects. It entails above all a new prophetic spirit leading to a strong and penetrating presence in

the Church and in society: it has to be the evangelic salt which gives flavour, the light which illuminates and the leaven which transforms. This requires renewed courage to go against the current of secular culture, without being afraid to confront contemporary man with the radical expectations of the Gospel. A Catholic Action which is “full of life, strong and beautiful” - as the Pope has said - but above all clear and demanding when presenting Christian living, which has the universal call to sanctity as its goal. A Catholic Action which is faithful to its original charism which, as we have seen, John Paul II, like so many of his predecessors, has described in so many fascinating ways.

Is this an utopia? No, it is a call, an assignment and a programme which have to be followed. This Holy Spirit’s great adventure for Catholic Action has already started. The Pope, the great prophet of hope, never ceases with his encouragement: “Catholic Action, do not be afraid! You are part of the Church and are dear to the Lord, who never stops to guide your steps towards the novelty of the Gospel, which is never outdated or overcome” (26<sup>th</sup> April 2002). And on another occasion he said: “*Duc in altum*, Catholic Action! Have courage; do not let yourself be overcome with nostalgia for the past. Do not be afraid to entrust yourself to the Holy Spirit and to follow the ever new ways of the Gospel. Do not be afraid to renew yourself...” (29<sup>th</sup> April 2004).

We must realize that here we have a very important Church’s goal - our goal! *Res nostra agitur!* The Pontifical Council for the Laity tries to contribute its share towards this goal. I am here, as its President, also to reaffirm in front of you all, that Catholic Action, in its varied organizational forms, constitutes one of the important priorities in our office which is at the service of lay people. We do our best to be faithful interpreters of the Pastoral interest of the Popes as regards this deserving ecclesial association.

To conclude, I have nothing else to add, except to wish that this Congress may be truly a milestone; a meeting which opens up a new spring in the life of Catholic Action and that many may rediscover it as a precious gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of our times.

# CATHOLIC ACTION

## A WAY OF HOLINESS FOR THE LAYPEOPLE

### INTRODUCTION

Alberto Montaner  
National President of Spanish CA Youths

We are about to experience the witness of the lives and deeds of exemplary men and women who gave themselves for Christ and were authentic visible signs of God on earth.

Speaking as a young person I should like to tell you what holiness is to me... holiness is, perhaps, a word that is somewhat unknown to Christians of our times, in particular to the young, or perhaps its essential meaning has been forgotten. But, today more than ever the call to holiness gives full meaning to our lives and the strength necessary to be men and women witnesses to the coming of the Kingdom.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us: “Be perfect as you Father in heaven is perfect” (*Mt 5:48*).

In the same instant in which, through baptism in the faith, we became members of the Church, we were called to holiness and the way of perfection.

It is important to see how the Second Vatican Council, specifically in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium (LG)*, speaks explicitly of the universal call to holiness of the lay faithful, “... all the lay faithful are called by God to holiness...” (n. 11). And, again, in Chapter V.

How, though, is it possible to concretize this call to holiness today? In n. 40 of *LG* we read:

- that Jesus is the model and master of holiness for all of us and that he preached wherever he went. This preaching is as valid today as it ever was.
- That Jesus spoke to us of a holiness offered to all, regardless of any condition or faith, the Kingdom of God being open to all. And this is a cause for joy, a reason for feeling ourselves loved, without any merits of our own. There is no greater love than that which gives without having received.

- That fundamentally in order to become holy we need only to love God and our neighbour, each one according to the charism he has received. As St. Augustine says, “Love, and do as you please”.
- That we have the grace to receive this vocation to holiness as a gift of the Father, not through our own merits but through the infinite love of God.
- That as persons we are sinners and imperfect who often stumble on this path of life but who rely on the infinite mercy of God and on prayer in order to enter in intimate union with the Father.

How is this holiness translated into our everyday reality?

In LG n. 31 we read: “By their vocation it pertains to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by dealing with temporal things and arranging them in accordance with God’s will. They live in the world, that is they are involved in the divers duties and tasks of the world and the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, with which their existence is closely interwoven. Acting in the world like a leaven, they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world by exercising their particular role under the guidance of the spirit of the Gospel, thus showing Christ to others mainly by the witness of their own lives and the radiance of their faith, hope and charity”.

Baptism configures us to Christ as priests, prophets and kings and makes us active members of his Church. So it is with baptism that we are called to build up the Kingdom of God on earth, in our countries, announcing Christ and his dominion over suffering and death.

In order to carry out our task as laypeople within the Church, our Mother, we must accept the mystery of God, live the communion of the Church and the mission entrusted to each one in our daily lives and circumstances: the mystery which springs from the *Triune God*, a communion between the People of God and Christ as head of the Church, and the mission entrusted to us: to go out into the world’s crossroads and explicitly proclaim Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. This vocation as members of the Church has remained, remains and will continue to remain valid in the world so long as “the Kingdom comes... but has not yet come”. It goes on as far as the world is scourged by suffering, so long as injustices grow like weeds among the flowers of our planet Earth, so long as the Risen Christ continues to be in our Paschal hearts, reminding us of his sovereignty over our world.

Every year, we renew this task and mission of the Church in the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who gives us the fervour



to be visible signs on earth of the Father's love and of the History of his Salvation which is entwined with the history of humanity.

When "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" he manifested the will of the Lord: to involve human beings in his divine plan to build the Kingdom on earth. As laypeople we have the good fortune to be able to follow in the footsteps of him who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life".

The Lord's will is clear when Paul writes in his first Letter to the *Thessalonians*: "This is the will of God: your sanctification" (1 *Th* 4:3).

In n. 20 of the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* of the Second Vatican Council there are four characteristics or 'notes' which form an important foundation upon which as militant Christians we can base our efforts to become holy.

By *accepting the aim of the Church* which is none other than to evangelize, to form Christian consciences and to carry the Gospel into all areas of life, making it real in particular Churches, in particular places at particular times.

By the *lay nature* of Catholic Action, in which we accept our task in the building up of the Church. This was called by Paul VI "a peculiar form of ministeriality". And indeed it was the latter who went so far as to say in an address to the Episcopal delegates of Italian Catholic Action, that Catholic Action is part of the Church's constitutional design.

By *being organized as an organic body*, working as Church in the form of community, both with fraternal movements of Catholic Action as well as with the diverse diocesan Church bodies, and with the different particular Churches.

Finally by being *closely linked with the Hierarchy*, without diluting the lay nature of Catholic Action and its full mission, seen in a profoundly ecclesial light.

On the basis of these four fundamental characteristics or 'notes', our following of Christ becomes concrete reality. As Catholic Action we have to continue to wager on a holiness marked by an incarnate spirituality. The fundamental meaning of Catholic Action lies behind our way of acting towards God, towards others, towards ourselves and towards history and is the basis of its being as a school of holiness. This way of filling all areas of life with the faith and grace of God and this desire to be the leaven in our small realities, gives Catholic Action itself and the Church with all its lay faithful a basic tool for holiness and action.

Here are some of the many things which Catholic Action has taught me about the way of holiness:

- to know how to analyse the real situation in which one finds oneself and in which one's evangelical activity is to be developed.
- To pray using the Revision of Life as a fundamental instrument of formation, reading with it the events of life in the perspective of the Gospel and the will of the Father.
- A formation which starts with life in order to arrive at life, taking on the challenge to be militant, mature, responsible Christians, deeply in love with Christ.
- To give oneself to an ecclesial group or community, the one closest, the parish as the bulwark and the fount of spirituality which supports and questions.
- That prayer should be both communitarian and personal "(...) speaking in friendship, being often alone with him whom we know that he has always loved us first" (St Teresa of Avila).
- To live the sacraments which help us to feel the presence of Christ among us fully, most of all the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The ecclesial formation offered by Catholic Action as a real school of ecclesiality which teaches us passionately to love the Church our Mother.

This spirituality generates a task in the world, but a task which is based on strong and firm spiritual foundations, that is on the strength of the group and community which sends us out as apostles of Christ.

It is difficult to explain this call to holiness to other young people, this vocation which develops as a fruit of an intimate relationship with God, full of trust in him and in dialogue with the Father.

Among the many gifts I have received from Catholic Action since I have known it, that which I value most is the feeling that I am part of the Church, an important part of a great community *which prays together, lives together, suffers together and together tries to follow Christ*. Being able to live one's faith in a group, to share my life and my sorrows with others without pretence, to be able to show myself as I am. This has enabled me to draw near to Christ and to live his values. I believe, though, that what has helped me to live the faith in my group and within Catholic Action is the strength I have received to be able to go into the world, feeling myself sent by the community, along with the opportunity to share our prayers and our lives.

Catholic Action has helped me to understand that holiness is not

alien to the layperson, is not the result of heroic deeds. To be holy, to be a saint, it is not necessary to die a martyr's death, to feel oneself persecuted, in the literal sense of the word, for professing a faith. I have understood that to be holy is to follow Christ and to try to follow him at every instant of one's life. I have understood that the world is full of great men and women, good people who carry their cross in silence. These are men and women who will never perhaps appear in the press or will never be applauded by the crowds, who will never have altars dedicated to them in the churches... but men and women who dedicate their lives to the cause of Christ, who go through their lives on tiptoe, without making a noise, but who in the eyes of our heavenly Father, who is good and knows all, do not go unnoticed.

For this I want to be holy, to be a saint, I want to follow Christ at every moment, in love with him and being faithful to him for all of my life. I want to ask his pardon every time I fail, weep before him for my sorrows and celebrate my joys with him. Saints dance, laugh, eat, go on strike, go to the cinema, have children, have family discussions... in short, they are not people divorced from a world which they do not feel, a world in which they do not suffer. This is because in order to be holy, to be a saint, we need only to love God and remain constant in this love to the end.

Now we are going to hear of some Christians who were visible signs of God on earth and true apostles of Christ.

## **SAINT GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA**

ITALY

On the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1962, Gianna Beretta Molla gave birth to a baby girl.

In the third month of her pregnancy, she discovered that she had a cancer, which at her request, was removed without endangering the baby's life even though she knew that her life would be at risk. The day after she gave birth she was diagnosed with septic peritonitis, which was incurable in her condition and which led her to go and meet the Lord on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1962. It was Gianna's "normal" choice: to risk. The heroic choice to give her life to save her daughter has deep roots in the family and in the formation which she received and lived in Catholic Action.

Alberto Beretta and Maria De Micheli, members of the Franciscan Third Order, imbued with the wisdom and fear of God, brought up a

family where the children learnt, through example, to give the best of themselves. They had thirteen children, of whom five died at a very young age. The eighth child Saint Gianna Francesca was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1922 and baptized on the 11<sup>th</sup> October. Right from the day of her first Holy Communion, every morning she went to Mass with her mother and Holy Communion became her indispensable food. She grew up as a very calm girl and was very keen on music, painting and loved being in the open air and on the mountains. At heart she was already a missionary, an attitude she developed in her family, which was a small domestic church.

In 1937, when the Beretta family moved to Quinto al Mare, near Genova, Gianna joined Catholic Action and her mother became the president of the CA women's group in the parish.

This was at the time when Pius XI published his encyclicals against Nazism, Soviet Communism and against the religious persecution in Mexico. In CA Gianna started an intense formative period in her spiritual journey. She committed herself to live and to follow the proposals which the Holy Father made to young people of that time. Like all GF (Female Youth Group) she strengthened herself with the Word of God and the Eucharist, went to weekly confession to the same priest, followed courses of Spiritual Exercises and made a firm resolution to "do everything for Christ", choosing rather to die a thousand times than offend him. In this socio-ecclesial context, actively involved with the CA children's group as a youth leader, Gianna drew up her life programme: "to save my soul and to succeed in leading many other souls to heaven to give glory to the Lord." She did her utmost for her own advancement and wished the best for the girls for whose education she was responsible. She was an attractive and heroic example as to how to imitate Christ, manifesting the beauty of a life lived according to the Gospel and giving due consideration to suffering. Souls are won through example and word but above all through sacrifice and prayer because it is through prayer that the Lord communicates the secret of the conversion of the souls we approach. She always kept in mind the fact that accepting a failure in apostolic work, after having done one's utmost, is more meritorious for eternal life than success.

Gianna, first as an *aspirante* and later as a *delegata*, together with the girls under her care, used to go to visit the poor, carrying out works of mercy with joy (*Rm* 12:8).

In 1942, when the war was at its worst, Gianna, obtained her classical diploma. Some months after this, she lost her parents. Later she

enrolled as a student in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Milan and graduated as a Doctor of Medicine in 1949, specializing in paediatrics. She opened her own clinic. She enrolled as a member of the Catholic Graduates' Movement after having been a member of the FUCI while at the same time she was still responsible for the CA group in her parish. She attended her clinic till two days prior to her entering hospital to give birth to her fourth child, Gianna Emanuela.

The saint used to tell her colleagues: "We have opportunities which priests do not have. Our mission does not end when medicine is no longer a solution. There is a soul which we have to lead to God and at that moment your word counts a lot. You are faced with the great mystery of man: with Christ. Those who visit the sick are helping 'me'. Just as the priest can touch the body of Christ, doctors touch Christ in the body of the very young, old and poor sick people they treat".

It was the time of the cold war, of the silent Church and of persecution but it was also a time of great hopes for lay people. The Second International Meeting for Lay People was held in Rome and Montini stated with enthusiasm: "This is the greatness of lay apostolate: knowing how to love". It is the time for zealous and challenging charity.

Gianna understood the fundamental dimension of life: the giving of oneself and decided to become a lay missionary doctor. From 1949 to 1953 she was in close contact with her brother Fr. Alberto, a missionary in Brazil and was thinking of joining him in his missionary work. But the Lord had other plans for her. On the 8<sup>th</sup> December 1954 she met Engineer Pietro Molla. After an engagement, during which they, joyfully and tenderly, were enriched by the experience of their mutual love lived out in purity, they eventually got married on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1955 and Gianna became "the strong woman of the Gospel" (*Wisdom* 31:10-12). They had four children: Pierluigi (19<sup>th</sup> November 1956), Maria Zita (11<sup>th</sup> December 1957), Laura Enrica Maria (15<sup>th</sup> July 1969) and Gianna Emanuela (April 21<sup>st</sup> 1962).

## The Mexican Saints

In the climate of religious persecution which predominated in Mexico in the 1920s the head of government, from 1920 to 1924, was General Alvaro Obregón. Initially Obregón did not apply current anti-Church legislation. Thus, the Church experienced a moment of peace during which it directed its pastoral activities towards the socio-political arenas,

enjoying a new Spring as in the era of first evangelization. This movement culminated in the consecration of the national monument to Christ the King on Mount Cubilete, the geographical centre of Mexico, as well as in the national Eucharistic Congress of 1924. The state was alarmed by the frequent religious demonstrations which were growing in number and fervour. It was against this climate of increasing confrontation that Plutarco Elias Calles (1924-1928) became head of government.

Following the teaching of Pope Pius XI and in response to the needs of the Mexican nation, preparations were begun in 1924 to organize Catholic Action. In 1926 Pius XI addressed an Apostolic Letter *Paterna Sane Sollicitudo* to the Mexican Bishops on the topic of the spread of Catholic Action. Because of the religious conflict in the years 1926 to 1929 preparations for the official launching of Catholic Action had to be postponed and could only begin again in June 1929. When religious persecution broke out many young Catholics and many of the youth section of Catholic Action were already involved in the apostolate. These younger members of Catholic Action, under the motto, "Long live Christ the King!", gave many martyrs to the Church, among them Saints Manuel, Salvador and David and the future Blessed Anacleto Flores and Companions.

On 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1926, Article 30 of the so-called *Calles Law* came into force. The Mexican Bishops, having consulted the Holy See, decided to close all the churches and suspend all acts of worship across the nation. Popular response was not slow in coming with groups of volunteers taking up arms to fight against the regime. Some months later two organizations emerged, one civil, the National League for the Defence of Religious Freedom, of which Saint Manuel Morales became president, and one military, the *Cristeros*. Meanwhile, almost all of the Bishops had been exiled. The death-toll from this three-year conflict was to rise to between seventy- and eighty-thousand. As a result of the mediation of the Ambassador Morrow of the United States, a *modus vivendi* was arrived at in June 1929 which led to final peace and permitted the official establishment of Catholic Action in December, 1929.

## **SAINT MANUEL MORALES**

He was born in Mesillas, Zacatecas, in the parish of Sombrerete, Zacatecas in the Archdiocese of Durango on 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1898. From a solidly Christian background, he was a faithful husband, a loving

father of his three small children, a good worker, dedicated to the apostolate in his parish and with an intense spiritual life nourished by the Eucharist.

A member of the Catholic Action Youth of Mexico he became president of the National League for the Defence of Religious Freedom, an association which attempted by peaceful means to obtain the abolition of unjust laws. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1926, when he heard that the Parish Priest, Father Batis had been imprisoned, he began to prepare to intercede for his release. He had hardly gathered a group of youth to decide what was to be done when a detachment of soldiers arrived. When the leader of this group called his name, Manuel stepped forward announcing, "I am here. At your service". The soldiers insulted him and began to beat him fiercely. He and Father Batis were brought outside the city. When he heard Father Batis asking that his life be spared because he had a family, he said boldly, "Father, I die, but God will not. He will take care of my wife and my children". Then he stood up and called, "Long live Christ the King and the Virgin of Guadeloupe!". The witness of his life is signed with his martyr's blood.

## **SAINT SALVADOR LARA PUENTE**

He was born in the village of Berlin Durango, in the parish of Sùchil in the Archdiocese of Durango on 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1905. Salvador was in the full bloom of youth, tall and robust, dedicated to the sport of *charrería*. Polite and considerate to all, he was respectful and affectionate towards his widowed mother. He was an honest and responsible employee in a mining concern. He lived his faith with purity and was dedicated to the apostolate as an ardent member of the Catholic Action Youth of Mexico. When the soldiers arrived to arrest him along with Manuel and David, he replied when his name was called, "I am here". He walked, smiling as usual, with his companion and cousin David to the place where they were to be killed. They had just realised that the parish priest, Father Batis, and his friend Manuel Morales, had been shot. Salvador was praying in a low voice when a burst of fire ripped through him, shedding his martyr's blood, a sign of his greatness as a Christian.

## **SAINT DAVID ROLDÁN LARA**

He was born in Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, in the Archdiocese of Durango on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1902. His father having died when he was a small child, he was a good and affectionate son to his mother. He was like a father to his brothers. His friends liked him for his good humour and generosity, his fellow-workers for his kindness and understanding. His employer in a mining company appreciated his honesty, conscientiousness and hard work. He was a sincere and loving fiancé. With his parish priest, Father Batis, he shared the problems of the apostolate. As a member of the Catholic Action Youth of Mexico, he felt keenly the difficulties of the Church and the need to be faithful to Christ, even to death. Sharing as he did the same ideals as his friend, Manuel Morales, and his cousin, Salvador Lara, he was arrested with them and subsequently executed only a few metres from where Father Luis Batis and Manuel had been martyred. Fearlessly he walked serenely the last steps on earth which separated him from heaven and was killed together with his cousin Salvador. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1926, when the sun was at its height, David showed his supreme love for Christ.

## **IVAN MERZ**

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA-CROATIA

Ivan Merz was born in Banja Luka in northwest Bosnia on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1896. His father, Moriz Merz, a Catholic and a railway employee, was of German origin from Bohemia. His mother, Teresa, was of Hungarian origin. Ivan was baptized on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1897.

As a small child he went to the nursery school at Banja Luka run by the Adorers of the Precious Blood. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1906, he received his First Communion. It was during his time in middle school that he began to experience problems with his eyes and which he had throughout his life. From his earliest youth he showed a strong sense of duty and could not tolerate that God's name be taken in vain. He was greatly displeased that his parents were not practising Catholics. It was thanks to him that they later came to the fullness of Christian life.

In the fifth class Ivan's teacher of Croatian was Dr Marakovic, one of the foremost promoters of the Catholic movement among students. He recognized Ivan's acute intelligence and natural gifts and helped him to see the truth of Catholicism.



Ivan showed himself to be distinguished by tranquility, modesty and conscientiousness. He was gentle with his companions and extremely loyal. At the age of sixteen he fell in love with a gentle and beautiful girl, a Protestant of German origin, who greatly influenced him. This girl killed herself as a result of disappointment in a love affair with another boy. This event led Ivan to experience an inner conversion.

To please his parents he entered a military academy in September 1914 but not feeling at ease there, he left after a short time. In January 1915 he went to Wien and enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy. In the Autumn of 1915, having passed the Latin examination, he enrolled in the Faculty of Law.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> December 1915, feast of the Immaculate Conception, he made a vow of chastity until marriage to the Blessed Virgin, aware that this could last until his death.

Between March 1916 and February 1917 he was in military service, and so was a soldier in the First World War.

In the Summer of 1920, the Croatian Jesuit, Fr. Vanino, home from Belgium and France, offered the directors of the Croatian Catholic Movement in Zagreb the possibility of sending some Croatian students to Paris. As a result, from October 1920, Merz began to attend the Faculty of Letters at the Institut Catholique as well as some courses at the Sorbonne. He came in contact with French Catholic circles and was helped in getting to know the situation of the Church in his own country. He went on pilgrimage to Lourdes and learned the value of pilgrimages as a school of prayer. The Rosary became his second best friend, after Jesus in the Eucharist.

He began to work with the clergy directing the 'youth league' of which he was immediately elected president (1922). He worked to unite this with the 'Aquila' organization, which had been founded in collaboration with the Slovenians, with a view to promoting the ideas of Pius XI. He proposed to the Bishops that these organizations be run in accordance with the Holy See's directives on Catholic Action.

Ivan prepared himself for the apostolate by study but, above all, by a deep spiritual life nourished by prayer and completely focused on the Eucharist. His personality made his words particularly effective because he lived what he proclaimed. He had understood that the goal of every person is sanctification, that is, to become like Jesus Christ. To achieve this goal a special effort in the practice of the virtues is needed.

With young people he insisted on the need to fight against sin and took concrete measures to achieve this. These included confession, monthly Communion, regular retreats. In particular, he stressed his need to live the liturgy which he considered the best school of the spiritual life, daily Communion being its centre.

Ivan can be considered the initiator of Croatian liturgical renewal. He paid particular attention to the students who were nearest to him. Not only did he teach them how to meditate on and live the liturgy but provided them with a daily routine which included morning meditation, Communion, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, various prayers. Love for the Church and the Pope were what animated Merz's apostolate.

On his return from Paris in 1922, Ivan became professor of French and German at the Archiepiscopal Secondary School in Zagreb. He worked there until his death. On 31<sup>st</sup> July 1923, he received his PhD from the University of Zagreb. He was not only an excellent teacher but also and primarily an excellent educator of the young.

In January 1928 he was diagnosed with chronic purulent maxillary sinusitis. On 25<sup>th</sup> April he underwent an operation after which he contracted meningitis. He faced the great sufferings of this condition with patience and tranquillity and died in Zagreb on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1928.

## **ALBERTO MARVELLI**

ITALY

He was born in Ferrara on 21<sup>th</sup> March 1918, the second of six children. He grew up in a truly Christian family in which a life of piety was joined with charitable, catechetical and social involvement. He attended the Salesian oratory and joined Catholic Action where his faith matured into a decisive choice: "My programme of life is summed up in one phrase: to become holy".

A strong character, firm, decisive and strong-willed, he prayed with great absorption because he aspired to "a spiritualization of action". He lived the primacy of the spiritual in his life because communion with God, realized in prayer and in the Eucharist, was uppermost in his heart. Convinced that time was the Lord's, he devoted much of his time to interior life, to spiritual exercises, reading the word of God and the lives of the saints as well as in catechetical activity.

His love for the Mother of God prompted him to consecrate his

heart to Mary Immaculate on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1934, and inspired his efforts to encourage young people to have a filial trust in her.

A dynamic and young man, much interested in sport, he had a strong sense of justice and was very popular with his friends at university. Here his spiritual and cultural formation matured in the FUCI and he chose Piergiorgio Frassati as the model of his young life.

Having qualified as a mechanical engineer on 31<sup>st</sup> June 1941, he became a soldier in a war which he condemned firmly and clearly: "May peace and justice come soon for all people and may war disappear forever from the world". Discharged from the army because three of his brothers were on the front, he worked for a short time at FIAT in Turin.

Following the fall of Fascism and the beginning of the German occupation, on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1943, Marvelli went home to Rimini and was involved in charitable work. After every bombardment he helped the injured, encouraged the survivors, assisted the dying and helped to free those buried alive in the ruins. Alberto distributed all kinds of supplies to the poor. He even managed to save many young people from deportation to Germany.

When the city was liberated on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1945, the first Committee of Liberation, aware and appreciative of the enormous work he had done in helping evacuees, appointed him a councillor. Attached to a branch of the Department of Civil Engineering, he was entrusted with the task of reconstruction. In a note-book of that period he wrote: "To serve is better than to be served. Jesus served".

He understood and lived his political involvement in the Christian Democrat Party as a service to the common good. Political activity can and should be the highest expression of living one's faith.

In 1945 the Bishop asked him to be responsible for Catholic Graduates. His task can be summed up in two words, culture and charity: "Culture needs to be brought not only to intellectuals, but to all the people". And so he founded a popular university, opened a kitchen for the poor whom he invited to Mass where he prayed with them. Then in the canteen he served soup and listened to their problems. He was tireless in his efforts for all. One of the founders of ACLI, he established a co-operative of building-workers, the first 'white' co-operative in the 'red' Romagna.

Alberto had reached a state of contemplative prayer. He prayed with his life more than with words, with a contemplative prayer expressed in charity.

On the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1946, while on his way by bicycle to an election meeting - he was himself a candidate for the first municipal elections - he was knocked down by a lorry. He died some hours later without having ever regained consciousness.

## PINA SURIANO

ITALY

Giuseppina Suriano was born in Partinico in the Archdiocese of Monreale on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1915, first born of Giuseppe and Graziana (Costantino) Suriano. She was baptized on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1915. Her serenity of soul led her to become interested in the simple things of life, centred around an awareness of their religious significance. Pina lived in her grandparents' large house, along with an extended family. The first grandchild, she was surrounded by the affection of her family, from whom she received her first moral and religious education. This education was perfected when, from the age of four, she attended the nursery-school run by the *Collegine* Sisters of St. Anthony.

In 1921, when she was six, she was enrolled in the local national school where she spent the five years of her primary education. Her teacher was Signorina Margherita Drago, the first one who really appreciated her singular virtues. In 1922 she received, within a few days of each other, the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation.

Pina was still a child of little more than twelve when she began to take part, with a deep ecclesial spirit, in parish and diocesan life. She took an active part in the initiatives of Catholic Action and in those which were prompted by local problems and needs. The parish became the centre of her activities, following completely the directives of the parish priest, Fr Antonio Cataldo, her spiritual director and confessor. She joined the Youth Catholic Action Group and became the delegate of the Junior Section: *angioletti, piccolissime, beniamine, aspiranti*. From 1939 until 1948 she was Secretary of her branch. From 1945 to 1948, as a member of the Womens' Section, she was President of the Young Women's Section. This nomination was an answer to the wishes of the girls themselves.

Being a member in Catholic Action is a reality in Pina's life which should constantly be borne in mind because the interests she cultivated, her aspirations and religious practices, were motivated

by her acute awareness of the implications of membership in this association. This is one of the explanations of how, as years went by, she was able to become an expert in the life and message of Jesus, of the mission of the Church and of the call to holiness. Underlying her apostolate were prayer, sacrifice, the Mass, daily Communion and meditation, in the context of the study of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church.

An indication that Pina's religious activities were prompted by a definite life-choice is the vow of chastity she made on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1932, in the church of the Daughters of Mercy of the Cross, the headquarters of the CA Young Womens' (GF).

Pina made several attempts to achieve her desire to become a religious but she found herself faced with insurmountable difficulties. Realizing that she was excluded from the religious life, she was anxious to give to Jesus the ultimate proof of her immense love. On 30<sup>th</sup> March 1948, along with three companions, she offered herself as a victim for the sanctification of priests.

Before entering the sorrowful tunnel of sickness, she had the great satisfaction of going on pilgrimage to Rome, in September 1948, for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of GF. There is an extraordinary coincidence between her offering herself as a victim in March 1948, and the development of a form of rheumatic arthritis which was so violent that it caused the cardiac deficiency which led to her death from a heart-attack on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1950.

## **PERE TARRÉS I CLARET** SPAIN (CATALUÑA)

Pere Tarrés i Claret was born on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1905 at Manresa in Catalonia (Spain). His parents, Francesc Tarrés and Carme Claret Masats were believing and exemplary parents, which is witnessed to by the fact that they had two further children, both of whom became Conceptionist sisters. Pere was baptized on 4<sup>th</sup> June and was confirmed on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1910. A pupil of the Scolopi Fathers, he made his First Communion on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1913. From 1914 he studied with the Jesuit Fathers. Having completed his baccalaureate, he enrolled in the Medical Faculty in Barcelona.

Young and cheerful, open and loveable, a lover of nature, contemplative, mystical with a poetic soul, Pere became a member of the *Federació Jovens Cristians di Catalunya*. The *Federació* was Catholic Action (AC), as Pope Pius XI envisaged it at the time: prayer, study, action, under the direction of the local hierarchy. Pere held different posts of responsibility in the *Federació* and in the diocesan committee of Catholic Action, acutely aware of the need for formation of the youths for mission in contemporary society. During the period of religious persecution more than one hundred of them were to give their lives for Christ the King. Of these Francesc Castelló i Aleu was beatified on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2001, and the beatification process of Josep Maria Armengol i Serra and another 61 martyred members of the *Federació* has begun. Tarrés published an account of the Catalanian JOC. For him, the secrets of the spiritual lives of the militants were Eucharistic devotion, fount of spiritual vitality and fecundity, since the apostle can only speak to others about God when he has himself already heard the sweet voice of the Lord in his own heart, and filial devotion to the Mother of God, to whom he himself was linked by his vow of chastity made in 1927.

In 1928 he qualified, with distinction, as a medical doctor. In the exercise of his profession he was a model of charity and piety. Along with his friend, Dr. Manresa, he founded the clinic of *Our Lady of Mercy* for the poor in Barcelona. On 18<sup>th</sup> July 1936, the day of national uprising against religious persecution, Tarrés was on retreat in the abbey of Montserrat, where he managed to obtain police-protection for the monastery against the anarchists. Back in Barcelona he secretly brought communion to those persecuted by the communists and managed to escape when his own house was searched. In July 1938 he had to enrol in the republican army as a doctor. As a result of his dedication, the soldiers asked that he be promoted to the rank of captain. He spent part of his time preparing to enter the seminary and lost no opportunity to show his faith.

When the religious persecution ended in Barcelona in July of 1939, Pere continued his medical work and became diocesan Vice-president of CA Youths. Some months later, in September 1939, he entered the seminary at Barcelona and was ordained priest on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1942. Appointed curate in the parish of Saint Esteve Sesrovires, he began to organize Catholic Action.

From 1943 to 1944 he studied for the Licence in Theology at the Faculty of Theology in Salamanca. Once more in Barcelona he held

various pastoral posts: diocesan Vice-assistant to CA Youths, assistant to the womens' centre and to CA Young Women of the parish of St Vincent de Sarrià (1944), chaplain to the community and college of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (1945) where he formed the CA group. He was involved in many apostolic activities, some of which presented difficulties, but to which he was able to respond with evangelical charity, prudence and fortitude, planting the seed of the Cross in fields entrusted to him. In November 1945 he wrote in his *Diary* that he felt himself immersed in the ocean of the apostolate as he had always wished, and had the same zeal and enthusiasm he had, as a layman, for the *Federació*. During holidays at the sanctuary of the Virgin of Nuria in the Pyrenees, at a height of 2.000 metres, he met many groups of CA Youths.

Between 1946 and 1949, he was appointed assistant to the lay Benedictine Oblates of the *Unions di scolans di Monserrat*, former members of the choir of the monastery; director of the Work of Visitation of Our Lady, a body concerned with obtaining material aid for the sick poor; councillor of the Catholic School of Social Instruction in Barcelona; ordinary confessor to the seminary; diocesan delegate to the *Womens' Protection Society*; spiritual director of the *Las Magdalenas hospital* for women terminally ill with diseases resulting from prostitution or from extreme moral misery. He was also director of the diocesan charitable works, predecessor of the present Diocesan Caritas. Because his intensive activity was founded on Christ, Tarrés left in indelible mark on all with whom he had apostolic contact. He was in love with God.

He died on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1950, in the clinic which he had founded, a victim of lymphatic cancer, having offered his life for the sanctification of priests.

## CONCLUSION

Karl Rahner said: "Today's Christian will either be a mystic or he will be incapable of making the journey of history".

But this mystic will be a person anchored in concrete reality, in the everyday life, a mystic who stands in communion with the Father and with his brothers and sisters and who receives the strength of the Spirit who supports him.

Catholic Action continues and will continue to form holy men and women with a lay vocation, responsible, mature and well prepared, who will benefit all the other vocations in our Mother Church.

But let us never forget that this holiness is rooted in the everyday unremitting work, in an anonymous, unpretentious proclamation of Christ. Let us not forget that, starting from our own small reality, we can become holy, can become saints. As Paul VI said: “We are everyday saints”.

I conclude with the words of John Paul II: “Catholic Action is a gift of the Spirit”. It has been our lot to receive this gift and the task of cultivating it. As Christians called to everyday sanctity, let us give freely that which we have received freely.

Let us go to the crossroads with our spirituality and our formation, to proclaim Christ, allowing ourselves to fall in love with him and to be moved by his life and works! Let us allow our hearts to be ravaged by the world and its injustices so that, in company with Mary, mother and protectress of the Church, and with the Lord, our God, we may respond to this explicit call to holiness!

So be it.

A. M.



## LECTURE

# CATHOLIC ACTION OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Paola Bignardi  
ICA National President

The following reflections are aimed at giving a clear picture of the development of the charism of Catholic Action in today's Church and world.

These considerations are a free and creative exercise which underlines an awareness of what is going on in the world in which we live, as well as in the life of the Church, especially the searching questions deep down in the hearts of people living in today's world.

With these reflections, I would like to answer the question: how does CA wish to live these first few years of the new millennium? What contribution does it wish to give? What does it want to say to people, to the world and to the Church?

### Introduction

The Pope has often spoken to us about CA's *charism* and the richness of its history. CA's history is interwoven with its charism and it is through this charism that it has borne fruit. CA's charism and its beneficial results, which are evident throughout its history, cannot be taken separately.

One cannot imagine any development projects concerning CA's charism without looking at its tradition.

- *Historical facts.* In 1968, Paul VI told us: "Your history is the engine which drives you on towards the future", referring to the driving force of an experience which is more than secular and which rather than holding us back, pushes us forward. Which are the most valuable elements of our history? Which are the facts, the *leit-motivs*, which run through it, which help us to interpret the present and project us towards the future?

- *Lay people as protagonists:* Catholic Action saw its beginning through initiatives taken by lay people, who, as believers, with a Christian and ecclesial spirit, assumed their responsibility in the mission of the Church of their times. They started with the problems of their society, which worried them as believers. In answer to these problems, they designed projects, took initiatives and worked out programmes of witnessing and of being of service...
- *The links with the Church and with the Hierarchy:* it is difficult to draw a line between the initiatives taken by lay people, who, because of their position, were on the front line, and the involvement of the Hierarchy. The Pastors always followed the initiatives and the involvement of CA's organizations in the problems of their society with interest and always gave their support. Very often the Church recognized and blessed the action taken by CA members and this was clear evidence that the Church approved of these initiatives. The attention with which Paul VI followed CA's developments and its conciliar renewal and the way in which Pius XI and Pius XII followed the activities promoted by the CA's Female Youth Section and by all CA lay people scattered all over the world are enough proof of the fact that Church recognized CA as organic to herself.
- *The apostolic urge:* CA lay people have always been characterized by their urge to be witnesses of the Gospel also in the civil, social and political spheres of life, besides giving testimony in their daily familiar and professional lives. Reading the signs of the times, they commit themselves to foster Christian principles and spread the leaven of the Gospel in society. With courage they make radical choices in the name of the Gospel. This urge is a commitment and very often a heroic stand to declare the values, which inspire their lives, even at a personal risk. This apostolic urge finds an expression in a variety of initiatives and organizations which stemmed from CA's experience.
- *Our extraordinary ability to regenerate and renew ourselves in keeping with the changing of times:* our history shows the extraordinary ability of our Association to renew itself. Here I refer to the Italian Catholic Action. ICA at one particular moment is very different from that of any other time. The fact that it does not adhere to any ideology has made it possible for ICA to regenerate itself in keeping with historical changes. It has managed to renew itself in answer to

the exigencies of the times which are continually changing, while remaining faithful to that which is fundamental without however being attached to its own past. It has succeeded in keeping the traditional elements alive whilst giving up those which depended on historical circumstances. This has made it possible for ICA to open a new way for the Church to help the people of God in accepting the conciliar teaching on the laity; preparing the way for the catechistic movement, familiarizing simple people with the Word of God and the liturgy and opening perspectives for women to assume social responsibilities at a time when this was unheard of.

Reflecting on our tradition we discover a wealth of examples which put a great responsibility on our shoulders. These traditions help us discover ways as to how we can relate with our times. We should not try to copy these examples but use them as an inspiration. We can use them to teach us how we can listen to today's needs without letting them dictate to us any specific scheme.

Had these reflections been made in our Churches, we would have based this exercise on the pastoral priorities of the diocese. In our case, we are considering the international context of this Congress, so we have to consider universal situations.

I think that the *Novo Millennio Ineunte (NMI)* is the best orientation in this regard.

### **1. With our gaze fixed on Jesus**

In n. 29 of *NMI*, the Pope invites us to “start afresh from Christ”, knowing that the presence of the Risen Christ amongst us helps us to find a reply to the question put to Peter in Jerusalem, soon after his Pentecost speech: “What are we to do?” (*Acts 2:37*). With the Pope we put the question with trustful optimism, but without underestimating the problems we face. We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. “No”- says John Paul II - no formula will save us but a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: *I am with you!*”

According to the *Letter to the Hebrews*, from which the expression “living with our gaze fixed on Jesus” is taken, this phrase refers to the attitude which the disciples should assume in difficult times. This letter was written during the very difficult times of a fierce persecution. As always, difficult times put us to the test. They make us gather all our energies and direct them towards a few specific targets.

They highlight that which is worthwhile and compel us to abandon that which is of secondary importance. We are living an exciting time for the Gospel, a time for which we were not prepared. Circumstances show us that we must be creative, strong, faithful and young at heart. We are faced with secularism or persecution, fatigue, confrontation with other views of life, injustice and war... Seeing all this, we realize that we are faced with many challenges but in spite of all this the heart of the Church is not tired. It is a tough time so we must live with our gaze on Jesus. We should orientate our glance on Him and concentrate our eyes on His face. We should converge our choices towards Him.

Our relations with the Lord Jesus can never be taken for granted and should always be put at the centre of our lives again and again. Jesus is a reference which is not always obvious yet always so essential. The meaningful paradoxical Easter gift bestows on us a life which is reborn through death and a love which is not afraid to annihilate itself to give life. This constitutes the energy and the paradigmatic image of Christian living. Today, in our Christian communities, we run the risk of letting ourselves be fooled by the world's ways of reasoning, whereby, appearances are more important than the state of being; success more important than love; money, structures, efficiency more important than disinterested witnessing of the values of the Gospel. Even our communities are not free from this temptation and run a very strong and dangerous risk of forgetting the radical importance of the Easter message, that is, to live and be a pascal witness to announce the Gospel.

The Pope reminds us that we should live with our gaze fixed on Jesus. We too, at the beginning of this millennium, are convinced that in order to live and remain an ever youthful CA, we must live with our gaze fixed on Jesus and let the mystery of his Resurrection regenerate ourselves and our Association continually.

## 2. The Council

The Council continues to be a "reliable compass" which gives us direction in the new millennium. Nearly forty years from its end, the Council is still carrying out its prophetic mission and urging us to instill its spirit deeply in our Churches. John Paul II, in n. 57 of *NMI*, reaffirms its relevance to our present times with these words: "What a treasure there is, dear brothers and sisters, in the guidelines offered to us by the Second Vatican Council! (...) With the passing of years, *the Council documents have lost nothing of their value or brilliance.* (...) Now that the Jubilee has ended, I feel more than ever in duty

bound to point to the Council *as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century*".

We know very well how the Council constitutes the most precious source which helps us to understand the charism of Catholic Action on which our Associations are founded. The fulfilment of the Council, therefore, also means promoting this particular way of being lay Christians which is Catholic Action today; Christian lay people who, in their everyday life, want to be witnesses of the fact that the Church goes along with every man to proclaim him that God is love; lay people who want to convey into the Christian community, the endless names which express - though in a confused way - the longing of every man for goodness and for that which is good. They want to show that they wish to assume and to share this longing together with the Church which is their family and with their pastors, with whom they want to collaborate. This adventure presents us with contrasts: words and silence, journeys through the desert and through smooth paths, misunderstanding and consent...

The conciliar mentality has imbued the culture of our association so deeply that it has given a specific character to our experience. We live the Council every time we put the Word as the focal point of our existence and of the life of our association. We do this every time we stress the importance of the interior dimension of life, when we foster a spirit of communion in our relations, when we defend the dignity of every human person, when we work to establish a spirit of dialogue with everyone and when we share the "joy and hope" of today's world. With the Council as its compass, CA of the third millennium will thus be a missionary CA, because it is open to all and rooted in that which is essential.

### 3. Holiness

One of the most intense and strong passages of *NMI* is n. 30, which speaks about holiness. It speaks about it as an "ordinary" experience within everybody's reach thus reaffirming the universal vocation to holiness which the Council speaks about. It also makes us evoke the countless anonymous saints which *Christifideles Laici* speaks about in n. 17. "The eyes of faith behold a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people, both men and women, busy in their daily life and activity, oftentimes inconspicuous and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world's great personages but nonetheless looked upon with love by the Father, untiring labourers who work in the Lord's vineyard. Confident and steadfast, through the power of

God's grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history".

It is with great joy and emotion that during these last years we could reconstruct how numerous are the saints and the blessed who, through Catholic Action, have understood the beauty of Christian living and have dared to aim towards the ideal of holiness. Saints and blessed, who in their everyday lives and in the circumstances they found themselves in, have been witnesses of the Gospel. Above all, they have opened the way to that holiness which can be lived in ordinary, common situations, faithful to God in all the events, dramatic conditions and trials of life experienced by all.

Among others, I can mention Alberto Marvelli, the Italian young man from Rimini who, together with Pietro Tarrés and Pina Suriano, will be beatified on Sunday.

Albert's holiness was lived within the life of a young man who was not extraordinary in any way, except for the extraordinary love he had for everybody. He dedicated his life to the education of children in the Oratory and carried out his studies and his profession with earnestness and dedication. He was in love with a young woman who eventually wished to follow another way of life and who helped him to see God's plans for him which were to dedicate himself entirely to the reconstruction of his city which had just been heavily bombarded during the war. However there is something else which is extraordinary in Alberto's life. He made the poor feel welcomed without establishing any institution for them. He opened his house and his heart to all those who knocked at his door and shared their poverty, so much so, that sometimes he ended up without shoes. The Eucharist was the secret of his life. It kept him united to the person of the Lord and kept his heart always burning with love.

Alberto's life shows the paradigmatic characteristics of the way to sanctity of all CA lay people. It tells us that we can be saints and remain common people; that in the Church, which is everybody's, we all can find the gifts which we need to lead a holy life; that CA is a living experience of loving brothers who help one another along this way with words, example and reciprocal witnessing.

We are proud of our history and feel grateful to God for it and responsible for it. We should ensure therefore that every step we take reflects always the spiritual richness of the past. We have always been a "school of sanctity" and we are committed to continue being so even to this day. Our spirituality is not based on anything which is out of the ordinary. It is based on the basic gifts offered to us by the

Church which are within everybody's reach: the Word of God, prayer and the liturgy, above all Sunday Eucharist, and the sacraments. In the Church, we can all find all the means and help to lead a "holy life". Catholic Action helps us to live this spiritual ideal through a *brotherly and welcoming associative life* and by presenting to us *spiritual ways of life* which can be followed whatever our call in life is. It does this through the guidance of *educators and assistants* who can present the beauty of a Christian life, lived in simplicity and faithfulness to our *Baptism*, and in joy as a result of our living in *communion*, showing that we are the visible people of God. Our efforts to live a *fraternal way of life* renders us open to all people and eager to establish strong relations with everybody. Faithful to our history, we feel the need to personalize the ways of life we propose. In our pluralistic and complex times, we need to present different ways of life which represent all the diverse situations while remaining faithful to the Gospel. Our proposals have one special characteristic, that of being able to find different ways which however are all faithful to that which is essential, to adapt these essential principles to the lives of lay people while remaining faithful to our history, to receive diversity of ways of living one's faith and spirituality within a common and vital ideal.

#### **4. The love for the Church**

Catholic Action's life is characterized by its strong link with the Church, a link which is primarily spiritual rather than functional. It is evident through the service we give, a service which we give wholeheartedly. As an ecclesial Association, CA follows an ecclesial spirituality which marks all its life.

This spirituality is expressed through our interior link with the Church. It makes us feel that the Church is our family. Thus it follows, that our free and faithful adherence to it is an essential element without which we are no longer ourselves. This is expressed through our service in the parishes because it is in the simplicity of ordinary daily living that the eternal truth of the Gospel meets every man's man.

There is no Church if due importance is not given to people and to the places where they live. Catholic Action's ecclesial spirituality also embraces the universal dimension of the Church spread all over the world without any geographical or cultural limitations.

Italian Bishops, as well as the Pope, use a special word when they speak about CA lay people: dedicated. They are dedicated to the life of their Church. Their attention is focused on the Church and they are

always ready to care for it as they regard it as a precious and living reality. Being dedicated has a stronger meaning than giving, it means putting one's whole life at its service, taking it to heart as being one's own, showing a commitment which does not expire with time or when there is plenty of work to be done.

It is a feature related to the soul and as such it has a spiritual dimension.

CA covers the globality of the life of the Church and of its mission. It does not choose particular field to be of service but gives its service wherever it is required. It does not develop any one aspect of the community but the community in its totality. It gives its attention to all its dimensions in order to contribute towards the building of a Church which is the people of God, a Church of the people which belongs to all and is for all, a Church which is open and welcoming and which has a mother's heart.

CA's presence in parishes is only mature if, within the parish, the community becomes more open, more disposed towards dialogue and more able to assume responsibility for the problems prevalent in the society wherein it is established. It is only thus that the Church can be a missionary Church, an open and loving Church which gives testimony of the Gospel. CA can only contribute towards the missionary life of our communities if it resists the temptation of closing itself in the sacristy.

The attention which CA has always given to the *vocation of lay people* stems from its desire to make of the Church a living experience open to real life situations, open to all and capable of being human. Today more than ever Catholic Action knows that it has to dedicate itself to this work, that of helping lay people to be more aware of their vocation, forming them to express it in the daily life of the Church and of the world, involving them in helping their communities to understand that there can be no missionary Church without the mature and responsible presence of lay people. The Church needs lay people who are capable of communion and co-responsibility, imbued with a spiritual eagerness and an apostolic passion to be strong and faithful witnesses and who are straightforward and truthful in their words

*Communion and co-responsibility:* I think that these are the two characteristics which distinguish CA's ecclesial commitment. Communion is a commitment which concerns everybody but it concerns us in a special way. One of our specific characteristics is our close collaboration with our Pastors. The fact that we share the same mission, makes us share



with them the fact that we have to be a point of reference for the unity for all. Today this entails that we strive for unity with all the different vocations, with the new lay associations and with all Christians. This makes me think of what the Council says when it speaks about the Church as being a point of reference for the unity of all the human race. Communion and coresponsibility, communion as a way of exercising our proper vocation, faithful to our calling and to our original vocation which brings with it a responsibility for all the Church's mission.

## 5. Evangelization

Today, participating in the life of the Church means sharing its zeal for the spreading of the Gospel, a task which is being taken very seriously these last years. It means trying to find an answer to the search for a sense of direction and to let oneself be open to the Gospel. This, I think, is becoming ever more evident in so many spheres of society and in so many areas of the world.

Apostolic zeal has always characterized our past. With the passing of time this fervour has been weakened maybe due to fatigue, to the difficulty of finding new ways of communicating with contemporary man or due to the fact that we have lost the drive, creativity and courage and started doing things out of habit.

Today CA wants to show a strong commitment towards a *new evangelization* and to refresh its missionary urge.

“Our mission is just starting”, John Paul II says in his Encyclica *Redemptoris Missio*. Our times, when the human race is on the move and always searching, when we are witnessing great conquests and profound misery and when people can meet in traditional and innovative ways, new ways for evangelization have to be found. When even countries with a very ancient Christian tradition feel the need to go back and to listen again to the old and always new message of the Gospel, the possibilities and the horizons for spreading the Gospel have to be widened. This can be done mostly through the rich resource for evangelization, which the Church has at its disposal, that is, through lay people's witnessing in everyday life, through their dedication in the various real life situations and in all the different human experiences: the family, the place of work, in education and in artistic, scientific, economic, political and communication spheres...

Thus it is necessary for us not to forget the source of our hope, that truth, which alone can give a full meaning to our life, reminding us that it is a gift to us from God. We know that this truth became visible in Jesus and expects to meet every man through so many unthink-

able ways, which however all call for zealous and humble witnesses, conquered by the gospel of love and capable of passing on the message through their daily lives.

The challenge presented by this mission should lead to the drawing up of *research itineraries and programmes which help in the rediscovery of faith*. These should be animated by lay people who know how to listen to what others have to say, who can share their course of action and who can be witnesses of the fact that in the Resurrection of the Lord every breath of truth and hope finds an inexhaustible font of richness. These itineraries are a challenge to our formative work, for, before being a presentation of our faith, they have to present the Church as a living experience to children, young people, adults and elderly people and have to lead them to meet the Lord of history. Another way of evangelization is helping dialogue about life and faith between the different generations. Together we want to open ourselves to the grace of God which makes of us new men.

Lastly, our commitment towards *dialogue with unbelievers and with other religions*. John Paul II himself, towards the end of *NMI* linked together these two words: dialogue and mission. From Paul VI we have learnt that “The Church should enter in dialogue with the world in which it exists and labours. The Church has something to say; the Church has a message to deliver; the Church has a communication to offer” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 67).

Today we are more than ever convinced of this. In the present situation, with an ever increasing cultural and religious pluralism, the commandment of love also means dialogue with all the different religious believers as well as with those who do not believe or are still searching. If carried out without creating confusion or indifferences, it is the best way of getting to know the truth and as the actual tragic circumstances show us, it is of the utmost importance and the only way which leads to peace. Dialogue should be characterized by clarity, mildness, confidence and freely giving. “Freely you have received, freely give” the Gospel tells us. The respect towards each others freedom, which is fundamental for dialogue, should not however overshadow the grace which is the source of our joy.

## **6. Our testimony in the world: witnessing to hope**

As lay people we know that in certain circumstances words fail us. The only reply is our way of acting, of living, our human reaction. The word of hope is our personal hope.

Paul VI in his *Evangelii Nuntiandi* tells us that today’s world is more ready to listen to witnesses than to teachers. We know that today’s

world tells us exactly what it wishes to hear from us, “words of hope”. Our responsibility as Christians is thus our being able to say true words of hope and to be able to say these through our daily way of living.

### **Giving testimony by living the incarnation**

We are followers of a Lord who has given his life for the world. The testimony that we are sent to give is that of showing and proclaiming the profound and dramatic beauty of life and to bring out God’s plan for it. The world has been renewed through the resurrection of Christ and is called to model itself, right from now, on the new life which he has already gained.

Far from being a Christian religion which is personal, abstract and detached from humanity and history, the mystery of the incarnation implants us deeply in our times. It makes of us full citizens who care for the places, realities and the people we come across. As Christians, we should not look upon the world as a reality we should try to “do without”. Rather, it is the world of our times which should lead us towards God. Holiness has to be lived “in the world”.

### **A “paradoxical” life**

The logic of the Incarnation, besides asking us to share all peoples’ life deeply, also expects us to know how to bring into light the novelty of a life lived according to the Gospel. This way of life brings about a difficult but fruitful tension in the life of every lay person as he has to involve himself in all secular realities but has to face them with the freedom of a son of God. As a citizen, he is immersed in all today’s social dynamics even if he is not at ease with them; he participates in the life of his country, even if he is drawn towards a country which is beyond; he is involved in a life from which he cannot escape nor can he run away from reality in spite of the fact that he is oriented towards a risen world. Today’s life, full of opportunities and threats, forcefully presents Christian living as a paradox. The increasing plurality of different outlooks on life calls for meetings and exchanges.

We cannot however give in to the insidious temptation of relativism which levels down everything. It should neither lead us to quite the opposite, to an integralism, which leaves no room for complexity

as evidenced when emphasis was put on old and new particularisms. The current culture, which gives importance to the body, presents the risk of turning the body into an idol or to reduce it purely to the level of merchandise. The successes of science and medicine improve the quality of life but, if the ethical and humanistic aspect is ignored, these could lead to a serious violation of the human dignity. From these examples, among many others, it is evident that today believers have to be open to the Holy Spirit so that he may lead them to a profound understanding of life and illuminate their discernment, showing them the signs of the work of God in our times.

### A conclusion (which does never ends)

#### 1. *So that the charism generates life*

The considerations which we have been studying these last years have helped us to bring to light the components which make up the precious gift of CA. Although we know that it is not easy to describe such a complex gift in a few words and that it is difficult to notice it because its work is very unobtrusive, nevertheless today, we very well know that the Church cannot do without Catholic Action.

In our Churches and in our different cultures this *charism* has developed under different forms which however can all be distinguished, so much so, that we have succeeded in getting them all together under IFCA. If we had to examine the life and spirit of all the concrete experiences, in all of these, we find a common *spirituality*, which, in my opinion can briefly be described as a *spirit of love for the Church and for the world*, in that which concerns its life, its history and it being God's creation. This love might lead to lively confrontation, but, similar to that in the family, it is always oriented towards the growth and promotion of the common good.

The next step that we should now take is to identify a specific aspect of our associative culture, which is essential in our living reality. In the *Manifesto*, which will be presented for discussion, certain aspects of this common *associative culture* have been indicated. These appear under specific words: *interiority, mission, communion, responsibility, dialogue and peace*. Could these values and attitudes be the result of an experience which stems from the fact that we live the same gift?

Could this help us to move a step forward and to find some common elements for a *formative common project*? At this point in time,

it may have its strong points in sharing some essential qualities, some common clear parameters for our formation in full respect for the cultures and for the local Churches, such as: a shared responsibility in promoting CA where it is not established yet or some symbolic gesture which brings out the link there is amongst us, for example, a commitment to renew our affiliation to Catholic Action together, maybe on the feast of Pentecost, feast of the Holy Spirit and of the Church.

*2. How do we take advantage of the international character of our experience?*

These last years, the Pope has been saying that the Church cannot do without Catholic Action. Apart from the fact that this affirmation fills us with joy, it also makes us feel responsible to ensure that this gift of CA reaches each Church as a living and significant experience.

How do we establish CA in those Countries where it does not exist? How do we bring out its beauty and its worth? How do we, through our lives, show that the Church cannot do without CA?

And what contribution can the Churches and Countries, where CA exists, make? What is the role of an organism such as IFCA? Surely IFCA's role is to establish dialogue among the existing CA but also to promote it where it does not yet exist.

*3. Giving due attention to the younger generations*

Young people and Catholic Action: I think that at this point in time CA needs to give due importance to the new generations:

- through a qualified and suitable educational programme in the case of children;
- through listening carefully to young people's needs.

Today young people are experimenting. They want to be free from the ways in which adults have lived or are living their Christian lives, are giving testimony or living their Christian experience. It is through a freedom from fixed schemes that associative ways of life which have a future can come into being. I can think of some elements which have to be kept in mind if we want to move on in this direction: a Christian life which accepts to meet the content and language of today's culture; the need to express oneself through an associative life which undertakes concrete commitments and which gives not only associative but also individual relevant service; a formation which does not fall into the temptation of rationalizing but takes into consideration the needs of the whole person: his sentiments, his

desire for fraternity, dialogue and to be of service... Surely the novelty is not here, but these are some indications which lead to a new sensibility. I am sure that, if accompanied by trust and support from adults, this initiative will find an expression in a missionary associative way of life as well as in new ways of assuming responsibilities in the world of politics, work and in social life.

Young people do not accept adults' nostalgic reminiscence; they do not understand why the messages of the Council which we pass on to them corresponds to the way we live the Council. We, adults, the Council's generation, protagonists of a period full of extraordinary novelties, have to ask ourselves whether we are being too rigid and as such obstructing this novelty in our schemes. We have to see whether in trying to pass on the Council's spirit, we are suppressing the creativity in our young people. We are an association which gathers different generations together. As adults, we must be responsible fathers and mothers to the new generations by listening to what they have to say.

Why is there such an extraordinary understanding between the Pope and young people? Because he is a credible witness, because he is a father in faith and because he proposes to young people the essential element of Christian living, the heart. He acknowledges and shows an interest in the concrete and creative actions which they take. The Pope's example helps us to understand how we can establish a fruitful dialogue between generations.

The Pope has told us: "*Duc in altum, Catholic Action!*".

Catholic Action should launch itself towards the future and keep up its tradition of being - in the words of Pope Paul VI - a force: your history is like an engine which drives you on.

We are certain that it is not our efforts which bring about the youthfulness which we desire, but it is the strength of the Holy Spirit which helps us to achieve this. So let us entrust ourselves to his strength and help.

*PRAYER VIGIL FOR PEACE*  
*CHURCH OF SANTA PRASSEDE*

**“LORD, MAKE ME  
AN INSTRUMENT OF THY PEACE...”**

*First part*

**CHRIST IS OUR PEACE**

A reading from the *letter of saint Paul to the Ephesians 2:12-22*

“Therefore, remember that at one time you, Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by those called the circumcision, which is done in the flesh by human hands, were at that time without Christ, alienated from the community of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it.

He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God,

built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit”.

A reading from the *Gospel according to Luke 6:27-38*

“But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic.

Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit (is) that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount.

But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as (also) your Father is merciful.

Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

## HOMILY

Dear brothers and sisters,  
Welcome to this Prayer Vigil for Peace!

### 1. *Our disposition and attitude*

We have come to Christ, our peace. We have all experienced fear and trauma and some of us may also be in a state of despair. In fact, the attempts which are taking place in all parts of the world, kidnapping, rapes, vile murders of the innocent, the defenceless and the weak do not let us have much peace of mind.



The contestations and exhortations of Paul VI in his prayer on the occasion of the Third World Day of Peace in 1970, seem to have been inspired by the events of the beginning of the third millennium.

Paul VI denounced the fact that, as history has shown, we are instruments of destruction. Destructive weapons in people's hands are on the increase. Anti-personal missiles of every type mutilate innocent people everywhere, in fields, in shops and in forests. Anti-aircraft machine-guns and hand-grenades circulate among peaceloving and unarmed people. During the Third World Day of Peace, Paul VI deplored the ideologies which render men enemies of one another, entice class hatred, incite nationalistic pride and ethnic violence. Today, these ideologies have become stronger and more destructive than in 1970. These ideologies bring about a plan for the elimination of groups of people who do not share the same economic, political or cultural vision.

At the end of his universal prayer in 1970, Paul VI praises the resolutions of the grand and universal institutions. Unfortunately, today we are compelled to confirm that the resolutions for disarmament, the appeals to stop all wars have not met with positive results. These extraordinary and great Institutions, in fact, are in the hands of members who lack a spirit of freedom, analysis and discernment because they are prisoners of their cultural, religious, economic and political prejudices.

## *2. An attitude of faith and hope*

What attitude should we take in order to solve the problem of helping men to live peacefully together in the midst of all the violence brought about by the strong and by pressure groups? It is not right to choose the way of defeatism and to let things go by and to abandon our struggle for peace. Faced by the horrifying programmes of bloodshed, of the extermination of ethnic groups, right to the very young ones, we should not be afraid! God has promised us new heavens and a new earth (*Is 65:17*). He helps us to foresee a time when those who, like wolves, devour lambs, will be able to live together as brothers (*Is 65:25*). So we should listen to Christ and follow Him when He invites us to be united in one Spirit, which makes of us one family, children of one Father who works and lives in all of us.

## *3. Conditions which let Christ, our Peace, bring about peace for us*

We can be instruments of peace if we let Christ, who has fought hatred to bring about peace among nations, convert us and make us one with him so that we might share the same sentiments, reactions and attitudes which he had towards each person, whether he was a friend or an

enemy. Christ will thus be our peace. In our turn we will be instruments of peace if we follow his programme, that of bringing down the walls which separate us and which we harbour in our hearts. Jesus becomes our peace when he penetrates into all our life, when he converts us and transforms us into children of God. We thus become peaceful and peace loving. Jesus is our peace because He enfolds us with his power as the Risen Christ. He gives an extraordinary power to overcome evil, violence and fear from suffering and death to all those who obey him.

We find so many such example in the world. I would like to mention the example of 40 young seminarians who were killed in Burundi in 1997 because they refused to divide themselves up into Hutu and Tutsi, saying: "We have one Father, we are all brothers and future priests, we cannot divide ourselves up". In my diocese of Bururi we have built a sanctuary dedicated to "these young martyrs of brotherly love". Twice a year, we organize a meeting for members of Catholic Action Movements with other Christians to pray for peace and to say "NO to violence" and to say "Yes to the sacredness of life". In order to take part in this pilgrimage, many Catholic Action members have to walk seven to eight hours to come and join in the prayers in this Sanctuary. On the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2000, the Holy Father during the commemoration of martyrs celebrated in the Colosseo referred to them as witnesses of faith in Africa. There are so many other such examples in the world.

Christ gives extraordinary courage to all those who take up his cross. He helps them to involve themselves in the struggle against hatred to bring about peace, to combat falsehood so that truth may prevail and to overcome revenge by forgiveness and mercy. He helps them to encourage peace promoters willing to work in order to discourage injustice, oppression of the weak and all that which offends human dignity.

In our society the balance between peace, tranquility and order is not on the positive side. But we should not be stopped by our fear, disillusion and traumas. Together with Christ, the prince of peace, our Christian associations we can form a chain of peace and of actions towards peace. With Christ we can transform the world if we ourselves let ourselves be transformed and if we commit ourselves to form a united and consistent body. In this way, we will be able to help each other in the struggle for peace.

H.E. Msgr. Bernard Bududira  
Bishop of Bururi, Burundi

## YOU LORD, YOU ARE OUR PEACE

1. “Lord,  
our hands are still bloodstained from the last world wars,  
so that not all peoples have yet been able  
to take each other’s hands in friendship;  
Lord, we are today more heavily armed  
than ever we were in centuries past,  
and we are so provided with instruments of death  
that we could in a single instant  
set the world ablaze  
and perhaps even destroy mankind.  
*You Lord, are our Peace.*

2. Lord,  
we have based the development and prosperity  
of many of our giant industries  
on the diabolical capacity  
to produce arms of every size and shape,  
all designed to slaughter  
and exterminate men who are our brothers;  
Thus we have cruelly established the economic stability of nations  
upon the trading of arms to poor nations  
lacking ploughs, schools and hospitals.  
*You Lord, are our Peace.*

3. Lord,  
we have allowed to re-appear among us  
the ideologies  
that make men enemies of one another;  
revolutionary fanaticism,  
class hatred, nationalistic pride,  
racial exclusiveness, tribal rivalry,  
commercial selfishness,  
self-satisfied individualism  
that is indifferent to the needs of others.  
*You Lord, are our Peace.*

4. Lord,  
look nonetheless on our inadequate but sincere efforts  
for peace in the world:

there are wonderful international organizations;  
there are proposals for disarmament  
and for peace-talks.  
*You Lord, are our Peace.*

5. Lord,  
You know that there are upright souls  
doing good in silence, courageously and unselfishly,  
and praying with penitent and with innocent hearts;  
there are Christians in the world - and how many they are Lord! -  
who want to follow Your Gospel  
and who practise self-sacrifice and love.  
*You Lord, are our Peace.*

Lord,  
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,  
grant us peace.  
*You Lord, are our Peace.”*

*(Paul VI, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1970, 3<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Peace)*

## Second part

### LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF THY PEACE

#### SIMPLE PRAYER

1. O Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace!  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.
2. Where there is discord, harmony.  
Where there is error, truth.  
Where there is doubt, faith.
3. Where there is despair, hope.  
Where there is darkness, light,  
and where there is sorrow, joy.
4. Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not  
so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love;
5. For it is in giving that we receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

*(Attributed to Saint Francis)*

#### COEXISTENCE IN TRUTH, JUSTICE, LOVE, FREEDOM: THESE ARE THE PILLARS OF THE WORKSHOP OF PEACE

Hence, before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on *truth*. St. Paul expressed this as follows: "Putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." (*Eph 4:25*) And so will it be, if each man acknowledges sincerely his own rights and his own duties toward others. Human society, as We

here picture it, demands that men be guided by *justice*, respect the rights of others and do their duty. It demands, too, that they be animated by such *love* as will make them feel the needs of others as their own, and induce them to share their goods with others, and to strive in the world to make all men alike heirs to the noblest of intellectual and spiritual values. Nor is this enough; for human society thrives on *freedom*, namely, on the use of means which are consistent with the dignity of its individual members, who, being endowed with reason, assume responsibility for their own actions (35).

(Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Blessed John XXIII)

### THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

In order to build up peace above all the causes of discord among men, especially injustice, which foment wars must be rooted out. Not a few of these causes come from excessive economic inequalities and from putting off the steps needed to remedy them. Other causes of discord, however, have their source in the desire to dominate and in a contempt for persons. And, if we look for deeper causes, we find them in human envy, distrust, pride, and other egotistical passions. Man cannot bear so many ruptures in the harmony of things. Consequently, the world is constantly beset by strife and violence between men, even when no war is being waged. Besides, since these same evils are present in the relations between various nations as well, in order to overcome or forestall them and to keep violence once unleashed within limits it is absolutely necessary for countries to cooperate more advantageously and more closely together and to organize together international bodies and to work tirelessly for the creation of organizations which will foster peace (83).

(Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*)

### WITNESSES OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACE IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Sharing our prayer with those who are living situations of conflicts, to become instruments of peace: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Colombia, South Korea, Holy Land, Spain.

### *Third part*

## **LET US PRAY TOGETHER THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR PEACE**

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*

We ask You, Holy Spirit, gentle breath on the first man:  
enlighten every place where humanity is wounded,  
every place where peace is threatened,  
every place where life is denied. *Veni...*

We ask You, power of God Almighty:  
give your strength to those who are afflicted,  
your presence to those who are abandoned,  
your light to those in darkness. *Veni...*

We ask You, breath of God  
to help us recall all that which Jesus has said:  
help your Church to preserve your word,  
to persevere in her faithfulness to the Gospel. *Veni...*

We ask You, Spirit of prophecy:  
help Christ's disciples to be a word which provokes,  
a witness who upsets,  
a strong and discreet presence which questions. *Veni...*

We ask You, Spirit of council:  
help those responsible in your Church  
to keep away from arguments founded on power,  
to those responsible for nations to be guided by justice and peace.  
*Veni...*

We ask You, Spirit of the Risen:  
give us a heart able to convert itself,  
to realize our infidelities,  
to refuse any form of compromise. *Veni...*

We ask You, Spirit which has led Jesus to the desert:  
help us to live only by your word,

give us a heart capable of listening,  
lips which can prophesy and can keep silent. *Veni...*

We ask You, Spirit blown on lifeless bones:  
give new life to those who are dead  
give hope to those who are in despair,  
transfigure all the dead into the light of the Kingdom. *Veni...*

## **Our Father**

PRAYER

***Never more war***

O God of our Fathers, great and merciful,  
Lord of peace and of life. Father of us all.  
Your plans are for peace, not calamities,  
You condemn war and shun the pride of violence.

You have sent Your Son Jesus  
to proclaim peace to all, near and far,  
to unite all mankind, every race and people,  
into one human family.

We ask You to listen to the call  
which all Your children are making in the name of all humanity:  
never more war, that brings about so much violence and mourning  
and threatens Your creatures in the heavens,  
on the earth and on the seas.

In union with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, we pray You once more:  
touch the hearts of those  
who are responsible for the future of all peoples;  
put an end to the mentality of retaliation and revenge.  
Let Your Spirit inspire new solutions,  
honourable and good hearted actions,  
thoughts of dialogue and patient waiting  
which are more productive than the quick decisions for war.  
**Grant us a time of peace in our days.**

***Never more war.***

*(John Paul II, Assisi, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2002)*



***Roma, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2004***

***“DUC IN ALTUM,  
CATHOLIC ACTION!  
BE A PROPHETIC PRESENCE  
IN THE WORLD”***



## OFFICE OF THE LAUDS

READING: *Rm* 14:17-19

### HOMILY

*H. E. Msgr. Giuseppe Betori*  
*Secretary General of Italian Bishops Conference*

“It is not eating and drinking that make the kingdom of God; but the saving justice, the peace and the joy brought by the Holy Spirit” (*Rm* 14:17).

When Paul pronounced these words, he had in front of him the image of a Christian community which was finding it difficult to find that necessary unity, that communion which is the essence of its identity. For this reason, the Apostle, a little earlier had affirmed: “All of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another” (*Rm* 12:5). And, further on, he will say: “Accept one another, then, for the sake of God’s glory, as Christ accepted you” (*Rm* 15:7).

In the Christian community of Rome this unity is endangered by the tension between those who still feel themselves bound to the norms of the Jewish law and protected by them - the immediate reference is to dietary rules, which explains Paul’s reference to a matter of “eating or drinking” (*Rm* 14:17) - and those who do not consider themselves bound by these norms, but take no notice of the effect that this abandonment might have on their companions in the faith. In Paul’s words, this is a confrontation between the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’. And he urges: “It is for us who are strong to bear with the susceptibilities of the weaker ones, and not please ourselves” (*Rm* 15:1).

There is a temptation to see this as a dispute between conservatives and progressives, and some do. But this would be a mistaken reading of Paul’s thought. In fact, this would introduce ideological categories into the word of God and to the Church, categories which are and ought to be completely foreign to both. The problem is dif-

ferent and has to do with how to reconcile truth and charity. Truth is clearly on the side of those who think that the justification which is the gift of Christ by means of his Paschal death and resurrection, has abolished the norms of the ancient law, revealing that law's provisional role linked to the 'pedagogical' era of the promise. But now the question is as to how this truth can be linked to charity, the latter being indeed the most important content of truth: "love is the fulfilment of the law" (*Rm* 13:10).

Paul's response is as firm in its doctrine as it is embracing in fraternal consideration. While not diluting for a moment the truth of the uniqueness of salvation in Christ, he is determined that the behaviour of individuals will not cause scandal. Charity does not have to take a step backwards in the face of the truth, but the latter effaces itself by an act of neighbourly edification (*Rm* 14:19). "Each of us must consider his neighbour's good, so that we support one another" (*Rm* 15:2). As Paul says in his *letter to the Galatians*: "Faith works through love" (*Ga* 5 6).

How does this work? Paul's first reference is to the person of Jesus himself: the community is built up by following the example of Jesus, living "in harmony with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus" (*Rm* 15:5). He is our model; and the gift of his Spirit is the source that makes it possible to imitate him.

From the very beginning of his pontificate the Holy Father has called us to make Jesus the central reference-point of our lives. At his inauguration Mass when he began his Petrine service, he invited us for the first time to "open the doors to Christ", an invitation which he has repeated many times and in different parts of the world.

The exhortation to turn our attention to Christ and to let ourselves be guided by him is repeated in the resonances coming from the experience of the Jubilee which the Pope summed up in his letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In fact, for John Paul II, "The great legacy" of the Jubilee is "the contemplation of the face of Christ: Christ considered in his historical features and in his mystery, Christ known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey" (*NMI*, 15). And again it is the Holy Father who reminds us that "faced with the great challenges of our time [...] we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives to us: *I am with you!*" (*NMI*, 29).

The future of a group of laypeople who, associated and in close contact with the pastors, are anxious to continue and to renew their service to the Gospel in the world and in the Church, forming

Christians, conscious of the truth and effective in charity, will happen by way of a more convinced and intense intimacy with the person of Jesus Christ. If the building up of the Church and witness in the world are the aims of this Association, its roots, without which these fruits cannot develop, is a living spirituality centred on the figure of Jesus and animated by his Spirit.

As Paul tells us (*Rm 14:18*) it is not possible to serve Christ without knowing him, without being intimate with him. This requires an assiduous listening to his word in order to assimilate his mind and his heart, this demands constancy in meeting him in his sacraments, in order to obtain continued newness of life; this requires creative imagination in order to discover how best to express in our lives his charity towards our brothers. In short, what is required is a search for an authentic Christian spirituality.

The text from St Paul, presented in the Church's prayer this morning, says something more. Every person's place in the community, everyone's capacity to contribute to the building up of that community depends not only on a radical and rooted relationship with Christ. This capacity is also defined on the basis of a capacity to project oneself beyond the confines of that community itself, towards boundaries bigger than that community, to goals which go beyond a mere search for co-existence. Paul places before the Christian community in Rome, which is suffering from the tensions between the 'weak' and the 'strong', the goal not only of a simple internal settlement, but that of the "kingdom of God" and of our service to humanity. Questions of food and drink disappear in the face of the search for "justice, peace and joy" (*Rm 14:17*).

Only a Church which is capable of going out beyond itself can find the path of internal communion. Whoever looks to Christ and allows himself to be guided by him, knows that his life has to be oriented towards witness and towards building up justice in the world, a justice which is a renewed order of life which Christ reveals and establishes and which is made possible by his Spirit; to proclaim and build peace, which is the restoration of the face of Creation in its original, full relationship with the Creator; to proclaim and demonstrate joy which is caused by the hope which dwells in the hearts of believers. The new world which is to be built is a world which is human and where justice, peace and joy prevail.

Serving Christ in this way places us in a positive relationship with God and with the world around us: "Whoever serves Christ in these things is

approved by God and esteemed by men". It is not that we need human esteem. On the contrary, we know that the presence of the Christians in the world is not without disputes - and persecution is a distinctive sign of fidelity to the Gospel. But we have to enter into dialogue with the world, to ensure that the message we give is an appeal for truth, arousing the wonder that ensues when the Church and Christians are living witnesses of a fully human life, lived in harmony and joy.

The Holy Father's invitation is echoed in this stretching of oneself to the horizons of humanity, beyond the Church's boundaries. What otherwise could be the meaning of his repeated affirmation that "man is the primary and fundamental way for the Church" (*Rh*, 14)? And what else could be the meaning of his repeated invitation of Jesus: "*Duc in altum!*" (*Lk* 5:4), the invitation to "launch into the deep" (*NMI*, 1), if not a clear indication that the Church remains faithful to her Lord only by accepting to take its stand as a part of and not divorced from history?

The activity of ecclesial Associations such as Catholic Action means more than simply providing formative itineraries which lead to an ever greater experience of Christ. This focusing or concentrating moment needs to be complemented by a movement of expansion equally radical, equally shared. The objective is to be of service to a laity which is aware, responsible and strong in its witnessing in the world; to help this laity in its reading of cultural changes and support it with concrete models of Christian living, to be carried on in ordinary life.

The ecclesial position which sometimes worries us and over which not infrequently we can indulge in futile conflicts, is not sought for its own sake. It is the natural consequence of the totally christocentric orientation of the Christian life and from the giving of this life in and for the human person, wherever he/she is found.

Our prayer today opens itself to these horizons in the certainty that, as this morning's psalms and canticle have reminded us, the "shepherd of Israel" (*Ps* 79:2), hears us. He, the Father, feeds us "on pure wheats" and "with honey from the rock" (*Ps* 80:17), from his breast we draw "water with joy from the springs of salvation", to show "his wonders among all the peoples" (*Is* 12:3-3).

# CATHOLIC ACTION ONE AND DIVERSE

## INTRODUCTION

Alejandro Madero  
National President CA Argentina

I would like to thank H.E Msgr. Clemens from the Pontifical Council for the Laity for being here to share this experience with us.

Yesterday we reflected about CA's relevance and validity. We also spoke about its identity and its prospects for the future.

Today we are going to focus on "how" CA expresses itself in the different countries. While it bears the same character in all these countries, at the same time, it keeps its particular diversity in each one of them. So CA is "One and Diverse" at the same time.

This is in fact a peculiarity of CA: it is one and diverse so that it can answer to the different cultures and realities of the local Churches. So it assumes different names and different organizational set-ups without losing its identity and charism.

We can say that:

- CA is one - it is defined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in *Christifideles Laici* and recently in the Holy Father's addresses to the Italian Catholic Action.
- CA is one because the vocation to which we are all called, that is our choice to work in the Church, is one.
- CA is one because the charism, which animates us and to which we have decided to dedicate our lives, is one.
- CA is one because the mission which we all share is one.

"You have decided to live for the Church and for its entire mission" (John Paul II).

At the same time, the diversity within the Church is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit and we see in this diversity a true richness of the contemporary Church.

Being "one and diverse" is a richness also for CA. It lives diversity in unity and unity in diversity.

Our presence here today at a meeting like this, offers us a splendid opportunity to express and experience unity. Each Association has come to this Congress and brought with it the meaningful experience of its particular history. Some Associations are older than others, but all have got rich experiences. Some of them have experienced occasions when enthusiasm and commitment was put to the test, when the journey had become more difficult, but we look back on these with satisfaction knowing that we have always tried to do our best. What do we have to say then about the different languages we all speak!...

Precisely to see some examples of this diversity, we are now going to listen to presentations by CA Associations from eight different countries in the world. They will explain to us how CA becomes incarnate in its own context and how it takes part in the pastoral work of the local Church. In order to make this session richer, we have also chosen different aspects of these experiences.

In conclusion, I would like to add that this unity, which we have been speaking about, grows day by day. The richness of CA's diversity is the result of everyone's commitment. It is up to us to make it grow through our involvement, our close relations and our participation in the international activity. This is the field where this unity becomes real and and visible.

## INTERVENTIONS OF THE COUNTRIES

### CATHOLIC ACTION IN AUSTRIA (KATOLISCHE AKTION ÖSTERREICH - KAÖ)

In Austria, 75% of the population is catholic. Of these roughly 15-20% are considered "committed".

CA is present in all the 9 dioceses in Austria. The number of members is about 550.000. These are divided in different categories: Movements for Children, Youth, Women, Men, Workers, Students, Graduates...

The KAÖ, as a whole, is responsible for the majority of the pastoral areas in 7 of the 9 regional dioceses and in the military diocese. In two of the dioceses there are only the Movements for Children and Youth.

#### Short history

The first Movements which can be called "catholic action" appeared in 1906. The idea of Catholic Action started developing suc-



cessively within the movements which catered for youth and those responsible for the liturgy and for announcing the Gospel.

After the Second World War, the Bishops of Austria decided to have CA Movements as the official organizations of the laity in the catholic dioceses of Austria. Although CA was founded by the Bishops and is administered by officials who are dependent on the Episcopal Conference, yet the major part of the work is carried out by voluntary lay people.

The KAÖ as an “umbrella organization” was founded in 1949 and was formally confirmed by the Episcopal Conference in 1950.

### **CA in Austria and the matters which are at the basis of its commitment**

At present KAÖ's attention focuses on some thematic priorities, which are shared by the various Movements. These are:

- Work, Economy, Social Politics
- Relations, Marriage and Family
- Art, Science and Mass-media

Of course other important issues are also kept in view, for example: Europe, free time...

#### **Social and political activities**

KAÖ carries out its involvement in socio-political spheres, with special reference to the following themes:

- Europe, European Union
- Family, Education (schools, adults, women...)
- Migration, Refugees, Human Rights...
- Solidarity at national level, at European level and at international level (Poverty, Poor workers, Development...).

#### **New pastoral challenges**

At pastoral level, in the present secularized context, KAÖ has established some priorities in the carrying out of its work:

- approach people who are outside “the inner Circle” of the Church in a country which has become more and more secularized.

- Take up the problems and the topics which are of major interest to people today and open up a serious and vital dialogue about them.
- Face the problem of the compromising credibility of the Catholic Church in Austria at public opinion level and in society.
- During these last years the leading role of CA in Austria has been questioned by the ever increasing number of new spiritual “movements”.

### **Commitment and projects**

In conclusion, KAÖ carries out the everyday work in the Catholic Church in Austria. The various Movements mostly work through the parish groups, by building up the community, providing formation and sharing their lives and spirituality with others.

In some Centres, educational and other type of activities (e.g. for Youth, Women...) are organized.

KAÖ has organized the “Day for Catholics” in Central Europe 2003-2004 and the initiative “Welcome-Together in Europe” (“Willkommen-Gemeinsam in Europe”).

Another important step was the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004: it was a mile stone on the way towards a Europe of peace in unity and plurality. Our commitment as Christians is essential in the building of a “fraternal Europe” and of a fraternal world (Card. Franz König).

Peter Grubits  
*Secretary General KAÖ*

## **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CA IN RUMANIA**

### *LIVING OUR FAITH AS A MINORITY*

Rumania is in Central Europe and borders with Hungary, the Moldovian Republic, Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria and the Black Sea.

It has an area of 237.500 sq km of which 31% are mountainous, 33% hilly and 36% fertile land. It has a population of 22 million inhabitants. The capital city is Bucharest and the language is Rumanian.

There are also various ethnic minorities: 7% Hungarians, 2% Roma, 2% Germans and others: Russian, Serbs and etc.

### **Some historical background about the Church in Rumania...**

- In about the year 60 AD, Andrew, the apostle, preached the Gospel to the people who lived on the Black Sea, amongst whom there were the Daci.
- 101-106: Traiano conquered Dacia and it became a Roman Province.
- The population of the new province started learning the latin language and culture and started accepting the Christian faith brought by the Romans.
- The Christians who lived in the Rumanian territory were under the influence of the Eastern Church.
- The first document which speaks about the Catholic Church of latin rite goes back to the XI century.
- During the XVII century, the Catholic Church of Byzantine rite came into being in Transilvania, through a union between some orthodox believers and the Church of Rome. This new Church gave a decisive contribution in defending the continuity of the Rumanian nation on the Transilvanian territory.
- Up to 1948, the year when the communist regime came to power, all existing religious confessions in Rumania were recognized; there was a fraternal co-existence among all these confessions.

### **After 1948**

- The Greek Catholic Church was suppressed.
- The Roman Catholic Church was tollerated.

We can give two significant witnesses of the martyrdom our Church has been through. The first example is the martyred Bishop Ioan Balan:

“Your Beatitude, if we, Greek-Catholic Bishops believed that the Orthodox Church is the true Church of Christ, we would sign right now, because we want to follow Christ! You have not presented us with theological arguments neither with Christian virtues, but you have locked us up and imprisoned us. Undoubtedly these are not Christ’s ways. Had the Government proposed to us and promised us, Greek-Catholic Bishops, to hand over to us the Orthodox Church on condition that he locks up and imprisons its Bishops, or even one of them, we would have given our lives and would not have accepted.

Therefore, you may take our life away, but not our faith! For as long as we are held in the buildings of the Othodox Church, we are its prisoners!”

The second is the statement by Pope Pius XII:

“Christ had 12 apostles and one betrayed him. I have 12 Bishops in Rumania but none of them has betrayed me”.

### **During the communist regime**

- The Greek-Catholic Church lived in catacombs.
- The Latin Church carried out its mission under the strict control of the Communist State.

### **1989**

- The fall of the Berlin Wall
- The fall of the communist system in Central European States as well as in Rumania.

### **The Catholic Church reorganizes itself**

#### **The Catholics of Byzantine rite:**

in one Archieparchia and in four Eparchies.

#### **The Catholics of Latin rite:**

Rumanian speaking: in one archdiocese and in one diocese

Hungarian speaking: in one archdiocese and two dioceses

German and Hungarian speaking: in one diocese.

Catholic Church Associations started to function again and different Associations, Movements and Organizations started being set up again:

- Caritas
- Family Groups
- Association of Catholic Doctors
- Association of Catholic Men
- Association of Catholic Women
- *Legion of Mary*
- Scout Movement
- Neocatecumenal Movement
- Communion and Liberation
- Faith and Light

- Charismatic Communities
- Catholic Action

### **A special reference to Catholic Action**

After the fall of the communist regime, a CA Youth Group (ATC) was set up in Iasi for Catholics of Latin rite. It started as a local group but eventually it was the foundation of the Diocesan Catholic Action.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1992, with the support of the Bishop of Iasi, Msgr. Petru Gherghel, Catholic Action was officially set up in 9 parishes. The statute and regulations of the Association are based on those of the Italian CA.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1994, the Children Catholic Action was started. In 1997 Adult Catholic Action Groups were set up.

By 2004 Catholic Action was active in 43 parishes with more than 3.800 members. It included all the different categories: Children, Youths and Adults.

### **Special activities**

*At Diocesan level:* camping-schools, Youth Diocesan Day, formation campings (for children, youth and adults), an annual pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Cacica, interparishes celebrations and meetings...

*At National level:* meetings for youth, meetings for members of the different lay groups, National Catholic Youth Day...

*At International level:* it forms part of IFCA and participates in its various meetings, pilgrimages and Congresses and in exchanges of experiences with CA members of other countries. Since 1998, the Children CA has been affiliated with MIDADE.

### **For Catholics of the Byzantine rite**

AGRU: General Association of United Rumanians (Adult Section) was constituted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1929.

In 1990 it started functioning again with the help of Card. Alexandru Todea.

### **Specific activities:**

- conferences
- catechesis
- summer university
- strong links with Rumenians of the diaspora.

ASTRU: General Association of United Rumanians (Youth Section) was also set up again.

- It was founded in 1929 in Cluj Napoca by Prof. Alexandru Borza, President of AGRU.
- On the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1931 an ASTRU federation brought together the active centres in the Metropolia: Cluj, Oradea, Timisoara and Bucharest.
- During the interwar period, it was the most important association, within the Greek-Catholic Church, which was involved in the spiritual, cultural and social formation of young people.
- In the spring of 1948, foreseeing the course of events which the Greek-Catholic Church was going to face, it dissolved itself and bequeathed all its patrimony to the Church.

Today ASTRU functions:

- at eparchial level: ASTRU Blaj, ASTRU Bucarest, ASTRU Cluj, ASTRU Oradea, ATCM.
- At national level, through a coordinating ASTRU Secretariat.

**Specific activities:**

- conferences
- spiritual exercises
- organization of national meetings for youth
- participation at the World Youth Day and at IFCA's International Meetings
- pilgrimages
- prayer and music evenings
- charitable activities
- formation camps.

**“Our faith is our life” (Card. Iuliu Hossu)**

Oana Tuduce  
*Romania CA Representative*

## CATHOLIC ACTION MOVEMENTS IN BURUNDI

Burundi has a population of about 7 million inhabitants, 90% of whom live on agriculture.

The country is divided into 7 dioceses. 65% of the population is catholic, 20% is protestant, 2% is muslim and the rest practise the traditional religion.

There are about 800.000 members in the various Catholic Action Movements and 100.000 members in the Spiritual Movements and in the other Church Movements.

Burundi is a country which has been in war since 1993 and up to the present day violence and vengeance still prevail.

The Church does its best to work for peace through pastoral letters, issued by Bishops, and through the organization of marches for peace, *fora* for young people, courses of formation on the sacredness of life, non-violence activities, encouraging reciprocal acceptance and defending fundamental human rights. All this is aimed at helping to bring about a climate of peace and hope. There is still a lot to be done, but we never lose hope.

Catholic Action Movements make the Church's programme, which is to work for peace, their own. They collaborate with the hierarchy.

### CATHOLIC ACTION MOVEMENTS' (CAM) WORK DIFFICULTIES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

#### I. What is CAM in our country?

During the meetings which we have had with our pastors in Burundi, we ensured that CAM answer to the four Catholic Action characteristics. The aim of all the Movements is to help the Church in spreading the Kingdom of God; their members are lay people, organized in Movements (children, youths, adults) and they work in collaboration with the hierarchy.

We can say that all CAM members share the Church's commitment to evangelize people's consciences through a human and Christian formation, so as to imbue communities and all environments with the spirit of the Gospel.

The different movements are: Chiro, Xaveri, Teachers' Groups, Young Student Groups, Young Catholic Workers, Christian Families Action Groups; Eucharistic Movements.

## II. CAM'S activities

### 1. *Charitable Initiatives*

Nearly, in all the reports of these organizations, one notes activities aimed at the poor such as providing them with water and wood, helping them to cultivate their fields, building and repairing the homes of old men and women, visiting and giving financial and moral support to the sick, visiting the sick in hospitals and in their own homes, looking after children whose parents are hospitalized, organizing special occasions for the sick, cultivating fields and vegetable gardens, cultivating sweet potatoes and manioc, which are then distributed to those most in need, organizing games for children with difficulties (orphans or street children), diffusion of literacy, etc...

It is also worth pointing out that as a result of our annual campaigns, we have been able to hold collections in aid of the handicapped (1981), the victims of disasters (as from 1993 up to the present day), and the prisoners.

### 2. *Apostolic activities*

In most of the CAM we have:

- Choirs to animate the liturgy
- Members who are Accolites and Masters of Ceremony
- Members who look after the sacristy
- CAM members who prepare converts for Baptism
- Members who organize marches for peace in the various Dioceses.

The godfathers and godmothers of the new converts have to be CAM members. In schools, CAM help disruptive students through counselling and good example.

We must also add that CAM members participate in Parish Councils and in the coordination of Catholic Action at parish, diocesan and national level.

## III. Development programmes

- Building of schools for formation and instruction
- Making of bricks
- Preparing sites for the eventual building of schools and playgrounds
- Building of multipurpose halls



- Reforestation
- Diversion of water, etc...

#### IV. Difficulties which CAM face

We would like to point out four major difficulties:

1. Lay people's lack of awareness of their proper vocation, as followers of Christ, to evangelize. In fact, some lay people genuinely think that apostolic work is the exclusive duty of priests, religious and catechists. The spreading of the Good News is however the mission of all baptized, each one according to his proper state of life.
2. Distances and indifference: many lay Christians are embarrassed to be considered as Agents of direct or indirect evangelization. By direct evangelization I mean being involved in "Apostolic Activities", as those mentioned above. Indirect evangelization means being a living witness of ones faith, giving advice and permeating daily life, including professional and social spheres, with the spirit of the Gospel. This challenge needs to be taken up and the response should be a clear and determined commitment within the Church.
3. A partial and incomplete concept of living ones faith. Some think that Christian living is limited to prayer and cult, forgetting that faith without deeds is dead (*Jm 2:26*). We need to address this challenge by committing ourselves to change our familiar, social, scholastic and ecclesial spheres.
4. The fear to take a stand against unjust attitudes, behaviours and structures. This is a great fault on the part of the Christians. We can only be witnesses of Christ, in all our daily life and environments, if we imbue these with truth, social justice, love and solidarity.

I would like to add these observations:

1. Lack of opportunities for permanent employment and of persons with a permanent post.
2. Inadequate supplies of material and economic means (books, means of communication: telephones, faxes, post-office boxes, computers and all the necessary material to go with them, visual and other aids, etc...; lack of office material such as paper, envelopes, typewriters, etc...).
3. Situations which do not help to favour truth and peace around us.
4. The danger of working in our closed circle without opening ourselves up to the outside world.

5. The lack of formation with regard to Theology, Bible, liturgy, catechesis, Church's Social Teaching and to the group dynamics.

## **V. CAM'S prospects for the future**

1. Give priority to the permanent human and Christian formation of members through the organization of formation and refresher courses.
2. Aim at getting together a group of responsible and committed lay people in the parishes.
3. Search and find ways and means as to how CAM can have their autonomy but at the same time collaborate with the hierarchy.
4. Evangelize intellectuals. To them it seems too simple when one speaks about the base communities. But it entails a lot of energy too.
5. Maintain and increase assistance and emergency services for those most in need. This is Christian charity.
6. Educate the beneficiaries to assume an active role in their own development. This should be made very clear but it entails that one must have the necessary means in order to achieve this.
7. We must be stricter in young people's formation. We must prepare them for jobs and help them with ongoing training etc...

## **Conclusion**

CAM's and CA experiences are different depending on the various environments. However, we can say that, considering the material and socio-cultural conditions in which we work, the result is positive. Definitely, in all the different countries, where CAM and CA function, they all face financial problems. This makes the organization of meeting at all levels very difficult as people cannot travel due to the lack of economic means. This lack of means and interchange reflects negatively on all organizations at all levels. Notwithstanding the presence of capable and experienced leaders in both CAM and CA, these are unable to share their expertise once people cannot travel.

Nevertheless, political and religious authorities appreciate all the work carried out by CAM and CA. In fact, very often, in various places, they ask CAM and CA to participate in their activities. This has greatly helped in the promotion of CAM and CA.

Candide Niragira  
*Representative of CA in Burundi*

## CATHOLIC ACTION IN ARGENTINA

*OUR RESPONSE TO THE POLITICAL CRISIS AND TO THE SITUATIONS  
OF EMARGINATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION*

Lately, the real situation in the Republic of Argentina, has been characterized by the word “crisis”, a crisis that has hit the people very strongly. The first signs began to appear towards the end of the year 2001 and the Church, through its pastors, had already given a sign of warning.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2001, sorrow, discontent, desperation and violence were already in evidence everywhere. In 15 days we had 5 Presidents. The majority of the politicians had already proved that they were thinking only of their personal and party interests forgetting all about the common good. In various parts of the country the cry was: “*Away with them!*”, a clear evidence that the general feeling of the people was that they were tired of a situation, which brought about plundering and violence leading to unpredictable consequences.

Faced with this situation, the President of the Argentinian Episcopal Conference, Msgr. Stanislao Karlic, preoccupied about the prevailing and future fate of the Country, shared his concern with the ACA and maintained that lay people should pull their forces together in order to get the country out of this crisis.

Together with the Commission for the Laity, we called Movements, Associations and representatives of the Laity together to arrange some concrete actions to be taken. Working groups were set up to take short term action and a decision was taken to organize a Day of Peace, to be held on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, in all the dioceses and parishes.

The extremely high debt of the State of Argentina - 150.000 million dollars, that is 120% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) - the uncontrolled convertible system, the freezing of bank deposits and the failure to comply with internal and external commitments were enough proof of the economic and financial crisis. The unemployment rate, emargination and poverty were a symptom of social exclusion and of the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor in a situation where educational and health facilities were lacking and violence and insecurity were on the increase.

The causes of all this were and are of a moral nature: the deep crisis in values which makes it difficult to reach any agreement and to arrive at establishing fundamental principles.

Corruption in nearly all the spheres of our national life has protagonists who resist all change and ignore the need to “clean” the institu-

tions, while the people realize their impotence in front of this situation. We are aware however, that “the crisis” is also a challenge and an opportunity for change and for a new beginning. Thus, full of hope, but fully aware of our limitations, we put together ‘our limited number of fish and loaves’ in order to reinforce our national identity and to create a stronger solidarity which favours those who are most in need.

The ACA, which has been present in the Country since 1931 and which is presently active in 55 dioceses and 854 parishes, counts 30.000 members, subdivided into 4 areas: Aspirants, Youth, Adults, Sectors.

ACA does not cut itself from the actual reality both as regards the responsibilities which it has to assume, as well as the consequences, which many of its members had to suffer. In the Jubilee of the Year 2000, we have asked pardon for our faults, we have accepted the responsibility for having failed, as laity, to intervene positively in society to give it a different outlook.

Faced with this reality, we have focused our commitment on some specific tasks:

- to begin with, faced with this emergency and in order to rebuild the social fabric, ACA has decided to provide more Services in order to answer to needs of the people in a concrete way. To achieve this, a quiet and effective network of solidarity was set up.

Knowing however that things can only change if one attacks the cause, we suggested that our National Assembly should set as its Motto: *“Time for Solidarity and Service. Time to work for the Common Good”*.

In short, our line of action had to follow two clear ways:

- at least a Service by every CA community
- a commitment to do something for the common good by each member.

This resulted in more than 800 services all over the country, all aimed at promoting human dignity.

Our commitment was animated by basic strategies and was aimed at generating means and action, directed to rebuild the nation from its very foundations:

- *Argentinian Dialogue*: a space in which, through the participation of the whole of society, opportunities were created which aimed at helping in the reconstruction of the basis of a society, wherein people find it possible to live together and together find ways to overcome situations and strategies which end up as State politics.
- *The Campaign “Hunger as a Priority”*: A Food Emergency Plan aimed at helping the poor was set up. Over a million signatures were collected in support of this proposal which has in fact become national law.

- *Collaboration with other non-governmental organizations*, at national level and in the dioceses where CA is established, aimed at reaching common objectives. Already for a number of years we had been working ‘hand in hand’, and we had established a network to deal with various social problems and to find answers to the crisis and find out their causes. *Social, Health, Educational and Supportive Networks* all depended on our members and leaders, who were involved in their organization or worked as volunteers.
- The proposal “*Political Reform Yes!*”, of which we were one of the promoters, aimed at creating mechanisms which render politics and our democratic institutions transparent.
- *The Institute for the Formation of Political Leaders*. Its aim was to contribute towards the renewal of the Argentinian political class and towards the improvement of the formation of present and future political leaders. At present there are 100 persons who are frequenting three different centres in the Country.

We are aware that there is still a lot of work ahead of us: above all we have to persevere in our daily efforts, as CA members, to be witnesses of our committed faith, which keeps our hope alive and which renders our charity creative. We also know that we have only lit ‘small candles’ instead of ‘cursing the darkness’ and that there is still a lot of work to be done when one considers the extent of the crisis in our Country.

We do not have the solutions for the problems of Argentina ready at hand, but our hands are open to the problems of Argentina.

When the God of our history comes, he will look at our hands.

Emilio Inzaurraga  
*Responsible for Formation in ACA*

## CATHOLIC ACTION IN SPAIN

### *THE COMMITMENT FOR FORMATION IN THE SPANISH CATHOLIC ACTION*

The commitment towards formation in the Spanish Catholic Action (SCA) is evidently dynamic and is directed towards a specific aim, that of helping members to live their faith and consolidate their Christian identity. This means “to be” a Christian, and to behave always “in a

Christian way". It also means to be a Christian in all the various aspects of ones life, in the way one thinks, feels and acts. Thus:

- **Formation is an ongoing process of conversion towards Christ.**

In order to succeed in conforming ones life with Christ, the whole formation process and all the tools provided should help the members to find their own ways as to how they can arrive at conforming all the different aspects of their personal lives with Christ. They are helped to grow in their wish to build - step by step, but permanently - an established Christian way of living.

- **Formation is an ongoing process of apostolic involvement in the world.**

It is an ongoing process of incarnating ones Christian belief into the concrete situations of today's world. Conversion and witnessing to Christ are two inseparable realities. Christ always and constantly directs us to God the Father and to our brethren. The formation process helps the members to be actively involved, to be protagonists and to assume responsibility in the building of a more fraternal world, which is more in keeping with God's will. This means assuming a loving attitude towards the world, learning to be at everybody's service and being able to discern in the world what God is asking from us.

- **Formation is integral.**

It should reach the human being in his totality, all his life's aspects and the integrity of his Christian faith. It means that, step by step, it should cover a person's existence, starting with Christ and his Church. Basically formation does not consist only in acquiring a collection of information about the Christian faith but it means forming the person in all her totality, not only her intelligence. Formation tunes and sensibilizes our minds to think and look at life in a Christian way. It gives our attitudes, our way of reacting, our way of facing reality and the way we behave, a Christian outlook. Formation is integral because it helps the member to understand and live the Christian message in its integrity and, in all the daily-life circumstances, show the relevance there should be between ones personal life and the faith of the Church.

- **Formation is an ecclesial process.**

As such it is personal and communitarian at the same time. It means living the faith of the Church. It is also an ecclesial process because the elements, which, step by step, build up this Christian

and ecclesial formation, are basically communitarian: leading to a communitarian way of life.

- **The objectives of the formation.**

The main objective of the formation in the SCA is to *live and consolidate the Christian identity* in a continuous, harmonious and unifying process so as to arrive at a Christian way of thinking, feeling and acting. Formation aims at presenting a spirituality which helps members to listen to the Holy Spirit throughout their lives.

In concrete terms formation aims at:

- *Developing an attitude of meeting God in Jesus Christ.* Formation aims at creating an awareness and at helping one to let this meeting effect all his relations: with God, who shows himself and who is manifested in Jesus Christ; with the Church, with the poor and the oppressed, with ourselves and with nature and history.
- *Developing a life which is guided by and is coherent with one's faith.* Formation in the SCA aims at developing a mature, responsible and committed faith.
- *Developing a coherent Christian way of living in all everyday life situations in private, communitarian and social life.*
- *Helping each SCA member to pursue his/her fulfilment as a person.*
- *Developing a sense of belonging to the Church and to feel committed to her mission, in keeping with one's faith.*
- *Fostering a social and political involvement for liberation coherent with faith.*
- *Developing attitudes which encourage Christian witnessing.*

The methodology, the way to achieve this and the type of Christian formation are very important matters. There are three important aspects in the methodology outlined in the Formation Project of the SCA:

- **Formation as a gift and as a task.**

At the root of the SCA formative methodology, there is a deep conviction aimed at helping the member to “live faith into life to the full”: the formative process is to discover a life which is both a gift from God and a task for us. The methodology itself intends to help the member to open up to God's loving and gratuitous action, thanking and accepting him and responding to him with an equally gratuitous and loving attitude towards ones brethren.

• **“The New Life” experience as a way of formation.**

The formative methodology of the SCA is a dynamic way of life. This formation can only start from the experience of the “New Life” which Christ gives us. It does not only mean knowing what it means to be a Christian but above all to live as a Christian and to experience living as a Christian.

• **The constant dialogue between the faith of the Church and ones life.**

The two basic methods of the SCA formation are “The Revision of Life” and the “Systematic Review”. The methodology is always the constant dialogue between faith and ones life. This dialogue is realized through an ongoing exercise which traditionally is called “See-Judge-Act”.

The dynamics of life which result from this dialogue faith-life is what little by little starts conforming our conscience to our Christian faith.

H.E Mgrs. Atilano Rodríguez Martínez  
*Bishop of the City of Rodrigo*  
SCA Assistant

Lourdes Azorín  
*General Secretary of the Federation of SCA Movements*

## **CATHOLIC ACTION IN ITALY**

### *THE PARISH AS A PRIORITY*

During these last years there has been a growing re-evaluation of the role of the parish in pastoral work. There have never been any doubts about this but following the publication of the document *Communicating the Gospel in a world which is changing* (2001), the basic position of the parish in the evangelization process has been affirmed with greater emphasis.

The recent document, issued by the Italian Bishops, published on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004: *The missionary aspect of the parish in a world which is changing* stresses the same point. Highlighting the importance of the parish means stressing the need to review some of the



pastoral practices which have characterized it in past years. Some of these seem to have lost their relevance, with the inevitable consequence that this “family of families” (as the Bishops themselves have defined the parish during their Assembly of November 2003) have lost their importance.

Maybe, rather than speaking about *the parish* as a priority, we should speak about *the parishes* as a priority. There are different types of parishes: those which are found in the cities, those on the outskirts, those in the centre, those out in the country, parishes which have to serve a whole country, parishes of the north, parishes of the south... each parish with its own peculiarities and its difficulties.

Because of the close link each parish has with the territory it covers, which in fact contributes towards its richness, one cannot speak about a model parish which can apply to all situations. One can only speak about some basic guidelines which can apply and which can be realized in any territory, in any socio-cultural context and which can apply to the relations between the persons who live in any territory.

The most advantageous aspect of the parish is the fact that the parish is found wherever people live. It reflects the universal character of the Church as people of God, in communion and mission and renders it accessible to all

Being localized in a particular territory means, above all, that it is open to all the people who live in that territory and not only to those who feel part of the parish because they use the parish facilities within that territory (schools, homes for the elderly, youth and adult recreational centres etc.) It means also understanding the problems, needs and exigencies of the inhabitants within that territory.

This fraternal link with the territory and with its inhabitants should be the target of the parish’s mission.

What are, therefore, the challenges which CA should take up once it shares the concerns of the pastors:

- CA should help the particular parish to open up and to get to know the realities of the particular territory and to establish dialogue within it. Also youth and children should be educated to this.
- The openness which we experience in the parish should become our style of life in the diverse places where we actually live. The great majority of us do not study or work within the territory of our own parish. A parish is missionary as far as its members carry out their mission in everyday life with dedication, zeal and with a sense of responsibility.

- It provides formation for lay people. This formation, particularly that for adults: their attitude within the parish seems to change. After having passed his youth in the parish to animate and plan parish projects, the adult's role in the parish changes in relation with the vocational aspect of the family. I think that the main challenge is to bring out the secular aspect of adult life in the parish and to find suitable and responsible ways of adult participation. Adult formation should take into consideration life's realities and dialogue between the different generations.
- Formation should not be the only target. Adults should be led to feel co-responsible for evangelization. Paola Bignardi states that: "A community which entrusts its mission to lay people, whose faith is mature, is a community which widely enhances its missionary potential". We can work towards helping the laity to mature their faith but this is not something we can enforce, we can only give our support.
- The spirit of democracy which prevails in our Association should be the way of life prevalent in the whole parish. The parish should be the place where the delicate and difficult process of deciding together is performed.

We should take the parishes as a priority not because the parish is the perfect community. At times we fall into this temptation but we soon realize our mistake when, thanks to God, we experience failure. Taking the parish as a priority means that we should know our territory, its inhabitants and their needs so that we may ensure that everyone has the possibility of listening to the message of the Risen Christ and is able to relish it to the full.

Ilaria Vellani  
*Vice-president Italian CA Youth*

## **CATHOLIC ACTION IN VENEZUELA**

*THE INTEGRATION OF YOUTH WITHIN CATHOLIC ACTION IN VENEZUELA*

### ***The Context***

Venezuela is a nation where the majority of the people are young. It has thus a renewing force of great vitality to rely on.

The young people of Venezuela, apart from the particular social class to which each one of them belongs, are characterized by their joyful attitude, their ability to communicate, their friendliness, their love of freedom, their easily aroused enthusiasm even if they are not always consistent. They are sincere, gentle, love celebrating and helpful.

In general, they do not reflect very profoundly even if they are deeply moved. They tend to be a bit superficial when faced with problems. They are ready to risk anything for something which they consider important but can easily abandon everything when faced with contradiction.

They are very different from the previous generation of young people, who have lived in a period when the country was still developing. These last ten years, young people have found themselves in a country which has lost its historical direction and has lost all hope, a country which is going through an economic, political and social crisis. They have grown up with no role models, no prospects for employment, no home. They also feel the impact of the globalization centred on the market, the culture of consumerism and competition continually pushed forward by the means of social communication.

As regards their relations with the Church, there is today a small minority who are aware of the fact that they are part of the Christian community. Others only have occasional indirect and purely institutional contacts with the Church. The majority of them do not have direct contact with the Church. Many of them live in their own world, they have their own values and their lives do not reflect the values of the Gospel in any way.

### **A short history of CA in Venezuela from September 1927 to October 1997**

The first Movement of lay people was founded in November 1927. It was the Women's Union of Catholic Action which developed very quickly (CAWU).

Other youth branches for both sexes followed in 1934. These disappeared one after the other in 1977 leaving only the CAWU. During the Assembly held in 1997, a decision was taken to start experimenting with a new structure.

### **The need for renewal**

The prevalent situation in the country called for a renewed CA.

There was a need for a CA which was *open, general, mixed and suitable for today's situation.*

The renewal made it possible to gather the four branches - which had started the Movement - into one association. The branches have specific areas but have a common aim, the same organizational set-up under the guidance of the Diocesan Councils and the Central Council. All of them work in collaboration with the Hierarchy (National Assembly, October 2002).

### **CA in Venezuela: the “good news” for young people**

- A sign of constant renewal
- aware of its commitment (the spreading of the Gospel)
- formation of consciences
- sense of service.

### **The integration process of our young people**

Meetings, including live-ins, study and reflection sessions on subjects which are of a special interest to youths are organized, such as: the meaning of life and of being young, what it means to be a Christian, friendship, self-esteem, values, service...

### **The young people in CA in Venezuela**

The formative programme of this sector follows three stages: the Motivation Phase; the Formative and Involvement Phase; the Spiritual, Study and Action Phase.

Young people are encouraged to deepen their faith in order to love Jesus Christ more profoundly.

### **CA in Venezuela: an option to grow**

The formation helps the young people to live and consolidate their Christian identity, to promote the human dignity according to God's project. It enables them to grow permanently in all the various aspects of their life.

### **An option to be of service...**

In CA the young people learn to love the world with a love which is modelled on Jesus Christ's example, on his service.

His way of being of service to the world and promoting man's value, consists in *evangelizing*. This mission contains in itself the most upsetting power which is capable of making all things really new.

### **The young people feel CA as their own family...**

The young people in the national meetings express their joy to be members of CA, an Association which works for the Church.

### A “good News” to communicate to others...

CA is part of Christ’s Church. She was founded to evangelize, to proclaim the Good News, the simple and great news about Christ, who is the Lord and who came to reconcile us with the Father, the Creator. He tells us that God is our Father, who loves us and calls us to share his love.

In Venezuela our CA is one and diverse.

Elio Rafael Moran Villalobos  
*VCA Youth Leader*

## THE CATHOLIC ACTION IN THE HOLY LAND

### *NAZARETH*

Our delegation is made up of 4 laypeople, our Auxiliary Bishop of Nazareth and the Bishop in charge of the Youths, representing the Jerusalem Patriarchate which comprises three countries: Palestine, Israel and Jordan.

In Bethlehem Catholic Action exists under this name, whereas in Nazareth we prefer to speak of Christian action, apostolic action. Most important of all is laypeople’s great commitment in the Church, particularly of those associated in prayer groups, and in groups dedicated to apostolic and pastoral work. These operative actively and in a responsible way in schools and in hospitals. There are also some specialized movements such as JEC, JOC. All these lay associations and movements keep the parish and the diocese as their common point of reference.

Looking at the recent history of our local Church, we should mention its most important event: the diocesan pastoral synod, in which all the laypeople participated with earnestness and enthusiasm. The synodal document is a compilation of our present and past history and of our projects for the future.

The synod promoted by the hierarchy could be realized and developed thanks to the marvelous commitment of laypeople who made out of it a real masterpiece.

At present, the priorities for the Church, and consequently for laypeople in the Holy Land, in the three countries, are the establishing of reconciliation and the search for peace.

Shadi Abu Khadra  
*Representative Lay Commission in Nazareth*

**BETHLEHEM**

Catholic Action of Bethlehem (CAB) was established in 1953.

Today its directive Body is made up of 14 members, each with his own responsibility. The president, nominated by the parish priest, remains in office for 4 years, and the parish priest is the spiritual assistant.

CAB members belong to different catholic rites and its activities are open to all the Christians and the Muslims who live in Bethlehem.

The situation which we are experiencing in Bethlehem presents a difficult daily reality. As Palestinian Christians we should let the Christians all over the world know that there is a great risk that the churches in the Holy Land might be transformed into museums.

For us it is becoming almost impossible to live in the Holy Land. Nevertheless we are the living stones of the Church. As CAB we wish to stress that we are not in a position to continue being the living stones of the Church if we are not helped by the Christians of the whole world.

The Holy Land is a small land, but the most important events of the Old and New Testament took place there, in places like: Canaan, Israel, Judea, Palestine.

It is also the land where the three religions, which believe in one God and which have Abraham as their father, coexist. This land is the land of the roots of Christianity: the land of Jesus and of the first Christian communities which have continued living here up today.

Today two peoples and three religions all think they have the right to own the same land.

We would like to draw Christians' attention that this land is the Motherland of all the churches in the world.

The attitude which Christians and the Muslims took against Israel during the occupation stems from the fact that both of them belong to the Palestinian nation.

It is very sad to note that, according to the statistics, the number of Christians is not increased during the phase of the occupation, due to the many problems which those living in Jerusalem as well as those living in the West Bank have to face. They have problems to find employment, as well as problems of an economic, political and religious nature. The number of organized Pilgrimages has greatly gone down or rather reduced to nothing. The education and health systems have been badly hit by the occupation, effecting negatively particularly the younger generations.

The present situation for the whole Palestinian society, as well as for CAB and for Christians families in Bethlehem is very critical.

We are doing our very best to keep our hope alive.

Tony Sfeir  
*CAB Public relations*

# A YOUNG ORGANISM THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF CATHOLIC ACTION

## 1. Situation and prospects

Beatriz Buzzetti Thomson  
Coordinator of IFCA Secretariat

The countries' presentation, which has just been concluded and which gave us such a clear picture of the enculturation of Catholic Action in diverse contexts, is the ideal setting for introducing the International Forum of Catholic Action.

IFCA is a relatively very young organism. The initiative to set it up was taken during the meeting for those, responsible for Catholic Action in different parts of the world, held in Rome while the VII World Assembly of the Synod for Bishops on the "*Vocation and Mission of lay people in the Church and in the world*" was in session. It developed in the light of *Christfideles Laici* (cfr. n. 31).

The constituent Assembly was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1991. Right from its very beginning, IFCA could always rely on the full support of the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL), in the person of its then President Card. Eduardo Pironio. In June of this year, it was nine years since it was recognized as an International Organism by the PLC and since its Normative Document was approved *ad experimentum*. The definite approval arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2000. In December 2001, it was recognized as a member organisation of the ICO by the Conference of the International Catholic Organizations - CICO.

IFCA is made up of associations or federations of national or diocesan associations, which answer to the four 'notes' outlined in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* n. 20 and included in *Christfideles Laici* n. 31, even if under different names and with different structures. The conciliar text says: "The organizations in which, in the opinion of the hierarchy, the ensemble of these characteristics is realized, must be considered to be Catholic Action even though they take on various forms and titles because of the needs of different regions and peoples (AA n. 20).

IFCA's goals:

- to be a meeting place for and to create solidarity among Catholic Action in the various countries and regions of the world.
- To study the world dimension of the problems which society presents to the Church and to Catholic Action.
- To animate and promote the “new evangelization”, while fully respecting the structural and pastoral realities of each particular Catholic Action.

It is not a directive organism and does not condition the various local Catholic Action. It is basically meant to be of service and to help promote, orientate, support and promote CA's specific contribution in the diverse historical, cultural and ecclesial contexts. It establishes contacts with Bishops, with other associations and movements and with other ICO at international level.

IFCA assumes the characteristic of being of service from Catholic Action's very nature, from its diocesan character. In one of his addresses to IFCA, Cardinal Pironio said: “Catholic Action's aim is the daily and organic building of the ecclesial community so that it may be at the service of men, an ecclesial community which is essentially missionary.” This is how Paul VI defined it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1977: “It is called upon to carry out a special form of lay ministeriality, directed towards the *plantatio ecclesiae* and towards the development of the Christian community, in close union with the ordained ministries”. This definition was later taken up by John Paul II. Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, in his address to IFCA constituent Assembly in November 1991, repeats that “Catholic Action is essentially an organic form of service to the local Church and to its pastoral projects... The concrete evidence of its affective and effective communion with Peter's successor is its insertion in the diocese and in the parishes, which are the expression of the unity there is among the people of God. Its theological place is the Christian community built on the Eucharist, the Word of God, the strengthening of the faith of the baptized, and in the irradiation of charity”.

And since the *plantatio ecclesiae* is necessary in every sphere of life, there are also specialized movements in Catholic Action, always in close relation with the pastoral action.

Because of this explicit correlation that exists between Catholic Action and the orientations of the diocesan Ordinaries and of the national Episcopal Conferences and as it is at the service of their pastoral plans, this organism came into being and functions as a “Forum”. It means it is the place where the different CA associations



meet, exchange experiences, collaborate and work for the promotion of CA, always respecting the characteristics and conditions of each local Church.

IFCA's work is to follow the common itinerary of each Catholic Action's journey in the world, taking the threefold guidelines - mission, communion and formation.

**Mission:** Catholic Action is there to evangelize. "Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization. Their primary and immediate task is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community - this is the specific role of the pastors - but to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering" (*EN 70*).

It is lay people's mission to proclaim the Good News to all men by giving witness through their life and words. In actual life, this means that we have to discern facts, we have to denounce evil and injustices and work for the development and the integral promotion of the human person.

As an Association of lay people, evangelization also presupposes that CA makes a renewed effort for the enculturation of faith in all contexts, so that every culture is assumed, purified and elevated by the Gospel.

**Communion:** Catholic Action's theological place is the ordinary life of its own concrete local reality, of the local communities, in close union with their Pastors. It is the primary place for the building of communion.

In its commitment to develop the community, Catholic Action tries to find and create opportunities for collaborating and cooperating with other lay movements and organizations. At the same time, it shares the concern of the community for all the lay people who do not belong to organized groups and for all the baptized, members of the people of God, who for various reasons are only partially part of the community.

**Formation:** a missionary formation which facilitates an enlightened discernment of our times and our history and which brings out our duty to change reality; a formation which develops us into

responsible lay people, aware of our duty to change the ordinary temporal realities and bring them in keeping with God's will, in the light of the Social Teaching of the Church. It means a formation which renders our way of living coherent with our faith.

It is a formation aimed at strengthening communion and at urging us to work for a deeper ecclesial communion, so that all the Christian community may always be and become even better a living expression of the People of God in history.

First and foremost, it should be a formation which promotes interior life and enhances its progressive development towards holiness. "This is the will of God: your sanctification" (1 Ts 4:3).

IFCA has created opportunities in order to enhance this threefold dimension: mission, communion and formation. Among these are:

- the ordinary Assemblies held in Rome, Wien and Buenos Aires. Participants analysed problems faced internationally and the challenges which these pose to the Church and to lay people, particularly to Catholic Action. In view of these, suggestions were put forward to the Secretariat so that it could draft its lines of action.
- Continental meetings were held in Malta, Rumania, Bosnia Herzegovina for Europe; Kenya and Burundi for Africa; Venezuela, Paraguay, Mexico and Peru for America. These were occasions for analysing and reflecting on the post-synodal Documents of the respective continents, as well as time to discern about the regional realities and to create initiatives which favoured solidarity among the countries.
- Weeks of Formation for Youths were held in Europe in Iasi (1998), Oradea (1999), Miromir (2001). These meetings were about the conciliar teachings which dealt with the mission of lay people in the Church and in the world
- At the request of Bishops and local Catholic Action organisms, IFCA has collaborated in the organization and in the realization of courses of formation and in the promotion of Catholic Action in Myanmar, Rumania, Bulgaria, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda and Cuba.

The Newsletter "Noticias Newsletter News" which is issued every semester and recently the website, both of them in four languages - English, French, Spanish and Italian - help to keep the member countries informed about the various activities and encourage exchange of resources among countries. It is worth pointing out the spirit of solidarity brought about among the different Catholic Action associations and movements such as economic contributions, exchange of formative material, sharing of formative resources and the contribu-

tion, which members from one country give to another, to help promote and consolidate Catholic Action. All these fraternal experiences are the precious fruits of IFCA's work.

At the beginning of this millennium, we should take note of Pope John Paul II persistent invitation, made to us in the *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: "In a special way it will be necessary to discover ever more fully the specific vocation of the laity, called to seek 'the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God'; they 'have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world ... by their work for the evangelization and the sanctification of people'" (NMI 46).

We know that Catholic Action is called to be the most adequate instrument to sensibilize and activate lay people in being co-responsible in the Church's evangelizing mission, in keeping with the objectives of Vatican II, the 1987 Synod and the Pope's teachings.

Only recently, on the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, we celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* together with our renewed commitment as Catholic Action, to live the threefold commitment of awareness, renewal and dialogue, suggested by Paul VI, more fully. We would like to be an instrument within the Church to achieve this goal.

This is a picture of the life, the goals and the service given by IFCA. While presenting it, we would like to let you know that we are always at your disposal. We are ready to share with you our "few loaves and fish" (cfr. *Jn*), fully convinced that the Lord will multiply them for the good of his Church.

## 2. *The Pontifical Council for the Laity and IFCA*

*Prof. Avv. Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour*  
*Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

1. Right from its very beginning, during its initial stage and the first years of its development, as well as during the preparatory period for this Congress, the International Forum of Catholic Action (CA) has always had the full support and trust of the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL). Rather, I would like to say that our Office feels in some

way corresponsable for the setting up of IFCA. In fact it was deeply involved in the drafting of the Normative Guidelines and was there to ensure and testify to IFCA's close links with the Holy See. It was an accepted fact that this initiative was beneficial to the universal Church. It conformed to the Pontifical Council for the Laity's Decree of Recognition and on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1995, it was recognized as an international organism according to Pontifical Law. Following this, the Confirmation Decree was issued on the 3 January 2000.

It is my pleasure to highlight the special pastoral interest which the last three Presidents of the PCL have always shown in IFCA. I remember the moving enthusiasm with which Cardinal Eduardo Pironio welcomed the very early developments of this initiative, which was so very dear to him, and the keen interest shown by Cardinal James Francis Stafford. The same may be said for H.E. Msgr. Stanislaw Rylko, who continually gives it his influential and warm support. They all wanted to sustain and encourage IFCA at the time when it was finding its feet and building its identity. They projected it to help the various CA experiences in the world and thus be of service in the building of the Church among diverse peoples and nations.

2. I would like to add that right from its very beginning, we considered IFCA as a very promising novelty, an initiative with possibilities which went beyond its formal set-up. There is a popular saying which goes: "everything in its own time"! However this time is not set down by our calendar, by our calculations or projects, but by God's plans. On our part we should study and discern the signs of the times, even if these are sometimes obscure, so that we may be prepared to act upon them. The signs appeared to be clear enough right from the very beginning. The day to day dull and monotonous efforts - the *cronos* - were soon shaken off by the *kairós*, a time of grace and as such a time calling for greater responsibility and greater undertakings.

3. It is not by coincidence that IFCA, even when still in its early stages and without any structure, was initiated, discussed and proposed in October 1986, while the VII Ordinary General Assembly of the Bishops' Synod on "*The Vocation and Mission of Lay People in the Church and in the World*". I can remember certain details very clearly and feel I am a witness and a protagonist. At the time, a number of CA leaders from various Countries met in the synodal hall and thereabout, attracted by this ecclesial event which undoubtedly was

of particular interest to them. During this meeting, the participants, who all had the same associative background and who were surprised and pleased to note the fraternal love, the ecclesial spirit of communion and the common apostolic concern for the good of all lay people which they all shared, saw clearly the need for the setting up of IFCA. Its aim were clear to all of them. It was during this synodal meeting that the idea of this initiative was put forward to our office. It was an unforeseen and unexpected grace which was the fruit of the synodal event which was in session and which helped to make this initiative possible!

4. When He was addressing the general Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference in March 1982, His Holiness John Paul II reaffirmed that “the orientations of the Council should be studied, meditated upon, reread and realized”. They are for us “a synodal key” which should lead us to reflect and develop its teachings further. In fact, etymologically synod means following a way together, walking in communion. In this journey and as a result of this “key”, the VII world ordinary Assembly of Bishops on lay people, which came immediately after the extraordinary synodal Assembly which commemorated and evaluated the 20 years in the life of the Church just after the conclusion of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, worked on a concise and enlightening recapitulation of the teachings of the Council on one of the major issues of ecclesial renewals. In fact we are all aware of the prominence which Vatican II gave to the Christian vocation of the laity. It stressed the fact that they are part of the Church and spoke about their ecclesial participation, their apostolic responsibility and about a renewed consciousness of the Church as a mystery of missionary communion.

This synodal Assembly was also a very strong experience of ecclesial discernment on the developments which took place in the first phase after the Council. It was a time of fruitful renewal but also of waves of turbulence, as new realities, new questions and problems, encountered by lay people, had to be tackled. It was also a recapitulation of the teachings of the Council, a discernment of the action taken, as well as a renewed orientation and commitment so as to give greater importance and a fresh impetus to the indispensable role of the laity in the Church, which had already been directed towards the dawn of the third millennium amidst all the great historical changes. The providential result of all this was the post-synodal apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30<sup>th</sup> December 1988). It was amidst

this recapitulation exercise, this discernment, this review and this new attempt, that CA became more consciousness of the need to take up the initiative of setting up IFCA.

5. This abridged recapitulation of the teachings of the Council reminded the Synod on the Laity of the special tribute which the conciliar Fathers paid to those associations which “under the name of Catholic Action” or under other names have “given excellent results in God’s Kingdom”, and “have been “deservedly recommended and promoted by the Popes and by many Bishops” (cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 20). On the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1967, speaking to the *Consilium de Laicis* which had just been set up, His Holiness Paul VI said that “the Council had ratified and amplified the contribution which Catholic Lay Movements had given in the pilgrim and militant Church for almost a century”. This was also acknowledged by His Holiness John Paul II in His message on the occasion of this Congress, saying that CA “has been an associative, structured and driving force” through the formation and action of generations of lay faithful who have been formed in its school of holiness, brought up to be faithful to the teaching of the Church, coresponsible and involved in building the Church, in prompt and direct service with their Pastors and to be witnesses of the Gospel in the social, political and cultural spheres of life.

6. This worthy tradition was referred to and reaffirmed in the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (n. 31). This synodal discernment also called for a discernment on the part of Catholic Action as, paradoxically, this came at a time when, in the universal Church, Catholic Action’s tradition had lost its impact and was passing through a period of anguish. CA even arrived at a situation where it disappeared and lost its importance even in the local Churches where it had flourished. It was even looked upon as a “preconciliar” reality. In fact, like many other areas in the ecclesial world, it passed through a phase of test and crisis which eventually lead to its maturity. Very often, at this time, there was a reference to the “crisis in catholic associationism” and many Pastors maintained that “there are good lay people but no laity”. Some even thought that the associative phase of the laity, who were then more involved in small communities, in parish councils, in being non-ordained ministers rather than being launched in the world, in the *diaspora* of active involvement, was surpassed. Catholic Action had to pass through the up-dating exercise brought about by the Council, it had to define itself ecclesialogically without relying on

its past organizational ability and it had to put itself in the context of a christianity which was passing through a disintegrating phase. It had to re-establish itself with renewed Christian and missionary energy, all this amidst the overwhelming waves of secularization, strong political and ideological storms, clerical contestations and intellectual problematics. In this synodal journey, from the apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1976) of Paul VI on to *Christifideles Laici* (1989) by John Paul II, following the way indicated by these great Popes, Catholic Action undertook the required, and at times painful, discernment.

7. Definitely this did not mean looking back with a nostalgic or problematic attitude, but it meant picking up the best from its rich tradition, its expertise, its responsibility and mission. Catholic Action worked on the unique and particular character, defined by the “four characteristic notes” outlined in the conciliar Decree on the laity, and now developed and enriched by the “criteria of ecclesiality”, which encourages the “freedom to associate”, indicated and proposed in *Christifideles Laici* (n. 30). It was also supported by the repeated advice and encouragement given to Catholic Action by John Paul II. The great Jubilee and the “programme” outlined in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001) have been fundamental in Catholic Action’s renewed commitment within the Church and to its mission. There is no true renewal if due importance is not given to holy living. This is precisely the reason why Catholic Action has reaffirmed and re-established its charism as a “school of sanctity”. It calls its members, individually and as a community within the community, to contemplate Christ’s face and all its profound mystery. We must look at a new beginning without taking anything as outdated, starting from a renewed encounter with the Lord, from full trust on the grace of God, from an adherence to the significance of faith, from an overall change in its ways of expression and in its set-up. Catholic Action’s charism is that of being a school of Christian formation and of educating in faith. It provides different programmes of discipleship starting from the sacraments of initiation on to an adult Christian maturity. Catholic Action has always been “a service towards the growth of ecclesial communion (...), a communion which does not express itself in vague affection but which encourages organic solidarity among all the members of the local Churches” (cfr. His Holiness John Paul II, *Address* during a national meeting of the ICA, on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1998). Recently, the Italian Bishops have stated very clearly:

“Catholic Action’s direct and organic link with the diocese and with its Bishop, its assumption of responsibility for the mission of the Church, its dedication to the Church and to its entire mission, its involvement in the life of the Church, in its pastoral projects, and in enhancing the spirituality of the diocesan Church, all this makes Catholic Action, not just another ecclesial association among the others, but a gift from God and a resource for the growth of ecclesial communion.” (cfr. Permanent Council of the IEC, *Letter to the National Presidency of the ICA*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2002).

Because of all this, “the inseparable link with the hierarchy and, in a particular way, with the Successor of Peter, is the very nature of your Association” (cfr. John Paul II, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1998). Because of this fundamental link, Catholic Action is faced with the task of collaborating with the hierarchy in stimulating a missionary urge in ordinary pastoral work” (John Paul II, *Homily* on the occasion of the X National Assembly of the ICA, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1998). This move towards a “new evangelization” - new in its fervour, in its methods, in its ways of expression - has been initiated by Catholic Action itself. The Pope himself is the prime witness and herald of all this.

And lastly, by placing communion at its very roots and putting itself in *status missionis*, Catholic Action, urged by its zeal for the good of mankind and animated by Christ’s love, is called to play its part to “reintroduce the Christian texture in society” (cfr. *Christifideles Laici*, 3). This is an exciting and demanding programme for individual Catholic Action members and for the whole association, a programme aimed at the good of the Church. IFCA came into being at the time of this new awareness.

8. One last point. The VII Ordinary Synodal Assembly was an occasion for demonstrating, discerning and reconfirming that which was referred to as the flourishing of new movements and ecclesial communities. These were acknowledged as gifts of the Holy Spirit, fruit of the spring expected after the Council and signs of a “new season of associations of lay faithful” (cfr. *Christifideles Laici*, 29), considered as “providential” by John Paul II (cfr. *Address* during the World Meeting of Movements and of new ecclesial Communities, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1998). The Pontifical Council for the Laity had to work hard on the familiarization, guidance, discernment and encouragement required by these new realities. During that same time, the Pope, speaking to the Bishops of Poland, reminded them that without Catholic Action “the infrastructure of catholic associationism in Poland is incomplete”



(cfr. John Paul II, *Address* to the XI National Assembly of the Italian Catholic Action, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002). This affirmation became a forcefully repeated *leit-motiv* on other following occasions. (cfr. John Paul II, *Message* to the Extraordinary National Assembly of the Italian Catholic Action, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003).

However this does not mean that there should be any competition or comparisons. We are all called to mature in our communion through the unity and diversity of our charisms, history and comunitarian, educational and missionary ways of operating. We should all welcome this as good news and as a rich resource which, through the grace of God, has matured for the good of the Church's mission.

Here I would like to point out the difficulty which the Pontifical Council for the Laity had in recognizing a representative body, representing Catholic Action at international level, which does not exist in the case of any other association or movement. Definitely, the mention or proposal of having an international superstructure of management never appears in the DNA of Catholic Action's tradition. Besides, the relations between the Italian Catholic Action, which has always been the model and support at world level of other Catholic Action traditions, have always been very good. IFCA has succeeded in overcoming this difficulty as definitely it did not want to be a bureaucratic-organizational body but simply wanted to create a body which fostered the newly revised ecclesial and associative awareness. It was meant to provide occasions for meetings, sharing of experiences and for catholic reflections as well as provide support, help in the dissemination and in the *plantatio* of Catholic Action in the local Churches of the different countries and continents. It wished to present Catholic Action as an initiative of communion and solidarity in today's wave of globalization. The Pontifical Council for the Laity considers its collaboration with IFCA and with the ICA in the preparation and the evolvment of this Congress, the Pilgrimage in Loreto and especially the meeting with the Holy Father, especially in the light of His teachings, as a new beginning.

For Catholic Action this opens a new period of development, a new phase, a new beginning, a renewed service in the life and mission of the Church in our times. You should continue following the way you have started by carrying out this task with great responsibility. You should rethink, reformulate and project Catholic Action in the Church at universal level, by cherishing and meditating all this as Mary did, and by entrusting your work to the Holy Spirit who renews all things.



## *MANIFESTO*

# *A CATHOLIC ACTION FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM*

The participants of the International Congress on Catholic Action, coming from more than fifty countries from Africa, America, Asia and Europe, lay people, priests and bishops, renew their commitment so that Catholic Action (CA) may be in the churches in every country, a mature and responsible expression of a laity capable of living the magnificent adventure of integrating faith with their everyday way of living.

### **1. A history of free and responsible lay people**

Throughout its history, CA has contributed towards the formation of lay Christians, conscious of their proper vocation, ready to assume their proper responsibility within the life of the Church and to build, with the leaven of the Gospel, a civilization of love together with all men and women of good will.

Remembering the ups and downs in this history with gratitude, we feel the responsibility to appreciate its richness and to make it relevant to our times.

### **2. A precious gift to the Church and to the world**

Humbly and joyfully, we acknowledge the richness of the charism from which CA originated:

to be lay Christians committed in the life of the Church and in her whole mission;

in close relations with its pastors, at the service of the ecclesial communion, in each particular Church and in every parish community;

to be lay Christians who love life and who share a commitment to work with all humanity for the recognition of each person's human

dignity. Men and women who live deeply rooted in their own country, community and city.

Children, Youth and Adults who wish to assume these commitments in their community by being witnesses of a spirit of fraternity which eventually becomes a reality for all.

This charism makes of CA a particular form of secular apostolate which, recognised by the Hierarchy, may take different forms and names in the various realities.

### **3. A project for life**

Conscious of their baptismal vocation, encouraged by the testimony of Blessed Pina Suriano, Alberto Marvelli and Pere Tarrés and so many other outstanding persons, whose veneration we renewed today at Loreto, we take upon us the challenges which the Holy Father John Paul II pointed out to us in his message to this Congress. We would like to go on being “a workshop for forming lay people, who enlightened by the Social Teaching of the Church, strongly commit themselves to work in favour of life, to safeguard the dignity of the human person, to work towards the realization of freedom in education, to promote the real meaning of matrimony and the family, to be involved in charitable work towards those most in need, to foster peace and justice and the application of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity in the different social realities”.

At the end of this Congress, convinced - as the Holy Father has insisted - that the Church needs CA, we confirm our commitment to make our associations always more active, to help in establishing CA in those countries where it does not exist yet and to strengthen the relations which unite us.

We entrust these commitments to Mary, Mother of the Church and Our Lady of Loreto.



## CLOSING EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: *1 Co* 3:18-23; *Lk* 5:1-11

# CATHOLIC ACTION LAUNCH OUT INTO THE DEEP...

*H. E. Msgr. Stanislaw Rylko  
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

### Introduction

This Eucharistic Celebration is going to close our International Congress on Catholic Action. During the days we have been spending here, this house has become a real cenacle for us, where we could experience the living presence of the Holy Spirit, not only during our common prayer but during our discussion, our dialogue, our listening to the witnesses as well.

This Congress has been a particular gift for us all, an extremely strong ecclesial experience for which now we want to thank the Lord. We want to bring the fruits of our works in this Congress to the Lord's altar, or rather the whole Catholic Actin with its strong wish for renewal, with the view of loving the Church more and more and of being of service to her mission in the contemporary world with greater and greater generosity.

We are quite confident that the One who, during these days, began a good work in us, will go on completing it (cfr. *Ph* 1:6).

### HOMILY

1. The word of God we have just heard during this concluding Eucharist of our International Congress on Catholic Action, takes us to the banks of Lake Genezareth and makes us listen once again to the important dialogue between Christ and Peter just before the miracu-

lous catch. We all know the story. These last two thousand years, the Church has continually tried to rediscover the fundamental paradigm of its evangelizing mission in the world. A lake, a boat, some nets ready for the fish and some tired fishermen, who have just returned ashore... These are the simple means which Christ uses to speak to us about truths, which are not at all simple, truths which concern the Kingdom of God and its spreading in the world. So what is evangelization?

It all starts through Christ's initiative: "Launch out into the deep and cast your nets..." (*Lk* 5:4). Evangelization is the fundamental work of the Church, it is not a human task, but it is Christ who works today through His Spirit. We Christians are only instruments in His hands, instruments at His service. As such, any apostolic success is not the fruit of our intelligence, but a result of our submissiveness and obedience to Him. John Paul II puts great emphasis on this fact: every pastoral activity must start with the contemplation of the face of Christ, that is with prayer - the primacy of grace! (cfr. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 38). If this is lacking, we start on a wrong foot. The secret of success in our evangelizing work is found in an intensive contemplative life in our communities and in individual Christians.

Christ said to Peter: "Launch out into the deep...". When confronted with the work of evangelization, the Lord opens to us the vast horizons of the world, referring both to geographical extensions ("till the ends of the world!") as well as to the variety and complexity of problems and situations of today's life. It is enough to look around at the modern areopagi of culture, science, economy, media... Christ invites each one of us and our Christian communities: "launch out into the deep!". You are faced with an enormous task. You must look far ahead. The work which awaits you is extensive. But you must have the courage and be daring in finding new ways of spreading the Gospel. Routine and habits can destroy our apostolic spirit. Today individual Christians and our communities must have impetus, "apostolic fantasy" and courage to be daring.

2. In reply to Christ's command: "Launch out into the deep!", the Apostle replies: "Master, we have laboured all night and we have caught nothing..." (*Lk* 5:5). In Peter's words there is a hidden weakness, a risk which threatens every evangelizer. Peter is tired after a hard night's work which ended in complete failure: he returned with empty nets in his boat. He is tired and discouraged. Very often in ecclesial spheres we come across these same worrying symptoms of

fatigue and discouragement, provoked by a hostile media and many “prophets of doom”.

In such circumstances it is very easy for us to fall into a sense of powerlessness which corrodes our Christian hope. We develop a fear to face the future and a dangerous spiritual bewilderment. When faced with the prevailing secular culture, there is a risk that Christianity might seem ineffective, just like salt when this loses its taste and is good for nothing. Today we must defend our Christian hope at all costs and make sure that we do not base it on this world’s assurance! In his *First Letter to the Corinthians*, St. Paul warns us: “There is no room for self-delusion. Anyone of you who thinks he is wise by worldly standards must learn to be a fool in order to be really wise. For the wisdom of the world is folly to God...” (1 Co 3:18-19).

As Christ’s disciples we are called to be witnesses of hope and to have the courage to go against the current. Following the example of our Master, we have to become a sign of contradiction in the world. The life of an apostle of Christ must be imbued with evangelic hope and this is very important. At the dawn of the third millennium, the Church is called upon to be a convincing sign of secure hope for all humanity.

3. Peter managed to overcome that moment of weakness and discouragement, brought about by that instantaneous failure due to his fatigue as fisherman, through an act of trust in the Lord: “Lord at your word I will cast the nets...!” (Lk 5:5). Human calculations do not suffice in evangelization. Rather, they could be a dangerous trap. That which counts is the ability to let the Master lead the way. How many times we have to start all over again! We must have great humility to start afresh even after repeated unsuccessful attempts, knowing very well that the result of our apostolic efforts is always a gift of grace.

“At your word I will cast the nets...”. This is an important message which the liturgy of the word gives us at the conclusion of our International Congress on CA.

Let us leave Rome and return to our local Churches with Peter’s words. The Pope, great prophet of hope in our times, encourages us with the words: “*Duc in altum*, Catholic Action! (...) Humbly dare to fix your gaze on Jesus so as to share with Him your authentic renewal...” (April 26<sup>th</sup> 2002).

However, in actual fact, with this Eucharist we are concluding only the first part of our Congress. Another part which is just as important awaits us, that is the Italian Catholic Action's pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of our Lady of Loreto, where we will be meeting the Holy Father who, as the supreme authority of the Church, will pass his message to us.

There, in the house where the Word was made flesh for our salvation, let us ask Mary to teach us how to say "yes" like her, which in reality means, unconditional and total obedience to the word of the Lord. This obedience, sustained by fervent love, is the inexhaustible source of the evangelizing mission of the Church.





***Loreto, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2004***

***PILGRIMS  
TO THE HOLY HOUSE***



# EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: *AP* 21:1-5; *LK* 1:26-38

## HOMILY

Card. Ivan Dias  
Archbishop of Bombay

Dear brothers and sisters of Catholic Action,

Our pilgrimage to this Holy House, and the Gospel we have just heard, remind us of the Annunciation which took place some two thousand years ago, when the plans of God for the salvation of all humankind began to unfurl. For us from Catholic Action this episode has a very special meaning, because it teaches us - at Mary's school - the true nature of our identity as heralds of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, it was in the house of Nazareth that the humble Virgin Mary said an unconditional and total "yes" (*Fiat*), when the Archangel Gabriel announced that God had chosen her to be the Mother of His only begotten Son who was to become incarnate.

It was from this home of Nazareth that Our Blessed Lady, carrying in her womb the Son of God, went with haste to help her cousin Elizabeth who, already advanced in years, was with child. Isn't this the ideal of Catholic Action: to carry Jesus to the whole world and make faith to flow into action?

It is precisely during the meeting with Mary that Elizabeth acknowledged her to be the "Mother of the Lord" and proclaimed her "blessed among all women", and baby John leaped for joy in his mother's womb. Mary replied to this festive welcome by letting a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to surge joyfully to God from her Immaculate Heart. In this canticle, now known as the *Magnificat*, the Blessed Virgin praised God for His marvellous works and many mercies, for His powerful victories, for His promises and His fidelity all through the ages. And the constant refrain deep down in her heart was: "Holy is His Name", because for her everything was a grace of God and was to redound to His greater honor and glory. Mary's hymn is a wonderful lesson in thanksgiving, and should find an echo in the

heart of every member of Catholic Action and inspire them to recognize and gratefully acknowledge the “mighty deeds” which the Lord is incessantly doing in them, in their midst and through them.

The *Fiat* and the *Magnificat* of the Blessed Virgin Mary were then followed by a lifelong *Stabat*, which indicates her patience, constancy and faithfulness, her perseverance till the end, till the foot of the cross of her beloved Son.

*Fiat, Magnificat, Stabat.* These sentiments marked the life of the Blessed Virgin and should be characteristic of the members of Catholic Action as they proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Many Catholic Action members have been inspired by these Marian virtues in the past, and many still continue to be led by them even today. First and foremost, by their *Fiat*: by uncompromisingly accepting God’s holy Will and submitting to Him all their plans and deeds.

Then with their *Magnificat*: irradiating spiritual joy always and everywhere and doing everything for God’s greater glory. Finally, by their *Stabat*: not being deterred by the challenges and difficulties they meet in the proclamation of the Gospel, because they are convinced that evangelization is not something of their own initiative, but the work of the Holy Spirit who is its principal agent, and that they are only at His service.

Let us therefore work with these Marian sentiments to bring Christ to the world. Mary, says St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, is the magnet which attracts the Holy Spirit and the compass which always points to Jesus, her Son. By following Mary’s example, every Catholic Action member can become a sign of the Emmanuel, a visible witness to the presence of God in the midst of His people. And we all know how much the world today needs such a witness. Pope Paul VI had rightly said that “contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses”. In fact, people today believe more in what we *are* than in what we *say* or *do*.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary - Mother, Teacher and Queen of Catholic Action - who has welcomed us with such care and maternal kindness in this her Holy House, bless us and accompany us always as we spread the sweet fragrance of Jesus Christ and of His holy Gospel all over the world. Amen.

*Loreto - Valley of Montorso*  
*5<sup>th</sup> September 2004*

***THE MEETING  
WITH JOHN PAUL II  
AND THE BEATIFICATION  
OF THREE CA WITNESSES***



# EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: *Wis* 9:13; *Lk* 14:17

## HOMILY

1. “For what man can learn the counsel of God?” (*Wis* 9: 13). The question asked in the *Book of Wisdom* has one answer: only the Son of God, made man for our salvation in the virginal womb of Mary, can reveal God’s design to us. Jesus alone knows which is the path that “leads to wisdom of heart” (cfr. *Responsorial Psalm*) and to peace and salvation. And what is this way? He has given us the answer in today’s Gospel: it is the way of the Cross. His words are clear: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (*Lk* 14:27).

“Carrying the cross, following Jesus”, means being prepared to make any sacrifice for love of him. It means not putting anything or anyone before him, not even those you love the most, not even your own life.

2. Dear brothers and sisters gathered in this “splendid valley of Montorso”, as Archbishop Comastri has described it: I cordially thank him for his warm words to me. With him, I greet the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops who are here; I greet the priests, the men and women religious, the consecrated persons; and above all I greet you, young people, members of Catholic Action led by your General Assistant, Mons. Francesco Lambiasi, and by the National President, Dr Paola Bignardi, whom I thank for her warm address. You have desired to gather here, under the gaze of Our Lady of Loreto, to renew your commitment of faithful attachment to Jesus Christ.

You know it: adhering to Christ is a demanding decision. It is not by chance that Jesus speaks of the “cross”. However, he straightaway explains: “After me”. These are the important words: we are not alone in carrying our cross. He walks ahead of us, showing us the way with the light of his example and the power of his love.

3. The cross accepted through love gives birth to freedom. The Apostle Paul experienced it when he was old “and now a prisoner also for Jesus Christ”, as he himself says in his Letter to *Philemon*, but inwardly totally free. It is this impression that the passage just proclaimed conveys to us: Paul is in chains but his heart is free, because

it is filled with Christ's love. Therefore, in the dark prison in which he suffers for his Lord, he can speak of freedom to a friend who is outside it. Philemon was a Christian of Colossae; Paul turns to him to ask him to free Onesimus, who was still a slave according to the law of the time, but is henceforth a brother through baptism. By renouncing the other as a possession, Philemon will receive the gift of a brother.

A clear lesson can be learned from this incident, viewed as a whole: there is no greater love than that of the cross; there is no truer freedom than that of love; there is no more complete brotherhood than that which is born from the Cross of Jesus.

4. The three new Blessed were humble disciples and heroic witnesses of the cross of Jesus.

Pere Tarrés i Claret, first a doctor, then a priest, dedicated himself to the lay apostolate among the young people of Catholic Action in Barcelona, whose adviser he subsequently became. As a medical practitioner, he devoted himself with special concern to the poorest of the sick, convinced that "the sick person is a symbol of the suffering Christ". Ordained a priest, he devoted himself with generous daring to the tasks of his ministry, ever faithful to the commitment he had made on the eve of his Ordination: "A single resolution, Lord, cost what it may". He accepted with faith and heroic patience a serious illness from which he died at the age of only 45. Despite his suffering, he would frequently repeat: "How good the Lord is to me! And I am truly happy".

5. Alberto Marvelli, a young man who was strong and free and a generous son of the Church of Rimini and of Catholic Action, considered his brief life of only 28 years as a gift of love to Jesus for the good of his brethren. "Jesus has enfolded me in his grace", he wrote in his diary; "I no longer see anyone but him, I think only of him". Alberto had made the daily Eucharist the centre of his life. In prayer he also sought the inspiration for political commitment, convinced of the need to live to the full as children of God in history in order to make it a history of salvation.

In the difficult time of the Second World War, which sowed death and multiplied violence and atrocious suffering, Bl. Alberto fostered an intense spiritual life, from which flowed the love for Jesus that led him constantly to forget himself and to take on the cross of the poor.

6. Bl. Pina Suriano, a native of Partinico in the Diocese of Monreale (Sicily), loved Jesus with an ardent and faithful love to the point that



she wrote in all sincerity: “I do nothing other than live for Jesus”. She spoke to Jesus from her bride’s heart: “Jesus, make me more and more your own. Jesus, I want to live and die with you and for you”.

Since childhood, she had been a member of the female branch of Catholic Action, of which she later became parish director, finding important incentives in the Association for human and cultural growth in an intense atmosphere of fraternal friendship. She gradually developed a simple, steadfast desire to give her young life to God as an offering of love and especially for the sanctification and perseverance of priests.

7. Dear brothers and sisters, friends of Catholic Action who have gathered in Loreto from Italy, from Spain, from many parts of the world! Today, through the beatification of these three Servants of God, the Lord is saying to you: the greatest gift you can make to the Church and to the world is holiness.

May you have at heart what the Church has at heart: that numerous men and women of our time be won over by fascination for Christ; may his Gospel shine once more as a light of hope for the poor, the sick, those who hunger for justice; may Christian communities be ever more lively, open and attractive; may our cities be hospitable and liveable for all; may humanity follow the paths of peace and brotherhood.

8. It is up to you lay people to witness to the faith through your own specific virtues: fidelity and gentleness in the family, competence at work, tenacity in serving the common good, solidarity in social relations, creativity in doing useful deeds for evangelization and human promotion. It is also up to you, in close communion with the Pastors, to show that the Gospel is timely and that faith does not tear the believer from history but roots him in it more deeply.

Courage, Catholic Action! May the Lord guide you on your journey of renewal!

May the Immaculate Virgin of Loreto accompany you with tender concern; the Church looks to you with confidence; the Pope greets you, supports you and wholeheartedly blesses you.

Italian Catholic Action, thank you!

## ANGELUS

### THE THREE DUTIES

1. At the end of this intense celebration, I would like once again to express to you my joy at being able to be with you. May you always be available to the voice of the Lord Jesus! Just as he needed Mary's fiat to become flesh, so his Gospel also needs your "yes" in order to become history in the contemporary world.

2. A very special greeting to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Barcelona and the Diocese of Vic, who are accompanied by Cardinal Ricardo María Carles, by Archbishop Lluís Martínez Sistach of Barcelona, by the Bishop of Vic and by the other Catalan Bishops.

The new Blessed is a great honour for your Land. His figure as a man, doctor and priest, is a shining example for the Christians of our time.

I also cordially greet the pilgrims from other Dioceses in Spain and in Latin America who, together with their Bishops, have taken part in the International Congress of Catholic Action. Catholic Action is and wants to be the school at which people learn to choose God with all their heart and to follow Christ as the one Lord of our life.

3. Dear Friends, I invite you to renew your "yes" and I consign to you three duties: the first is "**contemplation**": strive to walk on the path of holiness, keeping your gaze fixed on Jesus, the one Teacher and Saviour of all.

The second duty is "**communion**": endeavour to promote the spirituality of unity with the Pastors of the Church, with all the brethren in the faith and with the other ecclesial associations. Be the leaven of dialogue with all people of good will.

The third duty is "**mission**": as lay people, take the leaven of the Gospel to homes and schools, to places of work and recreation. The Gospel is a word of hope and salvation for the world.

May the sweet Lady of Loreto obtain for you fidelity to your vocation, generosity in carrying out your daily duties and enthusiasm in dedicating yourselves to the mission that the Church entrusts to you!

## ANGELUS

### “I LOOK TO CATHOLIC ACTION WITH GREAT CONFIDENCE”

Castelgandolfo, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2004

1. According to an ancient tradition, today we are celebrating the feast of the Holy Name of Mary. Indissolubly linked to the Name of Jesus, for Christians this name is the sweetest, for it reminds everyone of the Mother they have in common. Jesus, dying, entrusted us all to her as children.

May Mary watch over humanity in this time that is marked by overwhelming explosions of violence. May she watch especially over the new generations who are eager to build a future of hope for one and all.

2. I also noticed this deep aspiration to a world of justice and peace in the children, young people and adults of Italian Catholic Action, whom I met last Sunday at Loreto on the occasion of their national pilgrimage.

I am grateful to the Lord for having given me the opportunity to take part in this important ecclesial event, which culminated in the proclamation of three new Blesseds: Alberto Marvelli, Pina Suriano and Pere Tarrés i Claret.

In recalling their witness, I would like here to recall the three duties I entrusted to Catholic Action: “contemplation”, to walk on the path of holiness; “communion”, to promote the spirituality of unity; and “mission”, to be Gospel leaven everywhere.

3. May Our Lady help Catholic Action to persevere enthusiastically in its commitment to apostolic witness, always working in close connection with the hierarchy, taking a responsible part in the pastoral work of the parish and the diocese.

The Church is counting on the active presence of Catholic Action and its faithful devotion to the great cause of Christ’s Kingdom. I too look to Catholic Action with great confidence, and I encourage all its members to be generous witnesses of the Good News of the Gospel in order to restore hope to contemporary society which is in search of peace.

## **COUNTRIES PARTICIPANT**

ALBANY  
ANGOLA  
ANRGENTINA  
BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA  
BRAZIL  
BULGARY  
BURUNDI  
CAMERUN  
CANADA  
CONGO DEM. REP.  
COREA  
CUBA  
ECUADOR  
EL SALVADOR  
FRANCE  
GUATEMALA  
HOLY LAND - Palestine  
and Israel  
INDIA  
ITALY  
KENYA  
LITHUANIA  
MALTA  
MEXICO  
MOLDOVA REP.  
MYANMAR- BURMA  
NIGERIA  
PARAGUAY  
PERU  
POLAND

PORTUGAL  
RUMANIA - Latin rite  
and Byzantine rite  
RWANDA  
SENEGAL  
SPAIN  
SWITZERLAND  
TANZANIA  
TOGO  
UKRAINA  
UGANDA  
HUNGARY  
VENEZUELA  
ZAMBIA

**INTERNATIONAL  
CATHOLIC  
ORGANIZATIONS**  
ICCM  
WUCWO  
CJOC

**CONTINENTAL ORGANISMS**  
CCEE  
COMECE - UE  
FABC - Asia  
CELAM - Latin America

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