

The “New evangelization”: a Challenge and a Promise

by

Bruno Forte

Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto (Italy)

1. Why a “new evangelization”? An Emerging Crisis

The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New evangelization was established on 28 June 2010. In October of this year 2012, the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is called to reflect on *New evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. For Pope Benedict, this topic is of the utmost importance. Addressing the participants in the first Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council (30 May 2011), He tellingly explains in words emerging from his personal history as a scholar and pastor:

When I announced that I wished to institute a Dicastery for the promotion of the New evangelization, I opened the way for a reflection to begin on a subject I had pondered over for a long time: the need to offer a specific response to a moment of crisis in Christian life which is occurring in many countries, especially those of ancient Christian tradition.”.

The Pope shows how the realisation of a widespread crisis—particularly noticeable in “old” Christian Countries—underlies the urgency of a new evangelization. What, then, is this crisis? What are its causes? To face these questions is to begin planning for the new evangelization.

In the Apostolic Letter, *Ubicumque et semper*, September 21, 2010, establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New evangelization, Benedict XVI describes the crisis referred to: *“In the course of history, the mission [of the Church] has taken on new forms and employed new strategies according to different places, situations, and historical periods. In our own time, it has been particularly challenged by an abandonment of the faith - a phenomenon progressively more manifest in societies and cultures which for centuries seemed to be permeated by*

the Gospel... There has been a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred, which has even called into question foundations once deemed unshakeable such as faith in a provident creator God, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the one Saviour, and a common understanding of basic human experiences: i.e., birth, death, life in a family, and reference to a natural moral law”.

In the Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* (11 October 2011) introducing the Year of Faith on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the Pope observes with the same sincerity: *“Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people” (n. 2).*

The crisis is deep-rooted: culturally speaking, its origin could be identified in society’s progress to autonomy which began in the Age of Enlightenment. This has now developed into the various forms of modern ideology regarding the autonomy of the human being in history. The claim is that every human person, especially in ethical matters, is absolute. The transcendent is denied and the individual “ego” is alone.

Such an isolated person easily falls prey to the power of ideologies. When there is no connection to the Transcendent, humanity is vulnerable to oppression. The only way of escape is to open our eyes to understand the truth about ourselves, and to break out of our crippling egotistic individualism. We need to look beyond ourselves to see the truth of things, to face the reality of the Other whether this be close and immediate or transcendent and supreme. If modern ideology believes God to be “dead, useless and unnecessary”, (*mortuus, inutilis, otiosus*), any resolutely objective view of reality recognises the fundamental value of anchoring life and history in a source of meaning. Both the popularization of scientific positivism and ideological absolutism took the death of God for granted—as it is clear in recent writers such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Michel Onfray, Piergiorgio Odifreddi. However, the parabola of modern ideologies underlines the crisis of human being left to himself. The need to be connected with the living God reawakens a kind of “Longing for the Totally Other” (Max Horkheimer - Th. W. Adorno). There soon follows, *“an awareness that an interior desert*

results whenever the human being, wishing to be the sole architect of his nature and destiny, finds himself deprived of that which is the very foundation of all things" (Ubi cumque et semper).

The "post-modern" side of this crisis turns into a denial of any ideological standpoint as totalitarian and violent. Typically, ideologies forces the post-modern man to live on fragments: as a period of contamination (everything is contaminated, nothing is worthy) and fruition (it is better to live intensely, enjoying pleasures), the post-modern era turns out to be an era of frustration, a long good-bye to any sense of security (Gianni Vattimo).

Religion is also compared with ideologies, and, therefore, is rejected because of its prejudices. It becomes necessary, then, to clarify the character of the God of Christian faith as totally unlike the totalitarian violence of ideological reason: a God who decided to choose the abandonment of the Cross to show the world the depth of his endless love. Moreover, the denial of the possibility of universal outlook pushes many post-modern people to withdraw into themselves. A return to this kind of produces in fact a "crowd of loners". The force of Christian charity must be commended as a remedy for loneliness and as a way of creating points of contact and solidarity with others.

Christianity sees the whole in fragments as when the Son who had been abandoned on the Cross is then resurrected to new life. Seeing "the whole in a fragment" can be considered another name for "beauty". It is important, therefore, in the post-modern era that Christianity show itself as the disclosure of a humble, yet saving beauty—in the most beautiful realisation of our humanity, in the resurrection of the Crucified.

The cultural movements referred produce ethical consequences. The scattered islands created by the post-modern fragmentation turns others into "moral strangers" whom we must be wary of. This defines the so-called "liquid modernity", which has been often described by the British sociologist and philosopher of Jewish-Polish origins, Zygmunt Bauman. Nowadays, there are no "given" nor "axiomatic" models and patterns: there are simply too many conflicting instances so that all of them end by losing their force authority. Since there are no absolute points of reference, everything can be justified in terms of the current fashion. Ethical standards, given to the Western World through the Bible, now appear weakened, concealed and hardly evident.

The terms used are “relativism”, “nihilism” and “weak thought”. This fluid side of post-modernity can be particularly traced to the weakness of certainties promised by the “virtual economy”, which is increasingly distant from the real economy. Once the mask of maximum profit with minimum risk is gone, what is left is the rubble of an economic and financial situation which is unstable at all levels. Finding points of reference and reliable guidelines is an immense challenge for governments and regulators. As Benedict XVI highlighted in the *Caritas in veritate* Encyclical, even the economy looks for salvation by knocking at the door of ethics!

2. What does the “New” Evangelization mean?

Faced with this Western cultural context which has so affected human life, the challenge for believers in Christ is that of preaching the Gospel of Jesus to this world in a credible fashion. On May 30th 2001, Benedict XVI stated in his speech that: *“The term, ‘New evangelization’ recalls the need for a renewed manner of proclamation, especially for those who live in a context, like the one today, in which the development of secularization has had a heavy impact, even in traditionally Christian countries. The Gospel is the ever new proclamation of the salvation worked by Christ which makes humanity participate in the mystery of God and in his life of love and opens it to a future of strong, sure hope. Highlighting that at this moment in history, the Church is called to carry out a new evangelization, by intensifying her missionary action so that it fully corresponds to the Lord’s mandate”*.

What changes is not the Gospel, but those to whom it is preached. It is therefore essential to be ready to accept new challenges, to learn new languages, and to try new approaches. The Pope insists: *“The new evangelization must try to find ways of making the proclamation of salvation more effective; a proclamation without which personal existence remains contradictory and deprived of what is essential. Even for those who remain tied to their Christian roots, but who live the difficult relationship with modernity, it is important to realize that being Christian is not a type of clothing to wear in private or on special occasions, but is something living and all-encompassing, able to contain all that is good in modern life”*.

At the basis of these new approaches, there is always the new experience of contact with the living Christ for those who believe: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus caritas est*, 1). In this sense, the adjective “new” used for the term “Evangelization” needs to be clear: it is not a new idea, as if what has been done up to this point is wrong or incomplete, and as if a new proclamation of the Gospel to the world is starting now. Similarly, it would be misleading to forget that the past can show extraordinary examples of movements of renewal and reform in periods of great pastoral and missionary creativity. Take for example the missionary involvements of modern age that have spread the Gospel to so many different cultures throughout the world. New evangelization needs to have a genuinely “new” quality—in the Greek terms from the New Testament, what is meant to be *kainós*, that is, possessing the inexhaustible ultimate and eschatological newness of the Gospel, and not simply *neós*, not simply a newness occurring in the course of time. It is not by chance that Jesus calls his new commandment *kainé*: The *entolé kainé* (1 John 2:7s) means that only those who share in the newness of God’s communication in the Son, can live the new love he asks for and be credible witnesses to it.

Evangelization will be “new” if it springs from a deep commitment to renew and reform the whole Church and in all its members. Indeed, the grace of Evangelization does not belong only to the origins of the Christian faith. The source of this grace is not exhausted, but - as St Augustine affirms, “*this fount is revealed when it flows, not when it ceases to pour out. And it was in this way that the grace, through the Apostles, reached others too, who were invited to proclaim the Gospel... indeed, it has continued to be a call right up to these days for the entire body of his Only Begotten Son, that is, his Church spread throughout the earth*” (cf. *Sermon*, 239, 1).

Benedict XVI, quoting these words of St Augustine, says: “*The grace of the mission continually needs new evangelizers capable of receiving it so that the salvific news of the Word of God never fails to be proclaimed in the changing conditions of history*” (30 May 2011). It is, then, justifiable to refer to models from the past, and to think, for example, that “new evangelization” is to the Second Vatican Council what the great Catholic Reform was to

the Council of Trent. What the Spirit tells the Church through these great Councils is to be translated into the new life of Christians. It must find expression in new enthusiasm based on contact with the risen Christ. This is a continuing possibility for the Church, to provide credible witness to others out of lives transformed through discipleship to Jesus.

The summons to “New evangelization” includes what increasingly characterises this pontificate, namely, commitment *to reform the Church* – beginning from within with the Christianization of hearts. The Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of former days had already showed his distress regarding what he perceived as “grime” of the Church. As Pope, he has intervened with honesty and determination for the sake of purifying the Ecclesial Community. Of course, evil cannot be eradicated either by wiping the slate clean or, even worse, by ignoring it. The renewal of ecclesial life, according to the young professor and future Pope Benedict XVI “*does not consist of a quantity of exercises and external institutions, but in belonging, singly and entirely, to Jesus Christ...Renewal is simplification. Not in the sense of cutting down or diminishing, but in the sense of becoming simple, turning to that true simplicity that is an echo of our Lord’s simplicity. Becoming simple in this sense is what would be the real renewal for Christians, for everyone and for the Church itself*” (*Il nuovo popolo di Dio, Queriniana, Brescia 1971, 301. 303*).

Real reform is evangelical *metanoia*, a radical change of heart, the only reform that can bring the Church back to its original beauty and to be sign for the nations. Renewal and reform of the Church go hand in hand: they depend on each other.

3. *How to promote the “New evangelization”?*

How shall we proclaim the Gospel of our Faith in situations so different from the Christian past? Benedict XVI, addressing the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization (30 May 2011), says: “*The current crisis - brings with it traces of the exclusion of God from people’s lives, from a generalized indifference towards the Christian faith to an attempt to marginalize it from public life. In the past decades, it was still possible to find a general Christian sensibility which unified the common experience of entire generations raised in the shadow of the faith which had shaped culture. Today,*

unfortunately, we are witnessing a drama of fragmentation which no longer acknowledges a unifying reference point; moreover, it often occurs that people wish to belong to the Church, but they are strongly shaped by a vision of life which is in contrast with the faith”.

There are two crucial guidelines: First, the renewal of the standard pastoral life, which aims to take advantage of all opportunities to demonstrate the freshness of the Gospel. Second, creativity and courage in adopting new initiatives of evangelization. Both these are needed if we are to communicate the attractiveness and beauty of Christ. In the wake of totalitarian influences and the post-modern fragmentation that has occurred, it is now more urgent than ever to propose to people today “the whole in the fragment”, that is, the beauty that saves, the Gospel of the good and beautiful shepherd, Jesus (cf. John 10:11).

Christian tradition shows how this beauty can be experienced through worshipping and listening to the word of God, in liturgy, in communion and in charity. In this way, the beauty of Christ attracts and changes us, both in traditional and in new forms, and so enables us to proclaim in a credible fashion this beauty to others. According to Joseph Ratzinger—a few weeks before he became Pope—, *“What we most need at this moment of history are people who make God visible in this world through their enlightened and living faith. The negative witness of Christians, who speak of God but live against him, have obscured his image and opened the door to unbelief. We need people who have their eyes fixed directly on God, and who learn from him what true humanity is. We need people whose minds have been enlightened by the light of God and whose hearts have been opened by God, so that their minds can speak to minds of others and their hearts can open others’ hearts. God comes back to us only through those who are touched by God”* (Subiaco, 1 April 2005).

Such kind of believers have expressed themselves in history and they will continue to do so through different forms of beauty, in the figurative and plastic arts, in music, poetry, literature and architecture, in witness of faith and charity. These are all possible channels of communication with God. Beauty is for everyone, and no one is excluded from its gift; and, in particular, the poor are most deserving of it.

One field in which the beauty of Jesus Christ needs to be proclaimed is the standard pastoral life: the celebration of the fundamental stages of life with the sacraments is a

choice for what is truly of value, for it underscores the central proclamation of faith, the “kérygma” of the Resurrection of the Crucified. It is important, therefore, to put significant effort into the catechesis, both for children and adults. Likewise, there is the preaching of sermons – which are still too often under-prepared and long-winded – and the special occasions of holy days and pilgrimages, the celebration of sacraments and the meditation of the word of God (*lectio divina*), spiritual exercises for everyone, etc.)

A particular occasion of New evangelization is represented by marriage preparation courses, which are often addressed to couples who have not frequented the Sacraments for a long time or who are already living together. At the same time, taking care of families, especially young people, is an effective exercise of permanent Evangelization. Religious education in schools, in spite of the fact that it has a predominantly cultural and informative purpose, can be a precious means of Evangelization if it is informed by the teachers’ own meaningful experience. Thanks to all these forms and the daily testimony of parents and educators in particular, Christ will appear to modern men and women and especially to young people, not only as truth, which he is, not only as good, which he is and inspires in us, but also as a beauty that can save. In him is revealed the Whole of eternal love which is given into the fragments of our existence as it is touched by grace.

But there also new perspectives for Evangelization. There is one issue of interest to all Christian communities, and, more generally, for societies affected by the great cultural changes of recent decades. I am referring to the “educational challenge” which for instance Italian Bishops have chosen to focus on for the coming years. The reason for making education a focal area in the New evangelization seems clear once we consider how difficult it is to convey our values to the younger generation. It seems like the gap between generations has widened all of a sudden, due both to the rapid rate of change and the new languages of the computer and of the Internet. “Digital natives” were born during the Internet era and are at ease in accessing it. They have difficulties interacting with the inhabitants of the old planet Earth, defined as it is by borders and distances. Well-intentioned instruction on the part of parents and educators can be negated by the Internet world. There, the young people surf the web for long periods, and often without caution and discretion. Whilst the “global world” of the young is more and more standardized on

a planetary scale, national identities are rooted in history, use and customs; and there are of only relative interest to youthful eyes.

We have to acknowledge that pastoral work seems to answer questions that no one is asking, or ask questions that no one cares about. We often feel that we are living in a world without God. That may be the result of thinking of “God without a world”. That may be the case for many people we want to reach, who speak languages that are completely different from ours. Our love for young people, which is the reason why we want to pass on the best we have in our hearts, seems to struggle to find the right form of communication.

How can we face this challenge? How can we express what we really care about to new generations? Looking for an answer to these questions seems at the heart of commitment to the New evangelization. Let us meditate on the Biblical story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. Jesus approaches them on their journey, and draws them into to the complete reality of his mystery (Luke 24:13-35). The way in which the Son of God educates the two disciples who are so similar to us and to the young, we who are “foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”, can help us to understand how to face the radical challenge of education and living our commitment to Evangelization.

First of all, the Emmaus story makes us understand that education, as well as Evangelization, is *a path*: neither takes place in an untroubled, once and for all, closed relationship. Rather, both occur according to the risk and complexity, between nostalgia and hope, of personal development. All this is represented by the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus taken by the two disciples and the mysterious Wayfarer. The story suggests that we have all left the City of God, because we are the work of His hands, and we go as pilgrims towards the future at dusk, needing someone to be close to us, someone we can rely on: “Stay with us because it is getting dark and the day is almost over” (v. 29). We are all going towards the ultimate silence! It is the confrontation with the mystery of death that gives us two radical and opposite possibilities: being “towards-death” (as Martin Heidegger suggests when reflecting on the human condition) or being “beggars for heaven” (as Jacques Maritain suggests), bound to a life of victory over the death in the

heavenly Jerusalem. If man is alone in this world, the last word on his destiny could not be anything else but that of the final silence, when everything will die away. If, rather, there is a God who is love, every personal being is a singular and unique “you” to whom this love is addressed, and who will live forever, thanks to the eternal fidelity of the love that has revealed itself.

The choice is crucial between the two options, and must be made every day. The proclamation of life victorious over death must resonate every day, in a ceaseless witness. This is lived out through sharing the journey and through the humble and courageous promotion of the Gospel of love in the widest range of forms, languages and experiences. This is precisely the “new evangelization” that every generation needs. The proclamation of the meaning of life must never be taken for granted; for it implies the horizon of God and His eternal love. There will always be a need for people with a new heart, who are capable of singing the new canticle of hope and faith along the often winding paths which we human beings are called to walk. Anyone who evangelizes or educates must never forget that the crucial choice at stake—this fundamental option shaping each one’s life and the decisions each one will make. Educating means introducing others to the meaning of total reality through a process which helps them to see the truth and to make their own the account of life and hope proposed to them. The goal of complete education can be only the free and faithful choice of what is good in accordance with God’s plans for each and all, for there lies true peace. To reach this goal—for both education and evangelisation—demands that four conditions are fulfilled:

a) The first condition necessary for the transmission of faith is *the gift of time*. The modern culture of progress has profoundly altered our conception of temporality. Reason, which aims to dominate all, has relentlessly accelerated the transformation of historical reality. This “reason in a hurry” is expressed in the rapidity of technological and scientific development, as it is in ideologically driven revolutionary urgency. The myth of progress is nothing but a form of desire for reason to be in power. Modern philosophies of history not only interpret the world, but also attempt to transform it in accord with their image and likeness—and as quickly as possible. Emancipation – modernity’s inspiring theme—

brings a special urgency to the task. The gap between “historical time” and “biological time”, is ever widened by the thirst for global solutions. That is the characteristic of the cult of progress, with devastating consequences of environmental deterioration and ecological imbalance. We need now to rediscover humankind’s dominion over time if we are to begin finding time for people again, in what they need for their overall development. We must *have time* for others and *give them time*, accompanying them faithfully for the duration, patiently experiencing the gift of our own time.

Who is ever in a hurry, unready to give time to others on their journey, will never be an educator, nor an evangelist. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus could have immediately revealed his secret, but did not. He knew that the two disciples needed time to understand what he was going to reveal to them. As in every relationship based on love, even in an educational relationship or in the process of Evangelization, giving time for others is the most credible sign of genuine service.

b) A second condition for the effective transmission of faith is *care for interpersonal relationships*. As Romano Guardini states, “only life ignites life”; and it is therefore only within the warmth of interpersonal relationships that education can be effectively carried out. Historical parabola of modernity represent here an obstacle, because the general breakdown of ideologies and the strong allegiances they nourished, has produced in our post-modern condition a widespread experience of incommunicability and the dominance of the so-called “sad passions” shrouding the narrow horizon of the individual. As a result, interpersonal relationships have weakened. The “strong culture” built on ideology has splintered into countless “weak cultures”. A “crowd of loners” closes everyone up in a private world. We are increasingly alone because we lack a common dream. Building bridges, therefore, between those who are alone is now of vital importance. In that regard, Evangelization is relevant, as is educational process supportive of those sharing a common journey as they move on together. Educators and evangelizers must be *with* others before being *for* others. Education, like Evangelization, occurs through listening, sharing and dialogue. Dialogue does not mean the quashing of differences, however: others cannot love themselves if they are not allowed to be themselves, and accepting of the inevitable

differences between themselves and others. “If you love me, you can say no to me” is an indicator of an effective educational approach, presuming that the context is a network of care and love which does not exclude differences, but allows them to meet for reciprocal challenge and enrichment.

Likewise, essential to any educational experience is *communion in difference*: Here, we have an example in the mysterious Wayfarer on the road to Emmaus. He draws near, joins the two travellers on their journey, listens, and changes their way of seeing things: “Jesus Himself approached and walked along with them” (v. 15). He goes with them, asks questions, listens, reads their hearts—and makes their hearts burn within them at the proclamation of the word of life, sparking the desire, in their turn, to share what they came to feel and understand. This is what it means to transmit the meaning and the beauty of life through the eloquence of life itself. As Paul VI wrote, “Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers; and, when they listen to teachers, they do so because they are also witnesses” (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41). The one who educates, like the one who evangelizes, must draw near to the other: the light of life is transmitted by interpersonal interaction, patiently allowing to the other the time that is needed, and encouraging their choices. As John Henry Newman loved to say, *cor ad cor loquitur*, “heart speaks to heart”. “Nulla maior est ad amorem invitatio quam praevenire amando”, wrote St. Augustine to a friend who asked him how to educate the difficult boys of his day (*De catechizandis rudibus*, 4), that is, “There is no greater invitation to love than loving first”. Educators, like evangelists, must love first and foremost, and without tiring. Only a loving relationship is truly life-giving.

c) A third condition necessary for the transmission of faith is the ability to *keep memory alive*. After the strong claims of ideologies, post-modernism often arises like an “identity crisis” arising from a kind of loss of collective and personal memory. This amnesia is the result of a mistaken emancipation from the past and from our roots. We are in an era of “weak identities” affecting all the variety of memory in its personal, historical, national, cultural, spiritual and the linguistic forms. But the eradication of the past undermines the very possibility of addressing the challenges of the present and the future.

Without memory there is no identity—and no prophecy! In the story of the disciples of Emmaus it is significant that Jesus not only accompanies his two disciples, but also reminds them of things that have occurred, and enlightens their minds with the big picture of the history of salvation. In doing so, he rouses the two travellers by unlocking the meaning of what had been happening, touches their troubled hearts and opens their eyes to the wonder of the gift of divine love: “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (v. 27).

By recalling the wonders wrought by God for his people, the mysterious Wayfarer introduces these two into how own living truth, and opens up the treasure of his heart by making them understand what all have received from the heavenly Father as the gift of true life. Here we have an instance of how the language of memory shapes and inspires the identity of those with whom we communicate, so that objectivity and passion, facts and emotions come together. It is not enough to simply recall the past; its meaning needs to be teased out and applied in such a way as to address the deepest questions of our present lives. The “new evangelization” involves keeping alive this vital, “dangerous” memory. It places personal existence within reality as a whole, and therefore within the living tradition of faith and love which nourish life. It radiates the light that comes from the history of salvation and opens life to the promise of the future.

In this respect, education deals with the whole person and the whole of reality—“Catholic”, in the etymological sense of the term (“kath’òlou” = ‘according to the whole’). In the embrace of all reality, life gives life, the gift received becomes the gift given in love, just as the whole truth frees and saves. Therefore, memory must be like that which Jesus evoked – living and transforming, rather than sterile and inert: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (v. 32). Only the honest word and the genuine witness of what we have experienced are able to inspire life. Memory must be shared lovingly with others, just like Jesus revealing himself at the end of the shared journey in the gesture of the breaking of bread, thus of offering and sharing the gift of God through the gift of himself. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (vv. 30 and 31). The gesture of blessing is linked to the

symbol of the sharing of the bread, of word, of life, and heart. Only in a dialogical relationship rich with memory, and eloquent in gesture, is the life which gives life, between parents and children, between educators and students, between evangelizers and the evangelized...

d) A fourth condition for the transmitting faith both through education and Evangelization is *respect for the freedom* of others—that also means encouraging them along the path of genuine *liberation*. In post-modern culture there is shortage of great hopes to open horizons of adult and responsible freedom. With the sun having set on ideology, the future does not appear as reliable as the great ideological narratives, of widely varying origins, wanted to represent it. When the lights have gone out it is a challenge to move forward with confidence—for both personal existence and social development. Once more, the Emmaus story offers surprising riches. For Jesus reveals a new future to the two disciples. He opens their hearts to steadfast hope and inspires *prophecy*, spreading the freedom of courage and of joy.

Evangelization aims to open horizons, to rise to challenges, and to ignite passion for the cause of God in this world. Neither the evangeliser nor the educator may intend to dominate others, but to lead them to true freedom. Jesus proceeds in this way: he draws near, he explains the Scriptures, he feeds desire, he allows himself to be recognised and offers the two men the proclamation of his victory over death—but in all this, leaving them free from fear and bringing them to the freedom of the mission: “As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus approached and walked along with them ... And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (vv. 15 and 27). He stirs in the hearts of these two a “great joy” (v. 41). Such a joy created a sense of urgency; they left immediately to take to the others the Good News which they had witnessed: “They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together, and said, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon’ ” (vv. 33-34).

When you witness to an encounter of this kind, there is no stopping at what you have been given. You must pass it on in turn—even if freely choosing to do so.

Evangelization either produces witnesses who are free and convinced of what they are living—or, it fails in its goals. The evangelising educator must not create dependencies, but instigate life journeys for each and every one, thus radiating the light they have first received: “Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread” (v. 35).

Education has achieved its goal when its recipients are able to spread the gift that has come to them and changed them. The same must be said of Evangelization: to evangelize is not to produce clones, but to communicate and inspire life at its deepest, so to inspire journeys of freedom and expanding consciousness. In this way, the biblical icon of Emmaus gives us a description as much of education as of the new evangelization: an educator and evangelizer are alike in accompanying others from a sad meaninglessness to a life of joyous significance. This path opens from the precious depth of one’s own heart and leads into the heart of the Church, so that all can grow stronger in love. To be an educator means being able to repeat these words with St. Paul the Apostle: “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy” (2 Corinthians 1:24). It is to be the guardian and promoter of freedom for everyone.

A conclusion which is a beginning...

The style of Jesus can be perceived in his dealings with the disciples of Emmaus, we must then all examine ourselves, asking ourselves if, and to what extent, our commitment to the new evangelization is similar to his way of acting—in regard to our society, our historical memory and in terms of prophetic hope for its future. This is as relevant for the vital, daily communication between generations as it is for the Church’s global pastoral action in the service of the new evangelization. We might easily feel that we are losing the battle. However, there is comfort in the fact that we are not alone. God – who has educated his people throughout the history of salvation – continues to educate us in the present: “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). The Lord is the great evangelizer, and the gift of his love is ever new. We cannot, therefore, give up either

in rising to the educational challenge, or to that of the new evangelization, no matter the cost. And we will trust in the divine Master. As Pope Benedict XVI stated in his speech of May 30 2011: *“Proclaiming Jesus Christ the only Saviour of the World today is more complex than in the past; but our task remains identical to that at the dawn of our history. The mission has not changed, just as the enthusiasm and courage that moved the Apostles and first disciples must not change. The Holy Spirit which prompted them to open the doors and made evangelizers of them (cf. Acts 2: 1-4) is the same Spirit which today moves the Church to a renewed proclamation of hope for the people of our time”*.

We are not alone: the Lord Jesus travels with us in the strength of his Spirit, along with the Church, and the educating and evangelising community. The eyes of the Lord guide our steps; the ultimate goal is the beauty and peace of humanity reconciled in His love. In conclusion, I would now like to turn to Christ, telling him simply and faithfully on behalf of all those who wish to accept the challenge of the new evangelization and of the educational commitment it inspires:

Lord Jesus, you joined the two grieving disciples on their journey as they moved from the city of God toward the darkness of evening. You made their hearts burn, opening their eyes to the total reality of Your mystery. You agreed to stop with them at the inn, to break bread at their table and allow their eyes to be opened, so that they might recognise You. You then disappeared, because they – by now touched by You – left for the streets of the world to take to all people the liberating proclamation which You had given them. Allow us also to see You by our side, a wayfarer with us on our journeys. Enlighten us and allow us to enlighten others in turn, beginning from those who particularly rely on us to be companions on their journeys too, as you did with us, in order to remind them of the wonders of salvation and to make their hearts burn, as you made our hearts burn within us, so to follow you in freedom and in joy and proclaiming your beauty and the gift of your love which triumphs over death. Amen. Alleluia.”