



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY MEETING  
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL "COR UNUM"**

*Consistory Hall  
Saturday, 19 January 2013*

*Dear Friends,*

I welcome you with affection and with joy on the occasion of the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum". I thank the President, Cardinal Robert Sarah, for his words and I offer my cordial greeting to each one of you, extending it in spirit to everyone working in the service of the Church's charity. With my recent Motu Proprio *Intima Ecclesiae Natura* I wanted to reassert the ecclesial significance of your work. Your witness can open the door of faith to many persons who seek the love of Christ. In this way, during the Year of Faith the theme "Charity, new ethics and Christian anthropology", which you are examining, reflects the strong connection between love and truth, or, if one prefers, between faith and charity. The entire Christian *ethos* receives its meaning from faith as an "encounter" with the love of Christ, who offers a new horizon and impresses on life its decisive direction (cf. Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1). Christian love finds its foundation and form in faith. By encountering God and experiencing his love we learn "to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others" (*ibid.*, n. 33).

Starting from this dynamic relationship between faith and charity, I would like to reflect on one point that recalls the prophetic dimension that faith instils in charity. Believing adherence to the Gospel impresses on charity its specifically Christian form and constitutes the principle of its discernment. Christians, in particular those who work in charities, must allow themselves to be guided by the principles of faith, through which we adhere to the "God's point of view", to his plan for each one of us (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 1). This new outlook on the world and on man offered

by faith also provides the correct criterion for evaluating for expressions of charity in today's context.

In every age, when man has not sought such a plan he has fallen prey to cultural temptations that have in the end enslaved him. In recent centuries, ideologies that praised the cult of nation, race and social class have proved to be real idolatries; and the same could be said of reckless capitalism with its worship of profit that results in crisis, inequality and poverty. People today share more and more a common feeling about the inalienable dignity of every human being and about our reciprocal and interdependent responsibility for it; and this is to the advantage of true civilization, the civilization of love. However, unfortunately, our time also knows the shadows that hide God's plan. I am referring above all to the tragic anthropological reduction that repropose the age-old hedonistic materialism, but to which a "technological Prometheism" is added. From this union of the materialistic vision of man and the great development of technology a fundamentally atheist anthropology emerges. It presupposes that man is reduced to autonomous functions, the mind to the brain, human history to a destiny of self-realization. All this disregards God, his properly spiritual dimension and the horizon of the afterlife. In the perspective of a human being deprived of his soul and consequently of a personal relationship with his Creator, what is technically possible becomes morally licit, every experiment is acceptable, every demographic policy permitted, every manipulation legitimized. The most dangerous snare of this current of thought is in fact the absolutization of man: man wants to be *ab-solutus*, freed from every bond and from every natural constitution. He claims to be independent and thinks that his happiness lies in his own self-affirmation. "Man calls his nature into question.... From now on there is only the abstract human being, who chooses for himself what his nature is to be" ([\*Discourse to the Roman Curia, 21 December 2012\*](#)). This is a radical denial of the nature of the creature and child in man, which ends in tragic loneliness.

Faith and healthy Christian discernment therefore lead us to pay prophetic attention to this ethical problem and to its underlying mentality. The just collaboration with international bodies in the field of development and human advancement must not make us close our eyes to these grave ideologies. It is the duty of pastors of the Church — the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15) — to put the Catholic faithful and every person of good will and right reason on guard against the trend of these ideologies. It is a negative trend for humankind, although it may be disguised by good feelings in the name of alleged progress, alleged rights, or an alleged humanism. In the face of this anthropological reduction, what is the task expected of every Christian, and especially of you who are engaged in charitable activities and therefore, in direct contact with many other social agents? We must of course exercise critical vigilance and, at times, refuse funding and partnerships that, directly or indirectly, foster actions and projects that are contrary to Christian anthropology. But the Church is always committed positively to the advancement of human beings according to God's design, in the integrity of their dignity, with respect for their two-fold — vertical and horizontal — dimensions. The action for development of Church bodies also strives for this. The Christian vision of man is, in fact, a great "yes" to the

dignity of persons called to an intimate filial communion of humility and faithfulness. The human being is not a self-sufficient individual nor an anonymous element in the group. Rather he is a unique and unrepeatable person, intrinsically ordered to relationships and sociability. Thus the Church reaffirms her great “yes” to the dignity and beauty of marriage as an expression of the faithful and generous bond between man and woman, and her no to “gender” philosophies, because the reciprocity between male and female is an expression of the beauty of nature willed by the Creator.

Dear friends, I thank you for your commitment to promote humanity, in fidelity to their true dignity. In the face of the challenge of the times, we know that the answer is the encounter with Christ. In him men and women can totally fulfil their personal good and the common good. I encourage you to continue with joy and generosity, as I warmly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.