



The Holy See

**LETTER OF PAUL VI
TO CARDINAL JOHN KROL,
PRESIDENT OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*To Our Venerable Brother Cardinal John Krol
President of the Episcopal Conference
of the United States of America*

We have learned with profound satisfaction that the Catholics of the United States of America, especially the friends and cooperators of our Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith, are preparing to celebrate, on both the national and diocesan levels, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of this providential Association and the fiftieth anniversary of its being raised to the status and dignity of a Pontifical Missionary Society.

The hierarchy in the United States has been foremost in its zeal in promoting the Society, establishing it in each diocese, appointing excellent Diocesan Directors and presenting to the Holy See outstanding ecclesiastics to direct and coordinate all efforts on the national scale. Among these latter we could not fail to mention Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, who succeeded in giving such extraordinary vitality to the Association, thereby forging it into one of the most popular and efficient Catholic institutions of your noble country. And we feel confident that his successor, Bishop Edward T. O'Meara, who has just received episcopal ordination from our own hands, will not cease to continue in his praiseworthy and painstaking missionary apostolate. As we already told him after his ordination, we assure him of our particular benevolence; we know his zeal for the missions and we are confident that his activities will be even more effective as he assumes his missionary responsibilities in the midst of the college of bishops.

The charity of the Catholics of North America toward the Missions, as manifested through our Pontifical Society, has in past years been unflinching and most generous. As a result of this assistance, extended also to the three auxiliary Pontifical Societies of Saint Peter the Apostle, the Holy Childhood and the Missionary Union of the Clergy, the Missions have been able not only to subsist but also to develop and multiply.

There were 361 Missionary jurisdictions under the direction of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1922; today there are close to nine hundred. Throughout the years there has also been an impressive increase in the number of baptisms, of missionaries from many countries, of priests, religious, catechists and militant lay persons, who have dedicated themselves with so much loving devotion and respect to the service of the young churches.

But because of this great growth of the work of "teaching all nations", together with the increase in population and the numerous urgent and serious problems in Mission lands, our assistance is becoming steadily less in proportion to the enormous needs that cry out for our help.

Two years ago, the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith was officially designated to maintain the catechists of the young Churches and to provide for their education and instruction. In this hour, one of grave responsibility but full also of fervent hope, we feel that we must repeat, especially to the Directors of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, a thought of the Second Vatican Council (Cfr. Decr. *Ad gentes divinitus*, 39), one previously expressed by Pius XI: "We are not ashamed to make ourself a beggar for Christ, for the salvation of souls, and to ask help for the Missions".

This help which we now once again beg of your beloved people cannot be constant and effective if it is not supported by a growing authentic Missionary consciousness and by the deepest Christian love, which alone can give to material gifts the true dimensions of the theological virtue of Charity.

We are pleased that all our Pontifical Societies, without losing their close link with the Apostolic See, are acquiring a new and truer expression of episcopal collegiality. We trust that in this way we shall be able to face the future, better equipped to put into practice the conviction that "every man is my brother". It is our prayer that this year of Our Lord 1972, which witnesses the double anniversary of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, will see another step forward in our common task of consolidation and development.

We most willingly impart our special Apostolic Blessing to all those who, through their prayers and efforts, heed our plea for the most noble cause of the Missions.

From the Vatican, February 22, 1972.

PAULUS PP. VI