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Pope Encourages Individual-Society Balance

Reflects on Spiritual Dimension of Finance Sector

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 13, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- When Benedict XVI met Saturday with representatives of the Confederation of Italian Cooperatives, and of the Italian Federation of Cooperative Credit Banks, he noted that their history points to the search for harmony between individual rights and the common good.

In his speech the Pope noted that this year is the 120th anniversary of Pope Leo XII's encyclical "Rerum novarum," the first in what was to be a series of social encyclicals by successive popes.

That document, he said, "favored the fruitful presence of Catholics in Italian society through the promotion of cooperative and mutual societies, the development of social enterprises and many other public works characterized by various forms of participation and self-management. The purpose of such activity has always been to provide material support for people and constant attention to families, drawing inspiration from the magisterium of the Church."

"The heart of cooperative efforts has always lain in the search for harmony between the individual and community dimensions," he said. "This is a concrete expression of the complementarity and subsidiarity which Church social doctrine has always sought to promote between citizens and the state, a balance between safeguarding the rights of the individual and promoting the common good, in order to develop a local economy capable of responding to community needs."

More than philanthropy

The Pontiff observed that cooperative activities are characterized by their concern for solidarity, while at the same time they respect the individual's rightful autonomy.

"In a period of great change, of persistent economic uncertainty, and of difficulties in the world of work, the Church feels the need to announce Christ's message with renewed vigor. ... And you, dear friends, must be aware that Catholic cooperatives have an important role to play in this field," the Holy Father told his audience.

He invited the cooperatives "to ensure that the economy and the market never neglect solidarity," in order "to promote a culture of life and the family, and to favor the creation of new families with

access to dignified work which respects the creation that God has entrusted to our responsibility and care."

The Gospel, the Pope explained, strongly links the commandment to love others with the commandment to love God. This means that "for Christians loving others is not mere philanthropy but an expression of the love of God."

"Never forget the importance of developing this spiritual dimension," he said, "as you seek to respond to contemporary challenges and social emergencies, in order to continue to work in the logic of gratuitousness and responsibility, promoting wise and sober consumption."

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