

Lecture given by the Most Reverend Patrick Kelly Archbishop of Liverpool

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'Paul and our Contemporary Mission Ad Gentes'

I. Ad Gentes:

Our concern in this session is every man, woman, child: our concern is that which is not merely true but also universally significant. It is that which contributes to the well-being of everyone.

II:

i. My task, therefore, is to discern in Paul that which brings about change in the relating subject: and I must mean in us as those who relate not only chemically, biologically, genetically, but who relate by being attentive: by recognising coherence but also absurdity; by coming to ever more sound judgments, refined of the bias, the prejudices, the *prae-iudicia*, that ground bad calls; but above all else, as those who relate by loving, that is by consciously taking hold of myself and because I have become converted I am able to relate to the other as such, that is to the real, for the real is that which I encounter in true as opposed to rash, hasty, inadequate judgments.

ii. For there to be Mission Ad Gentes, to all, I need to learn, for example, from Bronowski's, 'The Ascent of Man'. That work explores how each significant liberating step, each one, in a refrain in Pope Benedict's 'Caritas in Veritate,' feeding 'of (the) innate yearning to be more,' (*para 29*) is not only because of a new known: it is also marked by a differentiation of consciousness, a change in the subject as such. And perhaps in our day we need to revisit, especially in every Eucharist, the first: from consuming the fruits of the earth to enjoying wheat bread while sowing seed for tomorrow's bread, and drinking this year's vintage with joyful thanksgiving, while pruning the vine for another year.

iii. In this recognition of the conversion of the subject we also begin to discern the criteria for the framing of a wholesome, integrating, forming curriculum be it in mathematics, physics, literature, history, philosophy, theology. Content shall be chosen to inspire, correct, form mathematicians, physicists, literary sensibilities, philosophers, theologians.

iv. And the yearning addressed is for that which is wholesome, integrating, and so is the saving of the subject as such. It is the answer to the plea in the 'Sound of Music' of a child confronted with 'Doh, Re, Mi': 'But it does not mean anything.' It is the response to the issue that sadly is no longer raised every evening by Dougal, Zebedee and Florence in the 'Magic Roundabout'.

v. But I avoid the words: relevant, relevance. I fear especially as the young un-nourishingly feed on a diet of idol, celebration, soap, so that the yearning for the more is closed down. Relevance reduces the real to that capacity of the wine-skin I already am and as a result the best wine kept until the last may never be tasted. (*cf. John 2:10*)

vi. And that wine in the end flows from only one source: a pierced side, pierced when he freely accepted a death and placed himself entirely for the others, who as sinners were utterly other from him the Holy One of God; he descended into hell, and went to that farthest of all far countries. But only from him so emptied, does the Spirit of Truth flow in abundance. (*John 19:31-37; cf. 7:37; and cf. Mark 5:7 and Luke 1:35; Luke 15:13*) I have long been grateful for the words in George Every's poem, 'The Shroud':

'How is this image
Made in us. We are afraid
Always to go further
From Father and Mother
Into the wounded side
Where ever to abide
Will always be to move
And to be moved
By love.'

In other words: it makes such sense that we sing: 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height and in the depth be praise...O loving wisdom...O wisest love...O generous love...and in the garden secretly and on the cross on high.' And we may thankfully pray: 'All your actions show your wisdom and love.' (*Eucharistic Prayer IV.*) Again, a refrain in 'Caritas in Veritate' is: 'the principle of gratuitousness.' (*cf. para 36.*)

And to see this becomes the life of the disciple not only the teacher, the servant, not only the master. (*cf. Matthew 10:24; Galatians 3:13; Romans 9:3.*)

III:

So to become wiser in our contemporary Mission Ad Gentes, an essential step is: to recognise the fruits of conversion of Paul, as a subject, as attentive, inquisitive, coming to judgments, choosing where he shall stand in relation to what, or who, is other, and especially perhaps, as regards those who are other because they have chosen to go into a very far country.

i. I begin with a problem he faced to which we will return at the end of the reflection: I mean disunity: the late George Every used to say: 'It all stemmed from the fact that the Christian Stephanus had a bigger house than any other Christian in Corinth'. But disunity in Rome (*Romans 12:1-8*), in Ephesus (*Ephesians 4:1-16*), Corinth (*I Corinthians 1:10-17; 11:17-34; 12-13 [sic]; II Corinthians 13:13.*), had to be addressed. But Saul of Tarsus was converted so searchingly that he could not send out the call: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.' (*Mark 12:28-34*); his relationship to, Paul's attentiveness to, reading from, forming judgements grounded in, love unto death of the Other for the others, means he has to talk nonsense: Be one because the Other is Three. And many of us have seen division in our day because of this folly of the who is three: I am for contemplation (the Father), I am for liberation (the Son), I am charismatic (the Spirit).

And we must also be attentive to this fruit of the conversion of Saul: The God is now the Father of all, working in us (*Ephesians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4*); the Lord is the one who chose to be plunged into the waters of baptism, the ultimate servant who in dark defeat conquers sin (*Ephesians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 12:5: cf. John 10:40-42; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 12:49*); the Spirit is the source of varieties of gifts and pleads within us (*1 Corinthians 12:4; Romans 8:26f; cf. ibid 12-17 and Galatians 4:1-7*). The God of Israel, the God who came close by, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit who come close by. (You will find the phrase, 'To know that he is close by' on the plinth for the tabernacle at the Church of our Lady of the Assumption, Maryvale, Old Oscott; words found by the late outstanding philosopher/theologian Peter Lawler, disciple of Frank Davis, in the writings of Cardinal Newman).

ii. A second example and a cautionary tale we need if we are tempted glibly to declare that what we name as the new Testament is a fulfilment of the old Testament; that issue is rigorously explored and graciously too, by Pope Benedict when in his book 'Jesus of Nazareth,' he dialogues with Rabbi Neusner:

Isaiah is crystal clear: 'I am the Lord; there is no other...There is no god but me, a God of justice, a saviour. There is none but me. To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.' (*Isaiah 45:15-26*); but of a man 'born of woman, born under the law' (*Galatians 4:4*) Paul, 'circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews,' will endorse this hymn: '...God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' (*Philippians 2:9-11*.)

iii. So to a third example, another fruit of a new reading of the purposes of God (*Ephesians 1:3-14; cf. ibid 3:1-20*); new convictions about Jesus, new choice of where to take his stand in the issue of how God is close by. I recall how he begins the longest, sustained searching, wrestling, in all his writings known to us: Romans 9-11, to which we shall need to return if we would ponder the Mission ad Gentes in our day. He writes: 'They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; and to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to them flesh is the Christ, who is God over all blessed for ever. Amen.' (*Romans 9:1-5*.) From acknowledging the manifold ways the God of Israel came close by his people, his insight conviction, word, love breaks out into: the one who appeared to me on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9 etc*) is God over all blessed for ever. Amen. (And cf. the untranslatable Greek, it seems to me in Romans 9:16: 'and so not of the willing, nor of the running, but of the mercying God.')

iv. And a fourth example: brother has become Other: Other has become brother. 'Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. To the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' (*1 Thessalonians 1:1 and passim in opening greetings*). The name Jesus used to belong alongside Paul, Silvanus, Timothy: the name Lord with God. But old readings, old coherence, accomplished judgments, old loving worship, are all collapsing in the face of new events, meetings, encounters. (*cf. Deus Caritas Est 1; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5*.)

v. And the breaking point of what held the old wine was the cross: 'we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.' (*1 Corinthians 1:1-2*.) And this foolish wisdom goes as far as this: 'For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (*2 Corinthians 5:16-21*.)

vi. 'Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,' and 'we regard no one from a human point of view.' (*2 Corinthians 6:17 and 16.*) 'We have the mind of Christ.' (*1 Corinthians 2.16.*)

vii. So a journey began: all data had to include Christ; all search for coherence had to be in Christ; all judgments had to be made according to Christ. (*cf. Romans 2:16.*) All loving had to become 'God's love (loving)...poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' (*Romans 5:5.*) But all of this is in Christ crucified.

That conversion of Saul into Paul, as an attentive, intelligent, rational, responsible subject grounded the labours that nourished so many of us in the 1950s and 1960s; labours of such men as Lyonnet, Cerfaux and the mighty Editions du Cerf.

viii. So a new beauty, that is a new locus where there come together the wholesome (unum), the true (verum), and good (bonum) and so we meet the beautiful (pulchrum); and this grounds a sure foundation for universal meaning, that is an encounter, a conversation that will take every man, woman and child beyond, but only by drawing them to be converted as subjects, converted in their senses, their feelings, their enquiring, their judging, their loving.

The crucified Christ is recognised as essential in authentic obedience to those universal precepts spelt out by Bernard Lonergan:

Be attentive to all the data, including Christ crucified;
Be intelligent, seek meaning, but before 'Jesus Christ...publicly portrayed as crucified' (*Galatians 3:1*) and name as absurd, disintegrated and disintegrating that which excluded him and his cross;
Be rational, and judge 'in the presence of Jesus Christ who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.' (*1 Timothy 6:13.*)
And be responsible: 'Do not let what you eat and drink cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.' (*Romans 14:15b-19.*)

ix. But, when it came to 'I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come,' (*2 Timothy 4:6*), it remained true: 'Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what is ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' (*Philippians 3:12-14.*)

VI. Two brief reflections before two conclusions.

i. So much in Saint Paul is a cautionary tale: the ekklesia at Corinth was healthy apart from views and actions consequent upon those views about baptism, the Lord's Supper, idolatry, gifts of the spirit, marriage and the resurrection of the body. I do not think Liverpool with our challenges is quite such a bad state.

I suggest: conversion of the subject as subject, as differentiated from the mere handing on of new content, is a slow, painful, rigorous process and most subjects as subjects prefer the old skins in which they are comfortably at home already. The Mission Ad Gentes today, that is to

all may not escape the price of conversion that forms authentic subjects. And one requirement that is part and parcel of that is the need for differentiation of consciousness; it is both vital in these days and yet rarely been so difficult to explain and accomplish, perhaps because it is alien to an often partial attention to data, incoherent readings, premature calls and so inappropriate actions around the equality agenda. The generic has not space for 'and it came to pass', but if Socrates is sitting, he is necessarily sitting.

ii. And this imperative of the contingent is manifest in one aspect of mission Ad Gentes at this time. The mission may not prescind from the Muslim reality and that cannot be profoundly addressed without being attentive, seeking to understand, coming to less foolish judgments and so working for responsible actions about Jerusalem, the Holy Land. Rigorous attention, thought through reading, sound judgments and so actions, and that includes words, (dabar), rooted in Romans 11-13. And indeed:

'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!' For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.' (*Romans 11:33-36.*)

V. Two conclusions:

i. Those, who have in the past and still day by day appropriate in a reflective manner their own conversion rooted and grounded in the 'love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge,' (*Ephesians 3:14-21*) in attention to detail, in interpreting and reading situations, in coming to repeatedly checked out judgments, in loving from a new heart, will have word of wholeness, healing salvation to share Ad Gentes.

ii. And as a young Bernard Lonergan asked questions, as once did a young man in the Temple (*Luke 2:41-52*), in Bernard's case about the Great Depression, and concluded: the issues were not merely economic but profoundly epistemological, so in our day we will discern that 'Caritas in Veritate' is timely indeed for evangelisation, a word of exhortation (*Acts 13:15*) for the peoples: indeed: 'the key to development is a mind capable of thinking in technological terms and grasping the fully human meaning of human activities within the context of the holistic meaning of an individual's being.' (*para 70.*) For 'Development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good.' (*para 71.*) 'Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual outbuilding.' (*Romans 14:19.*)