

Not Imposing but Proposing

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In 1991 joined the Mission Seminary of the Divine Word Missionaries in Pieniężno. 2002 - ordained a priest and went to missionary work in Ghana. 2008 - began licentiate studies in Rome. He was a rector and lecturer at the Interdiocesan Seminary in Tamale (Ghana). 2018 - obtained doctorate in dogmatic theology at the Gregorian University: *The Primary Role of Mercy in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church. The «Creativity in Charity» of St. John Paul II and the «Language of Mercy» of Pope Francis.*

Introduction

In March, 2019 I was preparing to leave Ghana for good. I had just come back a short time before from my studies in Rome. Hardly six months after my sojourn in Tamale I was requested to return to Rome by my superiors. When the MSOLA Sisters (Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa) in Gumo came to know about it, they invited me for a farewell supper with them. In fact, our SVD community used to celebrate the morning Masses with them every Monday. I enjoyed going there. I liked their unpretentious style of life and their insertion into the local dagomba community. That Thursday evening we started our farewell with 45 minutes of adoration in the chapel on the first floor. That chapel, a square room with very modest decorations, could be well named an "Upper Room". At least it made such an impression on me. Through its simplicity the chapel helped to put oneself in a right position in front of God as the One on whom depends everything. The discreet prayer of seven sisters and myself was also unassuming. As it was between 6.15 and 7.00 p.m., we could hear the loud sounds

of the Muslim prayers from every side of the house. However, in that small chapel I felt tranquillity and peace coming from the exposed Blessed Sacrament and the curled up postures of the Sisters emerged in trustful dedication to the Lord. The silence of the hidden Christ seemed to be stronger than the many voices surrounding us. That ordinary faith experience and the unimposing spirituality of the missionary Sisters reminded me strongly about the need of a patient proposal of the Christian faith to the people encountered instead of imposing it on them.

Such a discreet yet faithful Christian life has an immense value in offering the faith in Jesus Christ to others. To support my stand I want to quote the words of a great scholar and a great man of faith, my confrère and friend Fr Larry Nemer, taken from his Easter message to me:

“This feast always gives me a chance to reminisce about the many wonderful celebrations I have taken an active role in over the last 59 years since I was first ordained. It was a great blessing for me that I was able to celebrate these mysteries with the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit at Techny for 17 years! And for the last 12 years I have been able to celebrate these mysteries with the parish Community of St. Scholastica – our neighbouring parish in Melbourne”.

Referring to his present Easter celebration (2019), he adds:

“My celebration of Holy Week and Easter was different this year. There were only 5 of us «old timers» in the Retirement Residence who were no longer able to get out and celebrate with some parish or group, so we decided to have our own celebrations here in the Residence. They were simple, quiet and contemplative. Not having to worry about servers, choirs, and things needed for the celebration we were able to focus on the words being spoken and the «mystery» being celebrated in those closing days of Lent”.

I don't deny that one can doubt whether there is anything unusual in such an account. Indeed it is very ordinary. However, it gives the clear idea that the central point is the faithfulness of a Christian in every moment of life even while being surrounded by an ocean of indifference. That unimposing faithfulness to one's calling has a great testimonial value.

Our farewell in the MSOLA community continued with supper. Sitting around the round table we shared our companionship

and common vocation to spread the Good News to the farthest corners of the world and to the hidden realms of the human existence. Sharing such a meal strengthened us not only physically but much more in our commitment to Christ's call. I was ensured again about the importance of the mutual encouragement on a missionary journey.

1. Imposing and Proselytising

We can recall the view of Fr. Jacek Gniadek, SVD who precisely describes the idea of non-imposing of one's faith on others referring to the concept of St. John Paul II:

"The missionary does not impose his point of view on anyone. He respects the freedom of other people. And I do not mean tolerance in the colloquial meaning of the word. As a faithful disciple of Christ, the missionary contributes to the expansion of the space of freedom in the modern world"¹.

In the encyclical on the current relevance of the missionary message *Redemptoris Missio* (39) John Paul II wrote that all forms of missionary activity serve the development of human freedom. The Pope aptly notes that the mission of the Church does not limit anyone's freedom, and works in its favour, broadening the mental and spiritual horizons of people who do not know Christ yet. The missionary raises new questions that must be answered. The Church does not impose anything and – as the Pope says – stops before the sanctuary of conscience, and repeats to those who resist missionary activity: "Open the door to Christ!"².

One can have an impression that using force in proclaiming the faith in Christ is based on the fear and lack of profound rootedness in the faith fiercely proclaimed externally. Moreover, it seems to me that the imposition starts with being fully convinced that only our own position is right and all the other ones are wrong in their entirety. This is not to contest the uniqueness of Christ as a Saviour of every human being. Obviously, people often try to convince others about their rightness. It may take place not only in a Christian approach to other religions but it happens inside the Catholic Church itself when one begins presenting his expression of faith as the best possible one. There is a great need for openness and noticing the value in other expressions as well as

¹ J. Gniadek, *Kościół niczego nie narzuca*, „Misjonarz”, nr 10, 2012, p. 4 (my own translation).

² Ibidem.

recognizing the beauty of various ways of living the same faith in the only Saviour of the world³.

I belong to a very international religious congregation. Currently in the *Collegio del Verbo Divino* in Rome where I live, there are confreres of 19 nationalities. It happens that at the table with six seats there sit people belonging to six different nations. However, it may occur that one or the other person starts presenting his Catholic expression of faith as the best and the richest possible. In such a multicultural context it sounds rather pretentious and not genuine. The closure in on one's own experience of faith does not make us authentic and respectful enough in the encounter with other's experience of faith. Pope Francis in his speech to the capitulars of the SVD in June 2018 said:

“Let us not allow fear and closure to exist between us, because we have experienced the love of God, nor that we are the ones who put obstacles to the action of the Spirit. Aware of the gift received, of «many proofs of divine help», I encourage you to renew trust in the Lord and to go out without fear, to give witness to the joy of the Gospel, which makes many happy”⁴.

Without doubt proposing one's faith to another person needs great trust but also a great openness to seeing behind our own schemes. Bernard Lonergan, a great theologian known for his sensitiveness to historical research on different instances of such expressions of faith, alerts his readers to overpower the attitude which consents to the possibility of conveying the faith in expressions of only one culture⁵. Such an approach would clearly contradict the spirit of Vatican II according to which the Church should not be restricted to one cultural expression (cf. GS 42). A sincere and free believer in Christ should guard against a new form of imperialism that would impose one pattern of living on everybody, a sort of cultural globalization. The same faith can be expressed through different concepts and practices. Christians need to foster the catholicity of the Church, which finds noticeably

³ Cf. R. Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People*, Maryknoll 2017, p. 124.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Ai Partecipanti al Capitolo Generale della Società del Divino Verbo (Verbiti)* [on-line], http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180622_verbiti.html [access: 24.05.2019]. My own translation from Italian. Unless indicated otherwise, all the following quotations of Pope Francis, other popes and official Church documents, are quoted from the official Vatican site: www.vatican.va.

⁵ Cf. B.J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Toronto 2003, pp. 326-330.

different expressions in the various continents with their characteristic approaches⁶.

In such way of seeing the faith another Jesuit, recently appointed Cardinal, Michael Czerny comments on the Pope's vision for the universal Church:

"He really wants the Church in each place to flourish as the Church of those people in that place, that the people of that place feel that this is their Church. The Church is accompanying them in the challenges and in the difficulties but also in the joys they have day by day and the bitter ones as well. And that sense is coming from different places and having different experiences and coming also from different races and ethnic backgrounds"⁷.

It appears quite obvious that the living Church can be best expressed in the categories of the local people. That is well noticeable in the rich and various forms of the popular piety in the Church. Pope Francis shows great sensitivity calling on sharing the faith with another person only with respecting their full freedom. Referring to the preachers who apply all kinds of tricky means to obtain new followers, he says:

"They preach Christ, yes, but their message is not Christian. It has nothing to do with the preaching of a Lutheran or any other serious evangelical Christianity. These so-called «evangelicals» preach prosperity. They promise a Gospel that does not know poverty, but simply seeks to make proselytes. This is exactly what Jesus condemns in the Pharisees of his time. I've said it many times: proselytism is not Christian"⁸.

That is a hidden way of imposing one's own view rather than the faith with the hidden agenda of benefiting from convincing another person to join a community. In fact, even the good thing cannot be imposed on anybody. The effort of imposing one's faith on others is very present also in our times. So often we hear about people who

⁶ Cf. S. Dianich, *Magistero in movimento. Il caso papa Francesco*, Bologna 2016, p. 18; R. Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology...*, op. cit., p. 30.

⁷ "A bit nervous and also very happy": interview with Cardinal Michael Czerny [on-line], <http://jesuits.ca/news-detail?TN=NEWS-20191007030107> [access: 25.10.2019].

⁸ A. Spadaro, *Pope's meeting with Jesuits in Mozambique and Madagascar* [on-line], www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-09/pope-conversations-jesuits-mozambique-madagascar-spadaro.html [access: 17.10.2019].

consider themselves strong believers but who attack others in the name of their God. The act of throwing wooden figures of the pregnant woman into the River Tiber is not an act of sacrificial faith but an act of desperation in front of unknown reality⁹.

Therefore, sharing the Good News with another person demands consciously avoiding any semblance of imposing it. It needs to be imbued with a respect for the person and an openness to the partner in dialogue. It cannot be a cunning tactic of luring someone inside our own fence (cf. RMis 56). In like manner Benedict XVI said:

“We impose our faith on no one. Such proselytism is contrary to Christianity. Faith can develop only in freedom. But we do appeal to the freedom of men and women to open their hearts to God, to seek him, to hear his voice”¹⁰.

That is the way God acts and does not use force to destroy the sinner but waits patiently until the harvest time. Thus, God does not bring people to himself by force but through offering them a new life and blessing (cf. Gen 1,4; 4,15; 8,23; 12,3; 24,12)¹¹.

If we can speak about any force that the Church is using in the evangelization it is exclusively the inner force of love and the message of Christ: “For the force which the Church can inject into the modern society of man consists in that faith and charity put into vital practice, not in any external dominion exercised by merely human means” (GS 42).

2. The Irrevocability of the Personal Conversion

In Luke’s account of the passion, Jesus directs Peter in words of explanation: “And once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers.”¹² (Lk 22,32). Many times reflecting on evangelization we treat it as an action external to us; something to be performed.

⁹ Cf. C. White, *Controversial Amazon statue stolen from church, thrown in Rome’s Tiber River*, “National Correspondent” [on-line], <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/10/21/controversial-amazon-statue-stolen-from-church-thrown-in-romes-tiber-river/> [access: 25.10.2019]; S.B. Bevans, *A mission-shaped Church*, “The Tablet”, 2 November 2019, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass in the Outdoor Site of the Neue Messe in München. Sunday, 10 September 2006* [on-line], www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060910_neuemesse-munich.html [access: 9.06.2017].

¹¹ Cf. W. Kasper, *Mercy. The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, New York 2014, pp. 44-45.

¹² Cf. https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?bible_chapter=22&id=49

We put together our minds and we share profound analyses while bypassing the principal element. No Christian can effectively transmit the Gospel without before undergoing a personal process of turning back and recovering the essentials of what can be understood as a dramatic change of perspective (cf. Lk 15,18). It is about changing the quality of our life which is based on a new way of thinking and existing. Such personal transformation can bring also a novelty and freshness to the spiritless societies (cf. Acts 2,37-38). Christians making a difference in a quality of life share their faith without imposing the sheer theory of one's religion on others.

Without doubt evangelization originates in an inner drive. The evangelizer is at first profoundly in love with Christ and that real experience moves him or her to share this treasure with the people. It is undeniable that the witnessing can initiate with charity and it proceeds to communicating charity with natural joy. Therefore, the Good News can be communicated only if the Christian allows it to become integral part of him or her¹³.

Pope Francis, making reference to the theme of the 18th General Chapter, invited the Missionaries of the Divine Word to pass through such a process:

“It is Christ's love that impels us to personal and community renewal to strengthen our commitment to go out and announce the Gospel. Therefore, it will be necessary to go back to search for the roots, to see where you are rooted, what is the vital spark that gives life to your communities and to the deeds you carry out, in every corner of the world where you are present”¹⁴.

In proposing the Christian faith to others one does not go about convincing others about the existence of God or convincing them about the priority of a coherent image of God but about demonstrating through our limited human life that we are in a living relationship of friendship with Him. Thus, it is through the transparent acts of a Christian that people see and at times are attracted to such a relationship with God. It can have this type of impact because the relationship with God influences to the core our human approach to people.

A person who has passed through the experience of conversion has a great trust in God's providence even at times when everything seems to go contrary to our expectations. We remain faithful and take difficult new steps:

¹³ Cf. H. De Lubac, *Le fondement théologique des missions*, Paris 1946, pp. 22-23.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Ai Partecipanti al Capitolo Generale...*, art. cit. (my own translation from Italian).

“Trust in God and in His Divine Providence, because knowing how to abandon ourselves in his hands is essential in our lives as Christians and consecrated persons. How far does our trust in God reach, in His provident and merciful love? Are we willing to risk, to be courageous and determined in our mission?”¹⁵.

Hence, it's evident that evangelization is not just another human's own doing but the consequence of a life rooted in a profound relation with God. In not imposing the faith on others we respect the human freedom that is inscribed deeply in every person. We acknowledge the fact that even God allows us to choose the way we decide (cf. 2Thess 1,8-9). Paradoxically it means that God treats us seriously. “Can one reject Christ and everything that he has brought about in the history of mankind? Of course one can. Man is free. He can say «no» to God. He can say «no» to Christ” (RMis 7)¹⁶.

However, to enable the possibility of a free and conscious choice on the part of the human person, it is necessary to share the Christian message with the people. It demonstrates the obligation of evangelization¹⁷. Nonetheless, I disagree with the view that freedom should be understood to the extent that baptizing small children is considered as imposing one's religion on them and limiting their human right to choose¹⁸.

3. Proposing Challenges Triumphalism

Triumphalism expresses itself using worldly attitudes in sharing the Gospel. That way instead of showing the beauty of the Church it makes of her an oppressive reality in which one group of people dominates others. It is worldly because it does not follow the logic of the innocent servant who takes the guilt of the people (cf. Is 53,1-12) and does not claim his divine dignity (cf. Phil 2,5-11). Pope Francis often

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Eschatology. Death and Eternal Life*, Washington 1988, pp. 216-217.

¹⁷ Cf. B. Sesboüé, *Gesù Cristo l'unico mediatore. Saggio sulla redenzione e la salvezza* - 1, Cinisello Balsamo 1991, p. 426.

¹⁸ Cf. S. Mac Donald, *Infant baptism inconsistent with human rights, says McAleese*, “The Tablet”, 16 November 2019, p. 30. “She said [M. McAleese] it was one thing to acknowledge the right of parents to bring their children up in their faith and to introduce them to its rites and rituals, but it is quite another to impose significant obligations on those children that trammel their freedom of religion, thought and conscience”.

refers to the reality of triumphalism which he sees as a great threat to the life of the Church¹⁹.

On the contrary, the purpose of the Church is to be an instrument of salvation for the people. Thus, the Church needs to point to Christ and not to herself and be fostered by his merciful love. This must be the attitude of the Church as well. In that manner St John Paul II from the outset of his pontificate strove to overcome that triumphalism which truly damages the Church (cf. RH 4). God himself acts in such a manner:

“The presence of God is always, in reality, of a personal nature, and takes place above all in the heart, the intellect, and one’s freedom. God is always sovereign, and therefore, His presence is suggestive and elusive; He gives and He takes away; He can be present to us, and yet we only recognize Him as such when He vanishes”²⁰.

Thus, the protagonist in conversion is God who with gentleness leads a human being to himself or herself. Pope Francis is again very clear on that matter:

“What I mean is that evangelization is free! Proselytism, on the other hand, makes you lose your freedom. Proselytism is incapable of creating a religious path in freedom. It always sees people being subjugated in one way or another. In evangelization the protagonist is God, in proselytism it is the I”²¹.

I return again to my personal observation. Behind the fencing wall of the Common Formation Centre in Tamale the Carmelite Sisters have their monastery. They started that monastery more than twenty years ago but for all these years they did not have any lasting vocations. A few Ghanaian girls lived with them for a shorter or a longer period of time but in the end no one remained. Just in the recent two or three years the Sisters have a few vocations from Nigeria. The Carmelites live a contemplative life, always enclosed in their compound, carrying out their hidden life between prayer and work and nocturnal rest. For many people, including a substantial number of priests and religious,

¹⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Homily at the Celebration of Palm Sunday of the Passion of The Lord, St Peter’s Square, 34th World Youth Day Sunday 14 April 2019* [on-line], www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190414_omelia-palme.html [access: 14.04.2019].

²⁰ O.G. De Cardedal, *Epilogo*, [in:] Á. Cordovilla Pérez et al. (eds.), *Dios y el hombre en Cristo*, Salamanca 2006, pp. 649-650.

²¹ A. Spadaro, *Pope’s meeting with Jesuits...*, art. cit.

they do not see value in such a way of realizing one's life. Often, those girls who left the cloister explained their decision that they would like to be more active and bring a more significant contribution to the lives of people. I wish to contest such a stand. That seemingly hidden life of predominantly elderly and physically weak sisters has a great value in their Christian testimony. They decorated their chapel beautifully, which is not so obvious in the nearby chapels, and this enticed people to join them for their services. Likewise they tried to prepare their liturgies in a meaningful way. The Carmelites organized novenas before their main feasts of Holy Mary of the Mount Carmel as well as St. Theresa of Avila which used to attract many faithful even from distant parishes. Many people shared their problems with them and asked for their intercessory prayers. Though they lead their life in a very limited space, yet they have an impact on others and radiate to them the gift of faith.

In proposing the faith in Christ, a Christian approaches another person with great gentleness because he or she is aware that God acts in his own way in the human heart. Moreover, we admit the fact that every human being is naturally bound to God and no personal attitude can change that fact²².

The quality that prevents Christians from playing the role of a triumphant élite is mercy because living according to it they sense in themselves the need for mercy. In that way, they are disposed to accept serving in the almost invisible but essential role of leaven in human society and elevate it to be truly an authentic human community. Mercy does not permit a Christian to be a mere cover for an exclusivist attitude towards others. That would contradict the very central Christian mystery of the Trinitarian God, who is inclusive, open and inviting. It corresponds well with the idea of E. Schillebeeckx, who wrote:

“Jesus never takes abstractions or general norms as a basis for living: he always sees a man in his most concrete situation. That is why he was able to surprise other people and take them unaware with his profound humanness”²³.

Pope Francis follows the approach of Paul VI who believed that joy plays an essential role in spreading the message of Christ as the people will:

²² Cf. L.F. Ladaria, *Christian Faith in God*, [in:] K.J. Becker, I. Morali, *Catholic Engagement with World Religions. A Comprehensive Study*, Maryknoll 2010, p. 153.

²³ E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology*, London 1979, p. 203. Cf. W. Madziar, *The Primary Role of Mercy in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church. The «Creativity in Charity» of St. John Paul II and the «Language of Mercy» of Pope Francis*, Górna Grupa 2018, pp. 488-489.

“receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EN 80).

Therefore, Pope Francis sees the main method of evangelization in attraction. Attraction towards the one who offers love is generated in the heart of the person who experiences being loved²⁴. Thus attraction comes from the experience of joy; the Christian life grows where Christians live in joy. Faith needs to be lived in a way so as to show its relevance to human life. In the contemporary world, there are vast dechristianized areas where it is quite evident that proselytism is out of place; what counts is genuine Christian witness. Faith is a free act and cannot come about by means of force or by using illicit methods. There were times when we were using our power in the form of intelligence or money to convince others to become Christians²⁵. Evangelization takes place in the ambit of human actions and words which manifest the bounty of God. “Evangelization is essentially witness. Proselytizing is convincing, but it is all about membership and takes your freedom away”²⁶. In the approach of not imposing on another one is able to notice the traces of goodness and God’s presence in others where some can see only absolute disaster and hopelessness²⁷. In that way the sharing of faith is not a skill or technique but a way of life. “We must evangelize, which is very different from proselytizing”²⁸. Indeed, we are not in charge of our faith. Rather, on the contrary, we are to serve the faith²⁹.

²⁴ Cf. B. Forte, *La chiesa di Papa Francesco: uno sguardo “globale”, la scelta di vita, i valori*, [in:] H.M. Yáñez (ed.), *Evangelii gaudium: il testo ci interroga. Chiavi di lettura, testimonianze e prospettive*, Rome 2014, p. 281; F. Ocariz, *Evangelizzazione, attrazione e proselitismo*, “PATH”, nr 13, 2014, pp. 430-433. The author analyses the biblical concept of “attraction” as well as “proselytism” (433-436) and demonstrates that the second term had above all a positive meaning even in the time of the Fathers of the Church. The author concludes that proselytism and evangelization could be used as synonyms in the Christian context. Nonetheless, proselytism often obtains a negative meaning. S.B. Bevans, *New Evangelization or Missionary Church? “Evangelii Gaudium” and the Call for Missionary Discipleship*, “Verbum SVD”, nr 55, 2014, p. 171.

²⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, E. Scalfari, *Dialogo tra credenti e non credenti*, Torino 2013, p. 55; W. Kasper, *Il Vangelo di Gesù Cristo*, Brescia 2012, p. 282; F.X. D’Sa, *Pope Francis “Evangelium Gaudium”*, [in:] K. Krämer, K. Vellguth (eds.), *“Evangelii Gaudium”*. *Voices of the Universal Church*, Freiburg i. Br. 2015, p. 15.

²⁶ A. Spadaro, *Pope’s meeting with Jesuits...*, art. cit.

²⁷ Cf. *Christus Vivit* 67.

²⁸ A. Spadaro, *Pope’s meeting with Jesuits...*, art. cit.

²⁹ Cf. Papa emerito Benedetto XVI: *La Chiesa e lo scandalo degli abusi sessuali*

4. Proposing, yet not Neglecting the Truth

Though, it can be difficult and challenging, the truth is never neglected in proposing our faith to others. I recall my personal experience of the benediction of the families in the Parish of St. Marcela during the Lenten Season in 2018. There were days when I felt like abandoning the task because of encountering an attitude of indifference or even resistance. However, in such moments the love for another person should prevail and the evangelizer should knock at another door, either in the literal sense or in a more symbolic sense. They are still people who need the presence of those who have faith in their heart and meeting with them can open for them a way to a future friendship with God.

The transmission of a lived faith happens when we are with the people in all their life situations even when it becomes difficult for us because of the demand of sharing in the sufferings of others³⁰. Would it be too much to remain even with those who are against us? This is the way in which Christ showed the love of God to the people who persecuted him.

It is not possible to transmit the faith from a position where one makes himself or herself superior. Rather we need to walk beside one another and seeing another person first through his or her humanity. In this kind of brotherly accompaniment we discover the richness of a human being. We can even notice the presence of God who mysteriously hides inside the person. I was deeply encouraged by my fellow confreres, Fr. Martin Cingel and Fr. Bakoma Dadjomgou, who at the celebration of Mission Sunday at the Parish of St. Marcela gave the testimony of their life and mission in a different and far country from their own. The striking thing was the fact that both expressed not so much what they gave to people but rather how much they received from them. While being missionaries, a Slovak in Kenya and a Togolese in Paraguay, they themselves were transformed and their eyes were opened to the richness of the humanity of the people to whom they were sent.

The digitalised culture makes us live in a different way and form a different type of relationship. It is an exceptional place of dialogue, an exchange of opinions, and getting to know others. Nevertheless in

di Joseph Ratzinger, emerito Benedetto XVI, 10 aprile 2019 [on-line], www.corriere.it/cronache/19_aprile_11/papa-ratzinger-chiesa-scandalo-abusi-sessuali-3847450a-5b9f-11e9-ba57-a3df5eacbd16.shtml [access: 11.04.2019].

³⁰ Cf. *Christus Vivit* 76.

the transmission of the faith nothing can replace the personal contact with another person. The electronic contact cannot satisfy the solitude in which many people live today.

There is demand for telling the truth in a world that is full of fake news. Wilton Gregory, a new Archbishop of Washington, DC, repeated a few times in an interview: "I believe that the only way I can serve the local archdiocese is by telling you the truth"³¹. This statement should be very pertinent for every Christian who wants to share the Gospel. Through the lives of Christians people should first of all discover that God exists. That He is the One who loves us and takes care of us³².

Pope Francis does not dispense himself from the role of being a caretaker of orthodoxy. However, for him this role is performed not in terms of controlling but of facilitating access to the grace of discernment (cf. EG 94), which includes a persevering accompanying of a person (cf. EG 24). Thus, the transmission of faith cannot remain on the level of ideas which can define the faith only to a certain degree but which do not relate to the personal concerns of individuals. The evangelization is not a matter of intellectually convincing others but of attracting them towards the beauty of the Good News. Hence, it cannot be uniform but characterized by complexity and variability³³.

5. The Uniqueness of the Local Churches

After the 18th General Chapter, the *Collegio del Verbo Divino* introduced so called intercultural Masses. Once a month or in every two months various national or continental groups prepare the Liturgy and afterwards they serve their traditional dishes at the meal. What is very striking is the richness of human expressions. The same Mass in the Roman Rite can have so many different expressions depending on the cultures and languages. We may not be familiar with the expressions but we should not be afraid of such diversity because it comes from the core of human existence.

Every local Church expresses her faith in a specific manner. Therefore, there should not be imposed on all only one acceptable form of being Christian. The Church is to serve the people in their life situations and in their cultures³⁴. Every person needs to be recognized

³¹ Vide www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/gregory-promises-dc-catholics-i-will-always-tell-you-the-truth-55737 [access: 11.04.2019].

³² Cf. *Papa emerito Benedetto XVI: La Chiesa e lo scandalo...*, art. cit.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Cf. C.M. Galli, *La riforma missionaria della Chiesa secondo Francesco. L'ecclesio-*

and respected as a true subject and therefore nobody can be used as a means to achieve a greater aim³⁵.

A Christian should not see his or her own faith as a system of truths and precepts which need to be forcefully introduced to others as a way of opening the way to salvation for them but rather as a humble appeal to the human free conscience to open to an immense love of God (cf. EG 165). Pope Francis says it in different context where Christians are a small minority. To the bishops of Japan, he said:

“We know that in Japan the Church is small and Catholics are a minority, but this must not diminish your commitment to evangelization in which, in your particular situation, the strongest and clearest word can offer a humble, daily testimony and dialogue with other religious traditions”³⁶.

Therefore, the true transmission of faith excludes any form of imposing oneself on others and calls for a spirit of sharing with respect to one’s faith (cf. RMis 7, 8). Sharing the Gospel in the form of an appeal excludes any form of judgment and rather it is a search for a possibility of accepting another person into the circle of Christ’s followers (cf. EG 44).

Furthermore, faith cannot be limited to transcendent doctrines that have to be accepted. The variety of contexts and the plurality of experiences are not uniform. Unity in faith is not an abstract consensus but a vital rule of life. For that reason, the expressions of faith will need always to be expressed in new ways. With Pope Francis, the emphasis has moved from doctrinal discourse to the language of faith understood by the ordinary person³⁷.

One cannot but agree with the view that theology needs to be attentive to the times, culture and the concerns of the people. As such, it is pluralistic and open to a certain degree of controversy. Otherwise, it may well become irrelevant³⁸.

logia del popolo di Dio evangelizzatore, [in:] A. Spadaro, C. M. Galli (a cura di), *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, Brescia 2016, p. 55; R. Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology...*, op. cit., p. 124.

³⁵ Cf. A. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer. Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, New York 2014, p. 235; R. Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology...*, op. cit., pp. 109, 117.

³⁶ Pope Francis, *Incontro con i vescovi. Discorso del Santo Padre. Nunziatura Apostolica (Tokyo)* [on-line], <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/11/23/0914/01856.html> [access: 23.11.2019]. My own translation from Italian.

³⁷ Cf. S. Dianich, *Magistero in movimento. Il caso papa Francesco*, Bologna 2016, pp. 38, 40, 55.

³⁸ Cf. S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll 1992, p. 3.

Conclusion

I began my reflection with the memory of that evening experience in the chapel of MSOLA at Gumo to express my sincere appreciation to the people who share their faith in Jesus Christ without trying to impose it on anybody. That would be even an illusory action as if a human being wanted to take the place of the Divine Agent who can place the mysterious gift of faith in a delicate and unimposing way. It is obvious that a Christian needs to cooperate with that Agent through a life resembling that of Jesus' life. Every day we receive the opportunity to share our Christian faith with others. We should use these unassuming opportunities without waiting for an exceptional chance to make a spectacular act of giving the faith to others. Such a suggestion is particularly pertinent to the missionaries who are called to share the faith in situations of the present world. Especially they should not wait for the opportune moment but live the Gospel so that their life will be their mission of sharing the Christ with the people as the bread is shared. Not imposing is therefore not a call to the passivism of escaping into indifference but rather to a life of authentic faith which values above all friendship with Jesus Christ and for that reason respects to the core dignity of every human being.

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WŁADYSŁAW MADZIAR
Not Imposing but Proposing

Abstract

The author claims that faith cannot be conveyed by the power of authority. Even the most sacred truth cannot be imposed on a human; a human has been given a demanding gift of freedom by God. Only a testimony of Christian life is the right way of transferring the faith. The first Proclaimer of Good News is the Holy Spirit; no Christian should take His place. The author opposes the idea that in the secularized Europe Christian faith could be restored by virtue of authority and an act of law. A human himself is the source of renewal. The natural but hidden in a human reference to God is systematically and discretely transferred. This conviction allows us to live in hope that even in the religiously indifferent environment God's element is permanently active. Nonetheless, every believer is called to give faith testimony in

everyday life. In the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* Vatican Council II says: "It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man's response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will. This doctrine is contained in the word of God and it was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church" (10).

Keywords: Church, Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), religious despotism, proposition of faith, evangelization, Christian mission, Pope Francis.

WŁADYSŁAW MADZIAR

Nie narzucać, lecz proponować

Streszczenie

Autor głosi tezę, że wiary nie można przekazać mocą autorytetu. Nawet najświętsza prawda nie może zostać człowiekowi narzucona; człowiek otrzymał od Boga wymagający dar wolności. Właściwe przekazywanie wiary dokonuje się poprzez świadectwo życia chrześcijańskiego. Pierwszym głosicielem Dobrej Nowiny jest Duch Święty; chrześcijanin nie powinien próbować zajmować Jego miejsca. Autor sprzeciwia się idei, jakoby w zlaicyzowanej Europie można przywrócić wiarę chrześcijańską na mocy autorytetu i ustaw. Źródłem odnowy jest sam człowiek. Ukryte w człowieku naturalne odniesienie do Boga jest systematycznie, dyskretnie okazywane. Przeświadczenie to pozwala nam żyć w nadziei, że nawet w środowisku religijnie obojętnym pierwiastek boży jest permanentnie aktywny. Natomiast każdy wierzący jest wezwany do dawania świadectwa wiary w codziennym życiu. Sobór Watykański II wyraził to słowami deklaracji *Dignitatis humanae*: „Jednym z zasadniczych punktów nauki katolickiej, zawartym w słowie Bożym i nieustannie głoszonym przez Ojców, jest zdanie, że człowiek powinien dobrowolnie odpowiedzieć Bogu wiarą; nikogo więc wbrew jego woli nie wolno do przyjęcia wiary przymuszać” (10).

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół, Zgromadzenie Słowa Bożego (SVD), religijny despotyzm, propozycja wiary, ewangelizacja, misja chrześcijańska, papież Franciszek.