



The Holy See

***SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO DIRECTORS OF THE JOHN PAUL II
FOUNDATION FOR THE SAHEL
AND THE POPULORUM PROGRESSIO***

Tuesday, 4 July 2000

1. I am very pleased to welcome you and I cordially greet you, dear members of the Boards of Directors of the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel and the "Populorum Progressio" Foundation. I especially greet Archbishop Paul Joseph Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", and thank him for his kind words of welcome on behalf of you all. I greet his staff and am grateful to them for the assistance and support they offer to these providential institutions which concretely express the Holy See's closeness to those suffering poverty and hunger.

The John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel began its activity in 1984, following an appeal that I made in Ouagadougou in 1980 to the international community for a general mobilization against the serious desertification affecting the countries of the Sahel. Twenty years later, that appeal has not, unfortunately, lost its timeliness: not only in the desert areas of North Africa, but throughout the planet, the problem of water has become more serious and urgent. Lack of water will perhaps be the main issue that humanity will have to address in the near future. For this reason national leaders should not fail to adopt suitable measures for promoting equitable access to so precious a good for all humanity. It is not enough to think of present needs, for we have a serious responsibility towards future generations, who will demand an account of our efforts to protect the natural resources which the Creator entrusted to mankind to be used with care and respect.

As for the "Populorum Progressio" Foundation, established in conjunction with the celebrations for the fifth centenary of the evangelization of the American continent, it aims at the advancement of the most marginalized populations in Latin American and Caribbean societies, in the perspective of the total development of the person. This foundation is meant to assist the poorest of the poor. Large segments of the Latin American population, in fact, are still waiting to be able to achieve a development worthy of human beings.

2. The happy occasion of this first meeting with your two foundations, along with the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum",

during the Jubilee Year gives me the opportunity to reflect with you on the meaning of the Church's work on behalf of the very poor. For the Jubilee, in addition to being an occasion for conversion, also calls for acts of concrete solidarity towards the needy. Faced with the enormity of needs in today's world, the Church intends to make her own contribution.

With the limited means at her disposal she certainly knows that she cannot meet every need, but she tries to make some gestures of concrete hope that will be signs of Christ's loving presence. The Gospel recounts how Christ intended his miracles as an expression of God's mercy towards man. Likewise, the Church wishes to show through her action that God draws near to those in difficulty to restore their hope and dignity. The Church does not intend to be merely an agency of humanitarian aid; rather, she wishes to bear witness in every way to the love of Christ, who frees human beings from all evil.

3. One of your two foundations combats the desertification of the earth. Speaking of the desert calls to mind the condition in which part of mankind lives, afflicted by violence, disasters and selfishness. To those who find themselves living in this "desert" of our times, the Church wants to bring the water of truth and love. To the great poverty that enslaves people, the Church seeks

to respond by giving them Christ, the Son of God who became incarnate for love of man.

It is for this love that every heart truly hungers and thirsts. May the efforts to help people in difficulty to regain their human dignity be successful. Every contribution to the social progress of individuals and peoples in the grip of illness and poverty is praiseworthy. When Christians show concern for the sufferings and problems of their poor and needy brothers and sisters, they particularly want to help them experience that God loves them and wants them to take charge of their own development.

4. This is the light in which the initiatives undertaken by these two foundations in particularly afflicted nations and continents should be seen. It is in this light that we find all the Church's charitable activity, which the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" is called to inspire and coordinate. Last May, on the occasion of the "*Day for the Witnesses of Charity*", I recalled in this regard that those who work for charity are far more than mere social workers, but are true witnesses.

At the dawn of the new millennium, this is the perspective in which the Church's charitable interventions must be carried out. In the hope that this principle will inspire all your work and activity, dear brothers and sisters, I implore for you the constant support and protection of the Lord Jesus and of Mary, Mother of Hope. To this end I assure you of my prayers and willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you here and to everyone you represent, as well as to all the peoples who benefit from your service.

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