



Christelijke mensvisie is “ja” tegen waardigheid van de persoon

Address to the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum



The Christian vision of man is, in fact, a great ‘yes’ to the dignity of the person

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Pope Benedict XVI

Dear friends,

I offer you my welcome with affection and joy on the occasion of the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum. I thank the president, Cardinal Robert Sarah, for his words and I address my cordial greeting to each one of you, extending it to all those who do charitable work in the Church. With the recent motu proprio “*Intima Ecclesiae natura*” I wished to emphasize the ecclesial meaning of your activity. Your witness can open the doors of faith to many people who seek Christ’s love. Thus, in this Year of Faith the theme “Charity, the New Ethics and Christian Anthropology,” which you are taking up, reflects the close connection between love and truth, or, if you will, between faith and charity. The whole Christian ethos receives its meaning from faith as a “meeting” with the love of Christ, which offers a new horizon and impresses a decisive direction on life (cf. “*Deus caritas est*,” 1). Christian love finds its basis and form in faith. Meeting God and experiencing his love, we learn “no longer to live for ourselves but for him and, with him, for others” (ibid. 33).

Beginning from this dynamic relationship between faith and charity, I would like to reflect on a point that I would call the prophetic dimension that faith instills in charity. The believer’s adherence to the Gospel impresses on charity its typically Christian form and constitutes it as a principle of discernment. The Christian, especially those who work in charitable organizations, must let himself be oriented by principles of faith through which we adopt “God’s perspective,” we accept his plan for us (cf. “*Deus caritas est*,” 1). This new way of looking at the world and man offered by faith also furnishes the correct criterion for the evaluation of expressions of charity in the present context.

In every age, when man did not try to follow this plan, he was victim of cultural temptations that ended up making him a slave. In recent centuries, the ideologies that praised the cult of the nation, the race, of the social class, showed themselves to be nothing but idolatry; and the same can be said of unbridled capitalism with its cult of profit, which has led to crisis, inequality and misery. There is a growing consensus today about the inalienable dignity of the human being and the reciprocal and interdependent responsibility toward man; and this is to the benefit of true civilization, the civilization of love. On the other hand, unfortunately, there are also shadows in our time that obscure God’s plan. I am referring above all to a tragic anthropological reduction that re-proposes ancient material hedonism, to which is added a “technological prometheism.” From the marriage of a materialistic vision of man and great technological development there emerges an anthropology that is at bottom atheistic. It presupposes that man is reduced to autonomous functions, the mind to the brain, human



history to a destiny of self-realization. All of this prescind from God, from the properly spiritual dimension and from a horizon beyond this world. In the perspective of a man deprived of his soul and of a personal relation with the Creator, that which is technologically possible becomes morally legitimate, every experiment is thus acceptable, every political demographic acceptable, every form of manipulation justified. The danger most to be feared in this current of thought is the absolutization of man: man wants to be “ab-solutus,” absolved of every bond and of every natural constitution. He pretends to be independent and thinks that his happiness lies solely in the affirmation of self. “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” (Speech to the Roman Curia, December 21, 2012). This is a radical negation of man’s creatureliness and filial condition, which leads to a tragic solitude.

The faith and healthy Christian discernment bring us therefore to pay prophetic attention to this problematic ethical situation and to the mentality that it supposes. Just collaboration with international organizations in the field of development and in human promotion must not make us close our eyes to these dangerous ideologies, and the Pastors of the Church – which is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) – have a duty to warn both faithful Catholics and every person of good will and right reason about these deviations. This is a harmful deviation for man even if it is waved with good intentions as a banner of presumed progress, or of presumed rights, or of a presumed humanism. In the face of these anthropological reductions, what is the task of every Christian – and especially your task – involved in charitable work, and so in direct relations with many social protagonists? We certainly must exercise a critical vigilance and, sometimes, refuse money and collaboration that would, directly or indirectly, support actions and projects that run contrary to a Christian anthropology. But, positively speaking, the Church is always committed to the promotion of man according to God’s plan, man in his integral dignity, with respect for his twofold vertical and horizontal dimension. The actions of ecclesial development organizations are also oriented in this direction. The Christian vision of man is, in fact, a great “yes” to the dignity of the person called to intimate communion with God, a filial communion, humble and confident. The human being is neither an individual subsisting in himself nor an anonymous element of the collective. He is rather a singular and unrepeatable person intrinsically ordered to relationship and sociality. For this reason the Church stresses her great “yes” to the dignity and beauty of marriage as an expression of a faithful and fecund alliance between man and woman, and says “no” to such philosophies as the philosophy of gender. The Church is guided by the fact that the reciprocity between man and woman is the expression of the beauty of the nature willed by the Creator.

Dear friends, I thank you for your commitment on behalf of man, in fidelity to his true dignity. In the face of these challenges of our times, we know that the answer is the encounter with Christ. In him man can fully realize his personal good and the common good. I encourage you to continue in your work with a joyful and generous spirit as I bestow upon you the Apostolic Benediction from my heart.

Translation by Joseph G. Trabbic