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APOSTOLIC LETTER

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SETTING UP THE COUNCIL
ON THE LAITY
AND THE
PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
FOR STUDIES
ON JUSTICE AND PEACE

January 6, 1967

POPE PAUL VI

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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The Catholic Church, in her continuous effort of internal renewal and “aggiornamento” of her structures, in conformity with the times in which she lives, realizes “how much she should continually mature in the light of experience, in her relations with the world” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43), for whose salvation she is founded by Christ.

According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, every Christian, in the measure of his own strength, inasmuch as belonging to the people of God, must fulfill this mission of salvation (*Lumen Gentium*, nn. 17 and 31). The Council, after examining in several documents the particular position of the layman within the people of God — such considerations being one of its special features — finally dedicated to the activity of the layman in the Church a special decree, which provided for the institution of an organism “for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 26).

At the same time, the Council, wanting to establish a dialogue with the modern world, gave due attention to some of the major aspirations of the contemporary world, such as the problems of development, promotion of justice among nations and the cause of peace, proposing the institution of an organism in the Church, whose purpose should be to make the Catholic world more aware of those problems (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 90).

After the Council, a post-conciliar commission, with our mandate, studied the best way to implement the conciliar decisions

concerning n. 26 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, while a special group, similarly mandated by us, undertook study of the organism proposed in n. 90 of *Gaudium et Spes*.

The conclusions of these groups provided the basis for the work of the Provisional Committee, erected by us on July 7, 1966, in order to implement the decisions and proposals of the conciliar documents.

The fact that the two questions were studied together, made it possible to see both the specific and common aspects. Thus it became clear that there should be two different organisms, united however at the summit by the same leadership: the Consilium de Laicis and the Pontifical Commission of Studies *Iustitia et Pax*.

I. AIMS OF THE CONSILIUM DE LAICIS (Council on the Laity)

Its aim shall be the work for the service and promoting of the lay apostolate.

In particular it shall:

1) Promote the lay apostolate at the international level and provide for its coordination and increasing integration in the general apostolate of the Church; maintain contact with the apostolate at the national level; act as a place of meeting and dialogue in the Church between the hierarchy and the laity, and between the different forms of lay activity, in the spirit of the last pages of the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*; promote international congresses for the lay apostolate; foster the faithful observance of the ecclesiastical laws concerning the laity;

2) Assist with its advice the hierarchy and the laity in their apostolic work (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 26);

3) Promote studies for the further doctrinal clarification of questions concerning the laity, in particular as regards problems of the apostolate with special reference to the sharing of the laity in overall pastoral activity. Studies may be published on these matters;

4) In addition to receiving and giving information on problems of the lay apostolate, establish a documentation center, to provide material for guidance in the formation of the laity and render an important service to the Church.

II. AIMS OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION OF STUDIES IUSTITIA ET PAX

Its aim shall be to arouse the people of God to full awareness of its mission at the present time, in order on the one hand, to promote the progress of poor nations and encourage international social justice, and on the other, to help underdeveloped nations to work for their own development.

In particular the Pontifical Commission shall:

1) Gather and synthesize documentation on the major scientific and technical studies in the field of development in all its aspects: educational and cultural, economic and social, etc., and also concerning peace, insofar as it raises problems which go beyond those of development;

2) Contribute to the study of problems relative to development and peace, particularly under their doctrinal, pastoral and apostolic aspect;

3) Communicate the results of this study to all organisms of the Church interested in these problems;

4) Establish contact between all the organisms of the Church, working for similar purposes, in order to facilitate a coordination of efforts, give support to more important endeavors and avoid overlapping.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE TWO ORGANISMS

1) The Consilium de Laicis and the Pontifical Commission of Studies Iustitia et Pax shall have the same president, a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.

2) Similarly they shall have in common the vice president, who shall be a bishop.

3) The Consilium de Laicis and the Pontifical Commission of Studies Iustitia et Pax shall have each its own secretary.

4) The Secretary of the Consilium de Laicis shall be assisted by two assistant secretaries.

5) Both organisms shall be further composed of members and consultors selected on appropriate criteria. The appointments shall be made by the Holy See.

6) The term of office of the president, vice president, secretaries and assistant secretaries shall last five years. At the end of the five-year period the Holy See shall however be able to renew the appointment of any officer.

7) The Consilium de Laicis and the Pontifical Commission of Studies Iustitia et Pax are erected "ad experimentum" for five years. Practical experience may suggest suitable changes in their aims and final structure.

8) The two organisms shall have their headquarters in Rome.

9) We hereby declare ended, as from today, the *vacatio legis* concerning the conciliar decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. The bishops and episcopal conferences shall provide for the implementation of the decree in their dioceses and nations.

We have confidently established the two organisms in the firm hope that the lay members of the people of God, to whom we are giving a token of our esteem and benevolence by this official organization, may feel themselves more closely associated with the action of this Apostolic See, and, in future, dedicate to Holy Church with ever greater generosity their efforts, their energies and their activity.

Everything established by us in this letter issued on our own initiative we command to be firm and valid, everything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, Jan. 6, 1967, the fourth year of our pontificate.

