

IFCA International Forum of Catholic Action



**Catholic
Action
is mission**

with everyone and for everyone

II International Congress

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Homily Card. Pietro Parolin

HOLY MASS

Basilica of Saint Peter, 27th April 2017

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear friends of Catholic Action,

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This eucharistic celebration opens the II International Congress of the International Forum of Catholic Action (IFCA), with the title: “Catholic Action is mission: With everyone and for everyone”, which will be followed by the XVI National Assembly of the Italian Catholic Action. They are intense days which will see you gathered to celebrate the 150 years from the foundation of Italian Catholic Action and to reflect on its mission, to identify issues to which assign priority and the decisions to be taken for the future of its life and activity. You will have the joy of fraternally sharing moments of prayer and reflection, of meeting the Holy Father Francis, to whom we confirm from now our fervent prayers for his apostolic voyage to Egypt. You will have way of reaffirming fidelity to the Lord, to the church and to the High Pontiff and to touch with your hands the fertility and the perennial youth of the Church, regenerated by the Holy Spirit and confirmed in truth and in unity by the teaching and action of Peter’s Successor.

Teaching and action are strictly related. The fruitfulness of acting is rooted in a formation which is attentive and deepened and in mission, to arouse enlivened interest and be fully involved, postulates a constant intensive work of the spirit hardened by prayer, by meditation, by dialogue and by good readings.

However, on the other hand, the teachings received find their verification and their haven in the concreteness of commitment, when they are transformed in supportive action and in the ideation of numerous good deeds. Formation in fact does not constitute an objective that is an end goal in itself in which to relax and delight oneself. It cannot remain

infertile, gratifying the intellect without moving hearts, without giving birth to indispensable courage to risk something of oneself whilst promoting new initiatives, always perfectible and criticizable, knowing that one could do better and more.

One can therefore feel the necessity of that which can reasonably be defined as an always renewable catholic action. Growth in faith and human and christian formation is needed; and that formation is strengthened by donating it, acting with others, going out of one's protective shell to take off, with the weapons of the Gospel, of culture and of charity, like disciples prepared to deepen their discipolat.

The Holy Father Francis, meeting you 3 years ago has urged you to «remain with Jesus», to «go through the streets» and to «rejoice and be glad in the Lord always» (Speech to the Italian Catholic Action, 3rd May 2014). If you put in practice this advice you will become credible witnesses of the Christian news and of the vitality of your association.

Today, Thursday of the second week of Easter, the reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes the situation of the disciples conducted in front of the Sanhedrin due to the courageous testimony that they had given of the Resurrected Christ. They had remained with Jesus, had followed him, they had rejoiced and were glad in the encounter with the Resurrected Christ and had walked the streets of the world to give what they had received. The apostles, therefore, filled with Paschal joy and mindful of words and gestures of the Lord, rather than obeying human orders, find the strength to obey Divine commands and are therefore accused of teaching in the name of Christ and of filling Jerusalem with this teaching (cit Acts 5,28).

The heavens want Jerusalem and all the earth be filled with this teaching! That the news that Christ is risen and lives eternally next to the Father and intercedes for us, echoes strongly in the crossroads of history and in real and mediatic squares of our times. That believing Him and putting in practice His teaching means removing the chains of enslavement to evil and find authentic freedom, that obeying Him is the way to not obey to egoistic and self-destructive impulses, that - when they are not healed by Christ's warm light - ruin oneself, the neighbour and society.

However Christ's teaching is very different from any other philosophy. It is truly learnt when it is capable of transforming existence, if it becomes life. God the Father in fact did not give us a book of principles to adore, but has sent His only Son for us. Whoever believes in Him, as we have just heard in the reading from the Gospel of John (cit Jn 3,36), has eternal life, because he is fitted with the work of salvation of Christ, letting it deploy all its beneficial effects on his own existence. However, who becomes enclosed in himself and does not open up to Christ remains trapped in the earth's things, remains confined in a vision without heaven, without future, without eternity, without joy.

Every Christian is therefore invited to imitate the Lord, to become neighbour to whoever he meets and - in a totally special way - to be witness of resurrection through charity to the last ones, those who carry the crosses of illness, of poverty, of exclusion, of persecution, of solitude. We are therefore called to not only intelligently adhere to the revealed truth witnessed by the Apostles, but to become good samaritans for all those who have stumbled upon the crooks and find themselves on the roadside half dead (cit Lk 10,30). Believing in the Son of God necessarily means putting oneself on his path, imitate for His love what He has done in obedience to the Father and for our love.

Discipleship, the patient formation that it requires, evangelisation and charity that enlivens every dimension of being Christian, imply each other. To be in a state of mission with everyone and for everyone, as recites the motto of your congress, it is necessary to be rooted in the definitive future, to always have in front of your eyes the goal, the joy that is in front of us and that has been donated without our merit, but only through overabundant grace.

The Church expands through attraction. The Holy Spirit is its principal protagonist, it is He who renews all things, softly and powerfully blowing His breath of life. Every baptised person is anointed with the Holy Spirit and the Church certainly becomes more attractive when the serene witness of faith open to the concreteness of action shines through the disciples, when solidarity flourishes and moments of deepened formation and action are shared in harmony. Moments that awaken in even the

most distant people the wish to come closer to be able to discover the secret strength which renders this style of life possible.

Evangelisation and mission become more effective when this specificity is perceived most. That of an existence lit by an immense light and capable to light others, even if in the perception and acknowledgement of people's limitations, even in the certainty that human achievements will never be immune to imperfections.

Catholic Action has written the best pages of its history when it held securely united these realities, when formation was deepened and revealed in action, courageous and ready, when it has placed itself in an outgoing manner to communicate to thy neighbour the beauty of being Christian, that beauty which was concretely experienced in the liturgy, in meditation, in prayerful reflection, in the study of a teaching that the more it is lived the more it is experienced as true and comforting.

I wish that you, dear friends, make in these days a joyous experience of Church, to taste the breeze of the Holy Spirit that does not cease to blow and that invites to be witnesses of the resurrection and of the good life which flows from the Gospel. Many in our times seem disoriented and without a compass because, even though they have Christ close to them, they struggle a lot to recognise in the Lord Jesus the only everlasting fountain of truth and life.

Be, therefore, to those you encounter on your journey, like a clear signal that leads to Christ, an occasion to help them discover how beautiful and compelling it is to experience the joys and trials of life in friendship and in the discipleship of Christ.

May the Holy Virgin Mary be of help and guidance. She, after having kept Jesus in her womb, has kept and meditated in her heart (cit. Lk 2,18) the events that concerned him and brought about His first miracle in Cana in Galilee. May she keep you in friendship with Her holy Son and beg of Him the strength and audacity to be disciples and missionaries of his resurrection.



OPENING SESSION



PRESENTATION OF THE DAY'S PROGRAMME

EMILIO INZAURRAGA*

Welcome

Dear friends, brothers and sisters in the faith and in the common vocation of the baptized, we are all missionary disciples, we have come from different countries, realities, ministries and services to share a journey where we want to share a proposal to live our missionary discipleship in the present, from a concrete gift that the Holy Spirit has given to the church our open-hearted Mother and campaign hospital for those who are injured in our world.

Thank you to each of your dedication that is already bearing the first fruit in the joy of knowing ourselves and generating a stream of fraternity, celebrated in the Eucharist that we have started this day and that helps us to say yes to Jesus' invitation to follow him in the midst of the people.

As we have learned and experienced that a gift grows when it is given, we want, in this framework of the synod, to share the gift we have received and generate an event of faith, of encounter, of fraternity, of mission that helps us to enrich a lived experience and that confronted in the discernment could be a path for many lay people who seek causes to mature their faith and communally commit their talents and energies to serve the church and society.

The presence of Cardinals, Bishops, priests and religious is also a source of joy for us. This path is not done only by the laity, together, we are all part of this faithful people! With you and for the good news of Jesus to reach everyone, we want to walk by witnessing to the beauty of the gospel that does not seek "adepts", but people fully realized in the love of God, which is love and service to our brothers and sisters.

Throughout this day, we will reflect on our identity, on the challenges and possibilities, on the missionary paradigm of CA.

Catholic Action is mission, this expresses the motto of our Congress. This is our DNA, the essential profile of our gift. The AC, like the Church, is renewed and remains faithful to its identity if it focuses on the mission, if it comes out. An outgoing AC, that even with its fragilities and sins, does not enclose itself in intimate spaces, but goes out to meet and seeks "on time and in time" the roads "sometimes in a straight line and sometimes in a zigzag" to get in common, to live and propose the transformative and constructive fecundity of the Gospel and its wealth of new humanity, with all and for all, privileging those who feel distant, the weakest and most forgotten of the population to favor structures of good, of solidarity, of justice and peace.

Thus, as Pope Francis teaches us, "I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others." (EG 273)

With all and for all, to all people (popularity), in all places (capillarity), in all circumstances (coresponsibly). A popular, capillary and co-responsible CA

We will share five sessions and a meeting with Pope Francis. There will be four in this room with specialists and testimonies, with time for questions and one session outside, as a missionary experience, "on the way out". They will be like brushstrokes that try to leave the mark of something much more beautiful than there is behind of each testimony and how much it is called to germinate, to be faithful and to renew, present in the life of our communities in different latitudes of the planet. Our letter of navigation is *Evangelii Gaudium*, and on the table are the encyclicals *Laudato Sii* and *Amoris Laetitia*, which translate today the orientations of the Second Vatican Council and which we want to continue assuming completely. The presence of the Holy Father will be a time to renew our commitment, yes, we will listen to him as a father and as a pastor and we

will offer him our journey as a sincere prayer that will accompany his trip to Egypt as a friend, messenger of peace and pilgrim. I would also like to make a grateful memory to those who have shared our journey and today encourage us from heaven

The beloved Servant of God Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, inspirer of the FIAC, 30 years ago and in the first Assembly, with the presence of a few countries affirmed with enthusiasm: "The Spirit of God is recreating the Catholic Action inside the Church, mystery of missionary communion".

To Mons. Mansueto Bianchi, who accompanied the ACI and the FIAC as Assistant until his death last year, and to whom Pope Francis entrusted him with this Congress. He is accompanying us from heaven and continues saying ... "I believe that Catholic Action ... can and should represent a "strada maestra "in this new identity of the Church,"pultely "evangelical and genuinely popular"

To so many lay people, Saints, Blessed, Servants of God, and faithful witnesses who preceded us on the road and encourage us in our missionary vocation.

Friends, the II International Congress on Catholic Action, is underway, thanking each of you for your presence, we entrust it to the maternal heart of Mary, the first missionary disciple, to guide our efforts from the rich history that always pushes towards ahead.

Good job

**IFCA Secretariat Coordinator*

Catholic Action is where you are

Video Text to introduce the Congress

A discrete presence - sometimes hidden - a nod, a smile, a look.

Jesus is there, apart or as part of the crowd as depicted in the panels of an anonymous Flemish master representing the works of mercy.

Jesus is there, to indicate a style, a way - of discretion, of listening, of sharing - the way which Catholic Action tries to follow in daily life and in history's peripheries. Because Catholic Action is where you are: in the marches for peace in Burundi; in the campaign against human trafficking in Argentina; in the welcoming of immigrants in the Italian dioceses; in the inter-ethnic schools in Sarajevo; in the search for co-existence between peoples in the Holy Land; in the caring of creation in Austria; in the meetings of spirituality with children and the elderly, with young people and families...

Catholic Action has your face: that of John, of Frances, Joseph, Martin, Paul, Chiara... children of this age, of a globalised culture, of a world that seems to be at the reach of a "tap" and in which, paradoxically, solitude and distances between neighbours seem to be on the increase. Catholic Action has the face, the many faces of an outgoing Church. This Church cannot consider the mission "at the heart of the people" as an ornament, an appendix or a moment amongst the many existential moments, but as "something which cannot be eradicated from its being."

"Regenerating one's faith in the crucified and risen Christ, sharing the daily life questions and troubles and discerning deeply with evangelical criteria", should therefore be among Catholic Action's commitments. Catholic Action should: "enlighten, bless, enliven, cure, liberate..." , in the image of that Jesus who today, just as yesterday in the streets of Galilee, chooses history's margins and peripheries.



1st SESSION

With *Evangelii Gaudium* as our compass:
Catholic Action school of missionary disciples



Introduction

ZÉNOBÉ NIRAGIRA *

Our aim in this Second Congress is to propose Catholic Action as an effective instrument for the mission of the Church, People of God, for the formation of mature lay people, missionary disciples, co-responsible in the Church, mystery of missionary communion, and in society.

Since the beginning of Christianity, lay people have accompanied the work of evangelisation by assuming their baptismal commitment. The exemplary reference is that to Aquila and Priscilla, who actively collaborated with the Apostle Paul in his work of evangelisation.

Today more than yesterday the ecclesial and social challenges need a deeper evangelisation, following the destabilizing crisis in Western societies, and, like an echo, in the whole world, due to their dominant social and economic model. All this requires an urgent commitment by every baptised person to be a missionary disciple everywhere.

The experience of the Italian CA and the spreading of Catholic Action throughout the world as a result of the initiative taken by Pope Pius XI, sufficiently confirm the need for the lay people to associate themselves so as to collaborate in this work.

It is in this perspective that in Africa and elsewhere, Catholic Action was born. In some countries it is called “Catholic Action Movements ” described as a form of collaboration of the lay people with the apostolate of the hierarchy. These have been very fruitful for the kingdom of Christ.

These forms of apostolate play an important role in the dynamism of the particular Churches in Africa. They provide Catechesis for children and assistance to the poor in hospitals, in orphanages, in prisons. It is also noteworthy that religious vocations, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharistic and catechists come from these Catholic Action Movements.

Without these Associations, many parishes and dioceses would be like the New Testament without the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Saint Paul. They are real schools of permanent formation to a responsive faith and to holiness.

The Vatican Council II shows the importance of Catholic Action for the life of the Church and defines its identity through four characteristic notes: 1. the Church's apostolic aim; 2. the collaboration with the hierarchy; 3. acting as an organic body and 4. the lay character (AA n.20).

This identity is incultured in the different cultural realities and leads to a Catholic Action which is one and diverse. This is well reflected in this Congress.

In the Church today, with *Evangelii Gaudium* as our compass, Catholic Action wants to review its action in order to work for a true pastoral conversion that allows it to assume and live the style of an “outgoing” Church.

To help us in this reflection, we rely on the presentations first by H.E. Msgr. Eduardo Garcia, Bishop of San Justo in Argentina, IFCA Ecclesiastical Assistant and National Assistant of CA in Argentina and secondly on that by Stella Morra, a theologian in permanent contact with the reality of the lay people, whose last book “God never tires”, is particularly suited for the reflection on the mercy of God.

Let us prepare ourselves to listen to them.

**Representative of Mouvements d'Action Catholique - Burundi*

INTERVENTIONS



S.E. MONS. EDUARDO GARCÍA*

With the framework of our Mother Church in Rome, in this place so emblematic for all Catholics; as Catholic Action we want to join at the dream of Pope Francis working for the "missionary transformation" of the Church. His dream is ambitious and enthusiastic, he commits us personally and communally to "recover the original freshness of the Gospel", finding "new ways" and "creative methods", not to enclose Jesus in "boring schemes". The missionary dream of the Pope is "reach everyone". The Pope's dream "has a programmatic meaning and implies" a pastoral and missionary conversion, "which cannot leave things as they are" and a "reform of ecclesial structures" so that "they all become more missionary".

As Catholic Action, we feel called to live with renewed strength "a new stage marked by joy of the Gospel that fills the heart and the whole life of those who encounter Jesus" because we are sure that there is no Gospel without joy.

With this framework, in this Congress we cannot forget another great dreamer who gave us the kick start and the encouragement in the first steps of FIAC; and that today would enjoy seeing us here gathered:

Catholic Action: Where do you come from?

Everything has a root, a story that points out a path, a goal. Catholic Action has a history forged in the walk of the millennial Church. The laity have always carried out an apostolate and have felt committed in the

construction of the kingdom in a different way, with commitments attending different realities. In the Gospel the 72 and the women who accompanied Jesus, also in the book of "Acts" and the Epistles "appears the testimony of men and women who generously seconded the apostles in their mission.

From there, the path of the church was marked by men and women who have consciously and responsibly assumed their baptismal commitment, immersed in everyday life, imbuing the Gospel made flesh, in their life and culture.

The changes about associated forms of lay apostolate have happened towards the middle of the 19th century.

Catholic Action: Who are you?

The universal Church begins to feel the need for lay organizations to face new pastoral and historical requirements, and Pius IX began the road to an associative process. Catholic Action appeared in 1922 as an ecclesial association officially constituted by the encyclical *Ubi Arcano*.

In our most recent history we see that our Conciliar church has sought to be faithful to the message of its teachers, Catholic Action has not been kept aside and the Vatican II Council speaks explicitly of Catholic Action on three documents: *Christus Dominus*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Ad Gentes*.

We have four notes that define us, they are our letter of introduction and our deepest identity.

1.- As Catholic Action we have the same general apostolic aim of the Church. "(our aim) is the Church's apostolic aim, that is, the evangelization and sanctification of men and the formation of a Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life.." (AA 20 a).

2.- The Catholic Action is an essentially lay Association: "Cooperating with the hierarchy in their own way, the laity contribute the benefit of their experience to, and assume responsibility for the direction of these organizations, the consideration of the conditions in which the pastoral activity of the Church is to be conducted, and the elaboration and execution of the plan of things to be done." (AA 20 b).

3.- For this evangelizing action, Catholic Action has an Organization: "The organization is a constitutive principle of Catholic Action and its way of working in the Church. Paul VI said: You can do good in many ways, but in Catholic Action this is the characteristic way of doing good, which demands a discipline that distinguishes degrees. The organization allows you to reach everyone and in every moment of their life. "

4. Catholic Action works "under the superior leadership of the Hierarchy": Since its inception Catholic Action has lived and felt Church in progress, school of holiness, place of permanent catechesis, space for the formation of leaders for all areas of ecclesial and social life, the seedbed of vocations. Always faithful to the Church and accompanied maternally by her. Proof of these are the mentions of the popes and pastors from the beginning during the papacy of Pius IX.

In the post conciliar time the teachings of Pope Paul VI have had a singular importance. Above all, it is important, the thoughts of Paul VI about Catholic Action: " CA occupies a place not historically contingent, but theologically motivated in the ecclesial structure."

In this line, John Paul has reaffirmed that the Church needs Catholic Action, because it needs lay people willing to dedicate their existence to the apostolate and to engage, especially with the diocesan community, a bond that leaves a deep imprint on their life and on their spiritual journey. ... lay people are the yeast of the Gospel into human relationships and institutions, to the territory and to the new places of globalization, to build the civilization of love¹

¹ Address by the Holy Father John Paul II to the participants in the XI Assembly of Italian Catholic Action, 2-4 (26-04-2002)

Benedict XVI also encouraged us to continue saying: "This vocation is still valid today. Therefore, I encourage you to continue with generosity in your service to the Church. Assuming its general apostolic purpose in a spirit of intimate union with the Successor of Peter and active co-responsibility with the pastors, you perform a service in fruitful equilibrium between the universal Church and the local Church, which calls you to give an incessant and irreplaceable contribution to communion".²

These pastors have been able to discern the "signs of the times", seeking to read and reread the journey of Catholic Action in the light of God's call; always hand by hand with the mediating church of good news called to illuminate the concrete life of men and women of this world.

Catholic Action: Where are you going?

Along with all the wealth that for many people went unnoticed, God gave us the grace of Pope Francis.

The legacy of Francis is the legacy of the church that acquires in its person the strength of the urgent. To paraphrase the scripture ... "The Lord who has spoken through the prophets for a long time today does not speak in a direct way ..."

What does this magisterium tell us, who tells us his person, that they tell us their gestures to us as Catholic Action? We cannot fall into the vain temptation to think that there is a special word for us, which will ultimately lead us to cut back on its message or liquefy it.

If we are coherent with the essentiality of our ecclesial role, we must recognize that we do not have a particular charism, but that the particularity of our mission is "to be church and to build the church from and as it builds it and realizes it in each particular church and as universal church". Diocese, closeness, mercy, forgiveness, mission, love for the

² Benedict XVI (May 4, 2008).

poorest and the most destitute are many of the words that have to become part of our habitual vocabulary.

We want to make ours the proposal of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In this line, we can apply the suggestions of Pope Francis to our associative life.

"In her ongoing discernment, the (CA) can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated." (E.G.43)

As Church we need to look at ourselves, not from the "nostalgia" of the past time that will not return, we cannot look at us sociologically or from evasive illusions. We need a believing look that places us in our original evangelizing and missionary mission.

The call that urges us is to respond to the desires, searches, needs and hope of the Church and from there enrich our order and institutional path. We need that the call to evangelize that Francis asks us may illuminate our usual pastoral praxis. The process of missionary discipleship has to enlighten the upgrowth process of the members of our institution. The mission must be the present and transversal objective of all our proposals and actions.

(Catholic Action) It never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness. It realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street. (E.G.45).

This is our mystic. The words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta help us to enter more deeply into our identity: "what is ordinary cannot satisfy us. What is good for others is insufficient for us. We are not happy with the common good, but with a courage that will face all dangers with a serene soul, willing at any time to any sacrifice, to carry out any task or work; at all times we must commit ourselves until we be as close as possible to our King who dies of thirst "

With joy and happiness we recognize that Catholic Action has been able to advance faithful to its mission despite the difficulties that each historical moment has presented. A serene look at our history allows us to recognize that in each era the starting point has been diverse. The social, spiritual and ecclesial context have marked the rhythm and have placed the proper accents in our journey.

We are in a global reach change of era. In the middle of the contradictions of this moment, a commitment with the people's life becomes relevant. Benedict XVI said at the beginning of the Fifth Latin American Episcopal Conference in Aparecida that the church grows by attraction and not by proselytism. The life given by the proclamation of the gospel, the apostolate is at this moment the luminosity that makes the life of the children of the church attractive. This does not rule out or devalue the formation, the spirituality, the sacrifice. On the contrary, the generous and missionary apostolate is provocative. As missionaries in the encounter with reality, we discover ourselves in need in order to give a reason of our hope and it will be necessary to search for that vital formation that we need and that is much more than simple erudition. The complexity and the vastness of the work to be done make us recognize the poverty of our own strength and that, only in the prayerful, supplicant and worshiper encounter with the owner of the crops we can strengthen ourselves to go out and announce without fears, complexes or cuts the message of abundant life. All this demands the ascetic sacrifice of putting the kingdom first, sacrifice not for self-glory but for the good news to shine in everything and everyone.

We need men and women of this time to see in us a living gospel. We need our passion for Christ and for men to be attractive for young people to wish to join our work and spirituality.

That is why we want to affirm that (Catholic Action) "on the way out" is a (Catholic Action) with the doors open. Go out to others to reach the peripheries ... (E.G.46)

In exit it is not in escape. We went out because you cannot contain or save between four walls, or in a few formulas or prescriptions "what we have seen and heard". The mission of Catholic Action uses its structures but "is

not" its structures. If the novelty of life in Christ with the dynamism that comes from the Spirit intends to bind it to human forms and ways, it will simply look for other ways of realization. Our plans, schedules, requirements and demands are at the service of men and women of this time with their wounds, anxieties and hopes. They claim us an inclusive and non-exclusive gospel, with the same attitude of the Lord that did not come for the seemingly righteous but for the sinners, so that all may have life and life in abundance. Today we feel with joy that many men and women far from the Church, and many who do not formally belong to it, have stood up to confirm that in the words and gestures of the Pope they find what they have long sought. Rejoicing and applauding this step of grace is necessary but not sufficient. From a profound and joyful pastoral conversion, it is up to us to put ourselves in tune with his merciful style and his evangelical radicality that, far from being rigidity, is the loving presence of the Father of life in the middle of the world.

We strongly felt as a call and as a challenge the words of the person who drives Peter's boat today: *"I dream of a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that customs, styles, schedules, language and every ecclesial structure become a channel adequate for the evangelization of the present world more than for self-preservation."*
(EG 27)

** Bishop of San Justo - Argentina, FIAC Ecclesiastic Assistant
and National Assistant of CA Argentina*



STELLA MORRA *

Hold up the words and the Word...

There is a role, in solemn liturgical rites, that always strikes me as a beautiful image: it is that of the celebrant's assistant, who holds up the book, often leaning it on his own forehead, so that the one who is celebrating is able to read. His eyes see only the cover of the book, the back... for him it is closed and without meaning! But this service enables the one who is celebrating to proclaim aloud, so that his ears and those of all the assembly may be able to receive the gift of the words, and heart and mind can be nourished by them.

I like to imagine Catholic Action in this way: people who know how to hold the book of the world's words so that the church can read it, people who know how to hold the Book of the Word (with a capital W) so that the world can read it... but most of all people who can hold the big history book so that men and women, believers or not, can continue to teach each other to recognise better the works of mercy, which God does for all of us.

People, therefore, who do not put their own identity on the control and possession of the eyes, but on the work of their hands and their mind and attentive to the ears: reasons of the heart and passion of intelligence for a service, which make us all, inside and outside the churches, a people, giving us a language, a memory and a shared identity.

In fact, as we find in *Evangelii Gaudium* number 87, "...we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a "mystique" of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this rather chaotic tide which can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage. [...] If we were able to take this route, it would be so good, so soothing, so liberating and hope-filled! To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us."

I would like to try to indicate briefly some traits by which, Catholic Action, because of its four identifying notes indicated by Msgr. Garcia, can be the decisive engine and the service place for a book to read together.

Reasons of the heart

Generally our heart is clear and good: nobody deep in his heart can cancel the desire for love, for peace and for the goodness that animates it. And Catholic Action's people is people with big hearts and generous passions.

But in a time of cultural transitions and challenges, like that which is our today's salvation, at this complex moment, we are called to find "reasons" of the heart: gestures and words, concrete, comprehensive and communicable forms which can be presented as a motivation, which are not only motivated by good intentions but also by reason, that is, something which even others can see and understand, receive and see in them... exactly a readable book.

I would like to indicate only three traits, that I think are typical of Catholic Action and which are particularly essential:

- remember that every person we meet is a subject of dignity and of history, it is not a "you" recipient of something that "I" decide, but an "I" who meets another "I", with its own sensibility, its own life, its own words: those who read us, can stand on their feet! And not only in personal relations but in the ways, in the times, in the organisations, in the proposals, in the way we act as an organisation (and as a Church!). In front of us we do not have "people" or "distant people"; rather next to us there are people, woven from the same material as mine. We should always ask ourselves: "If what we are proposing was proposed to me, how will it affect me?"
- Remember that every person has a story and to really share a story one needs time, patience, respect, working together and a growing trust: exchanged words are only one dimension, but no one (not even we) can change one's own life just because "he has understood". We change when and because our life is being recognised, welcomed, loved and then, from within itself, life can flourish in the best possible way. Even in this case, it is not just a question of personal relations, which are always indispensable, but the right choice of an organisational style; we should always ask ourselves: what result am I really after?
- Remember that life and benevolence are tiring. It seems like a trivial observation, but I do not think it is: getting used to sleeping peacefully

and, at the same time, living without sparing oneself, seems to me the thing needed today if one wants to gauge himself well and to offer a gratuitousness and joyful experience which the world so badly needs. We are tired, sometimes nervous and angry, and so are those around us, because living is expensive. But we are “rich as a family”! He who said “come to me you who are weary and oppressed...” is our heritage and being with Him helps us to rediscover the necessary benevolence. But we should keep asking ourselves: what experience of gratuitousness, of abundance, of receiving without “paying”, offers what we are proposing?

With these traits (and obviously many others) a lay organisation like Catholic Action becomes decisive in helping the churches to set up structural workshops to foster an adequate style and in making itself a living memory for all of the reasons of the world’s heart which should be identified, accepted and shared.

Intelligence’s passions

Besides this, our time asks for intelligence’s passions; that is an ability to reason and these reasons are not to be just limited to the “already said” in classical theology, nor to the self-referential academic logics, theories which inevitably become ideologies, but rather they should be a passion and a desire which discard simple “listening” and give back a voice to a human and vital reason, which stems from life and from practice and which effectively returns to them.

In times of transition, we need to study, talk and understand more not less, we need to work hard for a rational awareness to foster cultures which make us a people, a true culture of mercy and blessings which identifies the faithful people among the other peoples without separating it, but which make it the salt and yeast which disperses itself without losing itself.

This is a very delicate situation, suspended between a warm and reassuring sectarianism, but which is auto-referential, unaware and which can be manipulated, and a perennially restless and theoretical academic approach which is very exact but elitist and submerged in distinctions and substantially paralysed.

Rediscovering the passions of a popular and vital intelligence is a challenge that a collective subject, conscious of itself and inclusive by definition, can try to face for everyone's sake.

Even here only three brief traits:

- think of places and times. We need to invent and experiment ways by which we can overcome spatial distinction (a clear-cut decision: in the church, out of the church) and form ourselves as lay people who "enter and exit" and therefore live on the thresholds. How can we stop thinking that there are "religious" things and things which are not and instead we experience that life, all our life, is the raw material of faith? Are we aware of societies and cultures which have discovered the distinction between public and private space as a value and recognise legitimate religious plurality in public spheres, ways which do not accept the radical privatisation of faith or the possible temptations of different forms of neo-fundamentalism? How can Catholic Action become this type of inclusive public space?
- As a consequence to this, how can we make a qualified service to the primary and inclusive values (on which we can all agree) of justice, peace, hospitality, Earth and common good care, visible and experiential? Collaborate with everyone, surely... But, for example, are we aware that synodality is not just a challenge for the "management" of the church within itself, but could also become a workshop and a prophecy of models of authority and collaboration, of concrete forms of co-existence and a way of government for a world tempted by populism and in a democratic crisis? How can Catholic Action be a workshop of a specific form of ecclesial democracy, a seed of synodality and hope for civil co-existence?
- reweave practices and thoughts. We constantly experiment the gap between "proclaimed" faith and concrete life, between "religious" words and everyday words, between the forms of the spirit (art, poetry, music...) and the forms of mass culture and globalisation, between popular and elitist... We really need to learn to build bridges, not only between people, societies and cultures, but even within each of us, rediscovering daily practices that express and conform true thoughts and elementary gestures which everyone

can do and that together are performative of life and of words. We need to rediscover our own interior unity. How can the Catholic Action be a responsive place for the development of new cultures and for everyone?

Four notes from the past for the future

As it has been already remarked, Catholic Action “has a place that is not historically contingent, but theologically motivated in ecclesial structures” and “is called to realise a form of lay ministeriality” (Paul VI, Message to the III General Assembly of the Italian Catholic Action, 25th April 1977). The challenges which we have highlighted have proved how true this is today: Catholic Action is definitely the subject which cannot be excluded (along with others) if one wants to take today’s questions seriously. From the Council we have received the important heritage of four identifying notes: the assumption of the general apostolic aim of the church; the lay character, even responsible decision taking; the organised form, as an organic body; the primary collaboration with the hierarchy. Now these notes are not just talents to be buried and preserved for the return of the landlord: rather they are a treasure to be traded, spent, used, multiplied and made to bear fruit.

Assuming the apostolic aim of the church: a church, which today thinks of itself as an outgoing church attentive to the real and existential peripheries. This Church will find in us as lay people who structurally live on a threshold, who are citizens aware of two cultures, who cannot be auto-referential, bent on themselves and, in this case, ready to deny themselves.

The lay character: we are people who, because of creation, that is for a theological reason, believe that life has its own beating heart, that image of God which makes it sacred and precious, without the need to receive adjectives from outside or to be labelled and taught. Every life, ours and that of the others, even when it is confused or hurt: perhaps rather more in those moments. Every life needs to be accompanied so that it can germinate the precious seed within it, respecting its rhythm and pace.

The organised form: we are people, who believe both in discipline and in chaotic fraternity, who know that every sentiment and impulse has to be accepted and then sifted, that fidelity to the gift received and imaginative creativity are not contrary to one another but reciprocal and this is perhaps one of the instances where witnessing is most urgent.

The collaboration with the hierarchy: if the pastors remind themselves that sometimes they walk in front of their people, sometimes amongst them, sometimes behind them, following them, we believe that we act as a linking reality moving backwards and forward between a group and another, knowing well the effort and the work which this double dealing entails... We will have to walk double the distance and sometimes it will be difficult to ask those who run to slow down the pace and those who linger to make haste, with frankness and freedom... be they brothers or shepherds! But helping people to walk all together is our joy..

I would like to conclude with a short poem by Derek Walcott and I will be very pleased if we could make this our mutual greeting on this occasion... Its title (Love after love) is already a program.

Time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself for having arrived
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the others welcome
and say: sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was yourself.
Offer wine. Offer bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you
all your life, whom you ignored
for another and who knows you by heart.
From the bookshelf take down the love letters,
the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel off your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Celebrate: feast on your life.

** Theologian, Gregorian Pontifical University*



Intervention by His Holiness Pope Francis



Greetings to the Holy Father
H.E. Card. Kevin J. Farrell *

Holy Father,

I greet you with joy and gratitude and thank you for accepting to participate personally in the Second International Congress of the International Forum of the Catholic Action.

Here present are His Excellency Monsignor Edoardo Horacio Garcia, FIAC Ecclesiastical Assistant, Dr. Emilio Inzaurraga, IFCA Secretariat Coordinator and delegates of the Associations and Federations of Catholic Action Movements coming from various continents.

Participating in the works of the Congress are different Cardinals and numerous Bishops who, with their presence, show the special appreciation which the Church's shepherds have in relation to the Catholic Action apostolate in various countries in the world.

Many times you have indicated the missionary spirit as an essential element for Catholic Action. With this International Congress, Catholic Action members want to reflect together in order to understand how to live this missionary spirit concretely. Holy Father, in one of your messages to Catholic Action, which we all remember, you wanted to give us three key words: remain, go, rejoice - remaining in Jesus, going to the borders and living the joy of Christian membership. All Catholic Action Associations in the world strongly feel this wish to "go to the borders", to be passionate

disciples of Jesus who wish to go out of the closed fences of old habits and of old routines, to meet the men and women who are still waiting for the message of the Gospel and to testify with joy to the love of the Father manifested in his Son Jesus.

Holy Father, while we eagerly wait to listen to the message which you will be giving us, we want to express our closeness to you and assure you of our prayers in view of the important apostolic voyage in Egypt which you will be embarking on in the coming two days. Your tireless testimony of brotherhood, of peace and of dialogue is a magnificent example of how to live concretely the theme of today's Congress: "Catholic Action is mission, with everyone and for everyone". We truly see in you the authentic missionary spirit, which accompanies and suffers "with everyone" and is "for everyone" a bearer of light and of the consolation of the Gospel.

We thank you for this and from our hearts we ask your benediction.

** Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life*



Welcome by Emilio Inzaurraga

With the introduction of very relevant experiences

Dear Pope Francis,

Catholic Actions of the world want to witness to our daily life in the middle of the Holy Faithful People of God, each one will give you a gift, fruit of the vital experience of faith and fraternity.

Children

The children of Catholic Action of Malta, Romania, Italy, Argentina and the Holy Land, representing the different realities of CA around the world, bring you a book made with your letters and drawings, they have worked on six verbs that you proposed in "Evangelii Gadium": to enlighten, to bless, to vivify, to raise, to heal, to free, with the commitment to grow by proposing to other children the joy of faith and the care of the common home.

Malt

A family from CA of Malta, integrated by three generations:

Grandparents: Michael - Berandette Polidano and Josef -Imelda De Bono

Your children: Joseph and Daniela De Bono parents of Gabriel, Francesca, Luke.

They are testimony of the faith that is passing on in the family, just as you told us many times, that your grandmother Rosa did it with you. They bring a tablecloth as a sign of the family table where life is celebrated, bread is shared, resentment is left aside to live forgiveness, also the place where we receive our friends and everyone who needs an embrace of solidarity.

Lampedusa

The president of CA of the Diocese of Agrigento, Salvatore Scibetta, (where Lampedusa is located), comes with the parish priest DON CARMELO LA MAGRA, and both of them bring you Holy Father a "New Testament and the Psalms" in English, which were found at the bottom of a ship. Migrants manage to carry a few personal items and therefore, they are obliged to choose the most valuable things: photos of their loved ones, objects or sacred texts.

We are not aware of the fate of the person who had this sacred book we only know that one of the pages, weakened by the trip, was folded carefully on Psalm 55, which begins like this:

*"Lord, listen to my prayer,
do not be insensitive to my supplication;
listen to me and answer me.
The anguish fills me with anxiety;
I am disturbed by the cries of the enemy,
for the oppression of the wicked:
because they accumulate infamies against me
and they harass me with fury."*

These words describe very well the feelings and prayers of the migrants who arrive there and in other parts of the world every day and of those who are victims of the new modern slavery.

Central Africa

The priest of Central Africa LUDOVIC BERTHIN secretary general of the Episcopal Commission of the Secular Apostolate brings you the embrace of his people, who after your visit in 2015 that has left a very important footprint in the work for interreligious and ecumenical dialogue and the beginning of a path able to reconcile the hearts. In this greeting we renew the commitment to live in the middle of our people, of popular culture and religiosity, to grow with it and discover God who lives in our homes, streets, squares, we must be promoters of charity, fraternity, dialogue that makes possible to end the scandal of war and poverty.

Bethlehem

The family of Vincenzo Bellomo and Carol Abu AKLEH with Antonio and Lea, their twin sons of 4 years, come from the land of Jesus, together with Mons Giaginto Marcuzzo bring you, together with Farah KMOSH on behalf of all, "bookmarks" made by Rafedih, they are all different, as a sign of our diversity, with them we will point out our Bibles, the Word that we learned to listen in our Parishes, home of the growth of the Christian life, of the dialogue, of the announcement, of the generous charity, of the adoration and the celebration, common space where we have been taught to give our lives, to work for justice and care for our common home.

But in addition, the children listened about your trip to Egypt and they want to help you, with a gesture that is to show you how to make the Sign of the Cross in Arabic ...

Holy Father, they are small but real signs of our missionary life style that expands silently in the realities of our lives where we are co-responsible in the mission of evangelizing and in the audacity to bring the Good News to the field of politics, economy, culture, education, art, science, from the family, childhood, young people, adults and the elderly, together with our pastors who will accompany us in our pursues and will stimulate our creativity!

Dear Pope Francis, we pray with you and for you!

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
FORUM OF CATHOLIC ACTION (IFCA) *

*[*Full-text transcript with the additions of Pope Francis
to the official text published on the website of the Holy See]*

SYNOD HALL

Thursday, 27 April 2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings to you all on the occasion of the celebration of this Catholic Action International Congress, with the theme: "Catholic Action is mission with everyone and for everyone". I would like to share some preoccupations and considerations with you.

I will speak to you about CA's charism, then about some lines of action and other subjects, about who the agents and the recipients are, about the style which CA should adopt and about the project.

Allow me to leave the text because this gives me the chance to say what I feel. I also feel that I cannot express myself as I want, when I have to speak Italian in the Square. If I could speak Spanish there, I would be able to express myself better.

Charism – rebirth in the light of Evangelii gaudium

The Charism. The reference framework of all the apostolic action of the Church has to indicate as to how we can reformulate the charism in the light of Evangelii Gaudium (EG), just as Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN) did in its time. However EN is still valid. It is the best postconciliar document which, even today, continues to indicate the way of action of the Church. EG is a somewhat updated translation, but that which is fundamental is there, in EN: this is only fair to this document as this document has not lost its actuality. How can we reformulate the charism in the light of EG in today's context?

Historically, Catholic Action's mission has been to form lay people who assume their proper responsibility in the world. Today, in concrete terms,

it is *the formation of missionary disciples*. Thank you for having decisively taken *Evangelii gaudium* as your magna carta.

Catholic Action's charism is the charism of the Church itself, deeply incarnated in the today and here of every diocesan Church which, discerning in contemplation and keeping in mind its people's lives, looking for new ways of evangelizing and of carrying out its mission, starting from the different parish realities.

It is not a project of proselytism, because this is against the Gospel. And here I would like to make Benedict XVI's words my own: "the Church does not grow through proselytism, but by attraction". It grieves me a lot when I see certain pastoral agents, lay people, consecrated persons, priests and bishops who are still reverting to proselytism, when "by attraction", the brilliant phrase used by Benedict XVI, should be the compass for our journey.

Traditionally, Catholic Action has had four pillars or legs *Prayer, Formation, Sacrifice* and *Apostolate*. According to the time in history, it has set one of these legs first and then the others. So, at a certain time, the stress was on prayer or doctrinal formation. Given the present characteristics, the apostolate should be the distinctive trait and it should be the first leg to be set.

We should not ignore the other three, but the first challenge is to go out, the apostolate comes first and then the others will follow. Missionary apostolate needs prayer, formation and sacrifice, it needs the other three. When one goes out, one realizes that if the other three are not there, one's work is superficial and does not bear fruit. This comes out very clearly in the Aparecida Document which has had a great influence on EG – I was there and had to study it. In the mission, there is an integrative dynamism which takes prayer, formation and sacrifice for granted, but it is the mission, it is the fact that one goes out, which brings everything together.

And this is not to be done to the detriment of the other realities but just the opposite. It is what provokes the others. Missionary apostolate needs prayers, formation and sacrifice. This comes out clearly in Aparecida and in *Evangelii Gaudium*. *There is an integrative dynamism in the mission.*

What am I asking of you? I appeal to you to offer formation to people, to men and women, children ...

Offer formation: offer a process of growing in one's faith, an on-going mission-oriented catechetical programme, adapted to every reality, based on the Word of God which fosters a happy friendship with Jesus and an experience of fraternal love.

Pray: with that holy extroversion which puts one's heart in other people's needs, in their suffering and their joy - a prayer which develops and which takes you far. Thus you will avoid looking constantly at yourself.

Avoid that winding prayer which does not urge you to go out of yourself, which does not lead you to the mission, which does not link with reality. And pray a lot. For some, praying is tedious and sometimes it is. Many times, Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus slept before the tabernacle but in spite of this she became a saint. She just sat in front of Jesus and did not move and Jesus liked this. This strengthens the heart and makes it become more apostolic. Pray with your eyes on the mission.

Sacrifice yourself: not just to feel holier - generous sacrifice is that which does good to others. Offer your time to find out what to do to help others grow, offer what you have in your pockets and share it with those who have less than you, offer the gift of your personal vocation generously to embellish the *common home* and help it grow.

There is a test which I usually give to very young children. I ask: "What do you do if you have two sweets and a friend arrives?" At times but very rarely, the answer is: "I put them in my bag to have them later". The majority would say that they would give one to their friend and keep the other one. It is good to share for the sake of others. The second question: "You have one sweet and a friend comes: what do you do?" Very few would answer: "I would eat it hurriedly". Others would say: "I would share it, half for me and half for my friend". Others, but very few would say: "I would give it to my friend as I would already have had one".

How are my prayers and sacrifices? Do I keep my sweet in my bag, share it, or renounce to it as I would already have had one? Our dedication, to be of service and to evangelise, should be accompanied by a spirit of sacrifice.

If I am invited to visit an old people's home and right on that day there is a football match, an important match on TV which I do not

want to miss, what do I do? Your questions and proposals as regards sacrifice should be realistic.

Sacrifice should never be artificial or narcissist, you should imitate Jesus. He committed himself for the good of others: it is the only Christian meaning of sacrifice. When it comes to renewing our evangelising commitment, this should be the only Christian meaning of sacrifice.

Renew your evangelizing commitment – at diocesan level– at parish level

This point is very clear to me. Some time ago, during a pastoral visit as Pope, during a meeting with the parish priests, I was asked as to what the charism of the gathering should be – there were also religious persons – *fondata da San Pietro ovvero dei sacerdoti diocesani!* My reply was “ a diocesan orientation”. It is the same reply which I would give to you if you had to ask me to indicate the main charism and the most important evangelising commitment found in CA’s charism. It is a diocesan orientation under the leadership of the Bishop.

In Catholic Action, the mission is not a duty among the others, it *is the duty*. Catholic Action’s charism is to carry out the pastoral work of the Church. If the mission is not its distinctive strength, Catholic Action’s true spirit is missed and it loses its reason for being.

The renewal and updating of Catholic Action’s evangelizing commitment is vital. It must aim at reaching everyone, everywhere, all occasions, and all existential outlying situations; in reality and not just as a formulation of principles.

I like to use the word ‘outlying’ situations because these are society’s most precarious places. Normally we think that this word refers to the poor, the poorest, and normally it is so, but it refers also to those who think it differently, to agnostics, ... I am open even to these, to listen to them, to dialogue with them. This is what reorienting our ways means.

This implies *rethinking your formation plans, your apostolic ways and even your own ways of praying* so that they may be, *essentially and not occasionally, missionary*.

I am a missionary on Saturday, a little, and then? As CA members, you are characteristically and not occasionally missionary; even in difficult and risky situations.

Abandon the old criterion: 'because this is the way we have always done it'.

There have been things in CA's history which have been really good and worthwhile but today they would be out of context if we had to repeat them and here I would like to quote a phrase which you should never use: "this is the way we have always done it". This phrase is a bad word. We do not have to change because times are changing. That which is fundamental, that is the announcement of Jesus Christ, the missionary disposition, prayer, the need to pray, the need for self sacrifice, never change. But we have to find out how to go about them but they never change. "This is the way we have always done it" has done and still does a lot of harm to the Church. When taking decisions, this obsession does not leave you free. Take Chapter 23 of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and read what Jesus said to the "obsessed". When, in a diocese, in a parish, in a centre, in a CA group there is the temptation "to be obsessed", read what Jesus is saying to you at that moment: "the obsessed are hypocrites" ... At times we should leave the old criterion behind because it does not work and instead use CA's realities with criteria which are needed today and which bear fruit.

Catholic Action must take on itself the whole mission of the Church by totally belonging to the diocesan Church starting from the Parish.

CA is not a satellite. Do not be wordly ecclesiastics whom we sometimes find in the Church. These maintain that they have their spirituality, are closed within themselves, self-centred ... This should not be CA's attitude as CA has a belonging. CA belongs to the diocese. A CA which is not diocesan could be a good thing but it is not a CA. A CA which does not incarnate itself in the parish is not a CA ... but has the parish become outdated?

The mission of the universal Church is updated in every particular Church with its own characteristics; likewise Catholic Action gets its authentic life

by answering and assuming as its own *the pastoral work of every diocesan Church through its concrete insertion* starting from the parishes.

Every diocesan Church has a pastoral line of action, a pastoral plan and the Bishop's directives. These are developed by the Pastoral Council so CA should insert itself in this line of action and incarnate itself in the parishes. The parish is not outdated. Parishes differ because the Church has always looked for different approaches. The parish is not outdated simply because the diocesan model is not outdated. The Bishop keeps close to the people of God through the parish.

Catholic Action should offer the diocesan Church mature laity, which, as a way of realizing its vocation, *supports the pastoral projects* of every place *with readiness*. You have to be concretely incarnated.

You should incarnate yourself in the place where you live and this is what it means to be catholic.

The apostle John fought the first heresy in the Church. This came some years after the death and resurrection of the Lord. It was scandalous to say that God was made flesh but John is very clear; whoever denies that the Word was made flesh is an Antichrist.

An ecclesial movement which does not incarnate itself in the ecclesial realities of the diocese through the parish, in a way proper to its nature, risks entering in the category of not being Christian, not to say Antichrist. When we come across these factions which thrive on themselves, study a lot but live closed within themselves ... these could be described as heretic gnostic saints ... but they are not catholic.

And a CA, which chooses to remain closed within itself and which does not incarnate itself by following the ways of the Word to redeem us, could be good but is not catholic. Always incarnated! But incarnated does not mean there where I want, but there where the Church wants me, in the diocese, in the parish.

This incarnation criterion does not apply only to inculturization which is the other aspect of incarnation. It applies to the organization as well as to the way in which the Church organises itself.

You cannot be like those groups which are *so universal* that they are not based anywhere, do not answer to anyone and keep looking for the best place for them.

These groups are orbital in the Church. It is true that we are living in a satellite era and these groups exist in the Church as well but CA cannot be one of these. You should be rooted, incarnated in concrete realities and these concrete realities are the diocese and the parish. But there is also the CA university campus. Incarnate yourself there, but always through the Bishop, not as an independent group. The diocese is the incarnation criterion and the parish is a *gran criteriu*. There is another level of incarnation. This is when there are other more original groups dictated by pastoral realities which are not parish-based like pastoral work on the university campus. These should incarnate themselves through the bishop but should not be ignored. There is no CA without a Bishop. There is no CA without a diocesan orientation.

Sometimes things happen in the spirituality of certain religious congregations. I can think of a General Mother Superior who wanted to change the congregation by giving universal recommendations. One of these was that in the morning, instead of going to the chapel, the nuns were to immerse themselves in nature! Maybe a little pantheistic! In spirituality we cannot have a disincarnated style. These are the modern forms of gnosticism which do not help.

Concreteness is a criterion you should keep – our faith is concrete – the Word was made flesh concretely. We have to keep in mind that when we go to heaven, we will be judged on a very concrete protocol which we find in Matthew 25. When we recite the creed, we affirm concrete facts. When faith is not concrete, it is not catholic. That which is catholic is always concrete. But that which is concrete can be corrupted as well. This is sin's path which is also concrete. Try to find something which is not concrete in the Creed, in the criteria demanded by Jesus in the universal judgement and in the Beatitudes which are the project for our life. And if someone thinks that the beatitudes are an idealistic journey, the conclusion is definitely very concrete: blessed are you when they persecute you, when they judge

you, when they martyr you. And here, any illusion of sophistication in that which is catholic disappears.

Agents – Everyone without exception

All Catholic Action members are *dynamically missionaries*. Children evangelize children, young people other young people, adults other adults and so on. Nothing better than one's equal to show that it is possible to experience the joy of one's own faith..

Avoid falling into the *perfectionist temptation of eternal preparation* for the mission and of *eternal analysis*, which when finished, are already obsolete and outdated.

How many diocesan curias or religious institutes are full of pastoral plans which when finished were no longer relevant.

The example is Jesus with his apostles: he sends them with what they had. Then he reunited them and helped them to discern on what they had experienced.

When Jesus sent the 72 disciples, these did not have the Denzinger in hand. They just had an experience of Jesus, they knew the gist of the Christian message and they knew the beatitudes. With that little, they went back to tell Jesus that even demons surrendered themselves to them. It was the strength of their preaching, the strength of their testimony. It was what they had and what was needed at that moment.

Reality should dictate to you the time you should let the Holy Spirit guide you. He is the interior master who enlightens our deeds as long as we are free from preconceptions and conditionings. One learns how to evangelize by evangelizing, just as one learns how to pray by praying, as long as one has a good disposition.

Everyone can go on a mission, even if not everyone is able go out into the street or in the countryside. Elderly people, who have been members for a long time, as well as newly enrolled ones, should be given a space and this is very important. One could say: they could be the *contemplative and interceding sector* within Catholic Action's different sections. They can create the patrimony of prayer and grace for the mission. This applies to the sick as well. God listens to these with special tenderness. They will all feel involved and will find themselves active and useful.

We should include special categories in our CA groups. Involve everyone. Everyone has a mission in the world. If you have an evangelising heart, you can be included - each and everyone.

And here I would like to speak again about something which has been very close to my heart for some time: the elderly. We are living in a throw away culture ... where the philosophy is “use and throw away” and when something does not work or is not productive, it is to be thrown away. When elderly people reach a certain age, they are discarded because they are no longer of use ...the trend is to discard them ... At times they need medical treatment or special care ... so we find them a nursing home ...and leave them there... . We are thus throwing away part of our family wealth.

Young people are unemployed, 40% in Italy, 47% in Croatia, in Spagna the figure reaches 50%, and so on in all European countries. Why? They are of no use, so they become waste. We do not say that we are discarding them, but in fact, what can a young person do if he is unemployed? He gets sick or commits suicide. (The statistics showing juvenile suicides are very worrying). They may also fall on drugs or join terroristic or criminal groups seeking to find an ideal or something to do in life.

Even children are discarded because no one cares for them unless they are very intelligent and are sent to some special bilingual or trilingual school so that one day they may become leaders. Everything has become like a funnel. More people are being discarded and the funnel is taking shape.

Today I feel it is important that I entrust you with a commitment. Work to establish dialogue between the very young and the elderly. I appeal to CA to find a way of doing this especially in the parishes. *Non passa tutto per questa scelta ma vedete il modo.*

When I pray Joel 3,2 I am greatly touched by the fact that one of the signs of the kingdom is: “old people shall dream dreams and young people shall prophecy”.

Young people will prophesy and implement the dreams of the elderly. We have deprived old people from their ability to dream because they are boring, because they are of no help to us. And we have cut off the roots of our young ones. This commitment is really pressing and I believe that today the Spirit is asking the Church to help in this dialogue, to help children in being nearer to old people, to ask them questions, to make them speak. This is beneficial for a child’s and a young person’s heart. It will be a prophecy which they will try to accomplish, to carry out. And this will be a renovation. It is impossible to bear fruit if the roots are very weak or do not exist. Everything will dry up. And we are cutting off the roots.

I seriously entrust you with this task. Keep in mind that everyone can do this and that this dialogue is important. I have seen it in some particular churches: groups of young people who go in old people's homes, in hospitals, they play the guitar and sing with the old people and then enter into a conversation with them. Then they realise that they should go again because there they have found a wealth which they should treasure. I recommend this in a special way.

Recipients – All men and all spheres

It is important that Catholic Action is present in the *political, business and professional world* but not because we believe that we are perfect and well prepared Christians but to be of better service.

It is imperative that Catholic Action is present *in prisons*

Including with those serving a life sentence because each prisoner needs a horizon and not bars or walls .. CA can provide a horizon and offer rehabilitation

in hospitals, in the streets, in slums, in factories. If it does not do this, it will be a *selective* institution which does not say anything to anyone, not even to the Church itself.

We have to be very strict about this point: concreteness, involving ourselves concretely in outlying areas more. I will tell you a story about a difficult unreachable situation. This involved a bishop but any lay person could follow his example. In his diocese, a young person organised a manifestation against the Church – it was not a procession. Instead of singing hymns they sang songs heartily, accompanied by rude, offensive and blasphemous gestures, against the Church, the Pope and the bishops. The bishop realised that here he had a case of a difficult, unapproachable situation. He found out who the leader was and after having prayed, he invited him for lunch. Evidently, the leader did not ask the bishop to hear his confession or to give him communion and nor did he become Catholic. They talked about his grandfather, his grandmother and about his ancestors. What this bishop did, reaching out to outlying difficult situations, is an example which CA should follow. Do not be afraid of anything, not even of those you face in the streets and say all sort of things. Therefore we need to pray, ask for enlightenment and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit so as to take the necessary steps.

What do I ask of CA?

I would like a Catholic Action among the people: in the parish, in the diocese, in the country, in the neighbourhood, in the family, in study and working spheres, in the countryside, in all spheres of life. It is in these new areopaghi where decisions are taken and where culture develops.

Streamline the ways of adhering. Do not be custom houses. You cannot be more restrictive than the Church itself nor more papists than the Pope. Open the doors, do not set examinations of Christian perfection because by so doing you will be promoting a pharisaic hypocrisy. What we need is active mercy.

The commitment which lay people who join Catholic Action undertake is to look ahead. It is the decision to work for the building of the kingdom. We do not have to “bureaucratise” this particular grace because the Lord’s invitation comes when we least expect it; we can neither “sacramentalise” formalization with requirements which respond to another sphere of the life of faith and not to the evangelizing commitment.

May Catholic Action offer a welcoming space and a *Christian experience* to those, who for personal reasons, feel that they are “second class Christians”.

Method – Among the people

The word “people” might be mistaken with the word “populist” but I am referring to persons, to the people of God. One can speak about people as an idea, a logical category and so can speak about populism or, ideologically, speak about popular categories, but people is a mythical category and so we can speak about populism, people means people, persons. When we see the “crowd” which followed Jesus, we refer to the persons who followed him ..., certainly the disciples, but it is always people, persons ... they followed him because they liked him, he cured the sick and they liked the way he spoke with authority.

The method depends on the recipients. As the Council tells us and as we often pray during Mass: mindful and sharing men’s struggles and hopes so as to show them the way of salvation. Catholic Action *cannot keep aloof from the people*; it comes from the people and should stay among the people. You have to make Catholic Action more popular.

And what does this mean? Does this mean that we have to go in search of those who do not form part of society’s elite? No, I am not saying so in this

sociological sense because this is the popular ideology. I am saying it in the mythical sense of people. You should build a Catholic Action of those holy and faithful people to God.

It is not a question of image but of truth and charism. Nor is it demagogy but it is following on the master's footsteps. He was never disgusted at anything.

To do this *it is good to take a popular neighbourhood* share people's lives and learn to discover where they are aiming for, their interests and their pursuits, their deepest yearnings and anguish; also what they need from us. This is fundamental if we do not want to fall into the situation of *failing to answer questions which everybody asks*.

Which are the questions which these people are asking, which individuals are asking? My answers should be based on real questions because sometimes we present a prepared speech and risk giving replies to questions which nobody is asking. This is a fundamental approach if we do not want to be ineffective.

One can sit at his desk and think of ways of evangelising but he will be in a position to do this only after having been in people's midst and not the other way round.

Go, move on, keep concrete contact and then yes, sit at your desk and draft your pastoral plans and then everything will be fine.

A more popular, more incarnated Catholic Action *will cause you more problems* because there will be more individuals, who apparently *are not in a position to make it*, who would want to be part of the institution: families where the parents are not married in Church, men and women with a difficult past or present but who struggle on, disoriented and disturbed young people

It is a challenge for Catholic Action's *ecclesial maternity*; accepting everyone and accompanying him on his life's journey with the crosses which he carries on his shoulders.

Everyone can participate *starting with what he has and with what he can do*. *For this, specific people will have to be trained. With this and for this, specific people should pray.*

Sharpen your observation to see *the signs of God evident in realities, especially in expressions of popular religiosity*. From these you can understand men's hearts better and discover the amazing ways in which God acts beyond our concepts.

There is a wisdom in people of good will, in people who earn the daily bread for their children. There are many temptations and a lot of evil but there is also so much wisdom which teaches us a lot. I remember one night, during a pilgrimage in Lujan, I was hearing confessions. There was a 22-23 year old sturdy young man, with long hair, a ring in his nostrils, full of strength, in the queue. He was a skilled worker, the son of a single mother, a part-time housekeeper in various homes. This lady had given a good education to her son. She sent him to a technical school from where he qualified as a skilled worker. This young man found himself in a messy situation and started worrying. One day he spoke to his mother about this and she told him: "Look my son, within a few days, there will be a pilgrimage to Lujan, go and ask our Virgin Mother what to do". This is wisdom. "And you, what did you do?" I asked. And he told me: "I went to the Virgin Mary" – and his eyes were wet because he had cried – "I have gone in front of our Virgin Mother and now I am going to do this and this ...". This is people's wisdom. The mother did not know what her son should do but she had suggested to him where he should go. There is a lot of wisdom in our people, a lot of wisdom which we should assimilate.

Sharpen your sight so as to see the Signs of God in real situations.

Project – An out-going Catholic Action – Passion for Christ, passion for our people

Yesterday we read the Gospel of Mark, and what does Jesus say? "Go, open out ... sometimes we imagine that the Church is ours, pretty closed. In the Apocalypse Jesus says: " I am standing at the door, knocking ... and if someone opens the door, I will come in to share a meal! ..." He asks to enter in our heart. Jesus knocks at the door from the inside so that we may let him go out. Be an outgoing CA, leading out towards the street, and I insist, this is not proselytism.

Passion for Christ, passion for our people

You have proposed an out-going Catholic Action and this is good because this takes you to the core of your being. An exit means an opening, generosity, facing reality beyond the four walls of the institution and of the parishes. This means *renouncing to excessive control and to programming results*. This freedom is a fruit of the Holy Spirit which helps you grow.

Catholic Action's evangelising project should follow these steps: *lead, that is take the initiative, participate, accompany, imbue and celebrate*. A step forward in our outreach is to be concrete and to proceed together. This is already an achievement to celebrate. Pass on the joy of your faith, the joy you feel when evangelising, in all opportune and not so opportune occasions.

Do not fall into the temptation of excessive *structuring*. Be enterprising, you are not more faithful to the Church if, at every step, you expect to be told what to do.

Please do not be of those who do not do anything before they ask for permission or because they do not find whom to ask. At times it is better to ask for pardon afterwards than to ask for permission before, but act ...

Encourage your members to appreciate the casual one to one missionary work or that initiated by the community.

And please, this serious theme preoccupies me: do not clericalise lay people!

The Holy Spirit's mission is in the first sacrament we all receive as lay people. Then the Spirit may call us in other ways. Do not clericalise lay people. It is a great temptation.

Many times it happened to me (at least three times in my diocese): a parish priest comes to me and says that he has a phenomenal lay person who does this and that and I tell him: "how good, what a good organiser he is!" and he tells me "what do think about making him a deacon?" "Do not give him a vocation. Leave it to the Holy Spirit. Do not clericalise"...

Baptism is the first step. But in its origin the Church made a very beautiful distinction.

When the Hellenists complained with the apostles because their widows and orphans were not cared for, the apostles organised a small council and during this meeting they came out with the idea of having deacons and so they looked for seven worthy men and they entrusted them with the care of widows, orphans and other material matters. Rome has a distinguished deacon who was the bursar of the diocese, the martyr Lawrence. When Peter justified this choice, he used this phrase: “and to us, to the bishops, prayer and the announcement of the Word”. The main duty of the Bishop is to pray and together with praying he is to announce the Word ... But I am talking to CA lay people. It seems as if I am talking to the daughter-in-law so that the mother-in-law may hear what I say! No

Do not clericalise lay people. Do not let your members’ aspiration be to form part of the parishes’ sanhedrin which surrounds the parish priest but let it be a passion for the kingdom. However do not forget *to present the vocational theme* very seriously - a school of sanctity which basically means discovering one’s own vocation, which is not to be a leader or a churchwarden, but rather, and above all, to be *an evangeliser*.

You should be *meeting places* for the other institutional charisms and movements present in the Church without any fear of the loss of one’s identity. Furthermore, your members should develop into evangelisers, catechists, missionaries and social workers who work to help the Church to keep growing.

Very often it is said that Catholic Action is *the long arm of the hierarchy*. Far from being a prerogative which makes you look down on the others, it is a great responsibility, which implies faithfulness and consistency to what the Church has shown us at all times in history, without expecting to remain anchored to past ways as if they were the only possibilities. Faithfulness to the mission entails this “*good plasticity*” of those who have turned an ear to the people and the other to God.

In the 1937 publication “La Acción Católica a luz de la teología Tomista”, one finds: “Perhaps, should not *Catholic Action* be translated into *Catholic Passion*?”.

This was in 1937, when I was one year old. I ask you, should not CA try harder to convert itself and unceasingly strive to be action, with Catholic Passion?

Catholic passion, the Church's passion is to live the pleasant and comforting joy of evangelising. This is what Catholic Action needs. Thank you.



2nd SESSION

We are mission,
lay people who journey together



Introduction

MATTEO TRUFFELLI*

«No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her efforts. God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of the human community. This people, which God has chosen and called, is the Church» (Evangelii gaudium 113).

I think that this passage from *Evangelii gaudium* represents the best entrance door to introduce the theme of this second working session, dedicated to the meaning and value of our being an association.

In fact, from Pope Francis' emphasis in the Apostolic Exhortation, we can deduce the fundamental reason, which, even today just like one hundred and fifty years ago, urges Catholic Action to see in the associative aspect not simply an organisational, functional feature to enable it to exist but one of its experience's fundamental characteristics and so, a decisive element for the carrying out of its evangelising mission.

It is precisely this awareness which calls its members to be missionary-disciples in everyday life. But this is never to be taken solely as a personal

vocation which calls exclusively to an “I”, but one which appeals to us to be always open to a “we”. This helps us to realise that we are on a journey with others with whom we share our joys and worries, choices and queries, which strives to offer everyone, of every age and condition of life, the possibility to experience a shared way of commitment in the Church and in the world. Catholic Action functions when it plans and carries out common courses or better a common path, it is Church which helps in fostering good relations between persons and for persons, accompanying and supporting them to walk together in the life and in the world.

Therefore, the association is not and should not be looked upon or experienced as a place where we feel satisfied simply by “feeling better among ourselves”, risking to be an elite closed circle and to give excessive importance to the organisational structures rather than to «missionary communion» (*Christifideles laici* 29-32). Therefore, we should look upon it as a space and an opportunity of communitarian discernment, of shared witnessing in the life of the world, as a builder of good ties among persons, family and the whole community and of lay co-responsibility.

A co-responsibility which involves all the people of God. Being an association is thus a sign but also a concrete form of a way of thinking and living as a Church, which is that which the Council has taught us and which Pope Francis insists about: a Church understood as the People of God journeying together; a Church which knows that the task of evangelising is not entrusted to someone or to a few but to a community.

This awareness is translated into Catholic Action even in the care of democratic procedures but above all in the constant promotion of an authentic collaboration between adults, youth and children; between men and women; between persons of different cultures, experiences, sensibility, social and economic conditions; between lay people, pastors and priests; among the different organisational levels of the association: parish, diocesan and national levels. This should be done in a style which, because of its ability to use to advantage the differences and to enhance sharing, we could easily describe as “synodal”.

A style which is of great relevance not only in ecclesial but also in civil spheres especially today in the context of a society which tends to be very fluid and where interpersonal and social ties seem to be corroding, in an ever growing challenging way, the solid foundations of co-existence.

Maybe one could say then, that precisely today, especially at this time of that «individualistic desolation», indicated by Pope Francis as the main obstacle for evangelisation (EG 2), being an association presents an experience which in itself forms, evangelises, promotes fraternal relations and fosters co-responsible participation in the life of the church and the world.

It therefore becomes very important to create a greater awareness and, at the same time, to make it easier for those, who look at the Catholic Action experience in the world, to understand the advantages of being an association. This means knowing how to live a profound life but also knowing how to proclaim the beauty and the significance of being associated laity, who wish to journey together in the Church and in the world, not individually, but together, not in a dispersed way but as a group of people who agree to foster and strengthen the weft of the ties of a larger group of people, just like yeast in dough of the ecclesial and civic community.

We entrust this double task to the reflections and experiences of H. E. Card. Carlos OSORO, Archbishop of Madrid and of Antonio MUÑOZ, National President of the General Catholic Action in Spain.

** National President of Azione Cattolica Italiana*

INTERVENTIONS



H.E. CARD. CARLOS OSORO SIERRA *

CATHOLIC ACTION AND ITS PROJECT

1. *Go back to your roots:*

When I first read the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* I noted in the points 47 and 48 the urgency to re-read what the Second Vatican Council tells us about Catholic Action. Among other things, Pope Francis says: "One of the concrete signs of that opening is to have the temples with the doors open, everywhere ... But, there are other doors that should not be closed either: the doors of participation, because all they can participate in some way in the ecclesial life, everyone can integrate the community ... The doors of the sacraments, which should not be closed for any reason either .. This is especially true ... of the sacrament that is the door: the Baptism. And let's think

Catholic Action is not a relic of the past. In 2004, St. John Paul II said: "The Church needs Catholic Action!" Memory should not be reduced to a nostalgic memory of the past, but should lead us to become aware of a valuable gift that the Holy Spirit has made to the Church, a heritage that, at this dawn of the third millennium, is called to arouse new fruits of holiness and apostolate ". Pope Francis told us in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, as in the new social context, we received a call for the revision and renewal of the parishes, in order to be even closer to the people, to be areas of living communion and participation, and that are completely oriented to the mission. It tells us: "The parish should be an ecclesial presence in the territory, an area for listening to the Word, for the growth of the Christian life, for dialogue, for proclamation, for generous charity, for adoration and for celebration. With all its activities,

the parish should form and encourage its members to be agents of evangelization, because the parish is a community of communities, a sanctuary, where the thirsty will drink to keep walking, and a constant center of missionary sending. (Cf. EG 28) ... And we will never have to forget that, the objective of these participatory processes will not be mainly the ecclesial organization, but the missionary dream of reaching everyone "(cf. EG 31).

2. The place in the Church:

In the Decree of the Second Vatican Council *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, we find the place where the movement started at the end of the s. XIX and driven by the successive Popes. In the Decree we are told about the responsibility of the laity in the mission of evangelization, according to their singular trait of secularity and encourages them to be associated for this mission in close collaboration between priests and bishops, thus publicly manifesting communion what is the Church

And so, the Second Vatican Council presents Catholic Action: 1) as an association, 2) as a vocation and 3) as a ministry. Its project is very well defined, based on the four notes that the Second Vatican Council indicates to Catholic Action, built on four pillars: spirituality, mission, formation and organization. It is a project designed to energize the life of the parish communities, taking as reference the diocese, at the service of the pastoral plan of the same and is aimed at all ages: childhood, youth, adults. And it does so with the four notes given by the Second Vatican Council and that are reflected in the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (cf. No. 20):

First note: apostolic aim: evangelization, sanctification, formation, commitment. **Second Note: secular direction:** promotion of lay leadership in the mission. **Third note: organization:** commitment to the community and associative, communion in the specific framework of the local Church. **Fourth note: linkage with the hierarchy:** cooperation between lay people and pastors as a stable form of work in a common project assumed.

3. To promote communion and mission in the Church with its four constitutive dimensions:

According to the Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, on the missionary action of the Church, it says in n.15: "For the implantation of the church, several ministries are necessary that, raised by divine vocation of the same congregation of the faithful, should be fostered and cultivated by all diligently, among these are the functions of priests, deacons and catechists and Catholic Action ". Can one discern the vocation to Catholic Action? Blessed Paul VI defined the charism "as a living and operative sense of the Church." Romano Guardini in his essay "The sense of church" in the first chapter says: "a religious event of transcendental scope has made its appearance: The Church is born in souls ", these words define very well the charism of Catholic Action, as a living love for the Church that is concretized in love and service to the diocesan Church in all its organisms and especially in the parish. Catholic Action has precisely in the parish its natural space in which to be Church, because it does not uproot the laity of its community, what it does is to articulate and make them contribute their dynamism, maturity, responsibility and leadership of the Diocesan Church in the parish, making it possible to develop two dimensions: the parish as a Eucharistic community and as an evangelizing mission territory, balance and coherence to the relationship diocese-parish, avoids isolations and always gives continuity to pastoral actions, does what Pope Francis invited us to live: "the important thing is not to walk alone, always have the brothers and especially with the guidance of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment "(EG 33).

All this, without confusing apostolic commitment with assumption of intraparrochial tasks. For this error provokes a subtle process of subordination - not far from a certain clerical style - that alters, or at least undervalues, the lavish contribution of the laity as "Church in the world". No wonder the ChL recalls again this secular nature qualified just as "modality" when affirming with force that "the common baptismal dignity assumes in the lay faithful a modality that distinguishes it, without separating it, from the priest, the religious brothers and sisters" (nº15). Therefore, Catholic Action promotes an associated presence in the different fields of public life, to personally and communally witness to the

faith in the Risen Jesus Christ, working in solidarity with all men of good will in favor of a new society, according to God. in which truth, justice, freedom, love and peace reign.

If I had to summarize all the above, I would say that there are four dimensions that are constitutive of Catholic Action:

- 1) The spirituality on which the whole project of Catholic Action rests, (children, youth, adults), common to all the baptized, answer to the call of Jesus, union with him and live the mission that he gives us.
- 2) The mission in Catholic Action is to endorse the apostolic mission of the Diocesan Church in each parish community, found in the Decree *Ad gentes*: for the planting of the Church and for the development of the Christian community several ministries are necessary, that all should favor and cultivate diligently, with the divine vocation raised among the congregation of the faithful, among whom are the functions of priests, deacons and catechists and Catholic Action " (AG 15).
- 3) The formation of a mature laity formed by children, young people and adults capable of evangelizing, in the key of active pedagogy and the pedagogy of action.
- 4) Living in an associative and community key: learning to live what the Lord has put in the Church, as it is the permanent call to be constituted and to live as a missionary community.

** Archbishop of Madrid, Spain*



ANTONIO MUÑOZ VARO *

Catholic Action wants to be updated to transmit the Gospel in our society and to offer the laity of the parishes new channels of participation in their pastoral mission. Definitely, we must be Church to be in the world being Church.

General Catholic Action is parochial

Catholic Action has in the parish its natural space in which to be Church. It does not uproot the laity from their communities, but articulates them by contributing in dynamism, maturity, responsibility and leadership. CA bets to organize the parish laity around groups whose point of convergence is not an specific pastoral function, but small communities that allow sharing the faith, review life with the gaze of God and take the impulse to be salt in the world, ferment in society. From these teams will come people willing to collaborate in the pastoral services needed by the parish and to make present to the Christian community with their life, witness and socio-political commitment within the civil society, individually and collectively. General Catholic Action does not design its own or parallel plans but endorses the Pastoral Plan of the parish and helps it to develop its two dimensions: the parish as an Eucharistic community in which people who recognize themselves as believers participate; and the parish as a territory of evangelizing mission, which allows an explicit convocation of the remote, impoverished or non-believers, to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Catholic Action is diocesan

Mission and evangelization refer above all to the diocesan Church as a whole. The diocese is the Church, the parish is concretion and articulation of the diocese. The parish, therefore, is never a reality for itself, it does not qualify itself, and it is impossible to think it if it is not in communion with the diocesan church. One should not fall into parochial self-sufficiency. It is necessary to value and reinforce the bonds that express the reference to the bishop and the belonging to the diocese.

In this sense, Catholic Action gives consistency, balance and coherence to the diocesan-parish relationship. It helps to connect some parishes with others, it prevents a parish from isolating itself and that pastoral actions are personalized or depend too much on circumstantial circumstances. A mature laity is needed that gives continuity to the pastoral lines marked by the diocese. For this, Catholic Action assumes the diocesan plans as its main guidelines and is called to be representative in the diocese, to have a presence in most of the parishes. With humility and attitude of service, without falling into self-referentiality, without putting acronyms or structures before the articulation of the diocesan laity required; "The important thing is not to walk alone, to always count on the brothers and especially with the guidance of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment". (EG 33)

Catholic Action is missionary

Catholic Action is redefined to try to respond to the challenges of the "New Evangelization". As Pope Francis affirms: "The reform of structures that pastoral conversion requires can only be understood in this sense: to ensure that all of them become more missionary, that the ordinary pastoral in all its instances be more expansive and open, that it places the pastoral agents in constant exit attitude and thus favor the positive response of all those to whom Jesus calls their friendship. As John Paul II said to the Bishops of Oceania, "every renewal within the Church must aim at mission as an objective so as not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion" "(EG, 27). In the new social context, we received a call to the

revision and renewal of the parishes, in order to be even closer to the people, to be spaces of living communion and participation, and to be completely oriented to the mission (cf. EG 28).

A mission that lay people must assume with responsibility and leadership. "Missionary pastoral will be fundamentally a pastoral carried out by laity" (EN 70). Catholic Action, through its processes, educates children, youth and adults to be witnesses of God's love for others. Betting on a methodology that calls for the deep conversion of people and encourages them to engage in the transformation of social reality. Lay people are responsible to make the church present in the world. Catholic Action promotes attitudes of solidarity and assumes as a criterion of transformation the option for the most disadvantaged people

Catholic Action not only encourages lay people to "go out" to evangelize individually by living in the secular life, it also helps to draw community lines for the mission in the parish and diocesan sphere. "The mission renews our communities: dioceses and parishes. The animation of our communities drives the mission: the new evangelization, the missionary evangelization and its commitment in the construction of a new civilization. The evangelization of non-believers in the spanish society, the participation of the members of our communities in the universal mission of the Church, and solidarity with the poor, are a sign and verification of vitality. The awareness of co-responsibility in the mission and participation in the evangelizing action, strengthens the faith of the believers and energizes our communities."

Catholic Action is a lifelong process

The proposal of Catholic Action, putting together in a single reality people of all ages, allows follow a project of integral pastoral. It favors the co-responsibility of everyone, whatever their age and condition. It guarantees a lifelong process, which can begin with the first announcement of the faith and last at the end of the life. An uninterrupted path, which encourages the continuity of the parish groups even when it passes from one stage to another.

Family, work, politics, culture ... are the proper field of evangelization of the laity, whose specific vocation places them in the heart of the world and in the guidance of the most varied temporal tasks (see EN 70). Catholic Action, to live that vocation consistently, is endowed with formative instruments that combine the Word of God, the contents of the catechism and the life itself. An organized, gradual and balanced process that seeks faith-life unity: "In discovering and living one's vocation and mission, the lay faithful must be trained to live that unity with which their very being of members of the Church is marked. the Church and citizens of human society. In its existence there cannot be two parallel lives: on the one hand, the so-called "spiritual" life, with their values and demands; and on the other hand, the so-called "secular" life, that is, family life, work, social relations, political commitment and culture." (ChL 59)

A process that always, arouses, promotes and nurtures communion with Jesus Christ. The purpose is not the mere transmission of a doctrine or an ideological vision of the world, but to seek the encounter with God, to discover him in the actuality, to understand the content of the Christian faith and its implications in all aspects of life.

Set mature people, consistent faith, ecclesial sense and missionary spirit.

** National President of General Catholic Action, Spain*



3rd SESSION

Evangelizers filled with Spirit.

Pedagogy of the CA, school of sanctity



Introduction

OANA TUDUCE*

In Chapter V of the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council has proclaimed the vocation to sanctity of all baptised, called without exception to the Church of Christ. No one is excluded; it speaks about the universal call to sanctity.

Every lay person should be aware of the universal call to sanctity, which is the principal aim of each baptised person. With Baptism, each one of us has been given a share in Christ's priesthood and in His prophetic and regal mission. The "theological place" where lay people can become saints is their daily life, where they live and testify the Gospel: in their family, in their place of work, in society, in their friendly relations. "All Christ's faithful whatever be the conditions, duties and circumstances of their life – and and through all these, will daily increase in sanctify." (LG n. 41/7).

Fifty years ago, the servant of God Giorgio La Pira wrote: "In our century, sanctity will have this characteristic: it will be a laity's sanctity. In the streets, in factories, in parliament, in university halls we come across those who within fifty years may be on the altar." It is worth noting that John Paul II has raised to the glory of the altars 1820 saints and blessed and, among these, there are 522 lay persons (248 saints and 274 blessed). Behind each number

we find a woman or a man, a young woman or man who with their whole life have answered “Yes” to the Lord’s call “Follow me”.

Benedict XVI said: “The history of the Church is a continuous history of sanctity, animated by the unique Love which has God as its source”. Also, Catholic Action has always been a school of sanctity, its pedagogy is based on sanctity and, right from its beginning, its programme has been identified by three words “Prayer, Action, Sacrifice.”

Catholic Action is a beautiful story of sanctity. In his homily of the 5th September in Loreto, Pope John II, in front of more than 300,000 members from all Catholic Action Associations in the world, made this declaration: “*sanctity is the greatest gift which you can give to the world*”.

A first step in sanctity’s pedagogy is to help everyone to understand that sanctity is possible and is compatible with every condition in life. The example set by the Catholic Action saints tells us that even today we do not have to be geniuses to become saints, but sanctity is the “high standard of ordinary Christian living” as John Paul II said in *Novo Millenium Ineunte*. By belonging to Catholic Action, one develops a desire to aim towards sanctity through the formation programmes which help us to discover our specific vocation to sanctity. For this reason, Catholic Action offers its members formative itineraries at all levels: children, young people and adults.

The saints, blessed, venerable and the servants of God described in the book *Azione Cattolica Scuola di Santità* are common Christians who, in their concrete situations, have lived the Gospel to the full. These, together with thousands of members of so many Catholic Associations in the world, reflect this beautiful image: “The eyes of faith behold a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people, both women and men, busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world’s great personages but nonetheless looked upon in love by the Father, untiring labourers who work in the Lord’s vineyard. Confident and steadfast through the power of God’s grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history” (CFL n.17).

* *Representative Catholic Action, Romania*

TESTIMONIES



LEI LEI WIN*
Myanmar

I come from Taunggyi Archdiocese in Myanmar. I live in Taunggyi , the southern part of Myanmar . I'm staying together with my father, my mother died last year.

When I was young, I want to find more experience out of my home.

My father is Buddhist and My mother is Catholic. My father did not forbid to go to the church. So, my reason was to study catechism in the church, everyday and finding different thing out of my home. I became happy to study in catechism class and willing to participate their activities more and more. When I was eleven year old , I became a member of Holy Childhood Association and through youth and lay association. I have a BA in Philosophy and my work is among the children as a teacher at Diocesan Preschool.

In CA I found and I find a daily experience to stay in community and this aspect has influenced my life and my choice in my life . Catholic Action teach me to be a responsible person, to be a leader as lay person with the other lay people, and collaborate with the priests and my Bishop. I'm still walking in the leading of Catholic Action , as a leader and a follower. In my Archdiocese from 1998 , I participates in Youth Association, Family Commission, Education Commission and now Catholic Action as Treasurer.

We hope to build an environmental common ground and thus relayed to it's neighbour, on and on. We may lead peace and happiness. It's called mission, CA mission.

The participation is a very important characteristic of CA, I tell you about 2 important meeting of Inter-Diocesan Catholic Action in these first months 2017

The Inter-Diocesan Catholic Action Fellowship Gathering was held in Taunggyi Archdiocese on February, 14-16, 2017. Four Dioceses participated in a gathering; there are Taunggyi Archdiocese, Pekhon Diocese, Loikaw Diocese and Taungngu Diocese. The delegates are from Catholic Action Members.

Every day, We Started with the Holy Mass for all of Catholic Action Members and Spiritual Instruction by Archbishop Bacilio Athai, with our priest assistants Rev, Father Fedele Tin Pe, Rev. Father Anecito Dereh and Rev. Father Celso Ba Shwe. They are participating in the congress. At night, we cerebrates one hour adoration in the opening day.

We presented Catholic Action activities from each diocese sharing our experience with discussion among the participants; we worked about the planning of Catholic Action. At our Gathering meeting, we elected a committee of “Inter-Diocesan Catholic Action (IDCA)”. The committee members were included one priest and two Catholic Action members of the different dioceses.

The second meeting, Inter-Diocesan Catholic Action was held on April 5-6, 2017 at Loikaw Diocese. We are preparing for 2017 – 2020 working plan to be developing Catholic Action and form a Board committee including five dioceses. After last session, with a Spiritual talk by Archbishop Basilio Athai and Bishop Steven., we draw IDCA Vision, Mission and Value and we cerebrated a Holy Mass. I was elected as a Secretary of IDCA.

Thank you.

** Responsible of the Catholic Action, Taunggyi Archdiocese*



THÉRÈSE NDOUR DIOP *

Senegal

By profession I am an economist, now in retirement. I am married and mother of two children.

After a childhood spent as an «âme vaillante» (valiant soul), in college in 1970, I joined the JEC (Young Catholic Students Association). As an active member, I went up the ladder in JEC and in 1978 I was part of the National Team as Treasurer and then I was national executive from 1980 till 1982 (the year when I finished my University studies).

Later, I joined “Présence Chrétienne” (Christian Presence), an association of Catholic executives committed to testifying the values of the Gospel in political-economical spheres. I was responsible for the economic section, to help the faithful to fight against poverty and to support their Church through the creation of twinned parishes. This started in 1995.

At this time, when the National Council for the Laity (CNL) was set up in 2008, I was elected General Secretary and then Vice-President from 2015. The CNL is a coordinating body of all Catholic Action Movements, Apostolic Movements and other Catholic Associations at national level.

After the setting up of CNL in various countries, in 2008, the Bishops of the Regional Conference of the States of West Africa (CERAO) decided to set up the Regional Council of the Laity for West Africa (CRLAO) for the 14 countries which make up the CEDEAO. I was elected General Secretary of this group and held this post until November 2016.

My commitment in Catholic Action Movements transformed my life: there I learnt to integrate myself in all environments, to develop a critical spirit in constructive analysis, to listen to and accept the other in his diversity of thought and of being: thus in cultivating a spirit of fraternity and openness.

With the method “SEE, JUDGE and ACT”, I have learnt to go deeply into things, to go all the way. This was very important for me in my professional life.

This commitment has greatly nourished and fortified my catholic faith.

We live in a country where the majority are Muslims and many young people become apostates when they marry or for professional reasons: this means that our Senegalese youth live in a hostile environment where the temptations are great.

This is why I urge them to engaged themselves in the structures of the Church which offers a healthy environment and a solid formation.

Catholic Action is a school where one can form oneself and be equipped to go out in mission in the society, where every movement has a specific mission: to transform one's environment through witness, action and service. Catholic Action Movements form us for this evangelising mission.

What I propose – and which is also my dream – is that every Christian joins Catholic Action, whatever his age, especially in our countries where the majority are Muslims and where there is the need to be strong and formed to be “Salt and Light” in a society going through a crisis of values and which is becoming more and more hostile to the Church.

** Vice President of CNL Senegal*



FR. MARCELO DE LEÓN*
Uruguay

I was born in a Christian family and was baptised when I was two months old. My family accompanied me in my journey of faith and my catechises was important for me as it introduced me to communitarian and sacramental life. At the age of 16 I started reflecting on my vocation and

after a long “struggle” the Lord won and when I was 23 I entered the Seminary.

On the 12th December 2014, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I was ordained priest and assigned to the Diocese of Canelones, Uruguay.

The year after, when I was trying to answer to the needs of the juvenile reality of our diocese, I came across Catholic Action. We started communicating and approaching people in order to establish CA in our diocesan community. At that time, Canelones was the only diocese in all Uruguay where Catholic Action existed.

Love for the Church, the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary, the desire to be saints and to live according to the Gospel: these elements, which Catholic Action promotes, were the force which drove me to choose to say ‘Yes’ to God. CA is the place where I can live my vocation with lay people in my parish and in my diocese. This is because Catholic Action is the Church. And it is to the Church that I want to offer my service.

During my time as Assistant I had the fortune to deepen my diocesan call as I had the opportunity to accompany different groups and parish realities. I went through this experience with a strong desire for unity in faith. I thank our Bishop Msgr. Sanguinetti for being always there for me and for all of us and for his constant support, as well as for having made CA a fundamental option for all the diocese.

Undoubtedly, CA is a strong experience of being Church. It enhances a process which strengthens one’s faith and roots him in a diocesan and parish life. In CA, one’s formation, life of prayer and zeal for action, which are ways of being a Christian on a journey of sanctity, grow. These three pillars help one to live his lay vocation in a solid and mature way.

CA fosters unity between faith and daily life, which is so important for everybody, especially in social realities where laicism is part and parcel of our lives, in the daily life of every person and family. It fosters an “active” sacramental life, in harmony with the great love that as Catholics we are called to live.

CA is mission. It lives with joy, the mandate which Christ gave to the Church, “Go and make disciples of all nations”. It is a community moved and guided by the Holy Spirit and is constantly attentive to its pastors’ voice and especially to that of the Pope.

It is a community which wants to make its greatest treasure, Jesus Christ, known. This is not so easy and there could be difficulties and challenges, including the call for individual and associative conversion. The love for God is what drives CA and it is its reason for being.

In a certain way I have already explained the reasons why we must propose the journey in AC, but I believe that it is important to emphasize that CA is first and foremost a gift from God to the Church.

** Priest in charge of CA promotion (Canelones Diocese)*



SISTER ROSARIA CARPENTIERI *
Italy

Being an only child, at the age of six my parents inserted me in the parish community of my place in Scafati (SA), diocese of Nola and enrolled me as an ACR (Children’s CA) member. I never left the Association until 2008 when I entered the convent. During all those years my ecclesial awareness, my desire for an authentic Christian journey and my belonging to the parish, diocesan and associative community have matured.

My vocation was born in CA. It was thanks to my journey in CA that I understood what vocation the Lord was calling me to follow. As Carlo Carretto wrote: CA was the small Church which helped me to understand the big Church. CA has taken me by hand, it has nurtured me with the Word, it has given me friendship, taught me how to struggle, led me to get to know Christ, introduced me actively in an active reality. It has been the place where my personal relations with Christ who called me to look beyond where I could discern and where my ‘Yes’ matured.

The journey which I undertook helped me to make the fundamental option of my life: the primacy of the Lord. I integrated my faith with my

daily life so much so that they became inseparable. CA helped my desire to give my life or better to give back my life to the Lord mature. The aspect which CA most refined in me is my belonging to the Church which is mother and teacher.

Actually, in the place where I live, CA is not a very active reality but in other places there was beautiful collaboration between CA young people and adults and religious persons and discussions between lay and consecrated persons as to how they could be more faithful to their proper vocation in their state of life. I can think of the collaboration with the diocesan youth pastoral team, of my participation in the school camps or the WYD, of the collaboration with youth and adolescent groups in the parish.

There is an expression which is very dear to me. This is about a Youth Project which defines CA youth groups as *a fraternity on a mission* where the moments of formation and service are compared to the movements of the heart: systolic and diastolic. The time of contraction is for formation and soon, nearly contemporarily, the time of expansion is for the mission. Mission in daily witnessing but also “*missione ad gentes*”. CA is mission as it calls for witnessing in daily life being like leaven in the dough.

CA is a school and a help for an authentic testimony of faith, which leads or should lead towards an authentic Christianity in society and towards an adult laity in the Church. But also because first and foremost it is a training place for vocations and a means of discernment.

** Sister (Francescane Alcantarine)*



OANA TUDUCE

As we have seen and heard from the testimonies of our guests, each one of them sanctifies himself in his daily life. His mission is to put the formation received in CA into practice.

I, too, would like to share with you my experience in CA, which has supported me in my associative and professional commitment.

I was born in Romania, at the time of the communist regime when no one spoke about religion. My father was orthodox, my mother was a byzantine rite catholic (Greek-catholic), but I never heard mention of words like “Catholicism”, “Catholic Church” etc. in our home. So much so, that with the change of the regime in 1989, I was an adolescent with no spiritual formation. The only religious practice I knew of was that of lighting candles on Christmas day, Easter and sometimes on the feast of Saint John the Baptist (my father’s name was John).

It was in 1990 when I made great discoveries about my religious identity. To my surprise, I discovered that my mother’s entire family (my maternal grandparents and great grandparents) had always been byzantine rite Catholics. They were not only practising Catholics but were important figures in their parish community. They experienced the “Silent Church”, no words, only deeds. Then I understood why, when every summer I used to spend my holidays with my grandparents, my grandfather used to hand me an old prayer book (kept in their house with great secrecy) and showed me the prayers which I had to learn that summer. In my opinion “these would never be of any use to me” but he used to reply “that I should learn them just the same and I am not to bother about this”. In 1990, when I attended my first Catholic Mass in the Byzantine rite, I knew most of the prayers. My grandfather had been my first catechist.

In 1990, the Byzantine rite Catholic community of Oradea, resumed with that which had been interrupted as from 1948. Together with the elderly Bishop Msgr. Vasile Hossu a number of adults started reorganising lay associations by retracing byzantine rite Catholics, officially very few... They started from AGRU, which before 1948 gathered together the elite, not only of the Byzantine rite Catholic Church but also that of the Romanian society.

I was “fished” as well to be part of a group of young people who were guided by the Bishop. The group was called ASTRU, the CA youth group. A priest used to travel 150 km every Saturday to come to catechize this group. I had my first Holy Communion at the age of 18, together with my

mother who was 46. I then discovered the Byzantine rite Catholic Church and got to know about the Bishops who were martyred in communist prisons; in short I started building my religious identity.

As from 1999, thanks to the many experiences I had, at national, European and international level, which all started during the first formation meeting for young people from Eastern Europe organised by IFCA, I started discovering CA with all its diversities. In 2005, we discovered the Latin rite CA in Iasi and together we set up a national CA group made up of lay people and priest assistants from the two rites, Latin and Byzantine. It was a unique structure for countries in Eastern Europe where the two rites coexist. I was president of this group for 8 years.

CA has offered me moral, human and spiritual support in my profession. I felt this when I had to defend the case of a mentally disabled girl, Bella, who was abandoned at birth and who was one of my pupils in a Special school where I taught. Bella lived in a family unit for the Protection of Children where she was maltreated by those who ran the house. I had been reporting the maltreatment which the girl was going through, together with 11 other inmates, for 9 years. After 9 years, those who abused of these children were punished and the girl was sent to a hospice where her human dignity was not respected. So she lived in our house for two years until we could find a place for her where she could live with dignity. Now she lives in a Centre where she is treated well.

This was perhaps the most difficult experience in my life and I would not have been able to go through it and solve it without the prayers of my CA friends who have sustained me. CA gives me the courage to dedicate myself to the service of abandoned and disabled children with whom I work every day. In spite of all the difficulties, I try to see Christ in each one of them.



4th SESSION

With everyone and for everyone



Introduction

RAFAEL ÀNGEL CORSO*

“With everyone and for everyone” is not a slogan, nor is it a demagogic statement which tries to please easily and freely. It is a reality which finds its roots in profound convictions, in the most beautiful revelations of our faith.

For the man of faith, life is a gift and the whole of creation reveals the extraordinary mystery of God’s love. Man, “in the image and likeness of God”, desirous of happiness and transcendence and at the same time conscious of his caducity, develops his existence as a constant search for saziety and fullness. With the words of Saint Augustine we can say that “*man created by the hands of God cannot find rest until he does not find God again*” (original text, *Confessions 1,1,1: You made us for you, o Lord, and our heart cannot find rest until it rests in you.*)

This conviction leads us to understand the urgent necessity for man to meet God’s mercy; man in his totality and all men cry from the depth of their hearts to express this necessity.

Consciously or not, disordinately or not, everyone searches for the “Living Water” which quenches our thirst and gives meaning to our life.

We read in EG, 112: *“The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to meet so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him.”*

From this perspective, the evangelising mission, Jesus’ Good News, which the Father’s loving mercy reveals to us, assumes a radical dimension; that of discovering ourselves as God’s gift, anxious to answer to this vocation as something which we cannot renounce. This vital reply sets us on a journey which is not solitary, but communitarian as a family, as the People of God which journeys in history and makes history.

In EG 113, Pope Francis says: *“The salvation, which God has wrought and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. God has found a way to unite himself to every human being in every age.”*

Proclaiming Christ to all men, on every occasion, in every place, [...] territory and all social spheres, geographical and existential peripheries, [...] through personal guidance and physical proximity, [...] and enlightening the criterion for discernment and for judging one’s actions. Reality is showing us the need to rediscover the meaning and fullness of life in the good news of the Gospel of Jesus and in the realization of his Kingdom.

This is the mission, which all the members of the people of God and all men of good will, share, [...] men of all places and ages. This is a task which urges us to try to find what unites us rather than that which divides us, thus living a missionary communion, creating space for dialogue, collaborating with others, strengthening interreligious links and social peace, contributing towards the common good and striving for integral development. We thus recreate peoples’ cultures to heal the wounds caused by war, terrorism, religious persecution, human trafficking, slavery, injustice, inequalities, forced migration, the lack of access to drinking water and to dignified housing, dependencies, hedonistic consumerism, indifference and contempt, the abandonment of those who suffer, the

ecological denaturalization and the destruction of creation and many other evils which develop in the human being like weeds and which cause pain, suffering and multiple variations of sin.

This process of depersonalisation requires a change in the paradigm of human development: we need to accept and spread the Good News of Jesus, the joy of the Gospel. This is the opportune time, the time of the Church's mission, of Catholic Action's mission, [...] It is the time to live the Gospel of life, which, while giving life, helps us to overcome the barrier between the present and that which is possible. It is the time for accompanying and being close to fellow men, the time for discernment and for putting ourselves at the service of the enormous human capital without exclusions, with everyone and for everyone!

There are ways of discernment for our times which Pope Francis indicated to us with great clarity both in *Evangelii Gaudium*, in *Laudato Si* and in *Amoris Laetitia*. As Catholic Action, we should confirm these by adopting them in our commitments.

We trustfully entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ, the Lord of history and, for the love of God and men, we consecrate ourselves to Him; in communion for a better future which realizes the will of the Father from whom we come and to Him we will return!

May Mary, the Star of Evangelisation, sustain the efforts of the International Forum of Catholic Action in this marvelous mission.

** National President Catholic Action Argentina*

INTERVENTIONS



THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

SANDRO CALVANI *

1. There is only one world and one humanity

From this distant point of view, the Earth may not seem of particular interest. But for us it is different. Look again at that dot. It is here. It is home. We are here.

On that dot one finds all those we love,
all those we know,
all those we have heard about,
each of the 108 billion human beings who were to date,
who lived on this dot.

All our joys and sorrows, the many religions,
the so self-confident ideologies and economic beliefs,
every human being, hunter and explorer,
every hero and coward, every saviour and destroyer of civilization,
every king and poor man, every young couple in love,
every mother and father,
every child who hopes to become an inventor and explorer,
every master of great philosophies and every corrupt politician,
every preacher of morality, every "superstar",
every "supreme commander",
every saint and sinner of the human species lived there,
on a tiny speck of dust
suspended in a ray of sunshine.
The Earth is a very small scenario
in a vast cosmic arena.

Think of the endless cruelty
inflicted by the inhabitants of one angle of this pixel
on the inhabitants - hardly distinguishable - of some other angle.

How frequently misunderstandings arise,
how eager people are to kill one another,
how passionate their hatred is.

Think of the rivers of blood
spilt by all those generals and emperors,
so that, in glory and triumph,
they can become the monetary masters
of a fraction of a dot.

Our ostentation, our imaginary self-esteem,
the illusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe,
are challenged by this dot of pale light.

Our planet is a solitary grain
in the big, enveloping cosmic darkness.
In our darkness, in all this vastness,
there is no indication
that we can get help from somewhere else
to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only known world that can host life.

There is no other place, at least in the near future, where our species can
migrate.

Visit? Yes. Colonize? Not yet.

Whether we like it or not, for now the Earth is where we play our cards.

It has been said that astronomy is an experience
that arouses humility and forms character.

There is perhaps no better demonstration
of the madness of human vanities
than this image of our tiny world
taken from six billion kilometers.

For me, this photo underlines our responsibility to deal with each other more compassionately and to preserve and protect the only home we have ever known.

Have we maybe forgotten our oldest and most experienced survival strategy?

The only one that has always worked,
that is, being responsible for the present
and looking especially at the future.

As a human family
we must choose whether to be selfish and short-sighted,
or become a collaborative humanity,
compassionate and visionary.

And we are not just playing with the future of the human family. 30 million other animal species live with us.

They are all without passports

and cannot vote or open their mouths at world climate change summits.

Animals, all non-human creatures on Earth, have never even made a tweet. They are all entrusted to human responsibility¹.

A quick look at the world reveals some symptomatic facts:

2. The number of refugees in the world has increased.

At the beginning of 2016, 65 million people were forcibly driven from their homes. These were 60 million in 2015. More than 21 million were classified as refugees. Governments and public opinion do not understand the complexity or the magnitude of this phenomenon which will remain with us and will grow for the next 20 or 30 years.

3. The global climate change agreement entered into force.

The treaty negotiated in Paris in 2015 was ratified in 2016 by 118 of the 194 countries which have signed new commitments to combat global warming. One of the main objectives of the agreement is to promote the transition to low-carbon energy.

No country in the world can backtrack at this point.

¹ From Carl Sagan "The Pale Blue Dot"

4. Global trade has slowed down.

In 2016, world trade registered the weakest growth since the start of the financial crisis in almost all continents.

Asia has made exceptions while maintaining the primacy of economic growth, with several large countries growing at rates around 7% or 8% per year.

5. We are all online.

More and more people are connected with mobile phones; for the first time more people have access to a mobile phone than to electricity or clean water.

Soon it will also be so for access to internet.

6. One third of humanity is less than twenty years old.

In about 40 African countries, young people are over 50%. These are less than 20% in the 30 most developed countries. At the same time in some countries the number of elderly people is always growing. Italy is the third Country in the world where the majority of the population is old; yet social assistance and resources, which are already inadequate, are always on the decrease. The trend risks making the problem irreversible and losing once again another economic opportunity.

7. We need 600 million jobs over the next 10 years.

A third of the 1.8 billion young people around the world are neither employed nor students. 21 million people are victims of forced labour in slavery.

8. One person out of every three does not have access to hygienic services.

2.5 billion people do not have access to decent sanitation and almost a billion defecate outdoors.

This is the most impressive and scandalous datum of all diseases which kill innocent children all over the world.

9. Most of the world's poorest people live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, but extreme poverty is in decline all over the world. Instead, extreme

inequality is on the increase. In 2016, the eight richest people in the world have accumulated more wealth than the poorest half of the world as a whole.

10. By 2030, two-thirds of humanity will live in cities.

Each of the 12 major urban areas in the world have *more than 15 million inhabitants. Asia, Delhi, Shanghai and Beijing have tripled their population in 25 years.*

Today, more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and cities are responsible for over 80% of world GDP.

11. Two billion people abuse substances.

Tobacco smoking has increased in over 20 countries, mostly by those with low and middle income. For example, in Indonesia, in 2016, there were over 70 million smokers, 30% more than in 2015. Tobacco kills 6 million people a year, one person every six seconds. 230 million people abuse illicit drugs and many more abuse drugs. 2 billion people abuse alcohol, which directly causes 100,000 deaths a year and millions of innocent deaths. In general, depression and unhappiness, which are the causes of tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, is growing in a large number of countries.

12. A record number of economies are changing course.

In 2016, 137 nations achieved 283 economic reforms, which is 20% more than in 2015. 54 of the poorest countries have achieved 113 radical economic reforms. Some nations are moving towards a circular economy, a sharing economy and are abandoning unregulated capitalism. Strangely enough, some rich countries are in serious economic crisis but have become stubborn conservatives and say no to any reform.

13. International solidarity has reached record levels.

Over 60 governments, both in the North and in the South of the world, help other developing countries. For the first time, official development assistance has exceeded 130 billion dollars, representing an increase of 6.9% compared to 2015. The aid to refugees has doubled from 6 to 12 billion, even if this is only 1.7% of total international aid.

14. There is more and more misunderstood complexity.

As globalization enters into every detail of every individual's life, the complexity of national and international politics increases every minute. Unfortunately, populist / superficial responses are on the increase, which, consciously or out of ignorance, pretend that solutions are simple and do not require any specialized competence, and that honesty and good will suffice. While specialized professional approaches in every human activity are increasingly expected, many accept or want politics to be the only space where anyone can have his say and govern even without knowing anything.

So, 2016 has not been an annus horribilis. The reality is that in 2017, lights and shades abound. 2017 presents us with satisfactions as well as with challenges which need to be faced with urgency.

The world is as hungry as ever for social change and for effective economic innovation. The great minds and big hearts, committed to a future of justice and progress towards sustainable development with widespread happiness, can make a big difference to a needy humanity.

The most important lesson I learned in my international civil service for 35 years in 135 countries around the world is that all the children of the world smile in the same language: this is the language of HOPE.

** Senior adviser, Mae Fah Luang Foundation
under Royal Patronage, Bangkok, Thailand*



**GOD'S INSTRUMENTS FOR THE LIBERATION
AND THE PROMOTION OF THE POOR**

MICHEL ROY *

I would like to thank you for inviting Caritas Internationalis to participate in this important event. Among other missions, the Caritas network works to awaken consciousness, animate Christian communities and invite everyone to get involved in this mission at global and local level.

This network finds you, Catholic Action members, everywhere. Our mission complements and interacts with yours so that we both bear witness to the love of God for men and women of our time, putting at the centre those who suffer. Because it is there that we find God. It is not uncommon that Caritas activists find their inspiration because they belong to a Catholic Action team.

My contribution revolves around three questions:

1. We are the Lord's instruments for the liberation of the slaves of our times.
2. We are the Lord's instruments for the promotion of the poor, the marginalized and the excluded, whatever the cause; for their holistic development, so they can regain their dignity, wounded by poverty and violence.
3. With the poor, we can transform society.

The liberation from the slavery of our times

It is enough for you to go out and look around, leaving others to enjoy their comfort and to be overcome by indifference and fear. Immediately you see how inhuman our world is and how it undervalues the human person. This is so in Rome as well as in the places you come from.

The contradictions of the world today are evident particularly in outlying districts, in the peripheries of large cities where the impact of the crisis is more dramatic and where, the contrast between the wealth of some and the increasing poverty of so many others, is most obvious. There, the crisis assumes the "human" traits of the faces and the stories of so many people, and the "inhuman ones" of those whose life's condition is always becoming more difficult and precarious, in a context where inequalities are on the increase. The fact that something is not going well, in this neo-liberal economic system, is clearly demonstrated by the growing number of impoverished individuals, families and communities followed daily by Caritas workers and teams. This is evident in the struggles of those who survive the daily problems, of those who flee from interminable conflicts or look for a decent income and the recovery of dignity after having lost their job and often their active citizenship and all their relations.

The cry of the poor people of our and all times is the desire and hope to be able to free themselves from the "slavery" which oppresses them, from the perverse dynamics of a development which, paradoxically, while creating wealth for some, digs trenches, impoverishes, dehumanizes and presents a gloomy life to many others. It is also the cry of Mother Earth which groans under the blind exploitation of resources, the loss of biodiversity and the disruption of its equilibrium. In the "common house" which Pope Francis often speaks about everything is interrelated.

«The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest"»¹. «A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.»². This is why Pope Francis invites us to continue to go towards the peripheries of the world and to the existential outskirts of the poor, «the most serious and profound work is carried out from the peripheries to the centre»³.

It is not by chance that God gave birth to his Son on the "outskirts" of the Empire, in a provincial town, and rather unknown place. It is not by chance that he chose as Mother Mary, a "lay" woman, without any titles and who was not a descendant of David. In the *Magnificat* Mary rejoices about that which God has done in her humble life and for what he did for all nations through her, especially for the poor and the oppressed. The *Magnificat* is a great hymn of the poor, of authentic and complete poverty. One can notice the seven verbs in "*crescendo*": God explains the strength of his arm, disperses the proud, he pulls down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. He fills the hungry, sends the rich away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy. These are all verbs that show a reversal of the situation and the *status quo*. God interrupts history, and turns our criteria upside down: he chooses and continues to choose that which has no value for us.

Luke, in particular, stressed the special attention which Jesus gave to the poor and the humble. In Capernaum in the synagogue, Jesus gets up and, opening the book, reads the passage from the prophet Isaiah (61,1-2a 58,6): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and to restore sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord"». On the way of the Lord there are the humble and the marginalized who were the first to listen and welcome the good news of the Kingdom and to recognize Jesus as the one who heals and frees from evil. The attitude of the people of Capernaum was to reject the teachings of Jesus. This is not so different from what is happening in certain parts of the world today, sometimes even in our ecclesial communities, when it comes to the exodus of refugees, migrants and the homeless who seek refuge in our cities.

«The scenario of poverty can extend indefinitely if, in addition to traditional forms, we think of its new patterns. These latter often affect financially affluent sectors and groups which are nevertheless threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment, by marginalization or social discrimination». (John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50). Yes, our secularized world is very often inhuman. The traditional safety nets are no longer there.

The promotion of the poor

So, what does committing ourselves together for the liberation and promotion of the poor mean to us today? What was the approach of Jesus? He begins his meeting with the poor by making them come out of their anonymity: there are no longer numbers but faces and concrete stories. Jesus is often upset when faced with their suffering and gets involved in their cause. Any violence, any injustice against them becomes violence against God. That is why Jesus frees them from the burdens that oppress them and focuses his attention on them. He establishes communion with them, a network of friendship. He identifies himself with them: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat." With Jesus, the humble and the poor become actors and disciples and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel. It is therefore from the poor and with the poor that Jesus changes the paradigms of the world of his time and ours, it is with them that he revolutionizes the way of thinking, human relations and the established order, so as to realize, already on this earth, a kingdom of justice and love. And he himself "the stone rejected by the builders" becomes the cornerstone, the foundation of human life, of the life of humanity

John Paul II writes: «If the Church of the poor is the Church which renounces to its security and to privileges so that it may take care of people, we must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this approach be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom»⁴.

«First and foremost - says Pope Francis - we can educate humanity, to recognize the humanity of every person who is in need of everything [...] by putting into effect the culture of encounter and sharing»⁵.

We must be aware of the sufferings of the poor, must know how to listen to their cry for justice and respond to them with all our forces working together to eradicate the structural causes of injustice and to restore respect for the rights of man.

For this, Pope Francis, in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* invites us to be "an out-going Church," a "mother" community which knows how to go out towards the physical and existential peripheries so as "[...] to draw near to

the new forms of poverty and fragility in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ [...]»⁶.

By 2030 it is expected that approximately 60% of the world population will be urban. The problems posed by this change are enormous: food supply, reduction or pollution of water resources, the dramatic problems of lack of work and the breaking of family ties, of human relations and of the networks of solidarity. In the outskirts, where the homeless and immigrants often live, stories, cultures and different religions converge. And the «culture of waste» causes terrible frustration which threatens to undermine the social fabric

The large urban suburbs and the existential peripheries present a challenge to religions and Churches but also a challenge to public authorities and to civil society. Here is the future, here we are called to reweave the human and communitarian fabric to promote a culture based on the values of justice and solidarity, to develop educational programmes and to work on social promotion which can transform the new forms of slavery and marginalization. "Make me visible!" urges the ongoing Spanish Caritas campaign which aims at giving back a home and dignity to the ever growing number of homeless people who haunt the Spanish cities.

With the poor we can transform society

There is a great evangelizing work which can and must go from the periphery towards the centre. It is the poor themselves who teach us how to cope with the contradictions of our world - because they have experienced them and are experiencing them - and it is they who show us the way towards a more human, fraternal and supportive development.

«This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know Christ's suffering. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which

God wishes to share with us through them»⁷.

Caritas can testify that the force which the poor, animated and organized as an active community, can be deployed to transform their conditions of life and their society. In South India, I met a group of women from the lowest class in India, and without caste, who had understood that their future and that of their children and their communities depended on their commitment and their collective actions to transform their environment: improve their daily lives but especially raise their heads and refuse the institutionalised discrimination of the castes and demand their rights. I have learnt from them that just one tick in heads and in mentality is enough to trigger social transformation which will give way and space to the poor to speak and which will permit them to build a more just and fraternal society, founded no longer on the economy but on people.

Finally I would like to share with you the next Caritas Internationalis campaign on the issue of migrants which will begin in September. The objective is to involve all the ecclesial realities - starting from parishes, movements like yours – as well as the other Christian Churches and other religious communities, in a common effort to meet and welcome refugees and migrants and share in their joys and sufferings, sustain their expectations and hopes through our pastoral, political, economic and social plans at all levels, from local to global levels. Wherever you are, join in this effort, which is so necessary today, so as to free, promote and share in the journey of our brothers and sisters who are on their way in search of a better life.

Thank you.

** Caritas Internationalis General Secretary*

1. Francis, *Laudato Si'. Encyclical letter on the care of the common home*, n. 48.
2. *Idem*, n. 49.
3. *Intervention by the Holy Father during the meeting on «climatic change and modern slavery: a commitment of the cities with trade unions.*, Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, 21 July 2015, *Osservatore Romano*, 23 July 2015, p. 8.
4. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2001, n. 50
5. Francis, Audience 3 October 2015
6. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n. 210
7. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198



FOR A CULTURE OF NON-VIOLENCE AND PEACE

REV. SALVATORE NICITERETSE *

The culture of non-violence, peace and reconciliation in Burundi and in some countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Preliminaries

Conflict can be defined as a process which begins when a person or a group of persons feel, perceive or think that another person or another group of persons negatively affect or will negatively affect their own interests (material, physical, political, psychological, spiritual...). Violence instead consists of actions, words, attitudes, structures and systems which cause physical, psychological, social, environmental damages etc. or prevent people to reach their full human potentialities. We are living both these situations today in Burundi, as well as in several other countries in Africa.

In sub-saharian Africa, some countries have undergone and are still undergoing conflicts which have caused nameless consequences of violence, insecurity, instability and political disputes, serious human rights violations, not to mention the problems related to democracy and Rule of Law. The Bishops, our Pastors, do not cease to invite the political players *to get together around a table to negotiate political agreements and to avoid violent solutions*. Following this tracking link, we are now going to illustrate the challenges related to violence and peace and some actions promoted by the Catholic Action Movements in collaboration with our hierarchy, sometime supported by the International Forum of Catholic Action (IFCA), with the view of building a lasting peace, reconciliation and prosperity in our countries.

I. Some of the major challenges in our Countries.

1. *A challenge to superficial faith which has no influence in the Church and in society.*

Some young as well as grown-up Christians have not yet understood the specific contribution of Christian faith in the political sphere: they do not appeal to their conscience as Christians enough. Instead of being in the first row and assuming their own responsibility in political, social, economic spheres, they are ready to declare to the ecclesiastical hierarchy: "Excellence, go ahead, we will follow you!" They are not yet ready to sacrifice themselves for a political ideal. This is why there are Christians who kill, who exclude the others and do not tolerate other people's different ideas about politics and administration, not to mention social injustices and all kinds of violations they perpetrate. *Sometimes the churches are full of Christians who are not full of Christ.* This is a real challenge to an in-depth Evangelisation of both young people and adults. This challenge is connected also to the political manipulations and to the arms aimed at eliminating each other.

2. *In many countries democracy had a wrong starting as a factor of violence.*

In many african countries democracy started badly.

We turn here to Burundi Bishops' words about democracy: *"Our democracy has reversed its starting point. The service to the people, as the fundamental criterion of every government, has not been the real basis of an endeavour in the direction of democratisation. The political party instead of being expression of competition and dynamism for progress, has changed into an ethnic group. Homeland is no longer a common and shared good. It is no longer "res publica", Republic¹. Therefore political manipulations have sometimes occurred.*

3. *Political manipulations and proliferation of arms.*

Owing to political manipulations, some youths following adult people's

example, suffer from the isolation in which the ethnic, political, religious groups, social fraternities and regional groups are closed. This closure does not tolerate any deviations of the members' behaviour². It prevents them from exercising their personal self-reflection and critical thinking and leads many people especially the youths to conform to the dominant idea. Several moral, spiritual, Christian and social values are often sacrificed to benefit the selfish interests of the ethnic or the political group. As for their moral judgment, the ethical criteria of a good conscience give way to ethnocentric and political criteria, since the members of an ethnic or political group are guided by the reasons of the ethnic group, of the political or regional group, in which the individual person is but a pawn³. These challenges have caused and are still causing arms' commerce and proliferation aiming at eliminating each other. All this has led and is still leading to violences, killings, displaced persons due to war, refugees, destructions of the infrastructures, poverty, hate and despair...

To these challenges we should add those of unemployment - which erodes young and adult people's dignity - of sects' proliferation, of the embripled rise of Islam and fundamentalism which do not support the same values as the catholics and try to find followers among the same catholics by proposing financial contribution. This s why there are youths who seek refuge among the Protestants or even among the Catholics themselves. There they sing a lot to distract themselves but the songs are not prayers leading to conversion and responsibilities in the society. Here are the enormous challenges to peace and to in-depth Evangelisation. Thence arise the efforts made by our Movements of Catholic Action - supported by the local hierarchy and in collaboration with the other associations and sometimes sustained by IFCA - in order to promote non-violence, peace and reconciliation (*Eph. 6:15*).

I. Some actions to fight against violence and promote lasting peace.

1. Message of our Pastors inviting to non-violence, dialogue and peace.

The Bishops, our Pastors, do not cease urging to solve situations of conflict and violence *through dialogue and negotiations rather than by force of arms*. In fact violence generates violence always and causes enormous

damages, both human and material, among those who are the protagonists as well as among those who are not protagonists (Message of the Bishops of Burundi dated 2011 for the election of 2015...). Besides our Bishop's messages and pastoral letters, there are also appeals by politicians and International communities to respect human rights, peace and reconciliation. Starting from our Bishops' orientation, the lay Associations have given priority to the formation of conscience.

2. Priority to the formation of conscience.

- In accordance with the Church's guidelines and in collaboration with our Pastors, we are promoting a faith grounded in the Person of Jesus Christ, that is not a superficial faith but a conscious, responsible, mature faith which can influence the Church and the society, by means of an ongoing formation deepened in the light of the values and principles of the Church's Social Doctrine. This is done without neglecting the global formation (biblical, spiritual, human, dogmatic).
- This formation aims to help people to increase their self-awareness about the human being's priority over things and powers: in fact: "individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution⁴...".
- We aim to strengthen the formation of the young and adult leaders of the Movements of Catholic Action, of the New Ecclesial Movements and the new Communities so that they can become authentic formators, and attractive animators of their own members to lead them to Christ and to the good in their own context.
- We organise many seminaries, formation workshops, Youth forums for specific groups (Young people, politicians, administrative staff, students...) so that the individual human being and the Right of Law are put at the center of political and economic concerns.
- This ongoing formation aims to promote also the spiritual life through prayers for peace, novenas, eucharistic celebrations with intentions for peace and reconciliation, prayer vigils. In fact prayer "*opens our heart not only to a deep relationship with God but also to encounter our*

brethren in the sign of respect, trust, understanding, esteem and love. Prayer inspires courage and supports all 'true friends of peace' who try to promote it in the different circumstances where they happen to live⁵".

- Following these guidelines, the International Forum of Catholic Action (IFCA), in collaboration with Catholic Action of the member countries and with the local hierarchy's support, have been able to organise formation seminaries at regional or national level in several countries such as Burundi, Cameroon, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Central African Republic, Senegal. The main themes have been the culture of non-violence, peace and reconciliation.

3. To be the voice of those who have no voice.

- Following *Ecclesia in Africa* urging us "to be voice of those who have no voice"⁶, some of our Associations try to be close to refugees, displaced persons due to war and to those refugees who live in the neighbouring countries: they visit them, support them morally, spiritually and materially.
- Our Pastors appeal to the political leaders in order to guarantee to anyone who is a refugee or a migrant the rights recognized to them, such as acceptance and integration.
- We help them to live universal brotherhood which is rooted in God, is born from the Spirit's breath and makes brotherly love grow. We propose the utopia⁷ of universal brotherhood, which expresses itself through distributive justice, sharing and respect of everyone's difference.
- We try to do everything possible to counteract detention or identity closure. This involves a special effort to educate people about comprehension and tolerance. At international level we should also avoid to come to term with supporter of ethnic cleansing or with illegal and oppressive regimes.

4. Care for promoting inter-religious dialogue.

Our Movements of Catholic Action, supported by the hierarchy, cooperate with other religious confessions in activities aimed at educating to peace, such as formation workshops and marches for peace, as well as messages for non-violence and peace. In today's process of peace and democratisation, the great challenge that faces every Church and every religious association, is the promotion of the inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue can be an effective means to find common paths together with other religious confessions in order to promote peace and justice, to reject violence, to defend the weak who are being trampled on, to overcome all deviations of fundamentalism.

5. Promoting active non-violence.

Catholic Action Movements' members, in collaboration with the hierarchy, are engaged in exerting their pressures for the change of the oppressive structures in the society. They organise manifestations for peace on the occasion of the Youths' forums. Instead of turning to violence we need to put into practice Active-Non-Violence, multiplying strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, marches-demonstrations for peace where it is still possible. These are the most important forms of pressure without violence, normally allowed in democracy⁸.

Conclusion: Promoting hope.

Hope is most necessary for those who have to face challenges of violence and peace. So we try to promote hope in our meetings and charitable actions in accordance with the Church's guidelines. We always recall - in time and out of time - that those who want to rule a more right, more supportive, more human, more fraternal and pacific society, look like the

young David in face of Goliath or like the prophet Elijah who was quite alone in face of Baal's priests. We need a hope which is as strong as steel to fight in these conditions. In short, a hope imbued with faith acquires an incomparable dynamism, in other words it cannot be overcome. It is the faith of the believer who is convinced that creation is waiting for freedom (*Rom 8:22*), that the yeast will eventually ferment the dough; that spiritual Advent begins here below in the heart of the material universe; that Resurrection is prefiguration of the Holy Spirit's victory that changes the face of the earth and that the poor and the last, so often forgotten in the earth's books, are recorded in the Lamb's book of life⁹.

** Ifca Coordinator for Africa*

1. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Burundi, Letter dated 26 July 1995
2. NTABONA. A: The appeal to Ethics, prerequisite for any search of peace, in *ACA*, 2-3/2000, p. 246
3. *Ibidem*
4. *Mater et Magistra* (M.M), n° 219
6. Compendium of the C.S.D. n° 519 6
7. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 70, 106
8. Louis O'NEIL; *Op. Cit*, p. 462
9. *Rev.* 21:23-27



THE CENTRALITY OF THE FAMILY WITH *AMORIS LAETITIA*

FRANCO MIANO AND GIUSEPPINA DE SIMONE *

The extraordinary experience of the Synod on the family has made us touch with our hands an outgoing Church, outstretched to proclaim the Gospel, a Church that thinks of itself as a permanent mission. But above all a Church that wants to be *with everyone and for everyone*.

The synodal journey was requested by Pope Francis as a journey together which has involved all the people of God: questioning together to rediscover together the reasons for the Gospel of the family which is “truly good news” (AL 1) for all humanity.

The choice of the family, as a theme for this Synod which meant to continue the reflection on new evangelisation that is on the challenges faced to announce the Gospel today, certainly was not random. It was not about starting from a reality which is often questioned but rather putting in the foreground a reality which asks to be rediscovered as the “future of humanity” and the “engine of the world”, an irreplaceable place for the formation of our humanity, a reality of relationship in which we learn to relate to others. Because of all this, it is not a problem but a resource, an incredible resource.

The family involves us all, because we all come from a family and belong to a family. Therefore talking of family means talking to everyone and regarding everyone, above all it means talking of a humanity which is made up of relations and is reached by the liberating announcement of the Gospel in the relations which delineate it and build its history.

The Church has chosen the path of concreteness, the path of a reality which is “bigger than an idea” because it is inhabited and guided by grace.

Amoris Laetitia, which underscored by Pope Francis’ sensibility is a synthesis of the whole synodal process, outlines from beginning to end the

action of grace in the life of a family and is a heartfelt invitation to trust this action and learn to discover it in the folds of our everyday life.

During these two years we have met many people around Italy (and not only) to talk to them about the Synod and *Amoris Laetitia* and each time we could see the joy and commotion of those who were being helped to reflect on the presence of the Lord who dwells in the thousands daily gestures that make the life of a family, of our families. What is extraordinary is the fact that the Church does not talk of the family from above or externally, but by listening and helping others to listen what is lived in the family. Even the re-reading of biblical texts that speak of family such as Psalm 128 reiterated at the beginning of the first chapter is performed in this manner: “Let us now enter one of those houses, led by the Psalmist [...] let us cross the threshold...” (AL 8.9).

The style of the apostolic exhortation as well as that of the Synod is surprising and moving. It is not an abstract enunciation of principles, but a will to listen to the life of all, in the conviction that the will of the Lord is seen and understood in the cry of the people.

But there is another reason which makes the family central when reflecting on the ways of announcing the Gospel. The family is essential to this announcement not from a strategic perspective but from a substantial one. It is one with God’s dream, as the Pope constantly repeats: “to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God’s dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone” (AL 321). One does not form a family to find comfort to one’s weaknesses or to guarantee respect to the uncertainties of life. Forming a family means realising that we cannot be happy if not together and that our life is only realised in a communion which expands. The horizon that gives sense to family life is the kingdom of God, the fullness of communion.

That is why the family cannot be a closed space and cannot be thought of as the little nest in which we find refuge. The family is a place in which one learns to be together, to care for one another with a behaviour made of little gestures which dilates the heart. “A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the

outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of “domesticating” the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters.” (AL 183). A genuinely “familial” style should be contagious and should expand into a human tension. “Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in society.” (AL 184).

It is in this way that they announce the beauty of the Gospel and transmit their faith. The spirituality of marriage and of the family is “a spirituality of care” (AL 321). Taking care, supporting and stimulating one another, is the living part of familial spirituality. A spirituality which is nourished by prayer, which finds strength in the Eucharistic celebration and which, above all, is strengthened by the opening of the heart to the needs of the weakest.

If care is the style of the family, it is also with a caring style that the Church recognises the need to turn to the family. “The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community” (AL 87). There is a pact which is essential for the announcement of the Gospel and for the life of the Church which needs to be rediscovered. “The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church” (AL 87).

Giving back centrality to the family does not simply mean extending the field of family apostolate. We need to give it a new look, to rethink the apostolate, the times, ways, places, starting from the families, to “strengthen the ties between the family and the Christian community”. “A Church according to the Gospel” – Pope Francis declared – “must be a welcoming home, with doors always open. [...] Christian faith is played on the open field of a life shared with everyone”.

It is therefore the time, for everyone and for pastoral workers, to question themselves basing on the essential. Today it is essential that more and more families (in the simplicity and normality of their life) know how to give the joyful announcement of the Gospel and the beautiful witness of the meeting with the Lord that changes life. “Christian families, by the

grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of family apostolate” (AL 200). It is essential to focus attention on the families’ concrete life in various situations, so that each can feel welcomed and encouraged, supported in the search for God; so that everyone can feel the community’s tenderness, a mother’s tenderness, the merciful love of God that raises and regenerates.

This is also Catholic Action’s commitment. The life of the family has always been an important proposal for Catholic Action and it is so now more than ever. One just has to think of dialogue between generations, shared co-responsibility, the sense of accompaniment - these are all experienced in Catholic Action. By associating children, youth, adults, students and workers, people of all generations and social conditions, concretely experiencing the living community and the love for one’s country, CA provides a project which is “at the service” of the families. The services for youth, CA’s work with engaged couples, with young couples, with parents, with little ones, with the elderly, with families in difficulties, in cultural and political spheres and above all the formative commitment, as the heart of the association, all follow this line of action. The serious formation given to all members of all ages is a formation that, starting from faith, helps to establish criteria of discernment, orientation for reason and the ability to make mature choices with responsibility. It is that education of consciences which is never totally accomplished but which accompanies us every moment of our lives and which is fundamental for facing family life satisfactorily.

When offering an associative life and formative paths which not only cross but also involve the families at all levels, Catholic Action can surely contribute to ensure that every family feels at home in the Church, feels supported and accompanied in its journey and discovers the gift it is carrying for the life of the Church and of all humanity. It can contribute to break the individualism in which it often finds refuge, helping to understand that enclosing oneself in his own securities “does not offer greater peace or happiness, rather, it straitens the heart of a family and makes its life all the more narrow (AL 187). “In addition to the small circle of the couple and their children, there is the larger family, which cannot be overlooked” the grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, neighbours as

well as friends and families, the community of families “who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith” (AL 196). It is what the Pope calls “larger family” or the “enlarged family”. It is the context in which one is never left alone in his suffering, his efforts, his limits. “This larger family [which is the ecclesial community but should be the human community] should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should embrace “even those who have made shipwreck of their lives”. “This wider family can help make up for the shortcomings of parents, detect and report possible situations in which children suffer violence and even abuse, and provide wholesome love and family stability in cases when parents prove incapable of this” (AL 197).

One could say that it is a dream, but it is a dream of a humanity and a Church which we should unavoidably share and for which we should feel in duty bound to spend ourselves with everyone and for everyone.

** Experts at the Bishops’ Synod on the Family
Extraordinary General Assembly (2014) and Ordinary (2015)*

Meditation for Vespers (1Pt 3, 18.22)

Thursday 27th April 2017

H.E. CARDINAL KEVIN J. FARRELL *

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit.²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him."

¹⁸ ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι, ²²ὅς ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.

We are living Easter time, a bright and joyful time for us Christians. It is always useful to reflect and ask ourselves: what has the Easter of Christ given us? How does his death and resurrection affect us?

In the passage we just read, Saint Peter says that Christ has died for us, unrighteous and sinners, to "lead us" to God. It seems to have done all the steps of the Old Testament in which God himself, as one, true, Good Shepherd, promises to "lead back" his sheep to safe pastures, that is to bring his people who are lost, knocked down, and abandoned to death, back to life. For example, in the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, we read: "O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel." (*Ez 37,12*). This promise has been fulfilled with the resurrection of Jesus. The Risen Christ "leads" us back to God, to Life.

Today, in your discussions, you spoke a lot of mission and evangelisation, therefore meditating on the condition of man, who is away from God, is of great help. Saint Peter defines Christ "righteous" and all men as "unrighteous", but this does not simply mean that men are dishonest and deceivers. What it means is that, without Christ, the majority of men lack an authentic relationship with God, in consequence, they live a false relationship with themselves, with others and with the world. This is

unrighteousness according to the Bible. “Being unrighteous”, for the Bible, is lacking the fundamental relationship with God! The consequence is that one assumes a wrong position in the world, and from this altered way of life, many errors and sins result. These sins lead men to ruin and to immense suffering. From “unrighteousness” in men’s relationship with God many “injustices” follow in daily life! The risen Christ is the only one who has the power to bring men back to “righteousness”, to reconcile men with God, and, in this way, return them to the right place in the world, the right relationship with themselves and with others. It is from this awareness that Catholic Action’s evangelising commitment is born!

Announcing the Gospel to all men, means letting them know the true dimension of existence, putting them in contact with the resurrection of Christ, giving them the opportunity to rise to an existence of children of God.

But Christ reached this new existential dimension, only after being “put to death in the flesh”. This reminds us of the Easter dynamic concerning also all Christ’s disciples. Only through being “put to death in the flesh” one becomes “alive” and “gives life” in the spirit. Let us therefore not be afraid of the difficulties, of the resistance that we meet, inside and outside of us! Let us not be frightened if the mission, if the desire to be “an outgoing Church” will involve suffering and sometimes will seem to us a useless and unsuccessful “death”. In reality it is not like this! The seed of the resurrection will be present even in our works! If we are united with Christ, the same Spirit that resurrected Him will be working even in us and will make our poor efforts thrive.

Let us therefore always look to Jesus our Lord, who, as Saint Peter reminds us, has ascended to heaven and has received sovereignty on all things, with trust. Everything is in His hands, it is He who guides the Church, her works, her mission, towards the fulfilment of the eternal Kingdom that one day He will present to the Father.

** Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life*



5th SESSION

An Outgoing CA –missionary experiences
in the city in collaboration with CA Rome



MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES IN THE CITY

1. Prayers with Taizé songs
2. Refugees – Centro Astalli
3. New economy - NeXt
4. Art, liturgy and faith – Centro Aletti
5. CA Parish Council Representatives in the CA Diocesan Centre
6. The strength of network against trafficking in human beings
7. “Bambin Gesù” Children’s Hospital
8. Human promotion in the outskirts through sports (Centro Sportivo Italiano)
9. Families in difficulties – Casa Betania
10. Caritas and CA in the parish
11. Cultural interreligious dialogue Pontifical Gregorian University
12. Public Institutions – House of Representatives
13. Public Institutions - Antimafia Parliamentary Commission
14. Public Institutions – Lazio Region: Cittadella della carità “Santa Giacinta” – Diocesan Caritas Rome
15. Parco Lido Lunapark Ostia – Little sisters of Jesus
16. Delegation Holy Land Custody



PARTICIPANTS

Countries and International Organisations

AFRICA

SECAM - Symposium of Episcopal
Conferences of Africa and Madagascar

1. Burkina Faso
2. Burundi
3. Cameroon
4. Congo B.
5. Ivory Coast
6. Gabon
7. Kenya
8. Mali
9. Nigeria
10. Central African Republic
11. Democratic Republic of Congo
12. Rwanda
13. Senegal
14. Uganda

AMERICA

CELAM - Latin American
Episcopal Council

1. Argentina
2. Colombia
3. Costa Rica
4. Cuba
5. Guatemala
6. Mexico
7. Paraguay
8. Peru
9. Uruguay
10. Usa
11. Venezuela

ASIA

FABC - Federation of
Asian Bishops' Conferences

1. Korea
2. Philippine
3. India
4. Irak
5. Lebanon
6. Myanmar
7. Thailand
8. Holy Land - Palestine
9. Holy Land - Israel

EUROPE

COMECE - Commission of
the Bishops' Conferences
of the European Community

1. Albania
2. Austria
3. Bosnia and Herzegovina
4. Bulgaria
5. Germany
6. Hungary
7. Italy
8. Lithuania
9. Malta
10. Poland
11. Portugal
12. Republic of Moldova
13. Romania
14. Slovakia
15. Spain
16. Ukraine

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

1. Caritas Internationalis
2. CCI Cardijn Community International
3. CMIS - Conferenza Mondiale degli Istituti Secolari
4. IACK - International Alliance of Catholic Knights
5. ICCM-FIHC - International Council of Catholic Men
6. ICYCW - International Coordination of Young Christian Movement
7. IMCS - Movement of Catholic Students
8. IYCS - The International Young Catholic Student
9. JOCI-IYCW - International Young Christian Workers
10. MIAMSI - Mouvement International d'Apostolat des Milieux Sociaux Indépendants
11. MIJARC - Mouvement International de la Jeunesse Agricole et Rurale Catholique
12. MMTC/WMCW - World Movement of Christian Workers
13. Pax Romana ICMICA/MIIC - Mouvement International des Intellectuels Catholiques
14. WUCWO-UMOFc - World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations



Programme “after”

08.00 Holy Mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica – the Altar of the Chair
Presided over by H.E Card. Pietro PAROLIN, Secretary of State

10.00 Opening Session Synod Hall

Welcome - Chiara Finocchietti, Responsible for CA Promotion, IFCA Secretariat
Presentation of the Day’s Programme - Emilio INZAURRAGA, IFCA Secretariat
Coordinator
Video

1st SESSION

With Evangelii Gaudium as our compass: Catholic Action school of missionary disciples

10.15 Introduction by Zénobé NIRAGIRA, Representative of *Mouvements d’Action Catholique* - Burundi

Interventions

H.E. Msgr. Eduardo GARCIA, Bishop of San Justo, IFCA Ecclesiastical Assistant,
National Catholic Action Assistant Argentina
Stella MORRA, theologian, Pontifical Gregorian University

10.45 Intervention by His Holiness Pope Francis

Welcome H.E. Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

Welcome Emilio Inzaurraga with the presentation of some significant realities

- CA children from Albania, Argentina, Italy, Malta and Holy Land
- a family from Malta: parents, children and grandparents
- the pastor of Lampedusa and CA President of Agrigento
- a priest from Central African Republic
- a family with two children from Bethlem and a young Iraqi seamstress displaced in Jordan and now in Italy

Speech by the Holy Father Francis

12.45 Lunch, Paul VI Hall Lobby

2nd SESSION

We are mission, lay people who journey together

14.00 Introduction by Matteo TRUFFELLI - National President of the Italian Catholic Action

Interventions

H.E. Card. Carlos OSORO - Archbishop of Madrid

Antonio MUÑOZ VARO, National President of Acción Católica General - Spain

3rd SESSION **Evangelizers filled with Spirit.** Pedagogy of the CA School of Sanctity

14.45 Introduction by Oana TUDUCE, Representative of Acțiunea Catolică din România

Testimonies: Lei Lei WIN (Myanmar), Thérèse N'DOUR DIOP (Senegal), Fr. Marcelo DE LEON (Uruguay), Sr. Rosaria CARPENTIERI (Italy)

15.30 Coffee break

4th SESSION

With everyone and for everyone

15.30 Introduction by Rafael Ángel CORSO, *National President of Acción Católica Argentina*

Interventions

- The world at a glance
Sandro CALVANI, *Senior Advisor Mae Fah Luang Foundation, Bangkok, Thailandia*
- God's instruments for the liberation and promotion of the poor
Michel ROY, *Caritas Internationalis General Secretary*
- For a culture of nonviolence and peace,
Fr. Salvatore NICITERETSE, *IFCA Coordinator for Africa*
- The centrality of the family with *Amoris Laetitia*
Franco MIANO and Giuseppina DE SIMONE, Experts at the Bishops' Synod on the Family Extraordinary General Assembly (2014) and Ordinary (2015)

Synthesis of the 4 sessions and presentation of the 5th session – Emilio Inzaurraga

16.45 Vespers and “missionary” benediction. Presided over by H.E. Card. Kevin FARRELL

5th SESSION

An Outgoing CA –missionary experiences in the city

in collaboration with CA Rome

17.45 Departures

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2. Refugees – Centro Astalli
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15. Parco Lido Lunapark Ostia – Little sisters of Jesus
16. Delegation Holy Land Custody

20.30/21 Return to Casa Tra Noi or other lodgings

PRAYER FOR THE II INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CATHOLIC ACTION

Lord Jesus Christ, first evangelizer of our life,
we pray for this II International Congress
on Catholic Action so that it may be
a “daring Pentecost for this outgoing Church”.

As a Church-communion we wish “to return to the source
and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel”
which tells us to “Go” to everyone, children, youths, adults, and families,
and especially to the poorest and the weakest,
with the message of the Life which gives life.

May we “listen to the Spirit which helps us to discern, as a community,
the signs of the times” so as to be daring and creative
experiencing “the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing”
and thus we live urged by your love which makes us disciples,
missionaries among our people.

May we put our mature co-responsibility at the service of the Church,
“while preserving a believing, generous and simple heart”,
to promote the culture of encounter, dialogue and peace
in the midst of our social and ecclesial responsibilities,
seeking the development of every person and the building of the common
good.

May Mary, the star of evangelization, animate us, as Catholic Action,
to be this “common home” with everyone and for everyone, a school of
sanctity,
a fraternal place wherein we regenerate our faith and revive our life’s
profound options.

May She, the mother of the living Gospel,
help us to renew our commitment to bring to light, bless, enliven,
raise up, heal and free others.

We are mission! This is what we are in the Church and in the world for.
May the Catholic Action Saints, Blessed and faithful witnesses of the world
intercede for us.

Amen.



Edited by IFCA Secretariat
Rome, February 5th 2019

“Catholic Action, Catholic Passion”

*Catholic passion, the passion of the Church,
is to experience the delightful
and comforting joy of evangelising.
This is what we need from Catholic Action.*

Pope Francis, 27.04.2017