

**Proposal of two texts for the time of reflection**  
**Mission of the Church New Evangelization**  
**1-THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**  
**FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**  
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**"By nature, the Church, during its pilgrimage on earth, is missionary" (5)**

This statement of the Second Vatican Council simply and integrally summarizes the ecclesial Tradition: the Church is missionary because it has its origin in the mission of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of God the Father. 6] Moreover, the Church is missionary because it personally assumes this origin, making itself a preacher and witness of this Revelation of God and saving the people of God from dispersion so that the prophecy of Isaiah, which the Fathers of the Church read as being addressed to it, may be fulfilled: *"Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out the cloths that cover you, lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes, for on the right and on the left you will go off, your race will despoil the nations and repopulate the forsaken cities"* (Is 54:2-3). [7]

Thus, the Apostle Paul's statements, *"For I do not regard the preaching of the gospel as a title of glory; it is a necessity for me. Yes, "woe to me if I do not preach the gospel"* (1 Corinthians 9:16) can be applied and used in the Church as a whole. As Pope Paul VI reminds us: *"Evangelizing all people is the essential mission of the Church .... Evangelization is, in fact, the grace and vocation proper to the Church, its deepest identity. It exists to evangelize"*. [8]

...] As an evangelizer, the Church begins by evangelizing itself. 9] It knows that this is a visible fruit of the uninterrupted work of evangelization which the Spirit guides throughout history, so that the people of those who have been saved can bear witness to the living memory of the God of Jesus Christ. And today we can state this certainty with greater conviction because we come from a history that has given us extraordinary pages of courage, dedication, audacity, intuition and reason; pages that have left us many echoes and traces in texts, prayers, models and pedagogical methods, spiritual itineraries, paths of initiation to the faith, works and educational institutions. [...]

**(Pope John Paul II)** To the Bishops of Latin America, he writes: "The commemoration of the new millennium of evangelization will have its full meaning if it signifies your commitment as Bishop, together with your priests and faithful; a commitment not to re-evangelize, certainly, but to a new evangelization. New in its ardor, methods and expressions". 12] It is not a matter of redoing something that has been done badly or that does not work, so that the new evangelization is an implicit judgment on the failure of the first one. The new evangelization is not a new version of the first one, a simple repetition, but it is the courage to dare to take new paths, in the face of the new conditions in which the Church is called to live the proclamation of the Gospel today. At this time, the Latin American continent had to face new challenges (the spread of communist ideology, the rise of sects); the new evangelization is the action which follows the process of discernment in which the Church in Latin America is called to read and evaluate the situation in which it finds itself.

...] "Today the Church faces other challenges, moving towards new frontiers both for the first mission "ad gentes" and for the new evangelization of the peoples who have already received the proclamation of Christ. Today all Christians, the particular Churches and the universal Church, are asked for the same courage that animated the missionaries of the past, the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit". The new evangelization is above all a spiritual action, the ability to make our own in the present the value and strength of the first Christians, of the first missionaries. It is, therefore, an action that requires, in the first place, a process of discernment on the health of Christianity, the path

followed and the difficulties encountered. Pope John Paul II continued: "The Church today must take a great step forward in evangelization; it must enter a new historical stage in its missionary dynamism. In a world where distances have been eliminated and which is becoming ever smaller, the ecclesial communities must unite among themselves, exchange their energies and means, and commit themselves together to the one common mission of proclaiming and living the Gospel. The so-called young Churches - declared the Synod Fathers - need the strength of the older Churches, and at the same time the older Churches need the witness and the boost of the younger Churches, so that each of them may benefit from the riches of the others". [14]

...] But in spite of this diffusion and notoriety, the term (New Evangelization) is not fully accepted in the debate either in the Church or in culture. There are still reservations about it, as if this were intended to produce a judgement of repudiation and the suppression of several pages of the recent past from the life of the local Churches. Some think that the "New Evangelization" covers up or hides the intention of new proselytising actions by the Church, especially with regard to other Christian confessions. [17] [...].

During his apostolic journey to the Czech Republic, Pope Benedict XVI wanted to address this concern and give a response: "A word comes to mind that Jesus took from the prophet Isaiah, namely, that the temple should be a house of prayer for all peoples" (cf. Is 56:7; Mk 11:17). He was thinking of what is called the house of prayer for all nations, which would clear up the external activities so that there would be a free place for the Gentiles who wanted to pray there to the one God, even if they could not participate in the mystery, for which the interior of the temple was reserved. [...]

I think that the Church of today should also open a kind of 'esplanade of the Gentiles', where people can somehow cling to God, without knowing him and before having found access to his mystery, in whose service the internal life of the Church is found.

## **CONCLUSION**

***"You will receive a power, that of the Holy Spirit that will come upon you."*** (Acts 1:8)

Basis for the "new evangelization" at Pentecost

By coming among us, Jesus Christ has communicated to us the divine life that transfigures the face of the earth, making the universe new (cf. Rev. 21:5). His Revelation has involved us not only as recipients of the salvation given to us, but also as its heralds and witnesses. The Spirit of the Risen One thus gives our lives the capacity to proclaim the gospel effectively throughout the world. This is the experience of the first Christian community, which saw the Word spread through preaching and witness (cf. Acts 6:7).

Chronologically, the first evangelization began on the day of Pentecost, when the Apostles received the Holy Spirit while gathered in a place to pray with the Mother of Jesus. She who, in the words of the Archangel, was "full of grace", is thus found on the path of apostolic evangelization, and on all the paths that the successors of the Apostles have traveled in proclaiming the Gospel.

The new evangelization does not mean "new gospel" because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and will be the same forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The new evangelization means: an adequate response to the signs of the times, to the needs of the men and women of today, to all the scenarios that make up the culture through which we reveal our identities and seek the meaning of our existence. The new evangelization means, therefore, the promotion of a culture more deeply rooted in the Gospel: it means discovering the new man who is in us thanks to the Spirit who has been given to us by Jesus Christ and the Father. May the journey of preparation for the next Ordinary General

Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, as well as its celebration, be for the Church a new Cenacle, where, gathered in prayer with the Mother of Christ - with her who has been invoked as the Star of the New Evangelization, [ 84] the successors of the Apostles will prepare the paths of the new evangelization".

### **The "new evangelization", a vision for the Church of today and tomorrow**

In these pages we have talked a lot about the new evangelization. At the end of the document, it is worth recalling the deep meaning of this definition, and the call it contains. We leave this task to Pope John Paul II, who has supported and strongly spread this terminology. "New evangelization" means that "we must rekindle in ourselves the ardent sentiment of Paul who exclaimed: 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1 Cor 9:16). This passion will not fail to awaken in the Church a new missionary spirit, which cannot be reserved to a group of "specialists" but must involve the responsibility of all members of the People of God. He who has truly found Christ cannot keep him for himself, he must proclaim him. A new apostolic impulse is needed that is lived as a daily commitment of Christian communities and groups".(85)

In this text, we have often spoken of mutations and transformations. We have faced scenarios (*social, cultural, economic, political and religious scenarios*) that describe historical changes, which often arouse fear and apprehension in us. In such a situation, what we need is a vision that allows us to look at the future with the eyes of hope, without tears of despair. As a Church, we have such a vision. It is the Kingdom that is coming, announced by Jesus Christ and described in his parables. It is the Kingdom that has already been born through his preaching, and especially through his death and resurrection for us. However, we often have the impression that we are incapable of making this vision a reality, of "making it our own", of making it a living word for us and for our contemporaries, of taking it as the foundation of our pastoral actions and of our ecclesiastical life.

In this regard, the Second Vatican Council and the Popes have already offered us a very precise slogan for present and future pastoral work: "new evangelization", that is, a new proclamation of Jesus' message, which restores our joy and sets us free. This slogan can be the basis of that vision that we consider necessary: the vision of an evangelizing Church, from which we start in this text, is also the task that is entrusted to us at the end of the text. The goal of all the work of discernment that we are called to do is to have this vision take root deep in our hearts. In the hearts of each of us, in the hearts of our churches, to serve the world. The joy of evangelising.

The new evangelization is to share with the world its longing for salvation, and to give an account of our faith by communicating the Logos of hope (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). People need hope in order to live their present. The content of this hope is "the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end"[86] This is why the Church is missionary by its very nature. We cannot keep for ourselves the words of eternal life that are given to us when we meet Jesus Christ. They are meant for all men, for every man. Every person of our time, whether he/she knows it or not, needs this proclamation.

It happens that the absence of this awareness leads to despair and discouragement. One of the obstacles to the new evangelization is precisely the lack of joy and hope that such situations create and spread among the people of our time. Often this lack of joy and hope is so strong that it attacks the very fabric of our Christian communities. In these contexts, the new evangelization is proposed not as a duty, an additional burden to be borne, but as a remedy that can give joy and life to the realities caught up in our fears.

That is why we must face the new evangelization with enthusiasm. Let us learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelization, even when the proclamation seems to sow only tears (cf. Ps 126:6). "May it be for us - as it was for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other Apostles, for a multitude of admirable evangelizers throughout the history of the Church - an interior impulse that

no one or nothing can extinguish. May this be the great joy of our dedicated lives. And may the world of our time, which seeks, sometimes in anguish, sometimes in hope, receive the Good News, not from sad and discouraged evangelizers, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives radiate fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ in them, and who accept to give their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church implanted in the heart of the world". (87)

## Why a new evangelization?

*cf article from Catholique.org*

*Several years ago, Pope John Paul II launched the invitation to implement a "new evangelization". Evangelization has always been for the Church and for Christians a mission of primary importance. So why speak of a "new" evangelization? Isn't it always the same reality that is in question? In what sense is it "new"?*

### **In what sense is evangelization "new" today?**

There are several reasons for this. The first is simple, and is especially directed to the so-called "old Christian" countries, Europe, America, among others. If faith, as adherence to Jesus the Savior, remains in the majority (80% of the French call themselves Catholic), it is often lived as a simple and important reference or as a claimed belonging. But for many people (who, for example, continue to have their children baptized) it is no longer at all a living faith that compromises life and invites to personal practice of the signs of Christian life. And it is necessary to note that the numerous efforts of evangelization that have been attempted (those of the working class, of scientists, of technicians, etc.) are rapidly reaching a plateau. Many professed Christians are content to maintain their cruising speed, having as their only reference the four great acts of Christian life: baptism, profession of faith, marriage and funerals. They live with a totally good conscience that makes them think that "God does not ask so much".

### **A Good News to proclaim**

Another reason: **to evangelize is to proclaim good news capable of changing the lives of those who receive it.**

Jesus came to save humanity and every believer receives at the same time security and joy: "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Today, however, the Christian faith no longer appears as good news. Many see it only as a bulwark of morality, even if they do not reject its rigours, which are too demanding in our hedonistic world, in search of immediate pleasure. Materialism and consumerism have led to a shift from happiness to immediate enjoyment, and this is enough for many, who see little of what they have to be saved. In recent decades it has also been seen a clear weakening of popular religion, made up of various practices, which are the expression of a very weakened faith, of a belonging that is more sociological than personal and committed. While it is true that seasonal practice continues to exist (the practitioners of Christmas and Easter, or those of All Saints and Palms), it has decreased considerably. Moreover, while thirty years ago most school-age children followed the Catechism, today only 30% do so, even in regions previously considered Christian. It is true that the number of adult baptisms has increased greatly (at least 350 in France in 2004), but this is also due to the fact that the number of children's baptisms is also lower. And this testifies to a great distance from the faith for most men and women today.

### **Proposing faith in today's society**

These different confirmations have raised questions for the Church over the last ten years or so, as they have done for the churches in several countries. Already in 1994, the French Episcopal Conference presented a report entitled: Proposing Faith in Today's Society, which was taken up again a few years later in the Letter to the Catholics of France. Cardinal Koenig, Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, and Cardinal Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, launched a Mission of Evangelization for the main cities: Vienna, Paris and other European capitals. In the past, as in the 17th century with Grignon de Montfort, Jean François Régis and other missionaries, it was the rural world that needed to be evangelized and these regions remained in Christianity for a long time. Today, says Cardinal Lustiger, it is the cities that seem more practicing than the countryside: therefore, they must be evangelized first. I remember that, during my childhood vacation, it was "the Parisians" who practiced, and not

the country people of this country that had been de-Christianized for centuries. Therefore, a new evangelization is needed, because in a very important part, the faith inherited from the past has been lost. But also because today's living conditions are very different. Therefore, there are no longer many real rural people but city dwellers, some of whom live in the countryside. Furthermore, how can we evangelize our consumer society, which is more suited to creating new needs than to opening up to a spiritual quest? It is true that a significant number of our contemporaries today are seeking the paths of a spirituality that will give soul to their existence. But many seek it in Asian spiritualities or in the syncretisms of the New Age, more than in the Christian faith, which for many is more or less disqualified: people look no longer spontaneously towards the Church.

### **The importance of the laity and the new movements**

New evangelization, then: new because it has to be done again, in a world that has forgotten its traditional faith; new because the world has changed and the methods or forms of the past are no longer in tune with today's world. Two facts guide this newness of evangelization. In the first place, the significant decrease in the number of priests and religious. Until about 1970, it was they who were responsible for evangelization: missions within (in the hearts of old Christians) or missions far away, congregations founded by Grignon de Montfort, Alphonse de Liguori, Cardinal Lavigerie and so many others. Second factor: the assumption of the evangelization of the various social milieus by the laity: Catholic Action in all its forms, the great spiritual movements: Foyers de Charité, Spiritual Retreats, etc. And new ecclesial movements: Teams of Our Lady (1948), Charismatic Renewal (1970), Neo-Catechumenate, the Focolare Movement (1943) and many others. The new evangelization will therefore be first and foremost the work of lay Christians, who will bear witness to their faith in their daily lives, in their work, in their surroundings, in their public or ecclesial commitments. The role of priests and religious will be, in the first place, to encourage them spiritually. It will also be the work of the new Ecclesial Movements, most of the time founded, animated and directed by lay people. Pope John Paul II expects much from these new Movements which he gathered in a same vision, at Pentecost 1998, in Rome and in which he places all his trust. The new evangelization: a challenge for all Christians to proclaim the faith they have received and for which they live, and which so many men and women are undoubtedly waiting for with confusion. Without forgetting that the new evangelization demands that each one begin to "re-evangelize" oneself.