The New Evangelisation

Some Quotes

John XXIII

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.

*John XXIII, Opening Speech Vatican II, Oct 11 1962*

Paul VI

One fact, however, dominates these particular observations, and it is the unanimous desire to instil in the Church a new impetus to the work of evangelisation, one that is widespread, harmonious, bountiful. The church is conscious of this fundamental duty, perhaps to an extent and with such a clarity as never before.

*Paul VI, Closing Address to the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 26th October, 1974.*

Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...

*Evangelii Nuntiandi, 8th December 1975, 14.*

What matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et spes*, always taking the person as one’s starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God. The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by people 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 evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

*EN, 20.*

In this same modern world…, and this is a paradox, one cannot deny the existence of real steppingstones to Christianity, and of evangelical values at least in the form of a sense of emptiness or nostalgia. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there exists a powerful and tragic appeal to be evangelized.

*EN, 55.*

Why the need for a “new evangelisation”? This is not simply a question of Church affiliation and Mass attendance, however there are some telling measures that suggest a certain “crisis of faith” in modern Australia. In the 2011 Australian census, those who identified as having “No Religion” rose to 22.3%, an increase of 7% in a decade. This rise was more striking in the 15-34 age bracket with 28% recording “No Religion”. It is a sobering fact the second-largest “religious affiliation” in Australia is “No Religion”. Roman Catholicism, the largest single denomination (25.3%), also registered a decrease of around 2% over a decade. This data indicates a measurement, but the greater question is a diagnostic one – or to use a religious term, a moment of profound discernment.
Atheistic secularism and the absence of religious practice are found among adults and among the young, among the leaders of society and among the ordinary people, at all levels of education, and in both the old Churches and the young ones. The Church’s evangelizing action cannot ignore these two worlds, nor must it come to a standstill when faced with them; it must constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting, or representing, to them God’s revelation and faith in Jesus Christ.

**John Paul II**

The commemoration of this half millennium of evangelization will have full significance if, as bishops, with your priests and faithful, you accept it as your commitment; a commitment not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression.  

*John Paul II, Discourse to the XIX Assembly of C.E.L.A.M., 9 March 1983.*

Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization. This phenomenon - the so-called “religious revival” - is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life’s meaning. Here too there is an ‘Areopagus’ to be evangelized.

*John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, 7th December, 1990, 38.*

Evangelization is the mission of the Church to tell the world the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Synod Fathers were eager that communio be the theme and aim of all evangelization in Oceania and the basis for all pastoral planning. In evangelization, the Church expresses her own inner communion and acts as a single body, striving to bring all humanity to unity in God through Christ. All the baptized have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel in word and action to the world in which they live. The Gospel must be heard in Oceania by all people, believers and non-believers, natives and immigrants, rich and poor, young and old. Indeed all these people have a right to hear the Gospel, which means that Christians have a solemn duty to share it with them. A new evangelization is needed today so that everyone may hear, understand and believe in God’s mercy destined for all people in Jesus Christ.  

*JPII, Ecclesia in Oceania, 22nd November, 2001, 18.*

**Benedict XVI**

It is the duty of the Church to proclaim always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ….In the course of history, this mission has taken on new forms and employed new strategies according to different places, situations, and historical periods. In our own time, it has been particularly challenged by an abandonment of the faith—a phenomenon progressively more manifest in societies and cultures which for centuries seemed to be permeated by the Gospel. The social changes we have witnessed in recent decades have a long and complex history, and they have profoundly altered our way of looking at the world. We need only think of the many advances in
science and technology, the expanding possibilities with regard to life and individual freedom, the profound changes in the economic sphere, and the mixing of races and cultures caused by global-scale migration and an increasing interdependence of peoples. All of this has not been without consequences on the religious dimension of human life as well. If on the one hand humanity has derived undeniable benefits from these changes, and the Church has drawn from them further incentives for bearing witness to the hope that is within her (cf. 1 Pt 3:15), on the other hand there has been a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred, which has even called into question foundations once deemed unshakeable such as faith in a provident creator God, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the one Saviour, and a common understanding of basic human experiences: i.e., birth, death, life in a family, and reference to a natural moral law…. 

....This variety of situations demands careful discernment; to speak of a “new evangelization” does not in fact mean that a single formula should be developed that would hold the same for all circumstances. And yet it is not difficult to see that what all the Churches living in traditionally Christian territories need is a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace. Indeed we cannot forget that the first task will always be to make ourselves docile to the freely given action of the Spirit of the Risen One who accompanies all who are heralds of the Gospel and opens the hearts of those who listen. To proclaim fruitfully the Word of the Gospel one is first asked to have a profound experience of God.

As I stated in my first Encyclical Deus Caritas Est: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (n. 1). Likewise, at the root of all evangelization lies not a human plan of expansion, but rather the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has wished to give us, making us sharers in his own life. 

_Benedict XVI, UbiCumque et Semper, 21st September, 2010_

**Synod on The New Evangelisation, 2012**

How can the news of Jesus Christ be expressed in a world permeated solely with scientific culture, modelled on the superficiality of ephemeral concepts, insensitive to the proposal of the Church? Proclaiming the Gospel is equated with changing one’s life; but today’s man seems tied to this kind of life of which he is in control because he decides when, how and who should be born and die….Perhaps our communities no longer show the characteristics which allow us to be recognized as carriers of a good news that transforms. They appear tired, repetitive of obsolete formulas that do not communicate the joy of encountering Christ, uncertain of the path to follow. We are wrapped up in ourselves, we demonstrate a self-sufficiency that prevents us from drawing near to one another as a living and fruitful community that generates vocations, having so greatly bureaucratized the life of faith and the sacraments. In a word, we no longer know whether being baptized is equivalent to being evangelizers. Incapable of being proclaimers of the Gospel, unsure of the certainty of the truth that saves, and cautious in speaking because we are oppressed by control of language, we have lost credibility and we risk rendering vain the Pentecost. In this moment, we do not need nostalgia for times of the past nor utopia for chasing after dreams; rather, what is needed is a clear analysis which does not hide the difficulties or even the great enthusiasm of the many experiences that in these years have allowed for the implementation of the NE.

_Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella, Intervention, Synod on The New Evangelization, 9th October 2012_
A young girl asked: “Are we the youth lost or has the Church lost us?” Her question expresses a longing for a Church where she can be found by Jesus and where she can find Him...The Church must learn humility from Jesus...The Church is called to follow Jesus’ respect for every human person...The Church must discover the power of silence. Confronted with the sorrows, doubts and uncertainties of people she cannot pretend to give easy solutions. In Jesus, silence becomes the way of attentive listening, compassion and prayer. It is the way to truth. The seemingly indifferent and aimless societies of our time are earnestly looking for God. The Church’s humility, respectfulfulness and silence might reveal more clearly the face of God in Jesus.

Cardinal Luis Tagle, Intervention, Synod on The New Evangelization, 9th October 2012

The Gospel cannot thrive in pride. When pride seeps into the heart of the Church, the Gospel proclamation is harmed. The task of new evangelization must begin with a deep sense of awe and reverence for humanity and her culture. Evangelization has been hurt and continues to be impeded by the arrogance of its messengers.

Archbishop Socrates Villegas, Intervention, Synod on The New Evangelization, 9th October 2012

The Gospel offers a vision of life and of the world that cannot be imposed, but only proposed, as the good news of the gratuitous love of God and of peace. The message of truth and of beauty can help people escape from the loneliness and lack of meaning to which the conditions of post-modern society often relegate them.

List of Final Propositions, Synod on The New Evangelization, 2012.

What people of all ages recognise in these practices (of contemplation) is the possibility, quite simply, of living more humanly - living with less frantic acquisitiveness, living with space for stillness, living in the expectation of learning, and most of all, living with an awareness that there is a solid and durable joy to be discovered in the disciplines of self-forgetfulness that is quite different from the gratification of this or that impulse of the moment. Unless our evangelisation can open the door to all this, it will run the risk of trying to sustain faith on the basis of an un-transformed set of human habits - with the all too familiar result that the Church comes to look unhappily like so many purely human institutions, anxious, busy, competitive and controlling. In a very important sense, a true enterprise of evangelisation will always be a re-evangelisation of ourselves as Christians also, a rediscovery of why our faith is different, transfiguring - a recovery of our own new humanity. And of course it happens most effectively when we are not planning or struggling for it. To turn to de Lubac..., ‘He who will best answer the needs of his time will be someone who will not have first sought to answer them’....The enemy of all proclamation of the Gospel is self-consciousness, and, by definition, we cannot overcome this by being more self-conscious. We have to return to St Paul and ask, “Where are we looking?” Do we look anxiously to the problems of our day, the varieties of unfaithfulness or of threat to faith and morals, the weakness of the institution? Or are we seeking to look to Jesus, to the unveiled face of God’s image in the light of which we see the image further reflected in ourselves and our neighbours? That simply reminds us that evangelisation is always an overflow of something else - the disciple’s journey to maturity in Christ, a journey not organised by the ambitious ego but the result of the prompting and drawing of the Spirit in us. In our considerations of how we are once again to make the Gospel of Christ compellingly attractive to men and women of our age, I hope we never lose sight of what makes it compelling to ourselves, to each one of us in our diverse ministries.

Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, Address to the Synod on The New Evangelization, 2012.