**Intervention at the P.M.S. Asia Continental Meeting**
*Taipei, 10.02.2019*

Dear brothers in the priesthood,

I am very glad to be here with you. I thank you very much for having invited me to participate in your Continental Meeting, first of all because it gives me the opportunity to get to know you better and to strengthen that bond that facilitates our collaboration.

As you know, various Continental Meetings have been organized this year. While ensuring the participation of the Secretary Generals in other such meetings in representation of our international offices, and after much reflection, I preferred to come to Asia. I decided to come here for two reasons. First of all, because this continent opens significant prospects for the *missio ad gentes*. This is not the first time I come to Taiwan, but it is precisely the knowledge of this country that can lead one to reflect, on one hand, on the great religious traditions that we discover among men, and, on the other hand, on what the Gospel has to say to the oriental man. As we know, there are very few countries in the Asian continent that have a significant number of Christians. In fact, here we find ourselves in the initial stages of a great apostolic task.

The second reason that drove me to come to Asia was the example of Pope Francis, who has already visited Korea, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and who will probably also visit Japan soon. By doing this, it seems as though the Holy Father’s intention is that of opening the way to this Continent, as if to say to the whole Church: "Go there, because there the Church has a great mission to carry out." Moreover, you know very well that countries such as China and Vietnam are of particular concern to us as Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. All this motivated my decision to accompany you during the first days of your Continental Meeting.

In a letter that I sent to all the Continental Delegates and to the National Directors who are hosting the Continental Meetings this year, I asked that these meetings be organized as an occasion to reflect on certain topics, specifically on the theological foundation of the mission and on the future of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Ours is a worldwide network at the service of the Holy Father to support the mission and the young Churches through prayer and charity. I therefore want everyone to feel involved, all the National Directions together with the International Secretariats, in a process that, though necessary, should not be something imposed from higher authorities, but rather the result of our concrete experience. In fact, the topic of the future of the Pontifical Mission Societies was brought up in our last General Assembly, during which the National Director in Italy suggested a motion in that respect. The Special Assembly in November asked to proceed on this path. I would now like to try to explain the reason why we wish to focus on these particular issues.

1. Theological reflection

During my first year as President of the PMS, I realized that, in the missionary world, a theological reflection on the missionary mandate is generally quite uncommon. I myself do not have much knowledge of the subject, but I could give several examples of what has led me to consider the urgency of the matter. It is above all the question: Why the mission as *missio ad gentes*?

In this regard, I have observed two possible limitations.

The first, very widespread even outside the missionary world, is a certain dichotomy between theology and pastoral activity, an opposition that must be overcome. Theology does not go against pastoral care, and the theological approach chosen is not indifferent the pastoral activities that are implemented. Each one of these two dimensions – pastoral and theological, life and theory, faith and reflection – sheds light on the other, and together they help the Church better carry out its mission. In fact, a dogma is formulated by the Church to define a path in which truth manifests itself. This truth is important for man, because it indicates the way to follow in order to realize his vocation as a human being and as a Christian. Therefore, a well-developed theology of the mission helps the Church focus on the important points of its mission. The faith of the Church requires the intelligence of reflection in order to become incarnated and effective in the task of evangelization. For our practical life to be authentically Christian, founded on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ as witnessed by the Scriptures and transmitted by the living Tradition of the Church, we must learn to think. There is no dichotomy or contraposition between theology and mission.

A second limitation is that the lack of theology leads to sentimentality. Let me explain: if reason is wanting, its place is occupied by the sentiments. In that case, it is no longer an ordered reflection that guides our steps, but rather our impressions or, perhaps even worse, the current fashion and trends of the moment.

I would therefore like to list some theological issues that call for our reflection and our response, if we want to establish the foundation of our missionary work. I will mention some of these topics so that later you may discuss them.

What does it mean today that Christ came for everyone? What does it mean that the Church, as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, is the universal sacrament of salvation? What role does the celebration of the sacraments have in the proclamation of the faith? What does the Christian proclamation of the faith entail? How can the relationship between dialogue and proclamation be better defined? What role do religions play in the economy of salvation? We read in *Ad gentes* 6: “The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root.” What does this mean? Can we still affirm that man is constitutively predisposed to the proclamation of the Gospel?

As I wrote in my letter to the Continental Delegates, I would be grateful if a representative chosen from each continental group prepare a 15 minute presentation of the conclusions and insights drawn from your discussions for our upcoming General Assembly 2019. I believe that this will help us extend and widen our reflection as much as possible.

1. The future of the P.M.S.

Obviously, this too is a topic that concerns us directly and that is necessary after 200 years of history. As I mentioned, this was subject of a motion during our last General Assembly. In this regard, I would like to make some considerations.

In the first place, I believe that the combination of prayer and charity wanted by our Foundress, Pauline Jaricot, is still valid, and it will continue to be so as long as the *missio ad gentes* endures. In fact, the mission will always need the support of prayer and charity. In this sense, our foundational charism is still essential. We should nevertheless ask ourselves how to renew this charism. I will try to recall some important aspects, asking a few questions that I hope will be helpful. Are there currently any particular challenges that require our attention? From a structural point of view, based on your experience, what can and must be changed? How can we promote the role of International Secretariats and the National Directions, and their mutual cooperation? Are there other ways to better finance the *missio ad gentes*?

In my letter to the Continental Delegates, I asked that the results of this reflection be put in writing and given to the President at the General Assembly. I therefore encourage you not to withhold your personal contribution.

To conclude, I would like to say that this year, in which we celebrate the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019, is a Providential occasion for us to reconsider certain essential issues such as those I have just presented. Reflecting together with your local Churches on the theme chosen by Pope Francis, "Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world", will help us to evangelically “recalibrate” the mission and reconsider the P.M.S. in view of our service to the *missio ad gentes* of the Church. For the preparation of October 2019, I would encourage you to also use the tools made available by the International Secretariats, in particular the web page www.october2019.va. In it you will find many different things, including the guide, that contains a liturgical, theological, and hagiographic section; as well as videos and witnesses. It is good that we not only download the material, but also provide new material to share with other National Directions. This is an essential aspect of the webpage. I thank you in advance for your contribution.