



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - June 2014

New Evangelisation and New Life in Christ

For some time, new evangelisation has become a burning issue on the order of the day. There is talk of its genesis, its urgency, its *raison d'être*, its methods, its essential content, to mention only a few issues related to it. Some treat it in connection with other subjects such as the mission "*ad gentes*", or better "*intergentes*", consecrated life, the laity, conversion, etc. In the Pallottine family in particular, this theme has often been treated in relation to the figure of Pallotti or to the Pallottine charism. In a similar vein, we wish to talk about the new evangelization in relation to another subject which, incidentally, is suitable for this Easter season which we are currently celebrating: new life in Christ. The following question will guide our reflection: what relationship is there between the new evangelisation and new life in Christ? In seeking a possible answer, we will first begin by clarifying the range of our key terms, in order finally to show that the new evangelisation both presupposes new life in Christ and leads to it.

New evangelisation

From the outset, with Benedict XVI, we wish to clarify that "new evangelisation cannot mean: immediately attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using new and more refined methods". Because the history of the Church itself teaches us that "large things always begin from the small seed, and mass movements are always ephemeral".¹ The new evangelisation refers rather to "the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today". It also refers to the capacity "of recapturing in our times the courage and forcefulness of the first Christians and the first missionaries". In this sense, the new evangelisation is "synonymous with renewed spiritual efforts in the life of faith within the local Churches, starting with a process to discern the changes in various cultural and

¹ Address of H.E. Card. Joseph Ratzinger to Catechists and Religion Teachers on the theme of the new evangelisation, Jubilee of Catechists, 12 December 2000.

social settings and their impact on Christian life, to reread the memory of faith and to undertake new responsibilities and generate new energies to joyously and convincingly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ".² Finally, the new evangelisation implies the proclamation of Christ based on witness of life. In other words, a way of living the Christian life which, to paraphrase Saint Peter, wins over, without words, those who refuse to believe in the Word (1Pt 3:1).

New life in Christ

In its turn, the new life in Christ consists above all in the life given to us on the day of our baptism.³ That day we were buried with Christ in death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too would live a new kind of existence (Rm 6:4). However, it does not involve a static life given immutably once and for all. Rather, it is dynamic, to such an extent that whoever lives it becomes disposed towards a spiritual development which attains the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, towards maturity. It is a life which tends to incarnate Christ in all of his aspects, with a view to coming one day to the full stature of Christ (cf. Ep. 4:13). Borrowing the idea of Saint Vincent when speaking of a soul (a person) introduced into new life in Christ, it means that "Jesus Christ continues his life in that soul, lives in it and applies his merits and his most holy works to it".⁴

The new evangelisation presupposes the new life in Christ

As John Paul II put it so well, "The urgency of missionary activity derives from the *radical newness of life* brought by Christ and lived by his followers. This new life is a gift from God, and people are asked to accept and develop it, if they wish to realize the fullness of their vocation in conformity to Christ".⁵ This implies that it "is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit".⁶ Before proclaiming the Gospel, it must first penetrate the life of the evangeliser. Otherwise, the new evangelisation will not be possible because, taking up again the position of the *Lineamenta* of the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelisation, what is not believed or lived cannot be transmitted. The sign of a well-rooted and mature faith is precisely the naturalness with which we communicate it to others. When we have experienced "being" with Jesus, we

² *Lineamenta of the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelisation*, 5.

³ Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n°1694.

⁴ OCCC III, 37.

⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 7.

⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 87.

"feel" compelled to speak of him, proclaiming and sharing what we have lived with Him and in Him. Having experienced our intimate relationship with Him as something good and positive and beautiful⁷, it is not possible to resist bearing witness to the proclamation even if it costs our life itself. This is why we say that the new evangelisation presupposes the new life in Christ.

Accordingly, no proposed "new evangelization" can disregard this need: to have men and women who have met Christ, who are conscious of having been touched in such a personal and profound way by Him and remain convinced that there is no other reality that competes for his attention; that there is no relationship, no power, no good, which can occupy the centre of their lives except God and Jesus Christ the Saviour. In addition, any initiative of new evangelization requires us to be in constant contact with Christ in prayer, since "evangelisation is done on one's knees".⁸

New evangelisation leads to new life in Christ

If new evangelisation presupposes new life in Christ, we could also safely say that it also leads to this new life. In fact, the proclamation of the Good News, the witness of life of those who lead a new life in Jesus Christ and who commit themselves to the new evangelisation, stirs up "irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst?"⁹ In the majority of cases these questions lead to a new direction in life, a new life in Jesus Christ, a profound conversion. Let us remember once again with Benedict XVI that the Greek word for "conversion" means rethink - to put into discussion one's ordinary style and way of life: letting God enter into the criteria of one's own life; not just judging on the basis of current opinion. Conversion therefore means: not living as everyone else lives, not doing what everyone else does, not feeling justified in doubtful actions by the fact that others are doing the same thing; but, rather, beginning to look at one's own life through the eyes of God; always seeking the good, even if it disturbs; not basing oneself on the judgement of the crowd, of human beings, but on the judgement of God - in other words, finding a new style of life, a new life. The latter, in turn, implies: coming out of self-sufficiency, discovering and accepting our own poverty - the poverty of others and of the Other, discovering his forgiveness, his friendship.¹⁰ Thus, new life in Jesus as evidenced by

⁷ Cf. *Lineamenta of the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelisation*, 12.

⁸ Cf. *Homily of Pope Francis during Mass with seminarians and novices, Vatican Basilica, Sunday, July 7th 2013*.

⁹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21.

¹⁰ Op. cit., Card. JOSEPH RATZINGER, *The new Evangelisation*.

participants in the new evangelization causes a change of life, leads to a new life in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

What emerges from our reflection is that the new evangelisation is an urgent priority for today's Church. Nevertheless, it is necessary to be aware that it presupposes new life in Christ and leads to it. However, in order that it may lead to it effectively, the new evangelisation must use "a language of mercy which is expressed in gestures and attitudes"¹¹ that convey the message to be transmitted, rather than mere words. Our contemporaries about whom Paul VI spoke during the 1970s have not changed so much: they are still tired of hearing, have had their fill of talk and even worse, are impervious to words. As in the recent past, they listen "more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if [they do] listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"; they better understand the language of facts and of life than that of words.¹²

Questions for personal and/or community reflection:

- a) If no proposed new evangelisation can disregard the need to have women and men who have met Christ, who are conscious of having been touched by Him in a truly personal and profound way, am I (are we) really striving enough to make this meeting with Christ effective?
- b) The new evangelisation should use "a language of mercy which is expressed in gestures and attitudes". What gestures and attitudes might be significant in circumstances of your life?

*P. Eugène Niyonzima, SAC
D. R. of Congo*

¹¹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the participants of the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation, Clementine Hall, October 14th, 2013.*

¹² Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41-42.