



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

The New Evangelization (4)

Last October, Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., the new Bishop of Edmundston, launched our 2008-2009 pastoral year at the Diocesan Centre by helping us deepen our understanding of the reality of the new evangelization.

The Richness of Dialogue

The dialogue with our brothers and sisters of different horizons is a method and a means of reciprocal knowledge and enrichment. The recent decades have enabled us to understand better that this dialogic activity does not conflict with mission. On the contrary, the dialogue is linked to and even an expression of mission. If together we listen to the Spirit of the Risen Lord who is speaking, we are already engaged in the work of evangelization. We thus prepare ourselves to welcome more intensely this God who speaks and reaches out to us. Dialogue is required for the profound respect we must have toward all that the Spirit is bringing about in the human person. We therefore discover these “seeds of the Word”, these rays of truth that illuminate all humans – the seeds and rays that can be found in individuals and the different cultural and religious communities as well as in accumulated human experience. The dialogue to which the Spirit of Christ invites us is founded on faith, hope and charity. It is animated by the desire to discover and recognize the signs of the presence of the Risen Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. But the dialogue also enables us to deepen our own identity as Jesus’ disciples in the Catholic community and to bear witness to the integrity of Revelation. The dialogue experience in recent decades has referred us back to our faith with new questions and has allowed us to understand better certain aspects of the Christian mystery. This dialogue assumes that we remain coherent with our own traditions and religious convictions. It is vital to provide proper formation for baptized persons who are called to live in this new context of religious pluralism. We must be open to the convictions of others to understand them better, without dissimulation or closure. The dialogue must develop in truth, fairness, humility.

Religious Pluralism

In this process, we cannot relativize what our partners in the dialogue consider as absolute. We must recognize the truth and goodness we find in others. We cannot affirm the truth and goodness of our faith by denigrating that of others. Dialogue also invites us to avoid absolutizing what is relative in our own faith. We are invited as well to respect the “hierarchy of truths” in the faith we wish to affirm. The dialogue we are asked to live develops according to multiple forms and expressions. It

is now over forty years since the Church began to engage in dialogue. Not all its efforts have been crowned with success. But the Holy Spirit invites us to continue in this direction: an entire wall of mistrust erected throughout the centuries demands to be torn down. The Church is convinced that it has entered into dialogue with the world through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is sometimes the only form of evangelization possible. Since we must live together on this planet, dialogue is essential. It is surely one of the roads to the Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus, even if the fruits come only when God wishes. It is important to remember that the agent of the conversion of persons is truly the Holy Spirit, not the evangelizer. We are but humble collaborators who try to remove the obstacles to the present action of the Holy Spirit.

Commitment to Justice

Another way for us to be “symbol” and “artisan” of the Reign of God is the issue of commitment for justice, for the transformation of the world according to God’s project. In 1971, participants at the Roman Synod affirmed that “the fight for justice is a constitutive dimension of our mission to announce the Good News.” We can think of the vast field of the Church’s social teaching, effectively synthesized in the Compendium recently published by the Vatican. Thirty-five years after this Synod on justice in the world, this dimension of the Gospel often remains the Church’s “best-kept secret”. Among those who are most involved in our Church, many still do not succeed in making the link between the Risen Lord, the Gospel and this commitment for justice. In *Christifideles Laici*, his post-Synodal exhortation on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, Pope John Paul II reiterated all the areas in which Christ’s disciples could involve themselves to serve individuals and the community, thus bearing witness to the Good News of the Reign of God.

Sharing the Good News

When hearts open to welcome the Good News, the Gospel can be announced in words, inviting conversion and faith. The God who reveals himself in Jesus is a God of communication for the purpose of communion. Since God communicates with us, we are invited to communicate with each other. “Woe to me if I do not evangelize,” says the Apostle Paul. The Gospel to be proclaimed is a message of happiness, not only for the future, but it influences the present as well. Our announcement is centred on a reality that is taking place before our eyes: this Reign of God, inaugurated by Jesus. For the “new evangelization”, we must, however, consider an initial announcement already made in the past. In our communities catechized in the past, our brothers and sisters of today are well aware of the message we offer – they have been hearing it since childhood – and they do not necessarily believe it is Good News. For some, unfortunately, our message is limited to prohibitions, dictates primarily of a sexual nature. Our challenge is to show that the news we bring is good for living in freedom and happiness. Under the action of the Holy Spirit, we must learn how to discern when hearts are open once again to receiving our message. It should be remembered that in our world, witnesses are needed much more than teachers, experience more than doctrine, life and facts more than theory. It is not so much a question of recovering persons to enlarge the Church, as helping them to embark on their journey toward the plenitude of God’s Reign. If a listener is influenced by our testimony, we must bear in mind that it is the Spirit of God, not the evangelizer, who is the actor of this conversion. The evangelizer collaborates but cannot claim the conversion of persons.