

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONGRESS  
OF THE VATICAN FOUNDATION  
"CENTESIMUS ANNUS - PRO PONTIFICE"**

*Saturday, 4 December 2004*

*Your Eminence,*

1. On the occasion of the Annual Congress of the Vatican Foundation *Centesimus Annus - Pro Pontifice*, I am pleased to address my cordial greeting to you and the members, with a special thought for the President, Count Lorenzo Rossi di Montelera.

I was delighted to learn that since its creation just over 10 years ago the Foundation has started to spread in the Dioceses of various Nations and is attracting more and more members. I urge you to persevere in the enterprise on which you have embarked, ever careful to preserve a close relationship with the Pastors of the local Churches.

2. The Foundation intends to combine material support for the activities of the Pope and of the Holy See with dedication to spreading the teaching of the Church on the great social issues that Christians are required to face in the light and with the strength of the Gospel of Jesus, the great revealer of God's truth about man.

This year, your reflection has focused most appropriately on the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, recently published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Indeed, the text is an up-to-date means of acquiring knowledge of Catholic social teaching of which, as time has passed, important studies have been made in response to the complex problems of a global society in rapid and troubled development.

Much remains to be done to ensure that this enriching contribution of ecclesial teaching becomes a consistent yardstick and a certain force of inspiration for Christian social action. One sometimes has the impression either that the social doctrine of the Church is mentioned rather than known, or that it is seen merely as a horizon of values perhaps too grand and noble ever to be put into practice in this world, rather than a demanding criterion for judgment and action.

3. It is therefore truly important to have a precise, motivated and complete approach to making the Church's social teaching known so as to avoid stressing any one aspect more than another, swayed by preconceived emotions or views, thus losing sight of its integral structure and using it instrumentally.

In addition, people must learn to use this doctrine as a valid reference in the context of family, professional and civil responsibilities. They must accept it as a shared criterion

for personal and community decisions and actions, in continuity with the fine witness borne, especially since *Rerum Novarum*, by Christians, both lowly and great, who have lived the passion for the human cause in the light of the Gospel.

In any case, it will be crucial to understand the social doctrine as an element that characterizes the spirituality of the lay faithful. In this regard, the *Compendium* fittingly recalls that lay spirituality "steers clear of both *intimistic spiritualism* and *social activism* and can be expressed in a vital synthesis that confers unity, meaning and hope upon life, which is contradictory and fragmented for many different reasons" (cf. *Compendium*, n. 545).

4. I therefore urge the Members to spare no effort to ensure that the Foundation seeks to pursue these goals in full harmony with the Statutes, recently updated after the experience of the first decade.

The important issues that trouble and challenge humanity across the world in a more and more "global" and "interdependent" context must be faced with clear-sighted vision by man and his personal and social vocation based on natural law, their common foundation. However, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls, "The precepts of natural law are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known "by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error" [First Vatican Council, Constitution, cf. *Dei Filius*, n. 2]" (n. 1960).

5. The social teaching of the Church illumines the values of an orderly and supportive human coexistence with the light of Revelation and keeps them clear and unambiguous. Lay Christians, open to the action of God's grace, are the living means of effectively instilling these values in history.

Therefore, as I once again express my appreciation for the Members' formative and cultural activity and the generous support they offer the Pope to enable him to respond better to the many needs that call on his pastoral tenderness for all the Churches, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Venerable Brother, and to each one of them, and I gladly extend it to all your loved ones.