

The New Evangelization

According to the *Lineamenta* of the Synod
of Bishops 2012

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The topic asked of me is very vast. Presuming in principle that all have already read the text of *lineamenta*, I shall treat only a number of points which seem to me important.

Lineamenta is the working document to prepare the *Instrumentum laboris* of the 30th Ordinary General meeting of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held at Vatican City from 7th till 28th October of this year, on the topic *New Evangelization, for the Transmission of Christian Faith*. This document has already been worked on by Bishops' Conferences, Conferences of the Religious and other authorities. The *Instrumentum laboris*, which will be used for the work of the Synod will be, in a way, a synthesis of all this reflection. *Lineamenta* retain its interest however since it serves as a catalogue of the great challenges in which Evangelization is confronted today and is an invitation to be answered with the means that one disposes of or that is called to invent. After an introduction, on the notion of New Evangelization, I shall introduce the three great parts of this document:

1. *The time of a New Evangelization*
2. *To Proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ*
3. *To Initiate to a Christian experience*

INTRODUCTION:

THE NOTION OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

The notion of "New Evangelization" is rather broad in reality. The text of *Lineamenta*, gives a great number of definitions (almost twenty!). We can therefore be flexible!

In the Apostolic Exhortation on catechesis, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, of 1975, Paul VI has already spoken "about new time for Evangelization", adding that "the conditions of the society oblige us to review methods, search by all means, study how to make the Christian message reach

the modern man”¹. Nevertheless, it is in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (1990) n. 33, that one finds that a diagnosis of a new stage for the mission of the Church is necessary. It points out 3 situations which confronts the Church: that of Mission *ad gentes*, that of the well constituted communities where Church exercises its pastoral activity, and finally, between the two, that of whole groups which have lost the sense of the living faith, requiring a “New Evangelization”. In practice, these three situations are often mixed. Finally, I think that one can detect there a realization by the Magisterium of the importance of de-Christianization in the said countries “of old Christendom”.

Before seeing rapidly what the expression “New Evangelization” implies, let us put aside first what it is not or what it does not envisage. First, we do not have to compare it to the ordinary pastoral ministry, nor search in it a catalogue of new “pastoral recipes” which would have an assured result. It is neither a question of disclaiming what has been heretofore made nor to make “tabula rasa” of all the missionary heritage of the Church in the 20th century. We know how rich it was, and we still largely live in it today. It is neither a question of favoring an introverted assertion of the identity of the Church or a change of attitude toward those who do not believe.

Now, what is New Evangelization? It consists principally for the Church to take seriously its identity and its missionary commitment. It is a kind of missionary “awakening” of the Church, in the new context of modern cultures. Waking up is all the more necessary since the temptations to fall asleep are numerous! The temptation of immobility (opposition to change), to do what has always been done, with the weight of routine – or even to conform to the surrounding culture, setting aside the proposal of faith to the advantage of an exclusively social religion. We are also confronted with discouragement in the face of the lack of apostolic workers, before the difficulty in finding a language which reaches the people. There is also our own look at the Church, where failures, negative images, the cultural gap between the Church and the society, etc., are often reasons of discouragement. Finally I think that one can say that New Evangelization is essentially a missionary resurgence of the Church, a new breath of hope, a new spiritual enthusiasm for mission. One could even speak simply of Evangelization, or even of the first Evangelization, because one realizes that, in the end, many people have not been evangelized!

New Evangelization will consist, then, in a revival of the life of faith, which will implicate a discernment of what has to be done in the new

¹ This document comes after the Synod of 1974 which had as theme *Evangelization in the Modern World*.

situations which touch Christian life, a rereading of our past and also a resurgence of various responsibilities and search for new energies for a cheerful and infectious proclamation of the Gospel. A huge work but which we can make very exciting!

FIRST PART:
CHALLENGES FOR THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

At first, it is a question of looking at the world in which we live, such as it is, the world often marked by a certain disenchantment, actual economic crisis, but more broadly still, a phenomenon of globalization, with fears, sometimes irrational, which affect many people faced with the reality of migrations, an uncertain future and perhaps especially a cultural and spiritual crisis which touches man in the very depths of his being. This is, of course, the negative side of things, but very happily, our societies are also marked by the other face of these phenomena which allows the development of a lot of experiments of brotherhood and solidarity.

While referring to these phenomena that our societies live, I would particularly like to stop on these “sites of New Evangelization” which are listed in the first part of the document, which are also new challenges for Evangelization. The first task for the Church will be to decipher them in different situations where they present themselves in our different countries.

1. The first challenge which holds attention is cultural, and it is that of secularization, more or less advanced according to countries, but is active a bit everywhere. Most of us are confronted by it. It deals with the possibility of imagining the life of the world and humanity without referring to a transcendence. God has, in a way, disappeared from existence and from human consciousness. It is present, sometimes insidiously, in every field of daily life: likewise, it shows itself as well in the development of relativism with its anthropological implications in the rapport of man-woman, the meaning of generation and death, but also in the behavior of many Christians: hedonistic and consumerist mentality under so varied forms as egoism, superficiality, worship of the person, with the risk of an internal void or a vapid spiritualism. One will note in passing and a bit everywhere, of a blossoming of Christian religious movements or the risks of fundamentalism. How does the Church, how do our communities find themselves before this challenge? How can the announcement of the Gospel be an encouragement for the Christian communities first so that they rediscover the joy of Christian experience, and find the sense of freedom and truth?

2. The phenomenon of migration. Today societies are more and more fluid, people leave their country or their region to live, deliberately or not, in new contexts. This leads to a modification of the ethnic geography of our countries and of our continents, with a meeting or a mixture of cultures which our societies have not known for centuries. At the same time, it favours a crumbling of the fundamental references of life, of values, of links according to which the persons structure their identity and achieve the meaning of life, or else an identitarian closure of societies which receive migrants and of the migrants themselves with all the fears that are attached to it. The great cultural or religious traditions which structured the sense of history or identity of the persons are shaken. Globalization is linked to this phenomenon. All this can be read at the same time negatively when linked only to economic and productive dimension, – or positively, as an instance of growth where humanity can learn new forms of solidarity and sharing for the development of all. From the point of view of Evangelization, we now become aware that mission is no longer a movement that is North-South or West-East, as we knew it up to this point, but that it moves beyond geographical borders. More profoundly still, we must learn to know areas that are foreign to the faith that we have never met. We need to find the energy to pose the question of God in all these processes of encounters, brewing, in the building or rebuilding of social tissues. Here, one would have to underline the importance of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, which, in my view, the *Lineamenta* does not underline enough.
3. The challenge of social communications. We are in media and digital age and social communications pervade the planet. It has become an essential “place” of social life. One saw its importance, for instance, in what has been called “the Arab spring”. Here also are the advantages, as the access to information, new possibilities of knowledge and exchange, in new forms of solidarity, the possibility of making the best values a common heritage for all – but also the risks, first that to reinforce individualism, which expresses itself in selfish concentration about oneself or about one’s individual needs, the exaltation of the emotional dimension in relations, thought reduced to a confirmation of the feeling of each. It is the culture of present, the ephemeral, and of appearance with the risks of the incapacity for memory or of vision of the future. The ethical and political dimension of life of the people increasingly diminishes. Evangelization must therefore encourage to live in this new world, in this new “Areopagus”, find means to make itself heard and transmit the heritage of wisdom and education of the Christian tradition.

4. Economic challenge. We notice the growing inequality between the North and the South of the world for access and distribution of resources, and the damage to creation. The actual crisis shows that the use of material forces has not found the rules of a worldwide market capable of protecting a more just life in common. We can also note that the voice of poor people is less and less heard, and one does not start from what they have to say. At the same time, however, they expect a lot from the Church in terms of sensitization and concrete action. Ecclesial documents on this subject are in general received favourably but (alas) not much put into practice!
5. The challenge of scientific and technological research. One benefits from it constantly, with the risk that science and technology become new idols or a new religion, to which one addresses questions of truth or expects meaning from it, all the while knowing that it can provide only partial and inadequate answers. That's how one sees new forms of gnosis emerging, which see a form of wisdom in technology. There is also a religion or worship of prosperity and instantaneous gratification, with the question of those who are excluded from it. What will the Church say about it?
6. The challenge of politics. Since Vatican City II the situation of the world has changed. We have passed from the clash of the East-West blocks of the Cold War into a multipolar world. There are new actors of economy, politics and religion (Asia, Islam). The historical Churches have reorganized themselves. We are in an unheard of situation rich in potentialities and also in risks and in temptations of domination, of power. The areas are numerous: commitments for peace, development, liberation of peoples; the improvement of forms of worldwide and national government; the building of new forms of life in common, dialogue, collaboration between religions, cultures; the safeguarding of human rights, of peoples, of minorities; promotion of the weak; the care for the planet. New Evangelization is all there, in the light of the Gospel.

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How to react as Christians, faced with these new challenges?

Faced with such transformations – and there would be many others – which challenge our identity and our faith in their foundations, the first reaction can be of distraction or fright. It is therefore necessary to develop a rereading of these very concrete situations from the perspective of Christian hope, first by surpassing the emotional level,

defensive judgments or of fright, to seize truly the signs of novelty, challenges and fragility. This rereading can be done only in a true dialogue with others, that would allow us to identify what these challenges can bring to the world, what can be assumed and on what one cannot cede. This leads to have a critical look on the styles of life, structures of thought and values, languages of communication in our societies, but also within the Church which must always re-learn to understand itself from its roots. This rereading must be made in the Church, in the community, to translate the hope of the Gospel into accomplishable terms.

If the Church wants to be a living body, it must have the boldness to pose the question of God within these problems which seem to be only questions of man or on man. The Church realizes the peculiarity of its mission then, by showing that Christian perspective renders light to the great problems of history. It does not remain locked up in its communities and its institutions, but she agrees to enter these phenomena of the life of man in order to testify there to God. This leads it, on one hand, to work with other Christians to show the force of the Gospel, this is ecumenism in act, but also, on the other, to accept confrontation with religions, either with agnosticism or sometimes with aggressive atheism or extreme secularization which want to eliminate the question of God from the life of man.

To illustrate it, I would like to make allusion here on the two initiatives of Benedict XVI, which show the necessity of a dialogue with the persons who consider religion as something foreign: on one hand what is called “the court of the Gentiles” and on the other hand, the participation of nonbelievers in the meeting at Assisi on October 26th, 2011². The Church can never abandon the idea of searching, with patience, all forms of possible dialogue to seize the deepest expectation of man and his thirst for God.

New Evangelization and need of spirituality

Another point on which I would like to dwell on is what one may call a return of the need for religion and spirituality which one notices in many European societies. The Catholic Church is affected by this very phenomenon. I think, for instance, of the development of pilgrimages, big gatherings (World Youth Day), and others, varying from country to country. This has not always been accepted, definitely not

² La Documentation catholique n. 21 (2011), 4 December 2011, pp. 1031-1064. See also the site of the agnostic philosopher Julia Kristeva, who took part in it, www.kristeva.fr/assise2011.html (texts in English, French and Italian).

so for a long time, but it reveals itself as very important opportunities of Evangelization today. Religious sentient has not been extinguished. For the Church, it is then a question of discerning the signs of the Spirit which is at work and to educate these expressions towards a mature and conscious faith.

The same goes for the consecrated life, in new communities (and also among the most ancient!), where they disclose needs of certain radicalism, but is it or will it always be evangelical? Elsewhere, one also remarks a regain of interest, even among the Catholics, for the great religious traditions, notably oriental, which for the Church becomes certainly a requirement of encounter, of dialogue and, especially, of discernment. But it is also a call to learn to know and confront forms and languages of the religious need, as they come in other religious experiences, to understand better the ways by which the Christian faith listens and takes the religious need of every person.

New Ways of Being Church

The actual social and cultural contexts which are in rapid change also lead the Church to identify new expressions of Evangelization. To speak, for instance, of "Christian country" and "mission country", has no longer sense. One sees, rather the slow work of building a new model of missionary Church, without sectarianism nor proselytizing, a Church close to the daily life of the people, which announces the Gospel starting from new realities. The time of a New Evangelization has come for the West where many people live completely outside of Christian life or know badly the faith, images of which are caricatured or distorted.

There is also a vast diffusion of religious indifference, secularization and atheism, a life lived as though God did not exist, the chase of consumption or economic well-being side by side with frightening situations of poverty and misery. These 'old' Churches of the West which live these new, difficult situations, with communities, sometimes dispersed, little accustomed to live in situation of minority; these Churches have certainly a lot to learn from the Churches of the East, the persecuted Churches or those that were victims of intolerance.

In conclusion of the first part of the document, I would simply like to underline a question which is asked there: Are we really interested to transmit faith? Do Christians take this mission seriously? The missionary duty of Matthew 28:19 (Mk 16:15; Lk 24:48) has entered a new stage. The one who loves his faith wants to manifest it, to take it to other people, to allow the others share in it. The lack of missionary ardour is a lack of ardour of faith. New Evangelization is the name

given to this new attention of the Church to its fundamental mission, to its identity, to its reason-of-being. No ecclesial situation is excluded from this program. New Evangelization means mission. It demands to be shared, to go beyond borders, to widen the horizons. It is the opposite of “to do what has always been done”. It is a call to the pastoral conversion to the missionary sense of action and of structures of Christian communities.

SECOND PART:

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

The second part tackles the question of the transmission of faith as such, under different aspects.

1. The purpose of the transmission of faith: the encounter and communion with Christ

The missionary mandate received from Christ has a definite reference to proclamation and the teaching of the Gospel (Mt 28:20). Paul presents himself as Apostle chosen to announce the Gospel of God (Rm 1:1). He will go even to the point of saying that he was not sent to baptize but to announce the Gospel! (cf. 1 Co 1:17). The first task of the Church is to accomplish the announcement and the transmission of the Gospel, which is not a system of articles of faith and of moral precepts, even less a political program, but the person of Jesus Christ, the definitive Word of God, made man, a living and effective word. The objective of the transmission of faith is therefore to realize the encounter with Jesus Christ, in the Spirit, to make the experience of the Father. To transmit faith it is to create the conditions with the aim of this encounter between man and Jesus Christ. The Church must therefore be basically a “Church of encounter”, with all that it implies. Meeting of men with the aim of meeting with God and meeting with God with the aim of meeting with men. That's how it fulfills its mission. The result expected of this meeting, the purpose of transmission, of Evangelization, is to insert men in the relation of the Son with his Father to feel the force of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ep 2:18). To transmit faith in Christ means to create conditions for a faith that is reflected, celebrated, lived and prayed over, that is to say, inserted in the life of the Church (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium*).

2. The Church transmits the faith which she herself lives

If one pursues reflection with this theme of meeting, one understands definitely that the meeting of God and meeting of men are linked. In effect, one cannot come to a meeting with somebody that one has not himself met, one cannot transmit what one does not believe in or what one does not live. One cannot transmit the Gospel without having as foundation a “being” with Jesus, without living the experience of the Father with Jesus in Spirit. In return, the experience of “being with Jesus” encourages to announce, to proclaim, to share what one has lived, because he has experienced something that is good, beautiful, positive. This action of transmission of faith is the experience of every Christian and of the whole Church that rediscovers in it its own identity. All the faithful are involved in it. The transmission of faith structures the face and the actions of the Christian communities. In order to announce and spread the Gospel, the Church must build Christian communities that are capable of articulating the fundamental works of the life of faith: charity, witness, announcement, celebration, listening, and sharing. Thus, Evangelization implies a certain logic which includes the whole existence: the Church receives and renews cultures, she testifies among the peoples of the new ways of being and living which characterize the Christians, she proclaims the Gospel by calling to conversion (first announcement), she initiates to faith and to Christian life by catechesis and sacraments of initiation, she develops the gift of communion among the faithful by the continuing education of faith, sacraments, the exercise of charity, and finally, she promotes the mission by sending disciples to announce the Gospel in works and in words throughout the whole world.

3. How to transmit the Gospel?

First, by means of Scripture and Tradition. It is one of the great contributions of Vatican II. The announcement of Word is at the root of the duty to transmit faith (cf. *Verbum Domini* n. 93). The Church transmits the faith which she lives, celebrates, announces and gives witness of³. For it she must take a greater consciousness of the place of the Word of God, of its revealing power through its proclamation in Assemblies, of its role in the mission of the Church. A particular attention should be given the announcement of Word to the new generations to favour a more mature faith.

³ Refer in particular to the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, and to the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010).

The transmission of faith, however, is not only made with words: it demands a relationship with God through prayer, which is faith itself at work. Liturgy is decisive here. We will have to rediscover this liturgical dimension of the announcement of the Gospel. The missionary aim was one of the strong points of the liturgical movement which has led to the conciliar document on liturgy, the *Sacrosanctum concilium*. Furthermore, there are two fundamental instruments to transmit faith and allow living the encounter with God, in a double fidelity, to God and to men: catechesis and catechumenate. We need to relaunch these two instruments to give a new depth to the pedagogy of faith. At the centre of all the journey is the mystery of the Passover of Christ.

The transmission of faith is therefore communitarian. The local Church is at the same time the subject which announces the Gospel, transmits faith, as well as fruit of this announcement and this transmission (cf. Ac 2:42-47). The faithful are gathered by the preaching of the Gospel and those who received the announcement are constituted into the single body by the celebration of Eucharist. And if the great number of Christians involved in the announcement of the Gospel is a gift of Holy Spirit in our communities, there is however new challenges for the transmission of faith the document underlines: the reduced number of priests renders less trenchant results; the laxitude of numerous families weakens the role of the parents; without counting that the number of Christian parents diminishes or no longer knows how to transmit faith; many are thrown into confusion in the face of the attitude of their children who are uninterested. One often notes that the level of sharing in the Christian community is too weak, that the missionary ardour seems to lack impulse. The burden risks, therefore, falling again on the catechists for whom the task becomes very heavy and who sometimes experience loneliness in accomplishing the task. The cultural climate and situation of lassitude of numerous Christian communities risk weakening the capacity of announcement, transmission and education of faith of the local Churches; then, how does one believe without a preacher? The question of Paul (Rm 10:14) is very concrete.

The present situation demands, therefore, a new style, a new impulse to take with joy and fervour the announcement of the Gospel. Every Christian must feel challenged by the call of Peter (cf. 1 Pt 3:15-16) to give reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness, respect and determination. It is a style which must include thought and action, personal and public behavior, internal life of communities and missionary impulse, attention to the poor people etc. With ardour, trust and freedom of word. It deals with setting out to lead men towards friendship with God. Every community and every baptized should feel involved.

In conclusion of this second part, one can say that the purpose of any process of transmission of faith is the building of the Church as a community of witnesses of the Gospel. For it the Church always needs to be evangelized. The fruits of this process of Evangelization take form in confrontation with challenges of our time. On one hand, it is a question of building families which are true and real signs of love and sharing, to build communities with an ecumenical Spirit, capable of dialogue with other religions, to support initiatives of social justice and solidarity, by putting the poor in the centre of interest of the Church, to show that to embark on following Christ is source of joy, and that finally the Spirit guides and transfigures history. On the other hand, one has to denounce the infidelities and scandals in very community, to acknowledge errors, while keeping the capacity to continue witnessing to Jesus Christ, having a permanent need to be saved and by having a solid trust in the hope which has been given to us.

THIRD PART: INITIATE TO CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

I shall dwell quickly on this third part, by underlining some points. Besides you would notice that in this third part there are repetitions.

First, one will note the intrinsic link between the sacraments and Christian initiation. The importance is once again given to the way of the sacraments of initiation. One would have to review baptismal practices, because there was logic of rupture as well as inertia, when one held on to the repetition of the past. One needs to work on discernment in adopting new styles of pastoral action for Christian initiation.

A second point which seems to me important for mission is the requirement of new forms of discourse on God in the announcement of the Gospel. One notes a growing lassitude with which people intend to speak about God. One has to renew the discourse on God, to discern why our culture has moved away from this discourse, to search forms and instruments that help working out the discourse on God which is able to interpret the expectation and fears of the men of today and to show that Christ is the gift that we all await, to which all men aspire. We must be inventive to be able to lead the Christians and every man who tries to accept the call of God in his conscience. For this, one has to have a great trust in the Spirit which guides, to conquer fear and have a great clarity of mind to situate the question of God at the centre of the life of the men of today.

On the other hand, I would like to underline what the document calls an “educational emergency” and that joins the educative action of the Church to transmit to the new generations the basic values

of existence and right behaviour. This has become more and more difficult both for the Church as well as for the parents and for the school. The society often makes its credo of relativism. If the light of the truth is lacking, one ends up doubting the goodness of life. Often today one transmits only a know-how or determined capacities, while trying to satisfy the desire for happiness of the new generations by immersing them in the objects of consumption and of ephemeral gratifications.

Are we still able of transmitting to the young persons the true values which give a meaning to their life? The parents are often demobilized or outmoded. There is a growing demand for genuine teachers, for an education in faith that helps the society get out of this educational crisis. The objective of this educational commitment is to guarantee the future of the Church but also that of the person and the humanity, by inserting the question of God and the experience of faith in the questions of the present. One needs to form free and mature persons, capable of putting the question of God in their life, their job, the family. The Church has a long experience in this domain.

Finally, we know, according to the expression of Paul VI, that man listens more readily to witnesses rather than to teachers. The Church evangelizes first by its behavior, its life, its witness lived in fidelity to Christ. To evangelize one needs persons who by their behaviour reinforce their commitment and confirm what is announced and taught. It is a question of being credible witnesses. It is therefore necessary to support and to form the persons who get involved in the Evangelization and education, by clearly affirming the essential character of this ministry, showing the place of the Christian family in the education to prayer, in faith, by calling upon new strengths through spiritual formation.

Only he can evangelize who has allowed himself to be evangelized. New Evangelization is a duty, a spiritual challenge, a task for the Christians in search of holiness. The baptized have to be conscious of their missionary and evangelizing commitment. I would finally like to make here an allusion to the Year of Faith which Benedict XVI wanted as an expression of the commitment of the whole Church for New Evangelization. I invite you to read the apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* which is a nice meditation on faith, as well as the pastoral note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith⁴.

⁴ Documents in different languages may be found in www.vatican.va

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would say that New Evangelization is meant be an appropriate answer to the signs of the times, to the needs of men and peoples, to all the challenges of today's world. It is not reserved for specialists. All are responsible. "An obligation that has been imposed on me" St. Paul said (1 Co 9:16). To get there, one must look at future with the eyes of hope to proclaim there a message which gives joy and which liberates, to have a vision of the Church which is evangelizing. Men need hope to live their present. I think that one of the obstacles to Evangelization is the lack of joy and hope when we meet difficult situations. We must confront this new stage of Evangelization enthusiastically, to learn the comforting joy of announcing the Good News.