



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE COMBONIAN CAPITULARS

23 June 1979 Beloved Brothers,¹. It is a great consolation for me to welcome you well-deserving Combonian Missionaries to the Father's House today, at the beginning of your General Chapter. After the Decree issued by the Cardinal Prefect of "Propaganda Fide" yesterday, this Chapter sees your two families, the Italian branch and the German one—divided owing to the well-known events in 1923—again united in the charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. You are his elect Sons because you take your name from him and are inspired by him, as the "Congregation of Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus", through the beneficial initiative of your venerated Founder, Mons. Daniele Comboni. I thank you heartily for your presence and, even more, for the fine evangelical testimony you have given by returning to the unity of one religious Family as it was brought forth by the original charism of your pious Founder, who, in his missionary concern, had constantly on his lips and in his heart the *Unum sint* of Jesus' priestly prayer to the heavenly Father (cf. Jn 17:11). What a valid motive this is, dear Brothers, to congratulate you and rejoice with you! May you be blessed for it! A grateful and reverent thought goes also and above all to the splendid, nay more, heroic figures of Combonian Missionaries who in the course of the past years and also recently have given a testimony of complete abnegation for Christ's cause, to the extent of facing serious trials and even the sacrifice of their lives: honouring in this way the whole Institute and meriting the Gospel praise: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you... Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." (Mt 5:11-12).² The General Chapter, which you began yesterday under the blessing gaze of Jesus, on the liturgical solemnity of his Sacred Heart, marks for you the end of a stage crowned with many fruits, and the beginning, more promising than ever, of a new period of ecclesial service in mission territories. Well, the Church expects a great deal from you: from your example and your generous apostolic dedication. I hope, therefore, that the work of this Chapter will be a courageous restatement of the Constitutions and Rules to give your missionary Congregation that spiritual character which is demanded by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, by the necessities of the times, and the requirements of the places in which you are called to carry out your ministry. In these days of reflection and discussion, let yourselves be guided above all by the luminous figure of Christ "gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29). For the salvation of souls, of all souls, without differences of language, race and nation (cf. Rev 5:9), he became a child with children, poor with the poor, suffering with the suffering, the way for those who had strayed, the truth for those in error, life for all men. In a word, he became "everything to everyone" (cf. 1 Cor 15:28), as St Paul says, in order that everyone might feel him near, beneficent and redeeming, and, with the Apostle of the Gentiles, himself, say "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).³ You have set yourselves the aim of going back to the origins of your religious Congregation in order to live your missionary vocation better and better according to the native spirit bestowed on you by the Founder, with his virtuous life and with his example as a zealous priest and an indefatigable bishop

completely dedicated to the salvation of pagans in the vast far-off regions of Africa, which became his country of election. Take care that nothing distorts what he wished to imprint on the face of his and your Institute. The education of the young, care of the sick, assistance for the poor, instruction for catechumens and devotion to the Sacred of Jesus, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3), must remain, though with the necessary updating, the characteristic features of your religious Communities. It is necessary, therefore, that, in view of the risk of activism, instead of activity, and of agitation, instead of action, to which disorderly zeal might sweep along even the missionary, primacy should be given to interior life, prayer, meditation, the spirit of poverty and sacrifice; in order not to yield to the subtle temptation of adapting oneself to the world, under the pretext, perhaps, of getting to know it better, but actually with the risk of remaining caught in its meshes. Mindful of the Master's words, "You are in the world, but not of the world" (cf. Jn 15-19), take care to be, wherever you go, inwardly and outwardly distinctive signs of Christ in your way of living and behaving, even in the habit which identifies you and indicates your presence in the midst of the people. May the blessed spirit of your Founder sustain you in the sessions of your delicate work. May he who was so open to the needs of souls, but always united with God, inspire you and obtain for you the graces necessary for a real reform of your consecrated life and for adequate knowledge of the urgent and multiple needs of the missionary world of today. Let my special Apostolic Blessing which I now impart with fatherly benevolence descend on each of you, on your work, and on your re-united Congregation.

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