



# The Holy See

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***LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER  
JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE WORLD MOVEMENT  
OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS***

*To Mr Laurent Katame*

*President of the World Movement of Christian Workers*

1. Mr President, as the *World Movement of Christian Workers* meets in São Paulo for its general assembly, I extend my cordial greetings to you and to all those present, and I assure you of my fervent prayer. I would like to encourage the participants in your assembly, and through them all the members of the movement, in their commitments and responsibilities as Christian workers. These sessions are an important occasion for the movement as a whole, and give its members the opportunity to draw new human and Christian energy from them, so that they can make their contribution to confronting the challenges facing the world of work today.

In your movement's activity an important place is given to the review of life, in order to see people and situations in an evangelical light in view of an ever more authentic commitment at the service of freedom and respect for every worker, as well as of his shared participation in professional life.

This pedagogy must help to structure individual and public life. Its starting-point is spiritual; in fact, it involves a deep relationship with Christ, who calls his disciples to defend man and to base their every action on fundamental moral and Gospel principles. It is particularly appropriate that in this Jubilee Year, in order better to strengthen his role at the service of the Gospel in society, each Christian worker be able to draw ever closer to Christ, Redeemer of man and Lord of history, and receive from him the necessary graces for his human work. In this spirit, participation in the Eucharist recalls man's specific mission in redeemed creation; human action attains its full measure when it is joined to Christ's sacrifice, for every Christian is invited to offer to God, as the offertory prayer says, what "earth has given and human hands have made", to receive the bread

of eternal life from his Saviour.

2. Through their work men and women have the mission of building a just and fraternal world, where workers see their rightful place and dignity recognized. By taking care of creation, they preserve and develop the goods of the earth. Work thus relates them to God, whose work of creation they continue to develop (cf. Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, n. 25), contributing to the realization of the divine plan in history (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 34). Work also relates man to his brethren through love of neighbour and the possibility, for the whole of society, of benefiting from the products of each one's labour.

To allow workers to be increasingly involved in professional life, it is important that your movement be concerned, at its various organizational levels, with the spiritual, moral and intellectual formation of its members, thereby giving them the means to rediscover the sense and value of work for the individual and for the community (cf. Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, n. 6; Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, n. 8), and also giving them tools for reflection and analysis, and principles for their personal and social action. Likewise, it would be good for each person to find his own place in professional or extra-professional networks, in order to be able to take an active part in civic life.

Indeed, every person is an indispensable element of business and social life and must be aware of his role at the service of the community.

Even if it has an important place in human life, work is not everything. So that people can maintain a better balance, attention should be paid to recreation, to personal and family life, to Sunday rest which allows them to turn to God so that they can live every moment of life more intensely. This attention prevents them from being locked into the cycle of unrestrained buying and selling, too often considered the essential reason for human work, and to focus their life differently.

3. You are fully aware of the enormous changes that are radically changing the economy and the world of work today, under the impact of great technological progress and new politico-cultural situations. No one, whether business manager, worker, political leader or social agent should be resigned to a globalization that is based solely on economic criteria, or acquiesce in the fatality of blind mechanisms. In dialogue and collaboration with all their partners in social life, workers are called to commit themselves to avoiding the ravages of globalization and of a technology that crushes man. The new economic situation involves developing new tools of analysis and action; in this area especially, lay organizations must help in the search for answers that are inspired by Gospel values.

4. Special attention should be devoted to young people seeking employment, to the unemployed and to those who are underpaid or who lack material means; it is essential that everyone be mobilized for the integration and reintegration of people who are at the age to have a profession, and to see that situations of poverty and misery, which offend their dignity, are overcome by an

ever more active solidarity. Today we are, and rightly so, more attentive to the protection of workers, who must not be subject to inhuman pressures, so that the inalienable dignity of individuals and the rights of each person may be respected, especially his right to a dignified life (cf. Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, nn. 4, 34), as well as the proper development of a career plan. It is also advisable to think seriously about the question of pensions for all workers. After a life of work, the latter have the right to a decent pension (cf. Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, n. 81), which will allow them to live and to support those who still depend on them. This is a normal expression of solidarity, equity and justice between generations, for which the Church appeals to all our contemporaries.

5. The Jubilee Year is a particularly appropriate time for reflecting on new forms of political, economic and social solidarity at all levels of society. The culture of workers, despite all the obstacles, must remain a culture of solidarity: in everyday working life, in neighbourhoods, with young people. Now more than ever, it is through your charity and sense of justice that this solidarity will be able to take root, grow and bear fruit. The Jubilee Year is also a favourable time for analyzing the economic and social imbalances in the world, in each country and in relations between countries, by re-establishing a correct hierarchy of values, with priority being given to the dignity of the working man and woman, their freedom, their responsibility and their necessary participation in company life. The Jubilee is also a particularly significant occasion for reflecting on the ways to extend solidarity on a global scale, especially to poor countries, particularly those oppressed by the burden of their debt. If the globalization of the economy and the development of new technologies offer real opportunities for progress, at the same time they increase the situations of unemployment, marginalization and extreme job insecurity, the first and principal victims of which are women, who, in some countries where a subsistence economy prevails, are the pillars of that economy. Solidarity and participation are the moral guarantees that individuals and peoples will not be mere tools but will become the protagonists of their future. Therefore, we need to strive for a "globalization of solidarity" and a globalization without the marginalization of individuals or peoples.

A concrete sign of this solidarity must be given by canceling the debt of the poorest countries or at least by significantly reducing it, while ensuring through the transparency of civil society that the reductions allowed of debts, loans or investments are used for the common good, and at the same time by offering scientific aids and personnel to guide the changes in the local economy. This type of assistance will enable indigenous people to be humanly and technically trained, with a view to the true advancement of workers, and to enable the people in the countries concerned to take charge of their economy. Your movement, which is present on all the continents, makes a particularly valuable contribution in this area.

As I ask St Joseph to accompany you in your work, I cordially grant you my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the participants in your general assembly, to all the members of the *World Movement of Christian Workers* and to their families.

*From the Vatican, 7 May 2000.*

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