

Evangelisation

SCRIPTURE

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus has ordered them. When they saw him, they worshipped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded to you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28:16-20)

cfr. Mk. 16:15 / Acts 1:8

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, pour forth your Holy Spirit into our hearts and stir in us the desire to deepen our relationship with your Son. Help us to truly believe and live His good news. Grant us the grace to become the message and the messenger of your Son Jesus to the world and the people of our time. Give us the courage to boldly witness to His saving presence. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

The Archdiocese of Calcutta is geographically vast, covering the districts of Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, East and West Midnapore and Bankura. The socio-economic and demographic conditions of these districts vary diversely from each other. A vast majority of the people of the Archdiocese belong to different ethnic groups and religious traditions. The presence and the activities of the church have immensely contributed to the welfare of all sections of the population, especially in the field of education, healthcare and social development.

The state of West Bengal has been a tolerant one towards other religions, and majority of its inhabitants also show greater respect and open-mindedness towards the people of other faiths. However, in recent times, one observes a growing tendency of fundamentalism which could in future affect adversely the social harmony among the people. Poverty, illiteracy and ineffective political system or other social maladies, affect the lives of millions of people. It is in this context, the church is called upon to proclaim the gospel boldly and fearlessly, and promote the kingdom values to bring about transformation in the lives of our people.

PART 1: TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to save us and to make us His children (cf. Gal. 4:4-7). Christ's mission was then entrusted to the Church, when Christ commanded to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15). This mission continues to the present day (cf. Catechism, nos. 849-55; Vatican II, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes Divinitus, "AG,"* no. 2).

Evangelization is the proclamation of Christ and His gospel by word and example, in fulfillment of Christ's command (cfr. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 905). The Church's fundamental mission is to call on people to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Proclamation takes place on a daily basis as the faithful bring Christ to the world. The new evangelization adapts this proclamation to a changing world with new ardour, methods and expression.

The Church has always evangelized. The Church is missionary by her very nature. She brings Christ to the world through the proclamation of the Word of God, through the sacraments especially the Eucharist, and through acts of justice and charity especially for the poor and the sick. At Vatican II (1962-65), the Church called for a renewed and intensified evangelization. This call is particularly evident in the decree *Ad Gentes*. In the present state of things which gives rise to a new situation for mankind, the Church, the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-14), is even more urgently called upon to save and renew every creature, so that all things might be restored in Christ, and so that in Him men might form one family and one people of God (no. 1).

The call to evangelize continued even after the Council. Pope Paul VI in his address to the College of Cardinals in 1973 stated: “.. for it is only in the Christian message that the modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.” (Paul VI, Address to the College of Cardinals, June 22, 1973, AAS 65, 1973, Page 383, cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 3)

New Evangelization

Pope John Paul II has tirelessly called on all the faithful to participate in the great work of evangelization. In this “present state of things which gives rise to a new situation,” the Holy Father has often spoken of the “new evangelization.” In his 1990 encyclical, *Mission of the Redeemer (Redemptoris Missio, Article No.3)*, Pope John Paul II said, “I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization.”

In the ever increasing and changing world, what is meant by *new evangelization*? The mission and message of the Church never changes, but the world in which she proclaims does. Pope John Paul II states in his apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte, (NMI, no. 40)*: *Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of “globalization” and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now . . . Therefore, the actual task of carrying out the mission to evangelize must be “new in its ardor, new in its methods, new in its expressions.”*

The Holy Father issued the same call to the faithful to the new evangelization in his 2002 apostolic letter on the Rosary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae (RVS)* and again in his 2003 encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia, (EE, no. 6)*: *To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the “program” which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization.*

Calling All Catholics

The task of evangelization is everyone’s concern. Traditionally, priests and religious have been associated with the missionary activities of the Church. The laity, however, has certain advantages in bringing Christ to the people with whom they interact. Many times it is only through the lay faithful that people hear the Gospel and know Christ. Building up both the family and the workplace, the lay faithful are indispensable in the renewal of society in Christ, becoming a message in word and deed and messenger in proclamation (cf. Catechism, nos. 897-900). The clergy and religious, in service to the laity, help them become holy and effective evangelizers. In turn, the laity encourages converts in need of the sacraments and further spiritual formation. The lay faithful are on the frontlines of furthering the Kingdom of God.

Evangelization is not merely a numbers game. In fact, the individual Christian may see no tangible results yet the Kingdom of God “is like a grain of mustard seed,

which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs”(Mk. 4:31- 32). The mystery of the Kingdom of God is that “the Church is at the same time a very large tree and a very small grain.” The faithful sow seed, trusting in God, who, in his own time, brings about a rich harvest.

Ingredients of the New Evangelization – Pope John Paul II

❖ **Holiness**

“It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting His image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit.”

❖ **Prayer**

“This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the *art of prayer*.”

❖ **The Sunday Eucharist**

“...the summit towards which the Church’s action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength..... precisely by celebrating His Passover not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church will continue to show to every generation the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world’s origin and its final destiny leads.”

❖ **The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Jesus Christ is “the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance.”

❖ **The Primacy of Grace**

“There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that without Christ we can do nothing.”

❖ **Listening to the Word**

“There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed *listening to the Word of God*.... It is above all the work of evangelization and catechesis, which is drawing new life from attentiveness to the Word of God.”

❖ **Proclaiming the Word**

“To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be servants of the word in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium..... Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep Him for themselves, they must proclaim Him.”

A Guide for Catechists and Religion Teachers – Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

❖ **Jesus Christ**

“... It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting His image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit.”

PART 2: LIGHT & SHADOW SITUATION

2.1 Light situation

- ❖ We have 2 Catholic Enquiry centers – one in Bandel and the other in Boitakhana.
- ❖ The Archdiocese is blessed with some trained personnel in the area of Catechetics.
- ❖ The Salesian Catechetical Center, Nitika prepares Catechists for the missions.
- ❖ There are some generous Catechists in our mission stations.
- ❖ Bengal is a very tolerant state and has great respect for Christianity. This is evident by the installation of the statues of Mother Teresa, at various religious and secular locations in the city, and a traffic island with the statue of St. John Bosco.
- ❖ All over the Archdiocese, people of all faiths throng to our Churches and mission stations to visit the Christmas cribs. Thereby, an opportunity for the Church to share the good news of Jesus.
- ❖ The “Good Friday Walks”, “Easter Rally” and celebration of the “Christian Unity Octave” contribute towards a united Christian witness.
- ❖ Eucharistic processions are privileged moments of evangelization.
- ❖ The popularity of the “Bible Convention” and “Healing Services” draw people of other faiths to listen to the message of Jesus and experience his peace and joy and many a time a healing.
- ❖ The saintly figure of Blessed Mother Teresa and particularly the services rendered by the Missionaries of Charity and other religious are powerful evangelizing signs.
- ❖ The recent “Kolkata Christmas Carnival” on Park Street has become an evangelization movement.
- ❖ Christmas Carols sung in Malls, Clubs, Hotels, Parks and other public places.
- ❖ The media readily broadcasts “Midnight Mass” and other Christmas programmes.
- ❖ Our missionary schools are agents of evangelization.
- ❖ Many of our Catholics in the corporate world bare great witness to their faith.
- ❖ The increasing number of vocations from the our mission territory is a fruit of the work of evangelization of zealous missionaries.
- ❖ Our social developmental programmes carried out through several social development centers and health centers and also our prison ministry, contribute towards the spread of the gospel.

2.2 Shadow situation

- ❖ Lack of awareness among us about our duty to be a messenger and a message.
- ❖ The institutional and institutionalized approach to ministry is a block for effective evangelization.
- ❖ Majority of our personnel, especially the clergy and religious, are caught up in the institutional ministry and lack willingness and generosity to work at the frontlines.
- ❖ Inadequate training, formation and remuneration of our Catechists.
- ❖ Vatican II understanding and post Vatican theological developments centered on other faiths has reduced enthusiasm for fresh evangelization.
- ❖ We, Catholics, both lay and cleric, are afraid and shy to proclaim Christ directly and publicly.
- ❖ The formation of priests and religious lacks the focus and thrust on missionary endeavors

- ❖ Growing tendency towards individualism, materialism and hedonism, among all Catholics, clergy and laity included, have diminished in us the passion and willingness for evangelization.
- ❖ The Church, as a whole, lacks the courage to take up social issues that affect the common people thereby, making us less and less relevant to society, at large.

PART 3: SETTING GOALS

- ❖ To establish the Kingdom of God through preaching the Good News
- ❖ To conscientize our faithful of their fundamental primary responsibility of proclaiming the gospel.
- ❖ To have the presence of Christian missionaries in all the civil subdivisions (seven districts) of the Archdiocese of Calcutta, for the task of evangelization.

PART 4: ACTION PLAN

- ❖ Establish a cell for the mission of proclamation in each Parish
- ❖ Offering adequate training and equip them for effective ministry
- ❖ Conducting monthly meetings at the Parish level, quarterly meeting at the Deanery level and half-yearly meeting at the Diocesan level
- ❖ Animation of clergy, religious, catechists and laity on proclamation mission
- ❖ Regularly conducting study classes on the Holy Bible
- ❖ Creating strong awareness among the faithful in every parish for mission of proclamation and evangelization
- ❖ Arranging regular trainings to deepen one's knowledge concerning evangelization
- ❖ Send lay persons to National Centers for on-going training
- ❖ Utilize festive occasions (Christmas, Good Friday and Easter) to spread the message of Christ.
- ❖ Offer opportunities in our schools, colleges and social centers for students and people to come to know the good news and the person of Jesus Christ.

PART V: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ❖ Is Christ and His Gospel being proclaimed by us in word and deed?
- ❖ There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. What is your identity and your role?
- ❖ Lay people are the vast majority of the Church, the minority being ordained Ministers and Religious. Are we not relying only on the minority to do the work of evangelization? Spell out concrete ways and means by which you, the vast majority, can become missionary disciples.
- ❖ How can women and the youth play a vital role in the new evangelization?
- ❖ Is our low evangelization zeal playing a role in the dearth of vocations to priesthood and religious life?
- ❖ What role can our parents and educators play in forming our children as little apostles?
- ❖ How can we celebrate "Mission Sunday" and "Holy Childhood Sunday" as personal evangelization opportunities?

CONCLUSION

Proclamation is the action of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the whole creation. It is a mandate given by the Lord himself to all his disciples, which is spelt out clearly in Matthew 28:19-20: ".....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.” In the light of this commission, the Holy Father Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” obliges every disciple of Jesus “to go forth from our own comfort zone, in order to reach all the *peripheries* in need of the light of the Gospel.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 20)

The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern men by basing our realities of light and dark situations. We can carry out a marvelous proclamation and re-evangelization work, given the social, political, cultural and religious factors of tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Bengal. It is therefore, we are called to strengthen our light situations and improvise dark situation for taking the Good News at all levels.

CLOSING PRAYER

Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who moved by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith; as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One, help us to say our own “Yes” to the urgent call, as pressing as ever, to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our Archdiocese.

Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia!

-Adapted excerpts from the prayer of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*

Annexure

1. Pope John Paul II, Speech to the XIX Ordinary Assembly of CELAM, Port-au-Prince (Haiti), March 9, 1983.
2. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists, December 12, 2000.