

**Holy Father's speech to the
"Centesimus Annus - Pro Pontifice" foundation**

Saturday, 11 September 1999

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to be with you again, dear members of the "Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice" Foundation, who have gathered here with their family members. I greet Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, whom I thank for the kind words he addressed to me. With him I also greet Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, Secretary of the same Administration, Mons. Daniele Rota and Fr Massimo Magagnin, national chaplains, and the other ecclesiastics present. I extend a cordial welcome to all of you who did not wish to miss this gathering.

The last time you met was just last February, but you felt the need to meet again with the approach of the Holy Year 2000, for the Jubilee is a great ecclesial event in which your Foundation is called to collaborate, in the context of the *Jubilee of the World of Work*, to prepare for those who work in the financial sector. As I thank you for this willingness, I am pleased that, precisely in view of this event, you have opportunely decided next year to study the theme: "*Ethics and Finance*". I am aware of your intention to organize an international congress on this subject on the eve of the Jubilee day. I appreciate such an important initiative and hope that it will bear abundant fruits.

Today, then, you wished to devote ample time to hearing Archbishop Miroslav Marusyn, Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, who spoke to you about my recent Apostolic Visit to Romania and of the many spiritual and material needs affecting the Eastern Catholic communities.

2. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in your daily experience you can see how, within the pervasive phenomenon of globalization that marks this historical moment, an essential aspect and one fraught with consequences is the so-called "financialization" of the economy. In economic relations, financial transactions have already greatly exceeded real ones, so much so that the financial sphere has now acquired an autonomy of its own.

This phenomenon poses new and difficult questions from the ethical standpoint. One of these issues is the problem of the relationship between wealth produced and work, due to the fact that it is possible today for great wealth to be rapidly created without a definite amount of work being done. It is clear that this is a very delicate situation which requires careful consideration by everyone. When dealing with the question of the "globalization of the economy" in the Encyclical *Centesimus annus* (n. 58), I called attention to the need to promote "international agencies which will oversee and direct the economy to the common good", while also remembering that economic freedom is only one of the elements of human freedom. Financial activity, in accordance with its own characteristics, must be directed to serving the *common good* of the human family.

One does wonder, however, which value criteria should guide the decision of financial operators, even over and above the functional requirements of the markets, in a situation such as that of the present day where there is still no adequate international normative and juridical framework. And again: what are the appropriate authorities for preparing and providing such guidelines as well as for controlling their implementation?

A first step must be made by financial operators themselves, who could try to prepare *ethical or professional codes* that would be binding for the sector. Those responsible for the international community are called, then, to adopt *appropriate juridical instruments* for dealing with critical situations that, if not "regulated", could have disastrous consequences not only within the economic sphere, but also in social and political life. And certainly the weakest would be the first to pay and would pay the most.

3. The Church, who is a teacher of unity and because of her vocation walks with men and women, feels called to defend their rights, with constant concern especially for the poorest. With her social doctrine she offers her assistance in solving those problems which in various sectors affect human life, aware that "even if the economy and moral teaching, each in its own sphere, are based on their own principles, it would be an error to say that the economic order and the moral order are so different and unrelated to each other that the first does not in any way depend on the second" (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, n. 42). The challenge appears difficult, due to the complexity of the phenomena at issue and the speed with which they arise and develop.

Christians who work in the economic sphere and, in particular, in the financial sector are called to identify viable ways to fulfil this duty of justice, which is clear to them because of their cultural background, but which can be shared by anyone who wishes to place the human person and the common good at the centre of every social project. Yes, the objective of all your activity in the financial and administrative field must always be never to violate the dignity of man and, for this reason, to build structures and systems that will foster justice and solidarity for the good of all.

4. It should also be added that the processes which are globalizing markets and communications do not in themselves possess an ethically negative connotation, and therefore a summary and a priori condemnation of them is not justified. However, those processes that, in principle, appear as factors of progress can have, and in fact already have had, ambivalent or decidedly negative consequences, especially to the detriment of the very poor.

It is therefore a question of acknowledging this turning point and of seeing that it is directed to the advantage of the common good. Globalization will have many positive effects if it can be sustained by a strong sense of the absoluteness and dignity of all human persons and of the principle that earthly goods are meant *for everyone*. There is room in this direction to operate in a fair and constructive way, even within a sector that is much subject to speculation. For this it is not enough to respect local laws or national regulations; what is necessary is a sense of global justice, equal to the responsibilities that are at stake, while acknowledging the structural interdependence of the relations between human beings over and above national boundaries.

Meanwhile, it is very opportune to support and encourage those projects of "ethical finance", microcredit and "fair and equitable trade" which are within everyone's reach and possess a positive and even pedagogical value for global co-responsibility.

5. We are at the close of a century that has undergone rapid and fundamental changes in this field as well. The imminent celebration of the *Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* is a particular opportunity to reflect extensively on this problem. I am therefore grateful to your "*Centesimus Annus*" Foundation, which wished to organize its work in the light of the great Jubilee event, while taking into account the perspective that I indicated in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, where I wrote that "a commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee" (n. 51).

You have understood, dear friends, that the Jubilee year invites you to make your specific, professional contribution, so that the word of Christ, who came to evangelize the poor (cf. *Lk* 4: 18), will find a ready response. I cordially encourage you in this initiative, with the wish that, as a result of the Jubilee, there may be "a new culture of international solidarity and cooperation, where all - particularly the wealthy nations and the private sector - accept responsibility for an economic model which serves everyone" (Bull of Indiction *Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 12).

With these sentiments, as I wholeheartedly wish that the Foundation will grow, so that it can ever more effectively work with the Holy See and the Church in the new evangelization and in promoting the civilization of love, I entrust your every project and every initiative to Mary, the Mother of Hope.

May you also be accompanied and sustained by my Blessing, which I willingly impart to you and to all your loved ones.