



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC
MISSION WORK MISSIO FROM AACHEN (GERMANY)**

Monday 3 September 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. With great joy I welcome you, collaborators of MISSIO Aachen, who in these days are making your pilgrimage to Rome. I especially greet your President, Fr Hermann Schalück, who accompanied you in this spiritual journey to the Eternal City. Seeing you, I think of the great merits of the Pontifical Mission Society in Germany. In greeting you, I gladly make my own the words of Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, to the Thessalonians: "We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (I *Thes* 1,2). Yes, faith, hope and charity have made MISSIO Aachen, in the course of her history, a major contributor to the missionary Church.

2. It is clear from the program of your pilgrimage-visit to the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles that you are first of all seeking spiritual encouragement for your future work. So I take the occasion, in view of your ecclesial mission, to "remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have" (II *Pt* 1,12).

In the modern world man runs the risk of limiting progress to the horizontal dimension. But what becomes of man if he does not also lift his mind towards the Absolute? A "new humanity" without God is destined to end quickly, as the blood-stained footprints left by the history of the ideologies and totalitarian regimes of the last century show us.

For this reason, the Christians of the third millennium, more than ever have the "wonderful and demanding task of becoming its 'reflection'. This is a daunting task if we consider our human

weakness, which so often renders us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task which we can accomplish if we turn to the light of Christ and open ourselves to the grace which makes us a new creation" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 54).

3. Looking toward this horizon, toward Christ, the sun of our salvation, gives new light to discover new contours in the "signs of the times" that should be reread and evaluated: the Church has a missionary task among the peoples that she cannot renounce. Among the more urgent tasks of the *missio ad gentes*, belongs in fact the proclamation that the human person who is in search of freedom and meaning will find the fullness of life in the *Mysterium* (the Mystery) of Jesus Christ, who is the "way and the truth and the life" (*Jn* 14,6).

Therefore, the mission cannot be conceived only as a contribution to development, but it must, first of all, be the proclamation of the Gospel by word and deed. I express my appreciation and esteem for you, representatives of MISSIO Aachen, for always having considered your activity to be directed to spreading the faith and for wanting to keep this orientation for the future.

Certainly, the missionary Church is active on many fronts, dedicating itself to meeting material needs and freeing the oppressed, to the just defence of the goods of the earth and the defence of human rights. Nonetheless, her principal duty is another: the poor hunger not just for bread and freedom, but most of all they are starved for God. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (*Mt* 4,4).

4. Thanks to the generosity of numberless faithful, the directors of MISSIO Aachen have succeeded in meeting a variety of spiritual and material needs in various missionary areas throughout the world. You have funded projects not only for the building and furnishing of churches, schools and dwellings, but also for the promotion of charity, of education and formation in order to confirm the personal dignity of all, especially of children and women. So it is important in the field of material support to pay attention to the spirit with which one gives. The generosity of the gift should always be inspired by faith and measured with the measure of love. Only then will giving be more blessed than receiving.

To collaborate in the missions means being able not just to give but to receive as well. The history of your institution shows that the *Missio* (the mission) succeeds if it is rooted in *Communio*. All the member Churches, the younger and the older, are called to give and receive in carrying out their vast mission. The Church as *Communio* is truly a community, that lives from the mutual exchange of its gifts, as the Second Vatican Council carefully explained: "In virtue of this catholicity each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity" (Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen gentium*, n. 13).

5. The number of people who have not yet heard of Jesus is even now enormous. The cultures

that the *mysterium* of salvation has not yet renewed are vast and call for the *communio* of the Church with all her powers. At the beginning of the third millennium, the Church's mission is to nourish her apostolic zeal to bring the light and joy of the Good News to all who do not yet know the love of God, manifested in Jesus Christ to save all people (cf. *Ti* 2,11; 3,4).

MISSIO Aachen offers a generous and precious contribution to this ecclesial mission. Thanking God for having given us this institution, I entrust all who are linked to it by their activity, donations and prayers to the Virgin Mary that she may grant them her maternal protection. I gladly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.