



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

Consistory Hall

Monday, 3 December 2012

Dear Cardinals,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you all on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. I greet the Cardinal President, whom I thank for his kind words, and likewise Monsignor the Secretary, the Officials of the Dicastery and all of you, Members and Consultors, who have come together for this important moment of reflection and planning. Your Assembly is being celebrated during the Year of the Faith, after the Synod which was dedicated to the New Evangelization, and also — as was stated — on the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and — within a few months — that of the Encyclical Pacem in Terris of Blessed Pope John XXIII. It is a context which already in itself offers many incentives.

The Church's social doctrine, as Blessed Pope John Paul II taught us, is an integral part of the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. Encyclical Centesimus Annus, n. 54), and with all the more reason should be considered important for the new evangelization (cf. *ibid.*, n. 5; Encyclical Caritas in Veritate, n. 15). By accepting Jesus Christ and his Gospel, not only in our personal life but also in our social relationships, we become messengers of a vision of man, of his dignity, of his freedom and of his capacity for relationships, which is marked by transcendence, in both the horizontal and vertical directions.

Just as Blessed John XXIII reminded us in Pacem in Terris (cf. n. 9), the foundation and meaning of human rights and duties depend on an integral anthropology, which derives from Revelation

and from the exercise of natural reason. In fact rights and duties are not based solely on the social awareness of peoples; they depend primarily on the natural moral law, which is inscribed by God in the conscience of every person, and thus — in the final analysis — on the truth regarding man and society.

Although the defence of rights has made great progress in our time, today's culture — characterized among other things by a utilitarian individualism and technocratic economics — tends not to value the person, who, albeit immersed in an infinite network of relations and communications, is conceived of as a “fluid” being with no permanent substance. Paradoxically, man today often seems to be an isolated being because he is indifferent to the constitutive relationship of his being, which is the root of all his other relationships: his relationship with God. The human being today is considered mainly in a biological perspective, or as “human capital”, “a resource”, part of a productive and financial mechanism that towers over him.

Even though on the one hand the dignity of the person continues to be proclaimed, on the other, new ideologies — such as the hedonistic and selfish one of sexual and reproductive rights, or a deregulated financial capitalism that abuses politics and takes the real economy apart — contribute to forming a view of the employee and of his or her work as “minor” goods. These ideologies also contribute to undermining the natural foundations of society and especially of the family.

In fact human beings — transcendent in their make up in comparison with other beings and with earthly goods — enjoy real primacy which makes them responsible both for themselves and for creation. Work, for Christianity, is a good fundamental to man, with a view to his personalization and socialization and to the formation of a family, as well as to the contribution it makes to the common good and to peace. Precisely on this account, the objective of access to work for all is always a priority, even during periods of economic recession (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 32).

Both a new humanism and a renewed cultural commitment and planning can come from a new evangelization of social life. This helps to dethrone the modern idols, to replace individualism, materialistic consumerism and technocracy with a fraternal culture, giving freely from a loving solidarity. Jesus Christ summed up and completed the precepts in a new commandment: “as I have loved you, that you also you love one another” (Jn 13:34); here lies the secret to all social life that is truly human and peaceful, as well as to the renewal of politics and the national and world institutions. Blessed [Pope John XXIII](#) undertook the construction of a global community, with a corresponding authority — literally motivated by love — and precisely by love for the common good of the human family. Thus we read in *Pacem in Terris*: “there is an intrinsic connection between... the inner significance of the common good on the one hand, and the nature and function of public authority on the other.... Public authority, as the means of promoting the common good in civil society, is a postulate of the moral order. But the moral order likewise requires that this authority be effective in attaining its end” (n. 136).

It is not, of course, the Church's duty to suggest — from a juridical and political viewpoint — the practical configuration of such an international arrangement, but she offers to those who are responsible for it those principles for reflection, criteria for judgement, and practical guidelines that can guarantee the anthropological and ethical frame around the common good (cf. *Encyclical Caritas in Veritate*, n. 67). In reflection, in any case, we must bear in mind that we must not imagine a superpower, concentrated in the hands of a few, that would dominate all peoples, taking advantage of the weakest; rather, any such authority must first of all be understood as a moral force with the potential to influence in accordance with reason (cf. 27), that is, as a participatory authority, limited in competence and by law.

I thank the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace because, together with other pontifical institutions, it has set itself to delve more deeply into the directives I offered in *Caritas in Veritate*. And it has done this either by reflecting on a reform of the international financial and monetary system or through the Plenary Session of the past few days and the international Seminar on *Pacem in Terris* that will be held next year.

May the Virgin Mary, the One who with faith and love welcomed the Saviour within her in order to give him to the world, guide us as we proclaim and bear witness to the Church's social doctrine to make the new evangelization more effective. With this wish, I very gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to each one of you. Many thanks.

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