



The Holy See

***SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES***

Friday, 5 June 1998

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. At the end of your annual general assembly you wished, as in the past, to meet me, and it gives me great joy to welcome you and extend my cordial greeting to you. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude for the intense, tireless work that you carry out in the service of the missionary Church. I first of all greet Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, who expressed your common sentiments; Archbishop Charles Schleck, Adjunct Secretary of the Congregation and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the general secretaries, the advisers, the national directors, gathered here from many countries of the world, and the personnel of the general secretariats. With affection I again express my heartfelt, fraternal welcome.

2. Through each of you I would like to extend my greeting to your Ecclesial Communities of origin. Some of them have an ancient and glorious missionary tradition and have played a significant role in the spread of the Gospel. By generously sending missionaries and committing considerable economic resources, they have encouraged the birth and development of young Churches, many of which are celebrating in these years the centenary of their evangelization. But how could I not publicly express my appreciation also for those Dioceses which, although lacking both apostolic personnel and financial means, are likewise anxious to respond courageously to the missionary appeal, opening themselves to the needs of the universal call to salvation, as far as their limited resources allow. What a providential reality is the mutual exchange, between Churches, whereby each one shares with the other the gifts received from God! This is an impulse from the Holy Spirit, who opens the heart of every believer, through a significant apostolic experience, to the needs of the entire world. Thanks to the help of every baptized person, it is thus possible to spread the truth of the Gospel to an ever larger number of people.

Yes, it is the Spirit who spurs us to lift our eyes from our own immediate necessities and turn them towards the needs of those who are “like sheep with- out a shepherd” (Mk 6:34), and “wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21).

Dear national directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the role assigned to you in this work of evangelizing is an important one. May your desire to sensitise the members of the Christian communities to this task always be your first and foremost concern. Your work, as those responsible for these Societies, is in itself a service directed to the whole Church. A service that the four Societies, which “have the common purpose of fostering a universal missionary spirit among the People of God” (Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, n. 84), fulfil in different and complementary ways.

While the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood has the objective of instilling an authentic missionary spirit in Catholics from an early age, the Pontifical Society of St Peter Apostle aims at the formation of seminarians and of men and women religious in recently established Churches. This work of increasing mission awareness must involve the entire People of God and become a need felt by everyone. It is above all the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith that is called to keep this apostolic yearning alive. Its objective is to involve families, basic communities, parishes, schools, movements, associations and religious institutes in the new evangelization, so that every Diocese acknowledges its universal missionary vocation (cf. *Statutes of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Rome 1980*, II, 9/a), not only with regard to fund-raising and spiritual co-operation, but also for the fostering of both temporary and lifelong missionary vocations.

I also thank the Lord for the work that the Pontifical Missionary Union is carrying out and I encourage it to concentrate on training leaders and formation personnel, thereby responding to its specific vocation. It is precisely for this reason that it was described as “the soul of the other Societies” (cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Graves et crescentes*).

3. Dear brothers and sisters, at the end of this meeting my heartfelt wish is that your apostolic ardour, nourished by constant prayer and filial devotion to Mary most holy, may accompany your daily work. May the icon of the Blessed Virgin recollected in prayerful contemplation in the Upper Room with the Apostles be the image of Christian communities who constantly listen to God and are ready to receive the strength of the Holy Spirit! Be guided by the Spirit of God! Co-operate with him in animating the entire Christian people, so that it may be faithful to Christ who wants it to be generously involved in building up his kingdom. “On all Christians”, the Second Vatican Council reminds us, “rests the noble obligation of working to bring all men throughout the whole world to hear and accept the divine message of salvation” (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 3).

This is the future of mission; this is your programme: “Today and Beyond the Year 2000”, as the title of your convention puts it so well.

While I entrust you to the merciful hands of Mary, Star of evangelization, I assure you of a constant remembrance in prayer and, as I urge you to continue on the path you have taken. I cordially give you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your co-workers in the tireless work of fostering mission awareness and collaboration.

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