

Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

22nd to 27th May 2011, Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome



Caritas Internationalis
19th General Assembly
Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome
23 May 2011

The *Caritas* Enterprise:
Laborious and Stimulating

Your Eminences, My Lord Archbishops and Bishops, Distinguished Delegates, my dear Brothers and Sisters, I greet you very warmly in the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I understand you represent 165 national organizations linked with the Catholic Church, operating in the areas of development, humanitarian and social assistance, in about 200 countries and territories of the world. On behalf of all of us working across the courtyard from *Caritas Internationalis*, we join you in thanksgiving for the 60th Anniversary and assure you of our prayers and solidarity for a blessed and successful Assembly.

When you *Caritas* representatives gather in Assembly, you probably wish to exchange the excellent field reports from their respective countries and territories. These remind me of the uplifting stories that I too would like to share, from when - as archbishop of Cape Coast - I practically lived *caritas* on a daily basis. The earliest and greatest of such field reports is the Gospel account of the *Good Samaritan*, the foundational parable for *Caritas* and for the Confederation of *Caritas Internationalis*. It is so inspiring / instructive that when reading it with *caritas* in mind, we succeed in understanding our



mission of living and witnessing to the Charity of Christ in our world. And we can only conclude wisely, as Jesus did, "Go and do likewise."

From the vantage point of my area of preparation, I cannot help but note that the *Good Samaritan* comes in sort of a "package" or what biblical scholars call a "frame", that is, the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer. This dialogue should be recognized as important, maybe even essential, for all those engaged in Caritas service. Let us listen to it:

25 And behold, a Lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?"

27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."

28 And Jesus said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

36 [And Jesus asked] "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?"

37 He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

In the spirit of the *Good Samaritan* and with your permission, therefore, I would like to focus my remarks on this exchange. As you may have noticed, it begins on a challenging note:

25 And behold, a Lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, asking, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

This opening sets quite an official tone. The questioner is not just anyone in the crowd; moreover, he stands up, as if in court, to pose his question in a formal manner. Luke tells us that the motive for this question was to put



Jesus to the test, as if to place Him on trial. By addressing Jesus as “Teacher”, the lawyer seems to be questioning Jesus’ credentials, his authority. Moreover, the question about inheriting eternal life is too sensitive, too convoluted to be answered in a straightforward manner that could avoid further debate. Thus, the Lawyer’s questioning was an attempt to put Jesus to the test and, in so doing, to justify himself.

At this Assembly, we might like to hear about our mutual successes. But the Lawyer’s question successfully deflects our attention from the good having been done to the *how* of doing it. Thus, he might well be putting us to the test, too. And in this way he can be of great help in focusing our reflections on the true purpose of a General Assembly and of the *Caritas* Confederation itself. Namely, to consider the normative, legal, organizational or structural requirements. There may well be danger of “a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests.”¹ Not to reflect on the foundational values that hold us in common, is perhaps to neglect or distort the Gospel mandate that called us into *Caritas* and keeps us as together in the Confederation.

26a So Jesus asked the Lawyer, “What is written in the law?”

Since a Lawyer was asking such a question, an objective answer seemed necessary in order to meet the legal challenge. It is as if Jesus were asking in return, “What are the basic facts behind what you mean?” in order to avoid a useless debate and confront the question “head on”. So that is where we start, too.

For us, the basic facts are that, “Almost two centuries ago, parish and diocesan groups were formed to assist those in need,” some taking the name *Caritas*. Over time, “they also began to coordinate their national and international action.”² More recently, sixty years ago –the anniversary being

¹ DCE 28. “The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest” DCE 28

² (JP II, 2004)

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celebrated - the Servant of God Pius XII set up *Caritas Internationalis* in Rome to “operate in the universal Church and gather together the national charitable agencies authorized by the respective Bishops ... to foster reciprocal knowledge, coordination and collaboration in carrying out charitable and social activities in the various parts of the world”³

We already mentioned the founding inspiration of the Good Samaritan, in which “we see the twofold reality of Christian charity, which is both universal and practical. The Samaritan happens to meet a Jewish man in need who, in any event, is outside the boundaries of his tribe and his religion. But charity is universal, so this needy “stranger” is in every sense a “neighbour” to the Samaritan. Universality does away with the limits that close established boundaries in this world in and thus create differences and conflicts”⁴. So, through our deep reflection on this parable, we can conclude with our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI that: “Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. The Church's charitable organizations, beginning with those of *Caritas* (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. ... a “formation of the heart”. The programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is “a heart which sees”.⁵ The

³ (JP II, 2004)

⁴ B-XVI, Synod Reflection.

⁵ DCE 31.



turning-point⁶ is found in compassion, it is the experience of “suffer with”, just as mercy, *miser cordia*, also is both Divine and human.

Jesus acknowledges, however, that, on a realistic basis, mere facts win no arguments, so he opens the vista wider, giving the Lawyer more space to make his case.

26b Jesus went on to ask the Lawyer, “How do you read?”

In other words, He sought not just the correct factual answer, but also a good interpretation or understanding.

Within the factual history of Caritas, we take note of Pope Pius XII’s intuition, “to gather together” the many national socio-pastoral structures which had already been born as the Church responded to various humanitarian crises. The word **network** may not have been utilized sixty years ago, but we know that the aim was to provide a networking platform. And so the name *Caritas* stands, not just for the Church responding to emergencies and other social needs, but also for the Confederation, composed of national Caritas member organizations which are offices within their respective Episcopal Conferences or closely linked to and approved by the Bishops in their country.

This Confederation (CI), far from limiting the autonomy to which the member organizations are entitled, fosters collaboration among them through its (CI) activities of animation, coordination and representation.⁷ It helps the members “to encounter their neighbour in a network of relationships ... building and nurturing fraternal relationships where there is hatred”, prejudice or apathy.”⁸

The Fathers of Vatican Council II articulated clearly that networking is inextricably linked to our identity as Church: “Since in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any

⁶ Card. Carlo Maria Martini, *Farsi prossimo*, 1986

⁷ Pope John Paul II *Grants Canonical Legal Status to Caritas Internationalis*, 2004.

⁸ *Compendium*, 4.



political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond".⁹

At the same time, Pope Benedict XVI would like charity to shine through: "It is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintain all of its splendour and not become just another form of social assistance."¹⁰

Now to return to our roots in the Good Samaritan story:

27 And the Lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."

In two verses, the Lawyer gives a classic summary of the entire law. It is a total guide for human conduct. We can be sure that Jesus himself would have answered in the same manner. It is the correct answer. The case is closed, far more quickly and more easily than we would have imagined.

Except ... how can one legislate love? Compassion? Solidarity? And is this not precisely the challenge of *Caritas*:... to coordinate, organize, set policy for, and monitor the exercise of charity? In fact, the inspiration for such grace-filled actions, which represent the Gospel at work in society, can be found in the rich body of Catholic Social Doctrine. And here *Caritas* is rightly expected to make its contribution. What might it be?

In testimony to Christ's charity, through works of relief and development, *Caritas* is part and parcel of evangelization. For, as Pope Paul VI affirmed, "evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social."¹¹ This aspect of evangelization is also articulated in the Church's

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 42

¹⁰ DCE 31

¹¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, § 29, 31.



social doctrine, which proclaims and bears witness to faith. It is an instrument and an indispensable setting for formation in faith.”¹²

Now the Church is a mystery and so cannot be reduced to a visible reality alone. She is the subject of Catholic Social Doctrine, not just its object.

We may note several challenges in this regard: excessive professionalism, proselytism in two senses: one, an abuse of the gratuitous charity we are called to offer; the other, an excessive caution about proselytism which would block legitimate and necessary evangelization.

First,–we should not draw a fictitious distinction between “professionalism” and evangelization. The power of the Gospel calls us to be professional in every action, but it also expects us to be motivated by faith and values when we offer this service in the name of Jesus and of His Church. Here our Good Samaritan is again the perfect example, as out of his own resources he provided the best possible care (oil, wine, bandages, transportation, pre-paid care at a hostel).

Christians, “as citizens of two cities, [are exhorted] to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other.”¹³

Secondly, the temptation of **proselytism**, that is, to use charity as a more or less subtle way of imposing beliefs on others. “Love is free; it is not practiced as a way of achieve other ends.”¹⁴

In performing the work of Caritas, we need not, and should not, restrict our aid to those who share our faith. We should ask ourselves instead about the manner in which we provide our services – do they reflect the values and the

¹² *Caritas in veritate*, § 15.

¹³ *Gaudium et Spes* 43

¹⁴ DCE, 31



teaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ who remains forever at the centre of our socio-pastoral service.

Because he fulfilled the law, the Samaritan shows that he is a neighbour, a member of God's people, one who inherits eternal life. This story supplies the practical model for Christian conduct. It offers radical demands that certain modes of action be approved and others be rejected.

But legitimate evangelization is not to be caricatured as proselytism. Quite simply, Caritas demonstrates how "love of neighbour will no longer be ... a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without."¹⁵ The task before us is to re-establish the "link between evangelization and charity. The Church's charity is not directed solely at social progress, but wants to draw man toward God, the source of all good."¹⁶

28 And Jesus said to the Lawyer, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."

As expected, Jesus acknowledges the Lawyer's answer as correct, and almost casually attempts to bring the discussion to a simple close. But knowing "what is in man," our Lord also goes on to offer his sceptical questioner another chance. He challenges him to be as good as his word, that is, to put the key to eternal life into practice.

And happily, Caritas would do the same. "The transition from theory to practice is of its very nature difficult; and it is especially so when one tries to reduce to concrete terms a social doctrine such as that of the Church"¹⁷

Today, we might locate such a challenge in the practice of "advocacy". The Fathers of Vatican Council II, without using the word "advocacy", expressed the challenge in this manner: "Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper

¹⁵ DCE 31.

¹⁶ Sarah, *Interview*.

¹⁷ M&M 229



mission in the political, economic or social order ... But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law.”¹⁸ They also made it clear, however, that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion.¹⁹ So, we note some distinctive elements to the advocacy activities undertaken by Church-inspired organizations. Pope Benedict XVI clearly delineates these points in his first encyclical: Christian charitable activity “is not a means of changing the world ideologically.”²⁰ The distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity may be found in its great objective: “to assist its members in spreading charity and social justice in the world,” and in particular, “the assistance, advancement, and integral development of the most underprivileged, within an overall pastoral programme.”

Accordingly, the very legitimate activity of *Caritas Internationalis* in terms of advocacy unfolds within the policies and directives of the Holy See, at the international level, and of the local Episcopal Conference and local Bishops, on the national level.

Moreover, such advocacy unfolds with prudence and respect for the responsibility of the lay faithful in the truly political and even cultural issues of their time and place. And this respect manifests itself in not seeking to employ a kind of Ecclesiastical authority for positions which are matters of prudential judgment, especially where we find groups of Catholics taking quite different positions on a controversial issue.²¹

29 But the Lawyer, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

¹⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* 42.

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 43

²⁰ (DCE 31)

²¹ Cfr. (GS, 42-43)



A few moments ago, our Lawyer was trying to put Jesus to the test. Now, after a brief exchange, the tone is different. He asks another question, this time to justify himself by getting Jesus to admit that it is impossible to know for sure who the second half of the Great Commandment is talking about when it says “neighbour”. And everyone knows that a law which is vague cannot be enforced.

The lawyer in this parable insists on a further definition of who is “neighbour”; he demands certainty. This test concerns the very role of God’s law in salvation. The law indeed is valid, but do non-Jews who observe the law also inherit eternal life? Where does one draw the line?

Precisely because *Caritas* is of the Church, *Caritas* faces a similar challenge to that proposed by the Lawyer in the Gospel parable.

There should be no opposition between the exercise of charity as a Gospel value in cooperation with un-believers. “A particular manifestation of charity and a guiding criterion for fraternal cooperation between believers and non-believers is undoubtedly the principle of subsidiarity, an expression of inalienable human freedom.”²² This leads ultimately to the determination of the field of work of *Caritas* and who its partners can be; and this is what the conclusion of the parable helps us to answer. “It is able to take account both of the manifold articulation of plans – and therefore of the plurality of subjects – as well as the coordination of those plans.”²³ So coordination in a genuine confederation “must be marked by subsidiarity, articulated into several layers and involving different levels that can work together.” (Civ 57).

Please notice, before we go further, how during this impromptu trial, the Lawyer’s case has significantly evolved. First he challenged the Teacher to tell him the key to inheriting eternal life. Now, a few minutes later, the question has apparently become much narrower, more obvious, simpler – but even more impossible to answer: *Who is my neighbour?*

²² (Civ 57)

²³ (Civ 57).



Amazing. Jesus' answer is what we call THE GREAT FIELD REPORT. But even though the Good Samaritan answers everything, Jesus does not just give the example and then turn away, but offers his former Accuser yet another chance – a chance, not so much to win the argument, as to find access to life, life to the full. Which lies in the broad field of the application of love and in the identification of everybody else as a partner in this labour of love.

36 [In conclusion, Jesus asked] “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?”

Jesus turns the original question about the neighbour inside-out so that it CAN be answered in action: Who proved to be the neighbour?

With the same kind of proof, there can be no opposition between justice and charity: “Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society.” “One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now”.²⁴ “There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable.” “the very thing which the suffering person – every person – needs: namely, loving personal concern”.²⁵

“The love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ ... does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which is often is even more necessary than material support”²⁶

And the Holy Father goes on to show how faith and reason are related. Our God is love, and eternal reason is fire, is charity.²⁷ Fruitful dialogue between

²⁴ (DCE 31)

²⁵ DCE 28

²⁶ DCE 28

²⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Reflection, II Synod for Africa.



faith and reason cannot but render the work of charity more effective within society.²⁸

37 The Lawyer answered, "The one who showed mercy on him."

For the second time, the professional Accuser gave the right answer. But he uses the vague expression, "The one who...", because he cannot bring himself to say the word "Samaritan". And, for the second time, Jesus opens the door to Life by telling him, "Go and do likewise."

Just as the Lawyer answered correctly, so when one asks about *Caritas Internationalis*, there is also a correct answer. The activity of *Caritas Internationalis* is supervised and guided by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", and one of the tasks of *Cor Unum* is "to foster and coordinate the initiatives of Catholic organizations that labour to help peoples in need, especially those who go to the rescue in the more urgent crises and disasters, and to facilitate their relations with public international organizations operating in the same field of assistance and good works"²⁹

What we mean is in the spirit of Jesus' response: "Go and do likewise." The verification or, if you like, the justification, is not so much in the quasi-legal discussion with the attendant risk of ideology, but in the implementation, in the *how* of the doing; the *how* of existing as a Confederation of local Church witnesses to the love of Christ and the governance of such a Confederation.

Here are four qualities which the Holy Father identified when speaking of governance at the global level. The leadership of the confederation should be

- i) regulated by law;
- ii) observe consistently the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, which we have already stressed several times,

²⁸ Civ 57

²⁹ (Pastor Bonus 146.2)



- iii) seek to establish the common good, which is really good and really common to 165 different organizations, large and small, new and long-established, linked to the Church in a variety of ways, and so on; and finally
- iv) commit itself to securing authentic integral human development inspired by the values of charity in truth, which I believe speaks for itself or, in other words, which your own field reports illustrate and exemplify.³⁰

Conclusion

The *Good Samaritan* is the first and greatest field report of *Caritas*, we began by saying, it is so great that it inspired Catholics to practice charity towards the poor and the weak and eventually coalesce into groups which took the name *Caritas*. The one-word synonym for *caritas*, is **compassion**, a virtue true of both God and man.³¹ **Compassion** is surely the core-value of every effective *Caritas* enterprise or undertaking, compassion as solidarity and compassion as evangelization, both compassion and competence.

In union with the Holy Father I would like to conclude by reading **some more of his words**. I am sure you will agree that practically every word connects with the vital field reports which each of you is carrying along. “In the face of the enormous problems surrounding the development of peoples, which almost make us yield to discouragement, we find solace in the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches us: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5) and then encourages us: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). As we contemplate the vast amount of work to be done ..., awareness of God's undying love sustains us in our laborious and stimulating work for justice and the development of peoples, amid successes and failures.... God's love calls us to move beyond the limited and the ephemeral, it gives us the courage to continue seeking and working for the

³⁰ Cfr (CIV 67)

³¹ Compassion, the one-word turning point. The Samaritan's compassion for the man, like Jesus' compassion towards the widow of Naim. It is the Holy Spirit who sparks charity in us, who teaches us its deep meaning. *Farsi Prossimo*

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benefit of all, even if this cannot be achieved immediately and if what we are able to achieve ... is always less than we might wish[158]. God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, because he is our All, our greatest hope."³²

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
(President, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace)

³² CIV, 78. Cfr. Our work: a valuable contribution to the laborious and stimulating pursuit ... (GMP 2011, 7).