



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 17 May 2008

Your Eminence,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am particularly pleased to meet all of you who are directly involved in the Pontifical Mission Societies, entities at the service of the Pope and the Bishops of the local Churches, which aim to carry out the missionary mandate to evangelize the peoples to the ends of the earth. I first address my cordial thanks to Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, for his words on behalf of everyone present. I extend my greeting to the Secretary, and to all the Collaborators of the missionary Dicastery, priests, religious and lay people. Dear friends, it is thanks to your hard work that the affirmation of the Council, according to which "the whole Church by her nature is missionary", becomes an effective reality. The charism of the Pontifical Mission Societies is to encourage among Christians a passion for the Kingdom of God, to be established everywhere through the preaching of the Gospel. Having come into being with this universal outreach, they have been a precious instrument in the hands of my Predecessors who raised them to the rank of "Pontifical", recommending that the Bishops establish them in their dioceses. The Second Vatican Council rightly gave them "pride of place, since they are the means of imbuing Catholics from their very infancy with a genuinely universal and missionary outlook. They are also the means for undertaking an effective collection of funds to subsidize all missions, each according to its needs" (*Ad Gentes*, n. 38). The Council made a special examination of the nature and mission of the particular Church, recognizing her full dignity and missionary responsibility.

Mission is a task and duty of all Churches which, like communicating vessels, share people and

resources in order to carry it out. Every local Church is the people chosen from among the peoples, convoked in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to "proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 10). The local Church is the place where the Spirit makes himself manifest with the riches of his charisms, giving to each member of the faithful the call to, and responsibility for, mission. Hers is a mission of communion. The local Church counters with the generating power of unity of Christ's Body, the seeds of disintegration among men and women which daily experience shows to be so deeply rooted in humanity because of sin.

Pope John Paul joyfully affirmed that "there has been an increase of local Churches with their own Bishops, clergy and workers in the apostolate... communion between the Churches has led to a lively exchange of spiritual benefits and gifts.... Above all, there is a new awareness that missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2). Thanks to the reflection that has developed in the past decades, the Pontifical Mission Societies have become integrated in the context of the new paradigms of evangelization and of the ecclesiological model of communion among the Churches. It is clear that they are Pontifical, but by right they are also episcopal, since they are instruments in the Bishops' hands for the implementation of Christ's missionary mandate. The Pontifical Mission Societies, "while they belong to the Pope, belong also to the whole Episcopate and to the whole People of God" (Paul VI, *Message for World Mission Sunday*, 20 October 1968; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 13 June 1968, p. 2). They are the specific, privileged and principal means for education in the universal missionary spirit, for communion and for inter-ecclesial collaboration in the service of Gospel proclamation (cf. Statutes, 18).

Moreover, in this phase of the Church's history, which is recognized by her missionary character, the charism and work of the Pontifical Mission Societies are not depleted, nor must they ever be lacking. The mission to evangelize humanity remains urgent and necessary. Mission is a duty, to which we must respond: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9: 16). The Apostle Paul, to whom the Church is dedicating a special year in memory of the 2,000th anniversary of his birth, realized on the road to Damascus and then experienced in the course of his subsequent ministry that redemption and mission are acts of love. It is Christ's love that impelled him to travel the roads of the Roman Empire, to be a herald, apostle and town-crier of the Gospel (cf. 2 Tm 2: 1, 11) and make himself all things to all people so that he might by all means save some (cf. 1 Cor 9: 22). "He who announces the Gospel participates in the charity of Christ, who loved us and gave himself up for us (cf. Eph 5: 2); he is his ambassador and he pleads in the name of Christ: let yourselves be reconciled with God! (cf. 2 Cor 5: 20)", (*Doctrinal Note on some aspects of evangelization*, 3 December 2007, n. 11; ORE, 19 December 2007, p. 11). It is love that must impel us to proclaim to all people, with honesty and courage, the truth that saves (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 28). This love must shine everywhere and reach the hearts of every man and woman. Indeed, people are waiting for Christ.

Jesus' words, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28: 19-20), are still an obligatory mandate for the whole Church and for every individual member of Christ's faithful. This apostolic task is a duty and also an inalienable right, an expression proper to religious freedom which has its corresponding social- and political-ethical dimensions (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 6). The Pontifical Mission Societies are asked to make the *Missio ad Gentes* the paradigm of all pastoral activity. It is their task, and in particular that of the Pontifical Missionary Union "to promote, that is, increasingly to disseminate among the Christian people the mystery of the Church, that is, this effective missionary spirit" (Paul VI *Graves et Increscentes*, 5 September 1966). I am sure that you will continue to work with all your enthusiasm to ensure that your local Churches assume ever more generously their share of responsibility in the universal mission.

My Blessing to all.

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