

The New Evangelisation The role of audio-visual means

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"For the Church, evangelisation means carrying the Good News to human beings wherever they are, and by its impact, transforming the human race from within and making it new. However, there can be no new human race, if there are not first new human beings, human beings who are new because they are baptised and living according to Gospel values.

"The aim of evangelisation is this interior change. Perhaps the best way to describe it is to say that the Church evangelises when, solely by the power of the Message it proclaims, it seeks to convert simultaneously the individual and collective conscience of people, the activities in which they are engaged, their lives and their specific situations" (EN 18).

Nowadays, the situation is more complex. It is no longer a question of simply preaching the Gospel in increasingly vast areas of the globe to ever-increasing masses of people, but also to reach and, as it were, overturn by the power of the Gospel, existing criteria of judgment, determining values, areas of interest, sources of inspiration and models espoused by the human race which are opposed to the Word of God and the plan of salvation.

1. A new "apostolic strategy"

The Vatican II Council gave much attention to the question of communicating the Gospel to the people of our times, to the young people who live in the changing world of today. This world, as daily experience shows, is rapidly evolving and is being transformed simultaneously in all its aspects: economic, social, cultural, moral, religious, etc. The human condition is affected directly by this in its deepest structures. A person's role in society and in the world is changing. His social background and the traditions of society will no longer be the main object of his struggle for personal freedom. This freedom will be exercised rather in the sphere of his **personal reactions** to these factors.

Given these conditions, one may well wonder whether Christians living in this increasingly mobile world will be able to survive with their ready-made religious culture, their series of well-established principles and their model of moral conduct, which has an answer for all questions even before they are asked.

If future man is to continue to exist in all his fullness, he will have to be capable of re-inventing his life. The Christian, too, if he does not want his faith to atrophy or divorce itself from reality, will have to be capable of recreating it constantly by integrating it into a constantly moving life.

The need for a "new evangelisation" is becoming increasingly urgent. In some ways, there is a need to be ahead of our times; to abandon factors that predetermine their evolution; rethink our systems of communication in function of the dynamic forces of present-day society. In a word, there is a need to rediscover the profound significance of education in general, and of religious formation in particular.

A "new apostolic strategy" is needed therefore. This was one of the messages of the last Council. It indicated the prin-

cipal characteristics which make up Christian anthropology: a relationship with God, which makes man capable of knowing and loving the One who is his Creator and his end; a relationship with the world which makes him "Master of all earthly creatures", because, as an incarnate spirit, he expresses himself through science, tools and machinery; a relationship with other people, without which he cannot find his place in life, and act.

This last point is simply mentioned here, because it is something that really defines a human being, and is developed throughout the pages of *Gaudium et Spes*.

And so, we now know the essential conditions which must guide the development of a new apostolic strategy: a definition of the aims; adaptation of the means to be used; re-training and specialisation of the mission workers. In a word, what is changeable has to be changed, so that LIFE can triumph.

However, we do not have to be very observant to realise that, changes which affect our most characteristic trait, our mentality, are the most difficult to bring about. Resistance to change is a characteristic of all societies, as soon as they establish their identity by means of institutions, which are intended to be stable, but which eventually become rigid and an end in themselves, as a result of a combination of ritual and custom. All requests for profound changes, especially if they involve structures, are considered by those in charge as a threat, because of the way in which they perceive them, and as a form of pressure, because of the way they assess their formulation.

Nevertheless, there is a need for change. In a changing world, characterised by technical means of communication, the practical problems of evangelisation - our daily work - are stated in new terms: "In the midst of these changes, our mission would be ineffective if, in its transmission of the message entrusted to it, it did not speak the language of the people of the present age" (Synod of Bishops, Oct. 1977).

Where the characteristics of the Gospel message are concerned, here more than anywhere else, the essential condition is to make others understand and to make oneself understood.

There are immediate applications for all we have said.

1° *Transcendence of the Message*

This is an absolutely basic requirement which governs religious teaching in all its aspects: the message it has to communicate always comes from above. "The Word of God is not simply an intelligible message addressed to mankind: it is a dynamic reality, a power which unfailingly produces the effects intended by God" (Vocabulaire biblique, article on the Word of God).

Pure and simple teaching is not enough. The pupil does not learn "to live the faith" in the same way as he learns history or geography. The Gospel message does not require simply a technique, but rather conversion as a preliminary to illumination, or "metanoia", to use biblical language.

2° *Commitment, personal participation*

In addition to transmitting doctrine first of all as teaching, catechesis must present it also as an appeal. It must present the Word of God with all its warmth and power, inviting each individual to build the Kingdom of grace with Christ. The plan of salvation goes on and invites all to share in it through the events of their everyday lives.

This is why religious education requires a **special pedagogical approach**, one that involves commitment and personal participation. The Gospel, as St Paul says, calls for a firm act of the will, a personal and free response, which is called living faith. This faith is "obedience in word and in deed" (Rm 15,18). Once an individual has become aware of this discovery, there begins for him a "new life". It is really a new way

of living for him, which gives him a new outlook on things and a new way of acting.

3° *Making the Message a part of modern culture*

The new kind of life that exists today, with its industrialised and secularised society, has an effect on religious life. On the one hand, the development of a critical spirit in people, has purified it of a magical concept of the world and of the remnants of superstition. This forces people to commit themselves to their faith much more personally and actively, and many of them develop a much livelier sense of God.

On the other hand, however, people are deserting the practice of their religion in ever-increasing numbers. In many places, this negation and indifference expresses itself not only on the philosophical level, but it affects also, and in a very widespread fashion, State legislation itself (eg. divorce laws).

There is room, therefore, for a great deal of work in order to bring about an **aggiornamento and renewal** of methods and means of information. What is at stake is to make man capable of envisaging a situation by himself, of standing back a little, and of adopting a certain line of conduct.

2. The role of audio-visual means

Audio-visual means are of immense importance in the context of pedagogy and educational methodology. Put at the service of the new evangelisation "they are capable of extending almost to an infinite degree the area in which the Word of God can be heard, and they bring to thousands of persons the Good News. It is by their means that the Church proclaims «on the roof-tops» the Message entrusted to it. In them, the Church finds a modern and effective replacement for the pulpit. Thanks to them, the Church is able to speak to the masses" (Paul VI, EN 45).

From the psycho-pedagogical point of view, audio-visual means entail a **complete recasting** of the system of information. Information received by audio-visual means assaults the conscious and the subconscious from all sides simultaneously. This information is such that it alters ways of feeling and perceiving; it exerts pressure in this way on certain types of latent motivation, and can inject others.

Audio-visual means can make a person live, in a very short space of time, in a universe constructed with a view to exerting pressure which will lead to change. All his senses are affected by them: his body, by the stimulation of emotional reactions and his unconscious, through subliminal influence. And so, not only is an acceleration and an extension of information-formation bound to occur, and must be used, but so is also the emergence of new ways of speaking and thinking.

Cinema and television have the unassailable advantage of being able to show scenes, episodes, demonstrations, action highlights, often more intelligible than when seen and heard directly. The same is true of television programmes and reports. However, given the speed with which the mind and the senses of the individual have to cope with auditory and visual stimuli, the use of such material in education should avoid overloading the senses.

On the other hand, the taperecorder helps speech and has many uses both in school and out of school. Tape recordings can be a very demanding and active element in learning. There is no piece of equipment closer to the pupils and more easily adaptable to the requirements of a lesson.

The record player and long-playing records can help to develop aesthetic sensitivity, sharpen the senses and discernment (the movements of a liturgical composition, the role of different instruments). Listening to records requires lively attention: fortunately, this is normally a spontaneous reaction to the music. There is nothing less static than a combination and succession of sounds, in which the variations in intensity and tone, the contrasts, the recurring theme, are all borne

along in a continuous movement. Here too, the message addressed to the senses is intended to produce an effect. The memory will not be affected unless the pupil feels this effect and is penetrated by it.

Other technical means can easily be used when organising liturgies or catechism lessons: photographs, slides, the overhead projector, selections from films. This list does not claim to be exhaustive. It shows simply that equipment exists and that its use is spreading. We should not be the last to use it, since it can help everybody to understand complex problems better.

3. Personalised approaches

"Personalised" formation is a means used by a modern psycho-pedagogical trend, promoting the establishment and growth of attitudes.

Gospel values do not reside in the mind but in actions, and it is behaviour that indicates the presence of these values. These values need to be "embodied" and personally assimilated, so that they constitute the well-spring from which the whole life of the individual flows.

Since life consists essentially in freedom and self-emulation, and not accumulation and repetition, personalised formation consists in a profound transformation of the individual, and by challenging him more, disposes him to undertake new things. Obviously, formation such as this, at a certain level, can and ought to be helped. But it is incompatible with any form of drilling (training). Religious education can, of course, help the individual to integrate all the elements of his life and give it unity once again.

The faith, acceptance and conversion constitute also a response. This response is simultaneously a friendly dialogue with the Loved One and a new lifestyle. Faith is real in a person only if the transforming union of the believer with God is so total that the person has the same mentality as God, and religion has become his very being: "it is demonstrated even in the concrete actions of daily life".

This is the aim, therefore: to make LIFE, true life, the purpose of education. The basic problem is how "to become a new man", as St Paul says. It is worth repeating that, in order to make this possible, what we need is not education based on preservation, personal or community influence. The faith of Christians must be made to be constantly active, in action, based on their active acceptance of a life-giving doctrine which is constantly before their eyes as an incentive for them to convert their heart and commit their lives.

As Paul VI recalled (All. 5/10/75), the establishment of a spiritual and community context is a priority, "a sine qua non condition if forms of *aggiornamento* in various areas are to produce the desired results and, in particular, if they are to contribute to that interior unity, which makes the religious a true gift of God".

"It is thanks to the Spirit that a community grows and that the Kingdom is built" (EN 75). The Spirit is the principal protagonist in the mission: he it is who urges each one to proclaim the Gospel, and it is he who, in the depths of the mind, makes the Word of salvation accepted and understood" (AG 4).

But, likewise, one can say that he is the ultimate objective of evangelisation. He alone brings forth the new creation, the new humanity which is the goal of evangelisation, together with unity in the truth which evangelisation seeks to create in the Christian community. Through him, the Gospel penetrates to the very heart of the world, for it is he who makes us recognise the signs of the times - God's signs - which evangelisation brings to light and promotes throughout history.

(Principal ideas based on material from a recent international symposium in Vienna, Sept. 1996, on "*The New Evangelisation and the modern mass media*"). •