

THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

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THE Propagation of the Faith was first founded as a Society in the year 1822, by Pauline Jaricot, in the city of Lyons, in France, and for the first hundred years of its existence was spread under the administration of a committee of French clergy and laymen. In the year 1922, Pope Pius XI., in the Motu Proprio, "Romanorum pontificum," dated May 3, transferred the Society for the Propagation of the Faith to Rome, changing its status from that of a more or less private venture to become a Pontifical work, and the official instrument of the Holy See in enlisting the help of every single Catholic in the world towards the fulfilment of the common crusade of Christianity to "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

The erection of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith to the status of a Pontifical work means, in effect, that the Propagation of the Faith must take precedence over every other form of mission aid. Further, all other forms of mission aid are allowable only in so far as they do not directly interfere with fundamental work of the Propagation of the Faith. This does not signify, by any means, that it is wrong to raise money for the missions by other means than through the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. To quote the words of a decree of the Superior Council of the Propagation of the Faith, dated April, 1928: "The Superior Council realising full well that the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith is insufficient in itself to meet all the various needs of the missions, does not hesitate to declare that it is nowise its purpose to hamper Missionary Institutes in soliciting support for their missions, but it does earnestly hope that these Institutes will not fail to recommend this Pontifical Society to their friends and benefactors and to persuade them to enrol in it for the reasons given above."

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith is an association of all the faithful, of all languages and of all countries, whether newly admitted to the fold of the Faith or tracing their Catholicity back through centuries. The purpose of this world-wide Association is to unite the prayers, the interests, and the sacrifices of millions for the spread of the name of Jesus Christ the Redeemer to every land; even to those in which Christ is still an outlaw.

IT IS AN OBLIGATION.

Our Blessed Lord's commission to His Church to "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature" embraces the whole membership of that Church. Pope and Bishops, priests and people, must all, each in accordance with his station in life, do what they possibly can to carry out this command of Our Divine Lord. The spiritual and temporal support of the missions is not simply part of the vocation of a few, but is a common obligation of every member of the Church. There are many ways of fulfilling this obligation; but the principal way, because it is the official way, is the Pontifical Association for the Propagation of the Faith. Of this Association his Holiness Pope Pius XI. says: "All Christian people should aid, through their generosity, the work of the Propagation of the Faith, which of all missionary organizations is the principal one; we have given it charge of all the missions that exist at present or all that shall exist in the future."

Speaking at the audience given to the Superior Council for the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith on May 19, 1936, his Holiness made the following statement: "It is well to note, my dear sons, that persons with such responsibility as you have the right, and, to a certain extent, the obligation not merely to recommend and to persuade, but rather to indicate the strict duty of all Christians towards mission co-operation, because they are Christians, living members of the Mystical Body of Christ and possessing the precious gift of Faith which immense numbers of men do not possess, because they have not received the smallest announcement of the Divine Redemption."

This doctrine is characteristic of all his Holiness has said with regard to the work of the Propagation of the Faith. The

Encyclical, “Rerum Ecclesiae,” addressing the Bishops of the world, remarks: “No one of the faithful can free himself of this duty. What, indeed, shall we say of you, Venerable Brothers, raised as you are to the fulness of the priesthood, and each of you finding yourself in your diocese at the head of your clergy and your Christian people? It is not only to Peter, whose Chair we occupy, but to all the Apostles, whom you succeed, Jesus Christ, as we read, has given the command, ‘Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ Whence it follows that the task of spreading the Faith falls to us . . . for in a matter of such great importance we must all one day render a strict account to God.”

IT IS NOT A COLLECTION

It must be clearly understood that the Propagation the Faith is not a collection but a devotion. The obligation that is placed by the Holy Father on the whole Catholic world can in no way be fulfilled simply by an occasional contribution to a collection. In this matter we simply have no choice, the laws of the Church in this regard are perfectly clear. The obligations of the Propagation of the Faith may be grouped under three heads:

Interest. Every Catholic must learn to consider the missions as part of his ordinary life as a member of the Catholic Church. He must read about them, he must hear about them, he must think about them and read, and hear, and think of the missions as something of definite personal interest.

Prayer. Having learnt of the missions, the Catholic people must be taught to pray for the missions. This prayer for the missions, and for the spread of the name of Christ to every corner of the earth, must not be a merely impersonal effort. Catholics must be convinced that they should pray for the missions as they would pray for a real personal need, as they would pray, for something that is definitely and intimately connected with their own chances of salvation. The Propagation of the Faith imposes the minimum of prayers: “One ‘Our Father,’ one ‘Hail Mary,’ one ‘St. Francis Xavier, pray for us,’” for daily recitation. The advantage of these prayers is, first of all that they are official, and, secondly, they are universal to the whole of the Catholic Church throughout the world—common to every language, common to every country, common to rich and poor alike.

Material Assistance. The material contribution as membership of the Propagation of the Faith is so arranged that the contribution may be within the power of every single Catholic, no matter what his financial state may be. One halfpenny a week, amounting to two-shillings and twopence for the whole year, is the ordinary contribution of Australian Catholics. The regular contribution of this small sum is of immensely greater benefit to the Association and to the end for which it has been established than the contribution of ten times the sum given simply and perfunctorily in an annual collection. If every single Catholic in the whole world made this very small contribution, the financial problems of the missions for a great many years to come would be effectively solved.

Besides this ordinary subscription there is a special subscription of £1/1/8, for those who are in a position to enrol themselves and nine of their friends as members of the Association. Perpetual membership of the Association, which carries with it all the spiritual advantages during life and participation in the daily Mass that is offered at the tomb of St. Peter in Rome every morning for deceased members of the Association, may be obtained by the payment of £8 once and for all.

The Mission Sunday collection, although recommended by the Holy See is not strictly part of the organization of the Propagation of the Faith—it is a welcome addition, and depends on the Bishop’s orders.

A special clause governs the membership of those people who are too poor to pay even the small sum of one halfpenny a week for membership of the Association. Membership of the Association for such as these consists in the daily recitation of the prescribed prayers, and in the contribution, if at all possible, of some small sum, no matter how insignificant, within the twelve months. Where the Propagation of the Faith is established in mission lands, and this is especially true of the South Sea Islands, material assistance as part of the membership of the Association very often takes the form of goods in kind, or giving one day’s work in the twelve months for the benefit of the mission.

“CATHOLIC MISSIONS.”

The official organ of the Association in Australia is the monthly magazine, “Catholic Missions.” It is published with a purpose of arousing the Catholic people’s interest in the work of Catholic Missions, and every attempt is made to cover the whole field of missionary activity in so far as space and opportunities permit. “Catholic Missions” is supplied free to promoters of the Society in order that all members of the Association may have an opportunity to read it. Special members and life members also receive a monthly copy of the magazine. Any person who may wish to receive a personal copy of the magazine each month may do so by paying, instead of the ordinary subscription of 2/2 for the year, a special subscription, called the magazine subscription, of 5/- a year.

ORGANISATION OF THE SOCIETY.

International.

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith throughout the world is ruled by a General Superior Council, with its headquarters in Rome. The president of this Council is ex officio the Archbishop Secretary of the Congregation of Propaganda. Its members are a number of distinguished workers in the cause of the missions resident in Rome, together with the National Directors of all countries in which the Society is established. The General Superior Council meets in Rome each year, and one of its duties is to divide the money collected throughout the world among various mission fields in accordance with their needs.

Note: Australia has a special privilege with regard to the funds collected for the Propagation of the Faith. By special permission of the Holy See, the Australian National Council is permitted to keep one-third of the funds raised in Australia for distribution among the missions within the Commonwealth of Australia. Thus, every year, the aboriginal missions and the dioceses where the Catholics are living in scattered communities spread over wide areas are considerably helped by the National Council for the Propagation of the Faith.

National.

In every country where the Society is established, a National Director is appointed. The National Director is appointed by decree of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, and, as he is appointed, so also he can only be removed from his office by decree of the same Congregation. Associated with the National Director are a number of others who form the National Council, representing, as far as possible, the various parts of the country. In Australia, besides the National Council, there is a National Episcopal Committee, presided over by his Excellency the Apostolic Delegate, to promote and assist the proper organisation of the Society in the Commonwealth, as well as to act as the distributing body for the funds available for Australian missions.

Acting in concert with the National Director, there is in each diocese the Diocesan Director, appointed by the Bishop of the diocese, who organises and controls the affairs of the Propagation of the Faith within that diocese.

ORGANISATION IN THE PARISH.

General.

The following paragraph is from the Pontifical Statutes of the Propagation of the Faith “Since the parish is, as it were, the vital cell of the diocese, it can easily be seen how necessary it is that the Society of the Propagation of the Faith should be firmly established there. On the parochial organisation, in fact, the whole foundation and eventual progress of the Society depend. The efforts of the National Council and the National Director would be altogether futile if there were no activity in the parish and zeal for the cause of the missions was unknown there.

“Let the parish priest, therefore, realise how important it is for the life of his parish to engender in his people a sense of their responsibility towards the missions. He should know that God, in return for zeal for the missions, will abundantly pour forth His blessings for the good of all, especially by strengthening the people’s faith, by bringing the people more frequently and nearer to God through the Sacraments, by multiplying vocations to the ecclesiastical and religious state, by

bringing back many a stray sheep to the fold. If he forgets that the gift of Faith which the souls under his charge have in their possession was not given as a merely personal gift, to be kept selfishly to themselves, but is a common gift which must of necessity, be given to others, he will hope in vain for any kind of real spiritual progress in his own parish.”

After all, the Catholic Church was brought into this world with the command: “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” The Catholic Church cannot rest on its conquests, cannot stay within its walls and count the souls that have been gained as a miser counts over his gold. The parish that has no thought whatsoever outside its own boundaries cannot really be a part of the Catholic Church.

Promoters.

The Association for the Propagation of the Faith is completely the laity’s share of the Church’s crusade for the reign of Christ. Not only are its members to be recruited from the ranks of the laity but its organisers must be found also amongst the laity. It is the definite command of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda that the organisation of the Propagation of the Faith should be uniform throughout the world. In order that the Association be established in a parish, it is necessary that a number of people be prepared to act as promoters of the Association.

Where the organisation is complete there is one promoter for every ten members of the association—that is, one promoter for every ten adult persons in the parish. In this regard it must be noted that, as far as the Propagation of the Faith is concerned, those over the age of twelve years are to be considered as adults. Naturally enough, there are promoters whose zeal and whose opportunities exceed those of others; sometimes one promoter will represent five or six more groups of ten.

The position of a promoter is of immense importance. One of the main objects of the Association is to get the Catholic people to accept their obligation in regard to the spread of the Catholic Faith, and to carry out that obligation with only the minimum of direction from Ecclesiastical Authority. Acting under the authority of the parish priest, an energetic group of promoters can relieve him of all worry and all responsibility with regard to the enrolling of the members in his parish in the ranks of the Mission Aid Society.

Promoters are required to enrol members of the Association to instruct them in their duty regarding the three daily prayers and to collect from them at whatever period it is most convenient one halfpenny a week, amounting to 2/2 for the whole year for ordinary members. A special membership is paid once for the whole year, and a perpetual membership once for a lifetime. Promoters should receive monthly a copy of “Catholic Missions” which, after perusing themselves, they are expected to pass on to those members whom they have enrolled in the Association. This is the practical way of fulfilling the condition of membership which enjoins the taking of an intelligent interest in the cause of the missions.

The office of a promoter is a very important one, because it is designed by the authority of his Holiness the Pope himself, it is directly concerned with the work of the salvation of souls, and it is a great work of charity in that it provides an opportunity for many others to fulfil what is the God-given duty of every Catholic.

The Parish Priest.

Everyone with a thorough and exact knowledge of missionary co-operation who has had practical experience in this field, even if only for a few years, is convinced that the backbone of the whole movement must ever be the parish priest. Heads of National Offices and Diocesan Offices may have acquired a prodigious store of missionary ideas, they may be expert organisers, as propagandists they may be skilled in writing and speaking. but if they fail to enlist the assistance of the parish priest and make his part the very basis of their work their efforts will be faulty and ineffective. Certainly a Director must be very simple if he boasts about having successfully started parochial missionary committees without the support of the parish priest.

A few months after his visit nothing but the memory remains of those committees if they are not supported by the parish priest. This has happened in many parishes; it is only natural. It will always be thus, because no religious activity is conceivable in a parish without the approval and the help of the parish priest or his delegate. He who thinks otherwise is a

dangerous visionary. We must turn to the parish priest, therefore, if we wish to put our movement on a sound foundation.

A Complete Plan.

The Holy See is insistent that the work for the Propagation of the Faith should be put upon an organised basis. To this end it enjoins that in every parish, wherever it is possible, there should be instituted a Parish Committee or commission for the Propagation of the Faith. This committee should be formed under the authority of the parish priest, or of one of the priests delegated by him, but its government and organisation is to be left, as far as is consistent with its dependence on the parish priest, in the hands of the laity who compose it. Such a commission should consist of

A Parish Council, composed of a president, a secretary, and a treasurer.

District Supervisors, one for each district of the parish, in accordance with the number of districts into which it is conveniently divided.

Block Promoters: Each district being divided into a convenient number of blocks, promoters are assigned to each block, building up circles of ten members, as near as possible living closely to each other. Block promoters may have other promoters depending on them, one promoter for each circle of ten, if so desired.

The Block Promoters' duty is to give every Catholic residing in the section of the parish entrusted to their zeal the opportunity of becoming members of the Association. To avoid possible imposition, each block promoter should be provided with an authorisation from the parish priest. The block promoters in each district must periodically submit their books to the district supervisors for audit; district supervisors in turn submit their books periodically to the treasurer for audit, and the treasurer is responsible to the committee and to the parish priest for all monies collected. The work of the secretary consists of transacting all business in connection with the supply of "Catholic Missions," etc., with the Diocesan Office. The president presides at all meetings of the Parish Council, and, in general, is responsible for the government and the right order of procedure in the work of organisation.

It is earnestly recommended, further, that these parish committees should be urged to actively interest themselves in the cause of the missions. The members of the committee could form themselves into a species of informal discussion group on the subject of Catholic Missions; the parish priest, or other priests in the parish, might occasionally give them addresses on some particular aspect of mission work, opportunities might be given of hearing lectures from visiting missionaries; every opportunity should be taken to impress these workers for the cause of the Propagation of the Faith that they are essential parts of the great mechanism that is working for the extension of Christ's kingdom. Enthusiasm enkindles enthusiasm, and if the ardent fire of zeal for Christ's triumph in the pagan world is burning brightly in the hearts of the promoters for the Propagation of the Faith, it is easy for them to transmit some spark of that fire to the other people of the parish.

Other Parishes.

It is readily understood that this system of organisation of the Propagation of the Faith is not possible in every parish of this country. There are many country parishes where the population is too scattered; and even in many city parishes the number of available workers is so few and the activities and sodalities so many that the organisation as outlined above would not be possible. In parishes such as these, the system of promoters working quietly among their own friends, thus gathering together a circle for ten or more members, could be profitably followed until such time as the more complete organisation would be possible. These promoters should be made personally responsible to the parish priest, or to the diocesan office, if preferred, for the return of monies collected, and the diocesan office should provide them with their monthly copies of "Catholic Missions."

It is to be clearly noted that, with regard to the copies of "Catholic Missions," there should be one copy of "Catholic Missions" for every ten members enrolled in the Society. When a promoter has ten members, one copy of "Catholic Missions" is received each month; when the number exceeds ten, two copies each month; when the number exceeds twenty, three copies of "Catholic Missions" each month, and so on progressively.

Conclusion.

No man is completely Catholic until he does something more than merely try to save his own soul, until he sees the world, the whole of it, waiting for the Light of the Faith—as the Church sees it. May we say, until he looks at the world as Christ looks at it’

No parish is truly a part of the Catholic Church where the Faith is at a dead end; where all energies are directed exclusively to conserving the Faith within the narrow boundaries of streets and lanes, with no thought of the Grand Crusade, with no urge to the conquest of the world for Christ.

No nation can aspire to be truly Christian until its Catholic children, all of them, are marching in unison with the other nations of God’s Church—Catholic and Apostolic.

“Faith, kept for itself, is a dead faith; because faith must be enlivened by charity or it cannot live, and charity must expand or die.”

PRIVILEGES GRANTED TO ALL MEMBERS.

I. A Plenary Indulgence (on the day itself or on any one of the seven days following, on the conditions of Confession, Communion, visit to a church or public oratory, with prayers there for the Propagation of the Faith and the Pope’s intentions).

(a) On the day of enrolment.

(b) On the feasts of Christmas, Circumcision, Holy Name of Jesus, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Most Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart; the Immaculate Conception, Nativity, Presentation, Annunciation, Visitation, Purification and Assumption of the B.V.M.; the Finding (May 3) and Exaltation (September 14) of the Holy Cross, St. Michael (September 29), Guardian Angels (October 2), St. John the Baptist (June 24), St. Joseph (March 19), Solemnity of St. Joseph (third Wednesday after Easter), Principal Feasts of the Twelve Apostles and of the Evangelists, St. Francis Xavier (December 3), St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen (April 24), All Saints, and anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation of Propaganda (June 22).

(c) Three days each month, at choice.

II. A Plenary Indulgence at the moment of death, to those who have confessed and received Communion (or, if unable, shall invoke the Holy Name of Jesus at least in the heart), with the acceptance of death with resignation as a punishment of sin.

III. Partial Indulgences

(a) 500 days each time, for assisting, with contrite heart, at novenas or triduum in preparation for, or religious celebrations of the octaves of, the Finding of the Holy Cross and St. Francis Xavier, or, if impeded, for reciting prayers for the same intentions.

(b) 300 days each time, for assisting, with contrite heart, at any religious function prescribed by the Work.

(c) 200 days each time, for reciting the Pater and Ave, followed by the aspiration, “St. Francis Xavier, pray for us,” and for every act of piety or charity performed in aid of the Work.

IV. Privileged Altar:

(a) On the day of the general or special commemoration of deceased members, all the altars of the church, public or semi-public oratory where it takes place, are privileged for all Masses celebrated for these deceased members.

(b) All Masses requested by members for deceased members, and all Masses celebrated by priest members for deceased members, enjoy the favour of the privileged altar.

V. 20,000 Masses are offered every year for the living and dead associates by the missionary priests.

VI. A Mass is said every day in St. Peter’s, Rome, for all deceased helpers, and for those deceased on whose behalf an offering is made to the Association.
