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*Paul VI
Pontifical letter
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PONTIFICAL LETTER
ESTABLISHING THE PONTIFICAL
COUNCIL COR UNUM FOR
PROMOTING HUMAN AND
CHRISTIAN DEVELOPMENT

POPE PAUL VI

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Pontifical Letter establishing the Pontifical Council
“Cor Unum” for Promoting Human and Christian Development.

To Our Venerable Brothers
CARDINAL JEAN VILLOT
Secretary of State
POPE PAUL VI

Venerable Brother,

Prompted by the duty of charity to encourage the whole human family along the path of sincere and mutual solidarity, we have long had in mind a new project. This project is something that many have asked of us, and since we consider it fully in harmony with the tasks which the Church must undertake in the modern world, we intend to inform you diligently of it; for you more than anyone else know and share our cares. We refer to the project of linking more closely—within the broad field of Christian solidarity among peoples and the promoting of the development of mankind through true charity—all the energies and the initiatives which flourish in the Church. The aim is to enable the bishops of the whole world, and also the Catholic organizations devoted to works of beneficence and assistance, to collaborate with united strength, together with the Roman Pontiff—who strives to perform his universal mission of spreading the Gospel and promoting human dignity, with the help of certain departments of the Roman Curia, whether of ancient or recent foundation—for the attainment of these noble goals. We therefore think it opportune to set up a special Council which would, so to speak, offer to all the People of God the possibility of coming together to deal with the above-mentioned questions concerning the promotion of human society and development in accordance with the unchangeable principles of the Gospel.

The setting up of such a council is clearly demanded by the growing needs which we described in detail in our recent apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens*: the Council's task will be to cast the light of Christ's teaching on the problems arising from those needs, and with God's

help to offer men ever more effective aid for resolving the difficulties which today oppress them.

In our time no less than in past ages, the Church considers it her duty to serve men with diligent zeal and kindly goodwill for she was founded by the Son of God, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28). It is her wish to follow his example, as Saint Ambrose writes: "The Christian people are known for this service, in accordance with what the Lord said to his disciples: 'Anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave' (Mt 20:27).....It is love that carries out this service, love which is greater than hope and faith" (*De Paradiso*, 14:72; CSEL, XXXII, p.330). She wishes to bring benefit to the brethren, with that sensitivity "proper to the Church which is characterized by a disinterested will to serve and by attention to the poorest", as we remarked in the above-mentioned apostolic letter (42). In this way she will be able to provide effective assistance for men who are today faced with the task of solving the most varied problems, in which they often lack strength or courage, and who very often are afflicted by pain, hunger and anxiety, or are stricken by grave disasters, so that they are left destitute and lead a life of extreme misery.

Within the Church, however, there are many organizations which devote themselves to such ends. They deserve the highest praise for their timely and provident endeavors to promote full development of living conditions and to make good damage suffered. But it is clear to all how very fitting it is that these admirable undertakings should increasingly harmonize with one another and that thus, by organic collaboration, they should succeed more effectively in reaching the goals assigned to them in the fields of charity, aid and promoting the development of peoples. It is also necessary that the activity of these organizations should be wisely and fittingly regulated by a mutual harmony of purpose, so that it should not be subject to chance and improvisation and should never lead to unnecessary waste of energy and resources. This corresponds fully with the wishes of the Second Vatican Council: the Council Fathers reminded all of the duty of the People of God "to do their utmost to alleviate the sufferings of the modern age. As was the ancient custom in the Church, they should meet this obligation out of the substance of their goods, and not only out of what is superfluous"; the Fathers then added: "without being inflexible and completely uniform, the collection and distribution of aid should be conducted in an orderly fashion in dioceses, nations, and throughout the entire world" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 88).

It appears to us that this responsibility rests first and foremost upon the See of Peter and belongs to the apostolic mission entrusted to us by God, since it is by his will that we have charge, as its bishop and pastor, of

the Church of Rome and that Church “presides . . . over the whole congregation of love” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans*: ed. Funk, 1. p.253). We are also firmly convinced that we have a duty to remind all nations that they are under the same obligation of mutual solidarity as are individuals. As we recalled in our encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, “the superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations” (49; cf. 48-49). This is demanded not only by the obligation of social justice and of mutual solidarity between peoples but above all by “the duty of universal charity—the effort to bring about a world that is more human towards all men, where all will be able to give and receive” (*ibid.*, 44).

After due consideration of all these elements, we set up and establish in Rome the *Pontifical Council “Cor Unum” for Promoting Human and Christian Development*, and we appoint and declare you its President. Its task will be to pursue the aims described above: to coordinate the energies and undertakings of all the Catholic organizations, indeed of the entire People of God, by appropriate exchange of information and by a growing desire to cooperate, so that full human development may be fostered in a steady and well-ordered way by the use of ever more suitable means; to assist bishops and all those in public office by setting up appropriate relations with Catholic charitable organizations and by encouraging as far as possible, an ever fairer sharing of resources and energies; to consult with the separated brethren so that where possible peoples may have the benefit of combined charitable undertakings; to facilitate relations between Catholic organizations and organizations of a public and international character working in the same field of charity and development; to ensure that in the case of sudden disasters the individual members of the Council give help in a coordinated, effective and speedy manner, with due respect for the rights and methods of each. In this way, the Church, to whom all eyes are turned, will be able to give those stricken by misfortune the help they expect from her, even though, unfortunately, this help is always unequal to the actual needs. It will also be the Council’s task, whenever the Supreme Pontiff considers that some special activities or initiatives should be undertaken in the charitable sphere, to assist him diligently and be, as it were, his instrument for putting such activities or initiatives speedily into effect.

We are therefore entrusting to you, Venerable Brother, the duty of organizing this new Council at the earliest possible date, in the form which you consider most suitable. It will be for you, in our name, to select from all over the world an appropriate number of Catholic organizations and to include them in the Council; with their assistance to arrange the Council’s activity and methods; and after a suitable experimental period to convene

representatives of these organizations and draw up and establish such regulations as experience will suggest.

As is obvious, we place great hope and confidence in this new Council. It is our earnest hope that, within the Christian community, it may give efficacious, though modest, aid for the ever greater fostering of well-ordered activity by the Church for the benefit of all in the world who are oppressed by need and are rightly demanding more human living conditions.

We pray God that his grace may inspire you and your fellow workers and, as a pledge of his gifts and as a token of our special benevolence, we most cordially impart to you our Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome at Saint Peter's, on 15 July 1971, the ninth year of our pontificate.

PAULUS PP. VI



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