



ECUMENISM, NEW EVANGELIZATION AND MARITIME WORLD

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New evangelisation is not really new...

Telling people about Christ is not new. Evangelisation and mission are the foundational ministries of the church. They are the original ministries, the oldest ministries of the Christian faith community. It is what we still do now, and what we are all about.

New evangelisation proposes no new gospel, or at least no different gospel to the one we know. But of course the gospel is always new. Even the word means that it is news. New evangelisation recognises that the gospel is always new: it is after all the current news from God about human life. It says what God thinks about life right here and right now, our lives, your life and my life. And when that news meets us, its audience, the news from God replaces our fear with peace, it soothes our pain, gladdens our heart, lifts the spirit and inspires hope. It does so now. It is new to the listener, new in its application, and good news in its implication. The gospel is the good old new news from God for the people whom He loves. That has never changed.

Offensive or irrelevant

New evangelisation acknowledges that the church of Christ has survived these 2000 years by understanding that its audience changes. As culture develops – or declines, depending on your point of view – people change. And with them changes the best ways to gain entry into other people's lives. The points of impact that touches someone's soul and could effect change, shift all the time, from generation to generation, from one place to another, from one situation to the next. New evangelisation simply says that the Church has realised that, once again, our audience has moved on, that our old ways of telling the gospel may not be as relevant as they were, and that it's time to think again whether our news is still new and our gospel is still good for today.

The moment you ask that, we come to realise that a post-Christian society (at least in the West) is so misinformed (yes, I think more mis-informed than un-informed) about Christ and his church that society now despises us. Not only are we behind the times – faith was a phase, but thankfully we've outgrown it now! – we are offensive – the faith-fanatics haven't realised it yet! Offended, that's how people feel about us. On the other hand, to those seafarers who come mostly from the East, Christian belief



may have become a pluralist preoccupation: it is perhaps only one cultural way of being among many alternative ways of being, depending on where you are or what you choose. Whichever way you look at it, faith is balanced on the edge of irrelevance.

Our real world

New evangelisation responds to this new and present reality:

- The Christian faith is in decline
- The Christian faith is one option in a pluralist multi-faith environment

How to respond?

How best to respond, then, to these new challenges that face us?: this is the question that new evangelisation asks of us. I do not pretend to have any of the answers, but I would like to suggest that new evangelisation should

- Present to the world Christ, not culture
- Give them life, more than church
- Show them community, as an alternative to rampant individualism
- Demonstrate responsiveness, rather than boundless freedom

These are not my ideas alone. I got them from a book that I'd like you to read. It's called "Everyday Church" and is written by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis.

Gateways to people's lives: being human, being spiritual

They say that what is required is that we re-define love.

- Because in this world of aggressive humanism, real people desperately need to share in a common humanness.
- This world, so besotted with materialism, misses being spiritual.

These two, a common humanness to be shared and a move to once again take our spiritual being seriously, these I believe are the gateways into the lives of present day people.

How seafarers mission measures up

This is the point where I would like to apply new evangelisation to our own ministries, the care of seafarers, fishers and their families. And it's no surprise that our ecumenical seafarers ministry is trailblazing this approach, and has been for some 2 to 3 hundred years. Because all four of those basic ways of getting through to the hearts and minds of people in post-Christian and pluralist societies are



cornerstones of seafarers ministries. Well, let me rephrase that: they're perhaps not cornerstones, but they are already there – a little neglected maybe, but already there, waiting to be developed.

Christ, not culture

It is from living in this Christianised culture here in the West that we have learnt from experience just how badly so-called Christendom has gotten it all wrong. The church has been powerfully influential in establishing Western culture. Christian values have developed into laws of morality and basic human rights, Christian ethics have driven social programmes for the betterment of society to the extent that it's become political manifesto and social engineering. While Western religion is spectacularly flailing, the West has adopted a "Christian" culture which it pursues with unashamed quasi-religious zeal. Well, should we not celebrate that as Christian victory? Philosophers, I think, have helped us to be more honest: they call our time postmodern, and post-Christian. This Christian culture knows no Person called Christ. So if we were to introduce people to someone called Jesus Christ, that would be really new to most, even when those same people's culture prides itself on being based upon "Christian" principles.

Oh, we did learn something very valuable from Christianising culture. We have learnt that Christ changes the world and not just the church. Christ is bigger than church, he encompasses all culture. But then, Christ is bigger than culture too. And the world could do well to get the message. When they do, it will again be news to them.

We then, present Christ, not Christian culture.

Life, not church

It is in working together ecumenically and outside of the formal institutionalised churches that we have discovered that all the church's one foundation *is* Jesus Christ, our Lord, after all. Together we offer seafarers Christ, not church.

Let me immediately add: I love church. I come alive in it, I thrive in it, I feel fully human only in the church. And I know that you feel the same. Not that very long ago our churches, yours and mine, were at war. That's how the La Granges from the South of France ended up in the Cape. Perhaps we love some things too much? Even the church?

But we, you and I, we try to show seafarers how Christ loves, not how the church we love fails to love. We present Christ, not culture. But neither do we present church. We have life to offer.



Again it's apparent that the seafarers' missions are uniquely positioned to make new evangelisation happen. Unlike the institutionalised church, our missions

- are embedded in otherness
- in a whole life-world foreign to the church
- in the maritime industry
- in seafarers workplace
- in people's life-space.

Our missions operate simultaneously, on the one hand, with and within the church, and on the other hand, outside and far beyond the church.

(I have not forgotten that there are two more things that new evangelisation should consider doing:

- Showing people community, as an alternative to rampant individualism – it is on community that I am focused
- Demonstrating responsiveness, rather than boundless freedom

But before I get to that, let me describe how I think we could offer a new perspective on life...)

Judged by grace, exposed to business

Precisely because we in seafarers missions work far beyond the limits of the church, our missions are uniquely vulnerable, exposed to the frontline of business and industry. And make no mistake: the maritime world judges us on its own terms, and not by ours. Out there we are not judged by grace. While we have an umbilical cord linking us to our Mother, the church, we're nonetheless also out there somewhere, far removed from the faith family, its cosy cathedrals and Scriptural certainties.

This double-sided life of our missions is both useful and dangerous. I hear Jesus saying: I send you into the world like sending sheep to a pack of wolves: be cautious as snakes and gentle as doves.

While we need to be robust when we enter this business-like world, we must work tenderly with the people we meet there. Because of what we do and depending on how we go about it, the working lives of ordinary people meet God. We witness where it works. We meet people in the sway of their busy lives bearing the fruits of justice, human dignity and simple but precious humanity. That's good!

What's tough is that out there we are exposed to life itself. Out there in the world there is little evidence of the loving-kindness that the church has for itself. We are judged by the harsh principles of business that govern outcomes and delivery.

Delivering Good News, facilitating peace

Our work's outcome should be people's joy at discovering peace with God. The gospel is good news for human life. If not, then why bother? Paul himself writes that if the gospel does not make you glad, and if it does not bring you to God, then we are the saddest people of all. Wimpie van Schoor focused ICMA here in Rome to address the problems that only God can solve: our reconciliation to God, our restoration to being human.

Now this we have in common, perhaps not with the world, but most certainly as people of faith.

We are unlikely bedfellows

Out here in the world where the umbilical cord to our own church is tenuous, stretched and strained, we have discovered others, from elsewhere, working as we do, and sharing a common love of Christ for people. And, strangely, this Christian love is shared by people we have in the past easily hated. In the remotest outposts, "the four corners of the earth, the edge of the world" – sea-going ships in ports – God has made us realise that we share faith and love with the same people we had previously suspected of heresy. It is in the difficult context of people's working lives that God has offered us the gifts of unlikely friendship and unexpected support: partnerships through ecumenical working. New evangelisation partners with ecumenical working.

Facing the problems of life, new evangelisation focuses on the simplicity of faith rather than the complexities of doctrines, and on the one Jesus Christ, rather than Christianity's multi-denominational confusion. New evangelisation brings us back to the core of our own faith: Jesus, the Christ of God. We have found more value in sharing ecumenically than in perpetuating the schisms, because in sharing we have re-discovered the vastness of Christ's love for us, the faithful and our churches. Due to our discovery that we are all loved, we are able to present to seafarers the foundation of all ecumenism:

- We can showing seafarers real community, as an alternative to the rampant individualism of our time. If community is human, then loving communities are God's work.

Can we be a loving community, a moment of church, a manifestation of the body of Christ?

From tolerance to celebration

Our ecumenical partnerships should not stop at casual alliances and bridging the canyons of schisms. It is time we went beyond the ICMA mantra in its Code of Conduct: that we should be tolerant of one another. It was Monsignor Jacques Harel,



AoS chaplain, General Secretary of ICMA and predecessor of Father Bruno Ciceri at the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People who once said:

ICMA should be a celebration of difference and diversity

From ecumenical working to partnering God's world

As we start to understand just how fundamentally our humanity is transformed by Christ, we realise that Jesus' incarnation touches all humans, even those farthest removed and militantly atheist. Not only can we, the churches, meet one another as friends and companions, we are brothers in Christ, children of one Father. But it goes even beyond the bonds of shared faith: the incarnational reality of Christ implies that we can partner with secular bodies in seeking the justice God wants. We can partner with secular bodies while overtly and explicitly Christ's, because through Christ all of humanity is again connected to God.

Bound together to God

Ecumenical focus on new evangelisation acknowledges this one simple tie that binds us all, both churches and humanity as a whole, to the God and Father we know through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, whether the world believes it or not. What's important is that it's the truth. That Christ is real and that we are his church.

But cut loose from everything else

How then to understand and to approach this new reality which we face? Well, being bound to God implies that we are cut loose from everything else. But being cut loose does not mean we are indifferent.

All of us are refugees, strangers scattered all over the world (1 Peter 1:1). We live here as immigrants, foreigners, aliens, strangers, temporary residents, itinerant people. People who do not belong here, people on the move. Crucial to understanding our new reality is that we believers have moved

- from centre to margin
- from majority to minority
- from settlers to sojourners
- from privilege to plurality
- from being in control to being witness
- from maintaining institutions to risking our all on missions

And this implies an uncomfortable sense of dependency. It means we are hosted by others, tolerated rather than welcomed, judged on our usefulness.



New evangelisation: who, what, where?

But that's good. That's a good place to start gospeling. John Finney states in "Finding faith today" that

The most important evangelistic work [is done]... not in the church and pulpit but in two relationships,

1. *One to one relationships with non-Christians*
2. *One to one relationships with lapsed communities addressing the very nature of faith.*

We're almost back to where Jesus started: on ships and mountains and beaches rather than on pulpits.

But then: we know all about that.

Andre Dreyer (CSO) once said:

God sends us to the ends of the earth. The ends of the earth have come to us! To our door, to our ports.

We're already there – on ships and beaches! On the edges of communities. The miracle in our own time is this revelation that, when one arrives at the edges of the earth, we are not alone. That the body of Christ is already there: not one church, but all church. And not even death will ever be able to overcome it (Matt 16: 18). We are strangers, but we are not alone. I have you, and you have me.

Together we are all strangers to the world. Together we respond to Christ.

New evangelisation takes our identity as foreigners seriously

Meeting seafarers where their world and ours meet requires of us to take seriously that we are foreigners entering the worlds of others. Our new identity in Christ shapes our ways of being with others: our engagement with others becomes Christ-centred. But being foreigners, our Christ-centred approach to others is always respectful. Christians treat their host culture with *respect*, honouring its authority and *seeking its prosperity*.

1 Peter 3 : 15 and 16: *"...Have reverence for Christ in your hearts and honour him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect."*

My reverence for Christ, and acknowledging Him as the Lord of my world and of yours, leads me to approach you always with respect, always seeking your best interests.

Respect is soft difference

What is required of us is what Chester and Timmis call "soft difference" rather than "hard rejection". They say that new evangelisation asks of us these questions:



- Where are the best places to meet people?
- When can we best connect with people?
- What hurts, what scares, what pushes people away from us?

And, I shall add:

- What will a moment of church, an encounter with God, look like from their perspective?

I think the answer to that might be: we are all here, the whole church. We are here for you. Christ is our Lord. Christ is the Lord of us all.

Seeking their prosperity

1 Peter indicates that evangelising in a foreign culture is possible when evangelists are perceived to be seeking what is in the best interest of those who are invited to encounter God. Confrontation is not recommended as the first step, neither is inciting rebellion. On the contrary, evangelists seek the prosperity of the city, and sets out to demonstrate its submission to and respect for local authority and custom. In reverence to Christ, Peter says, do good to the city. Seek its prosperity and be a blessing to the lives lived in it, because "Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?" (1 Peter 3:13). Inspire them to "...Turn away from evil and do good; they must strive for peace with all their heart."

Love is the key

The key then to evangelisation, to facilitate an encounter with God in a strange world, to create a moment of church, is to love. There is, once again, nothing new in that!

We refer to what we do for seafarers as "pastoral care". Pastoring is

- Not intense conversation
- Not therapy
- Not extraordinary interventions

Pastoral care springs from God's grace. Pastoral care delivers the good news of God's love. If our pastoral care does not leave them and us with a strong sense of God's grace, there is something very horribly wrong. Remember Romans 8:1 "There is no condemnation for them who are in Christ."

Christ is all you need

Our aim with pastoral care is not to make people moral or even more spiritually aware, nor to lead them to choose one church or faith tradition by rejecting another.

Our aim is for people to experience the joy of having met God in Christ. That was Paul's aim in all his ministry: That they may have joy. (Phil. 1)



Pastoral interventions is delivering the solutions to the problems that only God can solve, and does solve through Jesus Christ. It's outcome is peace with God, and joy for having found that peace. Implementing new evangelisation in our everyday pastoral care is not

- Good advice
- Positive thinking
- Instructions for living correctly

The gospel tends to say: "You need not do this or that..." rather than "You should not..." Why need we not do so? Because Christ has already done it all and He is sufficient.

Pastoring is speaking the truth about God. And the truth about God always amounts to this: the good God is greater than sin. Sin is settling for less, substituting Jesus Christ for a lesser god.

Can we all preach Christ with conviction: Orthodox, Catholic and Charismatic, Protestant and Pentecostal? I believe we do.

Where to with new evangelisation?

New evangelisation gets us talking to people. What we talk about is so varied that it cannot be taught. It encompasses all our experience of life. But what we can ascertain from the Biblical writers are the underlying attitudes that are almost always present in all pastoral conversations (Chester and Timmis):

- *Be at peace with one another, forgiving, agreeing, being humble, accepting, forbearing, living in harmony, greeting with a kiss.*
- *Do not judge, lie or grumble.*
- *Show hospitality to one another.*
- *Confess your sins to one another.*
- *Be kind to one another, concerned, devoted, serving and doing good.*
- *Instruct and teach one another. Admonish, rebuke, exhort and stir up one another.*
- *Comfort and encourage one another.*

Is there a formula? Is there a prescribed method for new evangelisation which belongs to only one of our churches? I don't think so. We do not need courses and rallies and clever techniques and practiced eloquence or neatly packaged dogmas. We do not need to introduce events of evangelisation into the busy lives of others. Evangelisation is our life. Loving Jesus is who we are. Meeting people will result in encounters with the God and Father of Jesus Christ. It's (almost) inevitable. If then there is one thing required of us it is that we meet seafarers, that we enter into their lives and engage with them.



New evangelisation is a lifestyle not a specialist activity. New evangelisation is countless acts of kindness. New evangelisation is provocative discipleship. New evangelisation is significant conversations.

New evangelisation is finding new ways to love

Love Jesus. Be passionate about Him. Love is not a technique. Love is an attitude.

Love people. Be passionate about seafarers, fishers and their families, because they are people. People are not evangelistic fodder or targets for gospel salvo's. These are people already loved by God, and to be loved by us. Love will take care of all their needs.

Love life. Love life in all its shapes and forms. Serve all life's needs.

Being authentic

Getting love right will do more for evangelisation than any formula, method or technique. Being authentically human means attempting to love people as Christ loves them.

Offering people real love is new evangelisation's first goal. And perhaps we start best by confessing that we did not always get it right.

Where love happens an authentic Christ-community comes to life. And this is my prayer: that seafarers' mission establishes us as an ecumenical union. That we go beyond ICMA's mantra of tolerating one another and concentrating on precarious fragments of unity, to celebrating our differences, glorifying God for our diversity and trusting one another enough to refer a seafarer to a colleague in the next port irrespective of that colleague's denomination or faith tradition. Because we are one in Christ. And the same love of God will be freely given by all in our faith community in every port where people find us, because we are the one body of Christ. Sadly, for this to happen, will be new. But is that not then what new evangelisation is all about? I pray that we might become an authentically Christ-centred faith community.

May we all prosper...

Let's not forget that Christian faith once prospered where it was hated by most. It grew in a culture where one cared only for oneself and one's own. Watching people publically tortured and killed was the height of entertainment, and not so very far from where we meet right now. In contrast, Christian faith brought to people their humanity and their dignity. New evangelisation acknowledges that sadly those times are returning. For all our technological advancement, wealth, enlightenment and emancipation we seem to spiral into a black hole where humans are cast aside as consumable commodities.

Christ is not new. Telling people about Christ is no new initiative of the church. But that people are still valuable to God, is still the best good news to be had. New



evangelisation, especially if we can share a singular commitment to showing together God's love for the people in whom he rejoices, can change the world.

Be not discouraged then by the small and insignificant bits of work that you do every day that do not seem profound or groundbreaking. Mission is love in action. Loving is a multiplicity of activities. On their own they may mean nothing. But with prayer and gospel intentionality God will use you and your small acts of kindness to restore people's lives and to construct again his kingdom. Be brave. Love with all your heart.

This presentation relies heavily on the 2011 publication of Tim Chester and Steve Timmis: "Everyday Church: mission by being good neighbours." ISBN: 978-1-84474-520-3. Inter-varsity Press, Norton Street, Nottingham NG7 3HR, England. I would strongly recommend it for further reading.