

New Evangelisation:

The Year of Faith and New Evangelisation

Michelle Moran

It was with great joy that the staff of ICCRS were able to be present in St Peter's Square for the opening Mass of the Year of Faith on 11th October 2012. Undoubtedly, this was a historic moment occurring during the XXIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops focusing on "New evangelisation for the transmission of faith". There was a deep sense of unity in the Spirit as we knew that the event we were experiencing together with the Holy Father, would also be celebrated in Cathedrals and Parishes throughout the whole world.

In one sense every year should be a year of faith so what is so special about this one? Pope Benedict is using the opportunity of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to invite people to come back to the source of the faith. However, he also recognises that today there is an even greater urgency for mission. In his homily at the opening Mass he said that we were not just gathered to "honour an anniversary" but that "today the Church proposes a new year of faith and new evangelisation because there is even more need of it than there was 50 years ago". On numerous occasions the Holy Father has spoken about the many challenges to faith which assail us particularly in the Western world. He recognises that it is not so easy to live our faith today and that we often find ourselves in a minority. Amidst this

"crisis of faith" it is vital for all of us to re-discover our faith as hidden treasure or the precious pearl. He says the Year of Faith is "a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one saviour of the world". (6) The Holy Father encourages all believers to re-discover their faith not as a burden or a duty but as an

opportunity or an invitation to a deeper encounter with God. He suggests that the year is not just for us to speak more "about" God but it is a call for us to go deeper in our relationship with God, to speak "with" him through a renewed prayer life.



The Year of Faith and New Evangelisation

It would be wrong for us however only to interpret the Year of Faith as an opportunity for believers to grow in faith. The special year, inaugurated during the synod on new evangelisation, is also inextricably linked in with the call to understand more deeply and engage more fully in new evangelisation. Indeed, the scripture passage, Acts chapter 14, that Pope Benedict has used as the title for this special year speaks about "the door of faith". We can see that the mission of Paul and Barnabas is gathering momentum. In Iconium "many Jews and Greeks became believers" (Acts 14:1). However, fruitful missionary activity is usually accompanied by opposition and difficulties, so we then see Paul being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:20). Paul nevertheless regains enough strength to complete the mission and moves with tenacity to the next town where a considerable number of disciples were made. In this period of their mission, they are engaging in a two-fold activity; they are "putting fresh heart into the disciples and encouraging them to persevere in faith" (Acts 14:22) and "opening the door of faith to the pagans" (Acts 14:27). Clearly, Pope Benedict is using these two activities as tracks for the Church to focus upon during the Year of Faith.

New Evangelisation in many senses for us in the CCR is not new because it is a grace flowing from Pentecost. However this Year of Faith can be an invitation for us to look at how faithful we are being to our missionary mandate. The Holy Father



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reminds us that; “today as in the past, Christ sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all people... In every age He convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new.” (7)

At a recent meeting of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which I attended, it was stressed that the Year of Faith is not a celebration as such or a call to excessive activism but it is rather an invitation to build faith. There is therefore an invitation to each one of us to go deeper in our faith. We also need to build stronger experiences of community where faith can be nurtured and sustained. Our evangelisation should focus ultimately upon “leading people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the son of God, towards the One who gives us life and life in abundance.” (2)

The particular contribution of Charismatic Renewal


Vatican II highlighted the vocation and mission of laity and Catholic Charismatic Renewal is one of the so called “ecclesial movements” in the Church that was birthed in the slip-stream of the second Vatican Council. As part of the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict is calling for a gathering of all the ecclesial movements in St Peter’s Square for the Vespers of Pentecost on 18th May 2013.

Indeed, the Church is looking to all the ecclesial movements to actively play their part in the Year of Faith. To this end, Cardinal Rylko, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, has urged the movements to exercise their particular charisms. He says the movements are schools of faith that have the capacity to build solid Christians. The faith needs to be taught again but also lived in a new way. He noted that many movements emphasise the need for personal conversion and when we live a life orientated towards on-going conversion we take on a new personality. There is then a unity between life and faith.

The Year of Faith provides Catholic Charismatic Renewal with an opportunity to invite as many people as possible into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the ways that we can do this is by more widely promoting the Life in the Spirit Seminars and by doing all that we can to invite new people to participate. Unfortunately, in some parts of the world it seems to have become common for people to keep re-doing the seminars as participants. Therefore we are not spreading the grace of the Renewal but merely re-cycling! The Seminars are meant to be the launch pad for a life in the

Spirit that is grown and nurtured in the Christian community, ideally the prayer group. In order to grow to maturity we all need the support and guidance of a community. So again the Year of Faith prompts us to build stronger communities, places of belonging that can both strengthen the faith of individuals and be a dynamic witness to those around. So during this special year it would be good to reflect on the quality of life in our prayer groups. Are we growing in faith? Is there a deep sense of *koinonia* community, where we seek to have “one heart and mind” and are always ready to love, respect and forgive each other? How are our prayer groups reaching out to those around us through witness and service?

We can also use this special year as an opportunity for a spiritual check up and commit ourselves to going deeper in our faith. Referring to the texts of Vatican II, Pope Benedict says that “they need to be read correctly, to be widely known and to be taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church’s Tradition” (5). Speaking at the opening Mass of the Year of Faith the Holy Father said, “I believe that the most important thing, especially on such a significant occasion as this, is to revive in the whole Church that positive tension, that yearning to announce Christ again to contemporary man. But, so that this interior thrust towards the new evangelisation neither remain just an idea nor be lost in confusion, it needs to be built on a concrete and precise basis, and this basis is the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the place where it found expression. This is why I have often insisted on the need to return, as it were, to the “letter” of the Council—Reference to the documents saves us from extremes of anachronistic nostalgia and running too far ahead, and allows what is new to be welcomed in a context of continuity. The Council did not formulate anything new in matters of faith, nor did it wish to replace what was ancient. Rather, it concerned itself with seeing that the same faith might continue to be lived in the present day, that it might remain a living faith in a world of change.”

As CCR journeys closer to the Golden Jubilee in 2017 we have a duty to continue to grow in ecclesial maturity. The Year of Faith gives us a wonderful invitation to re-visit some of those Vatican II texts that have been so important in our growth and development. Alongside this the CCC is a rich treasure chest to both nurture and enlighten our faith enabling us to present an even more credible witness of faith to those around us. 

Note: The numbers in the text refer to the sections of the apostolic letter Porta Fidei by Pope Benedict XVI published 16th October 2011.

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The ICCRS Leadership Bulletin is published along with the ICCRS Newsletter. Its purpose is to publicise formation on decisive topics in CCR.

Please contact the ICCRS office for permission to reprint.

The ICCRS Newsletter is e-mailed freely. And it can be posted for € 10.

In addition, the ICCRS Leadership Bulletin can be e-mailed for a annual subscription of € 15.

Leading with Authority

■ **Julienne Mesedem**

Life in society would lack order and richness without the presence of men invested with legitimate authority. They ensure the protection of institutions and satisfy needs in proper measure, for the common good. Authority comes from the Latin verb *augere* which means ‘to make grow’. Authority is the quality by which persons or institutions make laws and give orders to men and expect obedience in return. Authority does not derive its moral legitimacy from itself. It must not behave in an autocratic manner. Rather, it must act for the common good as a moral force on freedom and on responsibility.

To exercise authority is to strive to reveal a just hierarchy of values, to facilitate the exercise of freedom and responsibility for all. The leader must apply justice, allocate wisely, taking into account the needs and contributions of each person, in the hope of harmony and peace. The leader must ensure that the rules and arrangements he makes do not lead into temptation by pitting personal interests against those of the community.

In the image of Christ, he who has the authority is not he who commands, but rather, he who nurtures, he who serves. Jesus said, “If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mk 9:35). Faced with the indignation of the disciples at the request of the sons of Zebedee, He said: “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:42-45).

The basis of authority is not in power, but in submission and sacrificing one’s life (Jn 10:11). The authority that goes before the leader is not for his glory, but to confront the wolf in case of threat and aggression, for protection. Authority cannot feed the sheep except to the extent of the leader’s reliance on Jesus and his love for Him. At all times, he must seek to know the will of God, to be obedient so that he passes on only what he receives. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).


To be glorified, authority must be fulfilled in the sacrificial lamb. All authority comes from God: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rm 13:1). The Lord grants authority for our edification and not for ruin: “For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed” (2 Co 10:8). Because authority

comes from God, it must be permeated by the mercy of God’s heart, which jostles it, which fills it to the point where it can no longer live for anything other than the salvation of His sheep. The exercise of authority is measured morally in terms of its divine origin, its gentle nature, and its specific goal. No one can command or establish structures that oppose human dignity and natural law. He who has authority must exercise it as a service to others: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:26); “When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you’ ” (Jn 13:12-15).

After leaving his garments, Jesus was stripped of the master’s tunic he wore. It is the declaration of a major scandal. He chose freely to be a slave. Lower still, he died between two criminals. This is a complete reversal of values. This scene hides a previously unimagined message: who would have believed this? Who had ever thought... In the annihilation of self, in the service to others, hide such tremendous strength, honour, dignity, life, and love? Laying aside his garments, Jesus shed his authority, in an act that speaks of gift and surrender. From master, he resigned to servitude. When he put on his clothes again, after washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus kept the attire of the servant. Master Lord, He is the one who serves.

Laying aside one’s garments also means to shed one’s bad habits—pride, selfishness, and apathy—to be free to receive everything from God and be cheerfully willing to give of oneself. We must serve others like Jesus to progress on a path of humility that makes Christ present in all our actions.

Pope Clement of Rome wrote this prayer for those in authority: “Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord, and stability, so that they may exercise without offense the sovereignty that you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honour, and power over the things of earth to the sons of men. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given to them, they may find favour with you.”

Although we are advised to obey and respect the authorities, St Thomas Aquinas warns us by saying: “A human law has the character of law to the extent that it accords with right reason, and thus derives from the eternal law. Insofar as it falls short of right reason, it is said to be an unjust law, and thus has not so much the nature of law as of a kind of violence.” 



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

How to discern that a person is really resting in the Spirit?

It is important not to approach resting in the Spirit simply as an unusual phenomenon that has appeared among Catholics through the Renewal. This approach can suggest that the phenomenon is inherently problematic. A wiser approach is to consider the implications of a strong prayer of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit on the whole being of those prayed for. Because our bodies are an essential part of us, because our full healing has spiritual, psychological and physical dimensions, we should not be surprised when the prayer of faith produces visible physical effects. What we must not do is to try and make something happen by our efforts. For this reason, pushing people to fall back and rest is to be avoided. It is also wrong to put a psychological pressure on people by suggesting that only those who fall are blessed.

A full answer requires a sense of what is happening when people rest (generally on the floor) following prayer. In many places in the Renewal people line up to be prayed for, wanting to receive blessing and healing. When they are prayed for, many fall to the ground. But within half a minute they get up and go back to their places. This seems to me to be largely a waste of everybody's time and a distraction from the real business of the Lord. Here I share my own reflections as a priest-leader. Why do I say this? Is it because I think resting in the Spirit is a distraction and a waste of time? No, because I have seen people deeply touched by the Lord while they have rested in the Spirit.

Rather, I say this because the act of falling is an act of surrender. It is a letting go of my own control, and can become a sign of submitting to the Lord. It means switching off our patterns of worry and anxiety, of trying to decide how to handle our problems. When we have cut off our racing mind, and we can truly say: "I place myself in Your hands, Lord," the Lord can work in us at a deep level. Some people are taken back to forgotten parts of their lives. Others have profound experiences of the Lord. Some just don't know what is happening. The first time I ever rested in the Spirit the only thing I knew afterward was a certainty that I had got up too soon!


How do we know whether someone is truly resting in the Spirit? As long as nothing is obviously "not of the Spirit" this

is not an important question. What matters is that leaders and people have their focus on the Lord, not on experiences, not on unusual phenomena. When Christians baptised in the Spirit come together to seek the Lord, we do not need to ask this question. When people are resting peacefully, we leave them in the hands of the Lord. When there are signs of agitation, even violent motions of the limbs, the most likely reason is that deep wounds and hurts, maybe suppressed from memory, are surfacing. This is good, not bad. What is manifesting is not just the Lord and his grace, but deep pain that the Spirit is uncovering for healing. If these occurrences are disturbing the meeting, the person should be taken to another place, where the healing work of the Spirit can continue without disturbance.

Why is this phenomenon so widespread in our day? We can see a wisdom of God at work. Today, there are huge numbers of deeply wounded people. Every rise in the divorce rate, every division of children between quarreling parents, every act of abuse and exploitation, every mass movement of refugees fleeing violence and terror increase the number of those needing profound healing. Some learn to function in society and

hide their pain, others are walking wounded, unable fully to function. Not letting their pain come out can deny them the chance of healing.

Another factor today is that our world is full of noise! People carry their own entertainment with them, music, video, chat shows, etc. Noise is one device to push away isolation, loneliness, pain. Alcohol and drugs are another. So resting in the Spirit can be seen as God's gift of a silent space, where He can get in and work. In my view it should not be treated with suspicion, for then we risk "quenching the Spirit." What is needed is not suppression, but wisdom and discernment. Because of our noisy hyper-active lives, deep surrender and rest are difficult for many people. They want fast results. They want the fast-food version. So they lie for one minute and get up. This can be another way of not letting the Lord deal with our deeper issues. Resting is a profound act of trust.

In our day many practice soaking prayer, which is really resting with the Lord. This will be addressed in a future column. 

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