

Evangelization & Dissent

(by Fr. Jim Northrop)

My hope is that more and more Catholics will be evangelizers and recognize that they have the privileged duty of inviting people to be a part of what we're all about. When people encounter Jesus Christ and really come to commit themselves to the mission he has given to the Church you don't have to twist their arms to share the Good News with others. I think there is a lot of confusion about what evangelization is and what it isn't. Often times Catholics hear the word evangelization and they picture someone going door to door or telling people if they don't accept Jesus they're going to hell. We have to reclaim a Catholic vision of evangelization that's whole and rooted in the mission of the Church to be a "light for the world" (cf. Matthew 5:14). The following from the introduction to John Paul II and the New Evangelization (1995 Ignatius Press) states the following:

Evangelization means living and sharing this great gift of faith with enthusiasm. It means truly accepting Jesus Christ and sharing him with others – sharing his life, his love, his truth, his goodness, his values, his compassion, his integrity. As we foster a deepening conversion to Christ in our own lives, we can joyfully promote a new mentality, an openness, a desire, a willingness to bring to all the world what we Catholic followers of Jesus Christ have to offer.

We have all seen the spiritual hunger among many people in our society. All people want to experience "the good life". God wants to use us to make that colloquial expression become splendidly fulfilled through helping others know and accept Jesus as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life". Catholic evangelization means "bringing the good news of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the gospel itself. Its essence is the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the response of a person of faith, both being the work of the Spirit of God" (Go and Make Disciples p.2).

Deepening people's relationship with the Lord and one another is the goal of parish life. There are already ways that people share their faith in the parish, and I certainly wouldn't deny this. But I believe God is asking us to be more bold, more creative, and more enthused about the "new evangelization" so that we can attract more people to Christ. We're not called to maintain the status quo but to be challenged to deepen our commitment to mission and to recognize a vast majority of people do not know Jesus Christ and what discipleship is all about.

What happens when certain people within the Church promote ideas and ways of thinking that change the focus and goal of the mission as defined by Scripture and taught by the Magisterium (the official teaching office of the Church)? I see more and more examples of how much confusion there is in our Church because of people who dissent and think they can teach anything they want and call it Catholic thinking.

I recently read an article in U.S. Catholic that really highlighted this problem. Robert McClory wrote and [article](#) promoting religious pluralism as a new possibility for the Church. The article basically calls into question whether Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation and whether the Church has the right to claim it has the fullness of Truth when it comes to God's revelation. It slams the recent Vatican declaration [Dominus Iesus](#). The document sought to clarify heretical teaching on religious pluralism and it was promulgated by Pope John Paul II. Many people speculated that the Pope had nothing to do with the writing or approval of *Dominus Iesus*, but he clearly indicated during the [Sunday Angelus](#) that he ordered its publication and supported what it was saying.

The article in U.S. Catholic represents the widespread dissent we see within the Church from official Magisterial teaching. We live in an age where there are many theologians and "experts" who promote teachings and ideas that are in direct conflict with the teaching of the Bishops and the Pope. I recently received an email from a person seeking to join the Catholic Church who was told by someone who is teaching in RCIA that they didn't believe in the teaching office of the Church and that you didn't have to follow the teachings of the Magisterium. This is nothing new. I run into this problem all the time. At my old parish someone who was taking courses at Seattle University came up to me after Mass with a disagreement about my homily. He made the statement that "Jesus never said he was Divine. That's something the Church tacked on later in its history." Of course, wouldn't you know this person had also taught in RCIA.

In light of all the confusion I have witnessed I have also seen great signs of hope and renewal. While there are many branches within the Church that are diseased or dead there are many new branches sprouting forth full of love for the Truth and a renewed passion for mission. God always helps me keep my perspective by bringing certain people into my life who are committed and loyal to Church teaching and excited about sharing their Catholic faith with the people around them. God is raising up a whole new generation of ardent servants of the Gospel who are on board and not calling into question the very basics of our faith. Like the early church they have encountered the Risen Lord and their lives are becoming a bold proclamation of His love and power over sin and death. They have discovered the difference opening up to the Holy Spirit makes and they are not satisfied with compromising the call to holiness and total dedication of their lives for the work of the Gospel. I am inspired by these men and women and they are a wonderful sign of hope and a reminder of Jesus' promise to remain with his Church until the end of time. (cf. Matthew 28:20) I believe we need to be honest about the situation we're in as a Church but we also need to call out and celebrate the signs and fruits of faithfulness that are all around us. St. Paul put it this way:

God in his mercy has given us this work to do, and so we do not become discouraged. We put aside all secret and shameful deeds; we do not act with deceit, nor do we falsify the Word of God. In the full light of truth we live in God's sight and try to commend ourselves to everyone's good conscience. For if the gospel we preach is hidden, it is hidden only from those who are being lost. They do not believe, because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of

God. For it is not ourselves that we preach; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. The God who said, "Out of darkness the light shall shine" is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ.

Yet we who have this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not to us. We are often troubled, but not crushed; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed. At all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus, so that his life also may be seen in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:1-10)

So be encouraged by the Word of God and do not allow yourself to be discouraged as you look around and see the "mass confusion" in our world today. It may get worse before it gets better, but God is faithful to His Word and we have much to look forward to as we experience a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us for ministry.