



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GENEVA  
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (10 JUNE 1969)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI  
TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION\***

*Tuesday, 10 June 1969*

1. It is an honour and a joy for us to participate officially in this assembly in the solemn hour at which the International Labour Organization celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. Why are we here? We do not belong to this international body, we are extraneous to the specific questions which have here their offices of study and halls of discussion, and our spiritual mission is not intended to intervene in matters outside its proper domain. If we are here, it is in order to respond to the invitation which you, Mr. Director-General, so kindly addressed to us. And we are happy to thank you publicly, to tell you how much we appreciated this very courteous gesture, how highly we rate its importance, and how great its significance appears to us.
2. Without any particular competence in the technical discussions on the defence and promotion of human labour, we are nevertheless no stranger to this great cause of labour for which this organization exists and to which you dedicate your energies.
3. From its very first page the Bible, of which we are the messenger, shows us creation as the result of the work of the Creator (Gen. 2:7), handed over to the work of His creature, whose intelligent efforts must develop it and perfect it, as it were, by humanizing it in his service (Gen. 1:29, *Populorum Progressio*, No. 22). Hence, according to the divine idea, work is the normal activity of man (Ps. 105:23; Eccl. 7:15), and enjoying and rejoicing in its fruits is a gift of God (Eccl. 5:18), since each is quite naturally rewarded according to his works (Ps. 63:13 and 128:2; Mt. 16:27; I Cor. 15:58; II Thess. 3:10).

4. Through the pages of the Bible, labour is seen as a basic fact of the human condition, so much so that, when He became one of us (Jn. 1:14), the Son of God also and at the same time became a worker, and was naturally referred to in His entourage by the profession of his family: Jesus was known as "the son of the carpenter" (Mt. 13:55). The labour of man thereby acquired the highest imaginable titles of nobility, and you have ensured their presence, in the place of honour at the headquarters of your Organization, in that admirable fresco by Maurice Denis, dedicated to the dignity of work, in which Christ brings the Good News to the workers who surround Him, who are themselves also sons of God and brothers to each other.

5. While there is no need for us to evoke the history of the birth and growth of your Organization, yet we cannot pass over in silence, in this hospitable land, the work of pioneers such as Bishop Mermillod and the Union of Fribourg, the admirable example given by the Protestant industrialist Daniel le Grand, and the fruitful initiative of the Catholic, Gaspard Decurtins, which was the first germ of an international conference on labour. And how could we forget that on the fortieth anniversary of Leo Encyclical on the condition of labour your first Director desired to render homage to "the tenacious workers for social justice, among them those who based themselves on the Encyclical Rerum Novarum" [Quoted by A. Le Roy: *Catholicisme social et Organisation Internationale du Travail* (Paris, Spes, 1937), p. 16]. And the officials of the International Labour Office, when drawing up the balance in *The International Labour Organization: The First Decade*, did not hesitate to recognize that "the great movement which was originated in the Roman Catholic Church by the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of 1891 has proved extremely fruitful" [*The International Labour Organisation: The First Decade* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 359].

6. The sympathy of the Church towards your Organization, and for the whole world of labour, was unceasingly manifested from then on, most particularly in Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (15 May 1931, No. 24), in Pius XII's address to the Governing Body of the International Labour Office (19 Nov. 1954), and in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* where John XXIII expressed his "heartfelt appreciation to the International Labour Organization, which... has been making its effective and precious contribution to the establishment in the world of a socio-economic order marked by justice and humanity, and one in which the lawful demands of the workers are recognized and defended" (15 May 1961, No. 103). We ourselves had the pleasure of promulgating, at the close of the Vatican Ecumenical Council, the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* prepared by the bishops of the whole world. In it, the Church reaffirms the value of "the monumental amount of individual and collective effort", and also the primacy of the labour of men over "the other elements of economic life, for the latter have only the nature of tools", together with the inalienable rights and the duties which such a principle requires (*Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, 7 Dec. 1965, Nos. 34, 67 and 68). Finally, our Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* took pains to make all aware that "the social question has become world-wide", and of the consequences that this involves for the integral and united development of peoples, that development which "is the new name for peace" (26 Mar. 1967, Nos. 3 and 76).

7. In other words, we are an attentive observer of the work you accomplish here, and more than that, a fervent admirer of the activity you carry on, and also a collaborator who is happy to have been invited to celebrate with you the existence, functions, achievements and merits of this world institution, and to do so as a friend. Nor do we wish to omit on this solemn occasion the other international institutions of Geneva, starting with the Red Cross, which are all well-deserving and laudable institutions to which we are glad to extend our respectful greetings and our warmest good wishes.

8. To us, who belong to an institution exposed to the wear of time for two thousand years, the fifty years untiringly dedicated to the International Labour Organization are a source of fruitful meditation. Everyone knows that such endurance is quite exceptional in the history of our century. The inevitable precariousness of human affairs, made even more evident and all-consuming by the acceleration of modern civilization, has not shaken your institution, to whose ideal we wish to render homage, namely "universal and lasting peace, based on social justice" (Constitution of the International Labour Organization, Preamble). The ordeal of the disappearance of the League of Nations, to which it was organically bound, and the fact of the birth of the United Nations on another continent, far from taking away the needs for its existence, provided it rather with an opportunity, by means of the well-known Declaration of Philadelphia twenty-five years ago, to confirm and better define them, rooting them more deeply in the reality of society's progress. "All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity" [Ibid. Annex, II (a)].

9. With all our heart we rejoice with you at the vitality of your fifty-year-old but still young institution, ever since its birth in the Peace Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Who can recount the work, the toil, the night watches so fruitful in courageous decisions of benefit to all workers as well as for the life of mankind, performed by all those who with great merit dedicated their talent and activity to this organization? Among all of these, we cannot omit to mention the first Director, Albert Thomas, and his present successor, David Morse. Nor can we omit to mention that at their request, and almost from the very beginning, a priest has always been included among those who constituted, constructed, sustained and served this outstanding institution. We are grateful to all for the work they have accomplished, and we express the wish that it may happily continue its complex and difficult mission which is truly providential for the greater good of modern society.

10. Those better informed than we are can say how great is the sum of the activities of the International Labour Organization during fifty years of existence, how imposing the results achieved by its 128 Conventions and its 132 Recommendations.

11. But there is a primordial fact of capital importance in this array of material which cannot be left unmentioned. Here - and this a decisive event in the history of civilization - here the labour of man is treated as a matter of basic concern. It was not always thus, as is well known, during the

already long history of mankind. One may recall the ancient concept of labour (See, for example, Cicero: De Officiis 1:42), the disrepute it implied, the slavery it involved - that horrible plague of slavery which, unfortunately, has not yet entirely disappeared from the face of the earth. The modern concept, of which you are the heralds and defenders, is completely different. It is based on a fundamental principle which has been brought out conspicuously by Christianity: in labour, it is man who comes first. Whether he be an artist or an artisan, contractor, peasant or labourer, manual or intellectual, it is man who works, it is for man that he works. An end has been put to the priority of labour over the labourer, to the supremacy of technical and economical necessities over human needs. Never again will work be superior to the worker, never again will work be against the worker; but always work will be for the worker, work will be in the service of man, of all men and of all of man.

12. How can an observer avoid being impressed by seeing that this concept has been defined at the theoretically least favourable moment for the affirmation of the primacy of the human factor over the product of work, at the moment of the progressive introduction of the machine which multiplies inordinately the output of labour and tends to take its place? In an abstract vision of things, the work now accomplished by the machine and its energies, which are no longer supplied by the arm of man but by the formidable secret forces of tamed nature should, in the judgment of the modern world, so predominate as to eliminate concern for the labourer, who will at last be freed from the extenuating and humiliating weight of a physical effort out of all proportion to his limited output. But this has not occurred. At the very moment of the triumph of technology and its gigantic effects on economic production, it is man who draws upon himself the concentrated attention of the philosopher, the sociologist and the politician. For in the final analysis there are no true riches but the riches of man. Now it is evident to all that the introduction of technique into the process of human activities would be to the detriment of man, if man did not always remain its master, and dominate its evolution. If "one must recognize in all justice the irreplaceable contribution made by the organization of labour and by the progress of industry to what development has accomplished" (Populorum Progressio, No. 26), still you recognize better than anyone else the evil results of what has been called the fragmentation of labour in contemporary industrial society [Cf. G. Friedmann: *Où va le travail humain* (Paris, Gallimard, 1950) and idem, *The anatomy of Work, The Implications of Specialization* (translated by W. Rawson)(London, Heinemann, 1961)]. Instead of helping man become more of a man it dehumanizes him; instead of expanding him, it stifles him under a cloak of heavy boredom. Work is still ambivalent, and its organization may easily depersonalize the one who performs it, if he becomes its slave, abdicates intelligence and freedom, and even loses his dignity through it (Mater et Magistra, No. 83; Populorum Progressio, No. 28). Who does not see that work, which gives rise to marvellous fruits when it is truly creative, can also (Cf. Ex. 1:8-14), when caught up in the cycle of arbitrary will, injustice, rapacity and violence, become a real social scourge, as is attested by those labour camps, organized as institutions, which have been the shame of the civilized world.

13. Who can describe the sometimes terrible drama of the modern worker, torn by his twofold

destiny as the source of grandiose achievements, too often tormented by the intolerable sufferings of a miserable proletarian condition, in which hunger is joined to social degradation to create a state of real insecurity, both personal and family? You have understood this. It is labour as a human, prime and fundamental fact which constitutes the vital root of your Organization and makes it into a magnificent tree, which extends its branches throughout the whole world because of its international character, a tree which is the honour of our times, with an ever fertile root which nourishes it in continual organic activity. It is that same root which forbids you to favour particular interests and places you in the service of the common good. It constitutes your special genius and its fecundity; that of intervening always and everywhere to supply remedies for labour conflicts, avert them if possible, give spontaneous aid to victims, work out new protection against new dangers, improve the conditions of workers while respecting the objective equilibrium of real economic possibilities, struggle against any form of segregation which generates inferiority on any ground - slavery, caste, race, religion or class - in a word, to defend for all and against all, the freedom of all workers, and secure lasting victory for the ideal of brotherhood among men, all equal in dignity.

14. Such is your vocation. Your action is based, not on an unavoidable and implacable struggle between those who supply work and those who execute it, nor on the partiality of those who defend interests and functions. On the contrary, it is a freely organized and socially disciplined and organic participation in the responsibilities and in the profits of work. It has a single aim: not money, not power, but the good of man. It is more than an economic concept, it is better than a political concept: it is a moral and human concept which inspires you, namely social justice, to be built up, day by day, freely and of common accord. Discovering ever more completely whatever the good of the workers requires, you make others aware of it little by little, and propose it to all as an ideal. More than this, you translate it into new rules of social conduct, which impose themselves as norms of law. Thus you ensure a permanent passage from the ideal order of principles to the juridical order, that is, to positive law. In a word, you gradually refine and improve the moral conscience of mankind. This is an arduous and delicate task indeed, but it is so lofty and so necessary, and calls for the collaboration of all true friends of man. How then could we not give it our adherence and our support?

15. Along your way, obstacles to be removed and difficulties to be surmounted will not be lacking. But you have foreseen this, and to confront them you have recourse to an instrument and a method which could, of themselves, suffice as a justification for your institution. Your original and organic instrument is to bring together the three forces at work in the human dynamics of modern labour: men of government, employers, and workers. And your method, that has become a model, is to harmonize these three forces, so that they do not oppose each other, but combine "in a courageous and productive collaboration" (Pius XII, Address to the Governing Body of the ILO), by means of constant dialogue for the study and solution of ever renewed and recurring problems.

16. This excellent modern concept fully deserves to replace once and for all that concept which

has unfortunately dominated our epoch, emphasizing efficiency at the cost of agitation which too often generates new sufferings and ruins, thus risking the loss rather than the consolidation of the results obtained at the price of sometimes dramatic struggles. It must be solemnly proclaimed: labour conflicts cannot be remedied by artificially imposed conditions which fraudulently deprive the worker and the whole social community of their first and inalienable human prerogative, which is freedom. Nor can they be remedied by solutions which result solely from the free play - as it is called - of the determinism of economic factors. Such remedies may indeed have an appearance of justice, but they do not possess its human reality. It is only when the deepest reasons of these conflicts are understood, and the just claims they express are satisfied, that you can avert their dramatic explosion and avoid its ruinous consequences. Let us repeat, in the words of Albert Thomas: "The social factor must take precedence over the economic factor; it must regulate and guide it, in the highest cause of justice" (The International Labour Organization: The First Decade, op. cit., Preface, p. XII). That is why the International Labour Organization offers today, in that closed arena of the modern world in which interests and ideologies are dangerously opposed, an open road towards a better future for mankind. Perhaps more than any other institution, you can contribute to this, quite simply, by being actively and inventively true to your ideal: universal peace through social justice.

17. It is for this reason that we have come here to give you our encouragement and our agreement, to invite you also to persevere tenaciously in your mission of justice and peace, to assure you of our humble but sincere fellowship. For it is the peace of the world which is at stake, and the future of mankind. This future can only be built up by peace among all the human families at work, between classes and peoples, a peace which rests upon an ever more perfect justice among all men (Cf. *Pacem in Terris*; *Populorum Progressio*, No. 76).

18. In this stormy hour of mankind's history, full of peril but also filled with hope, it is in large measure for you to build justice and thus to ensure peace. Do not think that your task is ended; on the contrary, it daily becomes more urgent. How many and what terrible evils, how many deficiencies, abuses, injustices, sufferings, laments, still rise up from the world of labour! Allow us in your presence to act as interpreter of all those who suffer unjustly, who are unworthily exploited, outrageously scorned in body and soul, debased by a degrading work systematically willed, organized and imposed upon them. Hear this cry of sorrow which still rises up from suffering humanity!

19. Struggle, courageously and untiringly, against the abuses which are ever reborn, the injustices ever renewed; induce particular interests to submit to the wider vision of the common good; adapt older provisions to new needs, develop new provisions, urge nations to ratify them; and take the means to ensure their respect, for "it would be vain to proclaim human rights if, at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them, respect by everyone, at all times and for all men" (Message to the International Conference on Human Rights, Teheran, 15 Apr. 1968. See below, Par. 413).

20. We presume to add this: It is against himself that you must defend man, for man is threatened with becoming only a part of himself, with being reduced, as has been said, to one dimension only [Cf. H. Marcuse: *One-Dimensional Man: Studies on the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1964)]. At all costs he must be prevented from becoming only the mechanized servant of a blind machine which devours the best of himself, or of a State tempted to subject all energies to its service alone. It is man that you must protect, man carried away by the formidable forces which he unleashes and, as it were, swallowed up by the gigantic progress of his work, man swept along by the irresistible current of his inventions and, as it were, stunned by the growing contrast between the prodigious increase of the goods at his disposal, and their distribution, so easily made unjustly, between men and between peoples. The myth of Prometheus casts its disquieting shadow over the drama of our times, when the conscience of man is failing to raise itself up to the level of his activity, and to assume its serious responsibilities, faithful to the design of God's love for the world. Have we forgotten the lesson of the tragic story of the Tower of Babel, when the conquest of nature by men forgetful of God was accompanied by the disintegration of human society? (Gen. 11:1-9).

21. Overcoming all the destructive forces of contestation and "babelization", it is the city of men which must be built up, a city of which the sole durable cement is fraternal love between races and peoples as well as between classes and generations. Through those conflicts which rend our era it is not so much a claim to have, as it is a lawful desire to be, which is ever more strongly affirmed (*Populorum Progressio*, Nos. 1 and 8). For fifty years you have woven an ever closer fabric of juridical rules which protect the labour of men, women and youth, ensuring its proper remuneration. Now you must take steps to ensure the organic participation of all workers, not only in the fruits of their labour, but also in the economic and social responsibilities upon which their future and the future of their children depend (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 68).

22. You must also ensure the participation of all peoples in the building of the world, and take thought now for the less favoured, just as yesterday your first care was for the least favoured social categories. This means that your legislative work must continue boldly and strike out resolutely along new paths, to guarantee the common right of peoples to their integral development and enable in each instance "all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny" (*Populorum Progressio*, No. 65). This challenge is made to you today, at the dawn of the Second Development Decade. It is for you to take it up. It is for you to take the decisions which will avert the disappointment of such great hopes, and disarm the temptations of destructive violence. You must express in rules of law that solidarity which is becoming ever more definite in the consciences of men. Just as, yesterday, you guaranteed by your legislation the protection and survival of the weak against the power of the strong - for, as Lacordaire said long ago, "Between the strong and the weak, it is freedom which oppresses and law which sets free" [52nd Conference de Notre-Dame, Lent, 1848, in *Oeuvres*, of Fr. Lacordaire (Paris, Poussielgue, 1872), Vol. IV, p. 494] - so now and henceforth you must master the rights of strong peoples, and favour the development of weak peoples, by creating the conditions, not only theoretical but practical, for

a real international law of labour, as between the peoples. Like each man, so too each people must be able by its work to develop itself, to grow in humanity, to pass from less humane conditions to more humane ones (Cf. *Populorum Progressio*, Nos. 15 and 20). For this, appropriate conditions and means are necessary, and a common will, of which your Conventions, freely worked out between governments, workers and employers could and should progressively provide the proper expression. Several specialized organizations are already at work to construct this great edifice. It is upon this path that you must advance.

23. In other words, even though technical arrangements are indispensable, yet they cannot bear fruit without an awareness of the universal common good which animates and inspires research and sustains efforts, without this ideal which urges all to rival each other in building a world of brotherhood. This world of tomorrow will have to be built up by the youth of today, but it is for you to prepare them for this. Many of them receive insufficient training, and have no real possibility of learning a trade and finding work. Many, too, have jobs which have no meaning for them, the monotonous repetition of which may indeed secure profit for them, but cannot suffice to give them a reason for living, to satisfy their lawful aspiration to take their place as men in society. Who has not sensed, in the rich countries, their anxiety at the invasion of technocracy, their rejection of a society which has not succeeded in integrating them into itself; and, in poor countries their lament that, for lack of sufficient training and fitting means, they cannot make their generous contribution to the tasks which call for it? In the present changing world, their protest resounds like a cry of suffering and an appeal for justice. Amid the crisis which shakes modern civilization, the expectation of youth is anxious and impatient: let us strive to open up for them the paths of the future, offer them useful tasks and prepare them for their performance. There is so much to be done in this domain. However, you are well aware of this, and we congratulate you on having included in the programme of your 53rd Session the study of special youth employment and training schemes for development purposes [ILO: *Special Youth Employment and Training Schemes for Development Purposes*, Report VIII (1), International Labour Conference, 53rd Session, Geneva 1969 (Geneva 1968)].

24. A vast programme, Gentlemen, well capable of arousing your enthusiasm and galvanizing all your energy, in the service of that great cause which is yours - and also ours - the cause of man. In this peaceful combat, the disciples of Christ intend to take part with all their heart. For, if it is important that all human forces work together for this promotion of man, then the spirit must be put in the place proper to it, in the first place, because the Spirit is Love. Is this not clear? This work of construction surpasses the strength of man alone. But, as the Christian knows, he is not alone with his brothers in this work of love, of justice and of peace, in which he sees the preparation and pledge of that eternal city which he awaits from the grace of God. Man is not left to himself in a lonely crowd. The city of men which he is building is that of a family of brothers, of children of the same Father, sustained in their efforts by a strength which animates and supports them, the force of the Spirit; a mysterious but real strength, not magic, nor totally unknown to our experience, both historical and personal, for it has expressed itself in human words. And its voice resounds more



clearly than elsewhere in this house, which is open to the sufferings and anxieties of the workers, as well as to its achievements and its marvellous attainments; it is a voice whose ineffable echo unceasingly arouses, today as it did yesterday and ever will, the hope of men at work: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (*Mt.* 11:28 and 5:10).

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\*ORa n.25 p.1,6.

*Paths to Peace*, p.6-12.