

Year of Faith: To Develop the New Evangelization in the Chinese Church

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Year of Faith: An Opportunity

Pope Benedict XVI solemnly announced and inaugurated the Year of Faith. The Holy Father has said the foundation and core of faith is personal encounter with Christ. The history of the Church tells us that all activities and reforms cannot attain the expected results without a living faith. Today, the reform that the Church really needs is renewal of faith, in order to live the nature of the Church — evangelization.

Many clerics and Catholics in China speak of the future and renewal of the Church. However, those who love the Church in complicated situations have no way to make it happen. The Year of Faith initiated by the Holy Father really helps the Church in China find the key for the renewal of life and faith, as well as pastoral guidelines to address many problems. Therefore, the Year of Faith is an opportunity and a beginning for the Church in China to break out of its difficult situation. The pastors and the faithful have to make good use of grace in this year, to read the documents of Vatican Council II and understand their meaning, thereby to make up for the sluggish progress of faith due to the absence of the Chinese Church at Vatican II. Moreover, with the help of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, China's Catholics can know the doctrine more clearly. They can act according to criteria provided by dogmatic truth to overcome all the difficulties we face today.

The Meaning of “New Evangelization”

The proposal of “new evangelization” is the Church's constant response to the invitation of “proclaiming the Gospel to

every creature,” but there is a particular emphasis due to the living situation of the faithful nowadays. The new evangelization focuses specifically on Christian communities that “have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer see themselves as members of the Church.” Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that the new evangelization is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that members of the Church can be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in today’s world, capable of leading the many who are seeking to the “door of faith.” This “door” opens wide man’s gaze to Jesus Christ, present among us “always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith*).

For more than half a century, the Church in China has undergone hardship under an atheistic regime. To a great extent, the transmission of faith is restricted, and the integrity and credibility of faith have become ambiguous. Due to the lack of the Vatican II spirit and the abnormal situation of the ecclesial communities, the traditional belief of Chinese Catholics desperately needs to be renewed with the new evangelization. Only a strong faith can help Catholics in China walk away from the barriers of division to create unity and realize communion with the pope and the universal Church. We need the new evangelization to shape Chinese Catholics with full assurance of their faith. Today, both the internal and the external situation of the Church in China conform to the appeal of the Holy Father: we need “re-evangelization” in regions that “still wait for the first evangelization” and in regions where the Church has experienced a profound “crisis” of faith.

Pastoral Measures of the New Evangelization

Pope Benedict XVI has said that the “newness” of the new evangelization consist in method, not content. Blessed John Paul II also defined the new evangelization as one that was new in fervor, methods and expression. At the closing Mass of the 13th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Benedict highlighted three

pastoral directions: re-emphasize the sacramental life, proclaim the message of salvation to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ, and re-evangelize the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism. These three pastoral themes are in line with the three situations of evangelization mentioned in the encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*" of Blessed John Paul II: proclaim to Christian communities that have solid ecclesial structures and are fervent in their faith; proclaim to people who have never heard the Gospel; and proclaim to groups of the baptized who "have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church."

In the Church of China, the above-mentioned situations need new evangelization. It also means that the Holy Spirit invites us to carry out a "targeted" program of evangelization and pastoral care. In China, we are living in a social and human context different from other regions. Therefore, we have to take measures according to our real situation and available resources.

1. *The attraction to non-believers.* In atheistic societies and countries, religions often bear witness instead of being wiped out. It is evident that some non-Catholic relatives and friends are moved by Catholic rites of marriage and funerals. They are impressed by the gestures and words in the liturgy, leading them to know about the meaning and values of these major life events. This can be regarded as initial evangelization for society and non-Catholics. Besides, after seeing the good works of Christians, many relatives, friends and colleagues might ask the Catholic "to give an account for the hope that is in him," and they would then be invited to attend catechism class. Charity service is always the cornerstone of Christian faith witness. Free health services in rural areas, caring for the sick and elderly – these are all opportunities for non-believers to know Christ and the Church. Moreover, many people may come to believe in God after seeing a recovery from illness, demons being cast out, etc. The Church has always prepared well to offer service to those who pursue truth and the meaning of life, welcoming "all nations that are drawn by Christ."

2. Pay great attention to adult catechesis. All parishes in the Church of China should pay great attention to the system of adult catechesis. Parish priests should be most concerned about this pastoral work, because catechism class helps catechumens receive reliable faith content through reliable methods. Being more attentive to the faith formation of catechumens gives us a very good opportunity to adjust the core of pastoral work. It is evident that in many cases, due to the insufficient formation of catechumens, many newly baptized have brought superstition into ecclesial communities and many Catholics have become “religious illiterates,” “titular Christians” and “baptized pagans.”

As for evangelization, pastors should be well aware that the key of evangelization is not a matter of quantity or speed; rather, it is a matter of being a real “child of God.” Integral catechetical formation can lead catechumens to receive all the effects of the Sacraments of Initiation, so that they can become true Christians.

3. Catechetical formation. In the Church of China, both new and senior Catholics lack basic and systematic catechetical formation. This is because China’s Church in the past lacked the ability and conditions to offer laity formation, and it was even forbidden to do so. As time passed, the Church in China acquired some human resources. By the opportunity of the Year of Faith, it is possible to motivate the laity to study the Bible systematically, as well as the documents of Vatican Council II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Paying much attention to catechetical formation is advantageous to the development of evangelization. It is also possible to carry out the catechesis targeting different age groups. Both lay leaders and catechists are the main force of “new evangelization.” They are more suitable to help the faithful uphold the doctrines and promote the growth of faith. Catechetical formation is the starting point of the new evangelization. Without knowledge of “revealed truth,” it is impossible to build up a correct, healthy relationship between God and man, let alone develop good witness! A superficial understanding of faith may cause confusion and error in the life of faith as well as in ecclesial communities. All dioceses and parishes should pay more attention to and implement the professionalization and universality of a systematic catechesis.

4. Build up small communities. Under the leadership of parish priests, parishioners can build up small faith communities, realizing the integration of “I believe” and “We believe,” increasing faith awareness and inspiring evangelization. Faith is a personal act, but at the same time it is also a community act. It is a gift from God to be lived in the communion of the Church and communicated to the world. The local Churches should encourage and help parishes promote small faith communities. These small communities take up the mission of renewing the faith and transmitting the faith to the new generation. This is also one of the pastoral recommendations for laity formation proposed by the Holy See’s Council on Chinese Affairs in 2012: “We can take the lay associations and ecclesial movements as the pivot point to begin the apostolate because all these associations and movements are advantageous to continuing formation.” The small faith communities can attract “lukewarm Catholics” and implement key points of the new evangelization – namely, to re-evangelize those who have left the Church and those who do not live the Christian life. “Neocatechumenal Way,” “Focolare,” “Charismatic Renewal,” “Fellowship of Catholic University Students,” “Blessed Sacrament Sodality,” “Rosary Camp,” etc. – all these movements can help the baptized become true Christians and encourage those of little faith to re-encounter Christ. The various Catholic movements with different kinds of charisma can revitalize the evangelization of the Church in China, just like the new wine at the wedding in Cana, so that Catholics can feel the vitality of Christ and the Church. The Church in China should have the courage to accept the movements with different kinds of charisma and discern them according to the signs of communion and obedience to the hierarchy. Instead of separating from the parish, the small faith communities can make the Church radiate vigor, and encourage the faithful to bear faith witness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

5. Youth problem. Youth ministry is an indispensable part of pastoral work. The “Message of the II Vatican Council to Youth” stated that young people are the hope of the world and of the Church. They are to form the world and the Church of tomorrow.

They will either save themselves or perish with them. Development of the young is the present and future of both humanity and the Church. The Church sees its pathway toward the future and reflects itself in young people, because they are the hope and image of the Church. Young people are more open-minded and often ask questions, so we must give them convincing answers. The Church's pastors need to be concerned about the development of the world and its surroundings so as to correctly analyze their influence on young people and then offer proper guidance to the young. We can offer such guidance in various ways, such as through catechesis, Bible knowledge competitions, establishing and introducing international charismatic communities, creating youth organizations, and using new media to initiate various activities in which youths are interested. In short, we have to proclaim the truth of the Gospel to young people correctly, appropriately, convincingly and attractively, helping them to deepen their faith, respect the value of life and follow Christ our Savior.

6. *Family evangelization.* In Chinese society, the crisis of faith and the crisis of social integrity also directly impact marriage and families. The Year of Faith is an opportunity to revive our faith. One important pastoral guideline is to maintain the harmony and stability of marriage and families. The family is a domestic Church, the place to transmit faith and promote the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Pastors of local Churches should promote and revive the good tradition of family prayer, and publish a "Family Prayer Handbook" appropriate for modern times, to help family members pray together every day. Family is the core of evangelization and a strong fortress to resist the assault of atheism. Premarital counseling, the Sacrament of Marriage, Marriage Encounter – all these will help the family become a "school of love" and "cradle of faith." Family pastoral care is always the task of parish priests.

7. *New evangelization and new media.* We know well that the Church in China faces many challenges, and one of them is to connect the Gospel and Chinese society with the digital culture created by new technologies. New evangelization means

proclaiming the Gospel in the context of new technology. The mission of the Church in the world is to proclaim Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and to bring the Gospel to all people. On different occasions, the popes have encouraged ecclesial communities to utilize digital technologies when evangelizing. The Church knows well it inevitably must face the challenges of our time while faithfully fulfilling the mission entrusted by Christ. We are living in an age of rapid development in all aspects and are on historical frontiers with ever-changing technologies. In fulfilling its mission on earth, the Church has to pay attention to people in different situations and establish a dialogue platform that uses the language and methods of communications common to the people. The use of technologies or techniques should be evangelization-oriented, to let Jesus Christ be present in the life of modern people, and certainly also online groups! Pope Benedict XVI has said, “The Church is called to proclaim the Gospel to men and women of the Third Millennium, maintaining the content unchanged, but rendering it comprehensible also thanks to means and methods that are in keeping with today’s mentality and culture.” The Church does not aim to have its own media and websites, but to serve people living in modern times through media. Both the evolution of communication media techniques and their influence on social life require the Church to make adjustments and undertake renewal in pastoral care. With the help of the specific functions of new media, the Church in China has to accept the evangelization challenges generated by new technologies, promote exchanges with groups inside and outside the Church, strengthen the bond between the faithful and ecclesial communities and, at the same time, try to provide information about the Church and testimonials of faith. Media and internet are not the only means of pastoral work, but these tools certainly play an important role in interpersonal communication. The purpose of promoting internet evangelization is to use digital space as well as the fast and easy way of media to proclaim Jesus Christ. The Church encourages professionals to make good use of communication tools – websites, blogs, Twitter, QQ Web, YY Chat, Fetion, etc. With these vast and easy communications of words and images, new technology will certainly become an efficient assistant of evangelization.

8. *Evangelization through print media.* Printing books and publicity materials is a traditional way of evangelization in the Church. Evangelization through print media is straightforward and simple and still is effective nowadays. The Church should actively utilize modern language to express its faith in God through this medium. The Church can distribute booklets and pamphlets on evangelization and faith in different places, to promote channels of communication and boost prospects of knowledge. Evangelization through print media can take account of the needs of different groups. This not only helps Catholics to deepen their faith, but also leads non-Catholics to pursue truth and love.

9. *Pay attention to rural-urban migrants.* As the process of urban development keeps moving forward, a large part of China's rural population has migrated to cities. The transient population invites the Church to adjust its strategy of evangelization. The new migrants in cities represent an opportunity for new evangelization. The Church is concerned about the pastoral care of the migrants and transient people and always pays great attention to human values. It tries to relieve the pressure that migrants feel, foster correct values and life views in them, and help them know Christ and encounter Him. All of this can be discussed under the framework of "new evangelization." Dioceses can launch ad hoc committees and parishes set up relevant groups to provide pastoral care to people on the move and migrants in aspects of living and faith.

10. *The social teaching of the Church.* Due to the propaganda of atheism in the past 50 years, Chinese society has lost the foundation and energy to uphold and practice morality. The Church needs to raise its voice in society, defend human rights and point out truth in all dimensions. Proclaiming the correct anthropology and theology is the contribution that the Church offers to the Chinese people in order to revive morality. The Church's teaching about peace and human rights can help Chinese society end confusion and allow the country to assume the responsibility and obligation of globalization. The Church does not enjoy the privilege of social life as in medieval Europe, but the faithful can still enter

various aspects of social life and bear witness to justice and charity by the words and deeds of their faith. The Church promotes social progress by the real life of the faithful. New evangelization will not bear any fruit if the Church separates from society.

11. Parish is the frontier of new evangelization. In China, the territory of a typical parish is vast, and the parish priest has to care for many churches, oratories and communities. “Long distance” and “scattered parishioners” are practical problems of pastoral care and evangelization. The parish is the base for evangelization and catechesis, and also the place to implement new evangelization. The development of parishes in China depends on the pastoral work of parish priests and their missionary zeal to expand their territories. At this point in history, the parish priest should pay more attention to cooperating with other clerics and the laity. He also should be more attentive to the role and function of the catechist, and set up a system of formation. If the parish priest lacks a new missionary zeal, it is very difficult for him to live fully the new evangelization. The parish priest is the first catechist of the parish, and also the one who promotes communion between local ecclesial communities and the bishop and the pope. If he engages in sectionalism, factionalism and an independent kingdom due to his own personality defects, this can be considered a sin which harms the universality of the Church. Any “egoist” parish priest will cause the faithful community to become “stagnant” and lose its positive attitude. Such priests cannot recognize the “new evangelization” and cannot bear the fruits of love and tolerance. If a parish priest “hijacks” the parishioners’ ideas and limits their activities to a designated area or sphere, he will seriously hinder new evangelization in China.

The above 11 points are not perfect ideas, but just reflections on new evangelization measures in China. This article is a response to the implementation and vision of the new evangelization of the Church in China. The grace of God will inspire those “who love the Lord.” According to different circumstances, the Holy Spirit will manifest Himself in those who cooperate with Him.

To overcome difficulties, assume the mission

“New evangelization is not a momentary planning, but the way to look into the future, so that all of us can bear the responsibility to renew our faith, because preaching the Gospel is the foremost mission of the Church.” In every age the Church has to face challenges and difficulties when evangelizing, and they are always concrete and objective. With their love for God, the saints “spared no effort to respond to the invitation of the Gospel unto their dying day.” Promoting and implementing the new evangelization in China needs numerous saints. With God’s help, all of us are invited to be saints of the new evangelization in China and to devote ourselves to the task of new evangelization with the spirit of the martyrs. The Holy Father has said, “There is a passion of ours that must grow from faith, that must be transformed into the fire of charity...The Christian must not be lukewarm...Faith must become in us the flame of love, a flame that truly ignites my being, becomes the great passion of my being and so ignites my neighbor. This is the way of evangelization.”