

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

AND THE LASALLIAN FAMILY (1)

«We are in a new historical era. It demands:
clarity of vision
insight to analyze
united action» (Medellin 1968).

1. A GRAND PASTORAL PROJECT

Pope Paul VI said that to evangelize was the «joy and vocation proper to the Church, its deepest meaning» as he presented the Church that magnificent document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which after 16 years continues even today to enlighten and inspire every Christian who aware of his Baptismal commitment and his responsibility to teach the Gospel.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II has called on the Church to undertake a grand pastoral project. We referred to it as the New Evangelization called it the «most important and fundamental task of our times». However, this project, in fact, does not originate with John Paul II. He, himself, says that «The Spirit has spoken to the Churches of today and His voice has been heard through the Ecumenical Council which it can rightly be said represents the foundation and commencement of the gigantic task of the evangelization of the modern world. We have reached a new turning point in the history of humanity where immense-ly varied and serious questions face the Church» (1).

The Pope, then, is shouldering the heritage of the Council of Vatican II and of Pope Montini as he formally announces the New Evangelization with these words: «The present time in the history of mankind requires a revived transmission of the faith in order to announce to the men of today the perennial message of Christ, adapted to the actual conditions of living in today's world" (2).

It seems that it was on March 9, 1983, in an important speech to the assembly of CELAM in Port Au Prince (Haiti) that for the first time there was explicit and clear mention made of the New Evangelization. The talk was directed specifically to the Churches of Latin America which, numerically, will soon constitute half of the Catholic Church. It says: «The commemoration of a half millenium of evangelization will be truly significant if it is your commitment as Bishops united with your clergy and faithful, not to a re-evangelization, but to a new evangelization – new its zeal, in its methods, in its expression».

The following year, on October 12, 1984, at the inauguration in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) of a novena of years in preparation for the celebration of 500 years of evangelization, the Pope presented another very important program to «the continent of hope» by making a very thorough analysis of the situation and identifying the challenges which existed in Latin America. He ended by stating: «The next centenary of the discovery and first evangelization calls

us to a new evangelization of Latin America which can unfurl its energy as it did in its beginnings as

- a potential for sanctity
- a magnificent missionary effort
- a vast catechetical creativity
- a fruitful collegiality and union
- an evangelical struggle for the dignity of man

in order to awaken from the heart of Latin America a future of great expectations. It has a name: the civilization of love».

However, this grand project is not limited only to Latin America. Old Europe is also questioning itself about «the best way to announce the perennial message of the Gospel effectively and courageously at this time, and to reveal to the modern mind the the inscrutable riches of the mystery of Christ.» On October 7–11, 1985, the VI Symposium of the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe was held in Rome. The Pope addressed to the participants the famous discourse of October 11 in which he recognized that Europe «has undergone so many and such cultural, political, social and economic transformations that the whole matter of evangelization must be considered in completely new terms. We might even say that Europe «as it has been shaped by the complex events of the last century presents the most radical challenge encountered by the history of Christianity and of the Church». Therefore, he affirms that «the work of evangelization within the situation of Europe as it is today calls for a creative new synthesis between the Gospel and life».

If we were to continue quoting the texts of the present Pope we would never end, so much has he spoken on the subject. We might conclude with a quotation from *Christifideles Laici* which, as a document which synthesizes a path for the Church in modern times, says with great power and precision: «A great, challenging and magnificent enterprise has been confided to the Church: a new evangelization of which the modern world has dire need» (N° 64).

2. WHY A NEW EVANGELIZATION?

The above quotations already indicate the basic reasons why the Pope is proposing to the Church a new direction for its energies and mission in our contemporary world.

Nevertheless, for me it is important to develop this aspect a bit more because from the analysis of the situation and from the presentation of the needs we will draw the outline of our apostolic labors in such a way that they may truly be a response to actual problems.

Many of the addresses of the Pope subtly contain very astute analyses of the present situation of society and the Church. He does it humbly but clearly and without flinching when the Church is involved negatively in the process. On January 13, 1986 he said to the Pontifical Council on Culture: «Yes, we are on the threshold of the gigantic work of evangelization of the modern world which must be done on different terms. The world has entered an era of profound changes due to the amazing quantity of man's creations which threaten to destroy him unless he can integrate them into a spiritual and ethical vision. We are entering a new period of human culture and Christians find themselves faced with an enormous challenge».

On the 26th of November, 1986, in Sydney (Australia), he said: «In many ways the Gospel is firmly rooted in the life of society, but it is also true that the gap between the message of the Gospel and culture requires a new evangelization, a second evangelization. Sixteen years ago, my predecessor, Paul VI came here to this very place and spoke of the temptation to "reduce everything to an earthly humanism, to forget the spiritual and moral dimension of life and have no concern for the necessary relationship of man with the Cre-

ator of all the good things he possesses, and with the Supreme Legislator for their use." This temptation is as old as life itself. But today we are being called by the Church and each of its members to come up with a new response. In many parts of the world, the most important problem is not the preaching of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it as it was for the Apostles and for the many missionaries who have come after them. Today, the problem lies in preaching to those who have already heard it but who no longer respond to it.»

Representatives of the Catholic laity of the United States listed them in the Cathedral of San Francisco on September 18, 1987: «Every age poses **new challenges and new temptations** for the People of God on their pilgrimage, and our own is no exception. We face a growing **secularism** that tries to exclude God and religious truth from human affairs. We face an insidious **relativism** that undermines the absolute truth of Christ and the truths of faith, and tempts believers to think of them as merely one set of beliefs or opinions among others. We face a **materialistic consumerism** that offers superficially attractive but empty promises conferring material comfort at the price of inner emptiness. We face an alluring **hedonism** that offers a whole series of pleasures that will never satisfy the human heart».

At the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Believers which took place May 5, 1988, it was noted that the atheistic utopias of the Nineteenth Century were on the decline, and that the dangerous wave of secularization which was sweeping over the world had its dangers: «It reveals itself in consumer societies by hedonism, pragmatism, the search for efficiency without regard for ethical norms and by the neglect of the sacred character of life. All this leads too often to moral relativism and religious indifference.

One might think that this phenomenon exists only in the developed societies of the so-called First World. But this is not true. Even the developing countries find themselves enmeshed in this process, principally in the urbanized areas and among the intellectually cultured social classes where there is leadership from the economic, political and social sectors. And this is happening rapidly. The Pope calls attention to it in *Christifideles Laici* when he refers to those regions of the world which have preserved intact their traditions of piety and popular Christian spirituality, adding immediately that «this spiritual and moral patrimony today runs the risk of vanishing under the impact of many forces, the most outstanding among which are secularization and the growth of sects. Only a New Evangelization can assure the growth of a deep and pure faith which can make these traditions a powerful force within authentic freedom» (N° 34).

3. THE RESPONSE OF THE INSTITUTE.

Our Rule is the mature fruit of the 40th General Chapter. After 20 years of thought, experimentation and evaluation as suggested by Vatican II, the Brothers have produced a text of the Rule which is the «faithful expression of the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and of the tradition of his Institute».

One of its most dynamic Articles clearly reveals what the Institute of the Brothers is determined to be. It is article 11: «John Baptist de La Salle was deeply moved by the way in which "the children of the artisans and the poor" were abandoned and left to themselves. As a practical response to his prayerful consideration of this fact in relation to God's plan of salvation, he came to discern, in faith, what God wanted the mission of the Institute to be».

To respond in this same vein, to the same needs, the Institute is determined to be the presence of the evangelizing Church in the world today.

This solemn declaration places the mission of the Brother at the very heart of the mystery of the Church, a messianic people, sacrament of salvation, born of the evangelical life of Jesus and sent by Him to the whole universe as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

But it is also a declaration made at a specific historic moment with its own characteristics to which we have previously referred. Therefore, the Institute takes up a specific commitment which it must implement, develop and bring to a successful conclusion. How will the Institute fulfil this determined commitment and by so doing respond to the urgent call of the Pope for a New Evangelization?

The Institute responds with a bold project of a Lasallian Family.

This grand evangelizing project would gather ideas together, stir up determination, revitalize the spirit of hundreds of Religious, seculars and priests who, within the Church, look upon themselves as spiritual followers of John Baptist de La Salle. Together they can respond with courage to the 6 needs of our times which the Brothers capitulants of 1986 clearly identified and presented as strategic challenges which the Institute should face with creativity and effectiveness for the extension of the Kingdom:

- The needs of the new generations
- The calls of the new evangelization
- The permanent calls of the poor
- The renewal of the Christian school
- The development of Christian educators
- The evangelization of culture. (Circ. 422, p. 32).

Since 1986, the Institute has committed itself to the growth and consolidation of all the members and the diverse groups which form the spiritual family of De La Salle. This was ratified with the publication of the "Letter to the Lasallian Family" of Feb 2, 1989.

Such a family is aware of its specific mission in the Church and desires to be guided by the Holy Spirit along new paths toward sanctity, apostolic commitments and witness.

True Lasallians, that is, all those who «find that we have a clear, strong and common reference point for our lives in St. John Baptist de La Salle» must say "yes" consciously, actively and responsibly to the invitation of the Church and especially the Institute, to work at the Christian education aspect of that wonderful adventure which is called "new Evangelization".

In conclusion, it is important to recall that «if abstention from commitment has always been unacceptable, our times make it even more so. It is not licit for anyone to remain idle» (3). «These are not times for fears, nor for leaving to others such difficult but sublime tasks» (4)..

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- (1) Sixth Symposium of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences. Oct. 11, 1985.
 - (2) Address in Santo Domingo, Jan. 25, 1979.
 - (3) *Christifideles laici*, 3.
 - (4) Address of John Paul II to Domund, 1985.