

## MISSIONARY CHARITY AND COMMUNION BETWEEN THE CHURCHES

An exchange of opinions on the methods and possibilities of systematic fundraising for the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) draws our attention to one of the main challenges that is faced in the daily work of raising money for the mission of the Church. The question of the theological fundamentals of this dimension of fundraising work puts us in a sort of dilemma, because mission and money do not seem to easily get along with each other.

On one hand, we are aware of Jesus' instructions to his disciples concerning the proclamation of the Good News in the cities and villages of Galilee: "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick" (Mt 10:8-10). Service and gratuitousness characterize the credibility of those who spread the Good News of the kingdom of God in a world where, as a rule, completely different attitudes prevail. In fact, the accusation that missionaries have done their work for personal gain or by using material incentives has repeatedly damaged their reputation and, consequently, discredited their cause. In light of this, the joint ecumenical document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (2011) unequivocally states that situations of poverty and necessity must not be exploited to encourage people to convert through enticements, including financial incentives and fees (Principles, 4).

On the other hand, missionary work, as a systematic enterprise designed to spread the Christian faith, needed a goal and a plan from the beginning,

in order to be successfully implemented. It required planning, organization, structures, and strategies. But above all, it needed resources – people trained and equipped to do the work and, ultimately, the financial means to translate the projects into reality. The venture began with the planning of missionary journeys undertaken by the Apostle Paul and his companions. The desire to provide missionaries with ample support for their efforts was the main stimulus for the foundation of the Pontifical Mission Societies (1822/1922). Even today, to carry out its task of evangelization, the Church continues to need adequate spiritual and material resources, which not all local Churches have at their disposal.

It is clear that evangelization is impossible without financial resources. This raises the question of how money can be collected without harming the credibility of the Church, or the theological and ethical foundation of fundraising efforts within the Church, in the missionary context.

### **Biblical references**

What is immediately apparent is the marked skepticism of Jesus towards material goods and the destructive power they can have on us. His words resound in our ears and in our hearts: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24); “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Lk 18:25); “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . . But store up treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:19-20).

On the contrary, considerable importance is given in the Old Testament to material support for the poor and the disadvantaged. This is true, in particular, with the general prohibition of usury, for the forgiveness of debts in a jubilee year, and for the giving of alms. Social works of this type were not intended primarily to serve the interests of donors in order to increase their social prestige. They were oriented, above all, to the well-being of the

needy, and before God they had a meaning in themselves. In their sharp criticism of society, the prophets emphasize the significance of these works for the marginalized and establish a link between them and the history of the faith of the people of Israel. Jesus picks these ideas back up and amplifies them. Thus, it is God himself who rewards the good deeds and the attitude that inspires them (see Mt 6:1-4). In fact, it is God who ultimately rewards good deeds, because he identifies himself so much with the destiny of the poor and the humblest that they represent him to a certain extent (see Mt 25:31-46).

Of particular importance on this topic is the collection that the apostle Paul solicited from the Christian communities he founded to support the first Church in Jerusalem. The reason he did so was that this Church was in need. It evidently was facing material poverty that could not be alleviated with the resources available in the Church of Jerusalem. The collection was therefore intended to express the bond of spiritual and Eucharistic communion between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, a bond whose value was manifested in the hour of need in the form of concrete support. This help was not an act of charity but rather a spiritual duty towards those from whom the gift of faith was received: a true act of spiritual communion for the love of Christ and evangelization.

The theological foundation of this collection thus helps us understand the Apostle's understanding of the Church. For Paul, the Churches are not isolated from one another but linked by a spiritual, Eucharistic belonging. Like the parts of a body, the Churches are interconnected and interdependent, living in communion (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). For Paul, the spiritual experience that underlies and supports the unity of this ecclesial body is Jesus Christ, in his Revelation, in the preaching of the Gospel, and in the Eucharist. Through his Spirit, the individual parts are integrated into the body by baptism. In a sense, all the distinctions and differences between individual human beings are dispelled in Christ for the sake of true fruitful communion. There are no more Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people,

men and women, because they are all “one” in Christ (see Gal 3:28). Paul’s new way of looking at things is reflected, in particular, in the meaning he attributes to the weaker and humble members, for “if one member suffers, all the members suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26).

### The Pontifical Mission Societies

This image of a body and its many parts explains not only the interdependence of the strong and weak members of a Church, but also constitutes the foundation for the relationships of communion among the local Churches within the universal Church. Here too, the strong are bound to support the weak. This form of sharing presents a fundamental difference compared to offering simple contributions. While the flow of donations is the result of a marked social divide between the donor and the recipient, this distinction is abolished in Christ by the common belonging of all parts to the spiritual body of the universal Church. Within the spiritual community of the universal Church one cannot speak of donors and recipients. On the contrary, each member has something indispensable to offer, to contribute to the spirit-inspired community of the faithful. This exchange of gifts allows participants in the one body to become brothers and sisters who meet on equal ground.

Even if from the outside it may seem that it is a mere material help, practical communion within the universal Church has, above all, a spiritual, theological meaning. It is the realization of this link that underlies the crucial importance of the inspiring motivation of Pauline Jaricot: the connection between daily prayer for the work of propagating the faith and practical support for the Church’s missionary efforts through a regular donation (“every day an Our Father and a coin for the mission”). Mission then becomes a common effort on the part of all believers, to which every single person can contribute. Thus Pauline Jaricot anticipated in a very practical

way to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the Church is, as a whole and by its very nature, missionary and that each baptized person therefore must participate in the missionary task of the Church to preach the Gospel, to witness to the risen Lord, share the sacraments, and live in divine love.

Spiritual motivation is the primary motivation for donations and is enhanced by active efforts. This dialectical connection is probably the reason for the resounding success of Pauline Jaricot's idea. She thus intuitively anticipated one of the essential elements of a successful fundraising effort. Today fundraising is understood as a systematic activity carried out by a charitable organization in order to obtain the resources necessary to carry out its purpose at the lowest possible cost. This is done by ensuring that there is constant attention to the needs of donors. The fundraising is therefore oriented towards the motivation of donors. Donors should be able to identify with the objective they are supporting through their material gift. At the same time, the act of fraternal union expressed by their giving should be able to add spiritual value and motivation to their own experience of ecclesial life and faith. The success of fundraising, therefore, has to do first of all with the motivation and the missionary inspiration of faith.

The proclamation of the Gospel, prayer, and the invitation to share material involve, both for those who collect funds and for those who donate, a demanding call to conversion. Fundraising is always an invitation to conversion; everyone is called to a new, more spiritual relationship with their desires, their needs, their intentions, and their resources. In this particular vision, those who raise funds are not the only ones who profit, because even the donors participate in a new, edifying communion in the name of the Gospel, a network of sharing and fraternity. Raising funds as ministry is a subject we rarely consider from a spiritual point of view.

For the Gospel, on the other hand, the raising of funds is not only a response to a need, but above all a form of service to promote unity and communion in the Church. In a sense, it is a further opportunity to pro-

claim our faith and extend an invitation to other people to share the mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and his Church. Therefore, raising money is the opposite of asking for alms. We know that we have been given a clear task: all of humanity is called to be saved and to become one body in Jesus Christ. We invite donors to freely invest the resources that God has given them – energy, prayers, and money – for this goal to which our common faith has called us.

### **Collection of funds for the PMS**

The observations made so far have practical consequences for the fundraising work of the Pontifical Mission Societies. The crucial starting point is the motivation of donors, and the way to motivate and support them. The success of fundraising is based on the presentation of a convincing and compelling mission, whose purpose is to make donors aware of the opportunity of every single Christian to play an active role in the Church's mission of evangelization.

Motivational work must be accompanied by practical opportunities to give tangible expression to this personal orientation. This is the biggest challenge for the fundraising work of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Communication at the beginning of the nineteenth century was largely limited to letters and periodicals, while nowadays there are many ways and means of keeping in touch with the reality of mission work in the field. People must be able to experience the fact that their gift makes them part of a wider network of people and activities that has a meaning that goes beyond any financial commitment. For this reason, the collection of funds for mission must constantly emphasize that the money is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool to promote activity that ultimately no amount of money in the world could buy: the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus, the building up of his Church around the propagation of the Christian faith,

the celebration of the sacraments, and the realization of many works of Christian charity.

Increasing importance is attributed to the presentation of concrete and clear goals that donors can support and follow closely. Regardless of how important it may be to meet donors' expectations, we should never lose sight of the real meaning and purpose of fundraising. Ultimately, it is about participating in the life of the Church throughout the world. The Societies, precisely because they are Pontifical, guarantee the universal character of the way the funds will be used, working to distribute them fairly, so that no local Church is lacking the means to evangelize. The PMS, in direct service of the Pope, serve him in his solicitude as Pastor of the universal Church even in this material and economic dimension of the mission. It is a matter of helping to make it possible for all the Churches to live their baptismal responsibility for mission.

Emphasizing that all the funds collected during the month of October 2019 will be offered to the Pope toward the costs of evangelization, we reaffirm that the contribution of the experience of our National and Diocesan Directors is extremely valuable. Rethinking the ecclesiological nature and the role of the PMS, in view of a renewed focus on the work they do during the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019, means also keeping this in mind. The material support of the mission to proclaim the Gospel has always represented the extension of the faith and prayers of a large number of Christians for the *missio ad gentes*. The construction of churches and chapels for worship and places for catechesis and Christian formation, together with other activities such as the translation into local languages of the Holy Scriptures, liturgical texts, and documents of the Pope's magisterial teaching, need concrete gestures of Christian charity for the missions. The formation of catechists, pastoral agents, and lay Catholics engaged in secular fields, as well as the formation of seminarians and novices, has always been part of the missionary work of the PMS. Therefore, the task of rethinking the economic-material dimension of the PMS, rooting

it in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel and building up the Church, will be of great benefit to all.

Although the help given must be used for the specific needs of the individual local Churches, and these have the right to evaluate their own needs, the communion and universality of the Church must grow thanks to this work of raising awareness and raising funds. Therefore, structures must be set up to coordinate the activities of the various people and offices involved in this missionary work.

Great importance, therefore, must be attributed to accounting, in order to ensure the correct use of donations received and to comply with the relevant regulations in force in the various countries. There should never be the slightest doubt that the institution is doing everything possible to serve the common goal and does not pursue other interests. They must pay attention to the admonition of Jesus: "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (Mt 10:8).

Fundraising and the mission must not be understood as opposed and irreconcilable. It is imperative, however, that there be ethical reflection on the opportunities of fundraising activities and their limitations, in the context of Church activities, since not everything that is possible is necessarily right. Within the range of open possibilities, choices must be made that reflect the specific character of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Ultimately, this means giving priority to the activities that contribute to the fulfillment of the missionary task of Jesus.