

SAINT SULPICE AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

The General Assembly 2014 has clearly affirmed that it does its work in light of the New Evangelization. It is from this perspective that we wish to clarify the contribution of Saint Sulpice to the New Evangelization.

Throughout the unfolding conversations of the Assembly concerning the New Evangelization, whether in plenary session, small groups, or in private encounters, we have approached the question of the New Evangelization from three angles:

1. **The interior conversion of Christians** as a fundamental condition for evangelization. This perspective grounds itself directly in line with Vatican Council II which wished to promote the *aggiornamento* of the Church by asking Christians to modify their outlook on the world and their ways of acting, but also—and first of all—to change their hearts.

This is nothing new. Throughout the history of the Church, the interior renewal of Christians themselves has always been one of the essential keys to proper action before the challenges the Church has encountered, in particular, when it concerns her moving from one civilization to another, from one type of society to another. The great saints have often been the major artisans of these movements.

Saint-Sulpice is particularly sensitive to this dimension. The activities of our founder, the spirit of the institution he left us, and the institution itself are profoundly linked to his own conversion. Even today his message comes to us as a call to interior conversion. For us, as Sulpicians, participation in the New Evangelization cannot be imagined without our decided and willing response to Christ's call to holiness that appeals to us through the voice of Father Olier.

We can make this call reverberate among our seminarians by showing them the example of our founder and by following that example ourselves. It is grounded in both the demands of our baptism and the demands of our ministerial priesthood. It is nourished by meditation on the Word, so dear to Father Olier, and the Eucharistic life wherein he allowed Christ to transform him into sustenance for the people to whom he was given ministerial responsibility.

2. **The attention brought to the numerous and profound changes that are active in the society in which we live.** We cannot be simple spectators before these changes. We are engaged by them. They pose questions to us about the quality and solidity of our faith, and our manner of expressing that faith. They oblige us to modify our outlook and our language so that we can live and transmit our faith in this tormented world.

Our long pedagogical experience has taught us to try to understand the diverse generations of seminarians whom we have been called to form. Being so confronted by each succeeding generation is a fortunate opportunity for us, calling us to continual conversion.

Today, seminarians are confronted with numerous challenges: the aging of the Church in certain countries; the diminution of the number of priests; disappointment with the difficulties of ministry and the proclamation of the Gospel that sometimes leads young priests to leave; the changing climate in society in relationship to beliefs and morals, which sometimes results in a strong identity crisis among seminarians, and a difficulty with engaging in real dialogue with those who think differently; before a generalized indifference, before a tolerance that tends towards laxity, they are tempted to judge the world severely; the difficulty of finding their place in relationship to the laity; but also, in certain regions, the lack of laity engaged in the mission of the Church.

Our role as formators here is fundamental in assisting seminarians in finding a true spiritual liberty. We seek to develop their sincere love for Jesus Christ, meek and humble of heart, and we invite them to love this sinful world, to remember that it is the Holy Spirit who does all good things, without losing clear insight about the evil they deplore.

Concerning this point, the example of our founder can once again help us a great deal. He himself was situated, in the first half of the seventeenth century, in a turbulent period of the Church, marked by the advance of Protestantism, by the agony of a Church that saw its identity being diluted, by wars unceasingly being regenerated in Europe. Following the path of Pierre Cardinal de Bérulle, he knew how to re-center Christians in contemplation of the Incarnate Word, to remain steadfastly firm and clear in his judgment of society, while at the same time uniting himself with Christ, the ransom for the sins of the world. He knew how to love the men and women of his time as a true pastor, with the compassion of Christ and the Virgin Mary. He knew how to promote fidelity to a Church that refused to close in on itself and that he wanted animated by a strong missionary spirit. He also knew how to commit himself to a true sharing of the ministry with the priests of the parish of Saint Sulpice.

The figure of Jean-Jacques Olier thus remains for us an exemplary figure that we, conscious of the adaptations necessary for our age, can propose to seminarians as a model. He will help us not to adapt the Gospel to a society in the midst of

constructing itself, but to adapt ourselves to this society so that we may proclaim the Gospel to it in all of its purity.

3. **The benevolent welcome of new methods of evangelization in the context of an enlightened discernment.** Compelled by his apostolic zeal, Jean-Jacques Olier himself did not hesitate to utilize methods of evangelization that were new to his era. He participated in rural missions initiated by Saint Vincent de Paul (in the same line as those led by Michel Le Nobletz and Julien Maulnoir in Brittany, at the end of the sixteenth century). As pastor of Saint Sulpice, he divided his parish into seven sections, following the model created by Saint Charles Borromeo in his diocese of Milan, to facilitate the pastoral care of all his parishioners. He promoted catechisms, not only for children but for all categories of persons (catechisms that were later enriched by the formation of catechists).

Here the assistance we can bring to seminarians in relationship to the new methods of evangelization that are suggested to them is one of spiritual discernment. What inspires us most profoundly when we proclaim the Gospel? How do we know how to align the audacity of clear teaching with the patience of the Incarnation? Are we fascinated by the spectacular and the immediate? Are we content with a superficial accompaniment of others that does not truly reveal the mystery of Christ?

Through this discernment we will allow the new generations that are formed under our care to make their way, to design and develop, within the context of ecclesial communion, the pastoral art they practice.