



The Holy See

ECCLESIAL MOVEMENT FOR CULTURAL COMMITMENT,
FEDERATION OF CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS
FOR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER SERVICE AND
CHRISTIAN WORKERS MOVEMENT

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Paul VI Hall

Saturday, 19 May 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am glad to welcome you this morning in this meeting that brings together the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment, the Federation of Christian Organizations for International Volunteer Service and the Christian Workers Movement. I greet with affection my Brothers in the Episcopate who support you and guide you, the Directors and Leaders, the Chaplains and all of the members and supporters. This year your associations are celebrating the respective anniversaries of their foundation. The Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment is celebrating 80 years; the Federation of Christian International Volunteer Service Organizations and the Christian Workers Movement are celebrating 40 years. And all three of these entities are indebted to the wise work of the Servant of God [Paul VI](#), who, as National Chaplain in 1932 supported the first steps of the Graduate Movement of Catholic Action, and, as Pontiff, gave recognition to the Federation of Christian Volunteer Organizations and to the Christian Workers Movement in 1972. To my Venerable Predecessor goes our grateful remembrance for having given impetus to such important ecclesial associations.

These anniversaries are favourable occasions for reconsidering your charisms with gratitude and with critical scrutiny too, attentive to the historical origins and to the new signs of the times. *Culture, volunteer service and work* constitute an indissoluble trinomial of the daily commitment of the Catholic laity, which intends to give incisive witness to Christ and the Church both in the

private sphere and in the public sphere of society. The faithful layman takes up a challenge when he becomes involved in one or more of these areas and — in cultural service, in acts of solidarity with those in need, or in work — seeks to promote human dignity. These three spheres are linked by a common denominator: *the gift of self*. Cultural engagement, above all in schools and universities, aimed at the formation of future generations, is not limited to the transmission of technical and theoretical concepts, but requires the gift of self by word and example. Volunteering, an irreplaceable resource for society, does not so much involve giving things but in giving oneself in concrete assistance to the neediest. Finally, work is not only an instrument for individual profit but a moment in which we express our abilities by spending ourselves, in a spirit of service, in professional activity, whether this be in manual labour, farming, science or some other area.

But this has a Christian connotation for all of you. Your activity must be animated by charity; this means learning to see with the eyes of Christ and giving to the other more than external necessities; it means looking and acting with love in your relationships with those in need. This is born from the love that comes from God, who loved us first, it is born from the intimate encounter with him (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 18). St Paul, in his farewell discourse to the elders at Ephesus, recalls a truth expressed by Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Dear friends, it is the *logic of the gift* — a logic that is often threatened — that you value and to which you bear witness: giving your time, your skills and expertise, your teaching, your professionalism; in a word, giving attention to others without expecting any reward in this world; and I thank you for this great testimony. Acting in this way, not only do we do good for others, but we discover profound happiness, according to the logic of Christ, who gave all of himself.

The family is the first place in which we experience gratuitous love; and when that does not happen, the family becomes unnatural, it enters into crisis. What happens in the family, giving oneself without reserve for the good of the other is a fundamental educational moment for learning how to live as a Christian even in relation to culture, volunteer work and work. In the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* I wished to extend the family model of the logic of gratuitousness and the gift to a universal dimension. Justice alone, in fact, is insufficient. To ensure true justice that “more”, that only gratuitousness and solidarity can give, is necessary: “Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone, with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely delegated to the State. While in the past it was possible to argue that justice had to come first and gratuitousness could follow afterwards, as a complement, today it is clear that without gratuitousness, there can be no justice in the first place” (n. 38). Gratuitousness cannot be bought on the market, nor can it be prescribed by law. And, yet, both the economy and politics need gratuitousness and people capable of mutual self-giving (cf. *ibid.*, n. 39).

Today’s meeting highlights two elements: your affirmation of the necessity of continuing to follow the way of the Gospel in fidelity to the social doctrine of the Church and to her Pastors; and my encouragement, the Pope’s encouragement, that invites you to continue with constancy your commitment to our brethren. Revealing injustices and bearing witness to the values on which the

dignity of the person is based, promoting forms of solidarity that favour the common good — these are also part of your commitment. The Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment, in light of its history, is called to a renewed service in the world of culture, which is marked by urgent and complex challenges, for the spread of Christian humanism: reason and faith are allied in the path to the Truth. May the Federation of Christian Organizations of International Volunteer Service continue to have confidence above all in the power of the charity that comes from God, continuing in its commitment to eliminate every form of poverty and exclusion on behalf of the most disadvantaged populations. May the Christian Workers Movement endeavour to bring the light of Christian hope into the world of work in order to achieve ever greater social justice. Moreover, always look to the world of young people, who today more than ever seek forms of engagement that combine idealism and the concrete aspect.

Dear friends, I hope that each of you will carry out your personal and group commitments with joy, witnessing to the *Gospel of the gift and gratuitousness*. I invoke on you the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary upon you and I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the members and their families. Thank you for your work, for your presence.