



OMI: INFORMATION OMI: INFORMACION OMI: INFORMAZIONE OMI: NACHRICHTEN OMI: WIADOMOŚĆ

Documentation No. 281 (English)

March 2008

**2007 Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
Pastoral Theme Day**

**New Evangelization:
New Challenges for the Church's Mission in Canada**

**Claude Champagne, O.M.I.
Auxiliary Bishop of Halifax**

2007 Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops - Pastoral Theme

**New Evangelization:
New Challenges for the Church’s Mission in Canada**

**Claude Champagne, O.M.I.
Auxiliary Bishop of Halifax**

Before addressing the theme of the new evangelization, I believe it important to consider two essential elements: our increased ecclesial awareness of the universal presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ in our world, and the reality of God’s Reign at the heart of the mission of Jesus and his disciples. Our Church’s profound conviction today of the universal nature of the action of the Holy Spirit has a major impact on the way we live our mission of evangelization. John Paul II, moreover, describes the Holy Spirit as “the principal agent of mission”.¹

1. The Spirit, Principal Agent of Mission

When the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council decided to look at the world from the perspective of the faith, they sought to discern the “signs of the times”, the work of the Spirit in the world, in order to work with the Spirit. The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is in fact the fruit of this undertaking.

Those among us who are familiar with Catholic Action will recognize the See-Judge-Act approach: see the reality of our world, of our society; judge it in the light of the Gospel, of the faith; and take action to respond to Christ’s call.

This approach could provide us with a new method in theology. In the past, we reflected on matters of faith in a deductive manner. We recall the more traditional dogmatic approach that marked theology for centuries, a theology elaborated with Denzinger, the collection of the Church’s dogmatic declarations.²

Throughout the ages, dogmatic statements, supported by a few biblical texts, sometimes taken out of context, served as a starting point for theological reflection. Elements for reflection and current ecclesial life were deducted accordingly.

With the biblical renewal in the years preceding Vatican II, this deductive method was modified to some extent. The starting point for theology became the holy Scriptures, followed by the contributions of the Church Fathers, the great theologians of the Middle Ages and those of modern and contemporary times. These documents provided the basis for theologians to reflect on how to shed light on the life of the Church in their time.

With *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council Fathers opened the door to a more inductive theology, beginning with context, our situation. Admittedly, this new method is not exclusive. It cannot dispense with the deductive method. In fact, how could we recognize the action of the Spirit of the Risen Christ in our world today if we do not know how he was present in the history of salvation? Current theology assumes a fruitful dialogue between the two methods, deductive and inductive: allowing ourselves to be challenged by the questions of the present time and finding enlightenment in the Gospel, which is for all time.

It was in this way that the Church became aware of the universal action of the Spirit of the Risen Christ. Although *Gaudium et Spes* already claimed that every human person was mysteriously joined to

¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 1991, Ch. III.

² For those who studied in French, the equivalent was by Gervais DUMEIGE, *La foi catholique*, Paris, Éditions de l’Orante, 1961.

Christ's Paschal Mystery,³ Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* made it clear that the Holy Spirit is at work always and everywhere, even before the Christian economy.⁴

Since we are social beings, we can conclude that the Holy Spirit is at work not only in individuals but in the groups that we form. It was in this way that Pope John Paul II recognized the action of the Holy Spirit in history and societies, in cultures and various religions.⁵ Following the prophetic meeting at Assisi in 1986 for the prayer for peace, the Pope also affirmed that all authentic prayer, regardless of its origin, is inspired by the Spirit of the Risen Christ.⁶

These new elements lead us to view the life of mission as one that includes a dimension of contemplative life, contemplation of the presence and action of the Spirit of the Risen Christ in all those to whom we are sent to proclaim the Good News, believers and unbelievers, persons from our generations and members of new generations. This action of the Spirit helps us to understand that the mission today is not unidirectional; instead, it is both giver and receiver, for both partners can bring their riches, their experience of the Spirit to the other, which is implied in dialogue.

This means that before we discuss the mission we

have received as a Church, we must affirm that the primary mission, the most important in our world today, is first and foremost that of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, already at work, who precedes us in the world. It means that we do not go forth to conquer the world in order to bring God to this world. We do not make him present in our world: he was already there long before we arrived. We are not ambassadors of the Risen Christ and his Spirit, but we make visible his presence and action. The important thing is to recognize him, welcome him and collaborate with him, who prepares humans for journeying toward the plenitude of the Reign of God, already inaugurated in Christ's Paschal Mystery.

2. The Reign of God

The other important element for our vision of the "new evangelization" is the central role of the Reign of God, proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus in his Paschal Mystery. In recent decades we have understood how the proclamation and inauguration of God's Reign is the goal of Jesus' mission, rather than the Church, which he mentioned only occasionally. Mission can no longer be ecclesiocentric as it was until Vatican II. No, the Church understands itself today as being at the service of the Reign of God. John Paul II recognized this evolution in his missionary encyclical.⁷

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. "Since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery."

⁴ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: "But ... we cannot limit ourselves to the two thousand years which have passed since the birth of Christ. We need to go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit before Christ – from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Covenant. For this action has been exercised, at every place and in every time, indeed in every individual, according to the eternal plan of salvation, whereby this action was to be closely linked to the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, which in its turn exercised its influence on those who believed in the future coming of Christ. This is attested to especially in the *Letter to the Ephesians* (cf. Eph 1, 3-14). Grace, therefore, bears within itself both a Christological aspect and a pneumatological one, which becomes evident above all in those who expressly accept Christ. 'In him [in Christ] you... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it' (Eph 1, 13-14).

"But ... we need to look further and go further afield, knowing that the wind blows where it will, according to the image used by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus (cf. Jn 3, 8). The Second Vatican Council, centred primarily on the theme of the Church, reminds us of the Holy Spirit's activity also *outside the visible body of the Church*. The Council speaks precisely of all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way."

⁵ "The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history." John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁶ "every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person." Address to Cardinals and the Roman Curia, 22 December 1986, No. 11: AAS 79 (1987), p. 1089.

⁷ *Redemptoris missio*, Ch. II. Cf. also Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8. "Only the Kingdom therefore is absolute, and it makes everything else relative."

Admittedly, Jesus never defined this Reign, but he makes it present: what he was, what he did and what he said enable us to comprehend what he meant by the Reign of God.⁸

The following are among the important elements:

1. His welcoming and re-integration of all the marginalized of his society: the poor, sinners, publicans, Samaritans, foreigners, women. Jesus made it possible for each of them to find their place in the community.

2. Jesus' life of prayer which reveals to us a God of mercy and love, a God who has not forgotten humans but calls them to enter into communion with him.

3. Jesus' attitude to the Law is also important: although Jesus is a faithful observer of the Law, it is not an absolute in his eyes. The only absolute is God who is Love, mercy and pardon.

4. His preaching is not so much an announcement of punishment, judgment or retribution, but more often a message of pardon and mercy.

5. The healings and exorcisms that Jesus performed are presented as signs of the presence of the Reign of God among us. These help us understand that this Reign affects human beings in all their dimensions: spiritual, psychological, physical. We are no longer able to talk exclusively about the salvation of the soul.

6. Jesus also changed the type of relationships that exist among the members of the community. They are no longer individuals who dominate or who are dominated, but brothers and sisters, ready to place themselves at each other's service, ready to give their lives so that the others may live.

7. Jesus, a free man, invites us to experience inner freedom.⁹

All of these elements together help us understand

the riches of the Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus. It means that Jesus came to struggle against all forms of evil that are obstacles to the full human life that God desires for all his children.

It is he who inaugurates this Reign in his mystery of death-resurrection and who, after his resurrection, continues his mission of introducing the Reign of God and preparing humanity for the plenitude of the Reign offered by the Father to the end of time.

3. The New Evangelization

In his missionary encyclical, Pope John Paul II emphasized that we are facing three different pastoral and missionary situations:

1. The mission *ad gentes* for those who have not yet known Christ and his Gospel. In our country there are many who profess no religion or belong to other religious traditions. Recent immigration has notably increased the number of persons meeting this definition.

2. Christian communities in which the Church's pastoral activity is carried out. We will return to these groups when discussing the new agents of the "new evangelization".

3. Baptized persons who have lost the sense of living faith and no longer even consider themselves as members of the Church, leading a life separated from Christ and his Gospel.¹⁰ The Pope added that we must not create barriers or a rigid compartmentalization among these different groups.

It is in this context that we address the issue of the "new evangelization", *new through its agents, through its methods, through its ardour*. The "new evangelization" is not new because we are announcing a Gospel that is different from the one we have proclaimed since Pentecost, or another Christ, even though current theology provides us with an understanding that is somewhat different from the one that animated our missionary efforts in the past.¹¹

⁸ *Redemptoris missio*, 13.

⁹ *Redemptoris missio*, 14-15.

¹⁰ *Redemptoris missio*, 33.

¹¹ We are reminded of the vision inspired by a very literal understanding of "Outside the Church, there is no salvation." Many generations of missionaries gave their lives to bring enlightenment and salvation to those they believed deprived of it.

a. New through Its Methods

New through its methods: Today of course, we understand our mission in the light of this Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus. The reality of “sacrament” already used in *Lumen Gentium*¹² to speak about the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, helps us in our reflection.

The sacrament includes the values of “sign” and “instrument”.¹³ Today we prefer to use the concepts of “symbol” and “artisan” to designate persons, members of the Church, as the “symbols” and “artisans” of the Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus. Evangelizers are sent to be “symbols” of this God who comes in Jesus Christ, making visible his action in our world. We are therefore referred to all the values of the Reign of God already present in Jesus’ mission: dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education, care of the sick, aid to the poor and to children, freedom, pardon, love, respect for others, with the affirmation of the priority of transcendence and spirituality.¹⁴

Insofar as we are witnesses of this unconditional free love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, we become “symbols”, we make visible this Spirit of the Risen Lord at work in our world. When we promote the values of the Reign of God present in so many of our brothers and sisters, we become artisans of this Reign. This free love implies the service of the Reign of God at work in the heart of each person.

i. Going toward...

How can we, in our present world, be both “symbol” and “artisan” of this Reign? We must first cover the psychological and sociological distances that separate us from those to whom we are sent, conscious that this passage is a challenge, a death to things familiar to us in the Church, to open us to a new world, to new realities.

When the Holy Spirit urged the disciples to go toward a new world, a death was always involved. This is

what is known as “going toward the other”, “making oneself present to the other” to manifest God’s love to them, to love them unconditionally, freely, without seeking to win them over for our own collective interest in order to increase the number of faithful in our Church.

These Church conversions began with the first years of evangelization. The Holy Spirit urged Peter to go to meet the centurion Cornelius.¹⁵ In this important encounter, Cornelius receives the Good News, while Peter comes to understand that he is not just a circumcised man, separated from the uncircumcised who are the members of Cornelius’ family, but he is first of all a human being like all those who are present. Furthermore, this encounter makes him understand more fully that God does not make a distinction among persons and that he desires the salvation of all. The Jerusalem Church was upset: it had to change from the Jewish perspective to the universal perspective. It was obliged to divest itself of a recently acquired Judeo-Christian identity to open to a new reality. The experience of the missionary Church is somewhat like that of a young couple welcoming their first child: a dimension of life as a couple must die to give way to life with another person.

A few centuries later, the Roman Church was obliged to abandon its identity to receive the barbarians. Today, the Church centred on Europe and North America is in the process of dying to this Western reality, to give way to a universal Church in which the continents of the South are increasingly making their presence felt in ecclesial life.

Again today, the Holy Spirit urges the Church to go toward this post-modern world that will undoubtedly bring death to a certain way of being Church, to a certain identity. A missionary Church must not nourish nostalgia for the past. Our world, loved by God, has its strengths and weaknesses like the world of bygone days. It faces new challenges: justice and peace, sustainable development and preservation of the environment, the meeting of world religions,

¹² *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

¹³ *Redemptoris missio*, 19-20.

¹⁴ *Redemptoris missio*, 20.

¹⁵ Acts 10-11.

questions about the meaning and quality of life. As Pope Benedict XVI invited us in his first encyclical, we must look on this world with love. As a Church, we must die to what is old in us to develop a loving, respectful presence toward those to whom we are sent.

In the years since Vatican II, the missionary Church has better understood how it is called to put itself at the service of the Reign of God: by proclaiming the Good News and forming new Christian communities, but also by spreading the evangelical values that are the expression of the Reign of God. Ultimately, by interceding for the world, the Church is at the service of the Reign of God.¹⁶

Making ourselves present, therefore, involves seeking to discover the other, knowing them for what they are, in their culture, their mentality, in their search for a full human life, for the profound meaning of life. We are invited to receive the questions of our contemporaries.¹⁷ Thus, in going toward young people, we approach them with interest in them as individuals, in their lives, their joys and sorrows, their dreams and despair, but also their commitment, loves, friendships, questions and fears. We must therefore recognize those whom we address. Currently, certain groups in our communities feel invisible in the Church: women, ethnic minorities, the poor, homosexuals; they may express resentment toward the Church. They need to be regarded with the love they so fervently desire.¹⁸

At times, this presence will be the only possible means of evangelization. Some of our contemporaries have developed an allergy to all preachers and all forms of preaching. This is the experience of Blessed Charles de Foucauld, followed by the Little Brothers of Jesus and the Little Sisters of Jesus: silent witnesses of divine love.

Our world remains sensitive, however, to attention to others and charity toward the poor, children, those who suffer. We are reminded of the impact of Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta and of Jean Vanier on our contemporaries.

ii. Entering into Dialogue

Evangelization is now carried out through dialogue. Paul VI wished to make the Church a Church of dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters, with the members of other religious traditions, and finally with those who claim to be agnostics or atheists.¹⁹

For each one of us, this signifies the end of a monologue in which we were able to have exclusivity of speech. It also assumes that the evangelizer genuinely knows how to listen to the other, not to confront them and convince them rationally of the validity of our viewpoint – we have tried it without success for centuries – but instead in the spirit of being ready to recognize that the other has some truth to share, some goodness to offer – truth and goodness, fruits of the action of the Spirit of the Risen Christ. It is vital to encounter young people with the fundamental values that mark their lives today: the quest for happiness, freedom, authenticity. It is important to accept these values while considering them with a critical eye.

This signifies that we are open to learning about the other.²⁰ It is possible that some of our partners in the dialogue may be more influenced by the action of the Spirit than we ourselves, committed disciples in the footsteps of the Risen Christ. The important thing is that we all seek to draw closer to what God, as we know him, expects of us. Opening ourselves to the truth and beauty of the other can open the heart of the other to recognize the truth and beauty to which we wish to bear witness.

¹⁶ *Redemptoris missio*, 20.

¹⁷ Two texts are enlightening for the evangelization of young people. Olivier Fröhlich, “Pour que notre joie soit complète” (1 Jn 1, 1-4), “Proposer la foi aux jeunes” in *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Évangile: Vers une pastorale de l’engendrement*, under the direction of Philippe Bacq and Christoph Theobald, *Lumen Vitae*, Brussels, 2004, pp. 149-171. Timothy Radcliffe, “Before Phillip called you, I saw you under the fig tree” (John 1, 48), Bruxelles-Toussaint, 2006. This last text is available on the Internet.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Deus est Caritas*, 18.

¹⁹ His first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*.

²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 44: the Church recognizes the help she receives from the world of today.

The dialogue with our brothers and sisters of different horizons is a method and a means of reciprocal knowledge and enrichment. The recent decades have enabled us to understand better that this dialogic activity does not conflict with mission. On the contrary, the dialogue is linked to and even an expression of mission.²¹ If together we listen to the Spirit of the Risen Lord who is speaking, we are already engaged in the work of evangelization. We thus prepare ourselves to welcome more intensely this God who speaks and reaches out to us.

Dialogue is required for the profound respect we must have toward all that the Spirit is bringing about in the human person. We therefore discover these “seeds of the Word”, these rays of truth that illuminate all humans – the seeds and rays that can be found in individuals and the different cultural and religious communities as well as in accumulated human experience.

The dialogue to which the Spirit of Christ invites us is founded on faith, hope and charity. It is animated by the desire to discover and recognize the signs of the presence of the Risen Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. But the dialogue also enables us to deepen our own identity as Jesus’ disciples in the Catholic community and to bear witness to the integrity of Revelation. The dialogue experience in recent decades has referred us back to our faith with new questions and has allowed us to understand better certain aspects of the Christian mystery.

This dialogue assumes that we remain coherent with our own traditions and religious convictions. It is vital to provide proper formation for baptized persons who are called to live in this new context of religious pluralism. We must be open to the convictions of

others to understand them better, without dissimulation or closure. The dialogue must develop in truth, fairness, humility.

In this process, we cannot relativize what our partners in the dialogue consider as absolute. We must recognize the truth and goodness we find in others. We cannot affirm the truth and goodness of our faith by denigrating that of others. Dialogue also invites us to avoid absolutizing what is relative in our own faith. We are invited as well to respect the “hierarchy of truths”²² in the faith we wish to affirm. The dialogue we are asked to live develops according to multiple forms and expressions.²³

It is now over forty years since the Church began to engage in dialogue. Not all its efforts have been crowned with success. But the Holy Spirit invites us to continue in this direction: an entire wall of mistrust erected throughout the centuries demands to be torn down. The Church is convinced that it has entered into dialogue with the world through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is sometimes the only form of evangelization possible. Since we must live together on this planet, dialogue is essential. It is surely one of the roads to the Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus, even if the fruits come only when God wishes.

It is important to remember that the agent of the conversion of persons is truly the Holy Spirit, not the evangelizer. We are but humble collaborators who try to remove the obstacles to the present action of the Holy Spirit.

iii. Commitment to Justice

Another way for us to be “symbol” and “artisan” of the Reign of God is the issue of commitment for

²¹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991).

²² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.

²³ The dialogue we are invited to live develops according to multiple forms and expressions. 1. The dialogue of life emphasizes that we live in an increasingly pluralistic context, rubbing shoulders more and more with members of other religious traditions. 2. The dialogue of works: this testimony of believers in daily life, the testimony of the values that animate us and the resulting collaboration at the social level. Jesus’ disciples are invited to collaborate for the integral development of persons with people of different horizons. Together, we are called to fight for a world of truth, honesty and justice. Why not work together for what is possible? 3. Dialogue as communication of spiritual experiences. Finally, 4. Discussions among experts or official representatives, among ecumenical Christians as well as in interreligious dialogue. Cf. *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, Pontifical Secretariat for Non-Christians, 1984, 29-35.

justice, for the transformation of the world according to God's project. In 1971, participants at the Roman Synod affirmed that "the fight for justice is a constitutive dimension of our mission to announce the Good News." We can think of the vast field of the Church's social teaching, effectively synthesized in the *Compendium* recently published by the Vatican.²⁴ Thirty-five years after this Synod on justice in the world, this dimension of the Gospel often remains the Church's "best-kept secret". Among those who are most involved in our Church, many still do not succeed in making the link between the Risen Lord, the Gospel and this commitment for justice.

In *Christifideles Laici*, his post-Synodal exhortation on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, Pope John Paul II reiterated all the areas in which Christ's disciples could involve themselves to serve individuals and the community, thus bearing witness to the Good News of the Reign of God.²⁵

iv. Sharing the Good News

When hearts open to welcome the Good News, the Gospel can be announced in words, inviting conversion and faith. The God who reveals himself in Jesus is a God of communication for the purpose of communion. Since God communicates with us, we are invited to communicate with each other. "Woe to me if I do not evangelize," says the Apostle Paul. The Gospel to be proclaimed is a message of happiness, not only for the future, but it influences the present as well. Our announcement is centred on a reality that is taking place before our eyes: this Reign of God, inaugurated by Jesus.

For the "new evangelization", we must, however,

consider an initial announcement already made in the past. In our communities catechized in the past, our brothers and sisters of today are well aware of the message we offer – they have been hearing it since childhood – and they do not necessarily believe it is Good News. For some, unfortunately, our message is limited to prohibitions, dictates primarily of a sexual nature. Our challenge is to show that the news we bring is good for living in freedom and happiness. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, we must learn how to discern when hearts are open once again to receiving our message.

It should be remembered that in our world, witnesses are needed much more than teachers, experience more than doctrine, life and facts more than theory. It is not so much a question of recovering persons to enlarge the Church, as helping them to embark on their journey toward the plenitude of God's Reign.²⁶

If a listener is influenced by our testimony, we must bear in mind that it is the Spirit of God, not the evangelizer, who is the actor of this conversion. The evangelizer collaborates but cannot claim the conversion of persons.

The importance of the media should be noted in this announcement of the Gospel. It is a question of bearing witness to what resides within us and makes us live. It is not merely a question of technique, but we need to consult media professionals for we must fight against the image of our Church that is presented by the new means of communication. Our Church frequently appears more dogmatic than enlivening, more restricting than liberating, more concerned with orthodoxy than servant of the Gospel. Obviously,

²⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2005.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 36-44: promoting the dignity of the person, respecting the inviolable right to life, commitment to religious freedom and the family, in the form of volunteer work, politics, socio-economic and cultural life.

²⁶ Interesting reflections of Philippe Bacq, "Vers une pastorale d'engendrement" in *Une nouvelle chance pour l'Évangile* under the direction of Philippe Bacq and Christoph Theobald, Brussels, Lumen Vitae-Novalis, Editions de l'Atelier, 2004, pp. 23-28. The author makes a distinction, in the wake of the Gospel proposal, between "men and women, signs of the Kingdom" and the "disciples". A number of people welcomed the Good News of the Kingdom without necessarily becoming Christ's disciples. They met him mysteriously in meeting the needs of their neighbour (Mt 25). Jesus prolonged people's existence without asking them to become disciples: the paralytic (Mk 2, 11), the woman suffering from hemorrhages (Mt 9, 22), the centurion whose faith aroused Jesus' admiration (Mt 8, 10). These persons were never able to call Christ by name, and were given longer life, without becoming members of the community of disciples. They were, however, under the action of the Spirit, en route toward the plenitude of the Reign of God.

there is no question of diluting the message, but rather of concentrating on what is more pertinent, more vital, more energizing for those we address.

v. In a Language Meaningful for the People of Today

We should also note the challenge represented by the task of “inculturation”, that is, taking into account the culture of the persons to whom the message is addressed. It is a prerequisite for ensuring that our message is received and understood.²⁷

Those who welcome the Good News and become Jesus’ disciples will make their response on the basis of what they are, of their own culture, and will reformulate the message in their own language.

b. New through Its Agents

If the “new evangelization” is new through its methods, it is also new through *its agents*. In the past, ordained ministers and persons involved in the consecrated life were the principal agents of evangelization. Since Vatican II, we have gained a greater understanding of the co-responsibility in the mission of all the baptized persons of our communities. This responsibility is deeply rooted in the baptismal reality; a mandate from pastors is not required to exercise this responsibility, as we believed in the time of Catholic Action. But to be evangelizers, we must at least be in the process of evangelization. We cannot share the Good News unless we have welcomed it in our own lives.

We are rediscovering this idea of evangelization of “fellow creature by fellow creature”, in particular the evangelization of “youth by youth”. In his post-Synodal exhortation on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, John Paul II insisted that there is not a particular age for mission. From childhood, when the youngest are “symbols of the Reign of God” to the last moments, when dying persons are still

witnesses of the Paschal Mystery, passing through all the stages of human life, Christians are called to be evangelizers in a Church that is wholly missionary.²⁸

Catholic organizations and movements often provide an ideal opportunity to gain insight into the missionary responsibility of all baptized persons. Furthermore, those movements that insist on community experience provide support to all Church members, conscious of their responsibility and involved in evangelization.

This means that ordained ministers and religious must acknowledge that they no longer have the exclusivity of evangelizing activity; it is important to recognize the contribution of all baptized persons, men and women, in this activity for which our Church has been assembled, an essential contribution if we wish as a Church to face the great challenges of the mission today.

c. New through Ardour

The new evangelization is finally new through *ardour*. We have stated it already: our contemporaries need witnesses more than teachers. The evangelizers must be authentic disciples, influenced by the Good News, who live it and are transformed by it, who live the peace and joy it produces. Experiencing the Good News is a prerequisite for this evangelizing activity.

4. Responsibility of Bishops and the Episcopal Conference

While all members of the ecclesial community are responsible for evangelization, it is incumbent upon Bishops to raise awareness among all Church members about their responsibility, to inform them about our Church’s evolution in the way it understands and carries out mission. In addition, it is essential to form pastors, deacons and members

²⁷ Jean-Marie Donegani, “Inculturation et engendrement du croire” in *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Évangile*, pp. 29-45. The author notes the important characteristics of our world: secularization that is characterized by the disinstitutionalization of the religious reference and the pluralization of religious identities, profoundly marked by subjectivism, probabilism and relativism.

²⁸ *Christifideles laici*, 45-50.

of institutes of consecrated life, conscious of this new missionary context, opening the door to each Christian's contribution.

It is equally important to equip baptized persons to meet the challenges of mission in our world today. It is essential that they be firmly rooted in their Christian faith and capable of living in a world characterized by pluralism. The strong presence of other philosophies and religions leads to questions for Catholics. As well, only a few members of the faithful are capable of explaining the hope that is in them. Among our neighbours in the United States, studies show that approximately two per cent of Catholics are able to verbalize the faith that animates them in their daily lives.

In addition, Bishops have a responsibility for the image of our Church as projected in the media. It is obvious that the media also have a responsibility with regard to this issue, but the Episcopal Conference through its positions must be concerned about the impact of its interventions to enhance the relevance

of the Good News we offer, to underline its enlivening character. This is, to some extent, our challenge: how to express Gospel values without making it sound like repression.

We should also take note of the resentment of certain groups toward our Church: young people, women, homosexuals. These persons feel invisible in the Church and have difficulty finding their place in the community. We must continue to communicate a message of inclusion to all these groups that are often marginalized in our Church at present.

Conclusion

The goal of our mission is to collaborate with the Spirit of the Risen Christ, already at work in our world, supporting persons and communities in their journey toward the plenitude of this Reign of God, inaugurated by Christ, in his Paschal Mystery. Christ's disciples, members of the Church, recognize this mission to be symbols and artisans of this Reign of God in their own surroundings.

OMI DOCUMENTATION is an unofficial publication
of the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
C.P. 9061, 00100 ROMA-AURELIO, Italy
Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22 E-mail : information@omigen.org