



International Forum
Catholic Action
Italian Catholic Action



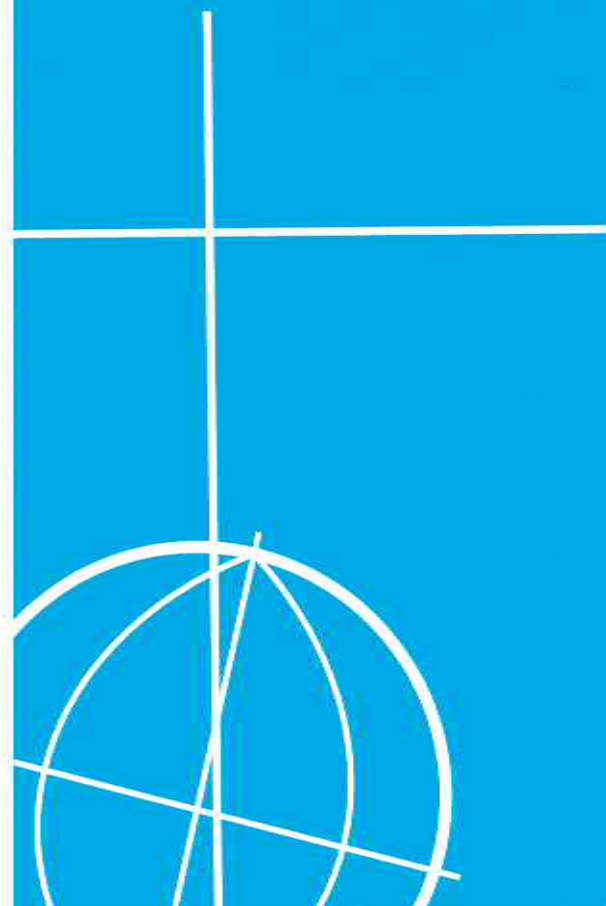
For the *life*
of the *world*
(Jn 6,51)

LAY CATHOLIC ACTION MEMBERS
20 YEARS FROM CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI

IFCA V ordinary Assembly
Rome, 27 april - 4 may 2008

DOCUMENTS

DOCUMENTS IFCA V ORDINARY ASSEMBLY ROME 2008



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Our translation into the different languages of the original texts.

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PRESENTATION

WITH GRATITUDE

Dear friends,

For Christians, meetings such as this, wherein we can get to know each other and reflect, are always a good opportunity for communion, prayer and formation. On this occasion, we have reflected about the conciliar novelty of our specific vocation as lay people by looking at the first Christian communities and at the lay people who collaborated with the apostles and with Paul. Together with the ICA we have met Peter's successor. Inspired by the theme "For the life of the world (Jn 6,51), Lay Catholic Action members 20 years after Christifideles Laici" we have enjoyed meeting our brethren from more than 40 different countries, Bishops, priests and lay leaders. During our working sessions, we have shared our everyday experiences, our aspirations and our hopes.

In these *DOCUMENTS* we have compiled the lectures and the interventions we followed in the Assembly and the homilies held during the eucharistic celebrations, so that they may be available to all. These documents bring together the different views on realities, which point at the way the world is heading.

They highlight lay people's responsibility as regards evangelization and the inculturation of faith, focusing especially on the missionary dimension and the specific identity of Catholic Action. The workshops of Catholic Action's different components (children - youth - adults) and the continental workshops came out with concrete practical guidelines to be developed during the coming three years. The representatives of the member countries have elected the new Secretariat made up of five countries: Argentina, Burundi, Italy, Myanmar-Birmania and Poland. This Secretariat will be responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken during this Assembly up to 2011.

This Ordinary Assembly may be considered a special one due to the fact that some special occasions were commemorated. The XX anniversary from the publication of *Christifideles Laici* was commemorated on the 30th April with interventions which are included in these *DOCUMENTS*. On the 1st May, the participants joined the Italian Catholic Action for the opening of the XIII National Assembly and went all together on a Pauline pilgrimage to the basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls. On the 3rd May they

took part in a prayer vigil with Italian Catholic Action's saints. The climax of our stay in Rome arrived on the 4th May with the impressive meeting with the Holy Father Benedict XVI. During this meeting the Holy Father had words of encouragement for our commitment in Catholic Action and also presented us with a clear mission of our CA Associations within the Church, that of helping lay people become saints. We shall never forget the look and the faces of the saints and blessed which we could see in the pictures hanging from the Bernini's Colonnade.

The words, uttered by the Holy Father about them, still resound in our hearts: *"The magnificent crown of faces that symbolically embraces St Peter's Square is a tangible witness of a holiness rich in light and love. These witnesses, who followed Jesus with all their strength, who spared no efforts for the Church and for the Kingdom of God, represent your most authentic identity card. Is it not still possible today for you boys and girls, young people and adults, to make your life a witness of communion with the Lord that is transformed into a genuine masterpiece of holiness? Is this not your Association's purpose?"*

The *DOCUMENTS* issued after an Assembly has more than one aim. The first is to serve as a record and pass on to others whatever happened during the Assembly although everyone knows that one cannot record all the emotions, the discussions, the concerns and the experiences of those who have participated. But undoubtedly, this is a historic document and will help in future research. The second aim is to pass on the invaluable material, which is the result of a common effort, to be studied and to be used for the formation of Catholic Action lay leaders, priest assistants and members, at the different levels in all parts of the world.

The third aim, which follows naturally, is to bring this material to the knowledge of our local Churches and to the different levels within the Church. It is CA's contribution towards the formation of lay people as evangelizers and as witnesses of Christ in society and in the world where they are called to sanctify themselves in their everyday lives. We thank God for those who have worked so hard for the realization of this meeting. We also thank the members of the Secretariat, whose term of office ends with this Assembly, for their generosity and for making it possible for us to meet here together in this fraternal and friendly atmosphere.

We entrust all our work to the new Coordinator and to all CA Associations, under the protection of the Virgin Mary, patroness of Catholic Action. May she accompany us in our mission "for the life of the world".

Emilio Inzaurraga
IFCA Secretariat Coordinator

THE ADDRESS OF BENEDICT XVI TO THE CATHOLIC ACTION

BE WORTHY CITIZENS OF THE GOSPEL...

Dear Children, Young People and Adults of Catholic Action!

It is a great joy to me to welcome you here today in St Peter's Square where in the past your praiseworthy Association has frequently met the Successor of Peter. Thank you for your visit. I greet with affection all of you who have come from every part of Italy, as well as the members of the International Forum who come from 40 Countries of the world.

In particular, I greet Prof. Luigi Alici, your National President, whom I thank for his cordial words addressed to me, Msgr. Domenico Sigalini, your Assistant General, and the national and diocesan leaders. I also thank you for the special gift you have desired to offer to me through your representatives which testifies to your solidarity with the neediest. I express deep gratitude to Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference who has celebrated Holy Mass for you.

You have come to Rome in the spiritual company of your numerous saints, blessed, venerable and servants of God: men and women, young people and children, educators and priest assistants, rich in Christian virtues, who have grown up in the ranks of Catholic Action which is celebrating its 140th anniversary in these days.

The magnificent crown of faces that symbolically embraces St Peter's Square is a tangible witness of a holiness rich in light and love. These witnesses, who followed Jesus with all their strength, who spared no efforts for the Church and for the Kingdom of God, represent your most authentic identity card. Is it not still possible today for you children, young people and adults, to make your life a witness of communion with the Lord that is transformed into a genuine master-

piece of holiness? Is this not your Association's purpose? This will certainly be possible if Catholic Action continues to be faithful to its own deep roots of faith, nourished by full adherence to the Word of God, by unconditional love for the Church, a vigilant participation in civil life and a constant commitment to formation.

Dear friends, respond generously to this call to holiness in accordance with the ways that best suit your secular condition! Continue to let yourselves be inspired by the three great "consignments" that my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, entrusted to you at Loreto in 2004: contemplation, communion and mission.

Catholic Action is born as a particular association of lay faithful marked by a special and direct bond with the Pope, which quickly becomes a precious form of "collaboration of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate", "most earnestly" recommended by the Second Vatican Council, and which identifies its indispensable "characteristics" (cf. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity in the Church, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 20).

This vocation of yours is still valid today. I encourage you, therefore, to persevere with generosity in your service to the Church. By adopting its general apostolic goal in a spirit of intimate union with the Successor of Peter and hard-working co-responsibility with Pastors, you incarnate a ministerial role in a fruitful balance between the universal Church and the local Church, which requires you to make a ceaseless and irreplaceable contribution to communion.

This broad ecclesial dimension which identifies your association's charism is not the sign of an uncertain or outdated identity; rather, it attributes great responsibility to your lay vocation: illumined and sustained by the action of the Holy Spirit and constantly rooted in the journey of the Church, you are challenged to courageously seek ever new syntheses between the proclamation of Christ's salvation to the people of our time and the promotion of the integral good of the person and of the entire human family. The Church in Italy, a lively reality.

In my intervention at the IV National Ecclesial Meeting held in Verona in October 2006, I recognized that the Church in Italy "is a lively reality - and we see it! - which conserves a capillary presence in the midst of people of every age and level. "Christian traditions often

continue to be rooted and to produce fruit, while a great effort of evangelization and catechesis is taking place, addressed particularly to the new generations, but now even more so to families" (*Address to IV National Ecclesial Meeting, Verona, 19 October; L'Osservatore Romano English edition [ORE], 25 October 2006, p. 6*).

How can we fail to see in this capillary presence also a discreet and tangible sign of Catholic Action? In fact, the beloved Italian Nation has always been able to count on men and women formed in your Association who are prepared to serve the cause of the common good disinterestedly, to build up a just ordering of society and the State.

May you, therefore, be able to live up to your Baptism which immersed you in the death and Resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of every person whom you meet, and of a world that is thirsting for peace and truth.

Be "worthy citizens of the Gospel" and "ministers of Christian wisdom for a more human world": this is the theme of your Assembly and this is the commitment you assume today before the Italian Church, represented here by you, by your priest assistants, by the Bishops and by their President.

In a missionary Church, faced by an educational emergency such as that which is found in Italy today, may you, who love and serve her, be tireless heralds and trained and generous educators; in a Church called to give even very demanding proof of fidelity and tempted by adaptation, be courageous witnesses and prophets of Gospel radicalism; in a Church which is confronted daily by the relativist, hedonist and consumerist mentality, may you be able to extend the spaces of rationality in the sign of a faith that befriends intelligence, both in the context of a popular and widespread culture and in a more elaborated and thought-out research; in a Church that calls for the heroism of holiness, respond without fear, always trusting in God's mercy.

Dear friends of Italian Catholic Action, you are not alone on the path that lies ahead of you: your saints accompany you. Other figures too have played significant roles in your Association: I am thinking, for example, among the others, of Giuseppe Toniolo and Armida

Barelli. Inspired by these examples of Christianity lived out, you have embarked on an extraordinary year, a year that we could qualify by holiness, in which you strive to translate the Gospel teachings into practical life.

I encourage you in this resolution. Intensify your prayer, reform your conduct on the eternal values of the Gospel, letting yourselves be guided by the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

The Pope accompanies you with constant remembrance before the Lord, while he warmly imparts the Apostolic Blessing to you who are present here and to the entire Association.

Rome, St Peter's Square - 4 May 2008

Rome, 27 April 2008

INSTITUTIONAL SESSION

OPENING CELEBRATION

HOMILY

Jn 6:35-40; 47-51

A BREAD FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD...

*H.E. Msgr. Domenico Sigalini
Bishop of Palestrina
IFCA Ecclesiastical Assistant
ICA General Assistant*

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh".

In our human experience there are words that we find it hard to understand such as infinite, eternal, forever, never, unlimited, perpetual, inexhaustible. We employ them to express some exaggerations or exigencies concerning our life. We long for everlasting love, unlimited possibilities; we promise forever; we say we will never forget. And in the case we refer especially to time we get lost in many meanings.

Jesus employs one of these words - namely eternal - with great emphasis. He promises eternal life to those who want it. He who believes in him will have eternal life. The life he thinks of for the world is the eternal life. Eternal means a life to the full, with no limits, beyond time, without end. Is it possible for us to think of anything that does never end and continues for ever? In our existence, we experience only short-lived realities, all things that we see are limited, there are perhaps recurring thoughts which are infinite. Everything is transient, everything is finite. "Forever" and "never" do not belong to our existence, they refer rather to a time of our life which is neither unlimited nor eternal.

On the contrary Jesus says that he who believes in him has the eternal, full, infinite, inexhaustible life. And this is the gift he wishes to bring to the world, to the many people who have received the gift of life from God. There is a life that he gained for us through his cross, a life which will have the utmost happiness and will never end. He is the only one who can give it to us, who can make us live it, make us worthy of enjoying it. This is his own vocation, the mission that God the Father entrusted to him. According to God's will, established from eternity forever, he should lose nothing that he gave to him. God is a Father, if he loves he loves forever. There is a vocation for every man, a DNA which does never change and characterizes human life: to share his happiness for ever. These kinds of thoughts make our head spin because they go beyond everyman's experience. They fill us with amazement and plunge us into a life that is not the life we experience, but the life we long for and dream of.

Jesus is solemnly charged by God the Father not to lose anyone of us. We can then fully understand his irrevocable and painful decision to take his cross. He wished to pierce the heaven and make us all go up there and live there forever.

In our time marked by great confusion there are many proposals promising full, everlasting life and endless happiness. Some questions may arise such as: who is right among those who allure us? The politicians, the televisions, the talk shows, our old wise men, the revolutionaries? Religion is still to be followed or is it to be left aside because we are self-sufficient? Where can we find the secret to live a true life, not dominated by odd theories that, now and then, someone sells as definitive? Is it possible to live a life to the full or we should be always content with bits of it or small adjustments?

The Gospel has no doubt. Only he who believes has got the full, beautiful, happy, complete, definitive life which is worth to be lived. He who entrusts his life into God's arms, he who has caught the direction of his journey in God and continues to follow it, to seek it and to walk. We need a faith to be happy. As Christians we say that we need the faith in Jesus Christ's God. Unfortunately many say that faith leads to fanaticism and intolerance: it is better to keep quiet, not to expose ourselves and mind our own business.

Happiness therefore would consist in letting the most shrewd men direct our own life, in being at the mercy of those who can make us reason as they wish because they are powerful, can persuade, have got all the possible images of happiness to dish out to us every hour of each day. Apart from the fact that a quarrel is better than cemetery-peace, it is equally true that man has a thirst for life that no adjustment can satisfy. Man bursts with energies, love, intelligence, strength. He must find out the right directions to express them.

The direction that the Gospel teaches us is the faith. To enable us to take this direction, God places himself in our life as the bread, the basic nourishment, the strong opportunity to grow in accordance to His view. This bread is the flavour of life, He is this flavour. It is the strength of our journey and He is the strength. Jesus says: I am the bread of life, I am at your disposal for any hunger you have, I am the strength of that God who does never forsake you, I place myself at your disposal for the life of the world. Is there anybody who believes in this great possibility? Let he follow me for the life of the world.

We are here to answer this question.

HERE WE ARE AGAIN AFTER THREE YEARS...

Paola Bignardi
IFCA Secretariat Coordinator

A special greeting to you all, to H. Em. Card. Rylko and to Prof. Guzmán Carriquiry whose presence here, as representatives of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, shows the Church's global attention for the laity. A most hearty welcome to all members of the IFCA Assembly, whose presence here testifies to Catholic Action's universality and to its charism of service to the Church, which is expressed through love and missionary zeal in the different parts of the world. Thus Catholic Action is rooted in the different contexts and assumes the face of the diverse Churches and of the cultural characteristics of the diverse peoples.

We are here again after three years; three years during which, each one of us in his circumstances, has tried to live up to the commitments we took together in the preceding Assembly: a special commitment to promote CA in the world through the preparation and formation of a group of animators and the organization of various meetings aimed at setting up CA in countries where it was not established; a special attention to be given to youth and this was expressed particularly through the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This brought together young people from all parts of the world as pilgrims of peace in the land of Jesus where violence and conflict prevail and where all the population, including Christians, is the victim of violence and fear. Through conventions and seminars but above all through our continental meetings, we continued reflecting on the conditions which Christianity is experiencing in different parts of the world. During these meetings we have focused the specific characteristics of being a Christian and what it means being a Church in our time.

We are gathered here after the enthusiastic meeting of the Italian Catholic Action and of the world Catholic Action in Loreto with John Paul II. We all remember how moved we all were by the fact that, in spite of all the suffering, the sacrifice and the fatigue this meeting cost him, the Pope wanted to be with us. We treasure all this in our hearts primarily because on this occasion the Pope gave his recognition to Catholic Action, something which it needed so badly. At that very moment, we realized that we have to live his words: contemplation, communion and mission in a concrete way, each one of us in his own country and in his local Church. We all however share the same inspiration knowing that in this way Catholic Action can grow and can be seen as a gift of the Church, which can bear fruit for the Church even today.

We are meeting here in this Assembly also to find new impetus and ideas which will help us live our common ideal in our varied experiences. We also have to remind ourselves of our responsibility to translate into everyday life the teachings which John Paul II has passed on to us in *Christifideles Laici*, of which we are celebrating the twentieth anniversary from its publication.

During these days, may our reflections, experiences and intuitions help us find a clear way as to how to live our CA call today and how to show to everyone the richness of our humble and strong charism.

In the light of *Christifideles Laici* we should ask ourselves as to how we can give a new impetus to our vocation as lay people and to our call as lay Catholic Action members and how we can translate this concretely during the coming three years.

I wish you all a fruitful Assembly!

WHERE IS THE WORLD HEADING? A SAPIENTIAL LOOK AT REALITY AND HISTORY

Fr. Federico Lombardi SJ Director of the Holy See Press Office
interviews Sandro Calvani UNICRI Director¹
and Sr Amelia Kawaji mmb
President of the International Union of General Superiors

Poverty, hunger, diseases

Fr. Lombardi: Humanity seems to be aware of its problems and of its responsibilities, but it seems so far from attaining its objectives. Today one speaks a lot about the food crisis; there is a growing tension and great conflicts because of the increasing cost of cereals. Does globalization bring about more poverty, hunger and emarginization?

Calvani: In the Gospel Jesus Christ warns us that "the poor will always be with you". Dag Hammarskjöld, UNO second General Secretary clearly stated: "The search for peace and development will not end with victory or defeat within a few years. The search for peace and development, with its efforts, mistakes and set-backs must never slow down and we should never give it up". Globalization, as such, does not bring about more poverty. On the contrary, the opening of commercial frontiers and the abolition of custom barriers between

¹ United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute. What expressed here does not necessarily represent UNO's opinion.

different regions of the world is a very good opportunity for trading a good number of products and services which, in the South, could get good value for money. The protectionism, which existed before globalization, safeguarded the goods, the services and the worth of money of the rich, against those of poor countries. The control on this protectionism is thus the right direction towards global justice.

But globalization has neither found nor promoted its new rules yet; it goes on without accepted and approved rules and thus, so far, the rule of the strongest prevails. This makes the poor economies more vulnerable. For example it is not the fault of globalization that in Mexico unproductive seeds are used in the cultivation of maize and that the maize produced goes to the bio-combustible market and not to the food market. Here the fault lies in the lack of rules. The food crisis is deteriorating is therefore the direct result of the increasing vulnerability of the traditional agricultural society which are left to fend for themselves without any legal powers to protect them. It is also the effect of the weak legislative, political, economic and social legislative systems of the South very often without leaders who are capable of defending the rights of all their people.

Sr. Amelia: In this period of change and in the globalized world in which we live, poverty, hunger and disease present themselves together and are interlinked, more so now that we have entered into a global financial crisis.

Without any doubt there are countries where the situation, although still difficult, is slowly *improving* as in the case of countries in Eastern Europe. But there are others where the situation has *deteriorated* such Argentina, Guatemala, Bolivia just to mention a few, or Saipán, a small island in the Pacific. This island lives on tourism and when this declined the situation here has been all changed.

In *Africa*, huge mines have been sold to foreigners for very little. China, for example, is acquiring great riches from Congo Democratic Republic.

Migration is a very important phenomenon. The migrants' transfers are in fact very important in many countries in South America, the Philippines and Eastern Europe.

Diseases could diminish if more vaccines were available. Malaria could disappear if there could be a greater attempt at *land*

reclamation. As regards AIDS, medical treatment could be found if only its cause had to be discovered... but there is still a long way to go and we are still very far away in this respect. In Congo there are many deformed children because their fathers are exposed to uranium, the mines' cobalt...

Malnutrition hits Africa and many countries in Asia and South America. Undoubtedly, "another world should be possible", another Africa should be possible. In South Africa, Mandela's dream has become a reality.

Communication, dialogue and conflicts

Fr. Lombardi: Globalization mainly depends on new and greater possibilities of information and of bringing together persons, peoples and cultures. At the same time, this process puts traditional cultures, relations between generations and national identities in crisis. This brings about confusion and disorientation and on the other hand it provokes a reaction of fear and refusal. Is this making dialogue more possible or is it eliminating all type of reference to other possibilities? Are we risking a clash between cultures and civilizations? The Pope often speaks about relativism and is very preoccupied about this.

Calvani: The risk of a clash among civilizations is there. It is not that apocalyptic future adventures described in some best sellers by some future-tellers, but it cannot be underestimated either. Globalization has a common language which makes it possible for all protagonists in the economic field to understand one another and to compete peacefully.

But there is no common language for the different cultures and societies. Very often this is not the case here. The true and serious leaders of many cultures and religions have made great efforts to understand each other. But the greatest threat comes from those who have no culture and from those who are proud to be ignorant. For example, one who takes pigs to graze to hinder the construction of a mosque is a dangerous illiterate person even if Islam never existed in that country.

In Italy there is council made up of young people responsible for dialogue among religions to prevent opposition, to educate in

reciprocal understanding and to prevent the establishment of extremists' groups. At the UNO we maintain that the Italian interreligious youth council is a good way of intercultural dialogue and should be copied elsewhere. The alliance among civilizations, proposed by the Prime Minister Zapatero and by President Erdogan, then taken up as the UNO programme by the Secretary General Kofi Annan is a network of dialogue which facilitates the inter-religious understanding on all Mediterranean shores.

The culture of relativism, which affects some living styles and the philosophy underlying it, are direct effects of the serious fall in collective ethic principles. The absence of fundamental principles, based on the co-existence of many post-modern communities, destroys their very same growth, besides being a threat to the relations with other cultures and communities. Relativism makes it possible for human communities to continue living together without any shared values and objectives; however their existence together is only a number of individualities together whose only interest is in themselves.

Sr Amelia: I have lived in Japan for 36 years. Here Christianity is unknown. Catholics form only 0.4% of the population, a minority, a small seed. *Asia is the cradle of the great religions*, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoinism, Islam, Christianity... There is no doubt that today Christianity is a "stranger in Asia" and still preserves a western image.

In Japan there is no problem for religions to co-exist and generally speaking other religions admire Christian values even though they still regard it as an *imported and European religion*. There is reciprocal respect and they collaborate without difficulties in initiatives taken for the good of society, such as the defence of Article 9 of the Constitution which says that Japan cannot have an army as a protest against the war in Iraq etc.

Nevertheless, one has to think not only about interreligious dialogue as a conceptual process, but as Panikkar calls it an *intra-religious dialogue*. This means that if we do not discover in us a space where the Hindu, the Muslim, the Buddhist, the Jew and the atheist can find a place - in my heart, in my intelligence and in my life - we will never be able to dialogue with them genuinely.

There is no doubt that we all have the responsibility to create a society where peace prevails. But *Peace* is closely linked with *Justice* and these two go hand in hand. In countries where injustice and

social conflicts prevail, it is more difficult to establish peace. This is what is happening at the moment in Guatemala where great violence prevails.

A sound *education* in values could help to bring about peace. The *Basic Communities* could be a platform for sowing peace. And undoubtedly, the *family* is the centre which helps to create coherent generations. Also, all *social movements* which strive and work for the common good and justice help to establish Peace among everybody.

Responsibility for the environment

Fr. Lombardi: Today a lot is being said about everybody's responsibility for the environment. There is a lot of concern about climatic change and its consequences even on the living conditions of the poorest and of future generations. Is it in fact a positive common growing awareness and a shared responsibility in front of urgent and serious problems or are there ambiguities and or hidden agendas which we have to watch?

Calvani: This generation is the first to avail itself, at its own leisure and without any limitations, of the planetary resources leading to an unprecedented global usurpation of these same resources. Already in 1962 the Club di Roma had warned that a number of resources for growth are limited and are not renewable.

This generation is also the first one to be able to steal resources which are far away not only geographically but also in time, in years to come. It is robbing a healthy environment and resources for the development of future generations. In actual fact, we are the first in the history of humanity to put in serious risk the life of those who are not born yet. Many do not know as yet what climate change is and if they know something about it they do not want to believe in spite of all the scientific evidence available.

The UNO panel on climate change, made up of hundreds of experts from different countries, has come to unanimous conclusions. We cannot allow all this waste of water and of energies which are not renewable and all these toxic emissions. We cannot go on allowing conditions of development which are grossly unfair and which bring about diseases and malnutrition.

There is a positive collective increasing awareness of environmental challenges but this is only leading mainly to charitable and philanthropic initiatives. What we need is a revolution in the way resources are managed, from family to global level. As yet there is no global alliance to safeguard the ethical aspect, the fair financing of resources and everybody's opportunities and rights.

Sr. Amelia: The *dialogue by God with humanity* begins with creation. Today, we know a little more about the history of the evolution of the universe, of the cosmos and know that this lasted millions and millions of years until the appearance of humanity and its fullness in Christ.

The *earth and the universe are the image of God*, and we are *co-creators* with God. We share in his creating work and should be responsible for it. The universe and the cosmos are inhabited by God, they exist within a cycle of *harmony* of which human beings are a part and they should respect this fact...

In *Buddism* there is great respect towards nature and towards all living things. The stones in the garden, the water which flows, the breeze; all these are part of life and part of himself. There is a spirit of contemplation, a harmony which enfolds them all.

The experience of evil and hope

Fr. Lombardi: The 11th September was a frightening demonstration of the presence of evil, violence and hatred. This is what terrorism is. Many conflicts, in the Middle East in other places, are an expression of deeply rooted hatred and a lack of hope. Faced with certain situations, for example the power of great economic interests, we feel helpless. In these situations, where are the signs of hope and the positive surprises which we can identify and which could encourage us?

Calvani: Terrorism is an expression of evil which goes beyond the common evil such as war and violence. Deep down, the main objective of terrorism, in itself, is not to kill. For terrorism, the death of so many people is a way of arriving at creating a sense of terror, that is, to eliminate all hope in those around and in those who survive. It works damnably well for them to serve their purpose; they have attained their aim and managed to scare us all, so much so, that

many have started hating those who are different and want revenge for their fears and anxieties. This new hatred brings about new violence, generates a hatred which is even more radical and boosts the recruitment of new terrorists. All this starts a diabolic and vicious circle of deaths and a waste of resources.

But we also come across a number of examples of dialogue, of peaceful co-existence and of attempts to arrive at reciprocal understanding between peoples and cultures normally considered enemies. These encouraging experiences show us the importance of listening to those who are most desperate. This keeps them from becoming radical and helps to establish true friendship among existing and potential enemies.

This is precisely the aim behind interreligious dialogue and the building of communities where people of different creeds live together and are of service in areas in conflict. Examples of these are Gaza and Palestine, the tolerance and comprehension of many European countries towards non-Christian places of worship and the many attempts, some of which successful, at reconciling India and Pakistan. Other good practices which show that peace is possible even in places where terrorism has left deep wounds are: the consultations with the armed groups in Colombia, between Catholics and Anglicans in Ireland and between Basques and Spaniards.

In these circumstances, I believe that today we need to take a leap in quality and quantity. We have to go from a period of a few prophetic pioneers to a more diffused movement where people who are different, even extremely different, lead their everyday lives together.

Sr. Amelia: In today's world we notice signs of hope. A new sensibility has emerged, such as the *value and the respect towards the human person*, the abolition of the death penalty, of torture etc.

There is an increasing *awareness of the dignity of woman* and of all feminine values. The woman is becoming conscious of her proper identity. Attempts are being made to "empower women" and to put an end to the patriarchal regime.

And as you know in developed countries one comes across the phenomenon of *domestic violence* which destroys many lives.

Men and women have complementary values. The ideal would be to arrive at a stage where they live, work and collaborate at par showing reciprocal respect, esteem and love.

Little by little we are discovering the richness of *plurality and diversity*. We are appreciating solidarity, care for the earth, relationships, search for peace and harmony and we are becoming conscious that we are *one big human family*.

The formation of lay Christians

Fr. Lombardi: Which tracks and references do you suggest for the formation of lay Christians today in this world which is always changing and for which we are responsible? Is the Social Teaching of the Church still relevant and useful in this formation? The Pope speaks to us, not only about an active involvement, but also about ideas, about the "truth about man" which faith helps us to understand. Which are the most effective ways of involvement which you have come across and which you would advocate?

Calvani: The Social teaching of the Church has often been prophetic and is still relevant today. It is enough to think of the great intuitions and inspirations of *Populorum Progressio* or of the new principles of *Mater et Magistra*. But while the doctrine remains the same, the new challenges and threats which we have to face are continually changing.

Establishing human rights for all, sustainable development and security and justice for every individual human being, at planetary level, is such a difficult and complex task that even the social teaching of the Church could appear inadequate.

When I think of the humanitarian crisis and the blood-thirsty conflicts which I have witnessed closely during these last twenty years and on those taking place today, it is clear to me that what we need is a genuine, strong testimony and an intellectually honest leadership.

The testimony which could change the most complicated conflicts and crisis is that which allows no space for compromise with itself and which knows how to survive among all contradictions with the joy and hope of he who knows how to love unconditionally. The leadership which we need and which gives results today is that which helps to build the community, which caters for the needs of the weak and works for the good of all without discriminating against any group or part of a group.

More than Christian projects, true Christian Parties, simple

devotion, Christian newspapers and Christian schools, we need projects which help individuals and society in their everyday life and which can be understood by all. Today more than ever, we need leaders and witnesses, who can make themselves available to all, rather than teachers who teach from the platform, the pulpit or on the microphone.

What is more, I have noted that, those who are ready to give a hand in order to give a practical solution to the world contradictions and injustices, without pretending to give an explanation or find the culprits, are usually much happier than the many, who have the know-how and have much more, but give less.

Sr. Amelia: It is the *age of the laity*. These have a lot of work to do in society and in the church.

Today all *Religious Congregations* have lay people who also live the congregation's charism as lay people. The *church* could never and should never live without lay people and this is even more so today.

It is not enough to occupy posts of responsibility in social or political spheres. Lay people must care for their "*spirituality*". They must be *men and women of prayer*, with a sense of the transcendent. They must be close to the mystery of God and able to read the *signs of the times*, the concrete needs of *society* and of today's world.

They should be both "*mystic and prophetic*". A committed lay person should be *mystic*, meaning that he should be close to the Mystery of God with a capital letter; he should be *prophetic*, able to talk and act freely when it comes to injustice, war, the death penalty, environmental problems and all that which is inhuman.

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: *Ac* 8:5-8:14-17; *Jn* 14:15-21

HOMILY

THE LAY CHRISTIAN A WITNESS OF HOPE

H. Em. Card. Stanisław Ryłko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

1. I extend my greetings to all of you, participants in the V Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action. I also bring you the greetings of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Special greetings go to Dr. Paola Bignardi, IFCA Secretariat Coordinator and the new Ecclesiastical Assistant H.E. Msgr. Domenico Sigalini. I would like to thank them both for having accepted these posts and extend to them my very best wishes for the mission which they have undertaken to carry out. I am very pleased to be here to preside over this Eucharistic Celebration with which you are opening your meeting, as this gives me the opportunity to reconfirm Catholic Action's special role within the concept of the "new lay associative season" which the Church is experiencing.

"Lay Catholic Action members, 20 years from *Christifideles Laici*" is the theme which you will be studying on the XX anniversary of the publication of this Apostolic Exhortation by the Servant of God John Paul II. Very rightly, it is described as the *magna charta* of lay Catholics. It was the outcome of the 1987 Bishops' Synod on the vocation and mission of lay faithful in the Church and in the world. This document brought together the rich and varied experiences of lay apostolate in the period after the Council. At the same time it indicated - an important milestone - the beginning of a new era for lay apostolate.

Twenty years after its publication, we can still say that its impetus and its prophetic vision have not expired. *Christifideles Laici*

continues to be a safe compass for lay people's formation and commitment. This is confirmed by the fact that Catholic Action soon adopted it as the *vademecum* for its members. I would thus like to congratulate Catholic Action for having included a public celebration to commemorate this event in the programme. I am convinced that your study of *Christifideles Laici* during this meeting, within the context of the new challenges which the evangelizing mission of the Church is facing, will be very beneficial for lay Catholic Action members in their everyday lives.

2. Another important exercise during this Assembly is the assessment of your work as Catholic Action since the unforgettable Congress of 2004 which reached its climax with the meeting with the servant of God John Paul II in Loreto.

While we look forward to listen to the message which the Holy Father Benedict XVI will be giving to Catholic Action, we cannot but think of the three duties left to us by Pope Wojtyła: *contemplation*, our journey towards sanctity; *communion*, our spiritual unity with our pastors, with our brothers in faith and with the other ecclesial associations; *mission*, our commitment to announce the Gospel in all the world's areopagi of the modern world. (cf. *Angelus*, "Osservatore Romano", 6-7 September 2004). We also remember his words, full of encouragement and hope: «Have courage Catholic Action! May the Lord guide your efforts to renew yourself! [...] The Church puts its trust in you; the Pope greets you, supports you and heartily blesses you» (*Homily*, "Osservatore Romano", 6-7 September 2004). These are precious words which Catholic Action should treasure: a well of hope for its present and for its future not only in Italy, but in the whole world.

3. Now, I would like to refer to today's liturgy, that of the VI Sunday after Easter which prepares us for Pentecost. In the Gospel, Christ says to His disciples: «I shall ask the Father and he will give another Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him, because he is with you, he is in you» (*Jn 14:16-17*).

Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is the Spirit of hope which gives life to the Church and to every disciple of Christ. The Christian man is a man of hope, of the "great hope" which Benedict XVI speaks about. And in the second Reading, Saint Peter exhorts us all to: «Proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts, and always have your

answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have» (*1Pt 3:15*). This is the mission of lay Christians in the world: to be credible witnesses of hope. This is the great challenge for Catholic Action: to be a school of hope, of that "great hope" for the multitudes of lay people of our times.

4. The postmodern world is a world which is very "unstable" (Z. Bauman). It lacks definite certainty and solid convictions. It is marked by an alarming absence of values, by a real and true "dictatorship of relativism" and by a "strange oblivion of God" (Benedict XVI). A world where nihilism and "the culture of death" are rampant and where hope is always fading away. The increasing number of suicides mostly among young people is a cry which asks for a reason as to why life is worth living. Surely the reason is not material well-being, the illusory lies presented by old and new ideologies, the myths of scientific progress, power, money, success... In order to give full sense to his life, man needs hope: that kind of hope which does not delude us even in our most dramatic situations, that hope which shows life's transcendent and definitive destiny.

In his encyclical *Spe salvi* Benedict XVI touched precisely on this nevralgic point of human existence. Going straight to the point he says: «Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope» (n. 23). It is not any god, but that God who showed himself in the person of Jesus. God is man's "great hope". Faith's present crisis is nothing but a crisis of hope. «Anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of his life» (n. 27).

Hope stems from our meeting with Christ. So the Pope strongly rebuts: «It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love [...]. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights, nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rm 8:38-39*)» (n. 26).

This hope is definitely far from being a form of individualism or of retiring within oneself. Christian hope bears a strong communitarian dimension. It should be shown and shared, because God saves us as a people, that is, as a Church. So this is why, in our world, the

presence, of authentic and credible witnesses, is indispensable. Their hope brings hope to those who live in darkness or feel lost. The Pope goes on to say: «For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is *de facto* a “proof” that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence» (n. 8). These witnesses of hope give others the courage to entrust everything to God.

So this is what Peter means when he says «always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have» (1Pt 3:15).

While wishing that this assembly may help your hope to flourish more, I entrust your work to the intercession of Mary, who, being the mother of Christ, the “great hope” of the world, is the Mother of Hope.

Rome, 28 April 2008

**TIME TO DEEPEN
AND TO LISTEN TO**

MORNING PRAYER

Acts 2:22-24

COMMENTARY

BE MISSIONARIES OF JOY AND LIFE

*H.E. Msgr. Luis Armando Collazuol
Bishop of Concordia
General Assistant of Argentine CA*

The manifestations of the Risen Christ and his words bring joy and peace and are a message of Life. To the women who went to the sepulchre He said: "Do not be afraid" (*Mt 28:10*). He greeted the apostles with the words: "Peace be with you ... the disciples were filled with great joy at seeing the Lord". (*Jn 20:19-20*). And after he joined and spoke to the disciples, who, sad and disconcerted about the death of their Master, returned to their village, the disciples said to one another "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" (*Lk 24:32*).

This experience of joy, peace and Life is the same experience which the apostles transmitted incessantly in fulfillment of the mission entrusted to them by Jesus: "in Jerusalem... and to the earth's remotest end" (*Ac 1:8*).

Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost, which was the first message by the Church to Jews, proselytes and to all nations, has as its main theme the Death, the Resurrection and the Glorification of Christ, announced and foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament.

All the other speeches, which Peter and the other Apostles made when they gave witness in front of their persecutors and when they preached to the Jews, were based on this fundamental announcement, the "kerygma", which is a summary of God's salvific plan. The

proclamation of Christ's Resurrection calls for conversion in expectation of the glorious Manifestation of the Lord.

Thus at Pentecost, the first proclamation, made to all the people within the newly born Church, is the announcement of the Risen Christ, he who lives to give Life. With this Good News, we too have come to know Jesus Christ in faith. This is our joy.

The concluding document of the *V General Conference of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean* held at Aparecida, makes an urgent appeal to all to be missionaries of joy and Life. "We would like to share the joy, which we have received as a result of our meeting with Jesus Christ, whom we acknowledge as the Son of God. He became man to redeem us and to reach all men and women who are faced with adversity. We would like the good news of the Kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ, who overcame sin and death, to reach all those who stand by the wayside begging and asking for compassion (cf. *Lk 10:29-37; 18:25-43*).

The disciples' joy is an antidote for a world scared of the future and oppressed by violence and hate. The disciples' joy does not stem from a feeling of selfish well-being but from their faith in Jesus Christ which brings joy into their hearts and makes them announce the good news of the love of God. Knowing Jesus is the greatest gift which a person can receive; meeting Christ is the best thing that could befall us and our greatest joy is to be able to make him known through our words and work" (*DA 29*).

Our eyes are enlightened by the light of the Risen Christ and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we follow him as his disciples. However, we must remember that, when he called us and chose us, the Lord also entrusted us with the mission of passing on this treasure to the others. We should not be sad, disheartened, impatient and anxious evangelizers.

We are gathered here just as they were on Pentecost day. We speak different languages and we come from different countries. Today, the Holy Spirit is calling us to be his disciples and missionaries. Faith in our destiny and the strength of the Holy Spirit should urge us to involve ourselves in evangelizing others and in transforming the world, even to the extreme ends, not only from the geographical aspect but also from the cultural and spiritual point of view. We should all work so that all may be united by the salvific Lord who through his resurrection is "the fullness of Him who is filled all in all." (*Ep 1:23*).

Individualism, sectarianism, injustice, exclusion, the breaking of social ties, despair, violence... which characterize so many present human situations, are all signs of death as they do not reflect the Gospel and the fullness of Life in Christ.

We want to be joyful missionaries of Life in a suffering world even when this tries to forget this through superficial escapes. We should not just stop to cry over death or to lament its consequences. If we want to be missionaries of Life, we have to examine carefully the signs of hope in men's hearts and in the cultures of our people; signs which are very often ambiguous and obscure. Aware of these signs and animated by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to offer people that fullness of hope which comes from having encountered Christ.

In the Church there are so many signs of hope. These should help to encourage us and to make us glad that we are spreading the Gospel. Today, we notice many signs of Life in many Christians. We notice that more people are willing to follow Christ as his disciples. More people are disposed to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, through meditation and contemplation, and by praying and living the Word of God. We notice that lay people are more aware of their charisms; lay people are getting more involved; there is a wider missionary consciousness; there is a more generous disposition to be of service to those who are suffering; more effort is being made to bring about Christian unity and there is a greater awareness and more importance is being given to the establishment of dialogue with the other religions and with contemporary culture.

Our mission as Catholic Action members is to make Jesus, the Way, the Truth and our Life, present in society. But this only materializes through our cordial approach to people; through our being witnesses of burning and universal charity especially towards the weak, the poor and the emarginated; through our unrestricted announcement of the Word of God; through our dialogue as Christians; through our Christian animation of all the different spheres of life and through our preaching and celebration of the sacraments, the culmination of which is the Holy Eucharist.

In its missionary journey towards peoples, Catholic Action turns to Mary. Through her listening to the Holy Spirit and as his disciple and missionary, Mary opened the way for the world to the great event of the Incarnation of the Lord of Life, source of all our hope.

Original text in spanish language

PAUL AND HIS COLLABORATORS IN PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

Romano Penna
Bible Scholar

The event which happened on the way to Damascus obviously interested only Paul. We do not know what happened to those whom Luke, in the *Acts*, refers to as «the men travelling with him» (Ac 9:7). Even Paul does not mention anything about them in his letters but limits himself only to the focal point of his experience.

However it is evident that in his apostolic activities Paul never acts alone! After this event, he only says about himself that he went off to Arabia (cf. *Ga* 1:17), but when, after a little while, he returned to Jerusalem «he tried to join the disciples» (Ac 9,26), even though these were all afraid of him. The fact that he 'looked for' the other disciples shows that his idea of a church was living and sharing the same faith in a community of brothers. Definitely, when he started his apostolic journeys, right from the start, he does not do anything alone.

In short, Paul had a full list of collaborators who shared not only his thoughts but also his apostolic fate. The list is definitely not skimpy but is in fact quite comprehensive and includes men and women: men like Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Epaphra, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Clement, Aquila; women like Lydia, Prisca, Phobe, Mary, Junias, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia. He also left a theological tradition endorsed by his so called 'deutropauline' letters as well as by other authors who came after him (such as Ignatius of Antioch, Justin and Irinaeus) who, so to speak, were his '*post mortem*' companions.

Here, I would like to speak about his collaborators individually. This, not only helps us to get to know them as historical figures but also to help us note the rich human side of Paul himself when he acquaints us with different characters and profiles.

1. - His first collaborator was *Barnabas*, a Jewish levite who came from Cyprus. It was he who guaranteed Saul's conversion with the Christian community of Jerusalem. (cf. Ac 9:27ff). When he was sent to Antioch of Syria, he went to Tarsus where Saul-Paul had retired. (cf. Ac 9:30; 11:25), They spent a whole year together in the important city of Antioch. In this Church, Barnabas was considered as a prophet and a teacher (cf. Ac 11:26; 13:1).

The Church in Antioch sent them both on a mission, which is referred to as St. Paul's first missionary journey. In reality this was Barnabas' missionary journey as he was responsible for the journey's plan and Paul only joined him as a collaborator. They touched the region of Cyprus and central-southern Anatolia, the cities of Attalia, Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (cf. Ac 13-14). Together they then went to the so called council of Jerusalem where, together with all the Apostles, they decided to separate the practice of having circumcision from the Christian identity. (cf. Ac 15:1-35).

At a meeting during the second missionary journey, there was some disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Probably, for two different reasons, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, while Paul did not agree due to the fact that during the previous journey he had left them. (cf. Ac 13:13; 15:36-40). Also, because Barnabas wanted to observe Jewish eating prescriptions which Paul no longer adhered to. (cf. *Ga* 2:13).

2. - *Silas* was another of Paul's companions. Silas was a Greek name of Hebrew origin (maybe *sheal* «asking, invoking», has the same roots as the name «Saul»), but he was also called Sylvan in the latin language: the first name appears only in the *Acts*, while the second is found only in Paul's letters. He was a Jew of Jerusalem, one of the first to become Christian and was greatly respected (cf. Ac 15:22) as he was considered a prophet. (cf. Ac 15:32).

He was detailed to go and explain the decisions taken during the Council of Jerusalem «to the brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia» (Ac 15:23). Evidently he was considered capable of mediating between Jerusalem and Antioch, that is between Judaism and paganism. And

when Paul and Barnabas separated, the Apostle chose him as his travelling companion.

Together with him, Paul went to Macedonia (to the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Beroea), where Silas stayed on but Paul proceeded to Athens. Silas then rejoined Paul in Corinth and together they preached the Gospel. In fact, in his second letter to the Church in Corinth, Paul speaks about «Jesus Christ, about whom I, Sylvan and Timothy preached to you» (2Co 1:19). This explains why Paul associated him as his co-sender of the two letters to the Thessalonians (cf. 1Th 1:1; 2Th 2:1).

3. - There were two other collaborators who were closer and therefore dearer to Paul: *Timothy* and *Titus*. He addressed three letters to these two, two to the first and one to the second.

Timothy is a Greek name and means «one who honours God». While Luke mentions him six times, Paul, in his letters, mentions him seventeen times. His name appears also in the *Letter to the Hebrews*. One can deduct that Paul held him in high esteem even if Luke does not tell us all about him. In fact the Apostle trusted him with important missions and saw in him his *alter-ego*, as one can conclude from the grand eulogy found in the *Letter to the Philippians*: «There is nobody else who is like him (*isópsychon*) and who cares as sincerely for your well-being; they all want to work for themselves, not for Jesus Christ» (Ph 2:20-21).

Timothy was born in Lystra (about 200 km north-west of Tarsus) from a Jewish mother and a pagan father. (cf. Ac 16:1). The fact that his mother had not circumcised him and the mixed marriage of his parents presupposes that he was brought up in a family which did not observe the laws strictly even if he knew the Scriptures from his childhood. (cf. 2Tm 3:15). We even know the name of his mother, Eunice, and even that of his grandmother, Lois (cf. 2Tm 1:5).

When Paul passed on to Lystra at the beginning of his second missionary journey, he chose him as his travelling companion, because «the brothers of Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him» (Ac 16:2), but he circumcised him «on account of the Jews in the locality» (Ac 16:3). Together with him and Silas, Paul crossed over to Asia Minor right up to Troas, from where he proceeded to Macedonia. But at Philippi, Paul and Silas were accused of disturbing public peace and were imprisoned when they freed a young soothsayer from the

spirit and her masters lost all hope of making money out of her (cf. Ac 16:16-40). Timothy was not involved.

Paul was then compelled to proceed to Athens. Here he was joined by Timothy who was then asked to go to Thessalonica, to get news about that young church and to confirm it in its faith and encourage it. (cf. 1Th 3:1-2). Timothy then rejoined the Apostle in Corinth, bringing back good news about the Thessalonians. In Corinth, he helped Paul in his evangelizing mission (cf. 2Co 1:19).

We find Timothy again in Ephesus during the third missionary journey. Maybe it was from here that Paul wrote to Philemon and to the Philippians. Both these letters were written in the name of both Paul and Timothy (cf. Phm 1; Ph 1:1). From Ephesus Paul sent him to Macedonia together with a certain Erastus (cf. Ac 19:22) and then also to Corinth to deliver Paul's letter to them wherein he asked them to give him a warm welcome (cf. 1Co 4:17; 16:10-11). We find him again, together with Paul, sending the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, and when Paul wrote the *Letter to the Romans* from Corinth, he also included greetings from Timothy. (cf. Rm 16:21).

From Corinth he left again for Troas on the northern Asiatic coast of the Aegean Sea. There he waited for the Apostle who was on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. (cf. Ac 20:4). From then on, Timothy's biographies say nothing more. We meet him again in the Appendix to the *Letter to the Hebrews*, where we read: «You know that our brother Timothy has been set free. If he arrives in time, he will be with me when I see you» (Heb 13:23).

We now come to *Titus*. His name is of Latin origin and we know that he is of Greek birth and, as such, a pagan (cf. Ga 2:3). Paul took him with him for the so-called apostolic council where it was accepted to preach to pagans without being bound to observe the mosaic law. In the letter addressed to him, the Apostle makes an eulogy about him and describes him as «a true child of mine in the faith that we share» (Tt 1:4).

After Timothy left for Corinth, Paul sent Titus there to convince that unsubmitive community to obey. It seems that his mission was successful as he reconciled that new church with the Apostle, in fact this is what he wrote: «God who encourages those who are distressed, encouraged us with the arrival of Titus; and not simply by his arrival, but also by the encouragement that you had given him. In fact he told us of your desire to see us and how sorry you were and

how concerned you were for us ... Besides being consoled, we are all the more filled with joy, much more than Titus is for having had his spirit refreshed by you all» (2Co 7:6-7.13).

Titus was again sent to Corinth by Paul, who described him as «my companion and fellow-worker» (2Co 8:23), to conclude the work in connection with the collections in aid of Christians in Jerusalem (cf. 2Co 8:6).

4. - *Apollos* was another of Paul's companions. Apollos is probably an abbreviation of Apollonius or Apollodorus. Although his name stamps him as being a pagan, he was in actual fact a fervent Jew from Alexandria in Egypt. Luke in the *Acts* describes him as «a cultured man, well-versed in the Scriptures... full of zeal» (Ac 18:24-25). He appears first in the history of Christianity in the city of Ephesus, where he went and was instructed in the faith by a Christian couple Aquila and Prisca (cf. Ac 18:26; cf. below).

From there he passed on to Achaia and reached the city of Corinth. Here he relied on a recommendation to the Corinthians to welcome him, in a letter he carried with him, sent by the Christians of Ephesus. (cf. Ac 18:27). As Luke writes, «In Corinth he was of great help to those, who by God's grace had accepted the faith. In an energetic way, he refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ.» (Ac 18:27-28).

His success in that city had a problematic turn, as there were some members of that Church who opposed the others in his name (cf. 1Co 1:12; 3:4-6; 4:6). Paul in his *First Letter to the Corinthians* shows appreciation for his work but reproaches the Corinthians for tearing up the Body of Christ, namely the community, subdividing it into opposing factions. His lesson was that Paul and Apollo are only *diákonoi*, that is, simple ministers through whom one comes to believe (cf. 1Co 3:5). Each and every one has a specific role in the field of the Lord: «I planted, Apollo watered, but God caused the growth. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building.» (1Co 3:6-9).

When he returned to Ephesus, Paul asked him to return to Corinth, but Apollo refused and postponed the journey to a later date unknown to us (cf. 1Co 16:12). We do not know anything else about him, even if some scholars think that he is the author of the important *Letter to the Hebrews*.

5. - Paul also relied a lot on *many female figures* who carried out an effective, valuable and irreplaceable role by collaborating in his evangelizing work. Their memory cannot be forgotten, just as that of the woman, who poured ointment on Jesus' head a little before his Passion: «Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her» (Mt 26:13; Mc 14:9).

We have been looking at the women who have had an active role in Christ's mission (cf. particularly the women who followed Jesus to assist him with their resources, among whom *Luke* (8:2-3) gives the particular names of Mary, called Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and «many others») and the sisters Martha and Mary who received him in their house (cf. *Lk* 10:38-42; *Jn* 11:20.28ff).

In the early Church the female presence is far from being secondary. I am not going to make a special mention of the four daughters of the 'deacon' Philip, who lived in Maritime Caesarea and who had the «gift of prophecy» that is they were able to intervene publicly under the action of the Holy Spirit. (Ac 21:9). But I must say that St Paul gave us a full documentation on the dignity and on the ecclesial role of women. He starts from the fundamental principle namely that, on the part of the baptized, there can be «neither Jew nor Greek, there can neither be slave nor freeman» but paradoxically «neither male nor female»: the reason is because «we are all one in Christ Jesus» (Ga 3:28), that is, we have all been given the same dignity, although each one of us has his specific role (cf. 1Co 12:7).

Well, the Apostle accepts as normal practice the fact that in Christian assemblies, a woman could intervene by «prophesying» (1Co 11:5), that is, guided by the Holy Spirit she could express herself openly and publicly, provided that this is for the edification of the community. Thus, the following exhortation asking «women to remain quiet during assemblies» (1Co 14:34) is seen as very relative and means, if not exactly a revised post-pauline interpretation (as some commentators say referring to (1Tm 2:11-15) simply a concrete way of keeping order during assemblies.

Besides it is maintained that the short letter by the Apostle to Philemon is actually also addressed to a woman called «Apphia» (cf. *Phm* 2), which St Jerome's Vulgate refers to as *soror carissima*. One must say that she must have occupied a high position in the Colossian

community. In any case, she is the only woman mentioned by Paul among the addressees of one of his letters.

In another instance, the Apostle mentions a certain «Phoebe» referred to as *diákonos* of the church in Cenchreae, a small harbour town to the east of Corinth (cf. *Rm* 16:1-2). Although this title did not have any specific hierarchical ministerial significance, it just showed the responsibility which this woman assumed in that Christian community.

In this same *Letter to the Romans*, Paul even mentions a couple, whose partners «Andronicus and Junias», are also both «outstanding apostles» (*Rm* 16:7). He acknowledges that they were Christians even before he was and cannot absolutely deny the fact that they contributed towards the foundation of the Church of Rome.

Within the same context, the Apostle, with a certain sensitivity, mentions the names of other women: a certain Mary «who worked so hard for you», then Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis «my dear friend», besides Julia. About these he states openly that «they have worked hard in the Lord» (*Rm* 16:6.12a.12b.15), a way of describing their ecclesial commitment. In the Church of Philippi he singles out two women namely «Euodia and Syntyche» (*Ph* 4:2). It seems that Paul called their attention to come to an agreement with each other in the Lord and also that they had to carry out an important mission in that community.

6. - He also mentions a married couple, referring to *Aquila and Prisca*, who are among the many collaborators of St Paul. In *Rm* 16:4 he even mentions the woman first before the man and this shows his special obligation to her. It is good to notice that they are the only married couple, who, we are told, had a very active role at the time when the post-Easter Church originated. In the *Letter to the Romans* (cf. 16:7), we also come across Andronicus and Junias who were also involved but we do not know whether these were husband and wife, which most probably they were, or brother and sister.

The names of Aquila and Prisca are Latin but they correspond to a man and a woman of Jewish origin. At least we know that Aquila geographically came from the diaspora of northern Anatolia, facing the Black Sea, while Priscilla, whose name sometimes appears in an abridged form as Prisca, was probably a Jew who came from Rome (cf. *Ac* 18:2). Anyhow Paul met them in Corinth, after they came from Rome, at the beginning of the year 50 of the first century. It

was in Corinth that he joined them because, as Luke says, they were tentmakers, that is of the same trade as himself. He lodged with them and they worked together (cf. *Ac* 18:3).

They had come to Corinth because the Emperor Claudius, according to the Roman historian Svetonio, «had expelled some Jews from Rome because they were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus», probably referring to Jesus Christ (cf. *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Claudius* 25). From this, one comes to the conclusion that they had embraced the Christian faith already in Rome in the year 40 and now they have found in Paul someone with whom they could share it.

Another time we hear that they went to Ephesus in Asia Minor. It was here that they had a determining part in the conversion of Apollos, the Jew from Alexandria whom we referred to before, to Christianity. Since he knew the Christian faith rather roughly, «Priscilla and Aquila listened to him, then they took him with them and gave him more detailed instruction about the Way» (*Ac* 18:26).

When then, from Ephesus the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, together with greetings he explicitly sent those of «Aquila and Prisca, and those of all the community which met in their house» (*1Co* 16:19).

Thus we get to know this couple's very important role in the life of the primitive Church: that of opening their house to the local Christians for their liturgical assemblies. This meeting was nothing but 'church', *ekklesia* that means a holy assembly, whose original specific connotations were definitely domestic.

In fact, up to the end of the third century, Christians did not have proper places of worship. At first, or rather, up to the time when Christianity distinguished itself from its Jewish roots with its socio-religious proper identity, the Jewish Synagogues were the only places of worship. But at this time, the private houses of some Christians, every now and then (probably every seven days) were transformed into a real proper church. On these occasions, the Christians read the Sacred Scripture and celebrated the Eucharist (cf. *1Co* 11:17-34). This took place also in Corinth, where Paul mentions a certain «Gaius, who hosted me and all the community» (*Rm* 16:23), or at Laodicea, where the community gathered in the house of a certain Nympha (cf. *Col* 4:15), or at Colossae, where the meeting was held in the house of a certain Archippus (cf. *Phm* 2).

When then Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome, they carried on with this very important work even in the Empire's capital city. In fact, when Paul wrote to the Romans, he stated specifically: «My greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus; they risked their own necks to save my life, to them thanks not only from me, but from all the Churches among the gentiles; and my greetings to the community which meets in their house» (Rm 16:3-5).

These words are the greatest eulogy which could be made to that very special couple and it was no one other than the Apostle Paul who wrote it. He explicitly acknowledges them as true and important collaborators in his apostolate. His reference to the fact that they had risked their life for him probably refers to some instance when they intervened in his favour during one of his imprisonments, maybe in Ephesus (cf. Ac 19:23; 1Co 15:32; 2Co 1:8-9). Together with his gratitude, Paul adds that of all the Churches of the Gentiles. Although this expression should not be taken literally, it shows the vastness and the influence of their contribution in favour of the Gospel.

A last but not least lesson which can be learnt from their example is the fact that every house can be transformed into a small church. This, not only because of the typical disinterested and reciprocal Christian love which should reign in every house but more in the sense that family life should be faith-centres and should all turn around the unique lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not by chance that the Pauline letter to the Ephesians compares matrimonial relationship to that between Christ and the Church (cf. Ep 5:32ff) and indirectly the life of the whole Church to that of a family.

7. - *To conclude*, I must say that if we take all these considerations together, we arrive at some very interesting conclusions. The most important is, that Paul involved many and different collaborators to help him carry out his mission. Undoubtedly he remains the most important Apostle, founder and pastor of many churches.

It is very evident that the thoughts he expressed in his letters were not coming from someone else. But it is also clear that he did not work by himself but rather he relied on the help of people he trusted and who shared (or with whom he shared) his missionary and pastoral labours and responsibility.

Another observation is about the availability of these collaborators. The information given about them shows clearly or at least....their readiness to be with Paul to support him and to take responsibility for different tasks. They were ready to stand in for him even in situations which were not so easy. Christianity could not have been what it was and is, had there not been the generous contribution of his many collaborators, including women. In view of these, John Paul II in his encyclical *Mulieris dignitatem*, wrote: «The Church gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine "genius" which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations» (§ 31).

Evidently, everyone was of service to the Gospel in his own particular way: the diverse geographical places of origin, the different cultural backgrounds as well as the diversified personal charisms all helped.

The fact that Paul represented their common *trait-d'union* means that collaboration should not make us lose the common reference, the common ideal and the unifying aim, which certainly is Jesus Christ and all those who represent him in the church. Precisely one of the indispensable characteristics of cooperation is the communion built on reciprocal trust.

N.B. - Further information may be found under the title "Collaboratori", in the *Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, edited by G.F. Hawthorne-R.P. Martin-D.G. Reid, Ed. San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1999, p. 256-266.

EVANGELIZATION AND INCULTURATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Introduction

Today it is even more important to realize the significant and vital role which evangelization should play and to understand that it is the fundamental mission and the unavoidable choice for the Church if she wants to remain true to herself. There are many factors which render evangelization so important but I am only going to treat the subject from the globalization point of view, a phenomenon dominated by economic, political, technological-communicative and cultural dynamics¹. Whichever way we look at this process, we have to admit that it presents a chance and a challenge to the evangelizing mission of the Church and so we are compelled to think of the process of inculturation.

¹ In its wider meaning, this term refers to different characteristic phenomena of our times: the development in international exchanges, the distribution of the world's assets (definitely not fair), world communication network, without forgetting English as the common means of communicating, the increasing feeling of belonging to a world based on conjoint, multiple and complex relationships among countries, a world therefore where the different categories of relationships and interdependence are becoming ever more fundamental: Juvenal Ilunga Muya, "Les Grands défis pour les églises d'Afrique en cette première décennie du XXIème siècle" in *Eglise d'Afrique*. Review on the study and experiences of pastoral work, April 2001 n. 1, p. 72-87.

We will therefore start by trying to show how globalization is a "chance" for evangelization. We will then try to highlight the challenges which it poses to evangelization and lastly, considering evangelization and inculturation, we will try to find out what the role of the laity is in this respect.

I. Globalization as a "chance" for evangelization

The present globalization process could be regarded as fertile ground for Christianity's universal vocation. In fact, since its very origin, the Christian community has always been guided by a universal-catholic vision, that is, it has always understood from the words of its founder and Lord, that as a community, it has been called to be the "light" of the world and the "salt" of the earth (*Mt* 5:13ff) and to communicate the fullness of life to the whole world (*Jn* 10:10). From the mandate given by the Risen Christ Himself "You will be my witnesses... indeed to earth's remotest ends" (*Ac* 1:8) we cannot but conclude that this should be our mission.

This openness towards others, towards the whole world is in the very constitution of the Christian community. That is why Origene wrote in his *Comments to John*: «The Church is the world when it is enlightened by the Saviour»². The Church has always been convinced that it has a special responsibility towards the future of the "inhabited land" (*oikouménē*). This conviction explains the setting up of missions in the far ends of the world; it has also been a determining factor behind technical and scientific inventions, in developments in social and political spheres and globally, in all areas which contributed to the humanization of nature and of the world.

This conviction is based on fundamental statements found in the biblical tradition: the command to subdue the earth (*Gn* 1:28); the vocation of all humanity to receive the announcement of salvation (as one can conclude from some of the most universalistic passages of the Old Testament); the revelation of the Word made flesh, sharing fully humanity's conditions and giving His life «for many»; the event of the

² Origen, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, vol. II, book VI, chapter 59, line 304, *Christian Sources* 157, greek text, preamble, translation and notes by Cécile Blanc, Cerf, Paris 1970, p. 365.

second Pentecost (Peter in Cornelio's house) and the mission of Christians to cooperate in the transformation of the world in order to make it more receptive to the Spirit of the Risen Lord.

The vocation and apostolate of the laity fit in precisely within this specific mission of the Church, that of spreading God's kingdom all over the earth and of helping men become sharers, in Jesus Christ, in His redemption and salvation³. Today, as in the past, the testimony of lay people extends itself to the whole world. Every Christian is in fact called to "shine out among them like bright stars in the world, offering the Word of life" (Ph 2:15) to the whole world. He cannot run away from this universal vocation as St John Chrisostomus says: "Do not say that you cannot leave an impression on the world: if you are a Christian, it is impossible not to leave any effect. It is in fact contradictory to say that a Christian cannot do anything for the world just as much as it is contradictory to say that the sun cannot give light"⁴.

So one could say that Christianity would be betraying its proper identity if it is not concerned about the future of the whole world. This is not to be taken only from the geographical point of view. It also means that Christian universality and catholicity should get involved in human situations which bring about divisions and exclusions: "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman; there can be neither male nor female - for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Ga 3:28). Considering this, it is evident that from this mandate, churches should be prepared to accept globalization. How could they not see it as an opportunity to carry out today, more than ever, a vocation which is inscribed in the origin of their Christian tradition? From this perspective, globalization offers the Church a good "chance", an opportunity to relaunch its mission. But evangelization and inculturation also bring certain problems with them. So evidently, globalization presents a challenge to the evangelizing mission of the Church.

II. Globalization as a challenge for evangelization

It is important to analyse closely the cultural change brought about by this globalization process at world level, in economic, technological-communicative, political and cultural spheres.

³ Ecumenical Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2.

⁴ John Chrisostomus, in *Acta Apost. Hom.* 20 n. 4: p. 60,162.

II. 1. The economic dimension

The most felt economic aspect of globalization is that of the market or of neo-liberal capitalism. This presents a challenge to evangelization as, in a certain sense, it stimulates consumerism and encourages secularism, making it difficult for man to be open to Christian values and to practise them. It places the material aspect of man at the centre, thus making it difficult for man to be open to that which is transcendent.

Besides, if, at global level, this type of capitalism has brought about positive changes in developing countries like India, China, Brazil, South Africa and others, one must also say that it has also brought about a deeper gap between the poor and the rich. The world's vision is characterized by merciless competition and continual innovations, as a result of which, those who are not able to keep up the pace, are simply excluded. This gives rise to an anthropology which is very different from that outlined in *Gaudium et Spes*. In this context, Christianity is only acceptable in as far as it helps to resolve man's material problems, only if it contributes towards human progress, thus risking reducing the Church's mission simply to pure humanism, philanthropy⁵.

This situation compels us to review evangelization in the light of the social doctrine of the Church, as suggested in the Encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI, "*Deus caritas est*". It says that we should take up the positive aspect of globalization and suggest the anthropology which could give a human face to the new changes and make it possible for non-believers to perceive the distinctive novelty of the Christian faith.

II. 2. The new communication technologies

The new communication technologies provide us with new possibilities to discover and keep direct and immediate contact with realities both near and far. This possibility to communicate with such a diversity of people, accessing the "World Wide Web" and the Internet so easily, has changed our quality of life. These technologies are

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, "*Charity, the soul of all missionary activity*", *Osservatore Romano*, Saturday 3 June 2006 p. 5.

today widely diffused: in fact, even in the poorest countries one finds mobile phones and possibly even Internet. What is the meaning and the impact of all this on evangelization?

The first consequence is that today missionaries are no longer isolated and compelled to wait such a long time to get information from Rome. There is a greater possibility to coordinate and to reorganize communication better with the dioceses and the operators, involved in evangelization across the world. Studies should be carried out about the possibilities which these new communication technologies present to us when it comes to communicating our faith and making it more easily available to those who as yet do not know Christ.

Another possibility is to create a network of solidarity for the evangelization of all peoples, with a view of spreading the Gospel and consolidating the presence of the Church in all nations. However, we cannot ignore the fact that these technologies could present themselves as the new absolutes, which little by little, pretend to replace any religion or become themselves a new type of religion. In this regard, it is worth remembering the words which the Servant of God John Paul II said on the 14th February 1982 in Kaduna when addressing lay people. He said: "As lay people you know that your special apostolate is to bring Christian principles to bear upon the temporal order, that is, to bring the spirit of Christ into such spheres of life as marriage and the family, trade and commerce, the arts and professions, politics and government, culture and national and international relations.". Globalization emphasizes how important it is for lay people to rediscover their call to be missionaries in the different cultural spheres where they live and work.

II. 3. *The political dimension*

Globalization leads to the privatization of public services and lessens the State's sense of responsibility towards its citizens. This tends to convert society into individual consumers. So, the need to establish and consolidate social ties becomes more pressing. Our Christian faith could and should help to create these ties.

In fact, if we look at history during these last decades, we realize that nations have become more conscious of the value of the human person and of human and nation's rights. Their aspirations for peace, their desire to overcome frontiers and racial divisions, their tendency to have meetings which bring together nations and

cultures, their tolerance towards those they regard as different; their refusal of political authoritarianism and the strengthening of democracy and their aspiration for an equitable international justice in the economic field have grown.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that globalization also favours the development of an underground network of violence, terrorism, criminality as well as new systems of injustice and a greater gap between the rich and the poor. The creative faithfulness to the Gospel demands a globalization of our responsibility and solidarity with the poor and the weak. In this context, the Church inevitably also becomes the promoter of a new social tie, of new forms of solidarity and identity⁶. So, when considering evangelization, it is important that we re-assess places which help to bring out this new form of identity and solidarity such as schools, hospitals and works of Christian charity.

It is possible to revive Christian values in public spheres. In this context, one can understand the relevance of the mission of lay people who are specifically entrusted to consecrate the world to God through their testimony of a holy life as lay people⁷. In this perspective, Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks about the lay person as the Christian, the disciple of Jesus, who participates in the life of Christ and represents his creative freedom and his amazing mission to the world⁸.

Another political characteristic of globalization is the phenomenon of migration. The demographic impoverishment of some parts of the world has brought about a most impressive migratory flow of peoples in western society. One of the results of this migration is the creation of multicultural societies. It has become a common situation to find a diversity of cultures and peoples who share the same political space and live together. These situations could create conflicts and tension among the different groups and are the new *areopagi* for evangelization. This is the reason why, the document issued by the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People has indentified migration as "a sign of the times and a challenge for

⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* nn. 28-29.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 901

⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Christian's states of life*, Jaca Book, Milano 1983, p. 185,191.

the Church”⁹. In this situation, being a sign and an instrument of communion with God and men among themselves, the Church is called upon to be instrumental in creating new identities and new social links, that is, to anticipate here on earth an image of the heavenly Jerusalem.

II. 4. *The cultural-religious aspect*

Of itself, man’s natural desire to improve his living conditions leads to a greater development of urbanization. Different cultural changes also result from this. *Gaudium et Spes* treats fully about the question of the true development of culture in numbers 53-57. Today, in view of evangelization, it is worth studying in depth the impact of urbanization on the transformation process of culture. One notices that, people, especially young people living in urban centres, are searching for a sense of direction, for stability and are trying to develop an identity and a personality. But at the same time they are inclined to look at identity, truth and the sense of direction as relative truths which are to be reformulated every so often according to circumstance¹⁰. So, our missionary efforts demand new methods and means of communication if we want to develop a deep sense of identity and personality. This is what Pope John Paul II meant when he spoke about the new “areopagi” for our mission¹¹. The Mission cannot be focused only on rural zones but should, even more so, be directed towards urban centres where the traditional culture is undergoing radical changes.

In fact, during this last decade, when it comes to ideals, the crisis is deepening: there is a void of ideals and values and the idea of relativism is spreading. With globalization, the profound social and cultural changes, started in the West and which have had evident repercussions on the religious aspect of life, tend to spread all over the world. In fact, we are witnessing the development of a society which is always becoming more pluralistic. There is an increasing tendency for cultures to be more secular with all the consequences which this brings about: a tendency towards dis-belief, towards religious indifference and moral relativism.

⁹ Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes* n. 12.

¹⁰ In this perspective the *Homily* by the Holy Father Benedict XVI on the XX World Youth Day is very enlightening.

¹¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* n.37.

This does not mean that religion has disappeared; rather there is a re-awakening of the religious sense among peoples. Up till now, this is still an ambiguous phenomenon which is characterized by an increase of a plurality of religious tendencies¹². This is evident through the interest shown in that which is esoteric, in Asian rituals, in the search for magic and mythical influences, in the desire to misrepresent the real world and in the proliferation of pentecostal movements. Anyhow, whatever the ambiguity of these phenomena might be, we must admit that these situations, which lead persons to the point of desperation, offer new chances for evangelization and induce us to find new ways of passing on our faith to those who have lost it or believe differently from us. So, we realize the need to look at religions within the wider cultural spectrum.

Such approach entails that we seriously consider interreligious dialogue, dialogue with science, tradition, peoples’ customs and the various cultures. We should consider this from the point of view of inculturation, that is from the point of view of the conversion which the Gospel should bring about in the people when we encounter them.

This approach helps us to realize better that Jesus Christ is a unique and distinctive figure and as such, so is Christianity when compared to other religions and cultures. The Christian faith should address these situations. This entails, that in different parts of the world, the Church has to move from the traditional pastoral approach to a renewed missionary commitment for a new evangelizing mission, that of promoting a spirit of conversion and of diffusing Gospel initiation initiatives. Thus, it is very important for the whole Church to be fully conscious that it has to promote and sustain a missionary spirit continually.

III. A new missionary awareness

The promotion of this infused awareness in all the Church presupposes a commitment to arouse an interest in the Christian faith, to fight any criticism and prejudice raised against it and to be ready to offer initial information about it. Above all it means making it more

¹² In his *Homily* on the occasion of the XX World Youth Pope Benedict XVI speaks about the religious boom.

possible for non christians to meet the Gospel in a world which is closed to Christ by helping them to open their hearts to accept his message and to be converted. This is why Vatican II insists on the following important points:

- the Church must be rooted in the environment, it must be part of the human groups living there, just as Christ, through the incarnation, bound himself to the social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom he dwelt (AG n. 10; cf. anche *Rmi* n. 43);
- wherever he lives, every Christian should be that “new man” born at baptism and strengthened at Confirmation, by the example of his life and by his words. He should establish relationships of esteem and love with those fellowmen among whom he lives; he should be member of their group, share in cultural, social political and economic life; be familiar with their national and religious traditions in order to discover the seeds of the Word which lie hidden there (AG n. 11; cf. also *Rmi* n. 42);
- he should give a concrete expression of Christian charity, of disinterested love, of solidarity with the poor and the suffering, of collaboration in the search of solutions for economic and social problems, of supporting all efforts by nations aimed at combating hunger, ignorance and diseases, working hard to create better living conditions, to establish peace, to promote human dignity and fraternal love (AG n. 12)¹³;
- openly and firmly, he should proclaim the living God and Jesus Christ sent by God for the salvation of all (AG n. 13; cf. also *Rmi* nn. 44, 45). Here we should stress that the announcement should aim at conversion, at a full and sincere union with Christ and his Gospel (*Rmi* n. 46), the union which comes from baptism.

The Holy Spirit is present in the Church and guides her in her evangelizing mission. It is encouraging to know that the protagonist

¹³ In this respect, Pope Benedict XVI's message for the LXXX World Mission Sunday is very enlightening and very meaningful. His appeal is not to reduce our mission to a mere philanthropic and social activity and reminds us that: “Being a missionary means... loving God by giving ourselves and, if necessary, even our life for Him”: Benedict XVI, “*Charity, the soul of all missionary activity*” *Osservatore Romano*, Saturday 3 June 2006 p. 5.

of this mission is He Himself and not we. It is He, who, even in our times, stirs up this new awareness for this evangelizing mission among peoples. This consciousness must remain always new and fresh in the Church since a Church, which does not evangelize, renounces its mission and so dies. And now, I would like to dwell particularly on the missionary commitment of lay people.

III. 1. Lay people and evangelization

We cannot but start from the very same words of our Lord: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt* 28:19). The context of this text is post-Paschal, when our attention is directed towards the disciples’ future prospects.

The said prospects are: the building of the Church, the concentrated effort on the announcement of the Gospel, the administration of the Sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist, and lastly the disciples’ attention to the whole world where they should be witnesses of the crucified and risen Lord. The setting for this vision which Matthew relates is a mountain. The mountain is the place for revelation. In fact, even in this episode, when the disciples saw him, they adored him. (*Mt* 28:17), just as they did when they saw him coming to them on the water. Even here, the disciples “bowed down before Jesus and said: ‘Truly, you are the Son of God!’” (*Mt* 14:33).

This passage from *Mt* 28:16-20 includes decisive elements in the will which the Risen Lord left to his disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (*Mt* 28:18). It is important to note that Matthew emphasizes the word “all”: “all the power”, “all nations”, “and all men”, “observe all”, “all the days”. So, everything starts from the unlimited love of God the Creator, which embraces the entire universe.

In the beginning, the mission is to go to non Christians, to non Catholics. It becomes a concrete reality in the administration of the sacrament of Baptism. Being a disciple does not mean leading a disembodied, abstract life, focusing only on the interior aspect of life. The exterior aspect of discipleship means that one has to go out of himself in order to build a visible church and small communities. Whatever happens in the world happens through the Risen Lord, who promised his disciples: “Rest assured, I am with you all days even to the ends of the time”. The expression “all days” refers to the future

in space and time. Wherever the disciples go and live, He will be with them all days, since the God, who is sending us to fulfil His mission, reveals Himself in His Resurrection as the *Emmanuel*, God with us and for us. This is the reason of our hope; the fundamental principle of our conviction to commit ourselves fully to bring about this new missionary spring.

Because of this fundamental principle behind our mission, we should not let today's insistence for inculturation make us lose sight of the need of a clear and sound evangelization by the Christians towards all non-believers in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Renewed courage to express our faith is needed not only for us who already believe but also, and even more so, for those who no longer believe or confess another faith. In our times, it is important that we manifest the public dimension of our faith. The lay Christian should express the public aspect of his faith where he lives and works.

As Christians we cannot believe, pray and hope only for ourselves but we should communicate, diffuse and share with others the benefit we experienced in our meeting with God¹⁴. For every Christian, Paul's words are even more relevant today than ever: "woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Co 9:16). Evangelization is a basic and constitutional dimension of our Christian faith, "an indispensable and permanent commitment"¹⁵. No modern situation can change it or stop it. On the contrary, the today's challenges should renovate it and revive it.

Undoubtedly, the Church, in its totality, is the first subject of evangelization. This is stated very clearly in Vatican II: "The whole Church is missionary; and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God" (AG n. 35). It is worthwhile highlighting the effective image, which the Fathers of the first centuries, had of the Church, that of "Mother Church"¹⁶. As a mother, the Church had to conceive in her own womb the new believers so that then she could

¹⁴ In this respect, the last doctrinal note by the Congregation of Faith on some aspects of evangelization, 3 December 2007, is important.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, "Charity, the soul of all missionary activity", *Osservatore Romano*, Saturday 3 June 2006 p. 5.

¹⁶ Enough to remember: Methodius, Bishop of Olympus, *Symposium* 8, 6, in *Sources chrétiennes* 95, p.187 and Augustine, *Sermo* 228, 1, NBA 32/ 1.

give them birth through Baptism. In concrete terms, evangelization calls for a different kind of responsibility and different operators at different levels.

One could say that Vatican II has brought about an ever increasing awareness of the idea that this mission is no longer to be considered solely the work of religious missionary congregations and institutes. The conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* has highlighted lay people's missionary role within the Church: "All baptized are called to be witnesses of Christ" (AG 6) and further in AG 36 it is reaffirmed that: "All the faithful, as members of the living Christ, are duty-bound to cooperate in the expansion and growth of His Body" (AG 36; cf. 28,41). Every Christian is and should be a missionary. In fact "every disciple is entrusted with the work of spreading the faith" (LG 17).

Lay people's involvement, especially since the Council, is one of the remarkable novelties and an added richness in the missionary activity of the Church. Lay movements, family groups, voluntary workers etc, are today a providential instrument in the ever-growing missionary activities, especially in areas where evangelization has just started. This missionary spirit is the parameter which measures the truthfulness and authenticity of our faith. Pope Pius XII had stated this at the beginning of his missionary Encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*. He affirmed: "What shall we offer to the Lord in return for the faith He has given us?... A missionary spirit is in some way the first sign of our gratitude towards God and this we can show by sharing the faith which we have received with our brethren"¹⁷. He was here anticipating the statements in *Redemptoris Missio*: "Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!"¹⁸. So the missionary commitment of lay movements should be reviewed and promoted from this perspective.

In today's challenging situations for evangelization, ecclesial movements are in fact an expression of new charisms. They offer new ways and modalities of educating Christians and of showing an apostolic commitment. This gives a new style to the Mission. Their awareness of the "novelty" which results from their baptism, their

¹⁷ PIUS XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, 2 June 1951, Introduction.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2.

longing to deepen the mystery of their communion with Christ and with their brethren, their unshaken faithfulness to the faith which has been passed on to them through tradition are essential requirements for a renewed missionary impulse. This prompts the members of these movements to try to reach those who do not yet believe or who have lost their faith in today's secularized situations. Evangelization aims at bringing about a new creation, which becomes a reality in a man transfigured by the love of God.

III. 2. *Evangelization and Inculturation*

Keeping within the context of the Bible, we must say that, whoever is committed with communicating the Word of Life is radically involved in what he announces. The message of the Word of God asks for self transformation that is for conversion. It leads to a way of life which results from the continual reading of the Bible which provokes a radical change in a person's life. The continual reference to the salvific will of God and the manifestation of His love, as narrated in the Scripture, invites its readers to search and experience this love. This search makes this love become a living reality in a new being, with a new life style permeated by the Gospel and by culture at the same time.

Accepting the Gospel brings about a new way of expression which fits in with today's way of life or better still with today's culture. This process cannot be predetermined by our criteria since it is basically the work of the Holy Spirit in the concrete fabric of the life of men and women who try to live by His Word. The authenticity of their lives testifies that it is possible to live the message of the Gospel in real life and that the spirit of the Gospel can imbue all spheres of man's life.

When it speaks about the ever growing perception of things as well as of the transmitted words, namely about the relationship between Gospel and experience, "Dei Verbum" says that "there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study of believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (Lk 2:19; 2:51) and through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience". It also refers to the fact that "as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete

fulfillment in her"¹⁹. Thus inculturation becomes an initiation to an experience of God, who through the Holy Spirit works in men's hearts.

This is what "*Ecclesia in Africa*" means when it says "that new evangelization should focus on the meeting with the living person of Christ"²⁰. The credibility of every effort for inculturation should therefore be based on the community's ability to let itself be questioned and changed by the Gospel "sine glossa". So, it refers us back to the importance of being witnesses through our own life and experience. And what could this witnessing be if it does not express God's love for us? This love should be evident in our concrete concern for others. This approach, based on the relationship between the Gospel and culture, brings with it some implications. It affects the way we understand our faith and its missionary character.

In fact, the relationship which exists between the Gospel and culture, makes us look upon the anthropological dimension of our faith and of evangelization seriously²¹. This means letting the Christian message develop its potential and ability to propose a message which is able to sustain and guide humanity's journey towards its full realization.

The importance given to the anthropological impact of faith and of our mission thus makes us realize that the true value of "*spiritual experiences*" is not just a simple emotional realization of oneself but a "*way of living*". "If you only knew God's gift" Jesus said to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:20). In this way, Christian faith becomes essentially a source of new life, that is, an interior structuring of the individual, a desire for discernment and strength to build a society where it is possible to breathe and hope. With this understanding, *mission may be defined as*

¹⁹ *Dei Verbum* 8 in Giuseppe Alberigo, dir., *Les Conciles oecuméniques 2^o Les Décrets. De Trente à Vatican II*, Paris, Cerf, 1994, p. 1977.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* 57 which quotes the propositio 4.

²¹ In a way one can say that this dimension becomes evident in the dynamics which have animated the Church since the 60's and which spoke about opening up to the world. Pope John XXIII turned out to be the exceptional emblematic figure of welcome, of friendly presence, of dialogue and openness. The Council was, in fact, defined as "a window overlooking the world". According to Paul VI this means "throwing a bridge towards the contemporary world". Paul VI, *Speech given on the opening of Vatican Council's second session 29.9.1963* in Cath. Doc. 60, 1963, n° 1410, col. 1357.

the true movement for "humanization" since it reveals to man the mystery of his own personal and collective existence (GS 22).

Here, by spiritual experience we mean a move towards conversion, that is, the acceptance of the novelty which Jesus instills in men's hearts. But this journey towards life and truth is possible only through a paschal experience where wrong is recognized for what it is, where sin is acknowledged and where love, free from all inhibitions and fear, means giving the utmost of oneself. This is what Pope Paul VI had meant when he said that inculturation means in-depth evangelization. He affirmed that: "What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a simply decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)... Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them"²². The proof of true inculturation is when believers become more committed to their Christian faith in such a way that this permeates all spheres of their lives and their culture.

In this perspective, lay people have a very important role to play. In collaboration with their pastors, they are called to infuse "Christ's mind" into people's mentality, into their costumes, their laws and into all secular structures where they live. (cf. LG 31; Rmi 71).

The future of evangelization and inculturation depends to a large extent not only on a profound human, cultural, professional and religious formation but above all on their spirituality, which the Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church says should contain the following elements: the Word of God; the liturgical celebration of the Christian Mystery; personal prayer; an authentic ecclesial experience, enhanced by wise guidance in spiritual formation; the exercise of social virtues and a persevering commitment towards one's cultural and professional formation"²³. Only through their spiritual life, that is, through their intimate union with Christ, can lay people, as members of the Church, imprint, through their lives and their proclamation, the Gospel of Christ on the history of the world.

²² Paul VI, EN 20; cf. John Paul II, Rmi 52-53; *Ecclesia in Asia* 21.

²³ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 546.

LECTURES

20 YEARS FROM CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI

1. *Is the Church more missionary today? Is the laity more aware of its proper vocation and mission?*

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I have known Catholic Action for a number of years, however lately, I have not been much in touch. Thus, it is a bit difficult for me to treat this subject. However I have done my best to overcome this difficulty. It is «even more difficult», because the difficulty is a question of knowing what to say. In fact, I would like to answer the questions put to me by putting another two questions: why are you putting these questions to me? If you yourselves do not know the answer, how would I know it? There must be something bilaterally pathologic. While going through my files, I found out that this same question was put to me some twenty years ago about CA in my diocese. Even then, I had asked them why they were putting this question to me? Theologians like to read the signs of the times, interpret them and try to foresee the future so very often, people refer these questions to them. These so called theologians, more than giving an answer, help listeners to broaden their questions, especially those which deal with obvious concrete facts.

The meaning of the question

I will try to interpret the questions put to me, in themselves and with reference to *Christifideles Laici*. I would like to start by asking myself whether we can expect anything more than simply a chronological reference from *Christifideles Laici*. It is a well known fact that the 1987 Synod was blocked when it came to more complex and difficult sub-jects concerning lay people's involvement in the Church's mission in our times: namely those referring to ministries and ecclesial movements.

Other organisms were set up to study these aspects and to present their propos-als. However, nothing has been heard about these since then. The 1987 Synod said things which were already known and did not help much in opening horizons to lay people's their mission. It might be said that *Christifideles Laici* is a great catechesis. I remember that on reading it, soon after its publication, I found it rather boring and lacking in impetus. It was an apostolic exhortation which was not at all inspiring. Maybe I was wrong but this is what I felt. This cannot be taken for granted simply just because it bears the Pope's signature and does not necessarily mean that it is stimulating.

This being an international Forum, I will be continually quoting the most important papal teachings.

A study of the ecclesial living realities at grass-root level would be most interesting but this would be an endless task. At the top, we cannot say that everything is boring. I will start by referring to the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* by John Paul II, one of the most stimulating documents he issued during his long pontificate. Maybe, by referring to it and to the pages introducing to the third millennium, we could come to the conclusion as to whether the Church has become more missionary. Here I can think of the proposition of the imperative *Duc in altum!* in *Novo millennio ineunte*. The world scenario of the beginning of the third millennium has proved to be and continues to be unpredictably complex and tragic. This does not bring out anything outstanding in ecclesial dynamics but maybe it can provoke the Church to be more attentive in cultivating a more eager missionary spirit.

But what do we mean when we talk of «missionary spirit», and what do we mean when we say that the Church could have been provoked to become more missionary? In a way, the Church is absolutely and

essentially missionary. It was born within and from a mission and as such it is difficult to imagine how it could be more missionary. However, the attention given to this dimension, within the existing ecclesial structure, could be different. Also the importance given to external relations as against internal relations within the community could be different as well as the reverberation of the saving and universal love of God, poured on us through the Spirit of Jesus.

How can we assess the degree of the Church's missionary sensibility today? What are the parameters? Against which objectives is this to be measured? Which of these are common to all and which are typical of lay Christians? We could go on and on. Which undertakings, which pastoral initiatives, in universal terms, throw a light on the Church's missionary spirit today? In what way does this concern CA? In what way does this concern this *Forum*? We could assess this missionary sensitivity, for example, from the commitment shown in the spheres of evangelization and in the area of adults' Christian initiation. Other aspects are: the religious dimension of communication among peo-ples and the willingness to restructure the Christian community and its ministries.

We could put the question in another way. When we say that certain situations, certain periods in the history of the Church, judged after a number of years and thus seen more objectively, did not portray a missionary spirit, what are we basing our judgments on; on what grounds are we saying so? What do we mean? Here it is easy to say that it is a question of the phenomenon of directing the interests of the ecclesial commu-nity (of the faithful and of the pastors) towards futile objectives, for reasons of little or no evangelical value (such as power, vanity, peaceful existence, prejudices, auto-sufficiency, lack of love...) We know that, according to Christ's teachings, a missionary spirit prevails when we seek the kingdom of God and his justice, convinced that the rest and more will be given to us. (*Mt 6:33; cf. Lk 12:31*).

Anyhow, in my opinion, the missionary spirit of the Church in general and of lay people in particular has definitely improved. I would like to substantiate my answer, even though the evidence from facts is next to impossible. So, I will try to do it through some parameters, on the basis of which I will try to assess the missionary spirit prevalent in the Christian community. I will focus on just three aspects:

- a simpler Church for a more complex mission;
- a Church which, in carrying out its mission, considers it normal practice to participate in Christ's suffering;

- a Church within which, the vocational identities are all interwoven without any mistrust between them.

A simpler Church for a more complex mission

The type of Church which Vatican II has outlined is undoubtedly much simpler than that we were used to and which no longer served a purpose. That time has passed and is no longer topical.

«In the Church there is a diversity of ministries but a oneness of mission» (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2). It is difficult to imagine a simpler formula, even if, as soon as one attempts to pronounce and explain this, one find himself in a labyrinth.

One cannot run away from this complexity; however, at the roots, there should be a simple intuition. This cannot be neither simplified nor simplistic, that is, its simplicity should be neither artificial nor fake. This intuition should remain evident in spite of and through the complexity. This transparency is essential.

But should there be a simpler ecclesiology or a simpler Church? Evidently, the first one has to come through the second one. The idea of a simpler Church for a more complex mission brings to mind the image, used by Pope John, of David in front of Goliath. He succeeded in winning when he threw off the heavy armour which was hampering him.

The challenge is not only that of maintaining purity of heart in everyone's littleness. This is already difficult to safeguard. The complexity of structures, projects and problems makes it difficult for the fundamentals of the mystery of the kingdom to be easily evident. At that level everything is costly, is so entangled with complex problems of interaction and justice. It remains more difficult to seek the kingdom of God and justice. Notwithstanding a complicated canon law, ecclesiology and its missionary spirituality should and could remain evangelically linear.

This is mainly the reality but it is also a big challenge for all the Church, especially for the laity. I am saying this because I am addressing this audience; to the clergy and to members of religious congregations I would say the same. Throughout history, during the periods which were marked by a re-launch of the Church's mission, there were persons or groups of persons who chose to lead a simple

way of life. Only in this way could they face the challenges of their time. The beginning of the Dominican Order, of the Company of Jesus and others are some examples; not to refer directly to the apostolic Church and to Saint Paul, to avoid imagining these as exceptional. The same may be said about the laity. We could easily say that evangelical poverty is the driving force behind the Church's mission; and it is definitely so. Many of the promoters of Catholic Action in our times were in reality well-off: their affluent economic condition made it possible for them to dedicate much of their time to apostolic work. They could not rely on any financial assistance like the clergy. Even these facts should be studied and reflected upon, but this would take me out of point.

I will stop here about this first point and very briefly I would say: recently, the Church's missionary spirit has intensified. What is more, it has avoided futile complications but has simply accepted those which were already there, and sharing the fate of the poor. Wherever this has not happened, the missionary motivation was blocked.

A Church which considers it normal to suffer with Christ

The missionary urge has also increased due to an interaction between the best ecclesial experiences during the Vatican Council. This has brought about an ecclesiology which is more rooted in the Gospel and which is free from that triumphalism which the Council denounced so strongly. This is also due to the difficult situations which the Church has had to face in many countries of the world especially in those where Christianity had been since long established.

In reality, the difficulties have been recurrent but we notice that waves of good and bad moments have different phases and times in different places and countries. If the XX century is considered to be the century of martyrs, even before this time martyrs were not lacking. Here, I can think of France, Spain, Mexico and countries in the East, Japan, Korea and Vietnam, whose martyrs have recently been included, in groups, in the liturgical calendar. I think of Russia and countries in Eastern Europe, where after the attainment of religious freedom some twenty years ago, the Christian communities were faced with the secularized culture of America and the whole West, which although lighter were more subtle. They have been echoed again by Benedict XVI

during his visit to Poland. Meanwhile, the epicentres of martyrdom have been shifted but the ecclesial experience has never been spared. Christ's words «woe to you» weigh heavily upon them and questions the times when everything seems so peaceful: their ancestors «treated the false prophets in this same way» (Lk 6:26).

Today, Christians are very conscious of the connection between martyrdom and mission. In reality, suffering is not enough; it is only through a strong faith that one can connect these two concepts. Two delinquents were crucified with Jesus. According to Lk 23:41. There was a big difference between them. The statement made by one of them was more objective than that made by Pilate, who had condemned him. «We deserve this sentence», says the thief to his colleague, «but this man has done nothing wrong». Peter also refers to this difference in 1Pt 3:17 «If it is the will of God that you should suffer, it is better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong». «None of you should ever deserve to suffer for being a murderer, a thief, a criminal or an informer; but if any one of you should suffer for being a Christian, then there must be no shame but thanksgiving to God for bearing this name» (4:15-16).

Triumphalism expected that those, to whom the Church showed a special love, were to show her honour and love in return. But in order to carry out this mission, Christians have to be the best possible witnesses of God's respectful and passionate love, which is almost unimaginable to humans. The devil is continually seeking to throw doubt on this as he did in his original temptation. God's love, *agape* and *eros* at the same time, according to Benedict XVI's encyclical, never tires in following us but never presses us for an answer. This is clearly expressed in the life and death of Jesus Christ as well as in the martyrs' free self-giving. Through the Holy Spirit's gift of meekness and strength they could resist the violence of those who struck them and were able not to give in to it.

A Church without jealousy

Lastly, just as it was at the time of the apostles, maybe even more so today, the missionary readiness of the Church lies on her being free from the spirit of jealousy and comparison. The text in 1Co about the struggle on the question of belonging. ("I belong to Paul", or "I belong to Apollo", or "I belong to Kephas," or "I belong

to Christ") is even more true today. Jealousy, not only contrasts greatly with evangelic charity but draws the church's attention onto itself and on aspects which are not so real and important. I am under the impression that very often, the internal dynamics and divergencies within the Church, hinder the Church from carrying out its mission no less than real historical difficulties which it has met.

Naturally, the many varied ways of interpreting this mission give rise to an internal debate within the Church, which after all, is a good sign if it stems from a desire to rediscover the common roots and to catch, through the testimony of every individual and group, a better perception of what the Spirit is saying to the Churches today. We could learn from each other and this is a very good thing to do. But the debate should always be carried out with our gaze fixed on the Lord - «glorifying God», says the *Acts of the Apostles* - otherwise the best forces and structures of the Church fade away. In my opinion, Catholic Action will be risking too much if it falls into this temptation.

I would like to conclude by recalling an experience, which, in my opinion, is one of the most intense testimonies regarding the Christian mission and vocation which has been passed on to us throughout the history of Christianity. I would like to refer to the last words written by Teresa of Lisieux three weeks before she died. I think that these words could help each one of us here and everybody else, to assess our readiness to live and love our work within the Church in communion with all those around us. She wrote: *O Marie, si j'étais la Reine du Ciel et que vous soyez Thérèse, je voudrais être Thérèse, afin que vous soyez la Reine du Ciel!!!...* Had she not written anything else but this, these two lines were enough to gain her the title of patron of the missions.

Let us reflect on the meaning of these words. Teresa was the one who would have wished for herself all the vocations which the Holy Spirit knows how to inspire, and chose to be guided by the letter to the Corinthians, which puts the sublime way of the love of God above all charisms.

This famous text was not written when she was still very young, when she was still looking for her way to God; she wrote it a year before her death, when she had reached her full spiritual maturity. Teresa did not choose to enter the Carmel confusing *tout court* the contemplative vocation with the sublime way of love; but from within a stronger Carmelite vocation, she found the way of living her proper identity through the way of love, not just like one of many others, but as the total fulfilment in the fragment. We must

remember that it is love which urges missionaries and sustains martyrs.

For each one of us, our own personal vocation is the true and concrete way of «being love» within the Church. Undoubtedly, for her, it was the Carmelite way.

She had felt within herself all the vocations, and in love she discovered them all. At the end of her short but intense life, we find her in front of Mary, who is the sole ideal icon of love within and in the Church. So much so, that we speak of a Marian dimension when we want to mean a Christian and ecclesial life of faith, hope and charity. Without denying that she wanted to be «love» within the Church, Teresa, in her paradoxical reasoning, clarifies her tension towards her own identity and writes: «I want to be Teresa», and am glad that Mary is «the Queen of heaven». Surely, Mary is not the queen of Heaven because Teresa declared her so, if not in the paradoxical logic of this short invocation. But Teresa is pleased that this is so.

We are not called to be Teresa. Evidently, we have to be ourselves. Other people's identity does not depend on us and sometimes not at all. However true and happy solidarity can make of the Church an immense chorus of gratitude. And as far as it depends on us to open the way to others so that they could be themselves, we are called to follow this logic with all our understanding. To be grateful of being ourselves and or because, or so that others could be themselves in the Lord: this is the best way to measure whether there is this missionary spirit. Of course in a dynamic and co-responsible way, without retreating idly within ourselves.

Just for love and living in peace.

2. How does Catholic Action live its proper identity?

Emilio Inzaurraga
CA Argentina
member of IFCA Secretariat

The Vatican Council II recommends “the associated apostolate of the faithful” and the “organized forms of lay apostolate” as ways to “promote the laity” in the light of the renewed “ecclesiology of communion” and as the right answer to the “human and Christian needs of the faithful”, and also as a sign of “communion and unity of the Church in Christ” (cf AA 18). Thus the Council has highlighted the importance of Catholic Action and has explained clearly its characteristic notes (cf AA 20, 21). It has also emphasized the importance of these four notes to be taken simultaneously (AA 20,21):

- the Church's apostolic aim
- the running of these associations by lay people themselves
- the functioning as an organic body bringing out the community aspect of the Church
- under the higher direction of the hierarchy: direct collaboration with the pastors.

The Council then *recommends* Catholic Action heartily and *invites* *priests and lay people* who are involved therein to adopt the said notes and to collaborate in a fraternal way with other forms of associated apostolate. The Council has spoken explicitly about our charism and has proposed a whole programme of action to develop CA in local Churches (in dioceses and parishes).

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, issued at the end of 1988, John Paul II, in his reflections on the vocation and mission of the laity, highlights the dignity of the lay faithful in the Church as *Mystery* and their participation in the Church as *Communion*. He states that this is characterized by the diversity and complementarity of the lay associations and outlines the ecclesial criteria concerning them.

With a particular reference to Catholic Action, the Pope says that: «Among the various forms of the lay apostolate which have a

particular relationship to the hierarchy, the Synod Fathers have singled out various movements and associations of Catholic Action in which "indeed, in this organic and stable form, the lay faithful may freely associate under the movement of the Holy Spirit, in communion with their bishop and priests, so that in a way proper to their vocation and with some special method they might be of service through their faithfulness and good works to promote the growth of the entire Christian community, pastoral activities and infusing every aspect of life with the spirit of the Gospel». (CFL 31)

Therefore the co-responsibility of the laity in the Church's Mission should be promoted in accordance with:

IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay people, sanctity of a secular nature, co-responsible for the life and mission of the Church, each in his/her particular vocation.
CHARISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missionary character: they live to evangelize. The same apostolic aim of the Church. • Organic character: the organization at the mission's service. • Diocesan nature: that is incarnation in the local Church. • Lay nature: run by lay people.
MINISTRY A charism of being of service, at the service of all the community.	<p><i>Plantatio Ecclesiae</i> To contribute towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the growth of the whole Christian community, • the implementation of pastoral projects • the animation of all spheres of life with the spirit of the Gospel.

Collaboration - Participation - Co-responsibility

But one asks: how does CA live its own identity?

We must therefore reflect together on the actual situation of CA in each diocese and in each parish and try to see whether it is truly faithful to its identity, to its charism and to its ministry.

Does CA live according to these characteristics? How are we living them?

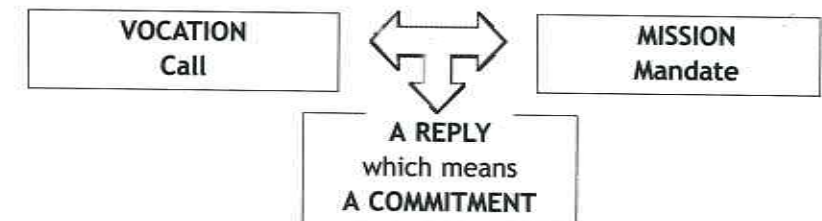
1. Providing itineraries which help to discern one's vocation

Each CA Association proposes to its members to assume their proper vocation and to start discovering in it God's will for them. As it happens with every vocation, the proposal calls for a free and personal decision.

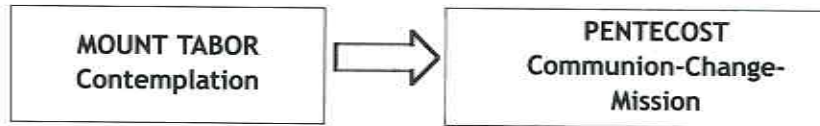
Honestly I believe that there are many who could answer positively this invitation from the Holy Spirit. I do not think that this call for CA is just for a few. Rather I believe it is just the opposite.

- The challenge for the future is to offer an environment which helps in the discernment of this vocation and which leads to commitment and to joyful witnessing.

God's invitation is a permanent proposal:



There is no commitment which is purely theoretical, abstract and intellectual. A promise involves the person taken as a whole; it does not simply involve his/her mind only.



The reflection which the Pope makes in *Christifideles Laici* is based on the passage from the Gospel which says: "It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle".

"Why are you standing here idle?" "No one has hired us". "You too go into my vineyard" (Mt 20:6-7).

2. School of sanctity

All of you who are present here know very well that this is not a slogan; it is not a made-up phrase but it is a reality. We have so many friends in heaven. CA teaches us to live a saintly life in our everyday life circumstances, without expecting anything extraordinary but rather proposing the ordinary daily routine "to carry out the simple everyday things well or, still better, very well".

Our task is to live and to be witnesses of Christ amidst the everyday joys and sufferings, successes and failures. In these circumstances CA members are a sign of faith, of active charity and of true and steadfast hope.

"You will know them by their fruits": what privilege, what commitment! And here I am not referring only to those who are already listed in the book which is going to be presented shortly. There we can find a full list of CA members who have been declared venerable, servants of God, blessed and saints by the Church. Nor do I refer to those who have been presented to us as models because of their virtues.

I refer also to so many others who, everyday, in their parish and diocesan communities and in their daily environments, try to live the spirit of the Gospel as best they can. I can say that I have been lucky

to know many "Alberto", "Pier Giorgio", "Gianna" etc... I am sure that you too, going through your personal history, can single out many, whom you would "raise" to the altars, without any hesitation.

- Here lies the challenge for us: to go on with proposing sanctity in daily life.
- It is possible to be saints.
- It is possible to be saints today.

3. Belonging to a community

The fact that we are lay people, living within the local Church and in communion with our Bishops, directs us to our parishes, to our "home" and "school", where the group community sustains our everyday journey. Here, the "scattered community" finds its direction, a source of Living water where, "one finds himself" and is led to "make oneself found by others".

Not only those whom we meet every week. We associate ourselves with others, in a "communitarian adventure". It is difficult for me to imagine a CA without remembering each friend who shares in my faith and mission, at different levels: parochial, diocesan, national and international and in different spheres. For me these friends are an example because they personify our ideal.

CA is an associative reality which helps its members to grow, to revise their apostolic mission, to feel that they are the Church and feel with the Church and set forth to carry out their everyday duties with a renewed and evangelic spirit.

I like to suggest to you to think of your CA friends, of your leaders and your Priest Assistants under whose guidance you are here today and of all those who have helped you all along your journey through life.

In communion with our Pastors and Priests

Thanks...

Acknowledgement...

When going through the numerous initiatives, associations, movements and organizations from the post-council time to the present day, we would be very surprised in finding out that their “founders” have been active Catholic Action members.

Encouragement...

For every lay person who takes up an active commitment in our social institutions, probably there would be one person less who wanders in our sacristy. How many times this has led to objections and protests!

Accompaniment...

We should be involved in pastoral commitments as lay people. Our ministerial function should sometimes make us reason differently from those who are involved in the intra-ecclesial life. This highlights the need for a sound formation for lay people so that they may be able to think for themselves.

4. Formation

CA offers a life-long integral formation programme which covers all the different stages of life from childhood up to old age. This is ongoing and covers all formal and informal situations.

We can compare our parish and our specialized mature groups (of any age) to an airport. It is important for the airplanes to arrive at an airport but it is important as well that they leave. On arrival we can share the joy of meeting, but also the need to refresh ourselves up from the fatigue of the journey, recharge our fuel, re-orientate the route, share our experiences, plan projects, update ourselves and recall our basic principles; but it is important as well to think of departing again.

An airplane which stays at the airport is of no use. The airplane remains at the airport only as long as it needs. Sometimes we make such an effort to take care of our airplanes that they forget to fly.

This integral formation does not mean only to get used to the Word of God and to the teaching of the Church, especially the Social teaching of the Church. Rather it should be a meeting which transforms our way of living.

This should lead to a strong faith, to an intense pastoral charity which generates a mystical life, and to an irrepressible enthusiasm to announce the Gospel.

To reach this goal our formation should be missionary. Today, as always, we should give a reason for our hope, for our values. We should do this with intelligence, so as to let the seeds of truth emerge which are present in every individual.

5. Organic nature

We have always maintained that CA is constituted organically. This needs the organization as a method to ensure that everything has its own place, each member his/her own role. This organization ensures as well established procedures, mechanisms for coordination, rules, norms. In fact each of our Associations has a Statute and Regulations.

The organic nature also reflects the life of the Church and helps us to feel with the Church. It applies to parochial, diocesan, national and international levels as well as to specialized groups working in different environments and organized according to different life conditions.

This is very different than setting up superstructures and obstructing the richness of associative life in adhering strictly to norms and procedures.

The idea of organizing should never be a limit. It should rather foster further possibilities. I believe that this organic aspect is an expression of the communion that should prevail amongst us and should help us in

our mission. This means that IFCA's richness lies in the variety of forms which CA adopts in the ways it works in the different countries.

This organic life is like the blood which flows through the veins towards the capillaries. It means that I have to give the best I can and that I share everything with the other members.

The task which we have to carry out has to do not only with our own interest but with God's will and with the community's decisions. In this organic way of functioning, there might be aspects with which we are not so pleased in comparison with others.

Working organically does not mean that we should be involved in everything. It means that we should carry out the work assigned to us and which we have accepted freely. Primarily, we should do our part in a common project as best we can. How beautiful it is if each one of us does his bit well!

6. Evangelizing proposal in three dimension

John Paul II said: "The field of your apostolic work should stretch further than the eye can see and should be as vast as the mission of the Church itself".

These three dimensions are:

- Working for:
- the growth of all the Christian community
- the pastoral projects
- and the animation of all spheres of life with the spirit of the Gospel (CFL 31).

We should be witnesses of the joy of living the Gospel in a concrete way and in our everyday lives.

We should contemplate Jesus in our family, in our profession, in society, in those who suffer as well as in those who are happy.

We should "work towards communion" not only inside but also "outside". We should call other people to share the transcendent human values, which are the values of the Gospel of Christ, and to imbue decisions and structures with them.

We have a lot to offer, to propose. It is our duty to do it.

As CA lay people we are not on a mission but we are "missionaries" because we are disciples of Jesus whom we have met on our journey. He has "seduced" us and has transformed our lives in such a way "that we cannot remain strangers and inactive" (CFL 2), because we are urged to spread the news that God is love and that life makes sense only in Him wherever we are: at work, in our personal relationships, in schools, in universities, in factories, in social life and in cultural, political and economic spheres of our peoples.

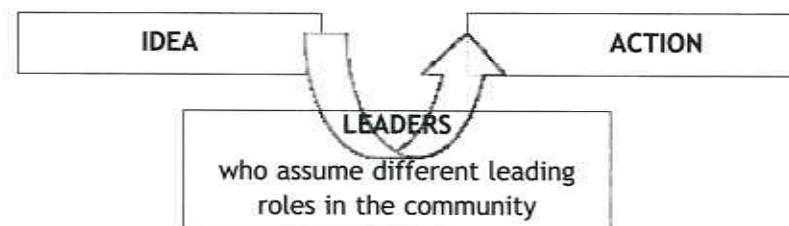
As CA lay people we should relive Pentecost permanently so that we can always be open to others, forget our fear and show our strong faith by speaking to people in a language they understand so as to pass on to them the Truth of Christ.

We should be specialists in repairing the split between Faith and Life. Maybe, for many of our friends, of our fellow workers, our witnessing is the only concrete way of their meeting the Gospel.

When faced with all the work we have to do and with the great problems we spoke about yesterday, we ask ourselves: what can we do with our abilities and resources? What can we change for the better?

7. Preparing leaders

A project cannot materialize without leaders who promote it and make it credible.



For CA, just as it is for the Church, **Authority means service.**

We are not here for nothing, it is not a privilege but rather a role of service.

We are in service:

- to the mission which animates the Association and
- to our people.

We are leaders. If we are here, it means that we hold a position of responsibility in our Associations.

This position is far from being a “post of honour”, even if undoubtedly you have the required requisites to occupy the post. However the post calls you to serve. I believe that our role to *serve as leaders* means that we should be committed and active members.

It is worth saying that being leaders presupposes that we should know our association, because otherwise it would not be possible to lead others. We have to do this through our example in our “everyday life”, now and even in future when we are no longer leaders. We must remember that we do not “hold” this role forever.

In our leading roles, in the dioceses and especially in parishes, where we mostly play our game, we should do our best “to push forward”. At the same time we should remember to keep down to earth. Our people too constitute the ground where we have to carry out our mission. We cannot do this from a distance. We can use long-distance control on machines but not on people.

This has nothing to do with the distance between our homes and the headquarter of our Associations: 30 kms, 200, 1.800, 10.000. It rather means how near we are to the reality in which we work, how we share our lives with our community using all the means at our disposal. Today, technology offers us opportunities,

which those did not have who started our Association 140 years ago and worked so hard to make it so great.

As leaders, we can explain what we understand, but we can teach only through what we are. What we do, speaks more loudly than what we say.

Example... example... example

Our example as leaders is not only what we are but rather the fact that we are on a journey towards what we should be; the fact that we live the values, the objectives and the proposals of our Association.

One should get to know them. It is possible. It is worthwhile.

Original text in spanish language

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: Ac 16:11-15; Jn 15:26-18:1-4

HOMILY

ON AQUILA AND PRISCA'S TRACES...

H.E. Msgr. Francesco Lambiasi
Bishop of Rimini
ex IFCA Ecclesiastical Assistant

I would like to dedicate our reflection to consider some figures of laypeople who were precious co-operators in the work of evangelization. In particular, let us retrace the path of two of them - Aquila and Prisca - in order to catch, in their apostolical outline, the most current features of our great ideal and of our most true and intimate identity.

This couple is particularly dear to us as members of Catholic Action: it has been quoted to us as a sort of our "ancestors" when after the II Vatican Council, the pastoral teaching of the Church wanted to express the most characteristic note, the one about the direct and organic link with the pastors as regard to evangelization: "lay people may be called in different ways and in a closer co-operation with the apostolate of the hierarchy like those women and men who helped the apostle Paul to announce the Gospel and worked hard for the Lord (*Lumen Gentium* 31)".

On Aquila and Prisca's traces we synthetically collect a *history*, a *word*, a *deaconry*.

1. A history

Aquila is a Jew, from the Roman province of Ponto. Prisca or Priscilla, it's a nickname, probably she is also Jew, with a Latin name, as her husband, and according to the spreading habit of the

time. According to the Acts, the couple arrived from Corinth, after the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, as ordered by the emperor Claudius, towards the year 49. If, as it seems, the edict by Claudius hit not only the leaders and activists, we can conclude the couple was indicated in the capital of the empire because of their missionary fervour.

Aquila and Prisca were "curtain makers" and they had to be wealthy since theirs was *domus ecclesia* in Ephesus: at their home the Christian community met (1Co 16:19; cf. also Rm 16:4). They had a curtain factory where, during his Corinth staying, also the apostle, their guest, worked (Acts 18:3). Together with Paul in that time they cooperated in the ministry in Corinth for more than a year and half (Acts 18:11-18). Then, during the third journey made by Paul for other two years and three months (Acts 19:8) they are in Ephesus, where the *First Letter to the Corinthians* was written (16:19).

For another couple of years, between the second and third journey of the apostle, the couple continued to evangelize without him in Ephesus. One of the happiest results of their work was the transformation of Apollos in apostle accurately and wholly educated in "the way of God" (Acts 18:24-28).

2. A word

The title Paul attributes to Prisca and her husband is "fellow-workers". Both in the profane and religious Greek world the word *synergos* indicates someone (a god or a man) who gives help or cooperation to another, or cooperates for a precise goal together with others.

As regard to the New Testament, the word is repeated 13 times and always referred to people: 12 people in Paul (1Th 3:2; 1Co 3:9; Ph 2:25; 4:3; Phm 1:24; 2Co 1:24; 8:23; Rm 16:3-9:21; Col 4:11) and once in John 3:8. It is then a typical Paulin word the apostle uses exclusively referred to his missionary action and with a different meaning from the one used before him. In fact he uses it referred to people committed with him in his missionary work as true "co-workers".

3. A deaconry

Aquila and Prisca are a couple at the service of welcoming and at the service of the Word.

3.1 At the service of welcoming

Aquila and Prisca welcome Paul in Corinth and give them a work (*Acts 28:2ff.*). The apostle is in a difficult moment: after the loss in Athens he has arrived in Corinth, depressed, and very soon he has to fight with the strong Jew colony of the place (*Acts 18:6-7; cf. 1Th 2:14-16*). The friendship of the Jew-Christian couple is the first service Paul has received from Aquila and Prisca, a service he will always be grateful.

Another service Aquila and his wife offer to evangelization is the hospitality to the Christian community. This confirms the situation of ease of the couple; they had to own a house big enough to host meetings of groups made up between thirty fifty people who gathered in houses to share their faith, pray, celebrate the Eucharist and the brotherly *agape* (*1Co 11:20-34*).

In the final part of the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Paul praises Stephan and his family for their service for peace and unity. Also Aquila and Prisca had to had such a service. They were capable of it: as Jews of the diaspora, they were open both to the Judaic world and the Greek-Roman one. Paul praises openly the gratitude of the Churches of the Gentiles towards the couple (*Rm 16:4*). This needs a constant task to overcome all ethnical, religious and social accounts to build communion and *koinonia*.

3.2 At the service of the Word

We have to remember in the New Testament not only the apostles assure the service to the Word (*Acts 2:4*). Also Stephen and Philip announce the good news (*Acts 6:10ff; 8:5-10*). But all Paul's co-operators are at the service of the announcement of the Word. Also Aquila and Prisca, as *synergoi* of Paul, co-operate with him to the birth of the community in Corinth and Ephesus. In a special way they carry on this minister towards Apollo after his arrival in Ephesus. Jew from Alexandria, probable disciple of Filonian school, great orator, Apollo was already Christian but his doctrine was very close to "johannites" world of the primitive Christianity.

The couple is soon aware of some holes in Apollo's teaching and they burden themselves to "give him more detailed instruction about the Way" (*Acts 18:26*), offering Paul one of his most brilliant co-operators. Is it exaggerated to state this couple, whose children are never named, has generated a true apostle to the Church?

Conclusion

In these tow fellow-workers of Paul we can find some traits which well define the CA lay people: to announce Jesus Christ, work hard with the apostle, to play his/her life to save others', to welcome the Christian community in his/her own home. We could say the apostolical ideal of CA is to announce the Gospel as lay people - in communion with our Pastors - to save the world.

Let's pray the Holy Spirit, the invisible still always present protagonist of the evangelization, in communion with Mary and with John Paul II, untiring envagelizer of the old and the new millennium. Let's pray so that our Lord never leaves his Church without Christian passionate lay people who announce by ordinary words of life - as Aquila and Prisca - the only Name under the sky where we have received the salvation, the one of Jesus Christ our Lord. In fact "nobody else can save us" (*Acts 4:12*).

"No, not a formula will save us, but a Person, and the assurance which he gives to us. *I am with you!*" (*NMI 29*).

Rome, 29 April 2008

CATHOLIC ACTION
“IN ACTION”

MORNING PRAYER

Acts 22:24

COMMENTARY

WITNESSES OF THE RISEN CHRIST UNTO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

H.E. Msgr. Atilano Rodriguez Martínez
Bishop of Ciudad Rodrigo
General Assistant of CA Spain

The reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* which we have just proclaimed, gives us Paul's speech to the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. The main message of this speech is the fact that, God had kept his promise when Jesus rose from the dead.

Although the people of Jerusalem and the authorities had not understood the words of the Scripture, Paul wanted to make it clear that with the resurrection of Jesus Christ a new time had begun. Our Lord's apparitions to those who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem confirm the new presence of the Risen Lord among us. They show that God never abandons his children and prove that God's promise had been kept.

Paul's exhortation to his audience, to listen to and accept the divine teachings, is an invitation also to each one of us. If we have participated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in virtue of the sacrament of baptism, we should consider ourselves dead for sin and alive for God. We should live as new men and women, renewed by divine grace. We, who have met the Risen Lord and participate in his life, should assume an attitude of ongoing conversion by avoiding sin, by living in union with Him and by experiencing joy and God's peace continually in our hearts.

However, we cannot be satisfied by living our faith in the Risen Lord in an individualistic way, thinking only of ourselves and of those in our groups. Like Paul, the Lord is calling us and is sending us to be witnesses of his resurrection even to the ends of the world. This is the great challenge with which the Church and Catholic Action are faced: to be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to those who are within as well as to those who are outside, to the Jews and to the Gentiles, to the just and to sinners. We should accept this challenge with joy because all human beings have a right to experience God's paternity and to discover his unconditional love. Although they do not show it openly, all men expect to get definite and convincing answers, which give full sense to their profound questions. They all need a reason to believe and hope.

Many will refuse to accept our message and our witnessing on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have created their own idols or live as if God does not actually exist. This should preoccupy us but in no way should it worry or disturb us because this has already happened to Paul when he preached to the Jews. It has also happened to Jesus himself when he told the crowd which followed him that they should nourish themselves with the bread of life. Many, as the Gospel says, left him because his words were hard.

We, Christians, should always sow with hope and patience, knowing that the Lord will see that the seeds will give abundant fruit when and as He wishes.

With the Psalmist, let us acknowledge God as our protector and let us ask him to give us His light and truth so that we may be guided to the holy mount, until we reach His house. He is always ready to cure our infirmity and our fatigue and to revive us when our strength fails.

Original text in spanish language

LECTURE

CA LAY PEOPLE IN TODAY'S SOCIETY PROPOSING THE CULTURE OF LOVE

Lourdes Azorín
ex general Secretary of CA Spain
IFCA Secretariat member

Introduction

Objectives of today's session: to reflect and become aware of the duties which CA lay Christians are called to carry out in the wider and different fields of public life, in society and in the different present day circumstances.

The main theme is: the Christian proposal in today's society, God's presence in public life and the realization of His influence.

Proposing faith: Jesus Christ, way, truth and life. Faith is the way to experience the meeting with a person, the living Jesus Christ, yesterday, today and always. He is the source of "the new life". Faith is not an ideology but a theological virtue, a strength, a dynamic force which is God-given. Faith is also a reference to a content, to a collection and commonly-shared set of principles: I believe in God the Father... Other than this there is freedom of opinion and of conscience. However all are requested to exercise the Christian discernment and the respect for the fundamental values consistent with faith.

It is always God who calls men to faith. He starts from specific human and ecclesial situations with which they are familiar and wherein they are called to be Christ's witnesses. So it is opportune to present, even if rather briefly, our socio-cultural contexts: the possibilities and difficulties and positive aspects and problematic challenges. We will limit ourselves to outline some characteristics of

the rapid socio-cultural changes which we are going through, knowing very well that without this awareness there can be no adequate missionary presence today. Unavoidably I will be referring to situations in the first world which I know best but I am sure that during our workshops and in our discussions we can amplify and elaborate on these.

1. A time of change without precedent

“In general and particularly in our Spanish society, in our modern culture we are experiencing rapid and profound changes. These are posing a challenge to the evangelizing ability of the Church”¹.

In general, Europeans have a very rich Christian heritage. The Christian roots of our culture and of our history are very evident. Undoubtedly, we are all experiencing a secularist and neo-pagan socio-cultural change which has never been experienced before². According to some analysts “we are witnessing a situation of new paganism: the living God is kept out of daily life, while many new idols are taking it over”³.

This paradoxical situation challenges our Christian conscience and spurs us on to find new creative ways by which we can react to these new situations which are a challenge to our faith and to the Church. It is a paradox which is certainly provocative. In today’s Europe, while traditions, religious experiences, Christian customs are being safeguarded, Christianity is very often considered as an anachronism which should be done away with. It should be overcome as it provokes the fears, suspicions and criticism against religion which were prevalent in the XIX century and which are widely spread even today.

The numerous and increasing traditional and popular manifestations, which are the roots and expression of Christianity’s vital aspects, and the active presence of ecclesial realities (parishes, confraternities, associations, sanctuaries, etc.) co-exist with the cultural influences and the new ways of life which seem to be dominant today. From a certain point of view, these influences are neo-pagan and from another, they

¹ Cf. GMFL p. 11.

² Cf. E. Bueno, *Spain, between Christianity and Paganism*. San Pablo, Madrid, 2002.

³ CEE, Pastoral Plan 2002-2005. *A Church of hope ¡Sail out! (Lc 5,4)*, 8.

indicate a society which “is far” from being Christian and which thinks that it has “overcome Christianity”.

The majority of Spanish people are baptized. However, the faith of a good number of them is not mature. Without a faith which has been assimilated and matured, it is very difficult to face the new challenges of our times. Some Christians have even fallen into a type of idolatry of earthly gains and a type of “do it yourself Christianity”.

This crisis cannot be attributed solely to the hostility of the enemies of the Church. The French Bishops very well say that: “the crisis which the Church is facing today is due to a large extent to the repercussions in the Church itself and in the life of its members due to the rapid, profound social and cultural changes, of a global dimension, taken all together”⁴.

2. Values and signs of hope in our culture

These socio-cultural changes, which have never been seen before, should not lead us to assume that attitude which Blessed John XXIII referred to as “prophets of doom”. He said that these “say over and over that this modern age of ours, in comparison with past ages, is definitely deteriorating” and that “they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life”⁵.

Though during these last ten years there have been great changes in the world and in Spain, compared to the seventies, and that

⁴ CEF, “Proposing faith in today’s society”, *Ecclesia* 2835-36 (5 and 12 April 1997) p. 514.

⁵ CEE (Ed). Second Vatican Council, “John XXIII Speech at the solemn inauguration of Vatican II” (11.10.62) p. 92: “In the daily exercise of Our pastoral office, it sometimes happens that We hear certain opinions which disturb Us, opinions expressed by people who, though fired with a commendable zeal for religion, are lacking in sufficient prudence and judgment in their evaluation of events. They can see nothing but calamity and disaster in the present state of the world. They say over and over that this modern age of ours, in comparison with past ages, is definitely deteriorating. One would think from their attitude that history, that great teacher of life, had taught them nothing. [...] We feel that We must disagree with these prophets of doom, who are always forecasting worse disasters, as though the end of the world were at hand”.

the general frame of mind is very different from what it was then, however, we should not assume a negative and pessimistic attitude. The same John XXIII said that “in the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which are directed toward the fulfilment of God’s superior and inscrutable designs”⁶.

I feel it is opportune to stress that our beloved society has undoubtedly many positive and stimulating values which fill us with hope and of which we should be fully conscious:

- the strong sensitivity in favour of the dignity and rights of the human person;
- the affirmation of freedom as an undeniable prerequisite of man and of his actions and the respect for individual and collective freedom;
- the ever-growing aspiration for peace and the conviction about the uselessness and horror of war;
- pluralism and tolerance, understood as the respect for the convictions of others and not as the binding imposition of opinions and ways of behaviour;
- the refusal to accept inequalities of rights for social classes and nations;
- the attention given to women’s rights and to the respect of their dignity;
- the concern about ecological imbalances.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* stresses that in Europe, as a civil community, “signs of hope are not lacking”:

- “We joyfully recognize the growing openness of peoples to one another, the *reconciliation* between countries which have been hostile and at enmity with each other for a long time, the progressive *opening up* to the countries of Eastern Europe in the process of seeking deeper unity. Mutual recognition, *forms of cooperation and exchanges* of all sorts are being developed in such a way that little by little, a culture, indeed a *European consciousness*, is being created. This we hope will encourage, especially among the young, a sense of fraternity and the will to share.

⁶ *ib* p. 92.

- We note as a very positive factor that the whole of this process is developing according to *democratic procedures*, in a peaceful way and in the spirit of *freedom* which respects and fosters legitimate diversity, encouraging and sustaining the process leading to the *growing unity of Europe*.

- We welcome with satisfaction all that has been done to safeguard the conditions and ways to respect *human rights*. Finally, in the context of the legitimate economic and political unity in Europe, while acknowledging the signs of hope seen by the attention given to the *rights and to the quality of life*, we sincerely hope that, in creative fidelity to the humanist and Christian traditions of our continent, there will be a guarantee of the primacy of *ethical and spiritual values*” (EE 12).

3. The challenges of our socio-cultural context

Together with these values and these signs of hope, today’s public culture, seen within the European context, is characterized also by other counter-values which, like fog, enfold the lives of individual people, families and groups.

The Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* affirms that Churches in Europe are “often tempted by a *dimming of hope*. There are many troubling signs”, amongst which John Paul II mentions: the *loss of Europe’s Christian memory and heritage*; accompanied by a kind of *practical agnosticism*; a kind of *fear of the future*; a *widespread existential fragmentation*; and an *increased weakening of interpersonal solidarity* (cf. nn. 7-8).

Among these challenges *consumerism, hedonism, individualism, relativism and secularism* stand out.

“The establishment of a *way of life dominated by consumerism and intensive exploitation* leads whole sectors of our society, the greater majority of them baptized, to push God and eternal salvation out of their private and public lives” (TDV 21).

Man may become a prisoner of these counter-values if these same human and Christian values are lived and interpreted on principles which have been thwarted, for example, if we think of a value like “freedom”, “democracy” and “sexuality” when these are interpreted from the point of view of absolute relativism and hedonism.

We are seeing a widespread *consumistic and hedonistic* mentality which goes as far as to sacrifice the supreme value of life, especially in the case of infants and elderly people, in favour of well-being. Man's life and his sacred dignity cease to be an untouchable value when personal, familiar, economic, social and ideological interests are in question. It is the phenomenon which is referred to as "the culture of non-solidarity" and "the culture of death"⁷.

Individualism starts to characterize whole social sectors precisely at a moment when social inequalities are aggravating. In the world, the gap between poor and rich countries is widening and the globalization of financial and economic circles is making it worse day by day. In our country, in spite of the relative control of unemployment, the situation as regards work is getting more precarious. There are certain social classes who seem to be destined to misery and immigration is on the increase.

Besides, under the influence of *relativism*, the conviction, that there is no definite truth, is very widespread. If there is no "truth", the assertion that "Christ is the Truth" is very often questioned. Then truth starts being questioned (does truth exist?) ending up questioning the whole statement⁸.

The acceptance of this mentality brings about great consequences as regards the well-being of man and society: the true God is ousted by finite realities which enslave him. So man puts his trust in that which is not eternal and ends up subjected to forces which are inferior to him and from which he cannot free himself if not with the help of Someone who is superior to him and to them. The scale of values is substituted by moral confusion and even by systematic amorality. The "gods" of paganism, the "religion of Nature and Life" are being born again⁹.

⁷ Cf. EV 12.

⁸ Ratzinger J., "Actual situation of faith and theology". (Internet, p. 2): "Relativism has changed itself into the central problem of our times. Without any doubt it does not present itself as some kind of resignation in front of the immensity of truth, but as a position positively defined by the concept of tolerance, of a dialogic awareness and of freedom, concepts which would remain very limited if one had to affirm that there is a truth which is valid for everybody".

⁹ Cf. E. Bueno, *Spain between Christianity and Paganism*, p. 235-283.

"At the root of this loss of hope is an *attempt to promote a vision of man apart from God and apart from Christ*. This sort of thinking has led to man being considered as 'the absolute centre of reality, a view which makes him occupy - falsely - the place of God and which forgets that it is not man who creates God, but rather God who creates man. Forgetfulness of God led to the abandonment of man'. It is therefore "no wonder that in this context a vast field has opened for the unrestrained development of nihilism in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality, and of pragmatism - and even a cynical hedonism - in daily life. European culture gives the impression of 'silent apostasy' on the part of people who have all that they need and who live as if God does not exist" (EE 9).

4. Some of the factors causing this situation

There could be two causes for this deterioration: *the first* is external - as we have seen above - the result of practical atheism, religious indifference and the budding neo-paganism, which is the result of the economic well-being and of a consumistic mentality.

The Spanish Bishops say: "Modern western public culture is consciously distancing itself from Christian faith and is moving towards an *immanentist humanism* [...]. This *pervading culture*, which prevails in the Church in Spain, has become the most pressing difficulty for the Church and its mission"¹⁰.

The second, is within the Church itself. It is linked to the first, and is caused by the prevalent contagious social atmosphere, by the incoherent life style of many Christians, by the routine of many of our communities and by the personal and social image which we are expected to give but which often lacks credibility.

According to the Spanish Bishops "the basic problem, which a pastoral vision looking towards the future, should treat with the greatest attention possible is *internal secularization*. [...] Among the effects of this '*internal secularization*' we can highlight: '*the ineffective way faith is being transmitted to the younger generations; the decrease in the number of vocations to the priesthood and to*

¹⁰ CEE, Pastoral Plan 2002-2005. *A Church open to hope. ¡Sail out! (Lc 5,4), 18. Ecclesia in Europa*, nn. 7-10: "The dimming of hope".

religious life; the lack of enthusiasm and even the disorientation which characterizes a good number of priests, members of religious communities and lay people; the poverty in the liturgical and sacramental life of a good number of Christian communities”¹¹.

Many baptized are living in a dilemma: they either seek refuge in a traditional religiosity, cutting all ties with a world which they look upon as strange and adverse to them - except when it comes to their well-being - and start regarding faith as a private matter; or they accept the criteria and ways of life prevalent in modern society, even at the cost of abandoning, to a larger or smaller extent, their faith and their Christian and ecclesial identity.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* seems to refer to this when it speaks about “whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering a viable and working community of faith, are now put to a hard test” and when it affirms very clearly that “many vital traditions of piety and popular forms of Christian religion are still conserved; but today this moral and spiritual patrimony runs the risk of being dispersed under the impact of a multiplicity of processes, including secularization and the spread of sects”¹².

“Today, many, surrounded by this secularized culture, do not know how to orientate their lives, their work and their apostolate in a truly Christian sense. Thus, for example, the inadequate defence of matrimony and of the family is a cry which results from void. The same may be said when it comes to public life in its many different aspects”¹³.

“The feeling of inferiority and marginalization which many Catholic adults experience, when they are incapable of showing publicly their Catholic identity with simplicity and without fear, is just the opposite of a faith ‘which leads to martyrdom’, that is, a faith which leads to a courageous testimony of Jesus Christ”¹⁴.

This contradiction between the faith, which many say they profess, and their personal and social life, which ignores this faith

¹¹ *ib* 10-11.

¹² *ChL* 34.

¹³ CEE, Pastoral Plan 2002-2005. *A Church open to hope. ¡Sail out! (Lc 5,4)*, 18.

¹⁴ *ib*.

(the split between faith-reason, faith-liturgy, faith-prayer, faith-morality), shows the importance of a new evangelization of our society, stressing the importance of catechises and of Christian formation.

5. The formation of the laity: a priority

Chapter V of *Christifideles Laici* is dedicated to the formation of the laity, a formation which is greatly needed and is indispensable “to bear much fruit”. I will simply give the titles:

- A continual process of maturation
- To discover and live one's vocation and mission
- A total integrated formation for living an integrated life
- Various aspects of formation
- Collaborators with God the teacher
- Other places for formation
- The reciprocal formation received and given by a All
- An appeal and a prayer.

Thanks to God, the awareness of the urgent need of the evangelizing presence of ecclesial communities has greatly increased within the Church. This awareness has changed our rich religious heredity into an agent of liberation and integral salvation. Many Christians, lay, religious and priests are conscious of the urgent need that baptized people learn to discern the values and counter-values of the predominant culture and to know how to accept some and reject others, in keeping with the gift which they have received in Baptism.

Today, the formation of the laity is a clear priority in our dioceses. We need to form true Christians, Christians who have fully accepted Jesus Christ's ineffable gift, the Gospel. While remaining united with Him and with His Church and coherent to His Gospel, they live and proclaim, with joy and clarity the salvific strength of faith, with all its religious and moral, personal and social implications: “The world... is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelizers themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible”¹⁵. Only thus can the

¹⁵ *EN* 76.

credibility of Christianity be re-established with those people, who erroneously think that the Church is not concerned about justice, inequality, freedom and solidarity, and who identify it with earthly power.

We are not pessimists; on the contrary, we share the same view as the French Bishops: “*Our times are not any less favourable for announcing the Gospel than times gone by. On the contrary, the critical situation which we are facing urges us to go to the source of our faith and to become disciples and witnesses of the God of Jesus Christ in a more decisive and radical way*”¹⁶.

In the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* John Paul II appeals for the formation of lay people in Europe, when he says: “Europe’s cultural and religious situation today calls for the *presence of Catholics who are adult in their faith* and for missionary Christian communities who testify to God’s love before all mankind”. The proclamation of the Gospel of hope thus implies a concern to *foster the movement* from a faith supported by social tradition, important as this is, *to a more personal and adult faith, one marked by knowledge and conviction*”.

CA lay members are therefore “called to have a faith capable of critically confronting contemporary culture and resisting its enticements; of having a real effect on the world of culture, finance, society and politics; of demonstrating that the fellowship between Catholics and other Christians is more powerful than any ethnic bond; of joyfully passing on the faith to new generations; and of building a Christian culture ready to evangelize the larger culture in which we live.

Along with ensuring that the ministry of the word, the celebration of the liturgy and the exercise of charity are directed to building up and sustaining a mature and personal faith, Christian communities need to work at *proposing a catechesis* adapted to the varying spiritual journeys of the faithful at different ages and in different life situations, and to provide for suitable programmes for spiritual accompaniment and for the rediscovery of one’s own Baptism.

Given its undeniable priority in pastoral activity, there is a particular need which has to be *cultivated* and, if need be, reinstated. This is *the ministry of catechesis* which should help in

¹⁶ CEF, “*Proposing faith in modern society*”, *Ecclesia* 2835-36 (5 and 12 April 1997) p. 514.

the education and faith development of each individual, so that the seed planted by the Holy Spirit in Baptism may grow and reach maturity. In constant reference to the Word of God, preserved in Holy Scripture, proclaimed in the liturgy and interpreted by the Church’s Tradition, *an organic and systematic catechesis constitutes beyond the shadow of a doubt an essential and primary means of forming Christians in an adult faith*” (EE 50-51).

I think that Catholic Action members should be “specialists” in this area. This is our greatest contribution, our greatest mission: formation.

“The immediate aim of Catholic Action is the Church’s apostolic aim, that is, the evangelization and sanctification of men and the formation of a Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel in the various communities and departments of life” (AA 20a).

6. The backbone of formation: unity between faith and life

In Catholic Action, formation is not a question of knowing or learning. *One of the characteristics of true formation is that it cannot be passed on unless it is a living experience.* We have to be a community which experiences this formation, which forms itself in everyday life and which is always transforming itself - in our case in a Christian sense through a process of on-going conversion trying hard to conform our lives to Christ’s. Unless there is this dynamic process, there is no true formation.

Formation is a vital and experiential process which transforms one’s conscience and penetrates it. It involves also a transformation of reality.

This formation aims to build a unitary, integral Christian conscience which is able to harmonize desires, sentiments, thoughts and actions and to develop the following fundamental dimensions harmoniously:

- *the personal dimension of Christian faith*

The Christian identity has a fundamental dimension: the personal dimension, that is my personal way of conforming my desires and my sentiments to Christ’s, to strive at becoming a person who can

say: It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me; and this throughout all my life.

- *The socio-political dimension*

The Christian identity has a socio-political dimension without which there is no full blown Christian identity.

The political dimension of charity: political charity about which so much has been said, presumes the awareness of the need and the grace to collaborate in the building of the kingdom of God. This is politics at its best and is far more genuine. It is assuming responsibility for people, for human relations and for working to change real situations for the better.

- *The ecclesial dimension*

The Christian identity has another dimension which is based on the radical social characteristic of the human person: the ecclesial dimension. We are not isolated persons. The human person is not an individual. Even if we like it, this concept is not the truth. We are not individuals; we come from a communion, from a community and from a God who is a triune God. We are constantly referring to others in our community, are in communion and are destined to live in communion with others.

In this socio-cultural context, our formation process should be based on *an on-going search for the unity between faith and life through an integral and unifying formation*. Formation should aim at helping individuals to live in unity “dimensions which, being distinct, are very often taken to be unrelated:

- the call to sanctity and the mission to sanctify the world;
- being members of the ecclesial community and citizens of civil society;
- the ecclesial and the secular character both of which characterize a Christian;
- in solidarity with men and witnesses of the living God;
- ready to serve and free;
- active in working for men’s freedom and contemplative;
- committed to work for the renewal of humanity and for one’s own personal conversion;

- living in the world without being worldly, just like the soul in the body, so are Christians in the world”¹⁷.

With this in view, formation should help to answer the doubts, the questions and the challenges which today’s culture and way of life present to a Christian adult. It should make him able *to find answers for himself which come from the faith he lives and to be able to show others the reason for his Christian hope even when the environment is hostile to Christianity*.

7. The presence of CA lay members in the society

What does this yeast-like presence mean? It means taking into consideration the current problems, challenges, aspirations, hopes and difficulties, studying them as Christians and undertaking, side by side with others, to transform the situations gradually so as to make them conform to God’s salvific plan for humanity. Through his involvement, the Christian announces the Gospel to others.

As CA lay people we are members of the community, which lives in our neighbourhood and in our parishes. We should feel the problems of our neighbours. There are problems of unemployment, of violence, of discrimination, of culture as well as aspirations for the betterment of one’s life. We should take up these problems and study them from a Christian point of view so that we may be able to offer Christian solutions and to get involved in helping those who are suffering. We should take note of the problems in our surroundings, discern about them in the light of the Gospel and of the social teaching of the Church and together with the others offer solutions and suggestions in every case.

8. A presence at the service of human dignity

Commitment in life situations nearest to us

This is the key of our “work” as CA lay people in the world. We should start with the family. The family is society’s fundamental cell. We all live in a family. We should take note of the problems which

¹⁷ Cf. CLIM 77.

families are experiencing, not abstract families but real families of people in our neighbourhood. There we find all sorts of problems: problems connected with work, politics, human conditions as well as psychological and marital problems, disagreement between couples, between fathers and sons etc.

These human problems may be found near and far and call for our constant attention and for our reflexion as well. First and foremost by living and acting as Christians. Then we can give our suggestions, involve ourselves and do our utmost so that every family may live as a family according to God's plan.

Let us now look at another sphere: the world of work. Here we find problems and situations of every type. Here the evangelization law tells me: embody yourself in those problems, consider them seriously, discern about them from a Christian point of view and propose solutions and alternatives so that these could be solved. This means that in the social spheres, that which characterizes lay Christians is being present and "working" in all areas which enrich life: the social, political and the cultural spheres. In these situations, the specific Christian contribution is to try to see the problems, judge the situation, dialogue with the other people and propose solutions together with them. In short, Christians should be an embodied presence.

We know that the most proper, specific and human way in which the lay person can carry out his apostolate and mission is to live his faith in his everyday circumstances. Thus he can transmit it and profess it in the environments where he lives and involve himself in the continual transformation and renewal of society in line with the social teaching of the Church. This is his social "work".

In the light of the social teaching of the Church

The social teaching of the Church is the basic essential element in a CA lay person's social "work". Implementing it means announcing it, proclaiming it and putting it into practice.

This entails that formation in CA should continually keep up to date with the social teaching. It is not enough to know the Popes' encyclicals by heart but the whole social teaching should be studied in depth and there should be a communitarian Christian discernment before any action is taken. This discernment should be based on the fundamental criteria related to the commitment in public life.

We are now indicating the criteria which, in harmony with faith and with the social teaching of the Church, make it possible for every Christian to judge for himself and to choose the political-social commitment accordingly:

- the theoretical and practical acknowledgement of the primacy of human person. The dignity of the human person comes first and foremost. The Church tells me that I should judge, give importance to problems and act, always respecting the dignity of every individual. This means that a Christian should always keep this in mind when taking action. This positive contribution applies to all spheres of life: the family, life, work, culture, the socio-political sphere, human relations...
- The coherence between the lay Christian's activity and political involvement with faith and with the spirituality generated by faith. This coherence can only be attained through an explicit formation in this field.
- The common good and solidarity which incorporate all the conditions which make the liberation and the full realization of each individual and of all persons, in every nation and in all nations possible.
- The preferential option for the poor and the oppressed, which is shown by active solidarity and by an effective communion with them.
- The priority of society over the State, which is an essential principle of subsidiarity.
- The advancement of true democracy so that society may be its own subject, expressed in co-responsibility and in a truly communitarian way of life.
- The promotion of popular culture and of social ethics without which society cannot be the protagonist of its life nor can man reach his own full realization.
- The tendency towards economic self-management as an expression of real democracy in this area.
- Realism in the objectives and in the ways of acting.

All these principles and criteria, rightly applied, lead towards a judgement on situations, structures, systems, laws, political projects and on all programmes presented in society. As Christians we cannot limit ourselves to proposing principles but we should encourage discernment so that everybody may be able to orientate himself

clearly enough so as to know whether they are or are not coherent with Christian principles and criteria.

This means that we have to reflect, discern and enlighten the Christians' consciences. This reflection should respect the freedom of political options to which everybody has a right. It means promoting an attitude towards an impartial and constructive criticism.

All this means a commitment which is coherent with the faith we live. Faith generates a style, a way of behaving, a way of directing life which always starts from the world near and around us and opens out little by little.

What should the CA lay Christian in whatever state he may find himself - unemployed, as a worker, a university lecturer - and in any other position? Work together with others and commit himself to cultivate and deepen this synthesis between faith and life. This link between our social commitment and faith implies the theoretical and practical recognition of the dignity of the human person and the defence and promotion of human rights.

You will know them by their fruits

There is then the undeniable socio-political dimension of the Christian identity. This is moulded by the collective and individual social "work" of Christians and by the social "work" of the Church. However it happens that Spanish Catholics have not gone deep enough in this respect. One must say that in many spheres - in parishes, in diocesan Catholic colleges, in our catechetical programmes and even in seminaries - this "work" is non-existent. Every Christian should be coherent and work to bring about the recognition of every person's dignity. This entails formation in the social teaching of the Church.

We are all involved in promoting all this so that justice may prevail in society and when we stand for social justice we are proclaiming the Gospel. We are all involved in promoting the preferential option of the poor, of the oppressed and of the emarginalized. Solidarity and active communion with them is the proof of this.

The preferential option for the poor is not an option which the Christian may opt for or leave, but it is a duty. I could say that I am or I am not a Christian but I cannot say: I am a Christian but I do not want to make the preferential option for Jesus Christ and for the poor. In the Gospel, this is very clear and John Paul II in *The New*

millennium textually says: "The Gospel imposes on the Church a preferential option for the poor".

"The Gospel imposes": here we are not speaking about a choice. To be able to say "I believe in Christ" we must all make the preferential option for the forsaken, the oppressed and for the poorest human groups.

Making society the protagonist

We must strive hard so that society may get priority over the State. The Church, and within it the Christians, should encourage social involvement so that society becomes the protagonist. What does this mean? The State has a reason to exist in as much as it serves the well-being of society. It is society's servant, so it is society that should be served by the State. A Christian CA member cannot be against parties because parties are necessary. They have a mission to accomplish. Christians have a duty to encourage protagonists in society and to try to create an awareness of what is happening around them, to be critical and to participate in social and political life.

Our "work" means that we should assume responsibilities in social life and be present in all spheres so that we may work for the betterment of real life situations. We should work within the various groups in order to promote social protagonism so that society may be served by the State and not vice-versa.

So that truth may always prevail

We are living in a culture which believes in relativism wherein everybody has a right to think and speak out his ideas. Every opinion is to be respected due to the fact that this is expressed by a person. However, this does not mean that every opinion is valid. In this sense, it is very important that as Christians, we are able to distinguish between the respect due to the person and the defence of truth which should prevail above every other interest.

Is the opinion of any person in any sphere of life valid and worth taking on? The Christian should be continually carrying out an exercise to distinguish between truth and lies and maintain that these are not the same, that love is not the same as hatred, that it is not the same to be with the poor and to be with the rich.

We are living in a society wherein people accept any opinion and all options are equally valid. If there is anyone who dare say that truth is above opinions and that one must search for truth and follow it, he is accused of intolerance.

In the Church, when it comes to social commitment, Christians who, through conviction and without any sense of superiority, promote a culture of freedom and truth after searching for and discovering truth, are very lacking. When Christians truly live their faith, they gradually generate around them a culture of truth and service; a culture of love and not of death.

As Christians, we should develop this type of reflection. We should cultivate a deep respect for others but fight hard against all that which implies untruths and death.

A Christian should distinguish himself by his love for life and by his desire to live. The love for life and the desire to live imply a culture which favours dignity and authentic freedom. Christians in Catholic Action can and should be present in all spheres. Thus they should be continually deepening their knowledge of the teaching of the Church regarding all areas: social themes, ethics, life, work...

"God calls me and sends me as a labourer in his vineyard. He calls me and sends me to work for the coming of his Kingdom in history. This personal vocation and mission defines the dignity and responsibility of each member of the lay faithful and makes up the focal point of the whole work of formation whose purpose is the joyous and generous living out of this responsibility".

Original text in spanish language.

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: *1Jn 1:5-2:2; Mt 25:1-13*

HOMILY

GIVE US SOME OF YOUR OIL...

*H. Em. Card. Leonardo Sandri
Prefect of the Congregation for Oriental Churches*

Dear Friends,

In this liturgy we thank God for having given us Saint Catherine of Siena. She was a virgin "burning with His Spirit of Love"! She is a model for Christ's disciples of all times because in her, God put together all the essential requisites for a Christian identity and for Christian witnessing: "the contemplation of the crucified Christ and dedicated service to the Church".

In the prayer of today's Mass, we find the key interpretation of every ecclesial mission. The service given by ordained ministers, consecrated religious persons and that given by lay people will only bear fruit if it is sustained by a steady and ever growing relation between contemplation and service. Who are the lay people of the third Christian millennium if not men and women dedicated to "contemplation and service", people who love the world and live their lives with an intense Christian sensitivity?

During your meeting you will be reflecting on the teaching of the Servant of God John Paul II, found in *Christifideles Laici*. I am also sure that your great friend Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, whom I remember dearly, will be with you. I treasure his memory as he shared his love for Christ with me. We come from the same country and he was my Rector at the Seminary in the years '60-'63. You will be trying "to go back to the origin". Very often, the document will

refer you to Vatican Council II. Through God's grace you will be able to see what went on in the Church since then and the authentic changes which were always meant to help in building the Church and never at creating divisions. Pope Benedict is always stressing this. I can think of the opening speech *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* with which Blessed John XXIII opened the Vatican Council. In this speech, the Pope stated that Divine Providence "is leading us towards a new order of human relations, which, through men's efforts and [...] beyond their expectations, leads towards higher and unexpected goals; all this, even adversities, end up by being of great benefit to the Church" (*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, 11 October 1962).

We should love the present time and never lose hope even when we see the dark side of reality because there is always light ahead of us. This is the distinctive characteristic of the Church, as our *mother* and as the *Lord's bride*. The Church passes this on to all baptized. With the Church, we are able to condemn evil but not the evil-doer; we learn how to spread the healing power of mercy. Thus Christ's bride shows herself as "the expert in being humane", steadfast in showing Christ's love and imbued with the comfort of the Holy Spirit. She shares all this with her children.

When we contemplate the crucified Lord we are not estranged from reality. Rather, we are immersed in life's realities without being "tossed about by the waves", knowing very well that we have something to give or better "Someone" to make known.

In this same speech, the Blessed Pontiff goes on to show "the never changing problem which the world is faced with: the ever resplendent Christ, the centre of history and of our life". And men are called to choose to stay with Him and with His Church, enjoying and being bearers of light, goodness, order and peace; or keeping away from Him and His Church or even against and creating confusion and disturbing good human relations thus bringing about dangerous civil wars (cf. *ibid*).

Dear brothers and sisters, Catholic Action is called to be a witness of the glorious Christ in front of all the world, to show in the Gospel's words that "God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all" (*1Jn 1:5ff*).

But is our faith's lamp, which enlightens us in our mission, full of the necessary evangelic oil? (cf. *Mt 25:1-13*) Our life will not be in a position to enlighten the world if we do not ensure that we are

constantly united, every single day, with God, our light. And only "God is light", because only "God is love"!

Contemplation means to entrust ourselves, with all our weaknesses, to the Pascal light. Contemplation, which leads to a fruitful and untiring service to the Church, is exclusively a gift from God! However, we do not pray enough for this gift for our pastors and for all the faithful. Today Saint Catherine urges us to pray incessantly for that oil which helps us to contemplate the crucified Christ.

Even today, those who look at Church with favour are telling us "Give us of your oil". This is the cry of those who feel lost when they read the Gospel and those who are deeply impressed by the love shown by Christians. Many who are *willing* to listen to Peter's successor because of his frankness and his profound Christian and human thoughts, his genuineness and *parressia* as teacher and father. The Church is still a reference point which surpasses what is purely human. This is not openly accepted and some hide this fact by criticizing the Church. But the fact remains that Christ, through His Church, still appeals to men's hearts!

Dear lay faithful, do not disappoint many people's favour towards the Church and those who tell us: "give us some of your oil". The answer is that that oil is our very same life when it turns to Christ through our conversion. The oil is the freedom with which we come closer to Christ and find in Him our source and our fulfilment. *Only God can give us this oil*. We are called to transmit this conviction in our daily witnessing.

The liturgy, the Bible, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church and our Christian spirituality all help us to achieve this. Lay people can be outstanding witnesses if they succeed in finding ways of supporting the family and education; if they make their presence felt in working, cultural and social spheres and if they make a stand against poverty and defend human dignity, if they work for all that which, for Christ, is authentically human. May the Lord grant us lay people who are competent in their profession and who do their best to rise up to occasions. The Lord and humanity deserve our very best and need our talents. I am now thinking of your talents whereby you have developed and rooted Catholic Action at parish, diocesan and national levels and of the universal spirit which prevails here.

“Give us some of your oil” thus means: help us to understand the true reason which makes you dedicate your whole life for the Church of Christ. Better still: help us understand that Christ is the light which enlightens hearts and people. This is the question put to us by many of our companions, even today!

Dear friends, I promise to pray for you and would like to ask you to pray for our beloved Eastern Catholic Churches. They were the very first witnesses of the Easter and the Pentecost. We, children of the Latin Church, can only find convincing words to announce the Gospel to today’s men, only together with them. Oriental Christians have a special ability to touch young people’s hearts and to convince them. We should not forget this! The charism of Oriental Christians is the charism of all the Church and, for a long time, this remained unnoticed because of our oversight.

I would like to thank you for the International Forum Youth held in the Holy Land from the 28th December 2007 to the 6th January 2008. I would also like to thank you for what you will be doing in the future. I implore you to keep on praying for peace in the East and in the entire world. Christ’s light came from the East. May also Christ’s peace come from the East!

My appeal to you is to show spiritual and material solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. Once again, dear Catholic Action friends, I wish you a fruitful meeting. May our Immaculate Mother be with you during your meeting.

Next Sunday, I will be in Lourdes for a meeting with Maronite Catholics. I promise to be with you in spirit during your grand meeting with the Pope in Saint Peter’s Square.

May the perseverance and joy of the Risen Christ be with us all.

LECTURE

CATHOLIC ACTION A GIFT OF THE CHURCH THE ESSENTIAL COORDINATES

Paola Bignardi
IFCA Secretariat Coordinator

In *Christifideles Laici*, the Church and every Christian community finds once again the conciliar teaching on the vocation of the laity. It is a renewed call for us to assume to the full our responsibility as lay Christians to promote our place and role in the Church and in the world.

The first and most important way, through which we can help lay people prove that they are part of the Church, is by living as best we can the gift of our being Catholic Action; in other words, it is to be fully ourselves.

I would therefore like to remind you what the Council said about us. It is only when we understand this teaching, enriched by the experience of these forty years, that we can interpret it in a more mature way and render it a concrete and real gift in the communities to which each one of us belongs.

CA: a gift of the Church

First of all we must remember that CA is a gift of the Church; the Council has defined it as an indispensable ministry (AG 15); Paul VI “a peculiar form of lay ministry” (from his speech at the III Italian Catholic Action national Assembly, 1977).

CA: a gift of the Church about which the Church affirms that she cannot do without it (cf. John Paul II at the XI ICA Assembly) because each Church cannot do without lay faithful who, in strong colla-

boration with their Pastors, share in the Church's ministry of communion for the accomplishment of its mission.

Going back in our reflection, to what the Council itself affirms about Catholic Action, I think it is important to refer to No. 20 in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and to the "four characteristic notes" which are outlined there.

Lay character

"Cooperating with the hierarchy in their own way, the laity contribute the benefit of their experience to, and assume responsibility for the direction of these organizations, the consideration of the conditions in which the pastoral activity of the Church is to be conducted, and the elaboration and execution of the plan of things to be done" (AA 20).

It is difficult to give a definition of the lay vocation. Today, in this Assembly, we think it important to highlight an aspect in this vocation which is taken for granted: the baptismal root, which leads us to accept in our daily life that call to *holiness*, which is "the fullness of the Christian life" (NMI 30).

CA's vocation is that of testifying the call of lay people to live a simple Christian life, without giving room to a minimalistic interpretation. It is rather a call to give importance to that which is essential and simple as the goal of a journey which leads to our full maturity. In this journey we have been practising a life, just like anyone else, as the core of our Christian living.

The beauty of a Christian lay way of living can be seen concretely in lay people, who know how to lead a life, which is *holy and secular* at the same time. I would like to highlight only some of these aspects:

- Lay character means that there should be a positive and trusting outlook on life's realities. This is expressed through an appreciation of life, which brings out its richness being a universal gift of God, and the fullness it acquires in the light of the Lord's Resurrection. We have experienced that our daily lives and experiences are precisely our meeting with Him and we do not have to leave these behind to be able to meet Him. All we have to do is to live these experiences with intensity and authenticity. Our spi-

rituality cannot be an escape from reality but it should be an embodied spirituality which expresses love and closeness to all.

- The lay character and universality: it means brotherhood open to all; it is the ability to be interested in the problems of all humanity, as we are all women and men of our times. The lay character means sharing.
- The lay character and responsibility: towards our own environment, towards our own towns, our own ecclesial communities, towards the spheres where, day by day, we spend our time...
- The lay character means paying attention to all the problems which common people are facing and keeping dialogue with everybody, convinced that the way these reason could help us to understand better the world of which we form part...

Ecclesial character

"The immediate aim of organizations of this kind is the Church's apostolic aim, that is, the evangelization and sanctification of men and the formation of a Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and spheres of life" (AA 20).

CA breathes with the Church: this means that it assumes the Church's apostolic mission as its own. One of the ways to understand CA is its original link with the Church, a link which is spiritual and at the same time affective, operational and interior. Certainly, everyone should live in union with his own Church, however, not everyone is expected to live it with such intensity and closeness as CA has chosen to do.

It is a link which means *availability to be of service*, without choosing the way in which this is to be done but answering to the needs of the community in question. Thus the Church knows that she can count on lay people who are ready to assume her needs as their own. They are ready to contribute towards the journey of the whole Christian community and to be of service, not as individuals or through the availability of single persons. They do this through the organic associative experience which draws its strength from its own subjectivity, which helps to bring out the richness of a lay vocation lived in everyday circumstances. CA works so that the ecclesial community does not become an easy going place of one uniform culture

but an alive context where bodies with different perceptions and experiences - vocational, associative and spiritual... - discuss, dialogue and interact continually.

It is a link which leaves *a mark on one's spiritual life*, on the type of intra-ecclesial relations and on the relations with Pastors. CA's spiritual journey follows the direction taken by the whole Church: the Sunday Eucharist, the liturgical year, sacramental life... to be lived together with all the others, as one community.

Within this conciliar ecclesiology, CA chooses the Church in her diocesan dimension.

Direct collaboration with Pastors

"Whether they offer themselves spontaneously or are invited to action and direct cooperation with the apostolate of the hierarchy, the laity function under the higher direction of the hierarchy itself, and the latter can sanction this cooperation by an explicit mandate" (AA 20).

CA cannot exist if not through very strong relations with the Pastors of its own community. The risk of giving a worldly interpretation to this relation is very strong. Impatience and resistance, from either side, present a constant pressure on this relation which can only be regenerated by faith and by future prospects.

Besides the natural link with Pastors which distinguishes the life of every Christian, we know that as CA we are committed to maintain a special relation with them. The Council defines this as "direct collaboration with the apostolate of the Hierarchy" (cf. LG 33) because of our choice to make the Church's goals our own.

Our relations with Pastors are not simply operational but they are a creative expression of a vocation which calls for reciprocity and dialogue; relations built on a filial and respectful spirit. It is not a spirit of subordination but of obedience. Bachelet used to say "obeying standing up": if not standing up it is not obeying as sons but as servants. It is obeying in faith as free persons, with a filial heart, that is with confidence and without the least sign of mistrust.

This is the way we look at our pastors: they are the ones who make communion the basis of the community which they are called

to build. They are the ones around whom the Church is united so that it might be a sign of that unity, which is promised and which calls for everybody's commitment in their territory. This is the communion, which in our times, marked by solitude, individualism and diffidence, announces the Gospel to today's people. It is that unity which is another word for that peace and serenity which every woman and man craves for today.

Maybe this aspect of our identity is the most difficult one to put into concrete practice in our lives. However, we cannot think of being CA if we do not take this on as our typical characteristic. When we try to live this experience with the greatest possible maturity, we will be contributing towards a richer experience of being a Church to all.

Organic character

"The laity act together in the manner of an organic body, so that the community of the Church is more fittingly symbolized and the apostolate rendered more effective" (AA 20).

Living *together* is another Catholic Action charism. We are not called to be witnesses individually but in unison and in an organic way. CA has chosen the organizational associative form, a choice which is not obvious, which goes rather against today's general trend. It has its value because it allows CA to live as a gift of the Church before it belongs to it; also because the link with the Church comes before its own particular choice.

It therefore follows that the associative choice corresponds to the democratic choice.

The Council says that a CA experience has to be characterized by these "four notes" which have to be taken all together. I have quoted this principle as it helps to remind us of our basic characteristic: a CA member is committed to abide by aspects which apparently seem to be irreconcilable. It is enough to think of the fraternity which should be fostered within the Association, but in communion with the Church of all; of the Association's identity, but within the universality of the people of God; of the sense of belonging to the association but open to service, democracy and communion. We can never "take refuge" in any one of these two quoted terms, but we should adopt them concurrently.

This is one of the aspects of our paradoxical characteristics as lay people. It does not permit us to stick to one partial aspect of our lives as Christians but drives us on towards a higher degree of a coordinated effort in this aspect which always remains a challenge for us to overcome.

Conclusion

I hope that through my reflections, I have succeeded in bringing out CA's rich contribution to the Church. This enlivening contribution is measured not so much by the initiatives which CA promotes but by the fervour with which, as a family, we feel co-responsible for all the family.

CA is deeply rooted in common people's daily lives. It is highly sensitive to what is essential which it tries to live in ordinary life circumstances. This is what makes CA a living experience which does not strike the headlines in a culture, which regards mostly as effective those experiences which impress and which gain publicity in newspapers.

Maybe, this is why, in a Church conditioned by publicity on the media, CA does not get so much ecclesial attention although after a deep reflection one quickly realizes what a great gift it is for the Church especially when in the Church there is such a great need of faithfulness: to time, to the ideal, to mystery, to people, to the place...

Christian communities should look with great attention at this experience, which many tend to regard as old-fashioned. Maybe this is because they no longer treasure the value of the Christian way of life of common people and of the spiritual journey of those, who have decided to give priority to what is essential, as a value in their lives.

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT 2004-2008

by *Maria Grazia Tibaldi*
IFCA Secretariat in Rome

I would like to start by thanking the people who help the Secretariat on a regular basis; those who translate all the communications sent by the Secretariat, *NOTICIAS...* into the four different languages; those who see to the secretarial work (invitations, documentation in connection with visas, mailing lists); those who work on the WEBSITE especially in connection with our meetings, particularly continental meetings and other activities. I would also like to thank the members of the Secretariat who work at Continental level as well as national leaders especially those who have hosted continental meetings in their countries.

The WEBSITE, which is kept up to date by the Secretariat and National CA Associations, has become - and could become even more so - an effective means of communication.

As from June 2006 it has been given a new look.

The WEBSITE is one of the responsibilities of the Secretariat and takes up a lot of our energy - that can be shared - so that it may be a means whereby one could get information about IFCA and get to know CA. The main difficulty is to get countries to send in their news, in short, in their own language or translated into another. Thus everyone will be sharing responsibility for keeping everyone informed.

Activities during these last three years

1. THE SECRETARIAT: from 2004 to 2008 it has met once every year and has also kept in close contact through internet.

In September 2005 and in October 2006, the Secretariat and the CA Promotion Group (CAPG) have worked together on the

preparations for the Assembly held in October 2007 and met immediately before and during the 2008 Assembly.

2. **THE CAPG:** is a new working group of the Secretariat and is made up of one or two CA leaders from countries on the Secretariat and other countries who can contribute towards the promotion of CA at continental level. The aim is to prepare material which could be used in connection with the promotion of CA.

The meetings have been an occasion of common formation to all the members, an opportunity to exchange experiences and to work together on the subjects and methodology which could help in the promotion of CA in the different realities both when it comes to the re-establishment or to the launching of CA. Argentina has been responsible for the coordination of this group and has prepared six Ppts which have been assessed and tested during a promotion programme.

3. CONTINENTAL MEETINGS

- American meeting: ARGENTINA May 2006
- African meeting: UGANDA August 2006
- European meeting: SPAIN March 2007.

The *DOCUMENTS* have been prepared and the material and the photos are available on the website.

4. Besides these routine activities, there was a special activity: **THE CA YOUTH INTERNATIONAL PILGRIMAGE** to the Holy Land. This was an initiative which was promoted by the Secretariat particularly by the newly set up **YOUTH COORDINATION GROUP (YIG)** of which Oana Tuduce is responsible.

A booklet, giving all the information about the pilgrimage and a special issue of *Noticias* about the CAPG (developments from August 2005 up to the pilgrimage) and the rapid developments which were the result of different contacts and initiatives and which led up to the setting up of the CAPG, have been issued.

5. During this three-year period, IFCA representatives have participated in different ecclesial and ecumenical **INITIATIVES:**

- at European continental level: the ecumenical Assembly in SIBIU (Romania) promoted by CCEE and KEK in September 2007. IFCA participated in all the preparatory meetings held in Rome in January 2006, in Wittenberg in March 2007 and in the Assembly with an Italian Rumanian delegation.
- At American continental level, after the V Conference in Aparecida. IFCA dedicated the continental meeting held in May 2006 to the theme of this Conference. IFCA has also contributed to the Conference and was represented by CA Argentina at a CELAM meeting held in Bogotá after the Assembly.
- At African continental level: IFCA dedicated its continental meeting held in August 2006 to the theme of the II Synodal Assembly of the Bishops' Synod of October 2009.

6. **IFCA:** it is an international Association of lay faithful of private right (recognized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity/PCL, on the 2nd January 2000) is the place where Associations of lay faithful, the majority of which are of public right, meet and coordinate their work.

a) IFCA forms part of a coordinating body called the Conference for ICO (CICO).

With the new CJC all these organizations - as well as the new movements - have revised and presented their respective statutes and have been recognized as International Associations of Lay Faithful (ILA) by the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL).

The CICO is undergoing great changes - not only in the change of name - but it has become more representative than AIF. A definite decision, which may mark the end of the CICO, will be taken in June in Paris.

b) Meanwhile a new coordinating body for Catholic OING (first meeting November 2007) has been set up by the Secretariat of State and the PCL so as to ensure a common stand at international level.

IFCA is not an OING, does not participate in the Forum but could collaborate in the formation of those who work at international level.

c) In future there is the possibility of working together through a NETWORK among AIF. An interesting network could be built among OIC/AIF which have CA roots.

Because of common objectives, we already have contacts with UMOFC - FIHC - MIDADE - JECI MIECI. We also collaborate closely with these organisms through CA representatives who sit on their administrative bodies.

Particularly on the theme - FINANCING OF IFCA

In collaboration with Bruno Frugoni, IFCA administrator 2005-2008, ex ICA national administrator.

Some brief notes and prospects.

FIRST PHASE of the first steps towards the 2004 Congress

After the first phase which was financially supported by the ICA - from the first meeting of prayers and reflection held in October 1987 up to the approval of the Constitutional Assembly held in November 2001 - the Normative Document had provided for a minimal annual membership fee which, as time went on, was confirmed during the following assemblies.

The ordinary expenses for the running of IFCA came from the State Secretariat, from the countries' membership fees (usually settled during the Assembly) and the rest covered by the ICA.

The expenses in connection with continental initiatives, with youth and with some countries (the number of which has grown) have been covered by contributions which came from different ecclesial sources: the Italian Episcopal Conference, the Holy See, CA Spain, Renovabis, hosting CA countries of CA initiatives and the ICA.

As time passed, a three-year and an annual financial report, up to the preparations for the International Congress on CA which was mainly financed by the Italian Episcopal Conference, became feasible.

We consider the 2004 Congress as a new beginning in IFCA's life as this encouraged us to start a new CA promotion campaign.

DEVELOPMENT STEPS 2004-2008

During this three-year term, the Secretariat has undertaken an increased number of ongoing initiatives: the setting up of the CA

Promotion Group, the Youth Coordination Group and a number of activities at continental level.

Some items have been singled out:

- Secretariat Meetings
- Meetings of the CA Promotion Group
- Continental Meetings
- CA promotion projects in a number of countries
- Youth Coordination Initiatives
- The up-keep of communication through the web-site
- Current expenses for the running of the Secretariat in Rome.

After the Secretariat meeting held in Rome on the 11th September 2006, the Secretariat Coordinator drew up a list of the normal initiatives which were being undertaken. This was meant to lead to a study of the financial needs and to help in the drafting of a financial plan.

Thanks to everybody's cooperation and the collaboration of the ICA's Administrator, we are putting our estimates and budget in order and studying as to how, in the future, IFCA could sustain its initiatives. The ICA will still be offering its support by making its offices and the services of its personnel available.

We hope that with the V Ordinary Assembly we have opened a **SECOND PHASE 2008-2011** wherein we continue to insist that IFCA is "ours", meaning that member countries sustain it financially in relation to their financial situation and also in other ways.

The IFCA Secretariat will continue to prepare projects for the promotion of CA in countries and for continental work. It will still help in the procurement of financial support from different organisms with which it is already in contact as well as from other possible new sources.

IFCA is particularly grateful to the Italian Episcopal Conference - Services for charitable interventions in favour of Third World Countries - the Pro Africa Foundation of the State Secretariat and all those who have helped IFCA financially.

Rome, 30 April 2008

***PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE
Elections***

Public celebration

***20 YEARS AFTER CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI
in the light of Vatican Council II
its relevance today***

*PRESENTATION
OF IFCA NORMATIVE DOCUMENT
AND PROPOSALS FOR A REGULATION
AD EXPERIMENTUM*

*Giuseppe Gervasio
ex ICA national President*

Suggestions regarding the revision and updating of the ways in which IFCA operates in the light of the 1995 Normative Document wherein it is recognized as an International Organism of Pontifical Right enjoying a private juridical personality (can 116 CJC)

The IFCA Normative Document (1995) provides for a simple and functional organizational structure, which corresponds to its aim: "to be a space where concern and solidarity for the Catholic Action of different countries, regions and continents can find expression"; to analyse the "great problems, at universal level, which modern society is posing to the Church and to Catholic Action" and to animate and promote "the new evangelization considering the diverse pastoral contexts and the diverse organizational realities of the different situations in which Catholic Action works" (cf. ND 2).

The Normative Document entrusts IFCA's functioning - that of working to reach its aim - to two distinctive bodies: the Assembly (which decides the directions which the Forum should take and which takes the required decisions) and the general Secretariat (whose task is to represent IFCA, to serve as a link and as a means of communication, to put forward suggestions and to implement the decisions taken during the Assembly).

During these last years, IFCA's activities have developed, the number of member and observer countries has grown and the number of initiatives undertaken has multiplied. All this has highligh-

ted certain needs which call for specific attentions, adequate lines of action and ways of programming and coordinating which answer to these needs.

In this regard some areas should be singled out which call for action by the Forum:

- basic guidelines for the development of formation activities undertaken by Catholic Action;
- youth activities which concern both their formation as well as their ecclesial commitment;
- the attention to be given to cultural, civic and social situations and problems which specifically characterize continents or regions and which call for a study by the Church leading to pastoral action plans related with different territorial and thematic areas;
- the need for an ecumenical dialogue and for a dialogue between religions and cultures;
- the promotion of participation and co-responsibility in the ecclesial community and the renewal of the associative forms of Catholic Action (which Catholic Action, today);
- the promotion and experimentation of ways of "new evangelization" (faith and culture, Christian animation in the flow of history);
- the promotion of communication between the Forum CA Associations and Movements and between the Forum and the other ecclesial organisms (with the Holy See, the Episcopal Conferences).

In order to answer to these concrete exigencies, it might be opportune to draw up guidelines to follow in the organization of IFCA activities and also consolidate and develop on positive past experiences gained these last years in the areas indicated above.

To achieve this it might be opportune to:

- identify some particular areas wherein the Forum intends to involve itself;
- set up working groups or commissions for the areas indicated above with the specific task of promoting the activities and keep up the relationships, carrying out the decisions taken by the Assembly and the general Secretariat for the specific sec-

tors (for example: youth, matrimony and the family; particular territorial environments; particular areas of activity) or for specific tasks (such as: relations with the Forum Associations and Movements; relations with ecclesial organisms; procurement of financial resources for IFCA's activities);

- entrust the setting up of these working groups or commissions to the general Secretariat according to criteria and instructions laid down by the Assembly;
- reinforce the work of the general Secretariat by providing it with supporting secretarial services which should be available to the Ecclesiastical Assistant and to the Secretariat members who are responsible for coordinating IFCA's work; help the working groups and the commissions in their secretarial work; follow the everyday developments of activities which are in progress;
- assign these secretarial tasks under the responsibility of the general Secretariat.

Whilst keeping to the norms regarding financial matters as laid down in the Normative Document (the Assembly establishes the contribution which is to be paid by IFCA members, the administration of resources in the hands of the general Secretariat which presents a triennial financial report to the ordinary Assembly), it might be opportune to propose that the general Secretariat should:

- forecast, on an annual basis, the financial resources required for the activities and initiatives it envisages to carry out, indicating the ways how these are going to be covered, keeping in mind the established contribution by members and other available resources; under required resources to cover expenses it should include the expenses connected with the activities as well as those connected with the everyday running of the Forum;
- always on an annual basis prepare a factual report for members and observer countries and present opportune suggestions concerning membership fees and other ways of procuring financial support for IFCA's everyday running and activity; in fact these information are definitely of great importance when the ordinary Assembly is called to decide on the matter as laid down in the Normative Document.

If a decision to adopt the organizational and functional guidelines suggested above is taken, this could be done on an experimental basis, and in due time, according to the ensuing results, one could arrive at a concrete evaluation of the proposals and at a decision to include them in the Normative Document after submitting them to the Pontifical Council for the Laity for approval.

The **V Assembly** held elections on the 30th April in the morning. The session was presided over by Francesca Zabotti, Vice-President of the ICA Adult Sector.

First phase: acceptance of new member countries

Countries may become members if the association is constituted at national level. An Association established in one diocese of a country may also apply. To join IFCA, the particular Association has to send in its request, through the Diocesan Bishop or through the Bishop responsible for Lay Apostolate, to the Secretariat.

Rwanda's request to join as a national association was accepted because when the Association is established in more than three dioceses, it may ask to join IFCA as a national Association. The other two countries which were accepted as members were: Senegal, at national level, and the diocese of KORHOGO in the Ivory Coast.

Second phase

The member countries, which had paid their annual membership fee, were invited to submit their candidacy for the Secretariat.

The electoral commission was appointed and a list of the candidate countries was drawn up. Each country had a right to one vote and could vote for its preferred three countries to sit on the Secretariat.

The countries which were elected and accepted as members of the Secretariat for 2008-2011 were: Argentina, Burundi, Italy, Myanmar and Poland.

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: Ac 17:15-22; Jn 16:12-15

IN MEMORY OF THE SERVANT OF GOD EDUARDO FRANCISCO PIRONIO

HOMILY

*H.Em. Card. Salvatore De Giorgi
Archbishop Emeritus of Palermo
ex IFCA and ICA Ecclesiastical Assistant*

In the opening prayer, which we said at the beginning of this Eucharistic Celebration, we implored the Lord to give heed to our greatest desire and said: "as in this Eucharist we celebrate the Paschal mystery of your Son, so may we rejoice in the assembly of Saints when he comes in his glory".

Each eucharistic celebration is a token, a prelude and an anticipation of the joy and the eternal glory enjoyed by the saints. In this context, it is a joy for me, on the tenth anniversary of "his passing away from this world to the Father" to commemorate our dear Cardinal Eduardo Francisco Pironio, who was the inspiration and support behind IFCA,

He preferred to look at death with the same paschal vision with which Jesus presented it to the Apostles when His Passion was imminent: the return to the House of the Father. "Now I enter into the 'glory of my Lord', in direct contemplation 'face to face' with the Holy Trinity. Up to now I have journeyed 'from afar towards the Lord', now 'I see him as he is'. I am happy. *Magnificat*".

This remarkable declaration of paschal faith opens his spiritual testament. It includes all the grandeur of Christian living and the secret of the invaluable and fascinating priestly and Episcopal

ministry of our Cardinal. He exercised this ministry in various fields and involved himself in the heart of the Church and for its benefit as Professor of theology, Rector of the Seminary, Vicar General, Bishop, National Assistant of the Catholic Action in Argentina, Secretary General and later President of Celam, Cardinal, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and Member of many Dicasteries of the Holy See. As he himself wrote in his will, in carrying out all these duties, he only had one aim, that of "being a simple presence of Christ, Hope of Eternal Glory". His was a missionary ministry and I would like to commemorate it in the light of the Word of God which we have just heard or are about to hear.

In the first reading, taken from the *Acts of the Apostles*, which we will continue reading during the fifty days after Easter, Saint Luke helped us relive the Apostle Paul's experience at the Areopagus in Athens during his second missionary journey. Humanly speaking, it was a disappointing experience but, according to God's plans, it was providential. It was decisive in the way the Apostle went straight to the point when announcing the Gospel, a way which we should always keep in mind. Up to now, Paul had spoken in Jewish Synagogues, so undoubtedly it was not easy for him to confront directly the pagan Hellenistic culture, speaking and discussing with representatives of the different philosophical currents. It was definitely difficult to discuss with the epicureans who maintained that pleasure is the only measure by which to decide about one's actions and with the stoics who had a pantheistic vision of the cosmos and exalted self-dominance as the supreme moral norm.

This may be considered as the first attempt at interreligious dialogue. Instead of starting by announcing the Gospel saying that Jesus Christ was crucified and rose from the dead, the Apostle decided to start from the expectations and convictions of his listeners ending up however in announcing the Gospel.

With a certain "captatio benevolentiae" he acknowledges that the Athenians were "afraid of the gods" as among the many monuments of their cult he found one dedicated "to the unknown God".

This fact offered him a good opportunity to come out with his first comment: "I announce to you him whom you adore without knowing him". He spoke about God, the Creator, and about the original radical unity and humanity's destiny. He stresses the

profound link that exists between the creature and the Creator, quoting the pagan poet Arato and the stoic philosopher Cleante. He clarifies that as a result of this, the Creator cannot be assimilated with creatures, such as idols. This is a result of ignorance. So he invites his listeners to correct themselves, keeping in mind the divine judgment which has to come "through a man whom he has chosen". This was a clear reference to Christ, but Paul, at least at that moment, does not mention him. The Athenians listened to him attentively. However, when he mentioned the resurrection from the dead of this man chosen by God as a proof of his words, some sarcastically looked at him with contempt; others despised him and abandoned him saying: "We will listen to you another time".

The Apostle was thus compelled to close his intervention. He left Athens and headed for Corinth, where he changed his subject and his way of evangelizing pagans. He no longer relied on "persuasive learned speeches", but he only tried to speak about "the manifestation of the Spirit and of His power", maintaining that "he did not know anyone else but Jesus Christ and him crucified", as he himself wrote in his *First letter to the Corinthians* (2:4-5).

This should apply also to us as we too have to announce the Crucified and Risen Christ, above everything else, in situations which are becoming ever increasingly more dischristianized. Card. Pironio was fully convinced of this and made it very clear in his ministry both as a teacher in matters of faith and as a guide in the formation of consciences.

I cannot forget his fervent appeal in his closing speech at the Vienna IFCA Assembly in 1994. He said: "We cannot remain unmoved in front of a God who gives us joy. Filled with the Holy Spirit's renewed fervour, we should go daily into the world (with its new situations and new challenges), to announce Jesus explicitly and to establish his Kingdom".

His teachings, his life, his spirituality, his ministry as professor and pastor were all Christcentred. Whenever he spoke to priests, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and to lay faithful, he always tried to convey this Christcentred spirituality, based on the action of the Holy Spirit, to whom he was greatly devoted.

"The Christian lay person - he used to say - is first and foremost a new creature who is born in Christ from the Spirit. His journey towards sanctity (about which he never tired of speaking) is a growth

in Christ 'which is always new'. Sanctity is attained when the Christian reaches this newness for good. In this journey, it is the Holy Spirit which works above everything else. Those who are sons of God are led by the Spirit. It is the Spirit of interior freedom, of filial prayer, of fortitude and testimony, of truth and love. It is the spirit which renews everything; it is the spirit which brings about interior unity".

I think that his hymn to the Holy Spirit is a touching and challenging comment on today's Gospel. In this passage, Jesus repeated to us the greatest Easter promise he made to His apostles in the Cenacle on the first Holy Thursday: the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, Spirit of truth, which guides to the whole truth, Spirit of communion and mission.

Cardinal Pironio loved to speak about the spirit of communion and about the mission of the church. Culturally and spiritually he was immersed in the mystery of the Church, which is a mystery of communion and mission. As members of the Church, to which we all belong, we should all be aware of this. In Vienna he said that "Communion is the beginning and end, the centre and the heart of new evangelization" because, according to John Paul II, "it is a great gift from the Holy Spirit", the real "protagonist of the mission". Communion "exists and grows depending on how much one lives in 'Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit' ".

On that occasion, he also said that in Catholic Action, which, as he wrote in his Testament, "he loved so much, this call to ecclesial communion and this missionary mandate, has a special significance. The heart of the world is the theological place for lay people's sanctification and mission". He went on to explain this further: the intensification of "spiritual life" in intimate communion with the Holy Trinity, "perfect communion with the universal Church under the guidance of Peter", active participation in the Dioceses in organic communion with the Pastors", the deep involvement "in the new areopaghi where the Church is called to announce the Gospel with the Holy Spirit's new fervour".

He concluded by saying that "Catholic Action's strength has always been its link with the hierarchy and its commitment to prayer and to a sacramental life. It is living the Christian novelty of Baptism by full participation in the Eucharist, by seeking purification through the renewing grace of Reconciliation and renewing the ever active strength of Confirmation every day".

Catholic Action should never forget this message and should live it, always and everywhere, if it wants to flourish, as we all wish and hope. This is IFCA's aim, both from the apostolic and from the geographic point of view. We do this, following the footsteps of the Saints, Blessed and of those declared Venerable and Servants of God, who in Catholic Action and in the service of Catholic Action, have set us an example. They have gone before us, following Christ on the way of the Beatitudes, with the motherly help of Mary, whom John Paul II invoked as Queen of Catholic Action.

Cardinal Pironio has left us an example even in this. His love for Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church, followed naturally from his love for Christ and for His Church. During this Eucharistic Celebration, which we are celebrating in his memory, let us raise to Mary the same prayer which he liked to repeat "that she always may accompany us with: the joyful availability of the disciples, with the fervour of witnesses and with the serene strength of the martyrs".

The public celebrations came to an end at Domus Mariae where, after dinner, the participants were invited to enjoy a "musical treat" specially prepared for the V IFCA Assembly, with excerpts performed by the Concentus Musicus Fabratenus Josquin des Pres from Ceccano (Rome).

1. THE LAITY TODAY THE CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

Prof. Dr. Guzmán Carriquiry
Undersecretary Pontifical Council for the Laity

This theme is very vast and complex so I will limit myself to a schematic presentation hoping that this might be provocative and stimulating and that it might lead to a critical examination which asks for clarifications, corrections and deeper study.

I will focus my intervention on 15 crucial questions - which are the 15 steps linked to the same line of reflections - twenty years after the publication of the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.

I. We should realize that we are protagonists in a contemporary important historical current called, in a bit pompous way, "promotion of the laity". This current had its historic beginning in the second half of the XIX century and kept developing up to the present day. It is in fact one of the most important characteristics of the Church of the XX century.

From a critical point of view, this current implies the gradual overcoming of the traces of a clericalism which characterized the Church and its procedures starting from the late Tridentine period. This attitude resulted as a reaction and as a defence against the attacks by the secularized world of that time under the impulse of its main critical movements: the Protestant Reform and the Enlightenment period (which, in their own ways, were "lay" movements).

This current gave rise to a renewed awareness of the vocation, dignity and identity of lay people, of their belonging, co-

responsibility and participation in ecclesial communion, of their responsibility and their specific contribution in the Church's mission. The Second Vatican Council has been a major event in the life of the Church, especially when it comes to the "promotion of the laity". This renewed awareness of the identity of lay people stands out in the Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, complemented by the very practical Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. In the synods which came after, these teachings were taken up again and developed further. In fact, the meaning of the word "synod" is precisely a journey undertaken together. All this lead to the publication of *Christifideles Laici* which is considered the "magna charta" for lay people of our times.

II. In spite of all this, in the ten years after the Council, there was a lot of discussion on the identity of the laity but, during these last years, this subject has been left out from ecclesial debates. Undoubtedly, many lay people are still on the receiving end and are still passive participants in religious services. A clerical mentality still prevails. Others still confuse the "promotion of the laity" with a struggle for power, rights and functions, in a Church considered de facto, as the setting for three corporations (the clergy, religious communities and lay people) in opposition among themselves. We have also been through the first phase of the post-conciliar crisis which showed itself, among others, in a wave, characterized by the secularization of the clergy followed by the clericalization of lay people.

As the title itself shows, *Christifideles Laici* has taken up and concentrated on the teachings of the Council. The noun "*christifideles*", is first and foremost the very essence of being a Christian in any state of life. That which is common to all the faithful is baptism, the grace of being children of God and the common call to sanctity. We all share the same faith, hope and charity, are all living members of the Body of Christ built by the strength of the Holy Spirit and all share in the mission of the Church. This is why we can affirm: "Lay person meaning a Christian!" This is the same affirmation which Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo made: "I am a Bishop for you. I am a Christian with you". The Apostolic Exhortation gives us a fundamental affirmation in this regard: "Incorporation into Christ through faith and Baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the Church. This mystery constitutes the Christian's most basic "features" and serves as the basis for all the vocations and dynamism of the Christian life of the lay faithful" (n.9).

If we consider our common dignity and responsibility as Christians, then “lay” means a “secular” way of life, a “secular character” which has a deep theological and sociological meaning. It is the realization of the newness of Christian life coming from Baptism. The distinction between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, between the lay state of life and the religious state of life, should always remain very clear. However, the characteristic features of each ministry and of each state of life should all contribute towards communion within the Church where the true meaning of “living the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness” is shared by all. They are “different yet complementary” (n. 55).

III. 98% of those baptized in the Catholic Church are lay people. Of these, only an average of about 5 to 15% fulfill their Sunday obligation, which is considered as a very important indication but which is not all. For many, baptism has been overcome by indifference and oblivion in an unheard of climate of dischristianization. Of these, 10 to 15%, a high percentage, live their Christian faith but in a very fragmented and inconsistent way. They pick and choose, arbitrarily or in a very confused way, from among the truths of the doctrine and the moral guidelines of the Church. They decide as to which they want to accept and follow. Christianity has little impact on their way of life.

A crucial question arises about the way faith is transmitted and how it is received. It is no longer a common patrimony nor is it something which you can treasure peacefully. It is the gift which is most attacked and tampered with by the “gods” and “lords” of this world. The fundamental question is not the circumstances, the situations or the challenges which have to be faced as regards faith but it is the type of faith professed by Christians.

IV. The very nature of faith and the meaning of being a Christian are at stake. To start with, Christianity is not a doctrine, an ideology and much less is it a collection of moral norms and less still a spiritualism of “beautiful souls”. It is a historical fact which really happened: the Word became flesh. The Mystery, in which everything consists and subsists, has burst into human history. Jesus Christ has revealed God’s face and that this God is merciful love. He has shown us the vocation, dignity and destiny of humanity and of all creation, saved from its frailty and corruption by His Pascal victory. Every person, at all times

and in all places, has been given the opportunity to be contemporary with Christ, through His Body, with His People, who are His Church, the company of His witnesses and His disciples.

This is why Benedict XVI in His encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* says that: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (n.1).

It is very important and fundamental that faith starts or restarts from the gift of a personal encounter with the exceptional and fascinating Presence of Jesus Christ. We are all called to live our faith, always as a new beginning, as a remarkable novelty in life, as a splendid truth and as a promise of happiness. All this takes us back to the event which makes this possible and fruitful.

It is not by chance that John Paul II inaugurated his pontificate with his appeal “to open our doors to Christ” and concluded it with his invitation to “start afresh from Christ” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* nn. 29ff), with our eyes fixed on his face, rediscovering the fullness, depth and beauty of his mystery. As confident beggars of his grace and conscious of our call to sanctity, which is a consequence of our belonging to that mystery of communion which is the Church, we are part of the unheard-of “revolution of love” which gives sense and fullness to human history.

Our Christian roots and our catholic traditions are kept alive by conversions which happen in the lives of new men and women rather than through historical references, rhetorical declarations or political arguments. There is no way other than “starting afresh from Christ”. His presence has to be seen, encountered and followed in just the same real, new and actual way and with the same conviction and affection experienced by His first disciples on the shores of the Jordan 2000 years ago. In this wonderful encounter, which is far above any of our expectations and which is an answer to the longing for truth and “peace of heart” in every person, Christianity does not remain an abstract logic but becomes a “living” reality.

Thus, the most important and proper human and Christian attitude is prayer. As poor sinners, we should pray that the mystery of God may be manifested in our lives and that we may be aware of Christ’s presence. This presence is manifested through the testimony of his apostles and disciples and when we accept his plan of salvation in our lives with a prompt and submissive “fiat”, as Mary did.

V. In view of this, we have to watch out against three strong currents which can weaken the nature of the Christian message. One is to reduce it to an irrational religious preference which is lost among the many prevalent changeable and interchangeable “spiritual” options. Our consumistic society and the show business community present these options in so many different ways, as light sentimentalism or as rigid, reactive forms of pietism or fundamentalism. Another current is to reduce it to a matter of morals by presenting Christianity as a sign of compassion towards our fellowmen, as edifying social voluntary work or as a mere ethical impulse to give a helping hand to pitiful social cases where people are victims of the greed for money, of poverty, injustices, exclusion and violence. Lastly there is the danger of regarding it purely as “clerical”, where the only preoccupation is power and where the agenda and the ecclesial methods and ways adopted are guided by this disordered attraction and by media pressure.

VI. Well, only an encounter with Jesus Christ can make us commit ourselves to realize the importance of striving to grow in our faith and to live our faith starting from a Christian initiation or re-initiation programme and moving towards the formation of a mature Christian personality. The method used in educating in faith is fundamental. It has to present a programme, a method and an accompaniment so as to help the baptized really become true disciples, witnesses and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In other words, it means that the baptized should rediscover their baptism with gratitude, joy and with a sense of responsibility. They should look upon their baptism as the most profound and sublime awareness of their dignity as persons, a dignity which had been curtailed and obscured through sin but regenerated through grace and destined to reach its fullness in Jesus Christ.

In this way, we truly become “the new creature” which we become through baptism. We become new men and women, not in a rhetoric or symbolic way, but in its true ontological sense, that is new protagonists within the world. Christian formation is not simply information but conformity to Christ. This growth should be nourished by grace, sanctity, truth and charity, by our Catholic tradition, the Sacraments, the hierarchical ministry, by the Church’s teaching and by the diverse charisms.

Here I would like to refer to that which Benedict XVI called “educational emergency”, referring especially to youth. How can we pass on to youth strong reasons and great ideals, how to live with

others, love, struggle and spend their lives in giving themselves to others and sacrificing themselves for others? How can we communicate our Catholic tradition to them as a challenge to their freedom and as a full answer to their longing for truth and happiness? The World Youth Day, which will be held in Spain, in Madrid in 2011, is a providential occasion for a large scale kerygmatic, educational, catechetical and missionary mobilization of youth.

VII. In the process of educating in faith, the encounter with Christ and the fostering of familiarity and communion with Him become an experience of a remarkable living novelty. The confession of faith and daily life experiences do not remain separate compartments. Nothing can remain outside one’s existence in this “*metanoia*”, this conversion or this transformation. If this encounter is true and decisive, it changes a person’s life and leaves an imprint on one’s married and familiar life, on his/her friendships, work, leisure time activities, on the use of his/her time and money and on the way he/she looks at reality including the insignificant daily events. Everything becomes more human, more genuine, more beautiful and more joyful. Man starts embracing everything with the power of a transfiguring, unifying and inspiring love. “For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation” (II Co 5:16).

Only our pagan and worldly burdens do not change. Christianity is a call from Christ which leaves us free to answer; it only awaits our simple “*fiat*”, like that of our Mother Mary, so that through the sacramental nature of the Church He may become flesh in our flesh. It becomes so all-embracing that it is just the opposite of a Christianity which is disassociated from a person’s vital interests.

This “*metanoia*”, this new way of life, is not the result of a person’s weak moral effort, but is rather the outcome of grace or of an encounter which becomes a friendship, communion and trust in the merciful love of God. It leads a person to exclaim with the apostle: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Ga 2:20). In *Christifideles Laici* John Paul II stated that “This vital synthesis will be achieved when the lay faithful know how to present the Gospel and their daily duties of life as a most shining and convincing testimony, where, not fear but the loving pursuit of Christ and adherence to him, where the determining factor becomes how a person lives and grows. This leads to new ways of living which are more in conformity with human dignity.” (n. 34).

Only those who experience a material life changed by faith, notwithstanding its inconsistencies and misery and always trusting in God's mercy, can be converted into authentic Christian witnesses in all spheres of personal and social life. A true social transformation is only possible through this radical change in individual persons.

VIII. This new way of life which little by little configures all existence should lead to a new sensitivity, to a new way of seeing, facing and discerning all reality. In reality, Catholics, who live their faith seriously in their everyday familiar and working lives, are not lacking, but their outlook on the real national public issues is still restricted and blurred by limitations set by political, cultural and mediating powers. They are devout but inconsistent. There are situations and risks which could lead to the degeneration of Christianity and which could lessen its claim for truth and for being the informed guardian of all realities.

In fact, if God exists and is the "Logos", He is the ultimate reason behind all reality. And if God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, how can we ignore the fact of God's Incarnation as the main event in human history, the key to comprehend all reality? "Only those who acknowledge God, understand reality and can respond to it in an adequate and truly human way" His Holiness Benedict XVI stated in *Aparecida*.

This claim to truth does not reduce it to an intellectual formula, to a philosophical argument or to an ideological vision of the universe, but identifies it with a person who has said about himself: "I am the truth", "I" the truth of the universe and of history, "I" the most radical and unequalled key of all reality, "I" the meaning and destiny of all human existence, "I" the meaning of your life! There is no alternative: it is either the assertion of a madman or it is the surprising truth. It is up to us, Christians, who have received this revelation through a 2000 year old tradition and have experienced its authenticity in our lives, to advocate this "hypothesis" and to show its rationality. This does not keep us from reading the "signs of the times" but rather it makes us evaluate, discern and take up the many approaches to truth in scientific, metaphysical and sapiential spheres where full dialogue should be established in order to create serious discussion about actual human conditions and come up with cultural synthesis, which are always provisional.

As Catholics, our conviction cannot be based but on Christ. This is the focal point of all historical reality and the corner-stone of all our authentic human endeavors, and at last the Catholic Church. As members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church, whenever we need a judgement as regards life and reality, we have a safe reference. When this belonging to the Church is weak and our knowledge and our way of life are poor, we cannot reach the right judgement. We lack the purifying power of faith in respect to reason so faith ends up being subordinated to the ad hoc dictates of power and of dominant interests. Intelligence in faith should radically enlighten intelligence in realities.

This is why Benedict XVI invites and urges us to enhance reason and not to enclose it or limit it only to utilitarian situations. Rather, we should extend it in all possible dimensions until it can encounter faith which sustains it and empowers it, and "throws a new light on everything (...)" and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 11).

IX. There can be no real growth in faith and in Christian responsibility before lay people discover and live their belonging to the Church as a mystery, in all its depth and density, in all its truth and beauty. Paul VI took a very heavy cross upon him. How was it possible that such a profound and beautiful ecclesiology, with such an ecclesial renewed self-awareness, a gift from the Holy Spirit, be implemented among the strong currents of disaffection, contestation, manipulation, adaptations and abandonment in the Church by a good number of its children?

The Church is not a religious institution among the others. It is not just humanity's moral conscience. Much less is it a great non-governmental humanitarian organization. It is not to be defined either as political or cultural. It is a great mystery. It is the sacrament of the presence of God, body of the incarnate Word, which prolongs this Presence in time and space so as to be contemporary to every man through Christians. Thus, the education of Christians towards a joyful sense of gratitude and towards an enthusiastic responsibility, which stems from this sense of belonging to the Church, is very important. Christians should be educated to live the inseparable - human and divine - nature of the Church, with all its constituting factors (the Word and the Sacraments, the apostolic and hierarchical succession, the ministerial and ordinary priesthood, community and charisms...). The faithful should be educated in the vertical and horizontal mystery of communion, as a miracle of unity which upsets

and attracts and which brings down the dividing walls of indifference among men, the result of manipulation, exploitation, oppression and of worldly and sinful human relations.

In view of this, the fundamental work is to know how to build and propose Christian communities which help lay people to live their vocation, to educate them in faith, to help them grow in sanctity, to encourage them to be protagonists of the Church's mission and to be witnesses of their availability to be of service in the world. It is worth saying that lay people need to be attracted and kept together, welcomed and sustained, accompanied and nourished by Christian communities. These communities should be places where they discover a new way of life. They should be a sign and a reflection of the mystery of communion and of a fraternal and dedicated group of Disciples of Christ. In these groups, they should find the loving support where they can educate themselves and find all the help they need.

Occasional attendance at religious celebrations, abstract references to the Church or multiplying the number of activities and initiatives is not enough. Creating communitarian settings which conform to our being a Church in its sacramental, communitarian, catechetical and charitable dimensions, where one can live his Christian vocation in a realistic, persuasive, attractive and considerate way, in a faithful and trusting way, is more important than anything else. All Christian communities, starting from Christian families and from parishes, are called to do this. This is, in their own different and often paradigmatic ways, what associations, movements and the new ecclesial communities are.

X. Those, who want to "promote the laity" and their true "protagonism" as Christians, should strive to strengthen the associative realities of lay faithful, as outlined in the Second Vatican Council. The times when lay people stood out as "protagonists" were times when different ecclesial associative forms flourished. There was a strong lay awakening at the end of the XIX century and in the first decades of the XX century when Catholic Action was the main school and associative paradigm specially recommended by the Second Vatican Council and whose tradition is recorded and re-launched in *Christifideles Laici*. This movement continued during this post-conciliar period and a number of traditional associations sought to renew themselves. Also, new and diverse ecclesial movements as well as new communities, which helped to push lay people on, were founded. Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI spoke about these

movements and consider them as "providential" for the Church's mission in today's world. They are "homes and schools of communion" and their rich, educational and missionary charism draws, moves and converts many lay people.

Christifideles Laici, nn. 29ff, speaks about this "new era of group endeavors of lay faithful", in a multiplicity of forms characterized by a stormy eruption of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which worked in groups. It is important then to know how to encourage the diverse associations, movements and communities in the light of the "criteria of ecclesiality" (n.30) as found in *Christifideles Laici* and developed and explained in the teachings of the Popes.

These criteria serve as a guide to ecclesial authorities to discern as to under which each lay association falls. A more open disposition is expected towards a service in the universal ministry of Peter's successor; towards the "common good" of the local Churches under the guidance of their Pastors; towards the collaboration with other ecclesial bodies for the good of the mission and to ensure a Catholic presence in public spheres where crucial matters for the common good are discussed. There is a lot to learn from the experience of these associations and movements about pastoral work in local Churches. This experience should be the point of reference for the insertion and collaboration of associations, movements and new communities, while respecting their autonomy, their charisms and their aim.

XI. If nothing which is human can be considered as foreign to a Christian, we know that the Christian vocation of lay people is to live this vocation in the ordinary circumstances of family, working and social life. Here we are speaking about the secular dimension of the laity. This means experiencing and testifying with one's life that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" in order to face those who question us on the meaning of our existence and of all reality. With their lives they give a comprehensive and reasonable reply which satisfies all human desires for happiness, beauty, peace and justice; desires which arise in man's heart and which have no limits and cannot remain unanswered. In real life, as people who have been redeemed by Christ, they witness the possibility of living together, the power and fruitfulness of charity, the good news of human dignity, of reason and of freedom and the surprising new human way of life in all environments and circumstances.

With full freedom and responsibility, in the light of their Christian judgement enriched by the social teaching of the

Church, it is up to them to work for the reform of all that which goes against human dignity and to undertake valid and suitable ways which make it possible for every man and all men to live peacefully together. This is just the opposite of any idea of “*fuga mundis*” or any other form of clericalization (involving lay people in ecclesial spheres and keeping them away from the outside world). The Second Vatican Council and successive Pontiffs have repeatedly stressed that this is the specific and irreplaceable role of the laity. Their insistence seems to indicate the need for better education in this regard and more effective measures.

XII. There are five very important areas where lay people should be Christian witnesses; where their missionary and evangelizing mission is needed and where they should contribute towards the building of new ways of life which are more human and wherein signs of the Kingdom of God may be clearly noted and are seen working:

- the family founded on the sacrament of matrimony between a man and a woman, a community of love and life, a fundamental cell of the human and social texture, a school of humanity and a domestic church, “a patrimony of humanity”, today more than ever attacked in its very nature, unity and mission.
- Work, as co-creation, a sign of growth in dignity, a sphere of solidarity and sanctification, today subjected to strong tendencies of transformation and insecurity.
- Politics, as another expression of love, service for the common good, today often at the mercy of self-referring lobbies and degenerated simply into form of power politics.
- Education, since everthing starts, gets strength and depends on the awareness of the “I” of the human person, of his freedom and responsibility, of his integral growth, of the human and social capital, where tradition is being assessed just like a construction theory, a dimension which is very neglected by a society which does not know how to educate and is renouncing to its responsibility to educate.
- Culture, as a critical conscience of human experiences, which does not explain itself in the areopaghi of universities, scientific research, technological innovations, philosophical and ideological discussions, artistic expressions and in the ever growing important field of mass media, spheres where the tendency is to regard reason as rationalism and freedom as radical liberalism or libertinism.

XIII. I will tackle in particular the question of lay people’s political involvement since the Holy Father has lately made three very important interventions on the subject. The first one was his inaugural speech at the V General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate in Aparecida: “Respect for a healthy secularity - including the pluralism of political opinions - is essential in the Christian tradition. If the Church were to start transforming herself into a directly political subject, she would do less, not more, for the poor and for justice, because she would lose her independence and her moral authority, identifying herself with a single political path and with debatable partisan positions.

The Church is the advocate of justice and of the poor, precisely because she does not identify with politicians nor with partisan interests... To form consciences, to be the advocate of justice and truth, to educate in individual and political virtues: that is the fundamental vocation of the Church in this area. And lay Catholics must be aware of their responsibilities in public life; they must be present in the formation of the necessary consensus and in opposition to injustices... This being a Continent of baptized Christians, it is time to overcome the notable absence - in the political sphere, in the world of the media and in the universities - of the voices and initiatives of Catholic leaders with strong personalities and generous dedication, who are coherent in their ethical and religious convictions” (Aparecida, 13.05.2007).

The second significant intervention in this regard was that which the Pope made during his pastoral visit in Sardinia: “A very important work” - Benedict XVI said - “is the formation of a new generation of committed lay Christians who are capable to evangelize the world of work and economic and political spheres” (Cagliari, 07.09.2008).

The third important intervention is that addressed to the XXIII Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, given on the 15th November 2008: “It is their duty to take up the witness of charity especially with the most poor, suffering and needy just as it is to assume every Christian task aimed to construct conditions of ever greater justice and peace within human coexistence, thus opening new horizons to the Gospel... In a particular way, I confirm the necessity and urgency of the evangelical formation and pastoral accompaniment of a new generation of Catholics working in politics, that they be coherent with the professed faith, that they have moral

firmness, the capacity of educated judgment, professional competence and passion for service to the common good”.

XIV. It is important that little by little, with determination and urgency, we overcome the *diaspora* and the anonymousness of Christians in society, their assimilation in worldly affairs, the split between their private faith and their public involvement through an education in faith, through a knowledge of the social teaching of the Church and its implementation, through the convergence of ideals and through a keen endeavour for unity so as to be able to face the major questions which are being raised at the moment. The Social Teaching of the Church proposes three principal ideals which are very topical today: human dignity (a person can never be considered as a particle in nature or as an anonymous element of a human city); subsidiarity (the commitment of one's freedom, associative and democratic participation starting from the grass roots, overcoming excessive dependence on the State and on the invisible market) and solidarity, an expression of charity especially towards the poor, the suffering, the emarginated and the oppressed - following the example of the good Samaritan - and builders of ways of life which are more dignified and just, bringing down divisions brought about by indifference, violence, egoism and inequality.

There is, so to say, a “programme” for this Christian commitment and for this convergence of ideals: the defence of life, from birth up to natural death, as a gift (and it is very evident how the question of life and death is the subject of a crucial anthropological debate in the public arena); the safeguarding of the truth about matrimony and the family and their beauty and their benefits; freedom in education with all that it implies; the defence of the “*libertas ecclesiae*”, source and guarantee of every other freedom which leads to the promotion of the natural rights of individuals and nations; the creation of a network of charitable, educational, health work, assistance and solidarity initiatives which help to change and improve society; the definition and initiation of new ways of development, with renewed synergies (involving the State, the market and civil societies) which are inclusive and which give special attention to the poor, the needy and the derelict; the building of forms of coexistence where people accept one another, starting from the revival of one's own tradition but able to accept and promote other cultures and avoiding polarization between withdrawing into a xenophobic attitude and a multicultural disaggregation which close themselves both in water-tight compartments; the promotion of peace from the “micro” to the

“macro”, and the rejection of violence, war and terrorism; the widening of democratic participation in the life of all nations; the affirmation of a very positive secular attitude away from fundamentalism and secularism; cooperation with poorer countries and peoples and research on ways how to overcome the great inequalities and the injustice which are causing international “disorder”; the reform of political, commercial and financial structures at international level in a community of nations and in an authentic spirit of solidarity as a human family. Today more than ever the Church and Christians are - and should be better - protagonists in the great task of safeguarding life, reason and freedom, the human ecology of living together and of the great ideals of peace, justice and hope.

Definitely we cannot be expected to put the conviction, that Christ is the corner-stone of every truly human project, aside. Christ should re-awaken in us and spur us on to be ready to collaborate with other Christians, with believers in other religions and with men and women of good will to work on this “programme” by participating in the democratic dialectics by sharing our well-founded reasons and by looking for opportune consensus forgetting all confessional and ideological limitations.

XV. The nobleness of the Christian vocation, the resulting responsibility, the challenges and the work ahead, bring out the tremendous disproportion for which Christians are responsible owing to their limitations, distractions, incoherence and misery. There is no room for Pharisaism. This is not a question of limiting oneself to moan, protest and condemn contemporary immorality in a world which is no longer Christian. Much less, there is no room to moralize and to think that everything depends on our individual initiatives, plans, campaigns and techniques. What Jesus said is very true: “Without Me you can do nothing”. Everything starts and restarts from our asking for grace in a prayerful attitude. Everything depends on a renewed encounter with the Lord's Presence in the community of His apostles and disciples. Everything finds its fruitful and powerful seed, even if it looks very small, in the grateful and joyous experience of the emergence of a new humanity which, in clay vessels, makes herself present in the many diverse living situations and spheres through new protagonists of the peoples, the nations and the cultures. All the rest will be given us as well.

Original text in spanish language

2. EDUCATING IS SHAPING ONE'S LIFE

Prof. Dr. Luigi Alici
ICA National President

I am very pleased and honoured to participate in this meeting. I renew the greetings and gratitude of the Italian Catholic Action with whom we will be sharing some important moments. These will be the opening of our National Assembly tomorrow, the public evening-vigil on Saturday evening and the meeting with Benedict XVI on Sunday morning. In the name of the ICA I would like to tell you that we are very pleased to share this associative spirit of fraternity with you.

In my short presentation I will be dividing the period from the publication of *Christifideles Laici* up to this day into three stages. Together we will see what happened within this span of time, which in reality is not so long, but, from a certain point of view, considering the rapid evolution in our mentality and in our culture, it seems so long.

I will look at the first stage from a historical point of view. In these last twenty years, when the Council and many enthusiasms seemed to fade in the Christian communities, there were two events in history which have had an influence on our customs and on our ways of thinking.

1989 is definitely the first of these instances. John Paul II refers to this in his *Centesimus annus*. 1989 marks the fall of the Berlin Wall. John Paul II says that for many Eastern Countries that was truly the effective end of the Second World War. 1989 was the end of a span of two centuries which, up to a certain extent, started in 1789 with the French Revolution. It marked the end of the enlightenment project founded on the collective emancipation of nations, marked by absolute freedom from the world and history.

In 1989 it became evident that certain political ideologies had failed to reach their objectives and from this failure - as John Paul II rightly says - new ideologies were born. The idolatry of individualism, a type of individualism and social atomism, was born. This was a new challenge, which the ecclesial world and particularly lay Catholics, had to face. Publicly, the explicit, declared, aggressive and conflictual atheism started to wane and was progressively substituted by a certain type of religious indifference. The Christian layman had to reflect on the ways the Gospel was being announced and felt the need for a change in style. It also meant that the Church had to find new ways through which it could open a dialogue with the world.

The second significant episode was, in a certain sense, the 11th September 2001: the terroristic attack in the United States of America which brought about a new situation. Apart from the terroristic aspect, western society, which was progressively losing its ideal of solidarity and other values, was faced with a certain fundamentalism, where the sense of belonging to an ideal was so strong, that some were even ready to sacrifice their lives for it.

The phenomenon of the kamikaze, not only in the United States but also in the Middle East, was a factor which put the West in crisis. In the West, great enlightening ideals of freedom were gradually weakened and the order of the day of our society was mainly taken over by the "market" and "security".

Gradually, western society started expecting the State and politics to give less importance to their duty to promote the common good. Sometimes, politics were even expected to nurture individual interests. In this situation, the relevance of religions which favoured violent fundamentalism and religions which did not uphold this violence but had a deep cohesion that the western world was losing disorientated and challenged lay Catholics.

For them, when the sense of civic solidarity is weakened, it becomes more difficult to advocate universal fraternity and to see, in this universal fraternity, a sign, through which creation itself is calling on humanity to live as a family, sharing the same destiny and origin.

The second point which I would like to raise refers to the situation within the Italian Church. After the Council, the Italian Church took a very important step. It presented a ten-year pastoral programme, which the Italian Bishops entrusted to all the diocesan

Churches. As the main event of this ten-year programme, the Italian Church called all diocesan Churches for a national Convention.

In 1995, the south of Italy held the III Ecclesial Convention and the IV one in 2006. These were occasions where lay Catholics played a fundamental role, primarily by discerning as a community. This discernment should be the central point of the Church's pastoral journey, meaning that lay Catholics, together with all the Christian community and with a sensitivity which is typically theirs, should be able to read the signs of the times.

During the 1995 Convention, there was unanimous agreement that, in view of the increasing individualistic trends and considering the changes in the political situation, the Christian community needed some type of cultural project. It should strive to discover or re-discover a way whereby to read the changes and agree upon priorities which should then direct the way of thinking, judging and the concrete ways of living.

In the 2006 Ecclesial Convention, this idea was stressed even further and the top priority was the need to pass on the Gospel from one generation to the other. In fact, we all know, that sometimes the generation gap is so wide that our children get the impression that our ways of living the Gospel are practices which date back to archeological times.

In 2005, during the preparatory period for this Convention, the Italian Bishops wrote a very important letter to all lay people entitled "*Making Christ the heart of the world*". In this letter, they highlighted at least three positive and coherent ways of living as lay Catholics:

- my relation with myself, that is, my personal, reflective, spiritual and interior relations;
- the relation between the "I" and the other, between me and my neighbour;
- the relation between the human being and nature and the world which surrounds us.

For the lay Christian, the meeting with the Lord is not a fourth relation but is a meeting which should be experienced within these dimensions. The lay Christian meets Jesus Christ when he meets himself, the others and when he assumes a positive relation with nature.

Here I would like to add a reference to Benedict XVI who, right from the beginning of his ministry, referred repeatedly to the importance of a faith which goes hand in hand with intelligence, to the importance of a *logos*, that is, to a way where human intelligence interprets the universe as an orderly, sensible, positive universe which reflects a transcendent design. Here, up to a certain extent, Benedict XVI is entrusting lay people to be witnesses of the Gospel in a dual way.

Firstly they should be witnesses of the Gospel by confessing publicly the values of the Gospel. Secondly, through critical reasoning, they should propose an order of natural values, which through dialogue, could be recognized and brought to everyone's attention.

This means that evangelization has to take into consideration cultures and ways of thinking. For a change of heart and for faith to be authentic and complete, a change in our way of thinking is also necessary.

As my third and last reflection I would like to highlight three challenges which, according to *Christifideles Laici* are considered as fundamental in our way forward.

I. In paragraph 23 *Christifideles Laici* says that in a situation like today's, when, in a number of countries, religious vocations are on a decrease, lay people are called to dedicate themselves generously to be catechists and to commit themselves to help others mature in their faith. However, when giving this service, the secular character of the laity should be preserved. In *Christifideles Laici* we find that it is not the role which constitutes the ministry.

In the absence of ordained ministers, lay people can be entrusted with pastoral ministries which are not exclusively the work of ordained ministers. However, the exercise of such tasks does not change the ministerial role of lay people which is not so much that of sharing in somebody else's work in the Church but it is mainly to help the whole Christian community read the signs of this changing world and to interpret history from a layman's point of view.

With their expert advice and charisms they are to help the Christian community to live the values of the Gospel. In future this challenge will be even more spelt out especially in countries where secularization is highly prevalent.

On the other hand, lay people cannot refuse and should be ready to stand in when it comes to catecheses. However this should never

make them lose their specific lay vocation and it should remain clear that their ministry does not end within the Church.

II. In *Christifideles Laici* paragraph 32 it is highlighted how communion represents both the source and the fruit of the mission and mission is accomplished in communion.

In the post-conciliar Church we have all witnessed how the enthusiastic growth of new realities brought about a new panorama in the field of the Catholic laity. Unavoidably this situation initially brought about some tension and an element of competitiveness.

Today this phase has been surpassed and lay Catholic Associations are going through a very important experience of closer cooperation. However communion cannot be their final target and it cannot be an end in itself. Communion is for the mission.

If the Holy Spirit is giving the whole Christian community the gift of a full and mature communion among ecclesial aggregations, it means that he is expecting a new missionary drive from us. Communion cannot be solely acknowledging and appreciating one another or doing something together hardly thinking of coordinating our efforts when it comes to evangelization. In our Christian communities, a federalistic interpretation of communion is not acceptable. The Church is not a federation of groups.

III. In his interventions, Benedict XVI is continually focusing on the urgent need for education. In Italy, this topic is also at the Bishops' centre of attention. Paragraph 60 of *Christifideles Laici* speaks about the importance of an integral formation which is one of the basic elements of this text. Integral formation means a doctrinal formation, a systematic approach to catechesis, a more exact knowledge of the Church's social doctrine and the cultivation of human values.

A formation project should be built on a harmonized synthesis of all these components. A purely catechetical programme is not automatically a formation programme. A knowledge of the social doctrine is not automatically formative if it does not incorporate all the other components.

Educating means shaping one's life. It means succeeding in drawing the attention, in attracting and in being present, in the life

of the younger generations at that fundamental borderline moment when the interior and the exterior start intermingling and their life starts taking shape.

We can only accompany our young people at this delicate moment, if we are able to present them with a well-defined project, which includes a balanced content of human sciences, psychological and sociological components, the *kerygmatic* aspect and the social doctrine.

A new formation project, which is a harmonized presentation of these components, is the best gift we could give to our children and for which, after all, they have a right.

Transcription not revised by the author

3. THE ACTUALITY OF CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI IN THE LIGHT OF THE ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL II

Beatriz Buzzetti Thomson
ex national President of Argentine CA
ex IFCA Secretariat Coordinator

The Ecumenical Vatican Council II has meant a deep renewal in the Holy Spirit and a greater self-awareness both of the Church as Mystery, Communion and Mission and of the lay faithful's vocation and their co-responsibility in building the Christian communities and in transforming the world.

20 years after the closing of this event, the Apostolic Post-synodal Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* represents a relaunch and an in-depth study of the conciliar teaching about the lay faithful. In the introduction it is stated clearly that "*the challenge embraced by the Synod Fathers has been that of indicating the concrete ways through which this rich 'theory' on the lay state expressed by the Council can be translated into authentic Church 'practice'*"¹.

Undoubtedly this is the first challenge to us: both the conciliar teaching and *Christifideles Laici* should become authentic Church practice through our life and action.

The image of the vineyard guiding the whole document expresses the deep theological meaning of Christ's concrete call to the lay faithful. The document, as it develops, recalls the passage from *Matthew 20*, where the landowner goes out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. It states explicitly that: "*The basic meaning of this Synod and the most precious fruit desired as a result of it, is the lay faithful's hearkening to the call of Christ the Lord to work in his vineyard, to take an active, conscientious and*

responsible part in the mission of the Church"².

Today, 20 years from this ecclesial event, each one of us feels himself questioned by the Lord's words "*Why do you stand here idle all day?*"... "*You go into my vineyard too*"³. We are called however not only to labour in the vineyard but to be part of the same vineyard. The Lord actually says: "*I am the vine and you are the branches*".

This insistent call of the Lord is rooted in the basic reality of Baptism. Through Baptism we are all made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. Through Baptism we have all been called to holiness. This is the common vocation of all *christifideles* - priests or lay faithful - all of us share the same dignity even though with different functions. Starting from this common dignity I would like to point out three aspects of *Cristifideles Laici* which can help us to think it over today and to take on its teachings: the secular character of the lay faithful, their being part of the Church communion and their role in the evangelization of culture.

First point: our *peculiarity as lay faithful*, in what does it consist?

What characterizes the lay people specifically is their secular character. This is what properly specifies our particular vocation within the common vocation to which we are called through Baptism and its diversity from ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious, thus complementing the global physiognomy of the whole People of God.

The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* says that "*the secular character is properly and particularly that of the lay faithful. They live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven.*" (...) "*the laity, by their particular vocation seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God*"⁴. We fulfill our own particular vocation, our own call, by doing temporal things as well as we can, ordering them

² CFL 3.

³ Mt 20:6.

⁴ LG 31.

¹ Cf. CFL 2.

according to the plan of God.

As regards these definitions stated by the Council, *Christifideles Laici* highlights that the secular character is primarily conceived as “the place” where the Lord’s call is addressed to us. “*They are called there by God*”: which means that this call is not something external, but that we are entrusted with a vocation which influences the worldly situations from within: “*They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven*”⁵. *Christifideles Laici* reaffirms that: “*The secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological and ecclesiological sense*”⁶.

In short, by reason of a divine vocation, the lay faithful should live in the world. There they should strive to pursue the fulfillment of their life up to holiness. This is the proper way to live their Christian existence to the full. At the same time they exercise the specific function of their apostolic task and their role in the Church when “*they... act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere*”⁷. In this sense the conciliar severe warning stated in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is very clear: “*The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbour and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation*”⁸.

The Synod Fathers have pointed out two temptations not easy to be avoided: on the one hand the temptation of being interested in Church services and tasks so strongly as to fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; on the other hand the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel’s acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world⁹.

⁵ LG 31.

⁶ CFL 15.

⁷ AA 7.

⁸ GS 43.

⁹ Cf CFL 2.

The second aspect that I would like to highlight concerns the fact that the lay faithful are part of the Church communion. It is necessary to bear this in mind in order to understand their mission and responsibility properly¹⁰.

Baptism constitutes us as members of the Church. Basically, as Christians, we have all the same common dignity. In this unity however there is a diversity of functions and charisms through which each one of us fulfills his/her own Christian vocation.

The function of the Pastors is distinguished from that of the lay faithful. The mission is the same: to bring salvation to all men, but the charisms and the functions are different. Certainly each one of us should bring to fruition his/her own gifts for the common good. This requires from us that we live the ecclesial communion as a simultaneous presence of diversity and complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, charisms and responsibilities. “*Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body*”¹¹.

The same concept can be expressed with the words taken from the Puebla Document: as lay people we should make the Church present in the heart of the world and the world in the heart of the Church”¹².

There is an ecclesial task, a personal, binding mission to be carried out in the world, which is proper to the lay faithful. They cannot delegate it, though they should not carry it out apart from the other members of the ecclesial community. The lay faithful do not act by themselves, individually as if they do not depend from anyone. Furthermore, they should carry out their temporal tasks starting from a deep reflection within the ecclesial community; then they should act in the world but always fulfilling an ecclesial task.

Christifideles Laici acknowledges, promotes the associationism and praises the different charisms as gifts outpoured by the Holy Spirit to His Church. It encourages the lay faithful to work in the world and highlights also that they should care about living the

¹⁰ Cf CFL 18.

¹¹ CFL 20.

¹² Document of Puebla, 786.

ecclesial communion fully aware of the mission entrusted to them. *"Without doubt a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself present in these countries and nations"*¹³.

In this regard, the Exhortation insists on considering the ecclesial communion as a gift to be received with a great sense of responsibility both by every member and by their lay associations. *"To be responsible for the gift of communion means, first of all, to be committed to overcoming each temptation to division and opposition that works against the Christian life with its responsibility in the apostolate: (...) thus the life of Church communion will become a sign for all the world and a compelling force that will lead persons to faith in Christ: In such a way communion leads to mission, and mission itself to communion"*¹⁴.

The third specific aspect I wish to refer to concerns the evangelization of culture. Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other. *"communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion"*¹⁵.

From this point of view the call is clear and direct: after having reminded us of the conciliar idea of culture, the Apostolic Exhortation says: *"In particular, only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history (...) For this reason the Church calls upon the lay faithful to be present as signs of courage and intellectual creativity in the privileged places of culture, that is, the world of education - school and university - in places of scientific and technological research, the areas of artistic creativity and work in the humanities"*¹⁶.

All along these days we have reflected upon the various aspects of our reality and the characteristics of our globalized world. Today, at about twenty years from the Synod, right in the middle of the epocal

¹³ CFL 34.

¹⁴ CFL 31.

¹⁵ CFL 32.

¹⁶ CFL 44.

change that we are undergoing, it is good to recall the words of hope. No, we do not want to be "prophets of misfortune", we must look at this world with all its values and problems, its anxieties and hopes, its conquests and defeats. We must look at the reality with the eye of the believer, with the certainty that Christ has already won and with the awareness that the good wheat and the darnel both grow together in the field. Anyhow *this* is the vineyard, *this* is the field in which we are called as lay faithful to carry out our mission. We should help us one another to discern the signs of the time, to trace the presence of the Lord of History.

The Apostolic Exhortation addresses two strong appeals to us: *"If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle"*¹⁷. And at the middle of the document John Paul II says: *"Therefore - with humility and trust I beg and implore you - allow Christ to speak to the person in you"*¹⁸. This means: give him your voice, your gestures, your eyes, your professional competences so that He may render Himself present.

This responsibility is ours. The journey is hard and tiring. But as the Holy Father told us at the opening of Aparecida Conference: *"Mary, Mother of the Lord, is in our midst. It is she who shows us the way to open our minds and hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes to fill the whole world"*¹⁹.

Let us open our minds and hearts and let the Holy Spirit act in and through us so that Christ may render himself present in our world.

¹⁷ CFL 3.

¹⁸ CFL 34.

¹⁹ Cf Address of Benedict XVI, 12.5.2007.

Original text in spanish language

4. CATHOLIC ACTION IN ROMANIA A CHURCH FREE AGAIN THE DISCOVERY OF THE LAY VOCATION

Oana Tuduce
National President of CA Romania
charged with IFCA Youth Coordination

The historical context

In 1988, the year when *Christifideles Laici* was published, the countries of Eastern Europe were still under the dictatorship of the communist regime. The life of the Catholic Church was characterized by persecution under different forms.

The Greek-Catholic Church was suppressed in 1948 while the Roman-Catholic Church was tolerated. In this context one cannot speak either about laity's protagonism or of lay vocation. Pastoral work was more directed towards the liturgy than towards formation because the latter was prohibited by the regime.

The "blustering wind" of Vatican Council II did not reach Romania except as a light breeze of which many were not even aware. It is enough to say that the documents of the Council were only translated in the 80's and this was done secretly at great risk. So no one could know about them, let alone study them.

In this historical context, when *Christifideles Laici* was published, nothing absolutely was heard about it. Fortunately, only a year after, the regime collapsed. New ways were opened for society, for the Church, as well as for the laity.

We saw significant changes in ecclesial spheres where, however, the situation of the laity was not considered as a priority. But lay people started becoming aware of the need to associate themselves so as to be able to give their contribution in the life of the Church.

So the associations which existed before 1948 were rediscovered and reorganized while in other dioceses, the first association to be set up was precisely Catholic Action.

It is interesting to note that, in the Catholic Church (at least in the Romanian speaking diocese), it was not the movements which started appearing after 1990, but the associations which already had a tradition in the Church before 1948, as if to bridge the gap from 1948 to 1989. For example in my diocese, which is of Byzantine rite, in 1989, we started by establishing an Oratory, a CA group of adults and Legion of Mary. Parallel to these, a CA Youth Group was set up.

The lay vocation started being discovered

Thus the vocation of the laity started being discovered and the lay identity started being consolidated. Lay people, conscious of their responsibility to build Christ's Church and man's house on this earth, started taking a more active part in ecclesial realities.

After 1989, we witnessed a great enthusiasm at all levels so much so that the contribution by lay people in the life of the Church became very significant. There was the possibility for young people to meet and to organize themselves, something which was not possible before. This made lay people aware that their contribution in the life of the Church cannot be passive but should be organized. We started becoming conscious of our role as lay people within the Church! Lay associations started to reappear in Romania but no one had the least idea as to what the identity of a lay leader actually meant!

As years went by, through meetings held at parish, diocesan and national level as well as through our participation in WYD, the lay identity started developing. These meetings were a great help in the development of our identity. We are now discovering the meaning of *Christifideles Laici* n. 46 which says: «*The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church.* This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favorable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations, and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society».

WYD in particular, has been an occasion when young people of different nationalities could discover other realities and could get to know the mission which young people have in the Church.

WYD has also thrown a light on the reality of our associations. We can now speak about a more defined and understood commitment. This meeting is a case in point!

Catholic Action associations in Romania got to know about the documents of the Council and about *Christifideles Laici* during the Youth Formation Meetings organized by IFCA. We could say that as from the year 2000, we have started to discover these documents and we have brought them to the attention of our small local realities. So, at least, 12 years after the publication of *Christifideles Laici*, the post-synodal document started circulating among the laity.

But in my opinion, the most important thing is, at least in Romania, that, after the fall of wall, the laity started committing themselves in the life of the Church without having any idea of the conciliar documents. However as time went by, they started carrying out their mission as lay people because they discovered these documents.

The youth hope of the Church

Christifideles Laici reminds us that «youth make up an exceptional potential and a *great challenge for the future of the Church*. In fact the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself and her call to that blessed youthfulness which she constantly enjoys as a result of Christ's Spirit. In this sense the Council has defined youth as "the hope of the Church"».

In the letter addressed to world youth, dated 31st March 1985, we find: «The Church looks to the youth, indeed the Church in a special way *looks at herself in the youth*, in all of you and in each of you. It has been so from the beginning, from apostolic times».

This is why IFCA has, right from its beginning, given special attention to youth. This was the motive behind the organization of

the Week Formation Meetings for youth which made it possible for young people from different countries to meet.

After the various activities for young people in Europe and in America, it was proposed to create a Youth Coordination Group with the aim of encouraging young people to give their contribution in IFCA.

I think that this Youth Coordination will continue to be a good way of putting *Christifideles Laici* into practice. *Christifidelis Laici* will remain always topical and has to be continually discovered.

Rome, 1-3 May 2008

***WORKING AND PROGRAMMING
SESSION***

*Participation
in the Eucharistic Celebration
and in the opening session
of ICA XIII national Assembly*

PAULINE ITINERARY

*140th Anniversary
of the Italian Catholic Action
Meeting with Benedict XVI
in St Peter's square*

The working sessions

The V Assembly was divided into two sessions. The first was the *institutional* part which came to an end with the elections and a Public Function. During the second part, the participants had the opportunity to exchange views in specialized groups (adults, youth, children and priest assistants) as well as in Continental groups. They were asked to draw up proposals which the Secretariat could include in its plan of action for 2008-2011.

- The participants also had the opportunity to attend the XIII Assembly of the Italian CA and the grand meeting on the occasion of the ICA's 140th Anniversary in Saint Peter's Square. They were thus able to exchange experiences even with the ICA delegates and members, who in their turn could get to know the international CA realities better.

- The visit to the Basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls, gave participants the opportunity to go on pilgrimage to places linked with the Apostle (the Basilica and the Tre Fontane Abbey) some time before the opening of the Pauline Year. This was followed by a visit to the CA group in the Good Shepherd Parish. In the evening the participants took part in the vigil-pilgrimage, together with the CA saints and blessed, from Santa Croce in Gerusalemme to the San Giovanni in Laterano. The following morning they attended the meeting with the Holy Father.

- *Countries' participation*

The participants - member and observer countries - all gave their contribution in the proceedings of the Assembly, not only through their continued punctuality and attention, but also by providing sweet and salted snacks during breaks. This way of sharing was very much appreciated.

At the beginning of some of the sessions, each country was given the opportunity to give a brief presentation about its CA.

The Priest Assistants were asked to prepare and animate the morning and evening prayers.

On the 29th April, CA Argentina and CA Romania introduced the workshops on missionary experiences. Emilio Inzaurraga presented a report about the work done by the CA Promotion Group, the material prepared and the activities organized in different countries: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Kenya, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The participants were greatly touched by the presentation given by Myanmar/Birmaniam and the Holy Land. Those present realized the importance of a unifying organism such as IFCA where solidarity and catholicity prevail.

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: Ac 18:9-18; Jn 16:20-23

HOMILY

CONTEMPLATIVE AND ACTIVE LAY PEOPLE WHO LOVE CHRIST

H.E. Msgr. Robert Sarah
Congregation of Peoples' Evangelization Secretary

Today I am pleased to have the opportunity to celebrate this Eucharist with you. We are commemorating St. Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. He was born in Alexandria in Egypt in the year 295 after Christ and was consecrated Bishop of the Christian community when he was just 33 years old, three years after the Council of Nicea. That Council affirmed that Christ was truly God and became truly man. But a priest from his diocese, Ario, together with many other Christians, refused to accept this basic truth of Christianity. Arianism spread like fire in the whole of the Roman Empire, so much so, that St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, wrote: *All of a sudden, the world woke up Arian...*

There had to be a fighter like Athanasius, very similar in character to St. Paul, to restart, *from within the Church*, to bring Christians and some of the priests who were outside this Orthodoxy.

Even the politicians of the time as well as the Emperors of the Eastern and Western Empires ended up outside this Orthodoxy. These persecuted Athanasius in all possible ways. To avoid being caught, he escaped and found refuge with the hermits who lived in the Egyptian desert, far from all the trouble. He reached as far as Rome and Treviri in Germany, where he worked to spread Egyptian monasticism.

St. Athanasius lived *within* and *outside* the world of his time - contemplative and active. He was docile when he was enthralled in God but aggressive and shrewd, even in his words, when he had to save himself from the hands of the cunning, who wanted to see him condemned and dead.

I have told you this, because today, in this globalized world, where no one is spared, we are all experiencing a *devious and intriguing secularism*, meaning, *a way of looking* at man and the universe as if God does not exist.

Secularism started within Christianity in Europe as a philosophy which aimed at denying all that which is transcendent such as Christ's divinity and Europe's Christian roots. It tends to reduce any religious form, all over the world, as a *psychological need of weak individuals*. Every religion is the result of myths and ideologies... It considers as sacred all that which is beyond *science*.

From the first reading taken from the St. John the Apostle, the proposed alternative comes out very clearly: *all that which comes from God wins the world; and this is the victory which has defeated the world: our faith. And, who wins the whole world, if not he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

As you see, we are very far from the *Da Vinci Code*, which presents Christ only as a prophet and as a man, even subjected to sin just like all of us.

John affirms: *And this is the love of God, that you keep his commandments; and his commandments are not burdensome.*

Today, another challenge for the baptized is *ethic relativism*, which also results from secularism. This tries to substitute Christian morality just as reason tries to substitute faith. The everyday scandalous and tragic situations, starting from those prevalent in Christian families in the West, confirm this.

You have come to Rome from different parts of the world precisely to reaffirm and experience a strong and dynamic enkindling of your faith in Jesus Christ. Like Athanasius and so many lay people of his time, who wanted to save a society which was in

crisis, and like so many hermits, *who were nearly all lay people*, let us thirst for true contemplation.

If the term Christian means *Alter Christus*, another Christ, *Ipse Christus*, Christ himself, another one sent by God the Father in a society which distorts and disowns Him, do not expect gratitude from the places where you work. Jesus said: *Just as they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.* We have to suffer persecution just like Athanasius and like so many others in our times.

And when they persecute you in one city move on to another. But do not do this to keep your mouth closed or to hide, but to carry on proclaiming the good news and to face new persecution.

Those who persevere till the end will be saved. Jesus said: *Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*

The justice preached by Christ is not to be taken to mean social, economic justice, which sometimes is attained through force. It means *divine equilibrium* in the way human matters are managed. It corresponds with the gentleness which leads to *the possession of the land*. This presupposes a *full disinterestedness* for personal success and the overcoming of *the desire for gratification in the spheres where we work*. Very often, we never get this gratification.

What does *Catholic Action* mean? Its true meaning is: an irresistible wish to follow Christ's equilibrium, which cannot be found in human ideologies, technical-cultural retaliations or economical-political superiority but in *a union of lovers* of Christ, nourished by prayer and contemplation. *The world is doing badly because it does not pray.* I am more than convinced that if we want to follow God's will, before acting or taking up initiatives, we should: pray, pray, pray, atone, atone, atone and move on, move on untiringly towards sanctity. Let us all note, let each one of us note, that there is an unavoidable relation between sanctity and prayer and there cannot be one without the other. There is great truth in St Chrysostom's saying: "I think it should be evident to all that it is simply impossible to lead a virtuous life without the help of prayer" (*de praecatione, orat. 1*).

The documents of the Church, particularly *Christifideles Laici* which you are studying during this meeting, deal with this remarkably. These are there for you to study, assimilate, to share with others and to *pray about*.

As Catholic Action, working in all the different cultures, depending on the continents you come from, your work of spreading the Gospel depends on how much you contemplate. It depends on your ability to *see the human events around you through God's eyes* and on your ability to direct them towards Him, who is the *living God*. It is God, who is continually directing human history, even though a writer once came out with the expression that *God is dead*. Christ has assured us: *I am with you till the end of the world*.

And when I look at you and think of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, of which I am responsible, I feel that I have to remind you of Christ's message: *Christ is with us till the end of the world but He wants each one of us to be with Him even to the ends of the world*.

He would like us to be the protagonists whether we are working on initial evangelizing or on new evangelization. He would like us to carry out this mission with all the wisdom and strength which we have received in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

READINGS: *Co* 15:1-8; *Jn* 14:6-14

HOMILY

HERE WE ARE! SEND US...

Fr. Fabián Esparafita
Priest Assistant of Argentine CA

Today we celebrate the feast of the apostles Saint Philip and Saint James. We are nearing the end of our IFCA Assembly which will reach its climax with our meeting with Pope Benedict XVI tomorrow.

On this occasion, I would like to share three short reflections with you.

1. The first reading, taken from the *First letter of Paul to the Corinthians* reminds us about the fundamental and most important crux of our Christian faith; that element without which we would be anything but disciples of Christ and members of His Church. It is the "*kerygma*". It is what the apostles preached, adapting it to the different circumstances and audiences. Saint Paul reminds the Corinthians, some of whom dared to deny that the resurrection was a real fact or, better still, they maintained that the resurrection was a purely spiritual and mystical fact. They said that it has absolutely no effect on our body and no repercussions on our daily and mortal existence.

Paul also reminds the Corinthians "the Gospel which I have preached to you" is not an ideology or a philosophical or theological

doctrine. Nor is it a moral code. It is the certainty of the saving events of which the apostles were witnesses and authorized messengers. It is the saving death of Jesus on the cross, which was the fulfilment of the divine plan for the salvation of the whole of humanity. It concerns His burial which is a definite proof that Jesus really died and of His glorious resurrection; it is God's determined dashing in into our poor human history and the fulfilment of all the promises and of all human expectations in Christ. This is the Gospel, the Good News, the foundation and the crux of our faith. This is what distinguishes us as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ or rather the person of Jesus Himself: His life and His death and resurrection.

At the end of his letter, Paul gives great importance to the apparitions of the Risen Lord and gives a list of authorized witnesses. Among these, James "the minor" and the apostle Philip whose feast we celebrate today, stand out.

Our work, as missionary disciples, is to announce, with our words and with our daily way of life, that Christ died and was risen. We should add our names to this list...

2. In the dialogue between Philip and Jesus which we find in John's Gospel, Philip's question seems to be bold and strange: "*Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us*"... As if God could show us this, there and then, just like anything else.

Jesus, on his part, reprimanded Philip: "*I have been with you all this time and you still do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*"... So Philip's boldness made Jesus reveal God's true face to us: "*He who has seen me has seen the Father*". Knowing God means listening to his words, living his commandments, contemplating his loving face in Jesus Christ's goodness, in his mercy and in his love for the poor and simple.

On our part we should admit that we are men and women who have been transformed by Christ's grace. We have already lived, a more or less long period of our lives, in Christ. We have gone deeply into Christ's facts and words... but we never arrive at knowing him completely. But he knows us, he knows our doubts, our questions, our talents and our fragility and this is why he reminds us that: "*I am the way, the truth and the life*".

Any journey has an aim and truth is life (*Jn 1:4*). Jesus is life because he is the only one who possesses it in its fulness and who can share it with others (*Jn 5:26*). The full truth is that he is the very fullness of life, that is, he knows and manifests the full reality of man and of God. He is the only way, because only his life, his death and resurrection show man the way which leads him towards his fulfilment.

For his disciple, Jesus is the life, because it is from Him that he receives it. This new life, when consciously experienced is truth itself; the truth understood as the way which leads to a progressive identification with Jesus and which leads to a dynamic growth in life and towards truth. The Father is not physically far; we get closer to Him through a progressive journey of identifying ourselves with Christ.

Thus, imploring the intercession of the holy apostles whom we are commemorating today, let us humbly ask God to give us the grace to enkindle our fervour as disciples and missionaries of his Son so that we may proclaim him with contagious joy, courage and conviction to the ends of the earth, in the environments where we daily live, work, study, enjoy ourselves...

3. Today we entrust the works, projects and dreams, which we have shared during our V IFCA Assembly, in the heart of St Paul.

Tomorrow we are going to Saint Peter to meet the Pope and, as lay Catholic Action members, to renew before him our readiness to serve the Lord and our brothers. And there we will repeat with Him: *Here we are Lord! Send us!*

3. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes ici pour confier au cœur de Saint-Paul, le travail, les projets, les rêves, que nous avons partagé au cours de notre V Assemblée du FIAC.

Demain nous irons à Saint Pierre pour rencontrer le Pape mais surtout pour renouveler notre disponibilité à servir le Seigneur et nos frères, en particulier vous, laïcs de l'Action Catholique. Et vous et nous, nous dirons avec lui au Seigneur: *Nous voici, envoie-nous!*

3. Oggi siamo qui per lasciare nel cuore di San Paolo i lavori, i progetti, i sogni che abbiamo condiviso durante la nostra V Assemblea FIAC.

Domani andremo a san Pietro per incontrare il Papa, ma soprattutto per rinnovare davanti a lui la nostra disponibilità a servire il Signore e i nostri fratelli, in particolare voi, laici di Azione Cattolica, e tutti noi diremo con lui al Signore: *Eccoci, manda noi!*

3. Hoy hemos venido a dejar en el corazón de san Pablo, los trabajos, los proyectos, los sueños que hemos compartido durante nuestra V Asamblea del FIAC.

Mañana iremos a San Pedro para encontrarnos con el Papa, pero sobre todo para renovar ante él nuestra disponibilidad de servir al Señor y a nuestros hermanos, particularmente ustedes, laicos de Acción Católica. Unos y otros diremos con él al Señor: *¡Aquí estamos, envíanos!*

Original text in spanish language

PARTECIPANT COUNTRIES

AFRICA

1. Burundi
2. Cameroon
3. Ivory Coast
4. Kenya
5. Congo Dem. Rep.
6. Rwanda
7. Senegal
8. Uganda
9. Zambia

AMERICA

10. Argentina
11. Colombia
12. Costa Rica
13. Mexico
14. Nicaragua
15. Paraguay
16. Peru
17. Venezuela

ASIA

18. Korea
19. Myanmar-Burma
20. Holy Land

EUROPA

21. Austria
22. Bosnia and Herzegovina
23. Bulgaria
24. Italy
25. Malta
26. Poland
27. Romania
28. Spain
29. Switzerland CA of Ticino
30. Ukraine

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4 May 2008 p. 3

INSTITUTIONAL SESSION

Rome, 27 April 2008

OPENING SESSION

• Opening celebration. Homily
A bread for the life of the world
+ Msgr. Domenico Sigalini p. 9

• *Here we are again after three years*
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