

MAGNIFICAT

Cardinal Eduardo F. Pironio
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Presentation

This small collection of texts is a sign of affectionate memory of Cardinal Eduardo F. Pironio, a sign of gratitude for the gift He made to us, through his evangelic witness, his christian wisdom, his fatherly and deep attention to the lay christians, to their own peculiar gift, to the service they are called to for building the Church and for the mission of the Church, the community of those who believe in Lord Jesus.

We selected three texts particularly meaningful: his spiritual testament, his lecture to the Assembly of the Internation Forum of Catholic Action held in Wien in 1994, his prayer to the Virgin of Luján.

The first and the third of these writings highlight his deep spirituality, his attitude of thanksgiving to the Lord, from whom he has all received: the gift of the life, the gift of the "New life in Christ", the gift of the priesthood and of the episcopacy. An attitude of thanksgiving which makes him write: "I feel happy to be martyr, to be pastor, to be father", and again "I thank the Lord for the privilege of His Cross: I feel very happy for having much suffered".

An incarnate spirituality, lived in the logic of selfgiving to the others, in the logic of the grain that, fallen into the earth and dying, bears much fruit, in the logic of acceptance, sharing and service; the perspective is that of a love which opens "to the world of the needy, of those who have no bread, no job, no health, of those who are not free, who have no friends, no love, of those who lost the meaning of life, who have no hope, who lost the Faith, who have got no possibility of dialogue, of those who live in a painful loneliness, of those who never knew that God is love".

Expression of this spirituality are the words of his testament by which he declares that his priestly life "was always characterized by three devotions and presences: the Father, the Most Holy Virgin, the Cross".

The second text is addressed to the Catholic Action: the Gospel the Lord entrusted to the Church is embodied in the ordinary life's conditions, spreads into History through the witness and the service of those lay Associations which work for the Church: among them Cardinal Pironio has "loved Catholic Action much" and has contributed a great deal to put into evidence its identity, its ecclesial nature, its correspondence to the necessities of the Church and the world, today, in the exacting perspective of the new evangelization.

This text, by its richness and its relevance to the present, invites us to search for other writings by Cardinal Pironio, also devoted to Catholic Action, to the laypeople's mission in the Church and the world, to the relationship between Church and world, faith and history: collecting these texts, meditating upon them, deepening them and spreading them will be a way for us, who received from him so much, to express our deep gratitude and to make his teaching and his pastoral service even more fruitful.

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THE JOURNEY OF CATHOLIC ACTION IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIFIDELES LAICIS

*May the God of hope bring you such joy
and peace in your faith
that the power of the Holy Spirit
will remove all bounds to hope
(Rom 15,13)*

These are my first words of welcome and good wishes to all of you who are taking part in this assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action. I wish that the Holy Spirit may transform the depths of our hearts to bring about an abundance of peace, joy and hope. This hope "which does not deceive because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us (*Rom 5,5.*)

In my reflections for the Forum that was held in 1991 I invited you to share in this hope, through the words of Pope John Paul II. "God is preparing a great springtime of Christianity and we can already see its first signs." (*RM 86*) This hope which opens up our hearts towards new horizons, new commitments, new steps forward on the path of evangelization and mission of Catholic Action.

One of the signs of this great springtime is the self-awareness that the church has been gaining through all her members: lay people, priests and religious. The Church as Mystery, as Communion, as Mission; or to use one of my favourite expressions which puts it so precisely, "The Church as a mystery of missionary communion".

The recent Synod on Consecrated Life brought us to the conclusion of a beautiful reflection on 'the circular nature of communion': this reflection began with the Synod on the Laity in 1987 and continued through the Synod on Priestly Formation in 1990 - priests who live, serve and communicate the Mystery - and it ends now with a reflection (contemplative meditation) on this gift of God to his Church which is consecrated life. That includes all the various forms of religious life and secular institutes, monastic life and apostolic life, virgins and hermits and new forms of consecrated life. The Spirit of God is working with might in his Church "in this magnificent and dramatic moment of history on the threshold of the third millennium" (*ChL 3*).

Another sign of this "great spring of Christianity" is the growing number of lay faithful who are taking part in the evangelising mission of the Church. Their profound longing for a deep lay spirituality (hunger for the Word of God - *Lectio divina* - and for the sacraments) their growing commitment to take part in the building up of the Christian community and the construction of a new society.

Among these positive signs of hope we can see especially the impact that the celebrations of World Youth Day has had on young people. These are a key moment of evangelization, a concrete and clear sign of ecclesial communion and a special invitation to personal renewal (which is shown through an increased desire for holiness and in many cases, a decisive moment for the choice of priestly or religious vocations.)

Finally I would like to place among these clear signs of Christian hope a new and deeper awareness of Catholic Action as a privileged form of ecclesial association "in close relationship with the hierarchy" and especially involved in its apostolic mission.

It was not by chance that the Second Vatican Council reminded the Bishops of their duty to promote the different forms of lay apostolate, "and in particular Catholic Action." (CD 17, cf. AA 20) Pope John Paul said the same thing as he accepted proposal 13 of the Synod Fathers: "among the different forms of lay apostolate which have a particular relationship with the hierarchy the Synod Fathers have singled out various movements and associations of Catholic Action" (ChL 31)

It is clear that Catholic Action - with its different methods according to the different countries and cultures where it is present - has deeply influenced the beginnings of lay participation in the mission of the Church and has started up a special form of association that has led to the growth and the maturing of the Christian community.

Without taking anything away from the strength of witness and evangelization of other new ecclesial movements - which "represent a true gift of God both for the new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so called" (RM 72) - we must not forget that "it was in particular the promotion of Catholic Action by Pope Pius XI that opened up a decisive chapter in the development of lay activity in the spheres of religious, social, cultural, political and even economic life. The historical experience and the doctrinal studies of Catholic Action prepared new recruits, opened up new horizons and kindled new flames" (John Paul II 21.9.94).

On the journey of Catholic Action there have been moments of darkness and light, moments of fatigue and loss of direction, fears of being overtaken by changing times and ecclesial standards. I believe that the Spirit has sent us this providential moment for the deepest renewal of our spiritual, doctrinal, apostolic and missionary commitment.

The celebration of this Forum will undoubtedly contribute to this renewal - and I shall return to this point later in my address. This Forum aims to involve other countries in the rich experience of association which has borne so much fruit and is so full of hope. I wish to stress, in the light of *Christifideles Laici*, some of the requirements and hopes on this journey of Catholic Action: formation, communion, audacity and prophecy in the Spirit.

1. Formation for a new evangelization

It has always been said that Catholic Action should be a "school of formation". And experience has shown that this is so. Generations of lay people have been formed in the deepest sense of the word by the school of Catholic Action: profoundly christian families, priestly and religious vocations, committed lay people in the fields of culture, education, economics and politics have emerged from this school. Sometimes however, Catholic Action has been accused of being merely "a school", of being closed in on itself, of forming people with a detached spirituality (lacking a direct relationship with daily life and with the commitments of the real world). It has been accused of being simply a doctrinal structure (an abstract theology, not lacking in depth but in ties to personal, family or community situations.) I think these accusations have often been unfounded, but I think there is an element of truth in them, as there is with regards to the formation provided in seminaries and religious institutes. For this very reason there has been a new emphasis in the last three synods - for lay people, priests and religious - on an integral, fundamental and permanent formation.

Formation for the new evangelization requires:

a: formation for communion.

The Church is essentially a missionary communion. For Catholic Action this means first of all real and effective communion with its pastors; like every experience of communion it is sometimes to be found wanting but it is always a rich and rewarding experience. It means communion with all the diverse members of God is people (priests, religious and lay people). And it means a particular ecclesial sensitivity towards and capacity for communion with the other forms of association: movements, groups and so on.

b: formation for an interior unity between faith and life:

so that the message of Christ can be expressed through witness, through evangelization and the promotion of our fellow human beings, and the service of prophecy and missionary action through contemplative prayer.

c: formation for the construction of mature ecclesial communities (ChL 34): communities of faith confessed through obedience to the Word of God, celebrated through the sacraments and lived in the spirit of charity as the soul of a moral Christian existence (cf *ChL* 33).

d: formation in the social doctrine of the Church: "a more precise knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church is vital.....this doctrine must be present in general catechetical instruction and in specialised gatherings as well as in schools and universities" (*ChL* 60). The social doctrine of the Church is part of moral theology (cf *SR* 5).

e: formation for a personal growth on the journey that leads towards holiness. Let us return to a theme which applies specifically to Catholic Action: to be a "school of spirituality and of holiness". The world today needs saints. Everyday saints (Paul VI).

II. Communion for the new evangelization

Communion is the beginning and the end of the new evangelization. "Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion" (*ChL* 32.) I would say that it is the centre, the heart of the new evangelization for two reasons:

a - because evangelization means the Word and the Eucharist

b - because the Holy Spirit (which is a spirit of love, unity and communion) is "The Protagonist of mission" (*RMV*.) "Church communion is therefore a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit." (*ChL* 20)

I wish to refer now to communion as the beginning and the end of the new evangelization, with particular reference to Catholic Action. " This communion is precisely the mystery of the Church." The Church, as defined by the Second Vatican Council with the words of St. Cyprian is "one people gathered together in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*LG* 4) For this reason the Church is the image and expression of the Trinity (a true icon.) And it is the whole Church - through her essential and indestructible communion - which inherits the evangelizing mission of Jesus. "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation" (*Mk* 16,15; cf. *Mt* 28,18-20.)

It is thus the whole Church - through the mystery of missionary communion - which today receives from the Risen Christ, through Pope Paul VI and John Paul II, her new mandate for evangelization and mission: "You go into my vineyard as well" (Be a Church of communion;) "Go out to the whole world (Be a missionary Church.)

For Catholic Action this call to ecclesial communion and this missionary mandate has a particular significance which I would summarise in this way:

- To live in close communion with the Trinity which dwells in us and with Christ who sends us out - we are the branches and He is the Vine: to intensify our spiritual life through the *Lectio Divina* and the Eucharist; our communion grows and is manifested according to the degree in which we live "in Jesus Christ" and "in the Holy Spirit."

- To live with particular devotion the mystery of the local Churches: you must become part of the Church of Christ as it is being lived out in your dioceses and your parishes, in perfect communion with the universal Church presided over by Peter. I will remind you of the words of St. Paul: "So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are citizens like all the saints and part of God's household. You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on Him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too in Him are being built into a house where God lives in the Spirit (*Ef* 2,19-22). To live through the Church, to listen to the Church and to love the Church in her entirety in her current, concrete situation - the one Church built on the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone.

- To take an active part in the pastoral planning of the dioceses, in full communion with the pastors: this includes preparation, carrying out and evaluating those plans.

- To live an evangelical life in this world - trying to share in the suffering and the hopes of men and women and to interpret through our faith the new signs of the times and to study them together with the pastors. In this way we can bring about a communion of salvation with the world; the one Church of Christ becomes present in the heart of the world. As the theme of this Forum says, "Men and women of the Church in the heart of the world: men and women of the world in the heart of the Church" (cf. *EN 70*). The sphere of their evangelising activity is the vast and complex world of politics, of social life, of economics, as well as the world of culture, of science and the arts."

- To discover and to insert ourselves fully into those new situations where the Church is called to proclaim the Good News with the renewed fervour of the Holy Spirit - the field of social communications, of culture, sport, the world of work and leisure activities - to find ways of being present, to witness and to carry out our evangelising mission.

III. Audacity and prophecy in the Spirit

"The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor (*Mk 4,18*; cf. *.Is 61,1-2*).

I would like to go back to a theme which I have already touched on and which is at the heart of the new evangelization and the heart of Catholic Action: "life in Christ" and "life in the Spirit." The new evangelization requires ardent witnesses and credible prophets. We are living in an era of martyrs, there is a need for audacity and prophecy. I wish to recall briefly some of the requirements of a lay spirituality which pertain specifically to Catholic Action and which are essential to the new evangelization.

a - a contemplative dimension to every apostolic and missionary activity. It is an inner requirement of the Spirit which dwells in us. This Spirit makes us into prophets (in other words the "mouthpiece of the Lord", it is not we who speak but the Spirit who dwells in us and speaks through us) and makes us into witnesses ("you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and then you will be my witnesses," *Acts 1,8*). This contemplative dimension requires:

- continual meditation on the Word of God; *Lectio Divina*;

- contemplative prayer which includes moments of silence and of prayer, of pure experience of God and of discovery of God in nature, in our work, in the poor, in the cross;

- love of the wilderness, of solitude, of retreats. "The Spirit drove him out into the wilderness" (*Mk 1,12*). Today we hunger for silence, for the need to find God in the wilderness, through prayer. Catholic Action has always distinguished itself by its need for and love of Spiritual Exercises.

b - The spirituality of the incarnation, "The Word was made flesh and lived among us" (*Jn 1,14*). Contemplation does not distance us from reality - in fact, the opposite is true - it puts us in touch with reality and gives us a greater capacity to take on the sufferings of our fellow human beings. The contemplative dimension makes us deeply serene, joyful and sincere. It brings us closer to the poor and fills us with the audacity and the prophecy of the Spirit. It helps us to denounce injustice, to combat violence and to proclaim the transforming power of the Beatitudes. In other words, it enables us to assume our commitments with strength and with joy.

c - A daily growth in sacramental life. Born into Christ through our baptism ("created in Jesus Christ", *Ef 2,19*) we grow towards holiness in faithfulness to God in our daily lives "in the image of the Holy One who has called you, and Scripture says, Be holy for I am holy" (*1Pt 1,15*.)

The extraordinary Synod held in 1985 - which helped us to understand so much better the Mystery of the missionary Church of communion - left us with the following recommendation: "The saints have always been a source and the origin of renewal in the most difficult

circumstances throughout the history of the Church. Today we have such a great need for saints that we must continually call unto the Lord" (*Rel FII*, A4, cf. *ChL* 16).

Catholic Action has helped us to discover the inexhaustible wealth of our baptism and of our vocation to holiness. Confirmation has anointed us with the force of the Spirit to be witnesses and prophets - "you shall be my witnesses" (*Acts* 1,8), and the Eucharist assimilates us daily to the bread of life and make us into a communion church (*I Cor* 10,16-17.) The sacrament of reconciliation helps us to rebuild the unity which we have lost and helps us to experience more deeply the communion of God in his Church for the salvation of the world.

This strong sacramental life - which stems from baptism and is centred on the Eucharist - has always been the source of Catholic Action's paschal spirit, of its wealth of apostolic activities and its indestructible communion with the Church.

I wish to stress this point: the strength of Catholic Action has always been found in its union with the hierarchy and its faithfulness to prayer and to sacramental life. We must continually be reborn through our christian baptism and through our active participation in the Eucharist, we must let ourselves be purified by the restoring grace of reconciliation and we must renew each day the active force of our confirmation.

However we must not just stand motionless and wait for God to make us happy, we must go about our daily lives and confront the world's new challenges and changing situations with new fervour from the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and working to build up his kingdom. The great Pope Paul VI, who described Catholic Action as "a school of holiness" and defined its theological position within the structure of the Church as "lay ministry", went on to say that "Catholic Action must discover new passion with which to proclaim the Gospel, the only possible source of salvation for this world which will otherwise fall into desperation" (25.4.1977).

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return with words of hope to this Forum which we have come to celebrate together. The Pontifical Council for the Laity has lent its support and encouragement to the initiative from the very beginning. It has always seen the Forum as a meeting place, a way of sharing gifts and talents, of working together for the promotion of Catholic Action. It does not in any way view it as a kind of international super-structure with powers to influence the local and national associations. Such an idea would go against the true identity of Catholic Action and against its fundamental relationship with the local hierarchy and the pastoral organisation of the local churches.

I wish however to outline some general trends which I believe should guide the work of this Forum, as I am sure you are already aware:

a - that the work of this form of traditional association - which was so strongly recommended by the Second Vatican Council (cf. *AA* 20) and so dear to the hearts of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II - should always remain within the sphere of a Church which is a Mystery of missionary communion: that it should live in and love the communion Church, touch others with its love and bring that love to life.

b - That it should serve as a point of reference, always willing to enter into communion with the other types of association, the movements and groups which God has inspired in recent years. The Forum should always be seen as an image of communion with all the other lay organisations working with the pastors on the various local projects so that we are not just individual lay people but a true organisation of the laity. Today there is an urgent need for an organised structure within the laity - the challenges of today's world prove this and the wealth of the communion Church demands it.

c - That we promote Catholic Action within those countries of central and eastern Europe that are searching for ways of organising their Christian laity, adults and young people. This must be done with humility but also with missionary zeal, with no proselytism but with courage and love. The organization of this Forum here in Vienna is a providential occurrence.

d - That you meet with your Bishops in a spirit of filial respect and obedience. Without them there would be no Catholic Action. You should do the same with your priests, especially the parish priests and seminarians. It is not a question of selling any goods to them but rather of reminding them of your presence and offering with joy and gratitude a real gift of the Lord to His Church which wants to be a missionary communion.

e - Finally - and I believe this to be the most important point - that the Forum is the image of a renewed Catholic Action, faithful to its original tradition but open to the demands of history, deeply filled with the Holy Spirit which is a spirit of communion and prophecy. The world waits for new men and women committed to the demands of daily life but with a deep experience of God, who can clearly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with the prophetic audacity of the Spirit. They must do that in an organic way as an expression of a communion Church, deeply committed to the building up of a fraternal and solid society: committed to the construction of a civilization of truth and love.

Let us pouring everything into the heart of the Virgin Mary, our mother and the mother of the Church, in whose womb "the Word was made flesh and came to live among us" (*Jn* 1,14.) May Mary always accompany and strengthen us with the joyous self-giving of the disciples, with the zeal of the witnesses and with the serene strength of the martyrs.

The journey of Catholic Action reflects the journey of Mary: a journey of faith and service, of contemplative silence, of cross, of joy and hope. It is the fruitful journey of obedience (*Fiat*) and gratitude (*Magnificat*) of giving thanks and of total and generous giving of ourselves.

May Mary always accompany us with the joyous self-giving of the disciples, the zeal of the witnesses and the serene strength of the martyrs.

Card. Eduardo F. Pironio
President Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis

Wien, October 30th 1994

SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen! *Magnificat!*

I was baptised in the name of the Blessed Trinity; I firmly believed in it, by God's mercy; I experience its loving presence in the littleness of my soul (I felt myself inhabited by the Trinity). Now I enter "into the joy of my Master", into direct "face to face" contemplation of the Trinity. Up to now "from afar I have wandered towards the Lord", now "I will see Him as He really is". I am happy. *Magnificat!*

"I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I am leaving the world to go to the Father". Thanks, my Lord and my God, most merciful Father, because you call and await me. Because you embrace me in the joy of your forgiveness.

Do not cry for my departure! "If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father". I ask you only to keep on accompanying me with your affection and your supplication and to pray much for my soul.

Magnificat! I entrust myself to the heart of Mary, my good Mother, the Faithful Virgin, so that she helps me to give thanks to God and to ask forgiveness for my numberless sins.

Magnificat! I give thanks to you, Father, for the gift of life. How beautiful it is to live! You have made us, o Lord, for life. I love it, I offer it, I wait for it. You are my Life, as you have always been my Truth and my Way.

Magnificat! I give thanks to you, Father, for the priceless gift of my Baptism which made me God's child and Trinity's living temple. I regret for not having well fulfilled my baptismal vocation to sanctity.

Magnificat! I thank the Lord for being a priest. I felt extraordinarily happy to be a priest and I would like to communicate this deep joy to the young people of today, as my best testament and legacy. The Lord was good to me. That the souls that received the presence of Jesus through my priestly ministry pray for my eternal rest! I ask forgiveness, with all my heart, for the good I omitted to do as a priest. I am fully aware that there were many sins of omission in my priesthood, for not having been generously what I ought to be before God. Perhaps now, by dying, I will begin to be really useful; if "a wheat grain fallen into the earth...dies, it yields a reach harvest". My priestly life was always characterised by three loves and presences: the Father, Mary most holy and the Cross...

Magnificat! I thank God for my service in the Episcopate. How much God was good to me! I wanted to be "father, brother and friend" of the priests, of the men and women religious and of the whole People of God. I wanted to be a simple presence of "Christ, Hope of Glory". I wanted to be so always, in the different services that God asked of me as Bishop: Auxiliary of La Plata, Apostolic Administrator of Avellaneda, General Secretary of CELAM, Bishop of Mar de la Plata and then, by Paul IV's appointment, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and at last, by benign call of the Pope John Paul II, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

I regret for not having been more useful as Bishop, for having deceived the hopes of many people and the trust of my beloved Fathers, the Popes Paul VI and John Paul II. Yet I accept my poverty with joy. I want to die with an inward poor soul.

I wish to express my thanks to the Holy Father, John Paul II, for having trusted me, last april 1984, the animation of the lay faithful. They are responsible, in an immediate way, for building the "civilization of love". I love them intensely, I embrace them and I bless them; and I thank the Pope for his trust and affection.

Magnificat! I thank God who, through the Holy Father Paul VI, called me to serve the Universal Church in the privileged field of the consecrated life. How I love men and women religious and all the consecrated lay people in the world! How I pray to Mary most holy for them! How joyfully I offer my life today, that they may be faithful! I am Cardinal of the Holy Church. I thank the beloved Holy Father Paul VI for this undeserved appointment.

I give thanks to the Lord for making me understand that the Cardinalate is a vocation to martyrdom, a call to the pastoral service and a deeper form of spiritual fatherhood. I feel so happy to be martyr, to be Pastor, to be Father.

Magnificat! I give thanks to the Lord for the privilege of the cross. I am very happy to have suffered so much. I am only sorry for not having endured it better and for not having always relished my cross in silence. Now at least I would like my cross to begin to shine and bear fruit.

That nobody feels guilty for having made me suffer, because he was a providential instrument of a Father who loved me much. Yes, I ask forgiveness, with all my heart, because I have made so many people suffer!

Magnificat! I give thanks to the Lord because He made me understand Mary's Mystery in Jesus' Mystery and because the Virgin was so much present in my personal life and in my ministry. To Her I owe all. I avow that to Her I owe the fruitfulness of my words. My important dates - of cross and joy - were always marian dates.

Magnificat! I thank the Lord because my ministry has been running almost always, in a privileged way, at the service of the priests and of the seminarists, of the men and women religious and lately of the lay faithful. I ask the priests to whom I did some good during my long ministry, the charity of a Mass for my soul. I thank them all for the gift of their priestly friendship.

I wish the seminarists - all those that God put one day on my journey - a saint and fruitful priestly ministry: may they be souls of prayer, may they relish the cross, may they love the Father and Mary! I ask the beloved men and women religious "my glory and my crown", to live with a deep joy their consecration and their mission. The same I say to the most dear laypeople consecrated in the providential call of the Secular Institutes. I beg everybody to forgive my bad examples and my sins of omission.

Magnificat! I give thanks to God for having been able to spend my poor energies and talents in dedication to the beloved lay people, whose friendship and witness enriched me spiritually. I loved Catholic Action much.

If I did not do more it is because I could not do it. God granted me to work with the lay people starting from the peasant simplicity of Mercedes (Argentina) up to the Pontifical Council for the Laity. *Magnificat!*

I ask forgiveness to God for my numberless sins, to the Church for not having served her more generously, to the souls for not having loved them in a more heroic and concrete way. If I offended anybody, I ask forgiveness: I want to die with a peaceful conscience. And if anybody

thinks to have offended me, I want him to prove the joy of my forgiveness and my fraternal embrace.

I thank everybody for friendship and trust. I thank my beloved parents - whom now I will meet in Heaven - for the faith they transmitted to me. I thank all my brothers and sisters for their spiritual company and their affection, especially my sister Zulema.

I love with my whole heart the Pope John Paul II, I renew him my full availability, I ask his forgiveness for anything I could not do as Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and as President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. God bears witness to my total devotion and good will. I thank him for his delicacy and his goodness in appointing me Cardinal Bishop of the Suburbicarian diocese of Sabina-Poggio Mirteto.

I renew the beloved Servants of Christ Priest, who accompanied me for so many years, all my gratitude, my fatherly affection and my deep veneration for their specific vocation, so providentially in the Church. I love them much, I pray for them and I bless them in Christ and in Mary most holy.

I thank my dear and faithful Secretary, R.F. Fernando Vergez, Christ's Legionary, for his affection and his fidelity, for his company always so close and efficient, for his collaboration, his patience and goodness.

I beg to celebrate Masses for me and to pray for my soul and for those of so many people whom nobody remembers. In particular I beg to pray for the sanctification of the priests, of the men and women religious and of all the consecrated souls.

I wish to die in peace and serene: forgiven by the mercy of the Father, by the motherly goodness of the Church, by the affection and the comprehension of my brothers. I have no enemy, thank God; I experience neither grudge nor envy for anybody. I beg everyone to forgive me and to pray for me.

I embrace everyone with my whole heart, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I place them all in the heart of Mary, the poor, contemplative and faithful Virgin. Hail Mary! I ask her: "After this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus!".

Cardinal Eduardo F. Pironio
President of Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis

Rome, february 11th 1996

PRAAYER TO THE VIRGIN OF LUJÁN

Virgin of Luján, Mother of the poor and the humble, Mother of those who suffer and hope: You chose this place in the silent immensity of the Argentine pampas, to listen to our prayers, to soothe our hearts and to tell us about your Son "the Saviour of yesterday, of today, of always". This simple place is the spiritual heart of our people.

Today we have come to You, a small group of disciples, apostles and witnesses of Your Son, gathered in these days in the International Forum of Catholic Action. You have always inspired the great undertakings of the Argentine Catholic Action and unforgettable militants and leaders of this providential apostolic association of the Church grew up and matured close to You.

Today we have come from far and from near countries. We are different faces and different cultures with a different language, but we understand each other in the same Word of your Son who says to each of us: "Here is Your mother". Yes, we feel You so, Maria, as our Mother and our Lady. We only ask You to look at us and to listen to us. We have so many things, so many sorrows to tell You, so many graces to ask of You for ourselves, for our countries and local Churches! But we miss time and words. It is enough for us to have come here to look at You and to know that You look at us and change us.

We are young and adult people, men and women, who wish to live the Church in the heart of the world, as Your Son asks of us. Fully committed with the hour and the time we are living. We wish to live with calm, strong and humble fidelity, in close union with our Pastors - Bishops and priests - with our religious and with all the lay faithful, the communion of the missionary Church. We feel ourselves marked with the Holy Spirit and sent again by Your Son to announce all the Peoples the Good News of the Kingdom: the love of the Father. Through the faith we have fathomed the world we live in and through the heart of a Church-communion, we have committed ourselves in a dialogue and in making a journey of salvation. We do feel the challenges of this century which is going to end and the hopes coming from "the new" which is approaching.

Virgin of Luján, Jesus' Mother and our Mother: today we leave our uneasiness and hopes, our sorrows and joys in Your heart. We wish to offer You our poverty, our prayer, our joy, our hope, our love for the Church inserted in the world as a universal sacrament of salvation. We beg You to make us strong in difficulties and calm in danger. You well know what we need: a great spirit of contemplation to understand the poverty of men and the sorrows of the peoples; a great readiness to accept and live the Word of God, a calm fortitude to embrace the cross of Your Son and a joyful readiness to serve our brothers.

We wish to love the Church intensely and to live in deep communion with our Pastors. That we might be people who pray and missionaries. That we might accept the Word of God and contemplate it, live it and communicate it with the fire of the Spirit.

Most Holy Mary, help us to be faithful to our hour. It is a "dramatic and magnificent hour", full of challenges and hopes. Lay faithful are needed who live the sanctity of their Baptism and the apostolic commitment of their Confirmation; who live with daily simplicity the Easter Mystery; who are afraid neither of the cross nor of the martyrdom. Who only live the joy of sanctity in the missionary communion of the Church.

Thanks Mother and Lady of Luján, for having received us in Your house, for having looked at us and listened to us, for having spoken to us and strengthened us, for having taught us "to be Church".

Now we go back to our homes, our countries, our local Churches, with the certainty coming from these words of Your Son: "Here is your Mother" and carrying in our hearts the joy of repeating with You to Jesus Christ - of today, of yesterday, of always - these words of Yours: "I am the servant of the Lord: let it happen to me as you have said". And we go back home, carrying Your presence as our mother who says to us. "Do whatever he tells you".

So we will commit ourselves and so it may be. Amen. Alleluja!

BIOGRAPHIC CARD

He is born on december 3rd 1920 at Nueve de Julio, province of Buenos Aires (Argentina).

He achieves his studies of philosophy and theology in the seminary san José de la Plata, completing them at the Pontifical University "Angelicum" of Rome.

He is ordained on december 5th 1943 in the national basilica of Our Lady of Luján, Argentina.

Between 1944 and 1959 he teaches in Pio XII seminary of the diocese of Mercedes (Argentina), teaching especially Theology.

In 1958 he is appointed general Vicar of the same diocese of Mercedes.

In 1960 Rector of the metropolitan seminary of Villa Devoto in Buenos Aires.

In 1963 Apostolic Visitor of the Argentine Catholic Universities. At the same time he is Teacher and Decan of the Faculty of Theology in the Argentine Catholic Pontifical University.

On march 24th he is appointed Auxiliary Bishop of La Plata and on may 31st consecrated Bishop in the Basilica of our Lady of Luján (Argentina).

After the Secretariat for the Non-believers was established, he was named member of it, national Assistant of the Argentine Catholic Action and President of the Commission Faith and Ecumenism of the Argentine Bishops' Conference.

In 1967 he is appointed Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Avellaneda.

In 1968 he is elected General Secretary of CELAM and in august of the same year Pope Paul VI appoints him General Secretary of the Second General Conference of the Latin-american Episcopate held in Medellín. In 1970 he is elected again CELAM's General Secretary.

On april 27th 1972 he is appointed Residential Bishop of Mar de la Plata (Argentina).

In november 1972 he is elected President of CELAM and again in 1974 for further four years.

In march 1974 the Holy Father Paul VI chooses him to preach the Spiritual Exercises to the Pope and the roman Curia.

In september 19th Paul VI appoints him Pro-Prefect of the Holy Congregation for the Religious and the Secular Institutes.

On may 24th the Holy Father makes him Cardinal of the Title of Cosma and Damian.

On May 26th of the same year he is named Prefect of the Holy Congregation for the Religious and the Secular Institutes.

On april 9th 1984 the Holy Father John Paul II appoints him President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. He is reconfirmed on april 9th 1980 for further five years.

On february 11th 1985 Pope John Paul II sets up the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral action of the Health and appoints the Cardinal as its President. A responsibility that he carried out together with the Presidency of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, until the Holy Father, by the constitution Pastor Bonus for the Curia's reformation, established the Pontifical Commission as Pontifical Council with its own President.

He participates in all the Bishops' Synods: ordinary, extraordinary, special ones.

He was member of the Second Section of the Secretariat of State; of the following Congregations: Bishops, Catholic Education, Oriental Churches, Causes of the Saints; of the Pontifical Council for interpreting the Church's laws.

On july 11th 1995 he is appointed Cardinal Bishop of the Suburbicarian Church of Sabina-Poggio Mirteto.

On august 20th 1996 the Holy Father accepts his resignation as President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, owing to his age.

He dies in Rome on february 5th 1998.