

# **CEAP AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

Speech delivered by Archbishop Socrates B Villegas at the CEAP 2012 National Convention, 29 August 2012, SMX Convention Center, Pasay City

The importance of March 16, 1521 has been taught to us even when we were children in grade school. The standard statement to be memorized at class recitations was Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese sailor, discovered the Philippines on March 16, 1521; but something more important happened on that fateful day. Magellan is not the most important character in the event of March 16, 1521. That blessed day saw the celebration of the first Mass in the Philippines. Ten days later, the first Filipinos were baptized and the image of the Santo Nino was given to the first Filipino Christians. March 16, 1521 celebrates indeed the arrival of Christianity in our holy shores and its gracious acceptance by our ancestors in the faith as proven by their baptism.

When the year 2021 comes, Christianity would be five hundred years in the Philippines. We will celebrate half a millennium of blessings looking forward to the next five hundred as a challenge for a new evangelization.

Like any big fiesta, the 2021 Jubilee will be preceded by a novena very much like the *simbang gabi* novena before Christmas. It will be launched on October 21 this year on the same day that our countryman Pedro Calungsod will be canonized by Pope Benedict XVI.

The nine year novena leading to the 2021 Jubilee will be an era of new evangelization.

## **What is evangelization?**

Evangelization is the proclamation, witness and implanting of the Gospel given to humanity by our Lord Jesus Christ and the opening up of people's lives, society, culture and history to the Person of Jesus Christ and to His living community, the Church, says the CBCP Pastoral Letter Live Christ, Share Christ.

Evangelization is Jesus in my heart, reaching out to your heart, said Blessed Teresa of Calcutta.

Evangelization is not about telling people what to do but telling people what God has done for them, said Father Raniero Cantalamessa.

Evangelization is the life and mandate of Christ Jesus himself, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21) and "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, until the end of time" (Mt 28: 19-20).

## **Why do we call it new evangelization?**

The first evangelization so to speak is dedicated to the proclamation of the Good News to persons and peoples who, until now, have not known the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The ongoing evangelization is the pastoral care of those already baptized who need to understand better and deepen their grasp of the faith and to live it more genuinely and more fully in all dimensions of life, private and public.

New evangelization is primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Faith and from the Church or to those who have accepted the faith but have not sufficiently allowed the Christian message to transform their personal and social lives.

### **In the context of the Philippines, to whom will be the mission of new evangelization be addressed?**

Let us look for Jesus among the poor, among the youth and among former Catholics who have drifted from the Church due to scandals, hurts, unresolved confusions and doubts.

Jesus is in them. We cannot love Jesus and ignore them. How Jesus dealt with them is how we must reach out to them.

### **How?**

The poor are voiceless. The poor are ignored. The poor are a nuisance. How was Jesus to the poor? Jesus made the poor our teachers. He gave the poor a voice so that they may be heard.

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Lk 6:20

Has not God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that God has promised to those who love Him? James 2:5

How was Jesus to the youth and children? Jesus just loved them. He gave them his gaze of love and tenderness. He looked at the rich young man with love. Mark 10:21

And taking a child, He set him in their midst. And when He had embraced him, He said to them: Whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me. And whoever receives Me, receives not Me, but Him who sent Me. Mk 9:36

How was Jesus to the confused and the hurting and the marginalized? How did he deal with Zaccheus (Lk 19:2-7), with the woman by the well (Jn 4:7-30), with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), with Peter after the denial?(Mk 14:66-72) He just listened to them. He did not rebuke; he did not debate. He just listened to them because to listen is to love. Listening heals. Listening soothes.

Then Jesus, raising Himself up said to her, "Woman, where are those who accused you? Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one, Lord." Then Jesus said, "Neither will I condemn you. Go, and now do not choose to sin anymore." (John 8:10-11).

Where are the youth? In our schools and colleges and universities but also in the streets and dark alleys, in our malls and parks, seldom home yet everywhere.

Where are the poor? Can they afford our Catholic schools and colleges? Only the blind will say the poor are not with us. They are with us but we have managed to make them invisible so they will not prick our consciences and disturb us in our comforts.

Where are the confused and hurting Catholics? Is there anyone here who does not know any former Catholic now born again Christian, agnostic or free thinker? Right in our schools, our youth write essays in language classes calling the Church leaders ancient, archaic and out of touch.

Believe it or not, accept it or not, the Catholic schools and colleges and universities must be at the front lines of the new evangelization. The poor, the youth and the confused former Catholics are ALL in our campuses as pupils, as teachers, as janitors and carpenters and electricians, as cooks and drivers. They are all with us. To ignore them and not do something for them is to betray our mission as Catholic schools.

### **How do we start?**

Before we begin our common apostolic action for new evangelization, it will be advisable to first examine our ecclesial and personal and corporate consciences and ask "Why is there a strong wave of secularization, a storm of antipathy or plain cold indifference towards the Church in some parts of the world necessitating a new wave of evangelization programs?" What can our Catholic colleges and universities contribute to the new evangelization of the Philippines and consequently of the rest of Asia?

The Catholic school must be a school of humility.

The gospel cannot thrive in pride. When pride seeps into the heart of the Church, the gospel proclamation is harmed. The task of new evangelization must begin with a deep sense of awe and reverence for humanity and her culture. Humility is truth. Humility is seeing ourselves the way God sees us; and we are sinners in His sight. Humility is solidarity with the rest of wounded humanity. Simplicity of life and humility of heart are indispensable tools for evangelization. Evangelization has been hurt and continues to be impeded by the arrogance of its messengers.

Unfortunately, our centres of learning can easily become centres of intellectual arrogance and conceit too. The Catholic school must be a school of the heart such that every theory we learn; every diagram we draw; every conclusion we make from our researches, increase our love and lessen our pride. The catholic school must be a cradle of truth and the greatest of all truths is that God is God and we are not He.

Sometimes, pride can disguise itself as academic freedom. In the name of liberal education, we disregard and consider as archaic the doctrine of the Church on basic teachings like the divinity of Christ and the virginity of the Blessed Mary. The unity of the Church is wounded not only by doctrinal heresies but also by heresies of morality. There is no such a thing as absolute freedom. Freedom is always subject to the parameters of law. Without humble obedience, freedom becomes arrogant autonomy.

The Catholic school that promotes academic freedom without respect for the divine law is not living up to its mission to be teachers on behalf of Christ.

The Catholic school must be a school of saints.

The great poverty of the world now is the poverty of saints. Whether we come from the uplands of Region 1 or the national capital region, everybody is looking for models to inspire and emulate. Our youth need models to inspire them. They need living heroes to ignite their hearts and excite them to know Jesus and love Him more. And we are so poor in this regard. Evangelization is not about something we do but something we are. Evangelization is not about projects and programs and plans but allowing God to work in the lives of people. Letting God be. Contrary to the popular dictum that we cannot preach to empty stomachs, our experience in the rural Pangasinan tells me that the gospel can be preached to empty stomachs but only if the stomach of the preacher is as empty as his parishioners. May we check our school vision mission statements please? Globally competitive, world class students who change the course of world events? Only holy men and women can change the destinies of nations, only saints. Do our vision statements clearly say we want to contribute saints to society?

The product of a good school is a good person. The product of a Catholic school must be another Christ. The “production and sale” of “other Christ’s” must be the sole business of every Catholic school.

Catholic education must be constantly nurtured by prayer. The first and only power of the Catholic school is the Lord and our first and only way to the Lord is love. The best lessons in the Catholic school are learned not from the classrooms but from the chapel. We must pray in school but it is not enough to pray. Our prayer must make us think and talk and listen and act and be like Jesus—that is education that we need for the new evangelization. Catholic education that does not come from prayer is a betrayal of our mission. Any prayer that does not lead us to apostolic charity will wither. Love without service is mere sentimentalism. Service without prayer is social activism. The transmission of the faith is our primary mission. Mathematics and science, literature and social studies become more interesting if studied from the Gospel perspective.

United by baptism, united in prayer, united through charity, we will become saints together in the Catholic school. To be holy is our one and only vision. Everything and anything that leads us astray from this path must be cast aside. We are called to sanctify, to lead and to teach. We are here as teachers not by worthiness of our graduate studies but by the favour of God who is the real owner of every school. We are a community of disciples not a non stock corporation. None of us is master; all of us are stewards in the school of holiness.

### **Every Catholic school must be a charity school.**

We will be credible bringers of Gospel joy if the proclamation is accompanied by its twin messenger of charity. The proclaiming lips must be accompanied by outreaching hands for service.

The Catholic school must be a school of practical charity, not just charity as a theological virtue in the religion class but charity that is lived by reaching out to the poor. Evangelization is proclamation of grace and liberation from sin. The proclamation of the gospel of charity must be accompanied by lives of service. The call for new evangelization will become an exercise in hypocrisy without a sincere program to make Catholic education realistically available to the poor.

We must insist passionately that our Catholic schools retain our Catholic identity. In a secularized and pluralistic society, the Catholic school must be a lighthouse of Christ. In the Moslem community, the Catholic school must engage in a respectful dialogue with culture but be clear about what we truly stand for. We must know who we are, show who we are, stay as we are—as Catholic schools.

We dream of a world in love with God. We dream of a nation living Christ and sharing Christ. Through humility, through holy living, through practical charity-- this vision can come true with the Catholic school at the forefront. Let the CEAP be at the forefront of new evangelization. It is not an option. It is a duty.

Would that every school and parish, every family and community, every nation and continent reach out to the poor and give them a voice to teach;

and every child and teen would be given eyes and hearts of love;

and every confused and hurting and angry soul be given a time to be heard—

then the world would be beautiful again and the gospel of Christ alone would reign supreme.

We dream. Let us dream and make this dream come true. The CEAP can only have a bright and secure future under the shadow of the Catholic Church. Without the Catholic Church we would be only EAP! The C in CEAP is Catholic. It is not just a description. It is our soul as an association. Without C we would die. Thank you. Peace be with you!