



Address at the beginning of the international meeting of CIDSE, The Hague - May 23, 2018

You are gathered together as CIDSE, an international alliance of Catholic development agencies working together for global justice. Since you are a network of Catholic development agencies, first I would like to share three biblical images with you when it comes to a network:

1. In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks in chapter 15 about the real vine and the branches. He says: “I am the true vine [...] Dwell in me, as I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, but only if it remains united with the vine; no more can you bear fruit, unless you remain united with me” These words of Jesus are not about just a good harvest of grapes. Jesus refers to the fruits of true love: “that you may bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples [...] Dwell in my love”¹.
2. In the first letter to the Corinthians, saint Paul writes about the body of Christ consisting of many organs. These different organs are parts of the one body. The members of this body are called to have concern for one another. Saint Paul writes: “If one organ suffers, they all suffer together. Of one flourishes, they all rejoice together”. Within this body, God has given different tasks and functions to be fulfilled².
3. The first letter of Peter gives us another biblical image of a network by inviting us saying: “come, and let yourselves be built, as living stones into a spiritual temple” with Jesus Christ, the risen Lord to be the cornerstone³.

At the beginning of your international meeting, in light of these three biblical images, I would like to emphasize the importance of being a network of love.

In 2006, when the diocese of Rotterdam celebrated her 60th anniversary, as a diocesan church we used the image of being a ‘network of love’. The Church as a network of love. When we use this image, it does not in the first place refer to our church buildings, made of bricks. The Church being a network of love is at the first place the community of Christ consisting of living stones, of many different organs to be one body, branches united by Christ, rooted in his love.

Inspired by the biblical images just mentioned, it is important to recognize that the network of love is about our identity as a local parish, as a diocesan church and also about the identity of the universal Church.

Dear members of CIDSE, being an international alliance of Catholic development agencies, you are a part of this network of love, which is the Church.

¹ John, 15, 1-10

² 1 Corinthians 12, 14-31

³ 1 Peter 2, 4-5. See also Ephesians 2, 20-22



It is clear that the Church to be a network of love does not exist for her own sake. The Church of Christ is called to proclaim the Gospel, to spread the good news by words as well as by deeds and actions of love.

Jesus the true vine, the head of the body and the cornerstone inspires us and teaches us to remain in his love. The church, as a network of love is urged by Christ to show compassion and mercy; to put solidarity into practice for the sake of God's kingdom, at the service of mankind.

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) spoke in this regard about 'friendship'; Pope Pius XI used in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) the words 'social charity'. Pope Paul VI introduced the terminology 'a civilization of love', expanding the concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question⁴.

Dear friends, as a network of love we are called to contribute to build a civilization of love. As Catholics we have the mission of transforming society into a "civilization of love"⁵.

The civilization of love is an important concept in the social teaching of pope Paul VI. And it is repeatedly used by pope John Paul II⁶ and pope Benedict XVI⁷.

In light of a true civilization of love, pope Benedict issued in 2012 the apostolic letter *Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, concerning the service of charity, entrusted to the Church.

By this document pope Benedict XVI intended "to provide an organic legislative frame work for the better overall ordering of the various organized ecclesial forms of the service of charity, which are closely related to the diaconal nature of the Church and the episcopal ministry"⁸.

In the perspective of the Church as a network of love, Catholic development agencies (working together for global justice), take part in this mission of love of the Church, with their projects and plans in accordance with the Catholic faith and teaching, including the protection of human life and dignity: in order to build a true civilization of love⁹.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (Rome 1991) n. 11

⁵ A. Koppers/P. Schallenberg e.a., *Docat. What to do?* (San Francisco 2016) n. 319

⁶ E.g. Pope John Paul II, *Message World Day of Peace 2001*

⁷ E.g. Pope Benedict, *Message 22th World Youth Day 2007*: "Develop your capacities, not only in order to become more 'competitive' and 'productive', but to be witnesses of charity. In addition to your professional training, also make an effort to acquire religious knowledge that will help you to carry out your mission in an responsible way. In particular, I invite you to carefully study the social doctrine of the Church so that its principles may inspire and guide your action in the world. May the Holy Spirit make you creative in charity, persevering in your commitments, and brave in your initiatives, so that you will be able to offer your contribution to the building up of the 'civilization of love'. The horizon of love is truly boundless: it is the whole world!"

⁸ Pope Benedict, Apostolic Letter issued motu proprio *Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, on the service of charity (Rome 2012)

⁹ Cf *Intima Ecclesiae Natura* (Rome 2012) art. 10. 4, regarding the responsibility of the Bishop: "In particular, the diocesan Bishop is to ensure that charitable agencies dependent upon him do not receive financial support from groups or institutions that persue ends contrary to Church's teaching. Similarly [...] the diocesan Bishop is to ensure



The ideal of a civilization of love can also explicitly be found in the teachings of our present pope Francis, for example at the gatherings of the World Youth Days in Poland and Brazil: “Through your witness and service, help to build a civilization of love” (July 28, 2013).

It is clear that the Encyclical *Laudato si'* speaks about our world and our environment as our common house in light of our vocation to build a civilization of love. The Church as a network of love has to set before the world the ideal of a civilization of love¹⁰.

In paragraph 231 of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* pope Francis refers to Paul VI and to Benedict XVI:

“Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also ‘macro-relationships, social economic and political ones’¹¹. That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a civilization of love¹². Social love is the key to authentic development: ‘In order to make society more human, more worthy of a human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm of all activity’¹³. In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a ‘culture of care’ which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us”

Dear members of CIDSE, as Catholic development agencies working together for global justice, you are called to participate in the mission of the Church as a network of love.

Being organizations with a strongly lay character in communion with the bishops as pastors of the People of God, you work together by means of many projects and programs in order to contribute to the edification of a civilization of love.

Since the Church is a network of love, and your organizations are a part of this network, we are called to seek together the cooperation with all people of good will, since the world entrusted to us, is our common house.

Two things more I want to mention here, at the end of my little speech at the beginning of your international meeting.

that these charitable agencies do not accept contributions for initiatives whose ends, or the means used to pursue them, are not in conformity with the Church’s teaching”.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Encyclical letter *Laudato si'* (Rome 2013) n. 231

¹¹ Pope Benedict, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Rome 2006) n. 2

¹² Pope Paul VI, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1977*

¹³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome 2004) n. 582



- Somebody from the past: saint Lawrence. Saint Lawrence is the patron-saint of the diocese of Rotterdam. Born in Spain, saint Lawrence served the Church (+ 258) as a deacon taking care of the poor and the needy in the city of Rome. In the third century Christians were severely persecuted. The emperor forced Lawrence to hand over all the possessions of the diocese. Lawrence, however, gave the goods of the Church to the poor and the needy. After three days, Saint Lawrence returned to the emperor together with the poor and the people in need. Saint Lawrence explained to the emperor, pointing at the poor and needy: “these people are the real treasure of the Church”. The diocese of Rotterdam published a short comic (in eight languages) about the testimony of Saint Lawrence serving the Church in favor of a civilization of love.
- Something with regard to the future: do-cat. During the World Youth Days in Poland in 2016, pope Francis presented to a crowd of more than one million young people a special book about the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church. This book is a real instrument to get to know the social doctrine of the Church. Pope Francis asked the young Catholics to be ambassadors of the Gospel¹⁴. It is important to invite new generations of Catholics to join our network of love in order to build a civilization of love, together with all people of good will. I am sure that the Do-cat will be of great help¹⁵.

Dear members of CIDSE, may the Lord Jesus Christ be your strength. By the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will teach us how to remain faithful to his network of love (as branches of the true vine, as members of the body of Christ, as living stones of the spiritual temple) and to build a civilization of love.

Finally I like to use some words of pope Francis on the 50th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* (April last year):

“The Church does not tire of offering this wisdom and work to the world, mindful that integral development is the path of good that the human family is called to follow. I invite you to carry on this work with patience and perseverance, trusting that the Lord accompanies us”¹⁶.

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¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Introduction to the Do-cat* (November 6, 2015): “I invite you all now really to get to know the social doctrine of the Church, I am dreaming not just about groups that sit under trees and discuss it. That is good! Do that! My dream is of something greater: I wish I had a million young Christians or, even better, a whole generation who are for their contemporaries ‘walking, talking social doctrine’. Nothing else will change the world but people who with Jesus devote themselves to it, who with him go to the margins and right into the middle of the dirt”.

¹⁵ Several times the *Docat* speaks about the ‘civilization of love’. See nn. 14, 51, 102, 275, 276, 319

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *The duty of integration*, address on the 50th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, April 7, 2017