

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE "CENTESIMUS ANNUS' FOUNDATION**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 19 May 2006*

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to be able to meet you for the first time and I greet you all cordially. I greet in particular Cardinal Attilio Nicora, President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, as well as Count Lorenzo Rossi di Montelera, President of the Foundation, whom I thank for his words on your behalf. I greet the Bishops present and the priests, your chaplains.

I would like to express to each of you my appreciation and my gratitude for your service to the Successor of Peter and for the generosity with which you support his apostolic activity.

The very name of your Foundation clearly indicates your appreciated goals. [*Centesimus Annus*](#) recalls John Paul II's last great social Encyclical with which the unforgettable Pontiff, summing up 100 years of the Magisterium in this context, planned the Church's advancement by encouraging her to analyze the *res novae* ["new things"] of the third millennium. [*Centesimus Annus*](#) says further that your committed collaboration assists the Church to carry out her task of spreading the Gospel in a clearly visible way through her social teaching in the various cultural areas of the contemporary world.

The qualification *Pro Pontifice* stresses in turn your intention to foster a particular closeness to the pastoral role of the Bishop of Rome and engages you, according to your own possibilities, to sustain the concrete instruments he needs in order to enliven and extend the Church's presence throughout the world.

You began your activity in a predominantly Italian context; I now see with joy that you are gradually branching out into other areas of Europe and America. The nature of the Vatican Foundation both prepares you for these wide horizons and orients you towards them.

The Study Convention you have organized on *Democracy, institutions and social justice* is treating relevant current problems. People sometimes complain of the slowness with which an authentic *democracy* progresses, yet it continues, if used well, to be the most effective historical instrument for ensuring its own future in a way befitting to human beings.

You have rightly identified two critical points on the way towards a more mature ordering of human coexistence.

In the first place, *appropriate, credible and authoritative institutions* are needed. They must not merely aim to wield public power, but must be able to encourage different levels of popular participation with respect for the traditions of each nation and with constant concern to preserve their identity.

Equally urgent is a tenacious, on-going and shared effort to promote *social justice*. Democracy will attain its full actualization only when every person and each people have access to the primary goods (life, food, water, health care, education, work and the certainty of their rights) through an ordering of internal and international relations that assures each person of the possibility of participating in them.

True social justice, furthermore, can only be possible in a perspective of genuine solidarity that commits people to live and work always for one another and never against or to the detriment of others. Thus, to achieve this in practice in the context of the contemporary world is the great challenge of Christian lay people.

Dear friends, through the [*Centesimus Annus*](#) Foundation you contribute with other praiseworthy Associations to increasing the knowledge of the social teaching with which the Church, as I wrote in the Encyclical [*Deus Caritas Est*](#), intends "to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run" (n. 29). Each one of you, as a faithful lay person, should live as his own "the direct duty to work for a just ordering of society", since "charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as "social charity" (*ibid.*).

Our Meeting today, therefore, serves to strengthen you in this generous undertaking. Returning to your daily responsibilities, may you feel increasingly united in the bond of Catholic communion and live enthusiastically the commitments you have assumed.

I also thank you for the donation your President has presented to me to support the works of my pastoral ministry, and as I invoke the motherly protection of Mary upon you and upon all your families, I cordially bless you all.