

PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

The following is a summary of Fr. Spiazzi's address in presenting the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" to journalists in the Press Office of the Holy See.

In addressing this Exhortation to the Bishops, clergy and all the faithful of the Church, the Holy Father deals with a matter essential to the mission of the Church, to the point of being synonymous with it: evangelization.

Nature of the Document

In accordance with the ministry proper to him in the Church, the Holy Father "confirms" evangelizers in the many efforts already undertaken and in which he rejoices. He helps them to discern the possible ambiguities, to surmount the obstacles, and above all to rediscover the living source of the apostolate. Finally, he undertakes with them a long meditation on the mission of evangelizers today; he adopts a pastoral and familiar tone. He deals with the needs and means and new problems, and give the necessary restatements, but in every case he takes care to point out the positive aspect and to give a fresh missionary impulse.

The occasion

This intervention by the Holy Father has been prompted by the present-day questions and studies on the subject of evangelization, and above all by a specific missionary problematic attitude. Three events have provided the occasion and the theme (cf. Introduction): the Holy Year to which the Bull of Indiction *Apostolorum Limina* has assigned evangelization as one of the principal themes, and which must be prolonged in the future (a task presented anew in the conclusion, paragraph 81); the tenth anniversary, celebrated on 8 December, of the close of the Second Vatican Council, the documents of which are frequently quoted; and in particular the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which took place just a year ago and which was devoted to evangelization. In conformity with the request of the Synod Fathers, the Holy Father

has made a point of taking up once more the abundant material provided by this Synod, in order to give precise orientations, respond to still pending questions, and renew the appeal made by his Brothers and give a new impulse to the Church's apostolate. This example of utilizing Synod consultation is worth noting.

The document is divided into seven parts.

I. From Christ the Evangelizer to an evangelizing Church

It is in the whole of his life and death that Christ was essentially the bearer of a Good News for all mankind. This Good News has two aspects: the Kingdom of God and liberating redemption. The Church is presented as the community of those who accept this Good News, and in her turn she becomes an evangelizer, both of her own members and of others. Evangelization is therefore her proper mission, as it were her identity.

II. What is evangelization?

The term "evangelize" has been chosen in preference to the term "being missionary", because it has a broader and deeper meaning. Rather than give a definition, the Exhortation describes the essential elements of evangelizing action. These elements are complex, and they must be neither separated nor opposed to one another. It is a question of an interior change of humanity, every person individually, and of the "strata of humanity" with their mentalities, by means of a personal and collective conversion. It is a question of an impregnation of cultures by the Gospel, which is identified with no single one of them and yet which must enter into connection with each of them. Evangelization includes at one and the same time the witness of the life of faith and an explicit proclamation. It involves, on the part of those who accept this proclamation, a sincere acceptance, entry into the ecclesial community, sharing in the Sacraments, and a fresh evangelizing impetus.

III. The content of Evangelization

What are the most important elements that make up the message itself? What is the aim of the message? It proclaims the Father's love, salvation in Jesus Christ, communion with Christ and the Church through the Sacraments, the need for fraternal love, the meaning of suffering, hope in eternal life. In fact the message "addresses itself to" the whole of people's personal and collective lives, according to the individuals' rights and duties.

Following the line of the Synod, the Holy Father carefully examines the links between evangelization and liberation—mutual links that are very profound—in which it is necessary to avoid all ambiguity or reduction of one to the other. The need to recognize religious liberty is opportunely noted here.

IV. The methods of Evangelization

In dealing with the manner of evangelizing, the Holy Father emphasizes a number of fundamental means which must necessarily complement one another:

- the witness of life;
- the need for a living preaching, in particular in the form of the homily;
- the importance of the mass media, which is never an excuse for doing without personal contact, which is often decisive;
- the catechesis in preparation for the Sacraments, for it is not a question of opposing a pastoral plan for the Sacraments to evangelization.

At this point, again following the line of the Synod, the Holy Father turns his attention to "popular religiosity", of which he shows the importance, the limitations and the risks; he prefers to call it "popular piety".

V. The beneficiaries of Evangelization

The Holy Father insists on the fact that evangelization is addressed to all people and to all social milieux. He then examines the situations that require a particular pastoral strategy:

- "those who are far off" and often in need of "pre-evangelization";
- the baptized who are not evangelized, or who are dechristianized;
- the intellectuals, who call for a fresh presentation of the Christian message;
- members of non-Christian religions, for whom the document manifests a profound esteem, without avoiding the complex theological problems and without avoiding the consequent duty of proclaiming Jesus Christ to them;
- the non-believers, and those whom secularism (carefully distinguished from secularization) transforms into practising atheists;

— the non-practising, characterized by indifference;

— "those who are near": the faithful who must not be deprived of spiritual nourishment and consolidation; and non-Catholic Christians who have the right to know the fullness of the deposit of faith guarded by the Church.

Under another aspect, the document takes into account the problem of the "multitudes" to be reached, and, by comparison, the present phenomenon of the small communities (ecclesial *communautés de base*): the Holy Father emphasizes the positive sense, while being conscious of their risks and their limitations, and establishes the conditions under which they become privileged points of encounter and points of departure for evangelization.

VI. The workers for Evangelization

Before describing the active part played by each category in the Church that is entirely missionary, the Holy Father insists on the fact that evangelization is always an ecclesial act, performed in the name of the Church. Here he explains the twofold perspective which the evangelizer must take into account at all times: that of the universal Church, and that of the individual Church.

The document then speaks of the particular role of the Pope, of the bishops and priests, of Religious, of lay people, with a special consideration for the family and for young people. The evangelizing role of the laity is evoked in its double aspect: inserting the Gospel into temporal realities; and collaborating with the Pastors in the service of the ecclesial community. And here the Holy Father emphasizes the importance of the non-ordained ministries.

VII. The spirit of Evangelization

In order to arouse a fresh effort at evangelization, which is the whole purpose of the Exhortation, the Holy Father stresses:

- the dynamism given by the Holy Spirit;
- the authenticity and holiness of the witnesses;
- the search for truth;
- care for preserving unity: the ecumenical effort appears here as an essential dimension of evangelization;
- love for those being evangelized and respect for their condition.

The whole Exhortation culminates in an appeal for missionary fervour. Here the Holy Father examines the spirit of "opting-out" which affects certain persons, in the guise of false pretexts, sometimes even invoking the Council. He clearly distinguishes between imposing the truth (which is not to be permitted) and proposing the truth, which is a duty of love towards and a mark of respect for other's liberty.

The Holy Father is convinced of this point: nothing can quench the interior ardour that has animated so many evangelizers. This conviction is as if it were a new missionary sending forth, on the eve of the third millennium of Christianity.