



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO LEADERS AND MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN CHRISTIAN WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS
(ACLI)
WITH THEIR FAMILIES ON THE 70th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 23 May 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you with affection on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Italian Christian Workers Association, and I thank the President for his kind words. This anniversary is an important opportunity to reflect on the “soul” of your Association and on the fundamental reasons which prompted you and which still prompt you to live it with commitment and passion.

Today, knocking at the doors of your Association are new questions that require new and specialized answers. What has changed in the global world is not so much the problems, as their size and urgency. The amplitude and speed of the reproduction of inequalities are unprecedented. We cannot allow this! We must propose fair alternatives which may truly be put into practice.

The expansion of insecurity, of illegal labour and of blackmail by criminal organizations cause the experience, especially among the younger generations, that unemployment takes away dignity, prevents the fullness of human life, and calls for an immediate and vigorous response. A prompt and vigorous response against this global economic system in which man and woman are not at the centre: there is an idol, the god of money. That is what truly commands! And this god of money destroys and gives rise to the culture of waste: babies are “discarded” because they not being conceived, or they are exploited or killed before birth. The elderly are “discarded”, because they do not have decent care, do not have medicine, or they receive miserable pensions. And now, we even discard young people. Think, in this land so generous, think about the 40% of young people aged 25 years and under who do not have jobs, are waste materials, but who are also the sacrifice that this worldly and selfish society offers to the god of money, which is the centre of our world

economic system.

Before this culture of waste, I call upon you to fulfil a dream which soars higher. We must ensure that, through labour — “free, creative, participatory, and mutually-supportive labour” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 192) — human beings may express and increase the dignity of their lives. I would like to say something about these four characteristics of labour.

Freedom of labour. True freedom of labour means that man, in continuing the work of the Creator, helps the world rediscover its purpose: to be the work of God who, in the work performed, incarnates and extends the image of his presence in Creation and in human history. Too often, however, labour is subject to oppression on different levels: of one person over another; of new organizations of slavery which oppress the poorest; in particular, many women and children are subjected to an economy which forces them to work in degrading conditions that contradict the beauty and harmony of Creation. We must ensure that labour is not an instrument of alienation, but of hope and new life. In other words, that there is freedom of labour.

Second: Creative labour. Every person carries within himself an original and unique ability to draw, from himself and from the people he works with the good which God has placed in his heart. Every man and woman is a “poet”, capable of being creative. This is what poet means. But this can occur only when man is permitted to freely and creatively express some form of enterprise or collaborative work performed in communities which allow him and others complete economic and social development. We cannot clip the wings of those, especially young people, who have so much to offer with their intelligence and ability. They must be set free from the burdens which oppress them and which prevent them from rightfully and appropriately entering the world of labour.

Third: Participatory labour. In order to make their mark on reality, people are called upon to express their labour according to their own logic, the relational type. Relational logic, which is always seeing the purpose of labour as being the face of the other and as the responsible cooperation with other people. It is there, because of a purely economic vision, like that which I spoke of earlier, that one thinks of the person in egocentric terms and of others as means and not ends. There, labour loses its primary sense of being the continuation of the work of God, and for this reason is the work of an idol; instead, the work of God is intended for all humanity so that all may benefit from it.

And fourth, mutually-supportive labour. Every day you meet people who have lost their jobs — this makes one cry —, or are seeking employment. They take what comes. Several months ago, a woman told me that she had accepted a job working 10-11 hours [a day], under the table, for 600 euros per month. And when she asked: “Is that all?” — “Ah, if you don’t like it then go away! Look at the line there is behind you”. How many people are in search of employment, people who want to bring home bread: not only to eat, but to bring home food, this is dignity. Bread for their family.

These people must be given a proper response. In the first place, it is a duty to offer one's closeness, one's solidarity. The many "circles" of the ACLI, which are represented here today by you, can be places of welcome and meeting. But then, appropriate tools and opportunities must also be given. The commitment of your Association and your services are necessary in order to help offer these job opportunities and new avenues of employment and professionalism.

Thus: freedom, creativity, participation, and solidarity. These features are part of the history of the ACLI. Today, more than ever, you are called to unsparingly place them in the field, at the service of a life of dignity for all. And to motivate this attitude, think about the exploited, discarded children; consider the elderly who are thrown away, who have minimal pensions and are not taken care of; and think of the young people cast out of employment: what do they do? They don't know what to do, and they are in danger of falling into addiction, falling into the underworld, or of leaving in search of horizons of war, as mercenaries. This is what the lack of employment does!

I would like to touch briefly upon three more aspects — this speech is rather long, I'm sorry. The first: your presence outside Italy. It began in the wake of Italian immigration, even overseas, and it has a very current value. Today many young people move away to find a job appropriate to their studies or to have a different experience of professional life. I encourage you to welcome them, to support them on their path, and to offer your support for their integration. In their eyes you can find reflected the look of your parents or your grandparents who went far away in order to work. May you be a good point of reference for them.

In addition, your Association is addressing the issue of the fight against poverty and the impoverishment of the middle class. The proposal of support — not only economic — to people below the absolute poverty line, who in Italy too have increased in number in recent years, can bring benefits to the whole of society. At the same time, those who until recently have lived a dignified life must not be allowed to slip into poverty. In the parishes, in the parish *Caritas*, we see this every day: men and women who secretly come to get food to eat.... They come somewhat in secret because they have become poor from one month to the next. They are ashamed. This happens, it happens, it happens.... Until yesterday they were living a life of dignity. It is all too easy to become poor today: losing a job, an elderly person who is no longer self-sufficient, an illness in the family, even — think of the terrible paradox — the birth of a child: it can bring you so many problems, if you are unemployed. It is an important cultural battle to consider welfare as an infrastructure of development and not as a cost. You can act as coordinators and as the driving force of the "new Alliance against poverty", which aims to develop a national plan for decent and dignified labour.

Last but not least, may the principles and the bond of your commitment always be maintained in what you call Christian inspiration, which refers to constant fidelity to Jesus Christ and to the Word of God, to study and apply the Social Doctrine of the Church when confronted with the new challenges of the contemporary world.

Christian inspiration and the popular dimension determine the way to understand and to revive the historical threefold allegiance of ACLI: to workers, to democracy, and to the Church. To the point that, in the current context, in some way you could say that your three historical commitments are summed up in a new and timeless way: the commitment to the poor.

I thank you for this meeting, and I bless you and your work. Please do not forget to pray for me, I need it.

Now, before giving the blessing, I invite you to pray to Our Lady: the Madonna who is so faithful to the poor, because she was poor. Hail Mary,