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**INTERVENTION AT THE NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE NEW EVANGELIZATION REGARDING THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES**  
*Bangalore, India – 08.03.2018*

Dear brothers and sisters united in baptism,

Dear brothers in the priesthood and in the episcopal ministry,

I thank you for this invitation that brings me for the first time in my life in India, in a country that offers many promises for the future of the Church. I have already met many of your priests in Rome, particularly the students who reside in our colleges. It has been my desire to come here personally to share with you our gratitude for your work and to encourage you in the great effort of evangelization you are carrying out. I also bring warm greetings from Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I desire to express my profound gratitude to the National and Diocesan Pontifical Mission Societies in India for their cooperation in supporting the mission of the universal Church.

1. **The True Meaning of Mission**

I am most happy to be with you to ponder and discuss the need for a renewed zeal among the disciples of the Risen Lord in responding to his call to “*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit*” [Mt. 28:19]. As the new Adjunct Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, it is from the perspective of these “instructions” received from Christ as he ascended to the Father that I would like to briefly present the place of these Societies in the life of the Universal Church.

In fact, the Church's mandate to proclaim the Gospel cannot be justified except in the mission of Christ. He, the Son of God, came to earth to bring us the life of God: "I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance" (Jn 10:10). The Second Vatican Council expressed well that the mission has its origin in the life of the Trinity. It is by the Father's Will that the Son is sent to the world for our salvation. However, even before this, the Son eternally proceeds from the essence of the Father. Likewise, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Therefore, a dynamism of self-gift that even reaches us is rooted in the Trinity. In fact, the Son’s “proceeding” from the Father is revealed by His being sent to the world, as well as in the breath of the Holy Spirit, from which the Church’s mission of announcing Christ originates. There is a relation of continuity between the Father, the mission of the Son by the Father, and the mission of the Church by the Son.

In the Gospel of St. John, this is how Jesus, on the Sunday of His resurrection, understands his and our mission, "As the Father sent me, so I send you ... Receive the Holy Spirit "(Jn 20: 21-22). Just as the Trinitarian life has its own dynamism that comes from love, which by nature is self-giving and attracts, so the same dynamism of involvement and attraction is found in the Church. For the Church, the mission is not simply an option among many, but belongs to her nature insofar as she is sent by Christ; that is, the mission reflects and realizes what the Church is. Therefore, as Pope Francis often affirms, the Church cannot but be missionary.

Here we must pay careful attention: it is not about spreading an ideology, or a culture, or a new morality, but it is a matter of transmitting this same divine life that works in us and saves us, and that we have received through Jesus’ death and resurrection. In other words, the mission of the Church is that every person may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit: from the personal encounter with Christ who died and rose from the dead for each and every one of us we have come to know the eternal life, which we must, in turn, share with others.

In this sense, it is good to underline what both Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have indicated: at the beginning of faith is a personal encounter with Christ. Every pastoral and missionary activity of the Church should aim to this. In this way, the mission does not mean only an ecclesial dynamism, but also a specific content: Jesus Christ, the face of the Father, who in his Son reveals Himself to us and gives us the knowledge of eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, the power of love, access to the truth and to the meaning of our life.

Here we can see why the proclamation of the Gospel is tied to the sacrament of baptism. In fact, we need an efficient sign that communicates the gift of the Holy Spirit as existential condition. The Gospel is not a mere theory but a practice that shapes our entire life. The sacrament is precisely this existential seal of that which we have heard in words. As stated in the Letter *Placuit Deo* recently published on the 22nd of February by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Faith confesses that we are saved by means of Baptism, which seals upon us the indelible mark of belonging to Christ and to the Church. The transformation of the way of living our relationships with God, with humanity, and with creation derives from Baptism (cf. Mt 28:19).

Thus, purified from original, and all other sins, we are called to a new existence conforming to Christ (cf. Rom 6:4).” As the Second Vatican Council Decree on the missionary activity of the Church *Ad gentes* states, “No one is freed from sin by himself and by his own power, no one is raised above himself, no one is completely rid of his sickness or his solitude or his servitude. On the contrary, all stand in need of Christ, their model, their mentor, their liberator, their Savior, their source of life.

The Gospel has truly been a leaven of liberty and progress in human history, even in the temporal sphere, and always proves itself a leaven of brotherhood, of unity and of peace. Not without cause is Christ hailed by the faithful as ‘the expected of the nations, and their Savior’”. The profound desire of man is satiated only in Christ.

Our Pontifical Mission Societies have a precise significance, because they share and support this mission of the Church. Indeed, even the Second Vatican Council emphasized the importance of the Pontifical Mission Societies (AG 38). I would now like to speak about them, namely about their origin and their task.

1. **The Pontifical Mission Societies**

The **four** Pontifical Mission Societies have their origin in the missionary zeal that marked France in the 19th century, and that included the founding of a significant number of new missionary institutes for the Universal Church. In fact, the history of the Pontifical Mission Societies is remarkably evangelical, an actualization of the parable of the Mustard Seed [Mt. 13:31–32].

They began with the creation of the *Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, founded by a young French woman, the now Venerable **Pauline Marie Jaricot.** She was born in the 19th-century, in Lyon, France - the youngest of seven children. Her father owned a silk factory and her brother was a missionary in what is now Vietnam. At the tender age of fifteen she was deeply touched by the Gospel and began to lead a life of intense prayer and personal ascetical practice. At the age of 17, on Christmas Day, 1816, she made a private vow of perpetual virginity.

Pauline’s spiritual awakening was rooted in a profound desire to participate fully in the Church’s mission *ad gentes*. In **1817** she invited some pious women employees in the silk factory to begin a prayer union dedicated to the Sacred Heart for the support of the mission *ad gentes* and of missionaries in distant lands. She subsequently invited each member of the union, known as the “*Réparatrices du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus-Christ*” (*Repairers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*), to donate but one penny for every prayer offered for the missions. The seed grew rapidly and other groups joined, until in **1822** Pauline formally founded the ***Society for the Propagation of the Faith***, dedicated to helping the Church’s missionary efforts worldwide. It soon spread, not only to other cities, but far beyond the borders of France and quickly becoming a world-wide network of prayer and charity.

Two decades later, in **1843**, the Bishop of Nancy, France, **Charles de Forbin-Janson**, regretting that he could not personally engage in direct missionary activity *ad gentes* and deeply moved by news from China that countless children were dying without baptism, consulted Pauline Jaricot. This conversation led him to inaugurate an association of children in his Diocese dedicated to praying for the evangelization of children in mission territories and to offering their small material contribution for this end. His motto was “*children helping children*”. This was the beginning of the ***Society of the Holy Childhood***, which spread rapidly throughout France and beyond its borders, soon becoming a world-wide reality. Pope Pius IX, by a Brief in 18 July 1856, raised it to the rank of a canonical institution, gave it a Cardinal protector, and requested all bishops to introduce it in their dioceses. Pope Leo XIII, in the encyclical letter *Sancta Dei civitas* (3 December 1890), blessed it and recommended it again to the bishops of the Church. I would like to underline the pastoral innovation of this Society in which, for the first time in history, children and youth are the subjects of evangelization. I believe that it is necessary to recognize in this Society an important pastoral instrument. During my first few months in the Pontifical Mission Societies, I have discovered that in different countries in Latin America the Society of the Holy Childhood represents the ordinary form of the pastoral work dedicated to the youth. In other words, the Dioceses have assumed this missionary idea of the youth to make of it a concrete method of evangelization. In our Secretariat, we are gathering testimonies of different experiences on this matter, which are available to the National Directions.

A few decades after the founding of the Society of the Holy Childhood, the Apostolic Vicar of Nagasaki, Jules-Alphonse Cousin, filled with love for the people of Japan, wanted to encourage native vocations to the priesthood and ensure their formation locally. His great desire was to build a major seminary for the formation of clergy in Japan and for this project he sought the help of a French laywoman **Jeanne Bigard** and her mother Stephanie, a well-off family from Normandy. When her father died, Jeanne sold all her possessions and withdrew into a small two-room apartment, dedicating herself entirely to organizing prayers and collecting funds for the construction of Bishop Cousin's Japanese seminary. She soon invited other groups to join her in this task, and this soon became a structured movement. In **1889** it was formally organized into the ***Society of St. Peter the Apostle*** for the formation of local clergy and religious. Like the other two societies, quickly spread throughout the world and was recommended to the whole Church by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical Letter *Ad Extremas Orientis*, published on June 24, 1893. Even in this case, the importance of the Society is not merely that of providing financial assistance. In fact, during these past few years, this Society has been promoting formation courses in the seminaries as well as for those who are entrusted with the formation of seminarians.

The fourth society was founded by Blessed **Paolo Manna** (beatified by Pope John Paul II), a member of the *Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions*. In 1895, soon after his ordination to the priesthood, he was sent to Burma (Myanmar). In 1907 he contracted tuberculosis and was forced to return to Italy, where he dedicated the rest of his life to promoting the missions. He was convinced that a new missionary spirit and awareness needs to be instilled in Bishops and their clergy. In his writings, Father Manna insisted on the irreplaceable role of priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the education of missionary awareness in the laity. In fact, he saw every Christian vocation as essentially missionary. His motto was “*All are Missionaries!” All baptized persons, but especially “every priest by nature, by definition, is a missionary. The Church's first and fundamental function is the evangelization of the world, the whole world*”. This led him to found the ***Missionary Union*** to which he invited Priests, Religious and dedicated lay-people. In 1916, the Union was approved by Pope Benedict XV and quickly spread throughout the world.

The remarkable growth of these four missionary societies paved the way for their formal recognition by the Holy Father and given the name **Pontifical**. The first three were granted this privilege on May 3, 1922, by Pope Pius XI, by means of his Motu Proprio *Romanorum Pontificum*, one hundred years after the birth of the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith*. The fourth Society was officially given the title **Pontifical** by Pope Pius XII on October 28, 1956 and was later renamed the “***Pontifical Missionary Union of the Clergy, Men and Women Religious and the Consecrated Laity***”. On September 5, 1966, Pope Paul VI renewed its foundational structure, giving it the name of “Pontifical Missionary Union”.

These four Societies, although distinct as to their immediate and concrete goal and purpose, collaborate as one team for the promotion of the missionary spirit and the support of the missions and of younger Churches. Their International Secretariats are located in Rome in the Missionary Dicastery to facilitate collaboration with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Each one of them is responsible for expressing the Holy Father’s concern and solicitude for the mission *ad gentes* and for younger Churches. Both the Second Vatican Council and the following Magisterium regarding the mission have emphasized the role of the Pontifical Societies. These are not a simple historical fact, but rather have a concrete task acknowledged by the Pontiffs even today, the task of raising missionary awareness and the task of gathering funds.

The first three societies have been given the responsibility to coordinate the distribution of funds generated by the good-will of the faithful. Therefore, according to number 69 of the current Statutes of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the General Secretariats in Rome have the mandate and sole responsibility to receive requests from the Ordinaries of Ecclesiastical Circumscriptions that fall under the auspices of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The General Secretariats then study the requests, ensuring that all of the necessary documentation is included and present them at the General Assembly in May/June every year. Requests that could not be presented in May/June may be presented at the Restricted Assembly in November, if they Ordinary ensures that the missing documentation reaches Rome in time.

The Offices of the Secretaries General, taking into consideration the information sent to Rome by National Directions regarding funds generated in a given country, formally ask a given National Direction to fund the diverse projects presented and accepted at the Assembly. These funds are then sent either to the General Secretaries’ account in Rome to then be forwarded to the Ecclesiastical Circumscription that presented the project, or to the account of the Holy Father’s Representative in the country where the project request originated. It is important to note that only Ecclesiastical Circumscriptions that fall under the competence of the Missionary Dicastery – are invited to present requests for subsidies. Dioceses and Archdioceses that fall under the Congregation of Bishops do not fall under purview of the Pontifical Mission Societies, excluding particular cases.

It may now be worthwhile to reflect briefly on the significance of the Holy Father’s decision to make these four societies “Pontifical”. Before 1922, these Mission societies were already a world-wide phenomenon and doing fine work sensitizing Catholics and other people of good will to the importance of the missionary mandate of the Risen Lord and its implementation in the lives of all who profess Christ as the unique Savior of the Universe. In fact, all four societies had been recognized canonically and were providing much needed spiritual and financial support to missionaries and to young Churches in mission lands. Why, then, call them “Pontifical”? How did the decision of Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII change the significance and work of the Societies?

By elevating the Societies to **Pontifical** rank, the Holy Father made them a permanent reality linked directly with the Holy See, that is the Peter’s successor and his role as Vicar of Christ and head of the Apostolic College with particular solicitude for all of the Churches. Their Pontifical designation confirmed their universal scope of action; that their activity embraces the whole world. It also clearly manifested that these Societies are a privileged expression of the Holy Father’s solicitude for the missions *ad gentes* and for younger Churches. All of the fruits, both spiritual and material, generated by the Societies are, therefore, placed at the disposal of the Holy Father and destined to be a concrete expression of his care for young Churches and the mission *ad gentes*.

This last point needs to be appreciated and internalized by everyone associated with and working for these Societies; that each one of us is working for the Holy Father and helping him in his care for the mission *ad gentes* and young Churches worldwide. It is a point that is sometimes not fully understood. In fact, it is because these Societies are “Pontifical” that the Holy Father is the point of reference for all that they do and all of the funds generated for any of these Societies are to be placed at his disposal. The task of *coordinating* the work of the Societies, including the use of the funds generated by the Societies, has been entrusted by the Holy Father to the President of the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Secretaries General of the four societies. Being aware of this unity between the Pontifical Mission Societies and the Holy Father is crucial and shapes the very nature of the Societies.

1. **Awakening a missionary renewal**

The Pontificate of Pope Francis has, without any doubt, reinforced and strengthened the missionary spirit in the whole Church. From his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* to the countless messages and other documents he has penned, one can clearly appreciate his desire for the Church to be truly missionary and not self-referential. The very life of the Church is directed towards proclaiming the Good News of Christ Risen from the dead. The Holy Father continually reminds us that the Church is missionary by her very nature and that she ceases to be herself if she stops being missionary. He has also often emphasized that baptism confers on every Christian a vocation to be missionary; to proclaim the Good News by word and example. In this sense, Blessed Paolo Manna’s intuition, when he returned from the missions, was prophetic in affirming that: *All are Missionaries!”*

Indeed, the Pontificate of Pope Francis has come in a moment of history when missionary fervor seems to have diminished within the Church, particularly in the Church present in the so-called developed nations. The technological and scientific advances of the past century have clearly brought profound changes to modern societies and questions related to faith and mission have presented challenges to the Church, who responded to them with courage and clarity at the Second Vatican Council and by the following Popes. However, we clearly see that in this time of great cultural changes, influencing not only the West but that also spreading throughout the world, the very idea of mission has weakened.

The causes of this are diverse, both inside and outside the Church. On the one hand, modern culture tends to marginalize God and make religion a purely individual reality. Indeed, in other situations, the external environment even impedes the Church from carrying out her missionary task. On the other hand, even within the Church it sometimes seems that the mission is reduced to human promotion. Moreover, the relationship between the proclamation of the Gospel and interreligious dialogue does not yet seem clear, and at times even the universal mediation of Christ seems to be questioned, as if the Gospel were destined only to an elite group of individuals.

In his Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, St. John Paul II wrote that the crisis of the mission is a crisis of faith (RM 2). Therefore, even for those of us who already have a Christian background, there is an urgent need to be continuously evangelized.

But we must have hope! If it is true that the faith has numerically weakened, it is also true that we are witnessing a flourishing of initiatives and charisms, often carried out by the laity, inspired by God precisely to help the Church evangelize in this challenging moment in history. New religious institutes and new lay missionary movements have brought new fervor and zeal to the proclamation of the Gospel.

What is interesting to note is that the generosity of Catholics and non-Catholics alike has not diminished. In recent years there has been a phenomenal growth of new charitable initiatives and new Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as countless new faith based charities. All of this indicates that people continue to give, sometime very generously, towards various causes, from feeding the starving in areas hit by drought, to protecting the environment. With this plethora of possibilities, it is no wonder that the funds generated for the missions, especially those collected on the last Sunday of October, have seen a gradual progressive diminution precisely in the more developed areas of the globe where these other initiatives have emerged. But precisely this is the significant fact: the drastic increase of humanitarian organizations and the diminishing attention given to the missionary world in terms of aid denote that the centrality of the Christian proclamation is less and less cared for, as if it were marginal compared to the so called “real” needs of the human person. This is indeed a tangible sign of secularism. On the other hand there is a continuous gradual increase of funds collected for Mission Sunday in mission territories. Nevertheless, the funds available to the Pontifical Mission Societies are decreasing slightly every year, making it more and more difficult to respond to the ever growing number of requests for ordinary and extraordinary subsidies. The financial aspect is only one side, the more practical one, of a vision of the Church – a missionary Church – that the Pontifical Mission Societies want to promote. A Church in which all of the baptized feel that proclaiming and witnessing the Gospel, that is, the person of Christ, is a call inherent to their being Christian, as the Council teaches us (AA 2).

This is why there is a National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in over 120 countries, who is responsible for promoting, sustaining and forming a truly missionary spirit in the hearts and minds of the Bishops, Priests, Religious and lay-people in that country. It is this last element that is most important in understanding the role of the Pontifical Mission Societies and how they operate in their complex network of National Directions with local Diocesan representation. It is the work of the National and Diocesan Direction to sensitize and inform local Churches about the importance of the Pontifical Mission Societies and the vital work that they do **for the Holy Father** in supporting mission initiatives and the life of Young Churches.

Here, I would like to underline the fact that of the many charitable organizations and NGOs, very few of them offer funds for direct evangelization: the construction of Churches, Seminaries, Convents, formation programs, funding of Catechists, etc. I remember a famous homily of Benedict XVI in Munich in which he recalled that many Bishops complain that they know where they can turn to in order to find assistance for social projects, but they do not know where to find aid for pastoral activities. It is precisely these initiatives that are purview of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Therefore, what does the appreciation for the Pontifical Societies depend on? The more one understands the importance of the missionary activity of the Church in making Christ known, the more will he be able to understand the need for structures that can sustain this important ecclesial task. That way, we will be able to understand the need to help the Societies create such structures that support the local churches.

1. **Missionary October 2019**

Finally, I would like to speak about Pope Francis’ recent initiative of announcing an Extraordinary Missionary Month in October 2019, the organization of which has been entrusted to our Pontifical Mission Societies.

On the occasion of the approaching centennial of the publication of Pope Benedict XV’s letter *Maximum illud*, which gave new impetus to the missionary task of the Church, Pope Francis wrote to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In the letter, the Holy Father said: “*I hereby call for an Extraordinary Missionary Month to be celebrated in October 2019, with the aim of fostering an increased awareness of the missio* ad gentes *and taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation of the Church’s life and pastoral activity*.” He further clarified the purpose of this initiative with the following words: *I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission"… The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself*.”

On December 3, 2017, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, on behalf of Pope Francis, addressed all Bishops and Religious Superiors, presenting them this providential missionary initiative. This is truly an historical event that the Pope has wanted with the goal of renewing the missionary zeal and awareness of the Church, and it is a privilege that our Societies have been entrusted with its organization. Let us not lose this opportunity!

I, therefore, invite you all to begin preparing for this Extraordinary Missionary Month, making it know in every Diocese and Archdiocese of this country and beyond; encouraging local initiatives in making the proclamation of the Good News of Christ at the centre of the pastoral plan of the local Church. Our Pontifical Societies, together with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, have already prepared resources to help local Churches in in the organization and celebration of October 2019. These resources will be made available both in print and online.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank the organizers for inviting me to speak at this event so as to bring to greater focus the importance of the Pontifical Mission Societies and the vital role they play in the life of the Church and how they are an expression of the Holy Father’s love and care for the missionary activity of the Church and for younger Churches.

May God bless you in all of your missionary efforts, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, and St. Francis Xavier, great missionary who also graced this land during his missionary journey that took him to the ends of the earth.