

John paul ii's call for new evangelization essay sample

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In his Guardian U. K. obituary in April 2005 Pope John Paul II was described as a pontiff

with a sense of mission.[1] This missionary call was to affect the whole tenor of his pontificate, yet there were a number of reasons why it was not the success that it might have been.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the archbishop of Westminster, England, described him at the end of his reign as “ The first world evangelist,” [2] This fits in with the Pope's words at his inaugural mass when he addressed not just the people of Rome, but the whole world saying “ Open wide the doors for Christ! To his saving power, open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilisation and development. Do not be afraid! Christ ‘ knows what is in man’. He alone knows it.”[3] His concern for the people of the whole world, whatever their religious convictions were, was recognised by Catholics and indeed by those of other faiths. At the time of his death a young Jewish man, Henry Silver was reported as saying that as a Jew, he came to “ pay my respects” to the “ first pope to go to a synagogue and to pray at the Wailing Wall” in Jerusalem. “ He's the pope for Catholics, but I feel like he prays for everyone and has appreciation for everyone,” [4]

In his Catholic Reporter obituary there is a reference to a quote by architect Daniel Burnham: “ Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood.”[5] Whether or not John Paul II ever heard the quote he certainly lived as if he had. Robert McFadden of the New York Times[6] states that it was obvious right from the beginning of his reign that this was a papacy which

would ‘ reshape the church with a heroic vision of a combative, disciplined Catholicism’ and this was what was attempted. In 1990 Pope John Paul II produced an encyclical on the subject of evangelization, in which he describes his own intention to travel all around the world in order to show how important mission is.

He in fact visited more than 100 countries in his attempts to promote the faith. ‘ Redemptoris Missio’ [7] is described as being concerned with ‘ the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate’ and as having the goal of renewing both faith and Christian life. The subject of the New Evangelism is heralded on the web site ‘ The New Evangelization ‘ as ‘[8]Building the Civilization of Love’. It was not his only effort to bring about spiritual renewal and this particular document cannot be read in isolation, but reflects the general direction of what John Paul II saw as his Petrine mission. This he also attempted with the Year of the Redemption, the Marian Year and the Year of the Eucharist.

The Pope believed that missionary endeavor was the sign of a strong church and indeed caused it to be strong. In the encyclical we are told that “ It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God,” and “ For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive”. Yet the web site which records many of evangelistic activities of the church throughout the world seems to take a little step back from the position of all being involved by adding that all could be concerned ‘ at least in prayer’. By the example of his evangelistic efforts even in the extreme difficulties of his physical existence

John Paul II showed that even such a state was no barrier to the task of evangelism.

During a speech made in Mexico City in January 1999 the Pope described this new evangelism as 'a seed of hope for the new millennium'.^[9] But it would only be so if Catholics of that day could make an effort to carry the message described as the 'precious legacy of human and Christian values which have given meaning to your life'. The Pope went on to emphasize the need for a proper Christian education to be available and the need of individual's to strive towards personal holiness both in family life and, if so called, in a consecrated or priestly role. We can perhaps link the challenge of 'Redemptoris Missio' to a similar challenge in 2000 in the document 'Novo Millennio Ineunte' ^[10] wherein the faithful were challenged by Jesus' words to Simon Peter to 'launch out into the deep' in order to obtain a catch which Christ could see waiting for them. Luke 5 v 4, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch'.

He speaks of the Spirit having been poured upon the church, but mentions too demands to be reconsidered and 'deciphered' in order to better understand what God was saying to the church 10 years on from the call to the second evangelization of the world. The Pontiff spoke of a need to profit from grace received by translating it into action and initiatives and concludes by urging local churches to make an assessment of its fervor and to find fresh enthusiasm for its responsibilities. This would of course include its enthusiasm for evangelization.

In the encyclical 'Redemptoris Missio' all members of the church are urged to devote some time to evangelism. He believed that God was preparing the world to receive the Gospel. He states that the supreme duty of every Christian and every part of the church is an unavoidable task of proclaiming the gospel to every person.

The writers of John Paul II's obituary describe how, throughout his life, even when Parkinson's disease and other physical problems made life extremely difficult, his vision remained clear. The writers of the obituary however feel that the pontiff, during his reign gradually alienated those he needed to carry out the task of the 'second evangelization' of the world. They describe how the 23,000 members of the Jesuit order, upon the illness of their leader Father Arrupe, found that the pope suspended their right to elect a new leader, instead imposing one of his own choosing upon them.

There were similar problems with Carmelites and Franciscans, both of who were expected to return to antiquated rules that they had voted against. It was felt that the 1994 synod was designed to exert control over the religious. The Pontiff seemed to be on the side of newer groups such as Opus Dei and Comunione e Liberazione. For instance the founder of Opes Dei, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, was canonized with great rapidity, despite his earlier pro-Hitler stance. At about the same time the six Jesuits, who, together with their housekeeper and her daughter, were murdered in El Salvador in 1989, were more or less ignored by the pontiff. Established theologians were attacked and discredited right from the first year of the pontificate. This even

stretched to the point of excommunicating a Sri Lankan theologian, Tissa Balasuriya, in 1997.

The pope seemed unable , perhaps because of his background in Communist Poland, to understand the difference between a loyal group, who did not necessarily share every idea with him, and true dissent. Academic freedom was felt to be at risk. Then many bishops felt offended when ultra traditionalists were appointed. These were often linked to Opus Dei and their remit was to restore order in sees considered to be 'troublesome'. This especially applied to Europe and South America. It seemed to some Catholics that the more someone was disliked the more likely he was to be consecrated as a bishop. In Chur, Switzerland the people were so incensed at the consecration of Wolfgang Hass as bishop that they lay down on the ground in front of the cathedral.

The second Vatican Council had spoken of a collegiate and of teamwork, but under the leadership of John Paul II national benches of bishops found that their teaching role was eliminated and that they had no theological status. This was more and more to be a one man show.

The laity were informed that if they practised birth control they were effectively 'atheists' because they were denying the kingship of God in their lives. The pope claimed to want to improve status of women, yet at the same time seemed to consider that their only aspiration should be to motherhood. He was much criticised when he forbade the use of condoms as this of course resulted in many more deaths from Aids than there might have been,

The area of ecumenism took a backward step, both in the east and the west, although it must be said that links with Islam and Judaism were apparently strengthened. In the east of course the pope was pivotal in bringing to an end communism, but he enraged the heads of the eastern churches when he set up archbishoprics within their territories. This encroachment was considered to be apostasy i. e an attempt to turn people away from their traditional Orthodox beliefs to Catholicism.

Catholics were forbidden to even discuss the ordination of women, despite the fact that for the first 4-500 years of its history women were ordained. In fact Pope Gelesi complained at the number of women officiating at the altars.[11]

How can the above be reconciled with the words of Pope John Paul II in ' *Ordinato Sacerdotali*' (1994),[12] which is on the subject of reserving priestly ordination only for men and where the pontiff declares that from the beginning the priesthood has always been reserved for men alone.

In France the catechetical work was disgarded and replaced in 1992. In England a new Cathechism was long delayed because it contained inclusive language. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, produced numerous documents which have often been described as both intolerant and condemnatory.

Priests who had spent their whole careers implementing the many liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council simply could not understand why John Paul spent so much time accomodating the ideas of Archbishop Marcel

Lefebvre, who was convinced that Vatican II was a Protestant, masonic or Marxist plot. Nor were the priests happy with the way legislation laid down by Paul VI was set aside, making it very difficult indeed, under the new regime, for those who felt, for whatever reason, that they must give up their role as priest or religious.

Yet despite all these difficulties throughout his time as pontiff he worked tirelessly in order to maintain the dignity of mankind and fought against the dangers that he perceived to that dignity contained in modern life. So much so that in their obituary notice the Washington Post referred to the church as having lost its light.[13]

This call to spread the gospel isn't of course a new call. In Matthew 28 v 19 we have in the words of Christ himself the great commission.' Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'[14]

In Acts 2 we have a description of the first Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first members of the church. They very quickly began to spread the good news wherever they went, first in Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, and finally throughout Asia Minor and into Europe. Since that time of course the message has gone further. Spreading the good news of Jesus was one of the church's main activities in those early days. Later missionaries went out to Africa, America and all the rest. In modern times Pope Paul VI, who was effectively the predecessor of John Paul II, saw the

task of evangelization as the main mission of the church. He said that the basis of all evangelization is the “ one gospel given in Jesus Christ.”[15] “ As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”[16] .

Yet Wycliffe Bible Translators[17] tell us on their web page that it will take many more years before all the languages that still need the Bible will have one, though they do hope that by 2025 at least a start will have been made in these remaining languages. Up until 2008 2, 426 languages have Scripture, but of these only 429 have the complete Bible, some 1. 144 have only a New Testament and 853 languages have a t least one book of the Bible, often a gospel, in their language. At present there are some 1, 900 translation projects going on and that still leaves work that needs to take place in more than 2, 200 other languages which means that 196 million people speak languages where translation of the scriptures hasn't even begun.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent.' Romans 10 v 14, 15[18].

With words such as these in mind in 2006 there was founded, in the United States of America, the Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists and School of Evangelization. The Society is not concerned with the conversion of non-Catholics, but feels that evangelization should also include the reaching out

to lapsed or inactive Catholics as well as the building up of the regular worshippers by enabling them to better understand the faith and so move them to greater devotion. They do this by supplying evangelization materials for free or at below cost prices. They quote John Paul II as saying :-

I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.[19]

In many ways the pope sought continuously to involve others in the mission. For instance he wrote to Catholic students in Canada in December 2002 when he described how he had earlier called on young people to become a new generation of builders in the Kingdom of God. They are described as illuminating the way of the Lord. and being able to answer the question of John 6 v 68 ' to whom shall we go? '[20]

The pope's biographer, George Weigel, who spoke of John Paul II as ' a man who believed that Jesus Christ is the answer '[21] has described how, during the early years of his pontificate, John Paul II laid the basis for New Evangelization by giving 129 talks each Wednesday on what he called " The Theology of the Body." Weigel, in a commencement address at the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, in June 2004, speaking of the late pontiff referred to his ' faith, his convictions and his commitments: In a word, his impact on history is a result of his discipleship.' [22] Weigel went on

to say that every person and every situation that we meet is important, because every person is of consequence in God's plan.

Yet today, as in many other branches of the church, concern for mission can be relegated to just one Sunday in the year. The Sunday Missal[23] contains a mass ' For the Spread of the Gospel', which is to be said on a designated Sunday in October. It is the last item in the book, which does not suggest that mission is an important part of church life. People, quite happily in most cases, listen to or join in words such as ' God our Father you will all men to be saved' and ' Send workers into your harvest' and so on without realizing that this may involve action on their part more than some coins in a collection or a jumble sale.

They hear readings from passages as Isaiah 2 v 1-5 which describes how, [24]' in days to come' all nations will come to the mountain of God , but can often give little attention to how this can be achieved. Also there is a tendency among Christians to assume that mission is someone else's job and occurs in far flung parts of the globe – the jungles of Papua new Guinea or the forests of Borneo, rather than at the youth club down the road or among the senior citizens group that meets in the church hall.

Yet Pope John Paul described evangelization as the 'primary service' which Christians can give to individuals and indeed to the whole world.[25] He quotes from the first letter to the Corinthians . ' For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel![26] ' This the pilgrim pope did to the end and, despite all the opposition to his various ideas, upon his death

the crowd immediately called for his beatification. In fact the normal 5 year wait for beatification was waived in his case and the process was officially started by Cardinal Ruini, the vicar general for the diocese of Rome, in June 2005 only a few weeks after his death.

In his comments upon Pope John Paul II John Allen[27] uses both the words 'defensive' and 'daring', two extremes that perhaps sum him up. Daring to strike out for what he believed in, yet also a firm defender of what he believed the church should stand for, even if that made life uncomfortable. Not everyone agreed with everything he did, a fact that he found to be problematical, but no one doubted his good intentions. Evangelization was important to him because he absolutely believed in texts such as Romans 3 v 23 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, Romans 6 v 23, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, and of course in John 3 v 16 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.'[28]

This last text was central to his first encyclical 'Redemptor hominis' or 'Redeemer of Man' He went on in that text to say that the consciousness of the church must go alongside universal openness, so that everyone may be able to find "the unsearchable riches of Christ".[29] Ephesians 3 v 8. This he knew applied not just to one section of society, but to every person on the planet and he spent his pontificate ensuring that as many people as possible were reached by the good news of the kingdom of God. As the result of his initiative we can read books such as 'John Paul II and the New

Evangelization: How you can bring the good news to others' by Martin and Williamson, a book described by Peter Kreeft as “ proof that Catholics are rediscovering the fact that the Catholic church is as essentially ‘ evangelical’ as any Protestant denomination.”[30]

John Paul II's biographer George Weigel stressed the pope's conviction that any act of evangelization must be rooted in prayer.[31] Throughout it all the pontiff's integrity and his faith shone out as a beacon in a dark world. Didn't Christ say that we should be like a city on a hill[32] that cannot be hid. This Pope John Paul II managed to combine being the salt also enjoined by Christ and spread wherever he went. By the end of his life of course he was in a wheelchair, and unable to speak, yet even through this his wish to evangelize was evident as, just by his presence, his faith and its importance was proclaimed.

His example has led to many initiatives such as those by the Catherine of Siena Institute which seeks to prepare lay apostles in their parishes[33] such as their ‘ Making disciples’ seminars. The group firmly places the responsibility to evangelize upon each and every Catholic saying:-

Every lay man and woman has been called by Christ (in his or her baptism) to a unique mission, and every lay man and woman has been gifted by the Holy Spirit in order to be able to answer that call.[34]

One definition of evangelism is militant zeal for a cause. Another is dissemination of the gospel. The task is still there as is the great

commission. And the work too continues. All Christians have a duty to respond. ' Let His light shine in your lives, continue steadfastly on the path of holiness, share with everyone " the good news of a great joy which will come to all the people" (Lk 2: 10)'. [35]The then Cardinal Ratzinger, taking up the baton, said on the web site ' The New Evangelization' site which in very exact detail tells all about the need to evangelize in each and every land:-

To evangelize means to show this path – to teach the art of living. At the beginning of his public life Jesus says: I have come to evangelize the poor (Luke 4 v 18). This means ' I have the answer to your fundamental question; I will show you the path of life, the path towards happiness – rather, I am that path.

Yet despite all this encouragement and the recognized need Father Ray Ryland is able to feel justified in writing an article entitled ' The Great Omission' outlining his belief that Catholics are not especially adept at spreading the gospel.[36] He exhorts his readers to keep the faith and not just to themselves. Perhaps he has hit on something. Too many people think of faith as a personal thing. Catholic styles of worship mean that faith is shown by actions rather than words, the sharing in the Eucharist for example.

This is fine in itself, but does not help people who never enter a church or help Catholics to learn how to explain their faith. They just aren't used to saying ' Jesus saved me from my sin and he can help you too.' This ability to

testify to what they believe is even more important today when so many are not bought up with any knowledge of a faith. As well as more formal styles of service perhaps Catholics need more informal sharing sessions.

These are available, but for many are not a regular part of their Christian life. In this at least the Evangelicals may have something to teach the church and the methods that they use could at least be examined. For example home groups. More people come to Christ through the witness of a friend in the first place than ever come through hearing a sermon. The church is struggling in many parts of the world.

In America the number of parishes without resident priests has risen from 549 in 1965 to 3, 328 in 2007 and although statistics are hard to obtain it seems that fewer people attend mass on a regular basis. [37] This only serves to emphasize the size of the task faced by each and every believer, a task John Paul II gave such prominence to . In *Catechesi Tradendae*[38] during the second year of his pontificate, catechesis, the task of making disciples is explained very carefully and at great length. Perhaps, now that we are 18 years after the writing of *Redemptoris Missio* it is time for the church to measure itself against documents such as these and consider again what must be done.

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