

HOW THE “CENTESIMUS ANNUS – PRO PONTIFICE” FOUNDATION WAS BORN A BRIEF HISTORY

Your Excellency

Mr. Chairman

Dear friends of the “Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontifice” Foundation

My warmest greetings to you all. I am happy to share with you my memories of the birth and first steps of the Foundation and I am very grateful to our Chairman and our Secretary General who have given me this opportunity.

The Foundation was officially established on June 5th, 1993. 68 Founding Members met in the Vatican, summoned for this specific purpose by His Eminence Rosalio José Cardinal Castillo Lara who was assisted by the then Secretary of APSA, H.E. the Most Rev. Giovanni Lajolo (now a Cardinal).

June 5th, 1993 marked the happy conclusion of the preparatory stage, during which the idea of the Foundation took form and the ongoing project was endorsed by a first group of supporters.

On May 1st, 1991 His Holiness John Paul II, beatified on May 1st, 2011, promulgated the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* that marked the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (published on May 15th, 1891).

These two encyclicals, highly significant for their respective ages, reaffirm the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church, principles repeatedly addressed by the Magisterium during the one hundred years that separated them.

While *Rerum Novarum* raised and addressed the issue of the “condition of the working classes”, synonymous of conflict between capital and labor, *Centesimus Annus* further developed the Church’s social teachings. John Paul II reaffirmed the dignity and central role of the person and the right to own property within the limits of its social function; he underlined the role and mission of the business enterprise and acknowledged the legitimate role of profit if respectful of the dignity and fundamental rights of the person.

In the one hundred years that separate the two encyclicals dramatic events had taken place: two World Wars; the Marxist revolution and the onset of dictatorships in Germany and Italy; the holocaust of the Jewish people; the use of the atomic bomb to end WWII in Japan; the division of the world in two blocks, resulting in the cold war and a race to produce and deploy ever more powerful weapons; the birth of new democracies in Western European countries and of international treaties for the safeguard of peace and the promotion of global economic development. Then the scientific and technological progress that in the 60s led to the conquest of the moon; Vatican Council II; the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; globalization and mass migration for

political or economic reasons. And lately the adoption by many countries of laws that were viewed as social conquests but have little to do with the moral development of person and family.

And in 1991 the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* came. From the first moment Cardinal Castillo Lara had the idea that “something had to be done” by Italian businessmen to show the Holy Father how much they appreciated this Encyclical. He consulted his personal advisor, Msgr. Nicola Pavoni, then President of the Italian Federation of the Societies of St. Vincent de Paoli, a charitable organization founded in Paris in 1833 by the Blessed Federico Ozanam, an Italian born Professor at the Sorbonne. Given the importance of the idea Msgr. Pavoni too felt the need to consult with an old friend, Msgr. Rota, President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paoli in Bergamo and also Assistant of the Bergamo branch of UCID (*Unione Cristiana Imprenditori e Dirigenti, i.e. Christian Union of Entrepreneurs and Corporate Executives*) of which I was President. Msgr. Rota said he needed a little time to think about it and promised he would give his opinion in a matter of hours. He called me at once in Varese where I had been working for a couple of years. My response was immediate: I suggested a foundation should be set up by Catholic businessmen whom I could easily approach given the many contacts I had through my job. My answer was quickly transmitted to His Eminence, who called at once a meeting in the Vatican attended by Archbishop Lajolo, Msgr. Pavoni, Msgr. Rota, Prof. Valentino (*Secretary of UCID, Italy, and representing the President, Mr. Alberto Falck*) and the undersigned. Mr. Falck was also President of the Lombardy branch of UCID. This meeting resulted in a first outline of how the foundation should be set up and of its institutional goals, the first of which would be the diffusion of the social doctrine of the Church.

My offer to hold a first meeting of businessmen and executives in Varese was immediately accepted. A date in July, on which Cardinal Castillo Lara and Archbishop Lajolo were available, was set and the venue was to be the Villa Cagnola, Gazzada (near Varese). I informed Mr. Falck at once and together we drafted a list of invitees. We all showed up promptly. His Eminence explained what we had in mind and that the idea would be best served by a foundation whose primary goals would be the diffusion of the social doctrine of the Church and support to the Holy Father’s charities. Everybody agreed. His Eminence then indicated there should be a minimum of 40 founding members willing to pledge a contribution of 50 million lire each.

There were two similar meetings in Padua and Turin and then a conclusive one again in Gazzada. The overall response was very positive and encouraging: participation was high and the initiative was warmly endorsed. Mr. Falck and I would formalize the endorsements and try, if possible, to go beyond the number of founding members indicated by His Eminence.

From the beginning we felt success was around the corner. Potential members were mostly contacted by phone, acting on our respective contacts and friendships. Mr. Falck and I met monthly in Milan and were very pleased to see that the list of supporters kept getting longer. Each time we would submit a brief CV of the new entrants to His Eminence who encouraged us to continue. Msgr. Rota was also kept informed. In the meantime the Secretariat of State, with the assistance of Mr. Giuseppe Camadini, Notary in Brescia, drafted the By-Laws of the Foundation that would be submitted to the Holy Father for approval.

In just over six months all the work preparatory to setting up the Foundation had been completed. The By-Laws were ready, and so was the list of Founding Members, vetted and approved. A first tentative date for the formal incorporation in the Vatican was set for a date in November, 1992 but for a series of circumstances was then postponed to June 5th, 1993.

It was a day of rejoicing and prayer for all the members and their families. Cardinal Castillo Lara and Archbishop Lajolo, visibly moved, expressed their heartfelt appreciation and so did Msgr. Pavoni and Msgr. Rota who had closely followed each step of our adventure.

The crowning moment was the audience with the Holy Father. All the founding members, one by one, were introduced to Him in a climate of profound devotion and affection, of strong emotions that often gave way to tears.

This is how the Foundation began its work, under the guidance of Mr. Roberto Mazzotta as Chairman of the Board, and with the spiritual assistance of Msgr. Nicola Pavoni and Msgr. Daniele Rota. Cardinal Castillo Lara, in his capacity of President of APSA (*Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See*) monitored and oriented its activity and progress.

The seed out of which the Foundation has grown was a good one. On June 5th, 1993 it gave life to a sapling that year after year kept growing and is now a luxuriant tree bearing abundant fruit. You, dear friends, symbolize this tree that is entrusted to the care of the Board chaired by Domingo Sugranyes Bickel, of the Secretary General Massimo Gattamelata and of the national assistant Fr. Gianni Fusco, who succeeded Msgr. Daniele Rota, now Honorary Canon of St. Peter's Basilica, and Msgr. Massimo Magagnin.

And now I take the liberty of inviting you, dear friends, to dedicate a moment of prayer, gratitude and affection to the beloved memory of His Eminence Rosalio José Cardinal Castillo Lara, remembering with him the founding members who have passed away: Msgr. Nicola Pavoni, Giuseppe Camadini, Vitoria Canacci Lombardi, Luigi Ciocca, Alberto Falck, Goffredo Manfredi, Carla Mazzoleni, Franco Nobili, Franco Panini, Lino Pasquale, Gian Mario Roveraro, Carlo Sobrero, Dante Toffano.

Thank you, dear friends.

Vatican City, May 24th, 2013

Andrea Gibellini