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**“LOVE NEVER FAILS” (1 COR 13:8)
PERSPECTIVES 10 YEARS AFTER THE ENCYCLICAL *DEUS CARITAS EST*
(VATICAN CITY, February 25-26, 2016)**

CONCLUSIONS

Dear friends,

After listening and reflecting together, the time has come to conclude our meeting in this hall. After this, we will end by thanking the Lord with a Eucharistic celebration presided by Cardinal Sarah, our former President. First, though, I would like to draw some conclusions, in order to provide a summary that will be useful for our work within the individual institutions that we represent here.

1. This congress has reaffirmed the relevance of the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. It is not a document of the past, but of the present, and it has maintained its entire validity. The Pope said this morning that the message of the Encyclical “remains timely, indicating the ever relevant prospect for the Church’s journey.” Moreover, the idea that the mission of the Church is founded on the reciprocity between Word, sacraments and service of charity was also reaffirmed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. The relevance of *Deus Caritas Est* shows that its basic outlines have not lost their value; rather, these lines continue to guide, with even more strength today, our charitable service. Thus it seems that a very practical first consequence is to personally re-read the text and to re-read it within our organizations. In this way, the spirit of our conference will be transmitted to the individual organisms that we represent, so as to rekindle the motivations of our commitment.

2. More specifically, our reflection of these days has moved us to share some of the points of the content. The first is the concept of charity. When the Holy Father visited us at *Cor Unum*, and also when he received us this morning, he restated the importance of charity, which, he said, “is at the center of the life of the Church and is truly the heart of the Church.” Cardinal Müller stated that “Charity is the life of

God, which animates the community of believers and pointed out that *diakonia* as the love of Christ is an expression of the Church's nature. Cardinal Tagle reiterated that perhaps we have forgotten this central role in the life of the Church, as a consequence weakening the very proclamation of the Gospel and the sacramental life. In addition, we have too often identified charity with alms-giving, and this has negatively affected all of our charitable service, for two reasons. On the one hand, we have reduced an attitude of life, a Christian virtue, or rather the name of God, to a mere financial act – depriving it in some way. On the other, we were forced to adopt non-Christian concepts to express the heart of Christianity. Here we remembered that charity is God himself, and the Christian God is manifested as such: therefore, Love never ends. We have taken on the words of St. Paul for this Congress: Love never fails. Love is also the goal, because man is called to share in the life of the Trinity that is love. Therefore, we are all invited to rediscover and re-use the concept of charity in its fullest meaning. There have been some semantic variations in the individual languages, but from our part, we can commit ourselves to using the concept in its full significance, precisely because it tells us of the divine origin of love, and hence of our charitable service. Precisely, because the term expresses the full meaning of what we do, it would also be appropriate to adopt it in the denomination of the respective offices that govern this area of the Church. It is not enough to use the term *social* to define our services, we should more precisely define them as *charitable*.

3. *Deus Caritas Est* states that it is God who seeks us to achieve our own good. Just as God seeks us for our own good – and he seeks us first- ; in the same way, we must seek others, to achieve their own good. From this analogy with the behavior of God springs forth how essential faith is for our service; because it places us in the same dynamic of God and helps us to see our neighbor with God's very eyes. It is about making God's love our own in order to give it. The insistence on this aspect of faith in our service is not a mere question of identity, as if we needed to separate or distinguish ourselves from others, rather so that each one of us may take on God's attitude towards the person that we serve. It means understanding, freedom and patience. It means seeking the good of the person and of the whole person. In our faith, to take on God's gaze towards men and women also means having a vision of men and women as God has revealed it to us.

4. Hence, we touch upon an absolutely crucial aspect: that is, the anthropology that guides our (charitable) action. We can ask ourselves this simple question: what does it mean for our work that the person that we serve is the image of God, wanted and created by God, wounded by original sin, called to eternity with God

and constitutively bonded to the other with which he lives? Can we reduce him to a simple consumer, or a simple recipient of rights, without involving him in the full maturity of his being as a person, body and soul? Man is free, and God treats him with freedom. Therefore, we cannot impose our vision, but only promote his freedom. Prof. Asolan, commenting Jean Vanier, asked us to view the poor with the eyes of the poor and allow ourselves to be challenged by who the poor person is and what he asks of us. Even more, and with a Christological perspective: if it is true that Christ chose the cross, then we can meet him in the crucified of today. I was struck by the observation of Prof. Hadjadj, who even indicated that charity is what saves man, body and soul, even in a culture such as ours, where heresy - to remember the words of Prof. Hadjadj - is not about the truth, but about love, reduced to sentimentality at the mercy of technology. Instead, charity guarantees the flesh itself. Tertullian said: *caro salutis cardo* ó salvation is rooted in the flesh. The words of the Pope come to mind, when he says that charity must touch the flesh. Thus, we should avoid reducing man to an object to be changed according to our plans, and take on with courage the challenges that come from his corporality and spirituality. I suggest we all continue the reflection on the anthropology that inspires us, and draw the appropriate conclusions for our charitable activity, without forgetting that all this is precisely the fruit of faith, that is, a gaze that corresponds to what God has revealed. The reflections and testimonies also indicated to us a method: the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* says that faith is an encounter. So, God meets me as a person, just as I meet the other as a person. The method is this personal encounter. Being with the poor is more than just giving them something. It was emphasized that the personal relationship is the first place where charity and justice may be realized. The service towards others is not true service if we don't meet one another as person to person: the personal element precedes all other elements, even organizational ones.

5. The challenges we face today are such that we cannot work alone, we must seek companions for the journey. The presence at our conference of speakers from other religions wishes to convey that we are extending our boundaries ó using the words of Pope Benedict ó so that together we can help others. The best form of collaboration between religions is contributing to make modern man attentive to that life of the spirit that allows him to change his attitude towards others. Religion is thus not a reason for conflict, but on the contrary, it is a reason for meeting in order to insert into the world a force for good. This is based on the fact that for all of us, God is the Creator and before Him we have a responsibility towards our brothers and sisters. The mercy we receive from Him is a gift of mercy for our brothers and sisters. This mutual collaboration also holds true for our organizations. The complexity of the

problems urges us today to work with others, to seek partnerships. It also emerged the desire for a better cooperation between Catholic organisms. It is difficult to find official forms, much depends on good will. *Cor Unum* has, as its institutional task, promoting collaboration among the Church's various charitable organizations.

6. Another aspect is testimony. If our action originates from God, because He is love, it means that love also speaks to us about Him. Sometimes words accompany this testimony, sometimes this is not possible. But if the Gospel of Christ moves us, then the witness to God passes on its own. This is precisely what distinguishes us from proselytism that wants to impose faith on others. The witness, however, knows that he is not acting on his own behalf; he refers to someone else, he is there for someone else – God. We are God's collaborators. Not out of a sense of duty, but for charity's intrinsic demand. In this sense, the Gospel and charity go together and are not at all in opposition, because the action is an expression of God's love for man. This task cannot be a law, an obligation imposed from above ; but rather an inner inspiration that can animate all of our activity and can propose solutions - never identical or preconceived - to the various problems that we encounter. Thus, the service of charity also becomes a form of evangelization, even today when perhaps more people are benefitting from our services than attending our churches. The Pope said so this morning with a phrase that includes each one of us: "All of us together can contribute concretely to the great mission of the Church: to communicate the love of God which is meant to be spread". The formation of those working in our organizations remains thus an imperative, as several speakers have suggested, starting from Dr. Thio.

7. Testimony also has an impact on the social and political situations in which we live. These dimensions must also be considered, though they do not properly pertain to the Church. But the political relevance of charity is a fact that we have been able to observe on many occasions. One consequence is the creation of a public space where we can bring the Christian novelty into the heart of the world; hence a space where we can defend the dignity of the person. Moreover, Cardinal Tagle emphasized that politics in itself has a divisive outcome, whereas charity is universal. This requires some attention on our part: the search for justice must not compromise our call to communion. Thanks to our concrete presence, situations can change, because the person can change! Allow me to refer to the great work of reconciliation that we may accomplish, even in the most delicate situations, as Dr. Moussalli has testified referring to his experience in Syria.

8. One final consideration: let us strengthen the theology of charity! The theme was presented to us in detail, and I truly hope that it will be brought to our individual

workplaces, because it deserves in-depth consideration. We talked about the experience of the first *Caritas* in the world, the German *Caritas*, founded in 1897. In the very same town of Freiburg in 1925, a Chair in the Faculty of Theology was established to reflect on the practice of charity. This means that charitable action needs a specific theological accompaniment, which is not only regarding the social doctrine, as Professor Gehrig told us. In fact, the latter takes into consideration activities that have society as a subject, while the subject of charitable activity is the Church. This is the real point: the Church is also a visible society, but it is not only a visible society. Therefore, ecclesial life responds to different criteria than mere social life: this is why a reflection is needed—even in the field of charity—that respects this uniqueness. In this ambit we may answer the questions on the relationship between human love and divine love, on the ecclesial dimension, on the Christological foundation of charitable service inasmuch as an ecclesial service. Allow us to propose a concrete proposal that in each Country there be a place in which to reflect on the Theology of Charity ó yet even before that - that we may in our own organizations reflect upon the criteria that inspire our actions. It is urgent that theological formation ó especially of priests ó includes a specific formation in charity. If charitable service is essential to the Church, then we cannot disregard it in the formation of future priests, so that they may feel invested and may learn the necessary methods and operating procedures.

Cardinal Müller stated that at this point in history it is not just òintellectual reservationsö, but a òlack of trust in the divine love that changes the world and gives hopeö ó that generates so much distance from the Church. That is why our activity is so essential, as it brings to light God's love.

In all these instances, our Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* intends to offer help and support. I wish to sincerely thank those who have contributed in different ways to the realization of this Congress, in particular our *Cor Unum* staff, the translators, the journalists, but especially those who took part in it and will be the bearers of the message of our Congress in their respective local Churches.