



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO "CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS" 28 May 1979 *Your Eminence, Your Excellencies,*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, This week, the Pope's programme of work is rather a heavy one, before the journey to Poland. However, I was anxious to satisfy your desire for an audience, even if briefly, to show you my esteem and the importance I attach to "Caritas Internationalis". I am very happy to note in the first place the ever wider implantation of diocesan "Caritas" organisms, in two thirds of the dioceses of the world. They are, on the local plane, the expression and instrument of the charity of the great Christian community presided over by the bishop, and therefore of all the ecclesial communities, parochial or others, attached to it. National "Caritas" organisms have an important role in over a hundred countries, to animate and coordinate charitable action, in close liaison with the episcopal Conferences. It seemed necessary too—and this was an idea that was already very dear to my late predecessor when he was still Mons. Montini—that these national organisms should be united on the international plane in "Caritas Internationalis", to study, stimulate and harmonize the projects of member associations. It is, as it were, a well structured tree with multiple ramifications. It must be added finally that the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" constitutes, around the Pope, around the one "who presides over the universal assembly of charity" (cf. Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 13), a meeting place for all Church organisms dedicated to charity and to development. According to the beautiful name you bear, which is the keyword of the Gospel, you are ordained to "charity". Your whole enterprise is to live by charity, to bear witness to it, to put it into practice, concretely and with others. Let us not let the word "charity", or its reality, be devalued. It is not just the fruit of a sentimental and fleeting pity. It is the deepest love for one's neighbour, for every person, and in particular for persons in need. Its justification and its dynamism come from high consideration for the person, his dignity, his right to have access to a decent life in spite of the material or moral misery that may overtake him owing to bad luck, natural disasters, illness, unjust social situations, etc. It is sufficient that this person should be in need, and sometimes immediate need, of food, shelter, clothes, a livelihood, comfort in loneliness, a visit, support, for himself and for the members of his family. And if this person is so important in our eyes, it is because he is important in God's eyes to begin with; it is because Christ identifies himself with him (cf. Mt 25:34-40); it is because Christ asks us to do for him what, in this situation, we would like to be done for ourselves (cf. Mt 7:12). Christians would not be worthy of bearing this name if they did not try to accede to this charity which comes from God. They must bear witness to it personally, and no one is dispensed from doing so. No one has the monopoly of it either. But it is essential that Christians should bear witness to it jointly, that their heart should be formed to it, that their desire for charitable action should be enlightened, that their initiatives should be coordinated. That is the role of charitable associations in the Church, and especially of the "Caritas" organisms. When charity has been defined so deeply, it is no longer a question—in the Church of contrasting measures of assistance with actions aiming at development. The two must go hand in hand. How could we fail to be concerned to establish for tomorrow conditions of life such that the endemic miseries of today can be overcome or avoided in the future, as far as it

depends on us? But what would this care for human advancement be if it neglected to meet, this very day, vital needs that cannot wait? For our society, God be thanked, makes it its business more and more to prepare a better future: Christians must be present in this effort, in their own way, that is, inspired by love and justice, with the aim of improving the whole man and of letting the persons concerned participate in their own development. You have been concerned with this matter in the course of this general Assembly. But on the other hand, our society, in its desire to plan everything, tends to minimize, as being temporary, certain personal emergency cases, certain unforeseen situations of distress, certain categories of persons living on the fringes of society. Now you know that new types of poor people are continually arising, in all our societies, who are excluded from "progress". "You always have the poor with you", Jesus said (Mt 26:11). "Caritas" must keep as its first aim, as its special vocation, the eager desire to locate them, to help them with educative care and to make others aware of them. And let us always take care too that the sums collected for these poor people sometimes, indeed, by other poor people, are really used in the service of the poor. Furthermore, your coordination on the international plane, the fact that you are recognized as having consultative status by the international organizations, give you the possibility and make it your duty to bear witness to Christian charity at the level of these international or intergovernmental authorities. It is a presence and an action that have their importance. The Second Vatican Council encouraged you to do so (cf. Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 90). You know how much the Holy See appreciates this international activity, in which it does not hesitate to take part actively, on its own plane. May it be possible to see everywhere, through your words and your actions, the Agape of the Lord, which knows no bounds! May this love be the evangelical leaven contributing to make this universe a world in which brotherhood and solidarity may really be lived, in which men may be able to lead a life worthy of sons of God! In this liturgical time, we implore especially the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love: may he enlighten, purify and strengthen the love of all the members of the "Caritas" organizations, whom I willingly bless, with a special intention for the leaders and delegates present here. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana