



BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND & WALES

INTERVIEW WITH ARCHBISHOP JOSE OCTAVIO RUIZ ARENAS

Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation

Holy Trinity Brompton, Anglican Church during Alpha International Week, Tuesday 7 June 2011.

Question 1: The term 'New Evangelisation' means different things to different people and can find expression in diverse ways because each country has a distinct culture. Is there a single definition?

When Blessed Pope John Paul II invited the Church to start the 'New Evangelisation' he acknowledged the need to reach those that have grown cold in their faith and about the role they play in the universal Church. Pope John Paul II called us to announce the Gospel with renewed vigour, finding new methods and expressions that can be adapted to all cultures. But in particular, he called us to go and find those who have drifted away from the Church (lapsed) taking into account their own cultures and local circumstances.

So it can be said that the Church has one global intention which will be incarnated taking into account concrete individual circumstances, because it is not the same to talk to a young person than to a banker, an economist or a housewife. We will be spreading Christ's message with the same strength and enthusiasm as the holy apostles, with the purpose of igniting a flame of profound love of Christ through a truthful encounter with Him.

Question 2: How does this tie in with Pope Benedict's teaching to reach out to a secularised Europe and the initiative of the Courtyard of Gentiles?

A New Evangelisation is of paramount importance to the Church because we are witnessing a growing process of secularisation all over the world. We need to rekindle the faith of our people and reignite the need for God in our lives. As Pope Benedict XVI says, if we leave God out of our lives it will be the end of civilisation and we will lose the foundations and purpose of our humanity. This message is not only for people of faith. We must go, as he said, to the Gentiles' Courtyard and meet those who do not believe. We must not be afraid and we must follow the example of the apostles who went out with great enthusiasm to evangelise not only the Jews but also the pagans, and that too is our role at this particular juncture.

Question 3: The use of social media was important during the Pope's visit to the UK. What do you think is the role of social media in the New Evangelisation?

New Evangelisation means to spread the message of Christ, and we need to find the most appropriate medium to do so. Announcing His word in church is not enough. His message must reach the whole world. The media have a very important role to play in the New Evangelisation, and not only the papers, TV and radio, but also the new media. We are living in a digital world, in a digital culture, therefore the New Evangelisation must make use of modern social media: Facebook, Twitter, etc. in order for the Church not to lag behind. Our Church needs to use these new technologies to reach out to people's hearts, especially young people. We must communicate the Gospel in those fora where young people communicate with each other.

Question 4: What does it mean to embrace ‘new means, methods and expressions’ of evangelisation? Where do we begin?

When Pope John Paul II asked us to find new methods and new ways to express our faith, he also acknowledged the very important role of the Church. The Church has been “teacher”, “mother”. We all are God’s sons and daughters and we need to communicate with each other. We must go out and talk to people and find out their needs, their concerns. We must begin a dialogue through which people may feel the need for God and furthermore, so that they may discover Him, not only through our message but also through our actions.

So in the New Evangelisation, it is most important that we, as shepherds, talk to people, but it is also important that the young speak to the young, women to women, bankers to bankers, economists to economists. The Gospel must be spread not only through those who have received an official mandate to do so, but through the whole Church and its members who must also work actively in this mission. Therefore lay people have a very important role to play.

Question 5: What’s the relationship between what might be called old forms of evangelisation and the new?

In our evangelisation we are announcing the same message we have been spreading during more than twenty centuries, namely, that Jesus Christ is the centre of our life; that He died for us, rose from the dead; that He is alive and that He is acting in the Church for our salvation. We now need to find a way for this message to reach people’s hearts and we must be creative to ensure that the message is one of happiness and hope. Our message cannot be announced in a half-hearted way. We cannot simply say: “Christ is alive”. We must do everything possible to show that we must find the Lord, and that once we’ve found Him we must become His disciples, listen to His word, live as He lived and imitate Him. When we do this we must go out and spread that same message with joy. So this is not a different message. We transmit the same message but the novelty lies in the way we do it: reaching out to people’s hearts and transforming the world so that there may be more justice, greater brotherly love and creativity in spreading the Gospel.

Question 6: What is your response to the claim that part of the challenge of the New Evangelisation is to find and create new languages to communicate the Gospel, as Jesus did in his time?

If we wish to reach out to people in our task of evangelisation we must know how people think. Pope John Paul II talked of “new expressions”, but what did he mean by this? He meant that we must transmit our message in a different way. We must keep our core values and the essence of the Gospel, but we need to find a modern language. To achieve this we need to know the people, their concerns, their lifestyle, in order to respond to them. The Gospel has to respond to people’s needs and if we speak a language that people do not understand, or if we do not understand the people, we will not be able to evangelise. Therefore, it is imperative to find a new language that ensures that the message of Christ and His salvation is understood by the new generations.

Question 7: What initiatives are you aware of that support the New Evangelisation and what is your message to people who are interested in responding to the call to get involved?

When we talk about New Evangelisation we must not think of it as a new process. Pope Benedict XVI has convened a synod of Catholic Bishops to reflect on what “new evangelisation” is, but this is a process which started many years ago and has led to many beautiful experiences.

There are groups, communities, apostolic movements, doing wonderful work to bring the Gospel to the society of today. For example, we have Alpha Courses and other evangelising expressions within the Church,

such as the Neocatechumenal Way, Communion and Liberation, the Focolare Movement and Charismatic Renewal. The Pope said that these groups are a real gift to the Church and we must make the most of them. Even at parish level, there are parish groups, young and enthusiastic people and prayer groups. We must find ways for these groups to respond to the needs of the New Evangelisation, but we are not starting from scratch. Together, we must find the way to respond to the call of the Holy Father to evangelise with enthusiasm and happiness to ensure that Christ reigns in our hearts.

Interviewed by Clare Ward, Home Mission Advisor, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales at Holy Trinity Brompton, Anglican Church during Alpha International Week, Tuesday 7 June 2011.

Links

Alpha <http://www.htb.org.uk/internationalweek> and <http://www.alpha.org/catholics>
Home Mission Desk <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/Home-Mission>
Missio <http://www.missio.org.uk/>

Missio is the official overseas mission organisation of the Catholic Church.

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