

The New Evangelisation of the Twenty First Century

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The word Evangelisation is being used a great deal these days and to very good purpose. We find it in the writings of recent Popes and especially in two important documents of Paul VI and John Paul II. In 1975 Paul VI published *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelisation in the Modern World)¹ which received new attention on its 30th anniversary in 2005. In 1990 John Paul II published *Redemptoris Missio* (The Mission of the Redeemer).² John Paul II also spoke widely of the new Evangelisation in his documents concerning the millennium.

We find this talk of evangelisation not only in papal documents but in theological and pastoral writing throughout the Church, indeed throughout the Churches. John Paul II called for a new evangelisation and Paul VI for a new period of evangelisation.³ The word 'new' is significant in that it betrays the awareness that what has happened before in countries once considered Christian needs to happen again in those same countries.

What is Evangelisation?

But what do we mean by this new evangelisation? Are we simply dealing with a better or new or more effective presentation of the doctrines of the Church? Is it a catechetical renewal that we are seeking? Is it a return to things as they were in times that seem more flourishing than our present time? Is it even simply a question of the adoption of new media in the proclaiming the Gospel? What is specific to this talk of Evangelisation?

For a start we need to note that talk of a new evangelisation has arisen in

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1. *Evangelii Nuntiandi, On Evangelisation in the Modern World* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1975). Henceforth EN.
2. *Redemptoris Missio, Mission of the Redeemer* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1990). Henceforth RM.
3. EN, 2.

the face of the experience of a breakdown in the handing on of the faith in Western countries – and especially in Europe. These countries have traditionally been Christian of one flavour or another and the countries in which this talk of a new evangelisation is most acute are those which have been traditionally Catholic or in which there has been a strong minority Catholic community. In our time we do not seem to be able to hand on the faith with the effectiveness that once was the case. This breakdown is of course having its effect in every area of the Church's life.

Something more seems to be needed than the simple handing on of the truths of the faith if that faith is to have impact on people living in our contemporary culture.

There is a section in Paul VI's document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which is important in understanding evangelisation adequately:

For the Church evangelizing means bringing the good news into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: 'Now I am making the whole of Creation new' (Rev 21.5, cf. 2Cor 5.17; Gal 6.15). But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.

The strata of humanity which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the word of God and the plan of salvation.⁴

This list of things which make up the strata of humanity to be renewed is worth singling out from the above quotation to give us an initial response to what we mean by evangelisation. These strata indicate the level at which the Gospel needs to meet people if it is to effect interior change in them. That level involves the whole orientation of our human lives and our personal formation, the very shaping of our personality. These strata involve our criteria of judgment, our determining values, our points of interest, our lines of thought, our sources of inspiration, our models of life. This list of phrases describe the level at which the inner change of evangelisation needs to occur.

4. EN,18 & 19.

What we also need to notice in this quotation is that evangelisation is not seen as a purely individual thing but concerns the whole person in their whole context, especially their social context: the Gospel seeks to convert 'both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs'. In brief as we shall see later, it involves the culture in which human beings live; and human culture is interior, not just exterior to human personality. Thus our culture is inevitably involved in evangelisation. In the course of history some cultures have proved more amenable to evangelisation than others. As a consequence we have to look at cultural influences as a possible explanation for the situation we are experiencing in handing on the faith today.

This cultural influence can be important in at least two ways. There can be difficulties in the society or culture which impede the reception of the Gospel. Such difficulties are often reported in Japan and in Muslim countries because of the profound unity of religion and culture found in those cultures. On the other hand the difficulty can come from previously imbibed cultural influences in the actual historical proclamation of the Gospel as we bring that to a new situation and culture. As Paul VI says in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: 'Nevertheless the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures.'⁵ So as the proclamation of the Gospel proceeds through history we can discover aspects of that proclamation which belong to the cultures within which it has previously been lived and proclaimed rather than being essential elements of the Gospel itself. We discover this as the further proclamation of the Gospel proceeds within new cultures. This discovery involves careful, critical discernment in the light of the tradition. Thus there will be instances in which we will be led to discover and relativise those absorbed cultural elements in order to free the Gospel from them and so enable the Gospel to be more effectively preached in the new cultural setting.

Before going on to draw out further the significance of evangelization, I want to go back into history and present a few cameos of evangelization as it has previously occurred so that we may gain a better grasp of our subject matter.

Historical Examples

1. The first proclamation of the Gospel occurred in a first century Palestinian Jewish setting and it happened within the ongoing tradition of the Old Testament. Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel occurred within his time and culture so much so that we need to retrieve something of that time and place in order to understand what his words and actions mean. The retrieval of that context always further enlightens us as to the meaning of his words and actions. His presence, words and actions cause a shift within that situation in that they affect it from within and thereby cause radical change. Those changes

5. EN, 20.

could only have happened within that tradition and they transform it from within. As an example of this we could take the New Testament's transference of the primary reference of the Passover feast from the Exodus of the Old Testament to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus led his contemporaries into a quite new era to be named after himself but he did that by exposing, questioning and challenging 'the criteria of judgment, the determining values etc...' that he found among his contemporaries. Etymologically, the very word *metanoia* (conversion, repentance) to which Jesus called his followers speaks of a 'going beyond one's mind' a shift of mind or mentality. Such a change of mind presumes as its starting point the mindset out of which the change occurs. The preoccupation which Jesus has about the use of the word 'Messiah' shows again the rootedness of the original proclamation of the Gospel in the Old Testament and its history and the change that Jesus sought to bring about within it.

2. We have a crucial example of evangelisation with Paul on the Areopagus in Athens narrated in Acts 17:16-34. There was Paul in Athens the centre of the Hellenistic world. He was there to proclaim Christ to that new world. He was in a city full of idols (v.16); there was no Old Testament background in that culture to provide the fertile ground for evangelisation. He began '.....I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters, because, as I strolled around looking at your sacred monuments, I noticed among other things an altar inscribed: To an Unknown God. In fact the unknown God you revere is the one I proclaim to you' (v.22-23). Thus does Paul lead into the proclamation of Christ from within their religious culture.

Paul could not refer to Jesus as Messiah as he would have done among the Jews because it had no point of reference in the Gentile situation. Instead he found fertile soil for the beginning of his proclamation of Christ in the Hellenistic religious background. And there are two dimensions to Paul's action on the Areopagus with regard to evangelisation: firstly, there is the immediate situation in which he finds himself and secondly there is the longer term process of evangelisation in the world of the gentiles of the Greco-Roman empire. The term he takes up as his beginning point, 'the unknown God', has great potential significance when we see it in the context of the Greek culture and their philosophical discussions concerning the divine. This will prove to be crucial in the ongoing history of the Christian faith and its spread with the culture of the Roman Empire.

This will bring the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ into a different concrete cultural form of 'the strata of humanity'. It is interesting that John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* suggests that what we need to find today is a 'new Areopagus'.

3. In 313 when the Emperor Constantine granted official recognition and peace to the Church, Christianity began to unfold publicly and culturally in the Greco-Roman world. It eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire which thereby became a Christian Empire. Gradually the culture of that Empire was christianised. This establishment of an identity between

Christianity and society which we call 'Christendom' became the means of evangelisation at work in that society; it provided the means by which people became Christian.

Given that it was inconceivable in the early Middle Ages for a ruler to have a different religion to his people, it made sense at that time to convert the rulers, and the christianisation of their people would follow. Such Christian societies provided the environment in which their members became Christian by a kind of social osmosis; it was a part of the social and cultural identity which they absorbed by being part of that society. This is not to question the genuineness of the faith of those people; it simply describes the way in which they came to faith. In its time it made sense and was effective. It was the particular way in which evangelisation happened. A society became Christian in its culture and institutions with the inevitable result that its members became Christian on the same principle that people become Australian by being part of Australian society or become Italian by being part of Italian society.

4. The unity of Christianity and society referred to as Christendom was the basic means of evangelisation throughout the ensuing centuries. In the process of establishing such societies the great missionaries of the first millennium preached the Gospel throughout those areas we now know as Europe. These missionaries worked, as they had to, beginning within the mentality of the peoples with whom they were dealing, which was also to a considerable extent their own mentality. We have the likes of St Boniface who in dealing with the Germanic peoples would cut down their sacred oak trees! This was an act of evangelisation! Those sacred oak trees were seen as the material concretisation of their gods and cutting them down was a challenge to the reality of those gods. Cutting down those trees showed the powerlessness and falsity of those gods. This was a language understood by those peoples with whom the missionaries were dealing. It was a step into their world in order to create a shift in that world and to begin to make that world new in terms of Christ's Gospel.

This was an act of courage and faith on the part of those missionaries because their grandparents had probably worshipped such trees and of course the mists of that old religion would still be within the missionaries themselves. They were also evangelising themselves.

5. Similarly in the early Middle Ages evangelisation was being carried forward among people upon whom the reality of fate fell heavily. They saw this as a destiny imposed upon them from which they could not escape. This was implicit within their grasp of reality; it was part of their 'mind' or mentality. This was so strong that it tended to exclude such things as sin, repentance and forgiveness from their worldview since all of these presume human freedom in order to make sense: and human freedom in their worldview was enslaved to this understanding of fate. In this we see a conflict of mentalities which required change not just in the individual but in the culture and mentality of the society.⁶ Such a change involves those strata of

6. See James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Medieval Christianity*, (New York/Oxford: OUP, 1994), 162-3.

humanity listed by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Such a change is not just a matter of doctrine but posits the need for a dialogue between the gospel and that culture.

6. Related to the above instance of evangelisation there is another noteworthy example. This involves the perception of sin as something interior to the person. The mentality of the time was such, as implied in the instance immediately above, that sin could easily be conceived as a taboo, something which it was forbidden to do whether one intended to do it or not. It was the exterior action alone which was wrong or brought a curse down on the perpetrator. This is an aspect of the force of fate. What we find in the Irish Penitentials and especially that of Columban is an awareness of the importance of personal intention in the nature of sin. Columban's Penitential spoke explicitly not just about murder, fornication, robbery, and the like, but about the desire to do such things thus encouraging a shift in the understanding of sin. In this we see the influence of the Gospel upon the mentality and morality of the time.⁷

A New Situation

In the third instance of evangelisation noted above – the establishment of a Christian society which would in turn christianise its members – we have the continuing means of evangelisation that has been at work through most of Christian history.

This social system and culture known as Christendom provided a more or less unrivalled view of the world into which it initiated its members. This was presupposed and worked by means of a social osmosis on those who lived within the society.

In the late Middle Ages a gap began to appear between the view of the world enshrined in the structures and atmosphere of a Christian society and glimpses of the world which did not quite fit the Christian view of the universe as enshrined by Christendom.

On the one hand, the Reformation broke Christendom up into various Christendoms and the principle *cuius regio eius religio* (let the religion of a region be that of its ruler) was the means by which the post-Reformation conflicts between these Christendoms was brought to an end. Thus we got 'Catholic', 'Anglican' 'Reformed' and 'Lutheran' Christendoms, corresponding to those areas in which each denomination was established.

Secondly, the new scientific discoveries of the world by Copernicus, Galileo and others began to create cracks in the fabric of the Christendom system which accounts for the strength of the religious reaction to them. Also rulers began to claim rights in such things as the law of marriage and divorce which had previously been the reserve of the Church in accord with the Christendom principle.

One of the strong tendencies of the history of Western Europe over the last

7. See Russell, *Germanization of Medieval Christianity*, 160; and Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Cambridge, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 153-160.

few centuries has been that of an increasing secularisation or withdrawal of various dimensions of human life from the preserve of the Churches and eventually from any influence of Christianity. We can see today that we live in a world in which the increasingly 'established' situation is secularity and pluralism. Religion is no longer an established element of these societies as was formerly the case. One could even say that the established situation is 'independence from religion'.

Such desire for independence from religion can explain the strongly reactive tendency present in many of these societies today. It is reactive to the earlier religious situation in which religion is seen to have been entirely too dominant. On the one hand this is understandable but on the other there is a certain imbalance in that reactive character as it manifests an anti-religious bias in practice when in principle such societies proclaim themselves to be secular and pluralist.

In terms of evangelisation the last few centuries have led us to a situation in which the old principle of evangelisation can no longer work. Since there is no longer a Christian society there can no longer be that social osmosis by which the members of a society become Christian. This situation has been coming about over several centuries but it has become obvious in the late twentieth and the current century. Thus the call for a new evangelisation.

As a result of this development over the last several centuries, the Church now finds itself in a society which does not accept but indeed challenges many of 'the criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life' which have long been part of the Christian tradition and which are rooted in the Gospel. This highlights the new task of evangelisation.

This situation is both new and not new. We can hear voices that have been speaking about this back to the end of the Second World War and beyond. To mention but one example, Cardinal Suhard, the Archbishop of Paris at the end of the Second World War, called France, often known as 'the eldest daughter of the Church', a Mission country. It is new in that the message has come home to us more clearly, it has been taken up by the highest authorities in the Church and it is seen as crucial for the Church's future.

Evangelisation

1. Evangelisation is not just a matter of teaching doctrine better. In the past our teaching, even if unknowingly, presumed the social and cultural dynamics of a Christian society at work forming its members. So the social dynamic of a Christian society formed the 'strata of humanity' of its members in a Christian manner and the explicit teaching – whatever form it took – informed those same people of the significance of that Christianity into which they had been initiated. Because of this cultural change, it is crucial that we go beyond the understanding that we are dealing with a failure of our schools or parishes or families. We are not dealing with a situation which can be remedied simply by better teaching or more dedication.

We are dealing with a cultural change which has taken the rug out from

under us; it has removed that fundamental, taken for granted, social atmosphere upon which we relied even if unknowingly. Members of our Western societies – and especially the more secular of those societies like Australia – are less and less being socialised into a Christian view of things. They are being socialised into secular and pluralist societies. If there is to be a Christian view of the world it has to come from elsewhere. In many ways the situation in which we find ourselves in such societies is more like that of the Church before the era of Christendom beginning with Constantine than that of the Church during the period of Christendom.

This is not to say that there are not Christian values embedded in such post-Christian societies. It is to say, however, that such values are no longer named as Christian and so will not lead people to see themselves as Christian. Such values would be simply taken as part of the society to which people belong. Those values are also in danger of being diluted or lost because they are no longer explicitly rooted in the source from which they come. Life values are a current example of this.

Many people continue to call themselves Christian, but they give that word a meaning so weakened that the traces of its roots in Christ and his Gospel are hard to find. In such situations the name 'Christian' is already being re-defined to mean 'good' or 'decent' or even 'law-abiding'.

If we look back to the instances of evangelisation given earlier in this article, we can see that in each instance ground had to be found within the culture or mentality of the people as a beginning point for the proclamation of the Gospel. Thus Jesus worked within the culture and mentality of the Old Testament in order to bring about a *metanoia*, a change of mind. His starting point flavoured his end point because it worked within and drew on beyond itself that earlier Old Testament situation. It was similar with Paul on the Areopagus working within Greek religiousness with his talk of 'the Unknown God'. So it is with Boniface and his Germanic tribesmen; he moves into their mentality in order to bring about a Christ-inspired *metanoia*. That inner-outer world of human culture can never be ignored if the Christian faith is to be more than an overcoat thrown over a people's natural culture.

2. Evangelisation occurs at the level of the 'strata of humanity'. It is the Gospel at work 'affecting' and when necessary 'upsetting' 'the criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life' as they are found concretely in human cultures and mentalities. There is a history of such evangelisation in the very history of the Church and its proclamation of the Gospel; just as there is also a history within the Church of the influence of the cultures and mentalities within which the Church has lived. There is both positive and negative evidence of this interplay. This history also shows the necessity of continuing evangelisation within the Church itself. The Church has to listen and re-listen to the Gospel and allow it to keep re-newing it and re-forming it from within.⁸

If we look at the historical examples given above we can see the Gospel

8. EN,15.

at work in those particular instances at the level of the strata of humanity. If we let that list of stata given by Paul VI draw up alongside those examples and form our perspective upon them, we can see that evangelisation occurring at that level in those historical instances.

Thus as Paul VI says in the same document that the starting point of evangelisation is always the human person and the human person in their relationships among themselves and with God.⁹

This in turn involves the evangelisation of cultures. The human person is not an isolated individual but lives within and draws life from the society and culture in which they live. This culture forms the human person in its own image and so the evangelisation of people involves the evangelisation of their culture, which is within them. It involves the renewal not just of the person but of that culture.¹⁰ It is worth quoting Paul VI at length on this important issue:

The Gospel, and therefore evangelisation, is certainly not identical with culture and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelisation are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelisation of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.¹¹

3. In further developing the understanding of evangelisation there are several important points to be noted in the quotation above along with some other significant matters.

(a) Paul VI notes that the split between the Gospel and culture is the drama of our time. He adds 'just as it was of other times'. There is, however, a specific character to this split in our time (as noted above) and that is that we are dealing with secular and pluralist cultures which are the particular product of modern times. We can no longer take for granted the presumption of the existence of God (or of gods) in the minds of people. This requires a change of ground greater than that of Paul on the Areopagus. It means that we can no longer work as did a Boniface by starting within the understanding of the

9. EN, 20

10. EN, 20; RM, 37b&c.

11. EN, 20.

divine which he found among the people to whom he was speaking. The ground we move onto to find our starting point has to be some aspect of the human as is suggested by Paul VI and John Paul II.

(b) The word 'regenerated' is a word to be noted. It fits in with what is the key Scripture text for this whole document: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new' (Rev 21:5)¹² The idea at work in the use of this quotation is that the Gospel is the means of making humankind in all its dimensions 'new'; and so the use of the word 'regenerated'. The importance of this is the rich understanding of redemption that it implies; a conception of redemption that ties it in with creation. Through the Gospel of Christ, through Christ himself, the whole of creation is 'made new': it is renewed, regenerated, opened up anew to the life-giving breath of God. It does this without neglecting the need for the recognition of that in human affairs which is incompatible with the Gospel, namely sin and death. The Gospel is not seen in this document as an overlay on human cultures but as permeating them and thus making them new-

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This has a very important consequence. Evangelisation thus understood does not set our created world and human cultures aside but works within them. This is a very different understanding of evangelisation to that fundamentalist notion of it which falls back upon that destructive dualism which sees the Gospel as separate from or even condemning of the world and society as we know it. Such a view is radically unfaithful to the Catholic Tradition, one of whose basic principles is the fundamental unity of creation and redemption. It recognises the world as coming from the hand of the same God who redeems us and his world in and through Christ. For the same reason evangelisation can never be seen as separate from the sacraments which unite creation and redemption.

(c) The Gospel is at work 'affecting' and 'as it were upsetting all that is in contrast with the word of God and the plan of salvation'.¹⁴ It is also an essential part of the Gospel – the two-edged sword of God's word – to identify and highlight sin and death in order to put an end to their capacity to impede the regeneration of humanity and all of creation. This identification of evil is of a piece with the transformation of creation.

(d) The renewing of creation cannot occur without the explicit proclamation of Christ's Gospel and the entry of its light into human affairs, human activities and human cultures. It is this light which sheds its unique radiance upon the lights and the shadows of our world; in its light we see light as we also see darkness.

This has to happen in the historical actuality of humanity or it cannot have its effect in human consciences, activities and milieux.¹⁵ God is at work in the historical occurrence of our human world – in consciences, activities and milieux; just as he was at work in the actual history of Jesus of Nazareth. God

12. EN, 18.

13. EN, 20.

14. EN, 19.

15. EN, 18.

was at work in the attitudes and decisions of Jesus. The interplay between Jesus and those he encountered involved his and their attitudes and decisions and this was the theatre of God's activity encountering humanity as it is and seeking to lead it to himself. All of these attitudes and actions were determining the future of that instance of human history which just happened to be crucial for the whole of human history, for the future of the covenant between God and human beings.

God continued to be at work in all that came about as an historical result of those actions and decisions involved in Jesus' life and death. He continued to encounter human beings in the new situation brought about by their attitudes and actions. God is at work in the actual interplay of the human history of our world. So the perspectives of the Gospel and the actions inspired by it have to be actually at work within our historical human world. In God's strange ways just as Jesus was so much at the mercy of human beings, so is God's action in the continuing history of humanity. A quasi-platonic otherworldliness in which human thought and action do not matter disables the Gospel. Radically, historically, God-is-with-us!

Evangelisation involves us in living and proclaiming the Gospel as an authentic but critical presence in our culture. We seek those elements in our culture which provide us with new 'areopagoi'.¹⁶

(e) Evangelisation needs to happen in a spirit of solidarity and friendship. This solidarity is that spoken of by Vatican II's document on the Church in the Modern World in these words:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor and afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs in a community composed of men, who united by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men.¹⁷

Evangelisation needs to happen in a spirit of friendship. We need to avoid the grudging attitude sometimes found in believers who are still grieving for the Christian society of the past. We cannot afford nostalgia for a past that is indeed past. To regard all of those who do not believe or who do not practise as negligent Christians who need correction is to avoid meeting the new situation in which we find ourselves. We need to accept the new situation in which we will indeed find people who are the products of a secular and pluralist society who have not really been related to Christianity by their socialisation. Such people do not see themselves in the same religious light as those who went before them – before them, perhaps, just by one generation.

16. Cf. RM, 37c.

17. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1

Even if they profess some faith in God, it will so often tend to have a certain formlessness to it in accord with the society to which they belong. As a basic attitude we need to be friends and pilgrims in our common humanity with the people of our time and we need to have respect for them and their belief. This creates the atmosphere for the dialogue of evangelisation within our cultural setting.

We can of course find people who do have a sufficient Christian faith to feel that they need to put their faith into better practice but this we cannot automatically assume. We will also find people who do not have faith or whose faith is fairly formless who come from practising Catholic families and who have had many years of Catholic Education. In my opinion this shows the power of the process of socialisation into one's basic society. Societies tend to make their members in their own image and likeness as did the Christian society of the Middle Ages and as do strictly Islamic societies today.

(f) Evangelisation is going to require serious theological and pastoral work and study. We need to ascertain the particular cultural form in which the 'strata of humanity' appear within our culture and also to allow ourselves to rediscover the riches and subtlety of our tradition as it encounters new cultures. There is a parallel here between the work of evangelisation, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue: in all of them there is an exchange which sheds light not only on the beliefs of those with whom we are in dialogue but also on our own tradition. We bring new questions and new perspectives to that tradition, out of the authentic dialogue.

The hard work of such study and research is unavoidable. We cannot be content with merely seeking lowest common denominators between the Gospel and cultures, nor can we ever be happy with syncretisms or rational solutions which ignore the mystery dimension of the Christ we seek to proclaim. As in Ecumenism and interreligious Dialogue, we do not seek compromise but the emergence of new perspectives and insights and the clearing away of the dross of human misunderstanding.

(g) All that is said above gives more rather than less importance to the Parish, the School and the Christian Family. These are the precious places where the Gospel can be lived and proclaimed. In all three we have the opportunity to make the Gospel explicit, ferment the love of Christ and let the joy of the Gospel ring out. In all three we have to find ways in which we can give the Gospel the chance to prosper.

(h) I return to one of the points made above. We must evangelise as friends, as fellow pilgrims of the human journey. We are not a ghetto or a sect: we are not supposed to be separated from the society about us but to be a seed of the Gospel within it. Sometimes that will require us to be counter-cultural. Humanity is as precious to us as to any other human beings. We have irreplaceable light to shed upon it, that light of the Gospel which we have accepted in the name of all humanity; that humanity which it is God's purpose to bring to himself.

(i) Finally a crucial and comforting point: John Paul II makes a point which we in our self concern can easily overlook, namely that evangelisation

is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Note that he says first and foremost. This accounts for the fact that genuine evangelisation brings forth things that are new within the ever ancient and ever new tradition. And the Spirit of God is not just at work among those who seek to evangelise, but says John Paul II 'in every time and place',¹⁹ and so in the cultures engaged by the dialogue of evangelisation, in the cultures of secularist and pluralist societies.

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18. RM,21-30.

19. RM, 2.