



THE ACTIVITY OF COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

Pastoral and Missionary Commission

THE HOLY SPIRIT: PROTAGONIST OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Sergio Pintor

In his Magisterium, the Holy Father in recent years has constantly recalled the necessity and the urgency for a strong relaunching of evangelization in current times: both for a «new evangelization» especially for the countries of ancient Christianity, and for a «first evangelization» for those places or people who still do not know Jesus Christ and his Gospel of salvation. Even if, as is cautioned in *Redemptoris Missio*, these two needs cannot be interpreted by «geographical confines» and are not altogether separate needs.

The same immediate, triennial preparation for the upcoming Jubilee 2,000 is at hand, and it requires a precise program and commitment to the «new evangelization» and a principle protagonist of that is the Spirit, according to the itinerary: for Christ in the Spirit of the Father. Of particular timeliness, on this path towards the Jubilee is what Paul VI wrote in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: «Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit...The techniques of evangelization are good, but not even the most perfect ones could substitute the discrete action of the Spirit. Even the most refined preparation of the evangelizer, cannot work without him. Without him the most convincing dialectic is impotent on the spirit of men. Without him, the most elaborate sociologically or psychologically based schemes are revealed as empty and without value»(1).

But what does a process of «new evangelization» mean and count for concretely? What presence of the Spirit do we recognize, embrace and manifest? In the light of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* we can say that «a new evangelization» means «assuring the growth of a clear and deep faith... forming mature ecclesial communities... remaking the Christian cloth from the same ecclesial communities»(2).

And it emphasizes especially the ancient traditions which are now weakened by indifference, secularism and atheism, and by the diffusion of sects. «New evangelization» also means rethinking very seriously the entire problem and missionary commitment of a Church: «We have to be aware that it will not be possible to relaunch an effective operation of evangelization without relaunching the missionary aspect of our Christian communities»(3).

It was John Paul II, himself in his IX pastoral trip to Latin America who emphasized even more the meaning of the expression «new evangelization»: grafted on the roots of the announcement brought by the first missionaries and animated by a "renewed apostolic ardor" we can speak of a "new evangelization" if its is: «new in its ardor, new in its methods, new in its expressions»(4).

a) An evangelization which is «new in its ardor»: in the measure in which it is actuated in a union which is always deeper with Christ, the first evangelizer, will lead to the conversion of the heart, it will allow for an awakening of the conscience to the Christian vocation which is a vocation of holiness. It is an «apostolic ardor» which derives from a new and faithful

relationship with Jesus Christ, it culminates in the practice of the Sacraments, it recognizes the glory of communicating the faith to others, it leads to the manifestation of one's own Christian identity and helps to face the different problems in light of that faith, it brings a coherence to the Christian life without any fanaticism(5).

b) An evangelization which is «new in its methods»: «An evangelization will be new in its methods - affirms the Pope - if every member of the Church becomes a protagonist of the diffusion of the message of Christ... Evangelization is the duty of all the members of the Church»(6). In this way, new perspectives are opened to develop a concept of mission and of evangelization, with the effective involvement of the different ecclesial subjects, with the respect and the harmony of different tones and ministries and with the consequential opening to new and various environments of evangelization.

c) An evangelization which is «new» in its expressions, which, according to the words of John Paul II, are: «if you keep your eyes attentive to what the Lord says, if you know how to acquire a firm understanding of the truth of Christ, if you announce the Good News with a language that everyone can understand»(7).

And here the perspectives of development opens up for a renewed pastoral mission, for a renewed pedagogy of faith, for a more communicative language and for an inculturation of faith, for a more convincing and mature ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. At the base of Pope John Paul II's insistence on the «new evangelization» there are three fundamental preoccupations:

- The deepening of the Christian identity on the part of those who associate themselves as members of the Church. It is an identity which is translated in a solid spirituality which invests all of one's personal and social life and is anchored on the revealed truth, not just on subjective or emotive attitudes.
- The re-evangelization of those who have lost contact with the community and with Christian values, and with those who act as though God did not exist...
- The evangelization of those who were never Christians and the evangelical transformation of societies never permeated by the Gospel (that is the announcement to non-believers even in our own houses and the *missione ad gentes*)(8).

The Content of the «new evangelization»

The New Testament and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* clearly indicate the content of the Kerigma or of the Christian announcement: God is love who is concretely intercepted in men walking in the path of history; Christ Teacher and Savior, Lord resurrected and glorified, meaning and full realization of life for every man; invitation to conversion and to a new life which requires a new and probing communal living, with one heart and one soul(9). In John Paul II's exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, he summarizes the content of the new evangelization: «Man is loved by God! This is the simply and shocking announcement which indebts the Church to man. The word and the life of every Christian should and must be to make this announcement ring: God loves you, Christ came for you, for you Christ is the way, truth and life!»(10).

At the center, therefore of the new evangelization is the Easter Kerigma. It's not a purely intellectual or abstract announcement, but one that is full of experience and existentialism, and is also workable and vital(11). «The content of the new evangelization should have three experiential characteristics which are found in the New Testament Kerigma. It must be a witness, prophetic and integral»(12).

- Evangelization is always a personal and communitary witness of the transformation

put into work by the event of Christ through the Spirit. The evangelizer is the witness of a reality and of a message which have involved him and renewed him, placing him in a community which in itself is a witness.

From here rises the necessity that the new evangelization be more and more accompanied by a self-evangelization and that the evangelization of the ecclesial community be matured in faith:

- Evangelization must be prophetic in that it reveals the saving presence of God not only in the actual relation with Christ, but also in the wider context of the walk along the path which leads to Him. In the new evangelization it is necessary to show that God has not distanced himself from the concrete history of the people, of groups and of populations, notwithstanding the historical and cultural appearances.
- The new evangelization must be integral, both on the personal and communitarian level. It must transform the personal and social way of living, it must convert people and become the yeast of a new humanity. It must unmask personal sin and social sin which created structures of sin which oppress humanity.

The Spirit as the Principle Agent

The Spirit is the principal agent in this «new evangelization». Here we see the invitation by John Paul II in his letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* to: «gain a renewed appreciation of the Spirit as the One who builds the Kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people's hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will come at the end of time»(13).

A document of the Ecumenical Council of Churches indicates the signs and ways in which the Spirit goes on to build the Kingdom of God today: «The Church joyously confesses the Holy Spirit as he who "is the Lord of life"». It deals with eternal life which God the Father shares with all those who are in communion with his Son (*John* 1,1-4). It is the heredity of the kingdom of the Son, a kingdom which while being fully real, must still be perfectly realized by His coming. By giving this life, the Holy Spirit:

- leads men who are sinners towards repentance and baptism, to the universal communion of those who are forgiven;
- renders testimony through the Church to the truth of the Gospel and renders it worthy of faith for all men;
- builds the Church, in every place with the proclamation of the Word and the Eucharistic celebration;
- stimulates the conscience of the Church with a voice of prophets, so that it is better preserved under the mercy and wisdom of God;
- maintains the Church in communion and in continuity with the People of God in all times and in all places;
- places the Church in a position to welcome and use the great diversity of the gifts which God gave to its members for the fulfillment of human life;
- gives the Church, when its united, the capacity to act like a yeast in society for the renewal and the unity of humanity;
- sends men and women into the world who are capable of preparing the way to the dominion of God on earth, proclaiming the liberty of prisoners and giving sight to the blind;
- reawakens Christians so that they wait for the coming of the Lord, when he will judge the living and the dead and will open the doors to his city and to his people" (from the Document of the Ecumenical Council of Churches: *The Holy Spirit and the Catholicism of the Church*, Uppsala 1969).

If the «new evangelization» «is destined to the formation of the mature ecclesial communities, in which faith emits and realizes all of its original meaning of adhesion to the persona of Christ and to his Gospel, of encounter and Sacramental communion with him, of lived existence in charity and in service»(14): this will not be possible without the action of the Spirit, to recognize and welcome to collaborate with in all of the pastoral action.

Almost in analogy with the action of the Spirit in Mary of Nazareth, the Catechism of the Catholic Church presents the action of the Spirit in the evangelization mission of the Church: «The Holy Spirit prepares men, precedes them with his grace to pull them towards Christ. He manifests to them the Risen Lord, he reminds them His word, opens their Spirit to the intelligence of his death and resurrection. He renders them present in the mystery of Christ, especially in the Eucharist, with the aim to reconcile them and to put them in communion with God so that they will bring much fruit»(15).

For a Renewed Commitment of Evangelization

Preparing the Jubilee, which is a strong memory of the unrepeatable mystery of the Incarnation, culminates in the auto-communication of God, which above all means to walk and to make humanity walk towards the achievement of that work of salvation so that the same Incarnation takes place: «for we men and for our salvation». To bring the evangelizing work forward, to build the Kingdom, or if we want, that of the human family in which there is peace, justice, fraternity and love, for whom Jesus became Incarnate, and lived and died and resurrected, means above all «rediscovering» the author before that of the construction, it means giving space that he is the real «transcendental subject, protagonist of the realization of the work in the spirit of man and in the history of the world»(16) it means finding again in the pastoral work and in evangelization the primate of the Spirit.

It was asked of us, as Paul VI already asked, to better study the nature and the ways in which the Holy Spirit acts in its daily evangelization: «It is he who, today like at the beginning of the Church, operates in every evangelization and which allows being taken and led to Him... He acts, mostly in the evangelization mission: it is not by chance that the great beginning of the evangelization came the morning of Pentecost, under the breath of the Spirit. We can say that the Holy Spirit is the principle evangelizing agent, it is he who pushes and announces the Gospel and in the intimacy of the conscience welcomes and makes it possible to understand the words of salvation»(17). It is asked that we look at the future with hope, because He is the «promised Father» and therefore will not come any less; it is he who teaches us and reminds us every thing (cfr. *John* 14, 26); he will announce the paths to take (cfr. *John* 16, 13).

It is only in the Spirit that we can continue in the world of today the work of the recreation of Jesus Christ, of working in the hope that he communicates to us the Pentecost so that every dominating logic of injustice and death is won over, of adapting ourselves without end so that human relations are reconstructed on love, which, is nothing, if it is not a gift of the Spirit: «God is Love» (*John* 4, 8-16): this is the nucleus of the «new evangelization» to which the Church is today called to; «and Love is the first gift, which contains all the other gifts. This love, God "spilled into our hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, which was given to us" (*Rm* 5, 5)»(18).

NOTES

1) EN 75.

2) ChL 34.

- 3) cfr. John Paul II, *Speech to the VI Symposium of Bishops of Europe* (Rome 7-11 October, 1985), in "Teachings," VIII, 2, 1985, pp. 910-923.
- 4) John Paul II, *Homily during the mass celebrated in the "Parque Mattos Neto" of Salto (Uruguay)*, May 9, 1988, in OR, 11-5-1988, p.4. On this occasion the Pope recalled and commented in some way his first speech in Haiti in 1983: Cf. John Paul II, *Speech to the XIX Ordinary Assembly of CELAM, Port-au-Prince (Haiti)*, in "Teachings," VI, 1, 1983, pp.696, 699.
- 5) Cf. *iv.i*
- 6) *ivi*.
- 7) *ivi*, p.4.
- 8) Cf. M. ZAGO, The content of the new evangelization, in "ominis terra," 23, 1990, p.104.
- 9) Cf. EN, cap. 3, nn.30-39.
- 10) ChL 34.
- 11) Cf. 1 John 1, 1-3.
- 12) Cf. M. ZAGO, *cit.*, p.106.
- 13) TMA n.45.
- 14) ChL 34.
- 15) CCC 737.
- 16) RM 21.
- 17) EN 75.
- 18) CCC 733.

