



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD
OF THE ITALIAN CONFEDERATION
OF WORKERS' UNIONS (CISL)***

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 31 January 2009*

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I receive you with great pleasure and cordially greet the members of the Administrative Board of the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions: in particular, I greet the General Secretary and thank him for his words on behalf of all. He has recalled that the cisl took its first steps precisely 60 years ago, playing an active part in the foundation of the free international union. He also mentioned that it contributed to the new foundation an anchorage in the principles of the Church's social doctrine and the practice of free and autonomous syndicalism, independent of political or party alignments. You wish today to reassert these same approaches, seeking to continue to draw inspiration for your activities from the social Magisterium of the Church, with the aim of protecting the interests of workers and pensioners in Italy. As the Secretary General has opportunely recalled, the great challenge and opportunity that the present disturbing economic crisis invites everyone to face is to find a new synthesis between the common good and the market, between capital and work. And in this area trade union organizations can make an important contribution.

With full respect for every institution's legitimate autonomy, the Church, an expert in humanity, never tires of offering the contribution of her teaching and experience to those who wish to serve the cause of the human being, work and progress, social justice and peace. In the course of the past century, the Church's attention to social problems has grown. For this very reason, my venerable Predecessors, attentive to the signs of the times, have not failed to provide appropriate instructions for believers and for people of good will, enlightening them on their commitment to safeguard human dignity and the real needs of society.

With the Encyclical *Rerum novarum* Pope Leo XIII offered a heartfelt defence of the inalienable dignity of workers at the dawn of the 20th century. The ideal directives contained in this document will contribute to strengthening the Christian animation of social life; may this be expressed, among other things, in the birth and consolidation of many initiatives of civil interest, such as social study centres, societies for workers, cooperatives and unions. There has even been a notable impetus towards employment legislation that respects the legitimate expectations of workers, especially women and minors, as well as a marked improvement in salaries and in working conditions. John Paul II wished to solemnize the 100th anniversary of this Encyclical which had "the privilege" of being commemorated subsequently in various papal documents with the Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, in which he remarks that especially in our period of history the Church's social doctrine contemplates the human being integrated within the complex network of relations that is typical of modern society. The human sciences, for their part, contribute to enabling the person to understand himself ever better as a social being. "However, man's true identity is only fully revealed to him through faith, and it is precisely from faith that the Church's social teaching begins", my venerable Predecessor noted. "While drawing upon all the contributions made by the sciences and philosophy, her social teaching is aimed at helping man on the path of salvation" (*ibid.*, n. 54).

In his previous social Encyclical, *Laborem exercens*, in 1981 on the theme of work, Pope John Paul II had emphasized that the Church has never ceased to view work problems as part of a social issue which has gradually assumed global dimensions. Indeed, work should be seen as the essential key of the entire social question, he insists, because it conditions not only the economic but also the cultural and moral development of individuals, families, communities and all humanity (cf. n. 1). Again, in this important document, light is shed on the role and strategic importance of unions, which are described as an "indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies" (cf. n. 20).

A recurring element in the Magisterium of the 20th-century Popes is the call for solidarity and responsibility. We know that in order to overcome the economic and social crisis we are experiencing, a free and responsible effort on everyone's part is required. In other words, it is necessary to overcome private and sectorial interests and unite so as to confront together the difficulties assailing every social milieu, especially the world of work. Never before has this been as urgent as it is today; the difficulties afflicting the world of work call for closer and more effective collaboration among the many different elements of society. In the Bible too there are significant references to the appeal for collaboration. In the Book of Ecclesiastes we read: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up" (Eccl 4: 9-10). The hope, then, is that from the current global crisis there may emerge a shared desire to create a new culture of solidarity and of responsible participation, which are indispensable conditions if we are to build the future of our planet together.

Dear friends, may the celebration of your union's 60th anniversary be a reason to renew the enthusiasm of its origins and to rediscover your original charism even better. The world needs people who dedicate themselves disinterestedly to the cause of work, with full respect for human dignity and the common good. The Church, which appreciates the fundamental role of unions, is as close to you today as she was in the past and is ready to help you to carry out your task in society as well as possible. Lastly, on today's feast of St John Bosco I would like to entrust the activity and projects of your union to this Apostle of youth who with great social sensitivity made work a precious means for training and educating the new generations. I also invoke upon you and upon your families the protection of Our Lady and of St Joseph, a good father and skilled worker who cared every day for the family in Nazareth. For my own part, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, as I bless with affection those of you present here and all the members of your Confederation.

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