



## Address to the Plenary Session on the Subject 'Towards Reducing Unemployment'

John Paul II declares that globalisation can have both positive and negative effects for workers. He points to the very harmful consequences of unemployment and lays stress upon the negative repercussions of black-market labour. He says that much must be done to help young people in relation to employment and calls for effective solidarity in combating unemployment wherever it is found. A business must not be seen solely in economic or competitive terms but must involve solidarity and participation. Company directors and decision-makers should 'base their actions on human capital and on moral values'. Much must also be done with regard to the imbalance between poor and wealthy countries. The Pope concludes by calling for 'an ever more human economy'.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen of the Academy,  
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1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the fifth general assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. I sincerely thank Mr. Edmond Malinvaud, your President, for the message he has just addressed to me on behalf of you all. My gratitude also goes to Msgr. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo and to all those who throughout the year have been involved in coordinating your work.

For the third consecutive year, you are continuing your reflections on the theme of work, thereby showing the importance that should be given to this subject not only at the economic level, but also in the social realm and for the growth and development of individuals and peoples. The human person must be at the centre of the employment question.

### **Employment is a major international challenge**

2. Society is subject to many changes as a result of scientific and technological advances and the globalisation of markets; all these can be positive factors for workers, since they are a source of development and progress; but they can also pose numerous risks to people by using them as cogs in the economy and in the unbridled quest for productivity.

Unemployment is a source of distress and 'can become a real social disaster';<sup>1</sup> it weakens individuals and entire families, making them feel marginalised because they can scarcely meet their basic needs and they feel neither recognised nor useful to society; this leads to the spiral of indebtedness, from which it is difficult to escape, but which calls for understanding on the part of

public and social institutions, and support and solidarity from the national community. I am grateful to you for seeking new ways to reduce unemployment; concrete solutions are certainly difficult, since the mechanisms of the economy are complex and are almost always of a political and financial nature. Many things also depend on the norms governing taxes and trade unions.

3. Employment is certainly a major challenge in international life. It presupposes a sound distribution of work and solidarity between all persons of a working age who are able to do so. In this spirit, it is not normal for some professional categories to be preoccupied with preserving acquired benefits, which can only have negative repercussions on employment in a country. Furthermore, the parallel system of black-market labour seriously damages a country's economy, since it represents a refusal to participate in national life through social contributions and taxes; likewise, it places some workers, especially women and children, in an uncontrollable and unacceptable state of submission and servility, not only in poor countries but also in industrialised nations. It is the authorities' duty to see that everyone has the same opportunities regarding employment and the work code.

4. Work is an essential element for everyone. It contributes to his personal growth because it is an integral part of his everyday life. Idleness offers no interior motivation and does not allow a person to plan for the future; not only does it bring 'loss and great want',<sup>2</sup> but it is also the enemy of a good moral life.<sup>3</sup> Work also ensures every individual a place in society, through the justifiable feeling of being useful to the human community and through the growth of fraternal relations; furthermore, it enables him to participate responsibly in the life of his country and to contribute to the work of creation.

### **Effective solidarity is more necessary than ever**

5. A considerable number of young people are among those painfully affected by unemployment. When they enter the job market, they often have the impression that they will have difficulty in finding a place in society and in being acknowledged for their real worth. In this area, all political, economic and social leaders are called to redouble their efforts on behalf of young people, who must be considered one of a nation's most valuable assets, to work together to offer them professional training ever more suited to the current economic situation and to formulate a policy vigorously geared to employment for everyone. In this way, confidence and renewed hope will be given to young people, who at times can have the impression that society does not really need them; this will noticeably reduce disparities between social classes, as well as the phenomena of violence, prostitution, drugs and delinquency, which are continually on the rise. I encourage all who have a role in the intellectual and professional formation of young people to guide, support and encourage them, so that they can be integrated into the working world. For them a job will mean the recognition of their abilities and efforts and will open a personal, family and social future for them. In the same way, through appropriate education and the necessary social assistance, it would be advisable to help families experiencing difficulty for professional reasons, and to teach low-income individuals and families how to balance their budget and not to be enticed by the

illusory goods marketed by consumer society. Indebtedness is a situation from which it is often difficult to escape.

6. Since employment cannot increase indefinitely, for the sake of human solidarity it is important to envisage a reorganisation and better distribution of work, without forgetting the necessary sharing of resources with the unemployed. Effective solidarity among all is more necessary than ever, particularly for those who have been unemployed for a long time and for their families, who cannot remain in poverty and destitution without the national community being actively mobilised; no one should be resigned to the fact that some remain unemployed.

7. In a business, wealth is not only created by the means of production, capital and profit, but comes first and foremost from the men and women who, through their work, produce what then becomes consumer goods or services. Hence all wage-earners, each at his own level, must have their share of responsibility, working for the common good of the business and, ultimately, for all society.<sup>4</sup> It is essential to have confidence in people, to develop a system that gives priority to the sense of innovation on the part of individuals and groups, to participation and solidarity,<sup>5</sup> and that fundamentally encourages employment and development. The utilisation of people's skills is a driving force of the economy. Looking at a business solely in economic or competitive terms entails risks; it endangers human stability.

#### **Need for a fundamental change in consciences**

8. Company directors and decision-makers should be aware that it is essential to base their actions on human capital and on moral values,<sup>6</sup> in particular, on respect for individuals and their inalienable need to have a job and to live on the fruits of their professional activity. Nor should we forget the quality of a business' organisation, the participation of all in its smooth functioning, as well as a renewed attention to peaceful relations between all the workers. I earnestly appeal for an ever greater mobilisation of those variously involved in social life and of all unions and management personnel to commit themselves, each in their own way, to serving the individual and humanity through decisions in which the human person, especially the weakest and the neediest, has the central place and has his specific responsibility truly recognised. The globalisation of the economy and of employment also calls for the globalisation of responsibilities.

9. The imbalances between poor and wealthy countries continue to grow. Industrialised nations have a duty in justice and a serious responsibility towards developing countries. Disparities are becoming more and more glaring. Paradoxically, some countries having natural wealth above or below ground are subject to unacceptable exploitation by other countries in such a way that entire populations cannot benefit from the wealth of their own land or from their work. These nations should be given the opportunity to develop their own natural resources by involving them more closely in world economic activity.

10. The point of departure for a revitalisation of employment is an ethical duty and the need for a

fundamental change in consciences. All economic development that does not take account of the human and moral aspect will have a tendency to crush the human person. The economy, labour and business are first and foremost at the service of persons. Strategic choices cannot be made to the detriment of those who work in a firm. It is important to offer a job to all our contemporaries through a just and responsible allocation of work. Undoubtedly, we can also envisage a review of the relationship between salary and work, in order to reaffirm the value of manual labour, which is often difficult and is considered secondary. In fact, salary policies should take into account not only a business' productivity, but also its employees. Too large a difference between salaries is unjust, for it devalues a certain number of indispensable jobs and creates social disparities that are damaging to everyone.

11. To meet the challenges that society must face on the threshold of the third millennium, I appeal to the Christian community to give ever greater support to those who are struggling for the cause of employment, and to walk with men and women on the path of an ever more human economy.<sup>7</sup>

In this spirit, I thank you for the valuable service you offer the Church by being particularly attentive to social phenomena that are important for individuals and for humanity as a whole. As I entrust you to the intercession of St. Joseph, patron of workers, and of the Virgin Mary, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to your families and to all your loved ones.

1 *Laborem Exercens*, n. 18.

2 *Tb* 4:13.

3 Cf. *Si* 33:29.

4 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 38.

5 Cf. *Ibid.*, n. 45.

6 Cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, nn. 99-101.

7 Cf. *Centesimus Annus*, n. 62.