



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO AMBASSADOR ALEXANDER BORG OLIVIER
PRESIDENT OF THE HOLY FAMILY CHURCH SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMUNITY***

*To Ambassador, Alexander Borg Olivier,
President of the Holy Family Church Society
of the United Nations Community*

In publishing the Encyclical Letter "*Centesimus Annus*", to mark the hundredth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's rightly famous social document "*Rerum Novarum*", my intention was not only to commemorate an important past moment of the Church's reflection on the social question but also to make reference to the situation of the world today. "*Centesimus Annus*" is meant to be an invitation "to `look around' at the `new things' which surround us and in which we find ourselves caught up", so that men and women of good will might give further impulse to the "*great movement for the defence of the human person and the safeguarding of human dignity*" which in many parts of the world "has contributed to the building of a more just society or at least to the curbing of injustice" (John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 3).

The hopes and expectations of the present deserve the closest attention, in order to ensure that leaders in the economic, political, cultural and religious fields do not waste the historic possibilities that lie before the human family. That is the reason for my keen interest in your Seminar and for my support for this valuable initiative undertaken by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See and by the Holy Family Church Society of the United Nations Community. I thank you, Mr Ambassador, for presiding over this meeting and I greet all who are taking part. I extend a particular word of greeting to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr Javier Pérez de Cuellar, and to the distinguished Representatives of the various countries present at the event. I pray that your reflection will further confirm you in your already deep commitment to the consolidation of justice and peace in the world.

The transformations of recent months have reduced the ideological tensions which had characterized international life for many decades. But this new situation must not blind us to the fact that immense problems of injustice and human suffering continue to afflict millions of human beings. There are many tragic situations which call for an immediate and more generous response from the international community. Furthermore, the increasingly global nature of the productive and economic processes means that the struggle for development and justice must necessarily take into account the interdependence of peoples and nations. A global sensitivity and solidarity towards the poorer peoples of the world is urgently needed. Either the human family as a whole learns to tread the path of cooperation and solidarity, and seeks to enable everyone to share in the benefits of progress, or a new age of fragmentation and endemic conflict will open up before us. The challenge is "to situate particular interests within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good" (*Ibid*, n. 47).

As you gather to reflect on "*Centesimus Annus*", I trust that you will be ever more convinced that the common good cannot be served unless appropriate attention is given to the ethical and moral dimensions of economic, social and political questions. The attempt to organize society in a moral vacuum is a false and harmful pretense, for freedom is intrinsically bound to responsibility, and decisions about public policy involve accountability not just to public opinion but above all to the objective truth about man's nature and the order of human society.

In meeting the challenges of the present hour, Christians have an essential contribution to make. The Church's spiritual and humanitarian mission involves them at the very heart of the struggle for human development and progress. "*Centesimus Annus*", leaves no doubt about the Church's willingness to play her part in building a better future for the human family: "To those who are searching today for a new and authentic theory and praxis of liberation, the Church offers not only her social doctrine and, in general, her teaching about the human person redeemed in Christ, but also her concrete commitment and material assistance in the struggle against marginalization and suffering" (*Ibid*, n. 26). As I wrote in the conclusion of the Encyclical: "In the third Millennium too, the Church will be faithful *in making man's way her own*, knowing that she does not walk alone, but with Christ her Lord. It is Christ who made man's way his own, and who guides him, even when he is unaware of it" (*Ibid*, n. 62).

It is my earnest hope that those taking part in the Seminar will find encouragement and inspiration for further action in the healing and elevating impact on economic and social realities of the Church's social doctrine. The Gospel truths and values on which this doctrine is based strengthen the seams of human society and imbue everyday human activity with a deeper meaning and importance (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 40). I therefore raise my heart in prayer to the Lord of history, asking him to bless you, Mr Ambassador, and all present at the Seminar. May his light and guidance accompany you always.

From the Vatican, October 8, 1991.

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