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## Message of the Holy Father to the Pontifical Commission for Latin America

The following is the Message of the Holy Father Francis to the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (CLA), on the occasion of the meeting with the aid institutions and bodies of the Church of Latin America, which took place in the Vatican from 22 to 23 June:

### Message of the Holy Father

*Dear Archbishop Robert Prevost*

*President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*

*Dear heads of aid institutions and bodies of the Church in Latin America,*

I thank you for your presence, and for deciding to gather here in the Holy See, invited by this Pontifical Commission.

The recent promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* implies a process of missionary and synodal conversion of all of us who work in the governance of the universal Church. Without a conversion of the heart, the reforms will remain in merely administrative or procedural. We all need a change of life so that the Church can clearly show the genuine face of Jesus Christ. Precisely for this reason, the reform of the Roman Curia seeks to “attune its present-day activity more effectively to the path of evangelization that the Church, especially in our time, has taken” (Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, 3).

It is in this context that, after listening to various opinions, I have been able to discern and decide that the pastoral and visionary intuition of Pope Pius XII at the moment of creating the CLA in the year 1958 should have been maintained and developed in the general context of the renewal of the Curia and of the Church in general. Bit by bit, its mission was refined, with the addition of nuances and emphases at each step (cf. Saint John Paul

II, Apostolic Letter *M.p. Decessores nostri*; Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*). Currently, the CLA “is responsible for studying questions regarding the life and growth of those particular Churches as a means of assisting the Dicasteries that deal with them by reason of their competence, and to help those Churches with advice and economic resources. It is also responsible for fostering relations between international and national ecclesiastical institutions working in the regions of Latin America and with the institutions of the Curia” (Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, 111). In this way the CLA is called to be a service, a “*diakonía*”, which shows the Pope’s affection and attention, which inspires the Church in the region, and which in addition promotes the interdicasterial synergy of the Roman Curia Latin American matters (cf. *Video Message on the Occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*, 24-27 May 2022).

One of the faculties that the CLA has is to financially support certain evangelization projects, deal with emergency situations and promote those activities that are significant for the Church in its area of competence. At times, CLA has been able to count on the *cooperation* of some aid institutions to address specific, particularly urgent challenges. I give thanks for this will to cooperate. However, I dare to dream of a “new fantasy of charity”, as Saint John Paul II said, more extensive and incisive (cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 50).

Permit me to dwell on this point. Every one of your institutions has its own nature and mission. But they all participate in a Catholic identity that must make its work something different to any purely secular aid organization. In other words, we must rediscover every day, with wonder and gratitude, that Christian faith is the certainty of God’s friendship that “precedes” us, that educates us and accompanies us closely at all times. Therefore, the *most specific feature* of all the Church’s aid institutions is not the administrative efficiency of their work – which we hope is very good – and even less the simple humanitarian effort that stems from a generous heart. What is truly original about our aid is the *charity of Jesus Christ* that drives us, it is that love that precedes us and invites us to confess God the Father, the wellspring of all good; Jesus Christ, our Brother, who redeemed us; the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, creates communion and steers humanity towards its fullness (cf. *2 Cor 5:13-20*).

If we take the “Christian essence” for granted, sooner or later it becomes a mere rhetorical figure, and in the end it is forgotten (cf. R. Guardini, *The essence of Christianity*). If the “Christian essence” is not present, there remains only cold pragmatism that ends up suffocating ecclesial institutions and their members. For example, Saint Paul knew he was an erudite, competent and efficient man. Yet, he says, “Christ Jesus made me his own” (*Phil 3: 12*), and from contemplation of He “who loved me and gave himself for me”, and the phrase “the love of Christ controls us” (*2 Cor 5:14*) acquires its full meaning. The Apostle discovers with wonder that his life can no longer remain the same. After the personal encounter he had on the way to Damascus, everything becomes a prolonged response to Christ’s love, which in him becomes energy, courage and heroism. The Apostle of the Gentiles truly feels driven by that Love, to the extent of saying: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (*1 Cor 9:16*).

Latin America needs solidarity-based aid. Aid to evangelize the geographical and existential peripheries. Aid to respond to the needs of the poorest and excluded. But it is important that all this aid overcomes easy voluntarist and Pelagian temptations (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Placuit Deo*, 1 March 2018). If this happens, I trust that there will be superabundant fruits: fraternal and synergistic cooperation between all Catholic aid institutions and agencies that, knowing they are sent and invigorated by the *same source*, will find paths of complementarity and collaboration of all with all.

May the Most Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, Empress of all peoples of the American continent, intercede for you and encourage you to dream of new forms of presence, service and charitable action in an authentically Christian way.

And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Faternally,

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 21 June 2023

Francis

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