

Key elements of the texts

The broad spectrum of the Papal speeches and addresses related to International Catholic Organizations and Catholic Inspired NGOs (ICOs and CINGOs) ranges from initial and strong enthusiasm to confident but nonetheless prudent support for collaboration with ICOs and CINGOs at the UN. The overall perspective includes a beginning of hope-filled and high expectations and later on, the development of a more realistic, perhaps sober, and more routine coexistence between the Holy See representatives and a very broad band of CINGOs active at the UN. To say the least, the difficulties in terms of the plurality of these Catholics NGOs - plurality in terms of topics covered and expertise, in terms of political and theological sensitivity, in terms of representation and advocacy, in terms of distance taken from the Magisterium - probably were underestimated at the outset by the different popes and by the NGOs themselves. However the Magisterium never relinquished its support and its commitment to the existence and work of ICOs and CINGOs in the United Nations system. On the contrary, the value of their work regularly receives praise and recognition. We shall outline some recurrent themes in the various interventions of the Holy Fathers with regards to ICOs and CINGOs.

First of all, the Magisterium never distanced itself from the stated conviction that it was good, indeed absolutely necessary, for Catholics to take part in the construction of the international community, to engage in international dialogue and, specifically, to be present, as organizations of *christifideles laici* at the United Nations system. The Church never renounced its aim to seek the unity of mankind, the unity of the community of all men and women. This goal is strongly linked to another consistent stance of the Magisterium: Nation-states cannot totally absorb the sphere of politics. Indeed they should not even question the notion that the political dimension of present-day social questions go beyond the political capabilities of nation-states, thus requiring international governance. This stance, however, cannot be reduced to the mere confluence of respective national interests, or to some power plays rewarding only the interests of the most powerful nations. We are constantly reminded by the Magisterium that international relationships must be based on a higher ground, namely on the good of the human person, the common good. The Holy Fathers have warned that international relationships must be based on the spiritual nature of human beings; international relationships must be ethical or face failure. The texts constantly point out that the end goal of the UN is peace in the strong sense of the word, as a realm of human

¶ *International engagement: the christifideles laici*

dignity, freedom and solidarity.

¶ The goals, responsibilities and identity of ICOs

The texts also give a clear picture of what ICOs and CINGOs are asked to do at the UN. They should contribute by their Catholic spirit, by their deep and real knowledge, experience and expertise, on the basis of their international constituencies, to working toward a world that will be a place of justice and peace for all. Their work contributes to the community of a future generation and forms part of Church's work to build up Christ's body into the fullness of humanity. Therefore, their work cannot become estranged from that of the Church as a whole. The Holy Fathers maintain that ICOs and CINGOs should consider their Catholic identity not as a hindrance to their work, but as the core value of their efforts and should therefore clearly understand the subsidiarity in which their actions are taking place. The papal texts state that, in fact, within the Church's wider mission, the contributions of ICOs are not only important, but truly essential. No other organization can fulfill this mission.

The responsibilities of ICOs go hand by hand with their mission. They must promote, from within the diversity of areas which they represent, the full development of the human person, of each man/woman and of all men/women. They are accountable for their actions to their collective conscience, to their constituency, to the Church, to all people, and finally to God. However, this is always a shared responsibility, for it is a shared mission: the share of Christ's mission imparted to them. The Holy Fathers list an entire series of requirements to be fulfilled in order to complete these tasks: they shall be competent in their area of expertise, truly representative of their constituency, well informed, able to discuss and dialogue, to negotiate, to bear witness to their faith and hope, etc. In other words, the Holy Fathers ask ICOs and CINGOs to fulfill the standards of international practices and of the Church. But more than stressing the responsibilities of ICOs, these texts underscore the value of their achievements. The Holy Fathers acknowledge that the Church is indebted to their work and stress the difference they have made through their engagement on so many different topics, both at the international and the local level. They praise their courage and perseverance within a world where obtrusive self interest of groups or nations impede the satisfaction of basic needs.

Acknowledgement of Christian identity, however, is the point raised most strongly in these texts. ICOs and CINGOs should stand up for their Catholic identity and harbor no fear in bearing witness to their faith. The denial, or cover-up, of their identity brings about the loss of their specificity and thus of the legitimacy of their involvement as Catholic organizations. Even more importantly, the loss of identity entails a qualitative loss of their actions. As a result of renouncing the Christian horizon and spirit of their work, their agenda will be diminished to the level of partisan negotiations, the mere defence of self-interest within their respective constituencies. If

they want to preserve authority and legitimacy, they should not abandon their Catholic identity.

Another feature of the texts is the constant recognition of Human Rights (HR) as the cornerstone of international relationships. The Holy Fathers recognise these as a crucial instrument of the New International Order. ICOs and CINGOs should thus work to enhance the recognition of human rights, monitor their application, and advocate for people suffering from violations of such rights. The Magisterium is also fully aware, however, of the conflictive interpretations of HR. They can easily be manipulated for ideological purposes; they may be organized according to several priorities. Therefore they should not be taken as sufficient in themselves. The Holy Fathers remind us that rights also entail duties. Human rights must be open to ethics and a generosity that goes beyond the mere rule of law.

Another constant topic of papal addresses is the role of ICO's regarding the construction of a community of nations which is said to be subsidiary to the role of the Church. The notion is complex and never fully developed in the texts that are presently available. It refers, however, to the Vatican II document on the apostolate of the laity (*Christifideles laici*). Practically, it means that if ICOs are called to engage specific topics at the UN, they are present as part of the Catholic Church and within the boundaries of its official positions or doctrines. At the level of representation, ICOs do not speak in the name of the Church, whereas the Magisterium can engage the Church. The ambiguities of the notion are clearly seen throughout the documents and are partly unavoidable as part of the eschatological tension encompassing the Church's actions. This tension accounts for different positions taken by the Magisterium with regard to the engagement of ICOs at the UN: it should be free of institutional or particular interests and seek the true common good of humanity; that is, such action should not be politically motivated but neither should it be apolitical. It should strive for and invest itself with the authority of what is beyond present-day interest: the true common good of humanity. The authority of their engagement will come from this moral and spiritual goal.

¶ *Human Rights*

¶ *Subsidiarity of their role*