



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOP-FRIENDS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT
AND THE SANT'EGIDIO COMMUNITY***

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 8 February 2007

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am happy to welcome you to this special Audience and cordially greet all of you who have come from different nations of the world. I also address a particular thought to those who are here with us and belong to other Churches.

Some of you participate annually in this appointment of Bishop-Friends of the Focolare Movement, which has the theme: "Christ Crucified and abandoned, light in the cultural night".

I welcome this occasion to send Chiara Lubich my wishes and my Blessing, which I extend to all the members of the Movement she founded.

Others are taking part in the Ninth Convention of Bishop-Friends of the Sant'Egidio Community, addressing the topic so pertinent today: "The globalization of love". I greet Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, and with him, Professor Andrea Riccardi and the entire Community, who, on the anniversary of its founding, will gather this evening in the Basilica of St John Lateran for a solemn Eucharistic celebration.

I do not have all your names here, but naturally I greet all my dear Brothers, Bishops, Cardinals and all you dear Brothers of the Orthodox Church, all of you from my heart.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I would first like to tell you that your closeness to the two Movements, while emphasizing the vitality of these new aggregations of faithful, also manifests that communion among charisms which constitutes a typical "sign of the times".

It seems to me that these encounters of the charisms of the unity of the Church in the diversity of gifts are a very encouraging and important sign.

The Post-Synodal Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* recalls that: "The relationships of exchange between Bishops... go well beyond their institutional meetings" (n. 59). It is what occurs also in conventions such as yours, where not only collegiality is experienced, but an episcopal fraternity that draws from the sharing of the ideals promoted by the Movements a stimulus to render more intense the communion of hearts, to make stronger the reciprocal support and a more active commitment to show the Church as a place of prayer and charity, a home of mercy and peace.

My venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, has presented the Movements and New Communities which have come into being in these years as a providential gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, in order to respond in an effective way to the challenges of our time. And you know that this is also my conviction.

When I was still a professor and then Cardinal, I had the occasion to express my conviction that Movements are really a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. And precisely as the encounter of the charisms, they also show the richness of both gifts and unity in the faith.

For example, could one forget last year's extraordinary Pentecost Vigil that witnessed the joint participation of many Movements and Ecclesial Associations? The emotion I felt in participating in St Peter's Square in such an intense spiritual experience is still alive in me.

I repeat to you what I said then to the faithful gathered from every part of the world, and that is, that the multiplicity and the unity of the charisms and ministries are inseparable in the life of the Church.

The Holy Spirit wants the multiformity of the Movements at the service of the one Body, which is the Church. And this comes about through the ministry of those he has placed to sustain the Church of God: the Bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter.

This unity and multiplicity which comprises the People of God in some way also makes itself manifest today, with many Bishops being gathered here with the Pope, near to two different Ecclesial Movements, characterized by a strong missionary dimension.

In the rich Western world, where even though a relativistic culture is present, at the same time a widespread desire for spirituality is not missing, and your Movements witness the joy of the faith and the beauty of being Christian in great ecumenical openness.

In the vast depressed areas of the earth, they communicate the message of solidarity and draw near to the poor and the weak with that human and divine love that I wished to repropose to the

attention of all in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*.

The communion between Bishops and Movements, therefore, provides a valid impulse for a renewed commitment by the Church in announcing and witnessing to the Gospel of hope and charity in every corner of the world.

The Focolare Movement, precisely beginning from the heart of its spirituality which is Jesus crucified and abandoned, emphasizes the charism and the service of unity, which is realized in various social and cultural environments as, for example, the economic with the "economy of communion", and through the ways of ecumenism and of interreligious dialogue.

The Sant'Egidio Community, placing prayer and liturgy at the centre of its existence, wants to draw near to those who experience situations of hardship and social marginalization.

For the Christian, man, however distant, is never a stranger. Together it is possible to face with greater effort the challenges that summon us in a pressing way at the beginning of the third millennium: I think in the first place of the search for justice and peace and of the urgency of building a more fraternal and united world, beginning precisely with the countries from which some of you come and that are tried by bloody conflicts.

I refer especially to Africa, the Continent that I carry in my heart and that I hope will finally know a time of stable peace and true development. The next Synod of African Bishops will surely be an opportune moment to show the great love that God has for the beloved African population.

Dear friends, the original fraternity that exists between you and the Movements you befriend, bids you to carry together "one another's burdens" (Gal 6: 2), as the Apostle recommends, especially concerning evangelization, love for the poor and the cause of peace.

May the Lord render your spiritual and apostolic initiatives ever more effective. I accompany you with prayer and gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you present here, to the Focolare Movement and the Sant'Egidio Community, and to the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

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