

New Evangelization and Modernity



BERGAMO, Italy – *Father Battista CORTINOVIS, SMM at the age of 80 is always a dynamic director of “The Apostle of Mary” in Italy, a Montfortian Marian and Missionary Magazine that stands out for its international scope and its attention to the themes of modernity. Recently, he published this article on the new evangelization in Europe which can interest our reflection in all latitudes of the world.*

“Go all over the world. Proclaim the gospel to all creation” (Mk 16:15). This is the mission that Jesus entrusts to his apostles. As if to underline the difficulties of such a project, Jesus himself once said: “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? (Lk 18:8).

Today, it seems difficult for some to give a positive answer to the question. Statistics and sociological research record a decline and virtual disappearance of religious practices, in a climate marked by secularization, secularism, atheism, or at least by religious indifference. And they blame ideologies hostile to religion.

Faced with this phenomenon, there are those who think they have to fight for the reaffirmation of the Gospel, believing that it is a momentary and surmountable crisis, with a view to putting Christ back at the center of life and modern culture. And there are those who, on the contrary, consider the process of secularization as irreversible, in the face of which it is not necessary to have an attitude of condemnation and rejection, but an openness in discernment and attention to the signs of the times.

From the Second World War onwards, there were profound cultural, economic and social transformations in European and North American society which led to a dechristianization: the explosion of the means of communication and scientific technology, the urbanization, changes in working conditions, the spread of well-being, consumerism. In people's daily lives, profound changes have taken place, to the point of altering their relationship with God.

To continue to announce the Gospel, in such a context, it is necessary to change mentality. In the process that has seen many people move away from the Church, especially young people, a prejudiced closure to modernity has gained weight, very often within the institutions of the Church.

On the contrary, it is possible even in modernity to build Christian communities capable of living the Gospel message and, with the humility of the Word of God, of entering into the heart of modern people, witnessing that Christian values can be fully experienced even in a complex and technically advanced society. It is about learning to be close to people in the different situations of life, following the example of Jesus who accompanies the two disciples to Emmaus: “Jesus himself approached and walked with them” (Lk 24:15).

The Church of Europe finds herself in a vanguard position, because the socio-cultural and economic transformations which have caused the religious crisis, sooner or later, will also extend to other countries of the world and their Churches will face the challenge of announcing the Gospel in de-christianized societies. This has already been seen in recent years in Eastern European countries, where the same phenomenon is occurring today.

Hence the meaning to be given to the expression "new evangelization": more than announcing the Gospel "again" and as always, it is a question of announcing the Gospel "in a new way", where the contents of basis of the message are always the same but their inculturation is different, requiring discernment in the Spirit, to interpret the signs of the times, which vary and require a new reading and a new language, to end up in evangelical witness, arrival of all time.

“The second evangelization of Europe must be new, in the sense of an evangelization radically renewed in relation to what was the first, [because] it takes place in a post-Christian situation and in a cultural climate profoundly different from that in which the first evangelization was implemented, and therefore requires different methods and means from those used in the past” (Civiltà Cattolica, IV, 1991, pp. 325ss).

In such new evangelization, care should be taken that the contents are presented in a more essential way, stripped of the encrustations that stifle their simplicity and their effectiveness. With more optimism, joy and serenity; with more positivity towards modernity, but not naivety towards the powers of evil. With more adherence to the concrete needs of faith seekers and fewer pre-packaged solutions. Jesus healed the sick, released feelings of guilt, encouraged confidence in life, supported good aspirations. Evangelism must rediscover this power of good. Return to Jesus of Nazareth, who spoke to the crowds with wisdom from the heart. And everyone listened to him with admiration and followed him.

We should take into account the evolution in the ways of living the faith, with less physical presence and more participation at a distance. Celebrations and religious debates that come to the house through the media, reading newspapers to learn about the life of the Church, readings to deepen the data of faith and morals, social messages that measure reactions to joyful or sad events in the Church. Modernity adopts different ways of life and relationships from those of the past. A voice to listen to and support also in the way of living and expressing one's faith. Even at the level of the liturgy, the voice of modernity asks to adapt the language, to help to understand the signs and symbols, words and liturgical gestures. Communication experts can help find the best solutions so that the Christian faith can express itself publicly in an authentic profession of Gospel values.

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