



Excerpts from a Conference of Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I.

The New Evangelization (5)

Last October, Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., the new Bishop of Edmundston, launched our pastoral year by helping us deepen our understanding of the reality of the new evangelization.

The Dynamism of the Media

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, 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.

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. 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.

“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.

Missionary Responsibility

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.

“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.

Responsibility of Bishops

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 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.