

Forum Internacional
de Acción Católica

International Forum
of Catholic Action

Forum Internazionale
di Azione Cattolica

NOTICIAS NEWSLETTER NOTIZIE

2007/1

In these postconciliar years the continental level has become more and more important in the life of the Church. This is due to the Bishops' Synods celebrated in Rome and to the continental meetings organised by the local Churches. It suffices to think of the Conference held in Aparecida in America and of the III Ecumenical Assembly promoted by CCEE and KEK in Europe. The post-synodal Exhortations, as well as the preparatory documents, have always given space to the laypeople's vocation, to the contribution of the laity, of the lay associations and movements to the Church's mission in all continents.

If it is true that the big phenomena are global, it is also true that the social and political dynamics of every continent are expression of the relationship between globalization and local dimension. The continents are actually a macro dimension of connection and communication: for instance, Europe and UE, Africa and UA are roads to unity and integration. They are already bringing and will go on bringing their own contributions to the global dynamics as other phenomena such as the Asian, American and Australian continents.

By favouring their exchanges and their commitment at continental level, CA helps the associations and the laity appreciate this dimension of the life of the Church and society for the national and diocesan associations and for the laypeople's daily life.

It is CA's task, for instance, to participate both in preparing the Synods, and in receiving and using their documents to form its members to an effective commitment to witness and strengthen the international foundations of the whole human community and to grow up in the catholic dimension, in the universal fraternity.

Among the guidelines for the triennium ending with V IFCA Assembly in April 2008, there is the choice - always renewed - to favour occasions to meet, to reflect, to work together between CA at the various levels: in this perspective carrying out continental meetings has now become almost a habit.

They represent a level of CA's life which is becoming more and more qualifying thanks to the commitment of IFCA member-countries and their leaders, in the last three years particularly in America, Africa and Europe.

IFCA Secretariat has focused three main themes to keep into consideration in planning the continental meetings held after 2004 in America (Argentina May 2006), in Africa (Uganda August 2006) and in Europe (Spain 2007): reading the continental reality and the future of Christianity, the challenges facing the evangelisation, the contribution of the youths, the promotion of CA. This can enable us to walk together in our different contexts after 40 years from the Ecumenical Vatican Council II.

You can find here some interesting material. The *DOCUMENTS* concerning the American meeting are ready in Spanish as well as those about the African meeting in English and French. The *DOCUMENTS* about the European meeting are going to be prepared in Spanish, English and Italian, as soon as possible.

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Towards V IFCA Ordinary Assembly

Date: 27-30 April 2008

Location: Rome

General theme:

The contribution of Catholic Action for the lay people's formation 20 years after *Christifideles Laici*.

1st May, participation in the celebration for the 140 years of the Italian Catholic Action

IFCA site: www.fiacifca.org

CA school of sanctity

Inauguration of the new chapel of the Italian Catholic Action's Saints and Blessed

A new chapel at Domus Mariae was inaugurated on Saturday 20th January 2007. It had been already blessed by H. Em. Card. Tarcisio Bertone on 12th January when he visited ICA's seat.

H.E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi, ICA general Assistant and IFCA ecclesiastic Assistant, presided over the Eucharistic Celebration with the proper liturgy of the consecration and gave his homily. It was attended by the members of ICA's Presidency and national Council.

The Chapel is dedicated to CA's Saints and Blessed. The relics of St Gianna Beretta Molla, Blessed Pier Giorgio Fossati, Antonia Mesina, Pere Tarrés and of some Blessed Martyrs of Valencia were placed into the altar.

Today the Lord (...) says 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.

From the homily by John Paul II, 5th September 2004, Loreto
on the occasion of the Beatification of Alberto Marvelli,
Pina Suriano and Pere Tarrés i Claret

V American Continental Meeting

Argentina - Buenos Aires, 29 April-4 May 2006

*Jesus Christ's disciples and missionaries.
So that our peoples may have life in Him*

Message from the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

before the forthcoming Latin American Meeting of the International Forum of Catholic Action (IFCA) which will be held in Buenos Aires, I am pleased to send H.H. Benedict XVI's warmest greetings to all the organizers and participants.

Through the theme chosen for your Congress "Jesus Christ's disciples and missionaries - so that our peoples may have life in Him" you wish to stress the link that exists between being Christ's disciples and the carrying out of His apostolic mission. In this regard, the Holy Father encourages you to be missionaries of the Gospel by humbly and faithfully placing yourselves at the Lord's service every single day of your lives, taking upon yourselves Christ's sentiments by living His words and following His footsteps up to the point of giving yourselves totally to Him. Our Baptismal grace makes us wish to share the greatness of the Gospel with many others.

Catholic Action men and women, carry out your work in your ordinary day's conditions of life so that your family life, your professional and civil commitments, the service which you generously give to the Christian community and to the spreading of the Gospel may contribute to make Christ the heart of the world.

The Church today needs lay faithful who, associated together, contribute towards the "spirituality of unity" in the different parish and diocesan commu-

nities. In this way, they show all people how beautiful it is to look upon the Church as one's own family, thus building that communion, which, as irreplacable leaven contributes to the unity of the great human family.

The Church today needs a Catholic Action which is committed to making the world smell "the good fragrance of Christ" (2Co 2:15). Yes, we have an urgent need of Christian lay people who "keep their gaze fixed on Jesus" (Heb 12:2) and translate the words, which they have learnt by listening to His heart, in their daily lives.

The Church relies on the generous, gratuitous and competent presence of Catholic Action so that the Gospel may reach the utmost parts of the earth and may be the leaven among the members of every community and in every culture.

Recall the triple mandate, entrusted to you by John Paul II, whom we dearly remember, to CA Associations in Italy and in all parts of the world, during the pilgrimage to Loreto on the 5th September 2004: contemplation, communion and mission and apply them as the basis of all your programmes.

You can only be faithful to these three duties if you follow Mary's way, as God's Servant Cardinal Eduardo Pironio very rightly used to say: "Catholic Action's journey is the same as Mary's journey, a journey of fidelity and service, of contemplative silence and bearing of the cross, of joy and hope".

Whilst entrusting your meeting to our Lady of Luján so that each one of you and each CA Association be a credible and convincing protagonist of the New Evangelisation and a sign of hope to the peoples of the American continent, the Holy Father imparts to you all his Apostolic blessing.

With warmest regards in the Lord,

Cardinal Angelo Sodano
Secretary of State

From the Vatican, 26th April 2007

Address of the participants to the Holy Father

Holy Father,

the participants to the V American Meeting of Catholic Action in Buenos Aires - coming from Paraguay, Costa Rica, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Venezuela, Argentina, Nicaragua, Spain, Rumania and Italy - would like to express to Your Holiness their heartfelt thanks for Your Message. We confirm our pledge of fidelity to Jesus, "Way, Truth and Life", as Christ's lay disciples and missionaries in the various human realities which call us to assume the challenge of an urgent and renewed evangelisation capable to answer the worries of men and women of our time.

We wish to be prophets of hope, to announce the Risen Christ, by being signs of communion in the various communities where we live. We wish to build a society rooted in the Gospel values, in order to contribute to the Common Good in our countries. We wish to intensify our efforts to be a leaven of unity of the great human family.

We recognize the grace of the gift that we were given, that of being of service to the Church and to the world through CA's charism. This Meeting renews our responsibility to make it bear fruits to build the Church in America, which is moving towards the V CELAM Conference.

At the Virgin of Luján's feet, we join in prayer asking the Lord to give You strength in the ministry He entrusted to You.

Report

The V American Continental Meeting took place in Victoria, in Buenos Aires Province, on the occasion of ACA's XXV Federal Assembly and of the 75th anniversary of its constitution, under the theme proposed by Pope Benedict XVI to the V Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate: "Christ's disciples and missionaries, so that our peoples may have life in Him".

From 1st to 4th May, Mons. Aguirre's house of exercises in San Isidro's diocese, received the CA delegations of the American Continent. After attending ACA's Federal Assembly from 29th April to 1st May, they met with the aim to reflect upon the real situation in America and upon their participation in the

journey towards the V Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate, which is going to be held in Brazil during May 2007.

More than 50 representatives

The leaders and Assistants from Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Argentina, attended the Continental Meeting organised every three years by the International Forum of Catholic Action (IFCA) with the aim to analyse the great problems of the continent and to look at them through the eyes of faith, searching a perspective in order to understand where Christianity in our land is going and which should be CA's answer to today's Church. An answer that should be embodied in the actual reality of our peoples, with a special attention to the youths' context and to their life and world.

Also IFCA Secretariat's members participated in it. IFCA Secretariat has its seat in Rome and is composed of representatives from Argentina, Burundi, Spain, Italy, Rumania and by ICA Ecclesiastical Assistant Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi. It was also attended by Beatriz Buzzetti Thomson, former IFCA Coordinator and ACA President.

The meeting opened with a welcome by Alejandro Madero and Mons. Luis Collazuol, respectively ACA President and General Assistant, and by Maria Grazia Tibaldi, IFCA Secretary, who read the message sent by Paola Bignardi, present IFCA Coordinator.

The Holy Father's Message and Blessing

The participants received with great joy the Holy Father's message and blessing that Mons. Lambiasi read. In a passage the Pope says:

The Church today needs a Catholic Action which is committed to making the world smell "the good fragrance of Christ" (2Co 2:15). Yes, we have an urgent need of Christian lay people who "keep their gaze fixed on Jesus" (Heb 12:2) and translate the words, which they have learnt by listening to His heart, in their daily lives. The Church today needs lay faithful who, associated together, contribute towards the "spirituality of unity" in the different parish and diocesan communities. In this way, they show all people how beautiful it is to look upon the Church as ones own family, thus building that communion, which, as irreplaceable leaven contributes to the unity of the great human family.

The Church relies on the generous, gratuitous and competent presence of Catholic Action so that the Gospel may reach the utmost parts of the earth and may be the leaven among the members of every community and in every culture.

The V General Conference of the Latin-American and Caribbean Episcopate

The second day was opened by the lecture "Towards the V CELAM Conference" held by Msgr. Andrés Stavnovnik, OFM, Bishop of Reconquista and CELAM General Secretary. He said: "The life of our peoples, in majority baptized, is menaced by numerous dangers of death. Our peoples however do not wish to go to the shadow of death. They continue choosing life, show their thirst of God and wish to be happy. It is very important to search and identify the causes of this contradiction.

As Christians, "we wish to take a further step to encounter the living Christ. At the beginning of the third millennium our individual, familiar, pastoral, communitarian and social life has to face a lot of challenges. We wish to go down deep within ourselves and then we will become able to face them and answer them after having encountered the Lord" (DPA, Presentation).

Dr Josefina Semillán de Dartiguelongue, in her lecture "America today: opportunities and risks of today's phase of change", analysed the cultural epoch-making changes that are occurring at structural level. She described the real situation of our continent which, though dramatic, at the same time presents opportunities for a positive change. Rev. Jorge Oestetheld, spokesman of Argentina Episcopal Conference, dealt with the theme "The future of Christianity in America. How to evangelize today: premises and challenges". He urged us to revert to what is essential, "packing into our rucksack" - as for a hard ascent to the mountain - the values of Christianity with a simple heart, which distinguishes those who get close to the others as did Jesus himself.

Catholic Action's answer

"A Catholic Action to be of service to today's America" was the theme of the panel discussion held with the participation of CA presidents of Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina, moderated by the General Secretary of the Federation of CA Movements of Spain. She went over the interesting experien-

ces of service that the Association is carrying on. She then chaired the workshops where the participants shared their own real situations and analysed the contribution that CA can offer to America today.

IFCA Coordinator in America and ACA Vice-president, Emilio Inzaurraga, presented IFCA's service in America, its goals for the triennium, the Secretariat's projects and the promotion of CA that was achieved in the region.

Rev. Fabián Esparafita bore witness to CA's promotion in Central America through his own experience.

Workshops

On Wednesday evening workshops were held upon specific themes, namely:

- Youths
- Formation
- Family
- Children and Teenagers
- Human Promotion
- Promotion of CA.

At the same time a meeting of the ecclesiastical Assistants took place.

Pilgrimage to Jerusalem

Also the Pilgrimage to Jerusalem of the CA youths from all over the world - beginning 2008 - was presented. Oana Tuduce (Romania) and Maria Grazia Tibaldi (IFCA Secretariat in Rome) are charged with preparing it.

The Memory of the martyrs, saints and blessed of America's CA, prepared by Mexico CA, was a special moment for prayer and reflection.

Together to the Basilica of Our Lady of Luján

On Thursday 4th, after the conclusions and the final address of IFCA Secretariat's members, the Assistants went to the Basilica of Luján where they celebrated the Eucharist presided over by Msgr. Lambiasi. Near the tomb of

God's Servant Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, they addressed a prayer of thanksgiving and of entreaty to the Lord.

At the Virgin of Luján's feet, the participants signed an address to the Holy Father to thank Him for His message, saying:

We confirm our pledge of fidelity to Jesus, "Way, Truth and Life", as Christ's lay disciples and missionaries in the various human realities which call us to assume the challenge of an urgent and renewed evangelisation capable to answer the worries of men and women of our time.

We wish to be prophets of hope, to announce the Risen Christ, by being signs of communion in the various communities where we live. We wish to build a society rooted in the Gospel values, in order to contribute to the Common Good in our countries. We wish to intensify our efforts to be a leaven of unity of the great human family.

We recognize the grace of the gift we were given, that of being of service to the Church and to the world by CA's charism. This Meeting renews our responsibility to make it bear fruits to build the Church in America which is moving towards V CELAM Conference.

Soon after lunch and a tour in the city of Buenos Aires the participants visited ACA's national seat.

IFCA Africa

III African Continental Meeting

Uganda - Lugazi, 5-9 August 2006

*The future of Christianity in Africa and in the world.
Catholic Action in Africa, launch out into the deep,
look to the future with courage!*

Message from the Holy Father

To His most Reverend Excellency
Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi
IFCA Ecclesiastic Assistant

Most Reverend Excellency,

on the occasion of the III African Continental Meeting of the International Forum of Catholic Action, that will be held in Lugazi, Uganda, I am glad to send to all the promoters and participants the blessing greeting of His Holiness Benedict XVI. The Holy Father wishes to express His approval for the good initiative and the interesting theme of the Congress: *"The future of Christianity in Africa and in the world."* As main biblical reference you have appropriately chosen the same word of the Lord assumed by *Lineamenta* for the II Special Assembly of the Bishop Synod for Africa: *"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world"* (Mt 5,13-14). So this meeting is wisely on the path of the Church in the African continent, being a meaningful moment towards the important synodal meeting.

The climax of the Congress will be the Eucharistic Celebration in the Ugandan Sanctuary of the Martyrs at Namugongo. To celebrate Saint Charles Lwanga and his saints Companions means to confirm the choice to walk on the footpaths of these Christian lay people - youth and adolescents - who witnessed their faith till the bloodshed for the Gospel. For them Jesus Christ was not the symbol of a vague abstract value, nor simply a great character of the

past, but a Person alive and concrete, an absolutely singular Person, who makes each baptised state together with the apostle Paul: "He loved me and He offered Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). To believe means, in fact, to belong to the Lord, be conquered by His love, commit ourselves to be with Him and for Him, light and salt of the Earth, yeast of the society. This is how lay Christians can offer their specific contribution to build the society of love.

In a special way the members of Catholic Action know how they are committed to put into practice the triple mandate - contemplation, communion, and mission - that the venerable Pope John Paul II entrusted them, on the occasion of the great pilgrimage to Loreto, on September 5th 2004. Since this message was addressed to the whole Association, it represents a sort of "spiritual testament" for the members of Catholic Action. On the same line, the Holy Father Benedict XVI encourages to show by a life of faith and of praise to God that "all Christians are called to the mystical union" with Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2014) to cultivate "a spirituality of communion" living humbly and grateful in the Holy Church, in syntony with the Pastors and with all the people of God, to witness the beauty of a living faith, that transforms the daily life and offers itself in an attractive way to all those who demand the reason of hope, that lives in us believers (cfr *1Pt* 3:15).

To all those who will take part to this meeting, the Holy Father reminds the programme that the Servant of God, Paul VI, indicated during His memorable apostolic visit in Uganda, in the Sanctuary of Namugongo, when he said: "First of all, have a great love for Jesus Christ, try to know Him better, remain united to Him, have a great faith and a firm trust in Him. Second, be faithful to the Church, pray with it, love it, make it know, and be always be ready as the martyrs did, to offer a sincere testimony in its favour. Third, be strong and brave, be glad, be always happy and joyful." (cfr *Insegnamenti* by Paolo VI, VII [1969] 589).

Assuring His prayers so that Catholic Action may grow and spread in the Ecclesial communities of Africa, also thanks to this III African Continental Meeting, the Holy Father gives your Excellency and all the participants His special Apostolic Blessing. I also send you my warm wish for a fruitful work and I take the opportunity of this circumstance to confirm myself,

Your most devoted in the Lord,

Angelo Card. Sodano

Secretary of State

From the Vatican, 31st July 2006

Address of the participants to the Holy Father

Holy Father,

Gathered in Mukono, in Lugazi Diocese, from 5th to 9th August 2006, the representatives of Catholic Action from Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Rumania, Italy as well as many dioceses from Uganda together, with their Bishops, express their deep and filial gratitude for the message received on the occasion of the III IFCA African Continental Meeting.

Your words, Holiness, are encouraging for us for the future of CA in Africa. They are a demanding invitation to live as a whole our vocation as lay people both in Africa and in the world in order to assume our responsibilities in the Church "family of God" as well as in the society in our countries, to contribute to the preparation of the II Special Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops for Africa.

We have deepened the theme of the future of Christianity in Africa enlightened by the word of God which will be the theme of the next Synodal Assembly "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world". We have examined the text of the Lineamenta which stresses the importance of the vocation of laity and their formation - starting from inside the family - for a coherent and brave witness of faith, at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace in our countries and in the whole continent.

We assure You our commitment at the school of Aquila and Prisca and of so many lay people who in the history of the Church as well as today cooperate closely with the apostles and their successors and are witnesses of God's charity till the gift of their life.

The example of St. Charles Lwanga and his companions lay martyrs is extremely relevant for the laity of CA in Africa and in the world. Together with the Nuncio, the Bishops and the people of God, we have prayed for Your Holiness and for all the Church during the Eucharistic Celebration at Namugongo Sanctuary.

We express our affection and faithfulness, we implore Your blessing upon our CA associations, our families and the whole African continent.

8th August 2006

Final Document

From 5th to 9th August 2006 the III African Continental Meeting - promoted by IFCA Secretariat - was held in Uganda in the diocese of Lugazi.

There were delegations of CA associations and movements from Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Rumania and Italy as well as from the different dioceses of Uganda. They were welcomed by H.E. Msgr. Matthias Ssekamanya, Bishop of Lugazi and President of Uganda Episcopal Conference and by H.E. Msgr. Christofer Kakooze, President of the Commission for the Lay Apostolate.

The theme of the meeting was: "The future of Christianity in Africa and in the world. *Catholic Action in Africa, launch out into the deep, look to the future with courage!*". The Gospel reference "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world" was taken from the theme of the Second Special Synod of the Bishops for Africa.

The participants, bishops, priests, laypeople belonging to CA and to other associations and movements, deepened the theme of the *Lineamenta*, recently proposed to the African Church in preparation to the III Assembly. They paid a special attention to the call to be fully aware of the laypeople's vocation: they are called through Baptism to become co-responsible in the Church to be witnesses for Christ in the world, to assume the glorious duty to evangelize their own continent "at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace".

The highest moment of the meeting was the Eucharistic con-celebration at Numugongo Shrine in the Solemnity of the Transfiguration, presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio H.E. Msgr. Christophe Pierre. The examples of Charles Lwanga and his lay companions, who witnessed their faithfulness to Christ through bloodshed, is extremely relevant and remains a shining example for the laypeople of the III Millennium both in Africa and in the world.

At the opening of the meeting as well as at Namugongo, H.E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi, IFCA Ecclesiastical Assistant and ICA General Assistant, read the encouraging message addressed by the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the participants and to the whole CA in Africa through Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State.

The Council documents, especially *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Christifideles Laici* and the *Lineamenta*, were the thread running through the moments of reflection, confrontation and dialogue. There emerged the urgency of well pre-

pared lay people, qualified according to the Social Doctrine of the Church, as well as the following priorities: basic formation in the parishes, in the small communities, at diocesan level; promotion of peace, reconciliation and solidarity at national and international level; formation of leaders in socio-political and economic spheres; building the Church as a family and working with Christian families, rediscovering the laypeople's mission, educating according to the Christian values and caring for the Catechesis, involving youths.

The presentation of the associative contexts both of the African and the European countries and of the ecclesiastical regions of Uganda was very interesting. It was followed by the presentation of CA vocation with a special reference to both the Council teaching - the "four notes" of AA 20 - and the postconciliar teaching *Christifideles Laici* n. 30 and 31, up to the "three duties" entrusted by John Paul II to the CA of the III Millennium in Loreto in 2004: contemplation, communion and mission.

From the reflection upon the "four notes": ecclesiality, lay status, organicity and cooperation with the Hierarchy - which should be known and developed - raised the urgency for CA to continue, qualify, spread the laypeople's formation, as recalled also in the *Lineamenta* (cfr n. 66): an overall formation which should make the most of the Social Teaching of the Church, nourished by the prayer and which should become pedagogy of holiness for the laypeople in their ordinary daily life; a formation for children, youth, adults, families, school, through the preparation of contents, methods, instruments, proposals.

In today's context of a multiplicity of associations and new movements, the validity of an association such as CA, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, was confirmed, with full respect for all the other lay associations.

A CA which is "one" in its common characteristics and "diverse" in its need to be inculturated and organized in forms which are more appropriate for the different realities. This can foster the "spirituality of communion" in cooperation with the Pastors and at the service of unity and "to witness the beauty of a living faith that transforms the daily life and offers itself in an attractive way to all those who demand the reason of hope that lives in us believers" (from the Holy Father's Message).

A privileged way to walk along together was picked out: the twinnings, the exchanges among "sister CA" at the service of "sister Churches", in order to

make diocesan laypeople grow, with a special attention to the youths: mature and co-responsible laypeople, with wide horizons open to solidarity.

At the end of the meeting the participants thanked the Holy Father, assuring him of their commitment, affection and faithfulness, at the school of Aquila and Prisca, of St Charles Lwanga and his companions, of so many laypeople who have lived fully their own vocation in cooperation with the apostles in the history of the Church as well as today.

"The Gospel cannot be deeply imprinted on the talents, life, and work of any people without the active presence of lay men" (Ad Gentes, No. 27).

The development of zealous lay people, therefore, especially of the laity of Catholic Action, must be the constant concern of priests and religious, in close collaboration with the Hierarchy. Here, Africa can find and demonstrate new and original forms of lay organization and lay expression.

At the same time, Africa must not neglect the centuries-old experience of many well established movements in other parts of the world. And, in the ranks of those movements, the African voice must be heard, and listened to with respect.

The Martyrs of Uganda were laymen, who did not hesitate to shed their blood for the Faith. To the lay men and women of today, they make a most compelling appeal, to follow in their footsteps through every-day tasks, striving for that holiness of life which brings a rich harvest of souls.

Address of Paul VI to the members of Catholic Action
and other Catholic Associations of Uganda

Journey to Uganda - Friday, 1st August 1969

IFCA Europe

IV Continental European-Mediterranean Meeting

Spain, Madrid, 1-4 March 2007

Where is Europe going?

Christians the wealth and hope of the future

Telegram from the Holy Father

On the occasion of the European Mediterranean Continental Meeting, organized by IFCA in Madrid on the theme: "Where is Europe going? Christians the wealth and hope of the future", the Supreme Pontiff sends His heartfelt greetings to the organizers, speakers and participants and shows His appreciation for this meaningful manifestation aimed at reflecting on Europe's common roots.

His Holiness hopes that this Symposium will help to promote constructive discussions about the fundamental relations between Christian faith and unity in the European continent.

He reaffirms the importance of the spiritual values which have moulded European art and culture and have incessantly helped in promoting solidarity and respect towards human dignity.

With these wishes, the Holy Father implores abundant heavenly blessings for the success of this assembly and imparts His apostolic blessing.

Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone
Secretary of State

From the Vatican 27th February 2006

Christian citizens for tomorrow's Europe

1. *The cultural and spiritual identity of the "old continent"*

1. Christians look at Europe's future with hope because of their faith in Jesus Christ, the only true source of peace.

"World peace cannot be safeguarded without creative efforts which match the perils which threaten it. The contribution which an organized and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable for the maintenance of peaceful relations". The words pronounced by Robert Schuman in the famous Declaration of the 9th May 1950, which within a year brought about the launching of the European Coal and Steel Community and later on the setting up of the European Economic Community (1957), are still very relevant today. Half a century has passed; we have seen the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the "cold war" and the completion of the process of decolonization. The words of the then French Foreign Minister still call on Europe to stick to its primary and true vocation: "to be an agent of peace", within its frontiers and on the world's chess-board.

2. The current period in historic is different from that which followed the Second World War. Yet, everyday we come across new threats to peace and to the possibility of nations being able to live together. It is enough to think of the current conflicts, of international terrorism, of the political instability in different parts of the world, of hunger, disease, ignorance and of the great socio-economic differences which prevail in so many parts of the world.

The concept of "unity in diversity" and of a Europe which strives for peace has not been clearly understood. Even today, the European Union Institutions come across many obstacles to function efficiently. The second time "no" to the Constitution by the French and Dutch electorate has raised an alarm. It indicates that the EU is still very far from its citizens and from their real aspirations. Today's Europe seems to be lacking a "vision" and runs the risk of distancing itself from the vision of solidarity envisaged by its "founding

fathers". Europe is at the mercy of a reinforced spirit of nationalism from within and is affected by the great challenges imposed on it by the economic, demographic, political and military globalization process from outside.

This communitarian Europe needs a new impetus which should stem from individual efforts. Individuals need to know themselves and to see their own identity in relation to that of others so as to build an authentic community.

It is not arbitrary that the Church has, on repeated occasions, reaffirmed its trust in the process of political integration, at the same time, pointing out the difficulties and limitations of this process.

3. The words of the late Pope John Paul II, addressed to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, on the 10th January 2005, are an example. "Certainly, an outstanding example of the possibility of peace can be seen in Europe: nations which were once fierce enemies locked in deadly wars are now members of the European Union, which, during the past year aimed at further consolidation through the constitutional Treaty of Rome, while at the same time showing an openness to admitting other States willing to accept the requisites for membership". This is a peace which, if one reads between the lines, requires the building of a mature democracy (a reference to the Constitution) and of a "common house" open to new members who share the great values and the same communitarian goals.

Numerous interventions (documents, speeches, exhortations, homilies ...) by John Paul II develop the "Europeistic" concept which could already be found in the teachings of Paul VI. The Polish Pope called two synods of European Bishops, one just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the other on the eve of the new millennium. He was interested in bringing down the "walls" which divided Europe so that East and West, "the two lungs", according to his famous expression- without which Europe cannot even breath", may be united.

Wojtyla travelled far and wide within this continent. During his many journeys, he advocated understanding, dialogue and reciprocal pardon as well as the protection of life, the defence of human rights and of fundamental freedom. He encouraged intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. He also identified some "patrons", like Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, St. Catherine of Siena, Edith Stein and Bridget of Sweden. All of these shared a common spiritual and cultural identity which was rooted in past centuries and was the foundation of the Europe of the future. It is the concept of a

Europe united within itself and open to the world, committed to work for peace and in full solidarity with the poorest countries in the world.

II. Christians as protagonists. The teachings of the Church

4. Within this framework, one can understand the sad and repeated appeals for the mention of the Continent's "Christian roots" in the EU Constitution's preamble. "Europe, at the beginning of the third millennium, 'Open the doors to Christ! Be yourself. Rediscover your origins. Relive your roots.' "Down the centuries", John Paul II writes in *Ecclesia in Europa* n. 120, "You have received the gift of Christian faith. It has founded your life as a society on principles drawn from the Gospel. Traces of these may be found in the art, literature, thought and culture of your nations. But this heritage does not belong just to the past; it is a project in the making, to be passed on to future generations".

We too would like to put forward our request once more to have this Christian heritage recognised. Together with other traditions, this heritage has moulded the spiritual, social, cultural and religious face of Europe. Besides the recognition of Europe's Christian heritage, we would also like to have our religious values and symbols respected and our freedom to worship and to give witness of our faith in public guaranteed.

Christians are called upon to be active agents in this project which aims at rebuilding Europe spiritually, culturally, politically and socially. It calls for "the engagement of believing communities to commit themselves to work for the humanization of society by putting the Gospel in practice and presenting it as a sign of hope". "Properly trained and competent Christians are needed in the various European agencies and institutions, so that, while respecting the correct dynamics of democracy and with their proposals, they may be able to contribute towards the building of a European social order which respects every man and woman, and which aims at the common good" (*Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 117).

5. Benedict XVI's frequent reminders aim in the same direction. He has already spoken about Europe in quite a number of his interventions. Even European ecclesial organisms, in *primis* CCEE (European Episcopal Conference Council) as well as the COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community) have spoken about this.

Benedict XVI affirmed this when he said "Neither a more or less effective economic union nor a bureaucratic body of norms that regulate coexistence can ever fully satisfy people's expectations for Europe. Rather, the tap-roots of a solid European "reciprocity", exempt from crises, are embedded in the convictions and common values of the Continent's Christian history and humanist historical tradition. Without authentic common community values it is impossible to build any reliable community of rights, which instead is what people expect. (*Address to the Ambassador of Austria to the Holy See*, 18th September 2006).

A document which deserves special mention when we speak about Christians as builders of tomorrow's Europe is the COMECE document entitled "The future of the European Union and Catholics' responsibility". On the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, in order to show that they are conscious of the fact that "the European Union needs to be built on firm community of values" (*Common values - the living source of the European project*, 1), the COMECE Bishops are organizing a Congress with the theme, "Values and perspectives for Europe's future" (Rome, 23-25th March 2007). Other Catholic Movements and Associations, including our representatives, will attend this meeting. We are all asked to accompany the participants with our prayers.

Another appeal has been launched by the "Christians Initiatives for Europe" Group. This says: "We affirm that European construction remains founded on a broader project which creates meaning and which is always of the same topic: reconciliation between people to build a space of peace, justice, prosperity and solidarity, a space open and in the service of the world." (*Let us rediscover the meaning of the European project*).

III. New evangelisation: areas of involvement

6. If these are the situations (not only in the European Union but in the whole of Europe) then Christians should try to be true and effective witnesses. With renewed and courageous commitment they are expected to involve themselves in the "new evangelisation" process. Besides using modern means to re-announce the Gospel, in certain cases, they have to announce the Gospel to those who never had the Gospel announced to them. In a spirit of reconciliation and dialogue, they should be Christian witnesses to men of good will.

In view of this, on the occasion of the IV IFCA European Mediterranean Meeting, we have identified some specific areas wherein we can involve ourselves:

- a) *commitment in cultural spheres.* Today more than ever we need to have "a faith which is friendly towards intelligence" (Benedict XVI) and which can dialogue with culture and cultures, through free and calm discussions, and which can be an "authentic contamination" among traditions, customs, knowledge and languages. As Christians, we should go on proposing that undeniable patrimony of the European tradition, which promotes a pro-life culture, renounces racism and all forms of slavery, is against the abuse of minors, of the elderly and of illegal immigrants. We should also promote a culture of the family founded on matrimony as "the sanctuary of life". John Paul II appealed to Christian families in Europe saying: "Families, be what you are". In collaboration with other realities and humanitarian associations, we also commit ourselves to promote a culture of solidarity aimed at supporting the poor, the weak, the sick, the disabled and the suffering. Thus, the Christian faith can continue to be "salt and leaven" in everyday life. This will help Europe understand that our Christian heritage is inscribed in its originating "DNA" and is a fundamental part of its present identity.
- b) *Commitment in formative spheres.* This is a must if we want to make citizens aware of the need for a Europe which is politically, socially and culturally united and which is inspired by common values which are based on the fundamental principles of human dignity and the common good and which is ready to undertake projects which aspire high. New ways can only be opened if Europe succeeds to be a workshop of active citizenship and if it has convinced people who can work towards human dignity, freedom, solidarity, democracy and equality among its people. Europe has to find new ways as to how it can face the pressing demographic problems among which are the progressive aging of its population and immigration. Other challenges include: the promotion of freedom and social justice; bridging the gap between North and South, East and West of the planet; sustaining dialogue between civilizations and between the great religions and helping concretely poor Countries to develop.
- c) *Commitment in ecumenical and inter-religious spheres.* "The most important task of the Churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the

Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all" (*Charta Oecumenica*, 2). Christians should look forward towards the experience of the ecumenical assembly which is meeting in Sibiu, 4-7 September 2007. They should open their hearts up to the rich experiences which always result from ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue; a dialogue which gives all the children of Abraham the opportunity to meet. This aspect has lately assumed a special importance with the entry within the EU of Rumania and Bulgaria, two countries with an orthodox majority. Divisions among Christians seem even more heart-breaking at a time, when, even if amidst thousands of difficulties, Europe is working for unity in economic and political spheres. Thus, in this globalized era, when peoples and civilizations are facing constant confrontation, religions should make people understand that it is possible to proceed through life together, respecting each other, listening to one another and showing compassion for one another. It is this, which will eventually, bring about understanding and hope for the future. We should be continually discerning and listening to the Word of God: "Church in Europe, enter the new millennium with the Book of the Gospel... May the Holy Bible continue to be a treasure for the Church and for every Christian: in the attentive study of the Word, we find nutrition and strength to carry out our mission day by day" (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 65).

All Catholic Action Associations, reunited in IFCA, thank the Lord for the gift of this meeting and for having, once again, deigned to work His wonders amongst them. They commit themselves to put these proposals into practice in their respective situations.

3rd March 2007

IFCA and ICO

To Maria Eugenia Diaz de Pfennich

WUCWO President

Wucwo World Assembly, Washington DC (USA)

Dear Maria Eugenia,

in the name of IFCA Secretariat, we would like to send our best wishes to all the participants of the International Assembly which is being held in Washington.

The theme chosen: "*Women builders of peace: united in faith and in action*" is a theme which expresses the great and demanding responsibility which lay Christians and lay Christians women have in society and in the Church of the third millennium, in the diverse realities wherein they live and work.

Peace is a gift from God which we are to treasure and share with others. Peace is a commitment which we should accept and maintain through prayer and competence notwithstanding all the difficulties we come across. It is everyone's duty to spread peace through dialogue so as to build a civilization of justice and love.

Associations are important to society and to the Church in as far as they educate and prepare their members to be responsible, open to others and believers in the importance of spreading a culture of peace. These qualities should be reflected in their witnessing as Christians and in all their undertakings.

In many countries, lay women, men, youths, children and Catholic Action members take their formation and commitment, at local and universal level, very seriously. It would be very beneficial if our organizations, WUCWO and IFCA, had to think of opportunities when they could be united in faith and action. They could also share their common beliefs and objectives and plan projects together. This could be started in countries where both WUCWO and IFCA are established!

One of the unavoidable prospects of Christianity for the future is unity in Christ: unity in faith and action. This will lead the world to believe and make of believers, women believers, the haven of peace in society.

Today we commemorate Mary's visitation to Elizabeth in Ain Karem. Let us join her in the singing of the *Magnificat* together with the poor and humble in the Holy Land, in the USA, where you are holding your Assembly, and wherever humanity is suffering and hoping. Let us sing the *Magnificat* with her as we move together towards justice and peace. May your work bear fruit!

Buon lavoro!

Paola Bignardi

Coordinator of IFCA Secretariat

Maria Grazia Tibaldi

IFCA Secretariat in Rome

Maria Eugenia concluded her service as WUCWO leader. During the Assembly a new President was elected, namely Karen Huxley from the United States.

**To Alejandro Madero
ICCM President**

ICCM General Assembly, Takoradi (Ghana)

Dear Alejandro,

in the name of IFCA Secretariat would like to send you our best wishes for the work of the General Assembly with a special greeting to all the participants.

The theme "*Catholic men's responsibility towards poverty, development and peace*" is a global theme you chose to discuss in Africa, in a continent which, more than any other, endures the contradictions arising from the relationship between poverty, development and peace. It is also the continent where the universal and the local Church is called to have courage to make fraternal and solid choices, prophetic choices so that she may look at the future with hope.

We thank you for this choice. IFCA is ready to cooperate, as far as one can, in the formation of Christian lay men and women, adult and young, called to live fully their lay vocation in society and in the Church of the third millennium, in the diverse contexts where they live and work.

The *Lineamenta* of the II special Assembly of the African Bishops' Synod underline the urgency of an active and aware participation of the Christian laypeople so that the Church in Africa may be of service to reconciliation, justice and peace. The Gospel reference "*you are the salt of the world, you are the light of the world*" is particularly exacting for the laypeople's vocation and mission in the world.

IFCA is working in Africa as well as in the other continents, to the promotion of Catholic Action, either under this or another name, as the Vatican Council II described it in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 20, in *Christifideles Laici* 31 and in the recent Pontifical Magisterium

It is a proposal to walk and grow together in the local Churches favouring the formation and education of the Christian laypeople so that they can be witnesses to the Gospel, citizens committed to development, to a culture of peace together with all men and women of goodwill, of different religions and cultures, capable of making a contribution of the human and Christian values in their daily life from family to politics in all the spheres of life.

For the future of Christianity in Africa and in the world, the unity in Christ and in the Church becomes a strong call for a joint action so that the world may believe and the believers may be builders of development and peace, builders of bridges, able to defeat poverty along the paths of inculturation, dialogue, subsidiarity, in the light of the Social Teaching of the Church.

We hope that we, IFCA and ICCM, we may both cooperate in rediscovering and updating our common roots in order to achieve projects together starting, for example, from those countries where both ICCM and IFCA are present.

Kind regards and best wishes for a successful work, from Africa to the world!

Paola Bignardi
IFCA Secretariat Coordinator

Maria Grazia Tibaldi
IFCA Segretariat in Rome

Alejandro Madero was confirmed ICCM President for a second triennium.

Life of the Secretariat

Meeting of the Secretariat and CA Promotion Group 2006

IFCA Secretariat and the CA Promotion Group met in Rome from the 9th to the 13th September. The Secretariat consists of the national representatives of five countries (Argentina, Burundi, Italia, Rumania and Spain) together with the Coordinator Paola Bignardi and the Ecclesiastical Assistant, Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi. Some other CA leaders and priest assistants from these same countries, participate in CA Promotion Group together with the Secretariat (about 25 people). Representatives from Venezuela and Malta were also asked to join this group.

The 2006 session of the CA Promotion Group is the second one after that held in September 2005 wherein the members reflected upon the future of Christianity, young people's contribution and the promotion of diocesan lay apostolate and of CA. During this session the Continental American Meeting (May 2006), the Continental African Meeting (August 2006), the Continental European Meeting (March 2007) and the V IFCA Assembly in the spring of 2008 were also discussed.

On one hand, the participants studied in depth various themes related to the manifold dimensions of the Christian lay vocation. Luigi Alici, ICA National President, held the opening lecture, followed by Msgr. Erio Castellucci who spoke about the local Church, the universal Church and the lay associations and CA. Mario Gnocchi, President of SAE (Secretariat of Ecumenical Activities), spoke about the ecumenical challenges and Sr Maria Ko, a Bible scholar, about dialogue with cultures and religions. Alberto Monticone dealt with the subject "living as lay Christians according to the Spirit".

On the other hand, they discussed the promotion of CA and reports were made about the work done in 2005-2006 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central America and Kenya. They also viewed a power-point presenting CA in the conciliar and post-conciliar documents (*Christifideles laici*) as a vocation, with its own particular method for forming laypeople. This material is fit to be used in

different contexts and can help to promote laypeople's apostolate, in particular CA.

During their stay in Rome, on Sunday 10th September, the participants paid a visit to the Trappa di Vitorchiano where Blessed Gabriella dell'Unità, who was CA member of the Feminine Youth Section and later a trappist nun, is venerated. After the Eucharistic Celebration, presided over by H.E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi, they met the nuns. Later on that same day, they went to Viterbo. There, they visited the Basilica of Santa Rosa, where Mario Fani is buried, who founded the Italian Catholic Youth and later on the Italian Catholic Action. They were welcome by the Bishop, H.E. Msgr. Lorenzo Chiarinelli and by the nuns of St. Clare.

On Tuesday 12th September, the Eucharist was celebrated in the Vatican Crypts. Here the group joined in prayer with the Holy Father and with the universal Church.

The next meeting will be held in September 2007, hopefully, in Rumania to coincide with the III Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu (5-9 September 2007).

News from the Countries

POLAND

X Anniversary of the Catholic Action in Poland

More than ten thousand people arrived at Jasna Góra on June 17th 2006 to attend the yearly Meeting of Catholic Action. Archbishop Józef Michalik, President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, presided over the Holy Mass. After some celebrations in the open air, Halina Szydelko, President of the CA of Poland, read the act of entrusting of the Catholic Action to the Mother of God in the chapel with the sacred Icon.

The previous day, in the papal hall of the Sanctuary, about 300 delegates met to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the re-birth of CA. Halina Szydelko gave a medal "for the apostolic commitment" to some supporters of the Association: Card. Józef Glemp, President of the Polish Church, H.E. Msgr. Piotr Jarecki, CA's first Ecclesiastic Assistant, H.E. Msgr. Edward Frankowski, the prelate Stefan Schudy, who organised CA's first national meeting, Paola Bignardi, Coordinator of the International Forum of Catholic Action, Krystyna Mochlinska, for many years President of Catholic Action in exile in London, and Jan Stefanek, former President of the Polish Catholic Action.

The Holy Mass preceding the meeting was presided over by Card. Józef Glemp. He highlighted the two main goals of Catholic Action, namely human rights and support to family. During the work-sessions the participants listened to the addresses of H.E. Msgr. Jarecki, who brought to light the necessary conditions for CA to become a hope for the laypeople who work in the Church and of Tomasz Arabski, President of the Catholic Laypeople Council. He spoke about "courage and responsibility", the challenges to the laity in the contemporary world.

Among the participants were the hosts come from Great Britain, Krystyna Mochlinska and Zenon Handzel, President of Catholic Action in London, while the International Forum of Catholic Action was represented by Stefania Striscia and Chiara Finocchietti.

RUMANIA

Constitution of ACRO

In the Rumanian Catholic Church, the Catholic Action is present under different names (AGRU, ASTRU, AC), even since 1928. This tradition was interrupted in the years of communism, but the activity of the associations was resumed in various centres since 1990.

From some experiences of exchanges, started in 1998 between different lay associations as part of the Catholic Church of Rumania, sprang the idea to set up a structure which could unify, at national level, these associations as forms of Catholic Action.

In the first meeting in Cluj-Napoca in January 2005, organizing aspects were discussed.

In Blaj, on 9th April 2005, a protocol to found the Rumanian Federation of Catholic Action was signed by the Catholic Action "Saint Joseph" from the Iasi diocese, the Greek-Catholic Youth Association - ASTRU Blaj, ASTRU Cluj, ASTRU Oradea, and The Greek-Catholic General Association - AGRU.

The National Council of the Federation (Sumuleu-Ciuc, May 2006 and Paltinis, December 2006) defined its structure, Statute and rotation of activities envisaged in the three-year plan.

During the yearly meeting on 14th May 2007 in Oradea the Rumanian Episcopal Conference approved ACRO's Statute, named the first national President Oana Tuduce and the first national Assistant Rev. Felix Roca.

BURUNDI

The WYD Cross in Africa for the first time

The World Youth Day Cross and the Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary arrived in Burundi on 19 October.

They were waited for and welcome by the CA Movements (CAM) of Burundi together with the whole local Church.

The Cross whose arrival was delayed from 9 to 19 October, owing to particular technical problems in transporting it from Congo Brazzaville, in its first stage stopped in all dioceses of Burundi: Bubanza 19 and 20 October, Bujumbura 20 and 21, Bururi 22 and 23, Gitega 24 and 25, Ruyigi 26 and 27, Muyinga 28 and 29, Nogyi 30 and 31.

Afterwards it was taken back to Bubanza and Bujumbura.

In all dioceses the Cross and the Icon were venerated by numberless faithful especially youths who, together with their Pastors, organised processions, Eucharistic celebrations, vigils of prayer, rosary prayers. In some dioceses also the representatives of other Christian confessions or of other religions joined in their prayer. At Muyingi, for instance, even the Anglican Bishop was present together with the Catholic Bishop to welcome the Cross. He spoke and said that the Cross and the Icon are very important signs of salvation for the whole humanity and that all believers are called to participate in this holy prayer.

The civil and military authorities gave their contribution to the success of the Cross pilgrimage. Even the President of the national Assembly participated in the Mass in Bujumbura.

The CAM, in particular the youths, contributed to the pilgrimage in an effective way, firstly in the preparatory phase by organising many meetings to study in depth the themes of peace, reconciliation, meaning of the Cross and Mary's role in the history of Salvation; secondly as the Cross and Icon pilgrimage went on in the various dioceses where they animated the prayers and involved the people.

COLOMBIA

In the first half of November during a visit to Colombia a meeting in Medellin took place with the President Clara Campuzano, the Vice-president Diana Jurado and the national Assistant, all from Medellin.

On this occasion they got also acquainted with those in charge with the diocesan CA as well as with the Assistant.

The CA in Colombia, mainly composed of women, is present in about 15 dioceses. It has started a journey of renewal with young groups in some dioceses, encouraged by the Bishops. It is a member of IFCA.

They are preparing a project of formation for youths, coordinated at continental level by CA of Argentina, in collaboration with CA of Venezuela and also with CA of Spain and Italy for meetings and exchanges.

The last Assembly of the Colombian CA was held in October 2005 under the theme: "We are Church in action" with a special attention to the themes of family, Church, peace.

September 2007

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