

# HOW TO EVANGELISE TODAY

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## 1. What is evangelisation?

If anyone wishes to reflect on evangelisation today, it is first of all appropriate to reaffirm the eternal dimension of the Gospel : it is the same to day, yesterday and tomorrow, as Christ himself is (cf Hebrews 13.8); there is no other Gospel than that received from its beginning by the church (cf Galatians 1.6-9). To speak of a 'new evangelisation' cannot thus presuppose a new Gospel, nor that it should be modified or changed to become current. As Pope John XXIII said, it's ourselves at the heart of advancing history, and thanks to the renewal of Pentecost known through the church, who have a better understanding the Gospel, but the Gospel itself does not change.

Concerning the 'new' evangelisation, I just say that I hardly appreciate this adjective, for the church has never ceased to proclaim the Gospel. Without it, it would no longer be the church of Christ! The term 'evangelisation' besides, is already impregnated with the novelty of 'good news' ; so, to speak of a 'new evangelisation' is to use a tautology. Moreover, I would remind you vigorously that the Gospel is first of all, and before all, the action of Christ in the power of the Spirit. In other terms, 'the messianic presence is not subordinated to mission, but dominates it, and constitutes the context in which mission is exercised.' (1) Thus the first subject of evangelisation, is the Lord himself. It's an activity which depends upon his presence in the church until the end of time. (cf Matt 28.20) ; that which Jesus Christ 'has said and done' (Acts 1.1), is undertaken by the Risen One, by the glorious *Kyrios*, thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the church. The Holy Spirit led Jesus in the course of his mission (cf Luke 4.18) and precedes the mission of the church (cf Acts 2.1-13; 13.2-4). Thus the evangelisation accomplished by the church is a 'pneumatic' event, a witness to the Word addressed by God, prophesy in action '*en ergo kai logo*' in deed and word (Cf Luke 24.19). This is why evangelisation is at the service of the Gospel. In doing it, the church - gathered and constituted as the church of the Lord of the Gospel - accomplishes its mission. It exists for this, it finds here its reason for being. Outside of evangelisation, one cannot speak of ecclesial activity, nor even of the church.

## 2. The place of evangelisation

Jesus himself, the living and risen Christ, commanded his disciples, witnesses of the resurrection, to announce the Gospel to all nations (Matthew and Luke), to every creature (Mark). Thus disciples of the Lord, all men are called to receive the Gospel of salvation, for it is addressed to all of them. And in fact, it's precisely thanks to this evangelisation, source of salvation, that the God's unifying plans are achieved : to bless in Abraham and his descendants all the peoples of the earth (cf Genesis 12.3 & 22.18). The evangelisation of the world and its nations thus constitutes the 'form' par excellence where the blessing of God, the salvation brought by Christ, the 'good news' of the Gospel are destined to gather together all men on earth. All human beings can thus be evangelised, this means that even in our current situation today, nobody is excluded from evangelisation. Neither religious belonging, nor atheism, nor agnosticism, nor the moral situation impedes the coming of the evangeliser, that is to say, the meeting of each man with the living God. Yes, we know this: across times, places and cultures, a fundamental human identity exists; all, in fact, are children of Adam (cf Genesis 1) To forget

this truth would bring us to an irreparable fragmentation of the essential unity of humanity and the fraternal dimension which unites a person with their neighbour, with terrible consequences,

After having recalled these two elementary but important truths - to know *the universal destination of the Gospel, and the essential identity of the human being*, everywhere, always and of all cultures - it still remains, as far as possible, to say something, about the distinctive features of people living here, now in our society, belonging to the 'first world'. Without doubt people's deep human identity remains the same. As such in our post-modern, or even post-Christian society, one can read information, about ways of living, and feel that one should surely not generalise about it, yet it has an importance which demands taking into account in evangelisation today.

The life of post-modern man seems closed off within a society reduced to a depersonalised mass. This is why such an exacerbated reaction, a radical individualism is manifested which dominates all, also a systematic mistrust regarding anything that can be called 'common', 'collective'. Always this seems to develop further the primacy of the individual, the singular, to the detriment of the *polis*. In this society, personal belonging to a common citizenship is no longer affirmed, any more than a certain class solidarity, for interests are, from now on, multiple and do not show themselves in any vital convergence on common projects. The will to realise a personal project is borne above all. It's the particular which seems to be the first source of conflict, the regulation of which is entrusted to simple 'rules of the game'. The consequence is that each person creates the meaning of his own life for themselves, interested very little in the meaning of the world and history. The need to welcome and transmit a heritage no longer unites generations. Nobody any longer feels they should 'transmit' something. Young people do not even see any longer that they can be inheritors. Who has the audacity to 'keep the memory'? As plurality, diversity, relativity and consequently tolerance impose themselves, each one considers themselves to be autonomous creators of ends and means, recognising as the only limit, the *respect for the rules* necessary to avoid things degenerating to conflicts of interests. But whether one likes it or not, this inevitably becomes a hymn to indifference.

The failure and fall of great modern ideologies and their total forms - social and political -, the growth of disillusionment with the churches, which continue to display ideological elements and uniformising constraining structures, still further incite post-modern man to adopt a manner of reflection and speaking which one calls 'weak thought' : i.e. thought which conceals mistrust toward all 'strong thought'. It wants to accept the present, such as it is, in order to struggle there in all freedom, according to its own singularity, making a search for meaning, tolerance, recognition of diversity, even humane compassion. The outcome is that the horizon becomes polytheist (Hillman), neo-pagan (Natoli), post-Christian (Vattimo), where not only tolerance is necessary, but again, indifference...

Religions no longer make war, and even their plurality is regarded as a possibility for individual choices. They are envisaged as commodities (one speaks of 'religions à la carte (2)) , one takes what one wants, some even going as far as reviving the Gods of Greece or pagan antiquity... At least in Western Europe, there lives, side by side with polytheism, the affirmation of being able to inhabit a world cleared of gods without provoking conflicts, whether they belong to Christian churches, or to other religions. (It is altogether different in ex-Yugoslavia or in Islamic countries). Tolerance and indifference reigns. (3)

Yes, on the level of the general majority, we can say that the people, to whom evangelisation ought to be addressed today are characterised above all by indifferent behaviour. The coming of

a pluralist and democratic society favouring public discussion, confrontation and opposition, where religious questions have their place in debate, has opened the way to indifference.

Twenty years ago this arena of public confrontation was occupied by *militants* atheists and believers - Marxist and anti-Marxist etc - these endeavoured to make their own viewpoint triumph, criticising, denying, refusing the opposite opinion. Today, on the other hand, the public arena is admittedly less lively, for it is occupied by indifferent protagonists, who no longer seek to convince others. They are no longer adversaries, and renounce all totalitarian associations. If conflict arises, it is a result of opposing interests, or protagonists emerging who are not noted for indifference, like the members of a sect, aggressive religious movements, or the fundamentalist zones of churches. Conflict arises, in a word, when 'sectarians' appear.

Sociologists call the today's indifference 'the indifference of decomposition', when it concerns ex-militants, disappointed by the fall of grand ideologies. But there also exists an indifference characteristic of this era which supports the experience of human mastery over things (such as computer technology dreams of!); this is indifference, which is lucid, aware, fully assumed.

Evangelisation first of all concerns those who are 'indifferent', but it is also useful to take account of other data, which, even though from a minority is none the less significant.

In fact, alongside indifference, we are seeing a new movement of conversions; an important number of adults entering the catechumenate and asking for baptism. These are women and men who, whilst belonging to catholic tradition, have never experienced belonging to the church. Thanks to an event in their lives, they meet Christians, or have contact with a community or movement of the church - they are 'converted' and wait to be evangelised. This phenomenon is well attested in France - in 1996, there were 6,000 adult baptisms at Easter! And this is in a country where the crisis in Catholicism goes back to the first half of the twentieth century. But, one is less conscious of this in Italy (though there are already several signs of it), a country where the crisis only goes back to the years 1965 -1980.

Yet another form of this appears in 'beginners-again' : adults already baptized (and thus they are not catechumens), who find the way of faith again as a result of a personal or family event. They are often former political militants who come back to the faith or resume the Christian life. They need a new initiation into Christianity, and in general, ask for a serious quality evangelisation, a real personal formation. They are not disposed towards an impoverished inconsistent ecclesial experience, they aspire to genuine personal Christian knowledge. (4)

However, if it's true that evangelisation is addressed to all, nobody can be excluded, for the mission of the church, according to the Lord's own will, is universal. Besides, it is true that this permanent evangelisation is *of the church*. Let's understand this genitive as an objective genitive first; it's only in the second place that it is a matter of subjective genitive, that is to say, the evangelisation of men by the action of the church.

My conviction over many years - is that among those for whom evangelisation is destined, it is may be appropriate today to count baptized Christians who manifest some Christian signs. In Europe they represent 30-40% of the population, and they too need to be evangelised. For it often happens that their Christian knowledge is not at the same level as their liturgical practise or their ecclesial life. When Christians do not know how to taste the received Gospel with joy, they don't grow into the knowledge of Christ, and don't arrive at the stage of wishing that others could rejoice in being Christian. They should be considered as insufficiently evangelised; they

urgently need. On this subject, I recall the evangelisation programme established by Bishop Walter Kasper.

"The new evangelisation is first and foremost a spiritual step. It is thus essential that we let ourselves be questioned - in a manner always new, by the Gospel. That we should ourselves live, with a determination and greater joy, in the spirit of the Gospel. We should be sincere, we should recognise that we ourselves can be an obstacle to the Gospel and its spreading. Without our personal conversion, all reforms, even the most necessary and best intentioned will be seen to be doomed to failure; without our interior renewal they will finish by being no more than a vain activism. Without listening to the Word and the will of God, without the spirit of adoration, without unceasing prayer, the church will not be renewed, the new evangelisation of Europe will not take place." (5)

This is why evangelisation of Christians themselves must go further than an initial knowledge of Christ (cf. Heb 6:1-3), it must fashion truly adult Christians, having the stature of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:13). Faith which converts and leads to baptism, and faith which gives the knowledge of Christ leads to Christian maturity, to the fullness of Christian life, should not be absolutely opposed, but recognised and developed as two necessary times of evangelisation.

I still remain, however, with the problem of the evangelisation of the younger generations, or rather with the transmission of faith to young generations belonging to Christian families incapable of transmitting the faith, or so weakly linked to the Christian community, that all 'legacy', all religious inheritance is incapable of realisation. What needs to be said is that there is a 'rupture of tradition' injuring the collective memory of our society. The educative system of the family, the school, the parish bears a heavy responsibility in this realm.

Young people today do not take pride in intellectual unbelief, or even with justified indifference. They are searching for meaning, they want to experience a step which puts them in communion with others, they don't appreciate ready made and a priori solutions. Sure, we are convinced of this. It's not in re-heating the liturgy with special sensational musical effects, nor in creating the atmosphere of a 'happening', by great gatherings of people, that the problem of transmitting faith will be resolved. At this point 'fathers and mothers' need to ask themselves : how do we develop a culture of presence? What lesson does their faith and daily Christian life teach? Dialogue with young people is possible. But do we have the will to transmit a heritage to them?

### **3. The content of evangelisation**

The beginning of the evangelisation accomplished by Jesus himself is reported by Mark, who summarises the content in two exhortations: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near: repent and believe the Gospel. (Mark 1:15) A call to conversion and adherence to the Gospel, i.e. faith in Jesus Christ, the one sent by God - such is the content of evangelisation.

Thus to renew evangelisation today means first and foremost to recall with vigour, and in an extremely clear manner the primacy in Christianity of faith, We live in a world today ever more secularised yet in a paradoxical way, invaded by the 'religious' - that is to say, by a disquiet, a religious aspiration, diffuse and frail, which often seems more effervescent than it is profound.

It's precisely for this reason that we are present at a real market of different religions with seductive offers, where everyone has the possibility of benefiting from a 'menu of religions'. But let's have no illusions, this effervescence of religion is absolutely no more favourable to

Christianity than is secularisation. In reality, it's a matter of religiosity which takes flight from all responsibility in history, as well as a personal relationship with a personal God, or fraternal communion in confessing a Father God. That's why it's necessary to affirm that Christianity is faith, personal adherence to the living God, to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the God that Jesus his Son and Messiah, has revealed to us and made known.

We need to remain vigilant in a world which comes back to 'religions' ( "religion, yes; but the Christ God no!", as Jean Baptiste Metz summarises this). In a world where the feeling of a 'beyond' returns, the sacred, it is appropriate more than ever to affirm forcefully - even if one clashes head on with common sentiment - the necessity to "start afresh with God", as Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini said, or else give up the primacy of faith. It is necessary to find again the roots of faith, grasped as an experience of an invisible but living God.

"What must we do to work the works of God?", some enquirers ask of Jesus; and he answers them with an extreme lucidity. "The work of God is to believe in the one whom he has sent." (John 6.28-9) But to preserve the primacy of faith fully alive among our contemporaries means above all, not to accept the easy interpretation of Christianity as a simple ethic, and to remain vigilant that no similar reduction of it happens.

Without doubt Christianity has its ethic, the Gospel ethic presented by Jesus and rooted in all the ethics of the old testament law and prophets. But this ethic should only be envisaged and understood as an epiphany of faith. The actions of Christians, are always works of faith, for it is adherence to the living Lord which sustains them, motivates them, inspires and judges them.

It's precisely for this reason that Christians - at the time where they can be esteemed as "church, servant of society" as "able to bring a soul-supplement" to the '*polis*' have a serious mission. Without either arrogance or mistrust, well aware of the treasure they carry unworthily in earthen vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4.7), they should remain vigilant and prevent Christianity from being reduced to philanthropy, or morality, or worse still, to a monotheism of values on which society can count to assure order and good functioning.

Without any doubt, civil society needs the role of the great religious traditions. The church, tempted to satisfy this demand, waits in a veiled manner for the recognition of its public presence. The risk is not impossible, the danger is very close, of degenerating into civil religion. When the '*polis*' proclaims "religion is useful", when the church proclaims "Society needs us", the temptation emerges with intensity to make an alliance, and the church no longer stays faithful to the mission which the Lord entrusted to it!

Cardinal Daneels in his 1990 pastoral letter significantly entitled 'Christ or Aquarius?' wrote : 'It can be that those who accuse Christians today of lacking a deep lived experience aren't wrong; or they reproach them for their incessant moral exhortations ... Yes, in the course of these latter years, Christianity was reduced to a moral system, and much was lost in this obstinate moralism. "

A church which presents itself as a 'simple moral guardian' is a church marked by secularisation, a church which has lost its most unique language, and which reveals itself as incapable of responding to the 'demand for meaning' which dominates today's spiritual crisis.

Christian religious experience does not only relate to an engagement with the world, it also relates to an engagement in personal relationships; to being in love with Christ due to God's revelation in holy scripture. Spiritual life cannot be reduced or transformed into a social ethic of

perfection or personal equilibrium. 'A living God is not the symbolic equivalent of an altruistic relationship'. (6)

After the age of persecutions, from the time of Constantine, Christianity was perceived as if it was civilisation, state religion. Even if the regime of Christianity is ended, alas, some people still wish that it should continue to play the same role in society.

### **Don't let ultimate questions pass by in silence.**

There's no doubt that evangelisation done by Jesus always retained the eschatological perspective, in such a lively and dominant manner that his preaching spoken of as apocalyptic. But catechesis and Christian preaching today domesticate and weaken this eschatological dimension. It is more for the decor, than to underline an essential reality of life. In History, the Church is a 'stranger and on pilgrimage' towards the only country. the heavenly country of the Kingdom of God and life eternal. But in fact, in actual church life all seems to be presented through realities, undoubtedly good, but which must be 'visible', without really co-inciding with the 'things invisible which are eternal'. (2 Cor 4.18). Also Christians are not asked any longer to watch day and night with certainty that the Lord will come. Thus, time is experienced as an eternal continuum, the future as something where anything can happen, but where the glory of the Lord is envisaged with difficulty - a future deprived of Advent!

This deficiency of eschatological memory is the fruit of ecclesial silence in relation to ultimate reality. Without this horizon, death, the after-life thus become frightening themes, which people try to avoid, or on which nobody knows know what to say. However impossible it is not to take account of these questions touching death and the after-life, or to another possible life, all people are faced with the certainty of death. Each regards it with a question mark, not to say, with anguish.

Even if people today are fascinated by predominating technique, and seek to tone down, hide, or put this unease at a distance, they do not, escape this question, even in an atmosphere marked by religious indifference. It's here that Christians must witness to a clear conscience. It's not a case of waiting on the threshold of the narrow gate of evil and death. It's simply a matter of giving a reason for the hope that lies within us. (1 Peter 3.15) Thus if we were to manifest our faith in Christ, only for this life here below, we should be of all men most to be pitied. (1 Cor 15.19) Christians believe in Christ, risen from the dead, who has conquered death for all and forever. Is not Easter the announcement that Christ conquers death by his own death, and empties hell by the offer made to all of eternal life?

The announcement of salvation should thus have for a point of reference the coming in fullness of the Kingdom, life eternal which is life forever in God, the disappearance of sin and evil. The eschatological feast.

It is necessary to announce the fulfilment of time in Jesus Christ, and an orientation towards the end of all things. The Lord returns in glory to bring in fullness the salvation we hope for, which will finally be - this the revelation of the fullness of justice and truth for those in history who were victims, oppressed, afflicted or who remained voiceless. Those who by suffering oppression and death were identified with the Lamb slain, will be with Him - become their only shepherd - standing alone victorious in glory.

In fact, people demand that Christians justify their faith above all else, in regard of this eschatological theme. We invite them to share in our experience of God's fidelity and promises.

If we wait for the Lord, if we desire eternal life, we can thus be asked about our hope, and openness to God's free gift of faith. Christ is our hope. (1 Tim 1.1) This formula of faith constitutes 'the strength of our life', wrote Boenhoffer. For Christ's sake we must show that we even know how to die, convinced that by death we will be forever with him in eternal life. (Phil 1.21-3 ; 1 Thess 4.13-18). Yes, for he alone has a reason to die, who has a reason to live!

It's not chance that Urs von Balthasar's last book - he was one of the great theologians of our time - is entitled : 'Hope for all - I believed and therefore I speak' (Ps 115.10, 2 Cor 4.13). We believe in life eternal, and that is why we announce it.

### **Announce the remission of sins**

To proclaim salvation in Christ, that is to say, total definitive complete salvation, the eternal life of the Kingdom for ever, doesn't mean neglecting to announce the salvation brought by the Gospel of the Lord Christ here and now, all along our way.

Let's ask ourselves the question : what experience of salvation is given to us here and now? And thus, what salvation, what redemption can we announce in evangelising people, such as are alive on earth?

Doubtless people can receive salvation in a fragmentary and incomplete manner, but possessing the first-fruits of the Spirit (Romans 8.23), they can experience the remission of sins, reconciliation with God. However, we should not forget that among the number of mandates to evangelise received from the risen Christ, is found the announcement of the remission of sins.

Evangelisation is to preach conversion and proclaim the remission of sins to all nations (Luke 24.47): and the risen Christ, breathing the Holy Spirit on the disciples, saying to them: "Those whose sins you remit are remitted." (John 20.23) During the institution of the Eucharist, the accent is again placed on the Blood poured out 'for the remission of sins' (Matt 26.28), for he who is placed in the hands of sinners is none other than the Son of Man, come on earth with the power to remit sins (Mark 2.10)

'The remission of sins' (cf Lk 1.77) allows Christians to 'know salvation' understood as the experience of redemption. Paul calls this saving event 'reconciliation with God' (2 Cor 5.17-20). It's an action accomplished by God himself while we were yet sinners and enemies (cf Rom 5.6-10). Thus, the Christian becomes 'a new creature', and can always return to the sanctifying mystery of Baptism, thanks to the experience of mercy and of forgiveness which delivers from sin and from the influence of evil.

Thus, I believe that the remission of sins must constitute the central nucleus of evangelisation. It's true that today the meaning of sin is largely lost. One of the reasons for this is that not enough has been made of the 'remission of sins', where, on God's part sins are wiped out.

To look for the Lord, to know where to meet Him, to follow him wherever he goes, this presupposes that someone upholds him as Lamb of God who bears and takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29, 35-42). If not, it's a master, a prophet who is being followed, and not the saviour, the Son of man and of God. (Luke 5.1-11) If to be evangelised is to bear witness to the paschal event of the victory of the Risen One over death, then the remission of sins today constitutes the most effective possible announcement of a similar victory at the core of our daily lives.

#### 4. The form of evangelisation

On all sides it is said today that to evangelise, one must be aware of no longer being part of a Christian regime, of being no more than part of a minority. But we should be attentive, not to read undiscerningly the sociological statistics. Historians remind us that the number of Christians today is the same if not more than the 'Christendom' era, if by 'Christians' is meant those who have a personal faith and motivation. In fact, a certain type of Christian has disappeared, making place for a new type, more mature in faith, capable of a level of Christian experience which in other times was reserved to clerics, monks and nuns; Christians who are wanting a personal experience of faith, to the point of becoming militant, or at least convinced witnesses of the Gospel.

Those who feel themselves part of a minority can feel irritation or fear, due to the weak social influence they exercise. This can cause them to seek forms of presence which are energetic and aggressive, and this seriously alters the exchange between people. In fact, a great number of evangelisers, animated by missionary zeal, end up by announcing the agapé of God, the 'God of love' by contradicting love between people, as if one could only announce the Gospel by condemnation and judgement of present times, like a tottering wall, threatening ruin to all attempts to build a more human world. Christian evangelisation should always be accompanied by charity and benevolence towards all - with '*makrothumia*', patience and magnanimity towards people and their culture. Yes, with the apostle Paul, we can repeat 'Woe is me if I do not proclaim the Good News!' (1 Cor 9.16). But, the announcement of the Gospel should emerge from *good exchanges* (cf the 'good conduct' of which St Peter speaks (1 Peter 2.12)), by a cordial exercise of *confrontation and otherness*.

The announcement must not be made at any price, nor with arrogance, that of 'catholic identity, pure and hard', nor by return to deadening certitudes, or the fading splendours of the truth. Pope Paul VI several times asked the church to seek to evangelise by dialogue/conversation (Ecclesiam Suam), not to become a sect, but to look at the world "with immense sympathy". If the world feels itself a stranger to Christianity, Christianity does not feel itself a stranger to the world, under whatever aspect the latter presents itself, or whatever attitude it displays.

That's why it's necessary to take into account the idea of being 'a companion to people', in defining the Christian presence in history. It's a matter of being in history, as Christians were described by the Epistle to Diognetus, as having good conduct, accepting serenely to be Christian in the midst of non-Christians.

It's 'no' to the visibility of the church at any cost, as a great number would like it to be. 'No' to the temptation to re-construct a catholic world, as if society only consisted of anti-Christian forces. 'No' to the post-modern refusal which regards people today with a mistrustful, condemnatory attitude. 'No' to the desire to intervene at the heart of society by authoritarian directive manipulation, or through pressure groups.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, in a significant text of 6th December 1995 for the feast of St Ambrose recalled that Christians should not 'pursue the objective of the Christianisation of society by force and power. They should preserve with the greatest care, a care almost jealous, the proper character and uniqueness of the Christian Word, in the face of contemporary ways of speaking.

To evangelise is to hide the yeast in the dough, to put salt and seasoning into food. It is to propagate the blessings of meaning, without forgetting that Christ wanted His church to be as 'pusillus grex', a little flock, clothed with the power of the Word for sure, but only doing so with the historic weakness of the cross in mind.

### **Obstacles to evangelisation.**

The church must say, like Christians: 'I am happy to boast of my weakness, because the power of Christ will sustain me.' (2 Cor 12.9). This is precisely why real evangelisation has no need of ecclesial over-exposition. On the contrary, it requires vigilance against all temptation to inflate the role of the church in a way that would make its mediation more obvious. Like St John the Baptist, like Mary, the Lord's mother, the church continues to uphold Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Jesus and him alone. Obviously, the church will not escape arousing the suspicion of being preoccupied with increasing its numbers, rather than giving priority to the promotion of encounter between man with God, by conversion and faith. The more the church is self-renouncing, the better it will know its Lord, and show him among men.

### **Witness by the power of attraction**

Twenty years ago it was said that evangelisation as a form of mission had had its day, and that a new form was beginning, called 'the new evangelisation'. Today, already, this expression no longer seems to correspond to need. I hardly appreciate, any more than I trust formulas that are close to being slogans, for drawing up programmes and pastoral plans for the church. They are formulae which seem unclear about whom such activities concern, and only last a season. Also I prefer the New Testament expression of evangelisation, and am ever ready to verify its use whenever time and place require it.

In this respect, means of announcing the Gospel in past or even recent circumstances are no longer for today. However useful they may have been in the past, I prefer not to take them up again. To announce the Gospel to non-Christians by verbal preaching is admittedly almost impossible today. The church is not frequented by non-Christians. There is a lack of places which don't belong to the church, where it is possible for non-Christians to listen.

Pope Paul VI in his marvellous apostolic exhortation *Evangelii in mundum* underlined that the first means of evangelising is the witness of 'an authentic Christian life', a life faithful to the Lord Jesus, a life where poverty, gratuity and freedom radiate, a life which justifies 'reasons for hope'.

Evangelisation today is achieved advantageously by the power of attraction. To evangelise consists of 'giving an account of the hope that lies in us' to those who ask us the reasons (1 Peter 3.15). They live alongside us, see us, hear us every day, there where we are, where we work and take our rest.

To transmit our intimate experience of faith through indispensable personal contact is the most fertile manner of bringing the Gospel to another person. Less, a town sited on a hill, (cf Matt 5.14) and more, 'salt of the earth' (cf Matt 5.13), Christians will not be unfaithful to the Lord's mandate, if they give a reason for their faith first and above all by their personal manner of life in the family as well as in society. Let's not forget that faith is a matter of relationships!

A permanent and daily witness, diffusing itself from cell to cell will ensure an evangelisation which is doubtless better and more effective than if it were the work of an ecclesial body using verbal announcements or even the media. Families, above all will allow this 'witness by

attraction', and thus also communities, associations which today show most eloquently how to be the church.

### **A community faithful to the earth.**

Finally, for evangelisation, I believe it is necessary to reveal a Christianity which is completely human, and thus faithful to this earth. It's true that there were periods in the church's history which were marked by *'fuga mundi'*, flight from the world, including not only flight from worldliness, but also flight from human company. This was characterised by a certain distrust of our world (*contemptus mundi*), and escape from history. But today, there is a proven need to consider 'the height of things' (cf Col 3.12) in remaining faithful to the earth, this earth, created by God as a good thing; this blessed earth, this earth beloved of Jesus, as the place where our salvation is achieved.

Are we thus in search of a Christianity which shows other traits, new traits in relation to the past? I believe, yes. Christians proving the need, people hoping for it. In fact, today we understand Christianity as a quest for God in the dull ordinariness of history and human existence. We understand the journey towards holiness as integrating mind and body, without facile dualism. We know no longer to say 'salvation' without at the same time saying 'liberation'.

Today, more than ever, witness insists that we should learn and practice 'elementary human grammar'. What it is to be a man or a woman, to be with another, to love and be loved ... It's on the inside of this very human space, that we need to transmit the Good News as a project for life. It's in the human view that the Gospel must be seen and recognised as 'proper human existence' in the best sense of the term, as the work of art which all should become. Our contemporaries and above all the young are asking for 'foundational experiences', and for people who can initiate and accompany them. All this is realised, thanks to personal encounters where the human quality should be the first concrete declaration of Christian faith and its value. "Tell more what sort of man you are, and I will tell you who God is." as Theophile of Antioch once said.

God loves our world - Christians should not only recognise this but sing it out. God has put us in this world to look for Him and to love Him. It's this world which, transfigured during the Lord's coming, will constitute the dwelling of God in all, where He will be all in all. (1 Cor 15.28).

In his first encyclical, Pope John Paul II spoke in an inspired manner for the link between the Gospel, humanism and evangelisation. In reality, this deep admiration before the dignity and value of humankind is expressed in the word Gospel, meaning 'Good News'. It is linked to Christianity. This admiration justifies the mission of the church in the world, and perhaps even more again 'in the contemporary world' this admiration, which is at once persuasion and certainty, and that in its fundamental roots is certainty of faith, without ceasing to give life in a mysterious and hidden manner to all aspects of authentic humanism, is narrowly linked to Christ.

For this evangelism, faithful to the earth, a human church and Christians is needed! May the church live, first of all with the poor and sinners, may it forget itself, release itself from the temptation to build itself up, and recognise its profound mission, and reason for being - to serve humanity.

## Conclusion

At the end of these reflections on evangelisation, it is necessary to recall one thing that is always asked of Christians, which is not, as such to be converted, but to witness in love to the hope that dwells in them by the grace of faith. We all need to put this into action, to accomplish evangelism. We must be instruments of this eschatological and pneumatic event. We must never cease to pray 'so that the word of the Lord may follow its course and be glorified' (2 Thess 3.1). We must make visible that the fact that it is a beautiful humane work to live as a Christian, and not forget that 'not all have faith' (2 Thes 3.2).

Our mission consists of transmitting the gift received without charge, I would say, without measuring the degree of success achieved. The Gospel should not follow the course taken by products bought and sold. It should not be weighed by the size of the audience it has succeeded in winning. It comes back to a style of evangelisation dominated by the logic of appearances, of efficacy, consensus, the will to create conditions allowing the church to be noticed and be influential in society. This contradicts the Gospel, supports people's refusal, and can only take away the voice of Christians engaged in witness.

In these earthen vessels we jealously guard the precious gift of the Gospel, well aware that it concerns all people, and that, with all, we must rejoice in it. That is why for a long time the Gospel was announced mainly with words and symbols. It must from now on be announced first through the witness of Christian life, and only after this, by word. This evangelisation is the act of a church capable of bringing forth martyrs. Yes, it is the evangelisation of the martyr.

*"The church thinks that these multitudes have the right to know the richness of the mystery of Christ in which we believe, that all humanity can find in unsuspected fullness, all that it is looking for, touching upon the subject of God, man, destiny, life, death, and the truth."*

Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii mutandii*

*"Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, speaks to man as a man also himself: its his life which speaks, his humanity, his faithfulness to the truth, his love which extends to all. His death on the cross also speaks, that is to say, the unfathomable depths of his suffering and abandonment."*

Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*