



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ORDINARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE SUPREME COMMITTEE
OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**

Clementine Hall

Friday, 21 May 2010

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Welcome to you all! I address my cordial greeting to Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the [Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples](#), whom I thank for his kind words; to Archbishop Robert Sarah, Secretary; Archbishop Piergiuseppe Vacchelli, Adjunct Secretary and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies; to all of the Dicastery's collaborators, and in a special way to the National Directors of the [Pontifical Mission Societies](#) who have come from all the Churches to convene in Rome for the Annual Ordinary Assembly of the Supreme Committee.

I am particularly grateful to this Congregation, whose assignment to "direct and coordinate missionary work and missionary cooperation throughout the world" (*Ad Gentes*, n. 29) was confirmed by the [Second Vatican Council](#), in accordance with the Congregation's founding Statute in 1622. It is a weighty mission, that of evangelization, especially in our time in which humanity suffers from a certain lack of reflection and wisdom (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, nn. 19, 31) and a humanism is spreading that excludes God (cf. *ibid.*, n. 78). For this reason it is even more urgent and necessary to illuminate new problems that arise with the light of the Gospel that does not change. In fact, we are convinced that the Lord Jesus Christ, faithful witness of the Father's love, "by his death and Resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity" (*ibid.*, n. 1). At the beginning of my ministry as the Successor of the Apostle Peter I strongly affirmed: "the purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know

what life is.... There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him" (*Homily at the start of Petrine Ministry*, 24 April 2005). Preaching the Gospel is an invaluable service that the Church can offer to the whole of humanity that journeys through history. You who come from Dioceses across the world are an eloquent and living sign of the catholicity of the Church, which finds expression in the universal breath of the apostolic mission, "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1: 8), "to the close of the age" (Mt 28: 20), so that no people nor environment may be deprived of the light and grace of Christ. This is the significance, the historical trajectory, the mission and hope of the Church.

The mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples entails a critical judgment on the worldwide transformations that are now substantially changing humanity's culture. The Church present and active on the geographical and anthropological frontiers bears a message that has been passed down through history, in which she proclaims inalienable human values, with the proclamation and witness of God's saving plan made visible and operative in Christ. Preaching the Gospel is the call of God's children to freedom, to the construction of an ever more just and solidary society, and to our preparation for eternal life. Whoever participates in Christ's mission must inevitably face tribulation, conflict and suffering, because they will come up against the resistance and the powers of this world.

And we, like the Apostle Paul, have no arms but the word of Christ and of his Cross (cf. 1 Cor: 1: 22-25). The mission *ad gentes* asks the Church and her missionaries to accept the consequences of their ministry: evangelical poverty, which confers on them the freedom to preach the Gospel with courage and openness; non-violence, by which they respond to evil with good (cf. Mt 5: 38-42; Rom 12: 17-21); willingness to give their life for Christ's name and for love of mankind.

Just as the Apostle Paul showed the authenticity of his apostolate through the persecutions, wounds and harassment he endured (cf. 2 Cor 6-7), so also is persecution the proof of the authenticity of our own apostolic mission. But it is important to remember that the Gospel "takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history. In all this it is the Holy Spirit who gives life" (John Paul II, Encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 64), and that the Church and her missionaries have been empowered by the Spirit to fulfil the mission entrusted to them (cf. *ibid.*, n. 25). It is the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 14) who unites and preserves the Church, giving her strength to grow, filling Christ's disciples with an overflowing wealth of charisms. And it is from the Holy Spirit that the Church receives the authority of the apostolic proclamation and ministry. Therefore, I wish to strongly reiterate what I have already said in regard to development (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 79), that is, that evangelization needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that the conversion of the world to Christ is not brought about by us, but given to us. The celebration of the *Year for Priests* has truly helped us to be more aware that missionary work requires an ever increasingly profound union with the One who God the Father sent for the salvation of all. It is a call to participation in that "new way of life" which the Lord Jesus inaugurated and which the Apostles made their own (cf. *Address to participants at the*

Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy, 16 March 2009).

Dear friends, my thanks again to all of you of the Pontifical Mission Societies, who in diverse ways are committed to safeguarding the missionary awareness of the local Churches. You impel them to more active participation in the *missio ad gentes* through the formation and the sending out of men and women missionaries and through solidary aid to the young Churches. My warm gratitude goes to you also for the reception and formation of priests, women religious, seminarians, and laypersons offered by the Congregation's Pontifical Colleges. As I entrust your ecclesial service to the protection of Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Apostles, I bless you all wholeheartedly.

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