

AN ECCLESIAL MESSAGE OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

Introduction - We were there at Santo Domingo. - How to understand the New Evangelization from a pastoral standpoint. - The various aspects of newness. - The role of the educative method. - The assigning of priorities. - An organic system of youth pastoral work. - The involvement of the lay faithful. - Insistence on a renewed spirituality. - Mary, the Star of the New Evangelization.

Rome, 12 December 1992
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

My dear confreres,

In recent months I have been able to make visits to various provinces in Latin America, Europe and India, and in the present plenary session of the General Council we are at present examining the reports of the many provincial chapters so far received. As a result it can certainly be said that serious work is being done in the applications of the GC23 and the realization of its concrete educational indications.

“The dawn of a *new evangelization*”, we read in the Chapter Documents, “is a call to take up the building of a more human society, and asks us above all to renew in fresh contexts our faith in the Good News brought to man by Jesus Christ”.¹ The challenges we studied in the Chapter “are not mere passing difficulties, but indications of a ‘change of

¹ GC23 90

epoch' that we must learn to assess in the light of faith".²

² cf. *ibid.* 91

"The individual and society," the Chapter recalls, "become transformed by a 'new culture', attentive not only to the demands of individual morality, but also to the human being's every need".³ For this reason the task of educating the young to the faith in the context of the new evangelization leads the community to rethink and renew itself in the light of the Gospel and of our Rule of life" as a community which is not only a "sign of faith" but also a "school of faith" and a "centre of communion and participation". (4) The GC23 has clearly launched us into the orbit of "new evangelization" in the light of the emerging culture.

³ *ibid.* 4

⁴ *ibid.* 215-218

From October 12 to 28 last, at Santo Domingo in the Antilles, the Latin-American Bishops considered the theme of the new evangelization from a specifically pastoral point of view. Evidently they had in mind the contexts of that continent, but I think that the ecclesial nature of the event means that it can suggest valid elements to other Churches too, and particularly to our own Congregation in different parts of the world. And so I think it opportune to invite you to reflect on some of the pastoral indications of the event which bring light and strength to our own post-Chapter commitments. Our reflections will not amount to a study of the Santo Domingo Document, so rich in suggestions and pastoral proposals, but merely a general approach which can shed light on our efforts and give them added stimulation. They are more the expression of a lived experience than the results of the analysis of a text.

We were there at Santo Domingo

The Bishops' Assembly of Santo Domingo was convoked by the Holy Father John Paul II, who took part in it personally during the opening days, especially with his inaugural address indicating the programme to be followed, and his practical guidelines for various groups.

Those taking part numbered 350. The Salesians among them included Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo, eleven Bishops, the Rector Major, three priests and two FMAs; external to the assembly I also found four or five confreres who were there in the role of journalists.

On 29 October, after the solemn closing of the event on the previous day in the ancient and monumental cathedral of the city, the Rector Major, with two of our salesian Bishops and a confrere who had also been a member of the Assembly as a theologian, left for Colombia where, in the retreat house of the FMA at Fusagasuga (near Bogota), they took part in three days of study of the Santo Domingo Document, with all the Provincials of Latin America and the USA who had been gathered together by the Regional Councillors Frs Guillermo Garcia and Carlos Techera.

We were able to reflect on those pastoral projections of the Assembly that were of direct interest to our own provinces. The content and objectives of our own GC23 gave us the feeling that we were in substantial harmony with the conclusions of the Bishops.

We were pleased by the appeal made by the Pope and the Bishops to adolescents and young adults to be courageous leaders in the new evangel-

ization, and we were particularly interested in the concern of the Pope and the Bishops for the "street-children"; this was the first time that reference had been made at the level of the highest pastoral responsibility to this phenomenon, and it was consoling to note that in our provinces, starting from the city of Santo Domingo itself, Salesians and also Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are already generously involved in various kinds of service to this needy group.

Obviously the Salesian Family was not present in the great epic of the first evangelization; but today it is decisive in taking up the tasks of the new evangelization; and the Family is numerous indeed: counting only the SDBs and FMAs, there are more than 10,300 of them in the continent (4,709 SDBs in 547 foundations, and 5,624 FMAs in 500 foundations). It is urgently necessary that for all our Family in Latin-America, we ensure an increase in pastoral quality.

Some of the more characteristic aspects of this 4th Assembly of Latin-American Bishops (the 1st took place at Rio de Janeiro in 1955, the 2nd at Medellin in 1968, and the 3rd at Puebla in 1979) can shed light also on the obligations of new evangelization for our Congregation in the world. And so let us try to single out the main ones.

How to understand the New Evangelization from a pastoral standpoint

The original title of the theme to be considered at Santo Domingo was: "A new evangelization for a new culture". It seemed the clearest and most suc-

cinct formulation for indicating the direction the Assembly would follow in its work.

In the process of preparation under the guidance of CELAM (the Bishops Council of Latin America), after three successive consultation documents, the Pope himself wanted the title to be changed; the suggested formulation, which subsequently became definitive, was: *New Evangelization - Human advancement - Christian culture: Jesus Christ, yesterday, today and the same for ever (Heb 13,8)*". It was not the intention that the Assembly should become a celebration of an historical and cultural nature: between the "discovery" of America, its "occupation" or "conquest", and its "first evangelization", only this last aspect was considered. Neither was it the intention that the Assembly should become a forum for the discussion of contrasting theological positions, but that it should be truly a global apostolic relaunching of a practical and dynamic kind; not specifically a "re-evangelization", nor a critical evaluation of the first evangelization and still less a cultural watering down of the Gospel, but a renewed Pentecostal attitude of the People of God for the courageous proclamation of the ineffable presence of the living Christ, the Lord of history, "the first and greatest evangelizer" (John Paul II), who is able to respond to the present gigantic challenges of the continent.

Since Puebla the world has seen the fall of material socialism in Eastern Europe: it brought with it the overthrow of insidious ideological attitudes and, in fact, presented an invitation to put no further trust in any ideology of a materialist mould. The Bishops gave attentive discernment to the market economy, but put no trust in neoliberalism; they wanted the total liberation of man, not only

from personal sin but also from every hankering after power that may generate egotism and structures of injustice.⁵ After this fact of history, the 4th Assembly of Latin-American Bishops appears as the most solemn magisterial proposal for a new era of pastoral work centred on the new evangelization. And it has presented with pastoral originality a clear vision of the approach and guidelines to be followed.

⁵ cf. Final doc. (SD) 200-203

At first sight it might be thought that the theme's change of title makes it more complex, because it would seem to present three different levels (Gospel, Advancement, Culture) as though to be considered in autonomous form. Such an interpretation of supposed triple autonomy was in fact excluded by the Assembly's reflections. That expression from the Letter to the Hebrews included in the title itself - "*Jesus Christ, yesterday, today and the same for ever (Heb 13,8)*" - is the golden thread that unites everything in an organic pastoral perspective. This has led to the presentation of the new evangelization with a unified perception that is both practical and realistic. Indispensable to this end, it is true, is an explanation of the paschal mystery of Christ and a firm adherence to his mystery of salvation in history which maintains inseparable in apostolic activity the various aspects indicated in the title: a new evangelization that at one and the same time *catechizes, promotes, and fosters inculturation*.

The road of Christ (and of the Church) is through man, not in an anonymous and abstract sense but through man living at a specific time, with all the current problems associated with the prevailing culture and the particular place where he lives. If the new evangelization did not reach out

in the name of Christ to human advancement and to inculturation, it would not be authentic and could not bring about a maturing of faith as the energy of history. There is in all this an original perspective which, as the saying goes, brings pastoral work out of the sacristy, but at the same time detaches it from the ramifications of ideologies and politics.

Hence the new evangelization was presented at Santo Domingo not so much as a development of doctrinal reflections (which certainly have their importance), but rather as an ensemble of conditions and means capable of leading to the discovery and the application of the mystery of Christ in life's situations. This has introduced some innovations both in grasping the reality and as regards the pastoral priorities to be adopted as propositions for pastoral activity.

This organic but complex perspective of the new evangelization was the central idea permeating all the work of the Assembly. The many topics dealt with were all to be considered in the light of this central theme. To declare therefore, as I have heard done by some people, that the best way to read the Document would be to start from human advancement, would be to distort it from its true nature.

The various matters dealing with the temporal order, as also those referring to the evangelizers (ordained ministries, consecrated life, ecclesial community), and those too dealing with indigenous cultures, social communication, etc., were not in the mind of the Bishops to be developed as arguments in themselves, but were deliberately linked with the global theme of the new evangelization, in the light of the mystery of Christ in history; to read

them as so many separate sectors would be to lose the organic sense of the text. Their particular significance can be clearly perceived from the headings given to the three parts of the final document:

Part I: *“Jesus Christ, Gospel of the Father”*;

Part II: *“Jesus Christ, living evangelizer in his Church”*;

Part III: *“Jesus Christ, life and hope of Latin America”*.

To get a grasp of the situations and problems is indispensable, but not by beginning immediately and solely from an independent analysis of them; that could give rise (and indeed has already done so) to ill-formed ideas with ideological overtones which could then have an influence on apostolic activity itself. To ensure from the outset the paschal perspective, on the other hand, is a help to “seeing, judging and acting” in a genuine pastoral perspective.

Hence the new evangelization proposed at Santo Domingo certainly concentrated the attention of the Bishops on the concrete reality of man in his practical situation, but it does so starting from the liberating light of the very rich mystery of Christ, presented as the great innovation and the finest news of the present day: everything from Christ, with Christ and through Christ, so as to “see, judge and act” as a consequence.

This fundamental option has the great merit of being able to present the new evangelization as absolutely inseparable from human advancement and inculturation, without on this account falling into the temptation of dangerous reductionisms.

The various aspects of newness

The new evangelization is so called because of the objective appearance of pressing innovations challenging the Church. It will be useful for everyone, and particularly for us to see how Santo Domingo singled them out.

Reflecting on the discussions and steps taken in the Assembly on both the structure and content of the final document, we can find these innovations at two complementary levels:

- *innovations as regards content*, both in the Gospel and in our present times;
- *innovations as regards subjects*, i.e. in the leaders of the new evangelization.

(a) *In the first place, new presentations of the Gospel.*

It is evidently not a question of presenting a *different* Gospel, but of setting about the presentation of Christ, the “New man”, as the first and greatest innovation of the present day. He is alive and present, as the Lord of history; as true God and true man he is the Gospel of the Father creator; without him was made nothing that exists; the whole temporal order finds its meaning in him so that the true nature of its lay character can only be grasped in the light of Christ.

In face of the disasters caused by sin Christ is the Redeemer, the only true liberator through love and not by violence. Ascended into heaven, with the Father he sends the Holy Spirit and in this way builds up in history the Church which is his Body, the sacrament of salvation with its various characteristic mediations for the establishing of the King-

dom, the Kingdom initially identified with the man Jesus, which is present in embryo as the cause of dynamism in the Church's mission.

The goal of the Kingdom is man in his concrete existence; faith evangelizes his advancement and gives leaven to his culture. Christ is the beginning and the end; he will come again, but even now he gives an eschatological dimension to the present time. All this needs deeper examination as the great light enabling us to interpret history.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Bishops at Santo Domingo "celebrated Jesus Christ", following the exhortation made to them by the Holy Father John Paul II.

This new manner of presentation invites us to rethink, for the new evangelization, the *Christology, ecclesiology and anthropology* which combine to form that pastoral perspective in which real situations are considered and through which we try to identify the most pressing challenges to which they give rise. In this sense we will find it useful to read again personally the circular letter on the new evangelization of 8 September 1989.⁶

⁶ AGC 331

In it I said precisely that Jesus Christ is the supreme and unsurpassable "novelty". "It is not enough", I wrote, "to recognize the exceptional nature of this event in an abstract way; it must be presented as the most important 'news' for the present day, something which amazes and renews, which has a response for the most distressing questions, which opens the life of every individual and of all human history to the transcendent: it is a matter of the mysterious eschatological dimension (i.e. of the final end, already in some sense present) which has its incidence on human cultures, enlightens them, judges and purifies them, discerns them and can

foster the values emerging from them. The new evangelization bases everything on this supreme event: the novelty par excellence! There has never been, nor will there ever be in the future, a novelty greater than this one; it is the yardstick for the measurement of all others; it never grows old; it is the perennially greatest wonder of God's insertion in history; it is the new creation anticipated in our old world. We have to be able to make this supreme novelty visible and communicate it to others. ... Only Christ reveals to man what in fact man really is!

“To ‘evangelize’ means in the first place to be able to proclaim the happy and pleasing news of Christ’s Easter victory, which upsets and disperses the fleeting attraction of evolving novelties... It is urgently necessary therefore that we become updated communicators of the great ‘News’ with its tremendous historical values”.⁷

⁷ AGC 331, pp.11-13

(b) *Secondly, the new concerns of our times.*

Here there are two aspects strictly connected with each other:

- The innovations associated with “signs of the times”. They bring forth new anthropological values (the emerging culture referred to by the Pope) in a planetary cultural movement observable especially in the big cities (like secularization, socialization, women’s lib. etc.);
- and also the social and cultural innovations found in the contexts of the present day. Here a distinction is made between the situation to be described and the challenges which the evangelizer has to discern. Innovation is to be detected especially in those challenges which belong to

the area of human advancement. The Santo Domingo document deals with no less than ten of these: *human rights, ecology, the earth as God's gift, impoverishment and solidarity, work, human mobility, the democratic order, a new economic order, Latin-American integration, the family and life*; to this last item the Assembly gave more ample development.⁸

⁸ cf. SD 210-227

In the process of discernment it is not easy to pass from the description of *situations* to the identification of the more urgent *challenges*. But that is precisely what we ourselves did in the GC23.

(c) *Consideration must be given also to making persons new*

Santo Domingo gave special importance to this aspect which refers to the evangelizers. The concluding document makes a strong and unambiguous appeal for "sanctity" as a condition for living a "new enthusiasm".

This is something that necessarily involves both individuals and also ecclesial communities at their various levels: they must become living and dynamic. Insistence was laid on the role of the various ministries and charisms, and in particular on ordained ministries and the consecrated life so as to rekindle the gospel flame of their identity. A special appeal was addressed to young adults and adolescents. The pressing need for a renewed pastoral work for vocations was highlighted, "closely linked with pastoral work for the young and for the family. We must speedily prepare workers and find resources for this dimension of pastoral work and support the commitment of the laity in the fostering of vocations to the consecrated life".⁹

⁹ SD 80

Another innovation indicated concerned mission frontiers, i.e. the more distant ones that have to be approached; it was emphasized that for Latin-American believers the hour has struck for missions "ad gentes". The mission ad gentes, as is pointed out in the encyclical "Redemptoris missio", leads to the discovery of the first meaning and source of enthusiasm for all evangelization; unless one shares the fervour of the apostles and missionaries, it is difficult to be genuine and generous in the work of evangelization.

Particular concern was shown for the so-called invasion of the sects; this growing phenomenon reveals a pastoral lacuna caused by a lack of formation in the faith and insufficient attention to popular devotion which must be given greater care in the new evangelization: "Let the Church develop ever more its communal and sharing aspects, made up of ecclesial communities, family groups and Bible circles, ecclesial movements and associations, which make the parish a community of communities".¹⁰

¹⁰ SD 142

(d) *Finally the particular urgency of new efforts of inculturation.*

It is in this area of dialogue with cultures that there is a pressing need for a "new method" and "new expressions". Culture is born with man; it is his work, not something absolute. Christ, in becoming man, entered culture with a double gift: that of bringing it to its fullness and at the same time of purifying it. He is the meeting of the story of a people with the story of God's incarnation. The Gospel has always been concerned about inculturation, not so much as regards the exaltation of cul-

tures but rather with their leavening through the light of the three great mysteries: that of Christmas (cultural incarnation), that of Easter (integral purification), and that of Pentecost (pluralistic universalization).

Christian faith is born through the permeation of cultures through "believing" persons and communities in a patient process of inculturation. In Latin America, alongside the emerging culture which is growing rapidly in town areas, there exist various native cultures of Afro-American and hybrid types. The distinguishing mark of the Gospel is a simple teaching of doctrine; it bears within itself an energy of new creation that it inserts in concrete human history.

Between *inculturation of the Gospel* and the *evangelization of cultures* there is without any doubt a big difference in meaning: a "Christmas" that leads to the "cross". Nevertheless the document declares that the new evangelization must be realized precisely through inculturation of the faith. This presupposes clarity in the Gospel itself, and a critical capacity for the discernment necessary for various purposes: for being able to baptize and incorporate new values, for revealing and fostering gospel values already present and purifying them from defective methods of presentation, and for overcoming the present modern anthropocentric culture and directing it towards a post-modern age, opening up new space for what is transcendent.

To such an end it will be necessary to create a new methodology together with the creative capacity for new expressions.

For this reason the importance was emphasized of Catholic Universities and educational centres

and the special validity of vocations dedicated to education. Most urgent too is the problem of the formation of consciences.

The role of the educative method

If there is one thing that is quite clear in this presentation of the new evangelization, it is that it is not sufficient to present the Gospel by itself. "Human advancement", says the concluding document, "is a special dimension of the new evangelization":¹¹ "the lack of consistency between professed faith and daily life is one of the various causes that generate poverty in our countries, because christians have not been able to find in the faith the force needed to penetrate the criteria and decisions of the sectors responsible for the spiritual guidance and organization of the social, economic and political life of our people".¹² Then, going on to speak of culture, the document asserts that "through our radical adherence to Christ in baptism we are obliged to see to it that the faith is fully proclaimed, thought out and lived, to the extent that it becomes part of culture".¹³

An integral reading of the text shows beyond all doubt that the line followed by the Bishops, as we have already emphasized, is that of commitment to "evangelization through promotion and inculturation". Now, in the commission on education to which I found myself assigned, together with Card. Obando and three other confreres, we concluded that the practical way to achieve such an aim is that of christian education as a "methodological mediation for the evangelization of culture".¹⁴

And in the commission education was discussed

¹¹ SD ch.II, part I, title

¹² SD 161

¹³ SD 229

¹⁴ cf. SD 271

also in connection with human advancement, because when you speak of education you have in mind not only the formation of children and young adults but also the continual updating of adults in the face of the many innovations we have referred to.

Now, all of this makes us realize the extraordinary role of educational activity in the formation to the faith of both youngsters and adults, even though it be in different ways.

It was frequently recalled that the Church's magisterium has provided two valuable aides for this complex work of christian education: the development of the "Social Doctrine of the Church" and recently the "Catechism of the Catholic Church". To these must be added a knowledge of the disciplines proper to education and the ability to apply them.

It is not enough to be preachers and catechists; one must be so in a pedagogical manner. For the practical formation of others to the faith and to contribute to the renewal of society, one must also know and give further study to the values and challenges emerging at the present day from real life situations and the diverse demands of cultures. And that means precisely looking upon educational activity as one of the main means for the facilitation of the new evangelization: we are called upon to promote human advancement and inculturate the Gospel *by educating!*

In this sense Santo Domingo gives a particular reminder to all, but more directly to those who have received in the People of God the charisma of the mission of education, so as to realize through their own specific vocation the maternal function of the Church.

This is why in the concluding document, with reference to certain hasty desertions in recent years, we find the following particularly significant appeal: "The charisms of Religious Orders and Congregations, placed at the service of Catholic education in the various particular Churches of our continent, are of the greatest help to us in fulfilling the mandate received from the Lord to go and teach all nations (Mt 28,18-20), especially in the evangelization of culture. We exhort men and women religious who have abandoned this very important field of Catholic education to return to the task, remembering that the preferential option for the poor includes a like option for the means which help people out of their distress, and that one of the best means to this end is Catholic education".¹⁵

¹⁵ SD 275

The innovation in education itself is also emphasized: "in the *new education*", says the text, "it is a matter of bringing about in the individual a process of growth and maturing according to the demands of the new values".¹⁶ On this theme too we have already reflected in the Congregation.¹⁷ Santo Domingo asks us to harmonize it with the new evangelization.

¹⁶ SD 266

¹⁷ cf. AGC 337

The assigning of priorities

The Latin-American Bishops at Santo Domingo followed the line taken in the pastoral guidelines of Medellin and Puebla. Years have passed of course between those events and the present day, and some of the terminology then in use was susceptible of reductive interpretations that were not genuine. The term 'option', for instance, used to be ac-

accompanied by the qualification 'preferential' or 'neither exclusive nor excluding', to preserve its authentic meaning.

This time the terminology 'priority lines of pastoral action' has been preferred to 'options', thus tying inseparably to the development of the theme – as we have seen – a deeply Christological preamble which ensures a true pastoral tone even in the reading of reality and in the inculturation of the faith. Nevertheless, within the text itself, especially in references to Puebla, the term 'options' continues to be used to ensure continuity of commitment.

The priorities chosen at Santo Domingo are fundamentally three in number:

1. a new evangelization through ongoing formation, especially through catechesis and the liturgy (*evangelizing by catechizing*);
2. an evangelization projected into the integral advancement of people, starting from the poor and for the poor, at the service of life and the family (*evangelizing by promoting*);
3. an evangelization concentrating on the penetration of urban cultural environments, and native, Afro-American, and mixed cultures (*evangelizing by inculturizing*).

And all this through the methodical mediation of a "new education".

As well as these three pastoral priorities, each particular section of the document concludes by indicating other specific priorities which apply the three above-mentioned ones and are to be adopted in line with the many differences between one territory and another. This highlights the necessity of a further local discernment (just as our own GC23 asked of us) for an adequate application of the general guidelines.

The Holy Father, in the letter of 10 November last authorizing the publication of the concluding document, tells the Bishops precisely to make in this connection an opportune and necessary local discernment to establish what will be most useful and urgent in the particular situation of their own diocese or territory.

The enormous problems created by the signs of the times, the continuing impoverishment, the invasion of the sects, the pluralism of cultures, the complexity of the big urban centres, the urgent pastoral needs of one's own country, corroborate the real field for the new evangelization.

Rightly too did the Pope emphasize the urgent need for a "Latin-American integration" which would make of the continent the "great overall homeland" of all its inhabitants.

This is the first time that an entire episcopate has dealt pastorally with the *new evangelization* in a realistic form of practical activity, offering in this way to the universal Church a message of prophetic relevance which can be seen as a model to be adapted in suitable form to the historical conditions of the individual peoples.

An organic system of youth pastoral work

One of the sectors to be given priority in respect of formation and the participation of leaders of the new evangelization (and which is of particular interest to us) is that which refers to adolescents and young adults. It is dealt with in part II of the document ("Jesus Christ, living evangelizer in his Church"), when it presents the diversity of ministries, charisms and services with which one can

collaborate in the realization of the common evangelizing action under the unifying animating influence of the Holy Spirit and through the guidance of the Bishops: a single mission rich in agents of different kinds.

Among the various options scattered through the text and all referring to the implementation of the *three fundamental lines of pastoral priority* there is that of an organic system of youth pastoral work.

It is a choice in full continuity with Puebla, and precisely with the second of its "options",¹⁸ which tends to be forgotten because of the emphasis on the first one concerning the poor.

¹⁸ cf. Puebla 1166-1205

Santo Domingo insists on the vital importance of the pastoral involvement of adolescents and young adults: "their mission", says the text, "consists in preparing themselves to be men and women of the future, responsibly active in social, economic, cultural, political and ecclesial structures, so that being sustained by the Spirit of Christ and by their intuition in finding original solutions, they may contribute to the promoting of an ever more human and more christian development".¹⁹

¹⁹ cf. SD 111; cf. Oss. Rom. (Eng.edtn) 21.10.92, p. 2

I think it will be opportune to read together here the description of the pastoral commitments of the Bishops in this connection.

"We intend", they write, "to carry out the following pastoral activity:

— To reaffirm the 'preferential option' for the young proclaimed at Puebla, not only in an affective but in a truly effective manner; this must signify a concrete option for an organic system of youth pastoral work, accompanied and supported in realistic fashion by a reciprocal dialogue between youth, pastors and the community. The ef-

factive option for the young requires greater personal and material resources on the part of parishes and dioceses. This youth pastoral work must always have a vocational dimension".²⁰

²⁰ SD 114

To carry this out, we propose a pastoral action:

— Which will respond to the need for affective maturing and the necessity to follow up adolescents and young adults throughout the process of human formation and growth of faith. Particular importance will have to be given to the sacrament of Confirmation, so that its celebration may lead young people to an apostolic commitment and to be evangelizers of their peers.

— Which enables youngsters to know and respond in a critical fashion to the cultural and social provocations they meet, and help them to commit themselves in the pastoral work of the Church and in the transformations needed in society".²¹

²¹ SD 115

— "Which can give dynamism to a spirituality of the *sequela Christi*, which may realize a meeting between faith and life, promote justice and solidarity, and encourage a project able to instil hope and generate a new culture of life".²²

²² SD 116

— "Which takes up the new forms for celebrating the faith proper to youth culture, and foster the creativity and pedagogy of the signs, always with due respect to the essential elements of the liturgy".²³

²³ SD 117

— "Which will proclaim, in the commitments made and in daily life, that the God of life loves the young and wants a different kind of future for them, without frustrations and emargination, where a full life will be acceptable to all".²⁴

²⁴ SD 118

— "Which will leave space for adolescents and young adults to participate in the same Church. That the educative process be realized through a

pedagogy linked with experience and participation and capable of transformation. That it may foster the assuming of responsibility through the process of seeing, judging, acting, revising and celebrating. Such a pedagogy must integrate growth of faith into the process of human growth, due account being taken of diverse elements like sport, festivity, music and the theatre.

This pastoral activity must keep in mind and reinforce all the valid organic processes amply analyzed by the Church from Puebla to the present day. In a particular way it will see to it that importance is given to pastoral work for youth in specific environments where adolescents and young adults live their lives: peasants, natives, Afro-Americans, workers, students, those living in city outskirts, social outcasts, the military and young people in critical situations.

The Church through her word and witness must first of all present Jesus Christ to young people in an attractive and motivating form, in such a way that he becomes for them the way, the truth and the life responding to their desires for personal realization and their need to give sense to life itself".²⁵

²⁵ SD 119

— "To respond to the present cultural reality, youth pastoral work will have to present the ideals of the Gospel to the young in a forceful and attractive manner accessible to their own lives. It must foster the creation and animation of vigorous evangelical youth groups and communities, which will ensure the continuity and endurance of educative processes among young people and sensitize and induce them to the challenges of human advancement, solidarity and the building of the civilization of love".²⁶

²⁶ SD 120

These concrete suggestions of the Bishops stim-

ulate us by emphasizing the contribution our own charism is called to give to the new evangelization. For us the educational and pastoral commitment for the benefit of adolescents and young adults is not simply a “first choice” or a “preferred option”, but constitutes the very substance of our mission in every time and place. The fact that the Bishops recognize the urgent need for it at the present day in view of the disturbing social and cultural situations, confirms the particular relevance of our charism which, as someone once said, if it did not exist already would have to be invented. The GC23 has invited us specifically to renew the methodology of our educational and pastoral activity.

There comes to mind the growing vitality attaching in these years to the commitment to the formation and involvement of *young animators* and the impulse given to the *Youth Movement*. It is not a matter of forming an elite which would obscure our missionary characteristic among those most in need, but rather of inserting a *leaven* to ferment the mass and render our activities in our various works truly educative and evangelizing.

The involvement of the lay faithful

The pastoral presentation of the new evangelization, with its purpose of making a concrete linkage between the proclamation of the Gospel and human advancement and culture, reveals the indispensability of the vocation and mission proper to the lay faithful and their role as front-line leaders. The text says as much explicitly: “The importance of the presence of lay people in the task of the new evangelization, which leads to human advance-

ment and even gives shape to the whole cultural environment with the force of the Risen Christ, allows us to declare that a priority of our pastoral work, the fruit of this 4th Conference, must be that of a Church in which the lay christian faithful are leaders. A mature and committed laity, well constituted through ongoing formation, is the mark of particular Churches which have taken very seriously the obligation of the new evangelization".²⁷

²⁷ SD 103

The frontiers on which the new challenges to the Gospel are met are listed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*;²⁸ there it is specifically stated that the hour has come to undertake a new evangelization. The faith has been uprooted from the most significant elements of existence; the christian texture of human society is in urgent need of repair. We recall the impassioned call of John Paul II at the beginning of his pontificate: "Do not be afraid! Open, throw wide, the doors to Christ! Open up to his saving power the confines of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Have no fear! Christ knows the human interior. He alone knows it! Today man is unaware of what he carries within him, in his heart, in the depths of his soul. Often he is uncertain about the sense of his life on this earth. He is beset by doubts which lead to desperation. Let him then – I beg and implore you with trust and humility – let Christ speak to man. He alone has the words of life, yes! of life everlasting".²⁹

²⁸ cf. CL ch.3, especially 37-44

²⁹ Homily 22 Oct. 78

It can be said that just as at Medellin the Bishops drew their inspiration from the conciliar constitution *Gaudium et spes*, and at Puebla from the Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI *Evangelii nuntiandi*, so at Santo Domingo they followed, in fact,

the guidelines of *Christifideles laici* to take the Gospel to the fields of human rights, the family, the world of work, politics and economy, and even Latin-American integration.

Unfortunately the majority of the baptized feel themselves christians in a general way, but not committed members of the Church: "few there are who take up christian values as an element of their particular cultural identity, and so feel a need for an ecclesial or evangelizing commitment. The result is that the worlds of work, of politics and economy, of science and art, of literature and the means of social communication, are not guided by evangelical criteria".³⁰

³⁰ SD 96

Here is found a great challenge for the formation and involvement of the lay faithful. There will be need therefore to foster their maturing in the faith, to follow them up and give importance to their movements and associations.

But this applies not only to the formation of a group of believers to act as leaven in the mass, an absolutely indispensable objective that must certainly be attained, but also to the leavening of the mass itself. Hence the emphasis given to the particular challenge of the *popular dimension* of evangelization, which becomes still more pressing in the light of the phenomenon of the sects, notably among town-dwellers. "The problem of the sects", says the text, "has assumed dramatic proportions and has become truly disturbing, especially because of their growing proselytizing activities".³¹

³¹ SD 139

Rightly the Bishops have reaffirmed the intention to provide an ever better follow-up in the ways of understanding and expressing the mystery of God and of Christ by the ordinary people: "popular devotion", declares the text, "is one of the best ex-

pressions of inculturation of the faith. It is not only a matter of religious expressions, but of values, criteria, behaviour and attitudes which stem from Catholic doctrine and constitute the wisdom of our people by forming its cultural template".³²

³² SD 36

In this most important field of the new evangelization, the GC23 has prompted us to elaborate a "lay project" destined to become a living part of our renewal in the Church. On the other hand the "popular" aspect of our mission must be considered with greater commitment, particularly with reference to religious associations for the people in general (like ADMA, the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians), and to our initiatives in the field of social communications.

Insistence on a renewed spirituality

At the foundation of the whole commitment to evangelization Santo Domingo regards a *new enthusiasm* on the part of all the leaders as indispensable, i.e. their spiritual conversion, the enlightenment of their mentality, and a clear awareness of their vocation to holiness. They must feel themselves called to be witnesses to Christ in a meaningful way, methodically renewing their commitment to educate to the faith: "the new evangelization demands the pastoral conversion of the Church";³³ "the witness of christian life is the first and most indispensable form of evangelization".³⁴

³³ SD 30

³⁴ SD 33

At the beginning of part II, the document speaks of the "Church called to holiness".³⁵ The first pastoral priority suggested in this connection reads as follows: "the new evangelization demands a renewed spirituality which, enlightened by the

³⁵ SD 31-53

faith which is proclaimed, gives life with divine wisdom to authentic human advancement and is the leaven of a christian culture. We think that it is necessary to continue to stress the doctrinal and spiritual formation of the christian faithful, and in the first place the clergy, men and women religious, catechists and pastoral workers, clearly emphasizing the primacy of God's grace which saves through Jesus Christ in the Church by means of lived charity and the efficacy of the sacraments".³⁶

* SD 45

It goes on to insist on the courage with which the Word of God must be proclaimed in all freedom in the face of any earthly power;³⁷ and on the ongoing formation of a faith which relies on the living presence of Christ in the celebration of the sacraments, in the active participation in the liturgical seasons, and in the proper value given to prayer. Vatican II had already declared that "the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed, and is also the fount from which all her power flows".³⁸

* cf. SD 50

* SC 10

Santo Domingo highlights especially the incisiveness that is proper to the liturgy: it embodies an essential evangelizing force; the Eucharist and every sacrament carry within them a very rich educative patrimony, because they release and send forth the renewing force of the paschal mystery. "The language of the signs of the times", says the text, "is the best vehicle for causing Christ's message 'to penetrate into the consciences of individuals and from there reach the ethos of a people in its vital attitudes, its institutions, and in all its structures' (John Paul II). For this reason the forms of liturgical celebration should be suitable for expressing the mystery being celebrated, and be both clear and intelligible to men and women".³⁹

* SD 35

In giving due importance to the liturgy, anything that is banal or improvised and any manipulating should be avoided; the sense of mystery should be emphasized and a proper creativity sought for in harmony with the Church's dispositions and the concrete needs in the lives of the participants, in the conviction that the celebrations, if well prepared, can penetrate into the very heart of both individuals and cultures.

These indications take our thoughts back to the experience of the preventive system practised by Don Bosco; he used to say that the Eucharist and Penance are the two columns for an efficacious education to the faith. We must get back the ability to give an educative power to liturgical celebrations in our pastoral activities.

We recall that our GC23 too stressed the need for a particular spirituality to reach the life of the young.⁴⁰ We reflected on the pastoral relevance of the salesian spirituality of Don Bosco, born specifically for the purpose of evangelization and renewed at the present day in wonderful harmony with the Council's leap forward.⁴¹

In a brief presentation then of the need for new enthusiasm specifically on the part of those living a *consecrated life*, the Latin-American Bishops state that since this is a matter of "a gift of the Holy Spirit to his Church bearing in itself a profound paschal dimension", it belongs (as had been said already by Vatican II) to the interior vitality and holiness of the Church, and must therefore be manifested by a daily witness emphasizing "the purpose and spirit of each Institute".⁴²

Further, we are invited at the present day to go more deeply into this theme in preparation for the Synod of '94. In an ecclesiology of communion,

⁴⁰ cf. GC23 part II, ch. 3

⁴¹ cf. AGC 334: *Salesian spirituality for the new evangelization*

⁴² SD 85

consecrated life is called upon to proclaim existentially to everyone and “in a splendid and outstanding manner that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes”.⁴³

⁴³ LG 31

It is clear that if Santo Domingo has placed at the centre of the whole setting up of the new evangelization the mystery of Christ, priority and great importance attaches to the fostering of holiness through a concrete commitment to the renewal of spirituality.

This too is an appeal which confirms all our insistence on an ongoing formation which results in confreres and communities being leavened with the pastoral charity which is central to the spirit of our charism.

In conclusion, we can see that the Assembly of Santo Domingo offers us Salesians an efficacious reminder of the priority of our charisma by incentives that are valid in every continent.

“Current trends in the world”, recalled our GC23, “emphasize the centrality of the individual in all the problems that mark human events. ‘We are witnessing the birth of a new humanism’, declared *Gaudium et spes* at n. 55, ‘where man is defined before all else by his responsibility to his brothers and at the court of history’”.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ GC23 2

In this context the focal point and common parameter of everything is the New Man: *Jesus Christ, yesterday today and the same for ever.*

Mary, the Star of the New Evangelization

The Holy Father ended his inaugural address to

the Assembly by invoking Mary and placing in her hands the hopes of all, their pastoral problems and the themes they had to study.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ cf. address at n. 31

On the same day in the shrine of Our Lady of Altigracia, the oldest Marian shrine in the Americas, the Pope made the following solemn Act of Entrustment to the Madonna: "On this day, 12 October 1992, before your image I recall the completion of five hundred years since the Gospel of Christ came to the peoples of America on a ship which bore your name and image: the 'Santa Maria'.... I invoke you in the language of all its inhabitants... these blessed lands are yours, for to say 'America' is to say 'Mary'... O Virgin of Hope and Star of Evangelization, make everyone zealous for the proclamation of the Good News so that Jesus Christ may always be known, loved and served - the blessed fruit of your womb, the Revelation of the Father and the One who bears the Spirit, 'the same yesterday, today and forever'. Amen!"

The majestic image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which dominated the great Assembly Hall, and the memory of her appearance to the native Blessed Juan Diego, combined to present the Mother of God as the living image, with her half-caste face, as the one who had given motherly guidance throughout five centuries to the inculturation of the Gospel. Mary had provided an original and incomparable model of "perfectly inculturized evangelization" and continues to be the constant companion of the Latin-American peoples who have dedicated famous sanctuaries to her in every country. "With joy and gratitude", says the text, "we welcome the immense gift of her motherhood, of her tenderness and protection, and we want to love her in the same way that Jesus loved her. And so we invoke

her as the Star of the First and of the New Evangelization".⁴⁶

⁴⁶ SD 15

We can say that the Bishops were united in a new cenacle around Mary to celebrate Jesus Christ, as though hearing from her lips the famous expression of Cana: "Do whatever he tells you".⁴⁷ He will give you the light, energy and wisdom to stir up a new enthusiasm and to find new means and fresh expressions in view of the immense task of the new evangelization; from him comes forth the power of the Holy Spirit who makes everything new and fills all hearts with benevolent generosity.

⁴⁷ Jn 2,5

At Cana Mary was there with her motherly presence at the beginning when water became wine. She has brought and will continue to bring the People of God to grow in the faith and defend it; to make of the new evangelization a "practical and dynamic reality, a call to conversion and hope, a new orbit of life, a new Pentecost in which the welcoming of the Holy Spirit will give rise to a renewed people made up of free men and women conscious of their own dignity, and able to forge a truly human history; a new evangelization that will be an ensemble of means, actions and attitudes that can bring the Gospel into active dialogue with the modern and post-modern world, to challenge it and be challenged by it in return; it is also the force to insert the Gospel in the present cultural setup."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ cf. SD 24

Mary has been invoked with filial affection that she may be in truth the One who will bring believers to the living Christ, the Lord of history, the New Man of yesterday, today and always, so that he may be the pastoral way, the truth and the life of the great relaunching of faith towards the third millennium. She is the new Eve who accompanies evangelizers as Mother of the Church and

the solicitous Helper of the People of God in this historical stage of new evangelization.

Let us ask her to make us feel throughout the Congregation the powerful message which from Santo Domingo resounds all round the Church.

And let us in turn treasure these precious incentives and indications.

With renewed salesian ardour and enthusiasm,

Don F. Viganò