

Reflections on

THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE MODERN WORLD, Vatican City 1973.

My work and experience bid me confine my reflections to Part Two: Theological Evaluation. Comments on precise points will be followed by a general remark on the consequences of the Second Vatican Council.

I. Some Principles of the Theology of Evangelization

I do not consider these principles open to question.

II. Detailed Study of Certain Apostolic Insights of the Second Vatican Council

Here we are offered what Aquinas would call solubilia argumenta. I consider the seven topics mentioned though not in the order proposed.

B. Freedom of conscience is not to be confused with religious indifference. It consists principally in the acceptance of the traditional doctrine that faith is a meritorious and therefore a free act. It denies that the work of evangelization consists in the exercise of economic, political, military, or similar power. It does not exclude the influence of holiness, good example, intellectual integrity, persuasion.

C. "Qualitative" Catholicism is to be pursued with regard to those already in the church. "Quantitative" Catholicism maximizes those to be brought into the church, and it is to be deplored only when conversions are superficial and short-lived and so confer no benefit to the converts or to the church.

D. The one name in which it is granted to men to be saved is the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4, 12). This, however, does not restrict the exercise of divine liberty. Accordingly, for centuries, theologians have been teaching that God wills all men to be saved and that he grants to each sufficient grace for salvation. Catholic doctrine is expressed in the present pamphlet when it states: "... even if God, in ways known to himself, can bring men, who through no fault of their own are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, nevertheless it is much more difficult to obtain this result without evangelization." Part Two, sect. I, D), #3.

Twenty-five years ago in Boston, Mass., U. S. A., a Jesuit priest made numerous converts by preaching without qualification, extra ecclesiam nulla salus, and by threatening all Protestants with eternal damnation in the fires of hell. He was silenced by ecclesiastical authority, and thereafter achieved the distinction of being perhaps the one person that has left the church because extra ecclesiam nulla salus.

A. The Second Vatican council could lessen the fervour only of those evangelists that were ignorant of the practice of the ordinary magisterium and of the common teaching of theologians. The decrease would be not in genuine but misguided fervour, not in genuine but in misguided evangelization. So-called theories of "anonymous Christians,"

"implicit faith," and the like are correct when understood in terms of the reply given to D above.

E. One explanation would be to point to the fullness of the humanity of the blessed in heaven and to point to its source in the humanity of the divine person, Jesus Christ.

F. The signs of the times are not a set of premisses from which one may proceed to draw syllogistic conclusions. They are data, in which good and evil intermingle, and call for discernment. Their significance is that, when good and evil have been distinguished by holy, intelligent, learned reflection, then relevant action proceeds to fostering the good and offsetting the evil.

G. Evangelization enlightens and unifies cultures inasmuch as (1) it does not destroy or uproot them or replace them by some other alien culture, but (2) explores their virtualities and discovers their potentialities for carrying the Christian message, and (3) enlightens each as it unifies all by transmuting each in its proper manner to express adequately and faithfully the doctrine of Christ.

III. Apparent Contradictions in Evangelization which have to be reconciled.

A. The relevant distinction is the now familiar one between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Objective teaching yields orthodoxy. But objectivity depersonalizes. This defect is remedied ^{by} making the mystery of Christ present in Christian experience. It is in response to the person of Christ that there comes ~~the~~ the orthopraxis of doing what is right.

B. Proclamation makes known what is to be believed. Witness moves to the judgement of credentia and to the act of believing.

C. The grace of conversion both grounds a new life in Christ and repairs the distortion of nature due to sin. Nature repaired and elevated is more fully human (but not only more fully human) than nature distorted by sin or even than innocent nature without grace.

D. The two aspects blend into one. In some cases not enough attention is paid to perfecting nature. In others not enough is paid to advancing in grace. The emphasis is to be placed on the aspect that has been neglected and often this means that it should be placed on both with due consideration given to their relative importance.

E. The hindrance is not the institution but distortions of the institution by sinful men and women. Hence whether one is working for the good of individuals or for the good of the institution, one is working against men's own evil ways or their inherited evil ways.

It remains, however, that in missionary lands where the church does not yet exist that finis missionum est plantare ecclesiam.

F. When both reforming activity within and missionary activity without are needed and can be done, then both should be done.

G. The argument is involved in the tricky logic of sin, which is an irrational. It is sinful to inflict suffering on the followers of Christ. It is meritorious to endure that suffering. The suffering does not alienate but reconciles: sanguis martyrum semen ecclesiae.

More generally, Sum. theol., I, q. 19, a. 9 ad 3m: Deus neque vult mala fieri neque vult mala non fieri sed vult permittere mala fieri et hoc est bonum.

H. The difficulty stems from thinking more of words than of realities.

The whole truth of the gospel is not uttered in a single sentence and assimilated in an instant. A professor of theology in a seminary takes months to teach a single treatise even though the seminarians are intelligent and ready to believe all he has to say. The ecumenist deals with people whose whole upbringing has been an inoculation against the "Roman" church. His task is far more complex and far more difficult than that of any professor. Either he divides up the task into a long series of distinct parts and treats them one at a time, or else he simply renounces work as an ecumenist.

It is quite untruthful to say that the ecumenist treats some topics and avoids others. Euclid in his first book is not avoiding books two to thirteen, and he delays book thirteen because it presupposes the solution of prior questions.

The Consequences of the Second Vatican Council

Although I am little inclined to criticize decrees scrutinized for months by conciliar committees and approved by enormous majorities in conciliar sessions, I am all the more moved to point out that the second Vatican Council was no isolated event. It was reported widely in the press secular and religious. Its proceedings were narrated in books written from different viewpoints. It provided the occasion for an outpouring of theological literature not always of the highest quality.

Above all, its recommendations for seminary reform and for the renewal of theological studies were given great impetus and not a little direction when seminary students -- not without incitement from some of those responsible for guiding them -- felt called upon to be as outrageous if not as violent as their counterparts in secular universities.

No longer is there a market for sensational theological literature, and no longer are seminarians as unruly as they were in the sixties. But the effects of a time of troubles linger on, and mistaken innovations of the past are corrected with difficulty when the former innovators now hold positions of authority.

Concrete situations vary from place to place and all are difficult to judge, but surely injustice would be done to none and much good might come if the Bishops' Synod were

to decree that the traditional requirement of debita scientia for ordination to the priesthood be strictly interpreted and seriously enforced.

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