



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

**TO THE DIRECTORS OF "CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES"**

*Baltimore, Maryland*

*Sunday, 8 October 1995*

*Dear Friends in Christ!*

1. "Caritas Christi *urget nos*" (2 Cor. 5:14). For more than fifty years *Catholic Relief Services* has worked to put into practice the mandate which the Church has received from her Lord: "to bring glad tidings to the poor... to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners" (Lk. 4:18). My Pastoral Visit to Baltimore gives me the opportunity to express my profound gratitude to your organization and to those who support it by their prayers and their generous contributions. Above all, I give thanks to Almighty God, who makes it possible for you to bear witness to the truth that "faith working through love" (cf. Gal. 5:6) is the sign of authentic discipleship.

Catholic Relief Services is known for the effective and innovative programs of assistance which it sponsors throughout the world. Ever ready at a moment's notice to help the victims of natural disasters and peoples burdened by poverty, famine, epidemics and war, you are inspired by a firm commitment to the rich *tradition of Catholic social doctrine* – the aim of which is "the defense of the human person and the safeguarding of human dignity" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 3). In fact, the Church's sacred duty of proclaiming the Gospel "to all creation" (Mk. 16:15) includes her teaching on *the moral and religious implications of political, economic and social life*.

2. The first principle of the Church's social teaching, from which all others derive, is that the human person is and ought to be "the origin, the subject and the purpose of all social institutions" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 25). Each individual without exception is created "in the image of God" (cf. Gen. 1:27) and redeemed by the Blood of Christ. In a world scarred by religious divisions and

national rivalries, Catholic Relief Services testifies to the *unity of the human family and to the equal and inalienable dignity of each and every person*. Its projects in Bosnia–Hercegovina, El Salvador, Haiti, India, Rwanda and Vietnam – to name but a few of its most recent initiatives – faithfully reflect the Organization's declared purpose to assist people "on the basis of need, not creed, race or nationality" (Mission Statement).

The splendor of Christ's glory is reflected in the face of every human being, and is even more so when that face is emaciated by hunger, saddened by exile, or oppressed by poverty and misery (cf. Mt. 25:31-46). With courage and compassion, Christians must be ever attentive to *the cry of the poor*, serving the Lord who is present in their suffering. As an indispensable condition for the preparation of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, "how can we fail to lay greater emphasis on the Church's preferential option for the poor and the outcast?" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51).

3. The truth about human dignity teaches us a correct vision of society. Since the beginning of my papal ministry, I have repeatedly affirmed the importance of *social solidarity* as an instrument for building up the civilization of love for which humanity yearns. Solidarity involves "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). While solidarity is first lived in the communion of the family, and then in the community and nation, it has a universal openness to the entire human family.

Unfortunately, the Church faces obstacles which hinder the practice of solidarity on a world level, including forms of isolationism which tend to weaken the sense of international responsibility. Other challenges come from ideologies which preach racial hatred and religious intolerance. Inspired by Christ's teaching and example, Catholic Relief Services' *commitment to international solidarity* echoes the assurance of the Lord of history: "As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me" (Mt. 25:40).

4. Dear brothers and sisters: your determined efforts to meet the needs of the countless number of people around the world who turn to you for help bear eloquent testimony to the Christian virtue of charity. As you know, *relieving the sufferings of the many modern Calvaries* which clamor for your attention and help means not only working to alleviate immediate suffering, but also, in the light of the Gospel, striving to foster self-respect and solidarity among the poor themselves. The best kind of assistance is that which encourages the needy to become the *primary artisans of their own social and cultural development*. This approach respects the authentic "subjectivity" of people, enabling them to share in that "subduing" of creation (cf. Gen. 1:28) by which humanity prepares the way for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

It is in this regard that there is a need for innovative strategies and creative approaches to resolving the structural problems of underdevelopment which themselves are often the result of

insensitivity and injustice. Responding to this challenge, then, represents an important facet of Catholic Relief Services' work, which should always be carried out in strict observance of the Church's social teaching.

5. As Pastor of the universal Church I wish to express my thanks for your tireless work on behalf of "the Lord's poor". I gladly entrust Catholic Relief Services – its benefactors, staff and volunteers – to Mary, the loving Comforter of the Afflicted, and I make my own the prayer of Saint Paul: "May the Lord increase you and make you overflow with love for one another and for all" (1 Thes. 3:12). With my Apostolic Blessing.