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Basic Evangelisation

GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLICS

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Kerygma Today

Some time ago Fr Raniero Cantalamessa preached about the kerygma to the Pope and a number of his cardinals.[1] It is interesting to see that he said, 'Gratuitous justification by faith in Christ is the heart of kerygmatic preaching, and it is a shame that this in turn, is practically absent from the ordinary preaching in the church.' He went on to note that at the time of the Reformation, Luther and later other Protestant reformers tended to say we are justified by faith alone. By way of reaction Catholics insisted that without works a person could not be justified. Catholics rightly believe that while one is not saved by good works, one cannot be saved without them. As Jas 2:23-24 reminds us: 'You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.' As a result of the sixteenth century split, however, Catholics have often failed to sufficiently emphasise the vital importance of faith in salvation, while Protestants have often failed to stress the need for good works.

In 1999 this imbalance was corrected in a Joint Declaration on Justification of historic significance, which was published by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Par 15 says: 'Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.'[2] It seems to me that this sentence incorporates our Lord's principle of reciprocity which is mentioned in Luke 6:38, 'Give, and it will be given to you.' Let's look at the first part, 'By grace alone, through faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any

1. 'The Righteousness That Comes From Faith in Christ,' Vatican City (16 December 2005).

2. For enlightening comments on the declaration see Avery Dulles, 'Justification Today: A New Ecumenical Breakthrough,' *Church and Society*, 306-17.

merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit.' It asserts that although, in terms of strict justice, we deserve God's judgement and condemnation on account of our sins, when we look trustingly into Christ's merciful eyes, expecting only mercy, we receive only mercy through the cleansing power of his Holy Spirit. It is a glorious truth, the very essence of the Good News. The second half of the sentence goes on to say that the Holy Spirit 'renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.' Those good works are a necessary expression of the grace of justification which has already been received, but not a means of earning it. In other words, having received gratuitously from God, we have to give in like manner to other people. That notion is implicit in Lk 6:36, 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.' What is implied here, is the fact that, while God's unmerited mercy is always available to us, we can only experience it's liberating power as long as we are willing to be merciful to those who have injured and wronged us. So instead of judging or condemning them, as they might deserve in terms of strict justice, we should refrain from doing so while offering the wrongdoers the unmerited gift of our mercy.

Implicit in this notion of justification by grace is a distinction which has been made by Catholic theologians since the time of St Augustine between operative and co-operative grace. In biblical terms operative grace is a replacement of the heart of stone with a heart of flesh (cf Ezch 26:26). Co-operative grace is the heart of flesh becoming effective in good works. As Bernard Lonergan has observed: 'Operative grace is religious conversion. Co-operative grace is the effectiveness of conversion, the gradual movement towards a full and complete transformation of the whole of one's living and feeling, one's thoughts, words, deeds, and omissions.'[3] Preaching the kerygma leads to the experience of operative grace, whereas catechesis facilitates growth by means of co-operative grace.

As has already been noted, par 15 of the Joint Declaration on Justification is a very good modern summary of the kerygma.

3. 'Conversion' in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, 18.

This kind of statement of belief lies at the heart of a number of kerygmatic courses being used to good effect in the church nowadays such as *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), Life in the Spirit Seminars, Alpha, Café, Philip Retreats, Cursillo Weekends etc. For more on these courses see chapter ten.

There are many descriptions of the kerygma ranging from St Paul's well known acclamation 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor 12:3), through the Apostolic Fathers of the Church, to the Nicean Creed. For example, the *Letter to Diognetus* contains an eloquent expression of the kerygma in chapters eight and nine. In chapter eight the author describes fallen human nature as follows: 'He left us to live as we pleased, giving free reign to our unruly instincts and being at the mercy of sensuality and lust.' A little later he explained: 'His purpose was that we, who in those days had been proved by our own works unworthy to achieve life, might in these days be made worthy of it by the goodness of God.' Then in chapter nine the anonymous author added, 'How surpassing is the love and tenderness of God! In that hour, [i.e. of the incarnation] instead of hating us and rejecting us and remembering our wickedness against us, he showed how long-suffering he is. He bore with us, and in pity he took our sins upon himself. He gave his own Son as a ransom for us – the holy for the wicked, the sinless for sinners, the just for the unjust, the incorrupt for the corrupt, the immortal for the mortal. For was there, indeed, anything except his righteousness that could have availed to cover our sins? In whom could we, in our lawlessness and ungodliness, have been made holy, but in the Son of God alone? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable working! O benefits unhoped for! – that the wickedness of multitudes should thus be hidden in the One holy, and the holiness of One should sanctify the countless wicked!'[4]

Kerygmatic Crisis of Head, Heart & Hands

Sadly, there are many Christians who, in spite of having been baptised and confirmed, are unfamiliar with the kerygma and unaware of its liberating power. As a result there is what could be referred to as a kerygmatic crisis of head, heart and hands.

4. 'The Office of Readings,18 December,' *The Divine Office*, vol 1 (Talbot: Dublin, 1974), 127-8.

The kerygmatic crisis of the head has to do with knowledge. Many Catholics are neither aware that there is a hierarchy of religious truths, nor the core teachings of the Christian faith. If one reads the story of the Philippian gaoler in Acts 16:25-35, and asks average Catholics to answer his all important question, 'What must I do to be saved?' they will usually be unable to answer in a satisfactory way. They will say such things as, 'You should love God and your neighbour,' 'You should obey your conscience,' 'You should obey the commandments,' and the like. What Paul actually replied was, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household' (Acts 16:31). In other words, many Catholics are not clear about the content of the kerygma. For a good, clear, succinct summary of the core Christian message see Ralph Martin's 'What is Our Message?'[5]

The kerygmatic crisis of the heart has to do with experience. Even if some Catholics are aware of the core teachings of Christianity, that doesn't necessarily mean that they are consciously aware of their liberating power in their own lives. This could be due to a lack of personal faith, a negative image of God, an unwillingness to turn away from sin, or some other personal reason. This lack of an experiential awareness of salvation in Christ is often evident in a lack of evangelical joy, which as G. K. Chesterton once observed in *Orthodoxy*, is 'the gigantic secret of the Christian.' Sadly, there are teachers in our Catholic schools who, although they teach religion to the children, fail to be credible witness to faith in Christ because they themselves have never come to experience his salvation in a personal, transforming way, or to live accordingly.

The kerygmatic crisis of the hands has to do with Christian action. If the truth of the kerygma has not fallen from head to heart, it is not surprising that nominal Catholics often fail act in a way that would be consistent with the teachings of Christ and his church. A few years ago an American booklet entitled *Fanning the Flame* spoke about, 'The disintegration of family life, the decrease in priestly and religious vocations, wasteful consumption, forgetfulness of the poor – these and many other factors are symptoms of the Catholic community's weakened state. It has left the com-

5. *John Paul II and the New Evangelisation*, 17-28.

munity prey to the pressures of a secular world where the media repeatedly mock the gospel and cheapen the centrality of a person's worth as a child of God. Increasingly many Catholics find it difficult to live according to our tradition and the teachings of our church.'[6] Are things any different here in contemporary Ireland?

Pope John Paul II observed in EE 47: 'Everywhere, then, a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptised. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptised live as if Christ did not exist.' Is it any wonder that in NMI 40, John Paul wrote: 'Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelisation. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).' Arguably, when it is examined in a more analytical way it could be said that the essential or core gospel message contains the following six points.[7]

The Kerygma in six points

1] *God's love.* This is where the Good News proclamation necessarily begins. In scripture we are told that 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:16). Then in Jn 3:16 we are told, in possibly the most important line in scripture, 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' Speaking about God's love Jesus said, on one occasion to the apostles and through them to us, 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love' (Jn 15:9). Unlike human love which tends to be restricted and conditional, the love of Christ is unrestricted and unconditional. In Rom 5:7-8 St Paul explained: 'Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly

6. Eds Kilian McDonnell, George T. Montague (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1991), 10-11.

7. I am indebted to the John the Baptist Kononia Community in Belfast for the six headings but not the content of each point.

dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' It is not surprising, therefore, that in Eph 3:17-19 Paul prayed that believers would have a mildly mystical experience of the incomprehensible love of Christ, and in Rom 5:5 he says the prayer has been answered because, 'God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.'

2] *All have sinned and are in need of salvation.* One of the reasons we do not experience the love of God is the fact that our sins act as a barrier. The word for sin in Greek, *hamartia,* literally means, 'to miss the mark,' or 'fall short'. Sin is like an arrow that fails to hit the target. In the New Testament the word refers to the fact that as a power, sin is universal.[8] God expects us to keep the commandments and to lead holy and loving lives in communion with the divine will. Judged by that criterion we all fail to measure up. St Paul spoke for all of us when he admitted, 'For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing' (Rom 7:19). That is why the apostle to the gentiles could say in Rom 3:23-24, 'for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,' and St John could add, 'If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives' (1 Jn 1:10). The Bible acknowledges that we humans tend to be in denial as far as our failings are concerned. In Jer 17:9-10 the Lord says, 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind.' Just as bright sunlight streaming through the window reveals hidden dust on tabletops, so the light of God's love reveals our shortcomings. That is why the psalmist prayed, 'Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Wis 12:2 explains how God answers this prayer: 'Gradually, you correct those who offend; you admonish and remind them of how they have sinned, so that they may abstain from evil and trust in you, Lord.'

In my experience, even when we sense the unconditional love and acceptance of the Lord, a lack of humility can lead some of us to be reluctant to truly admit our sins without excus-

8. See, Barclay, '*Hamaratia, Hamartanein*: The Failure Which is Sin,' in *New Testament Words*, 118-25.

ing or minimising them. Often we seek to attribute them to impersonal factors such as inherited tendencies, pathologies that are rooted in our childhood, environmental pressures, unconscious influences, genetic programming, hormonal imbalances, addictive tendencies, defects in education, the strength of temptation, etc. While we do not exactly deny that we have done wrong, we seem to lessen our responsibility for what we have freely chosen to do, or not to do. This is hardly walking honestly in the gentle light of truth. To confess one's sins in this self-serving, superficial way means that at best one will only feel superficially forgiven. To experience the depth and power of the kerygma we need to say without reserve, 'For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight' (Ps 51:3-4).

3] *Jesus died to forgive our sins.* Every time I celebrate Mass I'm struck by the prayer the priest says over the chalice at the time of consecration: 'This is the new covenant in my blood which will be shed for you and for all, so that sins may be forgiven.' It reminds us that on the cross Jesus was our scapegoat. He took our sins upon himself so that we might be forgiven. As St Paul said, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21). Knowing this to be true St Paul proclaimed: 'Therefore, my brothers and sisters, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses' (Acts 13:38-39). Paul also says in Rom 6:8-12: 'Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.'

4] *Believe and repent.* When the Good News message is proclaimed it invites the hearer to conversion, not firstly by turning from sin or changing his or her behaviour. If it did, it would make a human work (i.e. repentance), a condition for meriting God's forgiveness. As a result, a person would be put at rights with God as a result of personal merit. The basic form of conver-

sion is to believe the Good News, to trust wholeheartedly that if you expect only mercy from God, you will receive only mercy. As St Thomas Aquinas wrote, 'The first conversion to God consists in *believing* [my italics].'[9] The late Anthony de Mello proposed a kerygmatic type meditation in his book *Sadhana: A Way to God*,[10] in which he focused on this kind of conversion process. Imagine, he says, that an angel appears to you and says, 'Listen carefully to what I have to say now: Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, is present here and now with you. Do you believe this? Now I am going to get you to consider something that is even more difficult to believe. Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord who is present with you, loves and accepts you just as you are ... You do not have to change to get his love. You do not have to become better ... to get out of your sinful ways ... He obviously wants you to become better. He obviously wants you to give up your sin. But you do not have to do this to receive his love and acceptance. That you have already, right now, just as you are, even before you decide to change, and whether you decide to change or not ... Do you believe this? ... Take your time over it ... Then decide whether you believe it or not.' Speaking for myself, I have to admit that this meditation exercise moves me every time I use it because it helps me to relive the experience I described at the beginning of this chapter. And so once again, I become consciously aware of the amazing grace of Christ that saved a wretch like me from my sins.[11] When a person is aware of that grace, it gives him or her both the desire and the supernatural power to turn away from any sin that would grieve the Holy Spirit of God within them. So repentance as the second phase of conversion

9. *ST* I-II, q. 113, a. 4.

10. (Gujarat: Anand Press, 1978), 115.

11. Anyone who wishes to experience the power of the kerygma for him or herself could also say the following prayer. 'Jesus I open my heart to you. I believe you died and rose again, for me and for the forgiveness of my sins. I want to belong fully to you. I ask you to forgive all my sins, the ones I am aware of, the ones I am not consciously aware of, and the ones I have forgotten. I thank you that I am receiving the free gift of your unconditional forgiveness and acceptance. I offer my life to you and I promise to obey you as the number one Person in my life by turning away from anything that is contrary to your holy will. Amen.'

follows from the first, namely, complete trust in the God of mercy, and the mercy of God.

Although the saving grace of Christ is always available to those who believe in him, we can only receive and appropriate that grace when we are willing to offer the same mercy – with no strings attached – to those, living or dead, who have hurt or injured us in any way. I say this because it is the clear, consistent, and unambiguous teaching of the scriptures. Let us look at the evidence in the New Testament where a principle of reciprocity is clearly evident. In the Lord's Prayer, having said, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,' Jesus went on to add, 'For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses' (Mt 6:14). On another occasion, Jesus said in similar vein, 'Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven ... for the measure you give [to others] will be the measure you will get back [from God]' (Lk 6:36-39). At the end of the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the man who failed to show mercy was severely punished, and Jesus commented, 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart' (Mt 18:35).

The later New Testament writings echo these sentiments. For example, in Col 3:13 we read: 'Bear with one another, forgive each other if one has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you, you must do the same.' In Eph 3:32 the inspired author says: 'Be generous to one another, sympathetic, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ.' Finally, St James warned: 'For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement' (Jas 2:13). In view of these verses, it seems evident that to forgive those who have hurt or injured us is integral to the kerygma.

5] *Receive the Holy Spirit and his gifts.* In Eph 5:18 we read, 'Be filled with the Spirit.' Notice that it is not advice or an encouragement, rather it is a command of the Lord. Without the Spirit we can do nothing, but when the Lord and Giver of Life is active within us, we can do all things. That is why those who preach the kerygma urge those who listen to ask for the Spirit and to do

so with expectant faith because, as Jesus promised, 'If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (Lk 11:13). Those who ask for the Holy Spirit should also be open to receiving the gifts of the Spirit, the traditional seven mentioned in Is 11:2, and the nine more charismatic ones mentioned in 1 Cor 12:8-10. Is it any wonder that St Paul says in 1 Cor 14:1: 'Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.' These special gifts are rooted in love, express love, and help to build up a loving Christian community. As LG 12 says: 'These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the church.'

6] *Enter into Christian community.* To be united to Christ is to enter a spiritual community made up of all those who have received the grace of salvation as a result of baptism and personal faith in the message of the kerygma. As Acts 2:47 tell us, 'The Lord added to their community daily those who were being saved.' We know that 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.' This community is referred to by Paul as the Body of Christ, we are the members, and Jesus is our head. As Eph 4:11-13 puts it: 'It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' Experience indicates that it is virtually impossible to grow in the Christian life without the help and nurturance of a loving community. It helps to create a feeling of belonging and builds up faith by providing teaching and practical support. Furthermore when Christians help one another they find it easier to resist the false values of secular society and thereby grow in holiness of life (cf Rom 12:2).[12]

12. cf Pat Collins, 'Unity and Evangelisation', *Gifted and Sent*, 183-192.

In EN 23 Paul VI makes the important observation that, 'the proclamation only reaches full development when it is listened to, accepted and assimilated, and when it arouses a genuine adherence in the one who has thus received it. An adherence to the truths which the Lord in his mercy has revealed; still more, an adherence to a programme of life – a life henceforth transformed – which he proposes.' Pope John Paul said something on similar lines: 'Sometimes even Catholics have lost or never had the chance to experience Christ personally: not Christ as a mere "paradigm" or "value," but as the living Lord, "the way, and the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6).'[13]

Motives for proclaiming the Kerygma

Canon 211 of CCL makes this important point, 'All Christ's faithful have the *obligation* and the *right* [my italics] to strive so that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach all people of all times and places.' In EN 24, Pope Paul VI said: 'The person who has been evangelised goes on to evangelise others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelisation: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.' It seems to me that in spite of the universal call to evangelisation, which is rooted in baptism, very few Catholics seem to make a conscious effort to fulfill their prophetic calling by reaching out to either the un-churched or unbelievers. Sherry Weddell of the Catherine of Siena Institute in the USA says that of those Catholics in America who go to church on a weekly basis, only about 5% are intentional disciples of Jesus in the sense that they try to share their faith with others. This regrettable lack of effort by the majority may be due to the fact that so few Catholics are truly evangelised themselves.

The vast majority of Catholics were baptised as infants[14] and

13. 'New Catechism will Promote National Recatechising Effort,' *L'Osservatore Romano*, (March 24, 1993), 3.

14. CCC 1227 reads: 'According to the Apostle Paul, the believer enters through baptism into communion with Christ's death, is buried with him, and rises with him: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried

confirmed[15] as children. It has to be said from a theological point of view that, in receiving these sacraments of initiation, they received the grace of justification and therefore new life in Christ. As a result, Catholics tend to believe that because of this fact, they have been evangelised and are in touch with the power of the kerygma. Of course there is some truth in thinking this, because undoubtedly the love of God has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf Rom 5:5). But it could be argued that while reception of baptism and confirmation were undoubtedly sacramental events, they were not necessarily experiential ones.[16] The gospels tell us that a tree is known by its fruits (cf Mt 12:33). Often the fruits of the Spirit which are listed by St Paul in Gal 5:22-23 are noticeable by their absence in their lives. This may indicate that the graces given in the sacraments of initiation remain dormant because they have not been consciously appropriated by faith.

There are at least two familiar problems associated with a lack of the experience of salvation. Firstly, in the post-Reformation period large numbers of Catholics have stressed the importance of good works. As a result, many of them have tended to rely on personal merits more than they rely on faith in Christ for their salvation. For example, the notion of merit is implicit in the words of this widow, 'It is just not fair. When I prayed for my husband when he was sick with cancer, God did

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therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. The baptised have 'put on Christ'. Through the Holy Spirit, baptism is a bath that *purifies, justifies, and sanctifies* [my italics].'

15. CCC 1285 reads: For 'by the sacrament of confirmation, [the baptised] are more perfectly bound to the church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, *more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed* [my italics].'

16. That disjunction between a sacramental and experiential event is evident in the story of the Samaritans who had heard the kerygma from Philip the evangelist, believed what he had preached, and received Christian baptism. Nevertheless when Peter and John visited them they concluded that the Spirit had 'not fallen on any of them' (Acts 8:16). They seemed to be distinguishing between baptism as a *sacramental event* that enabled them to receive the Spirit, and an *experiential one* where the Spirit is released in the person in a conscious and transforming way.

not listen even though my husband went to Mass every Sunday, was honest in all his dealings with others, and was always loyal to me, whereas there is a man down the road who never attends church, has been in prison twice, and has never been sick for a day in his life.' As the lives of the Pharisees showed, the notion of salvation by means of good works can lead to related problems such as a tendency to hypocrisy, scrupulosity, an unhealthy sense of guilt, and a propensity to be moralistic, holier than thou and judgemental in attitude. Secondly, there are Catholics who for all intents and purposes live like baptised pagans in so far as their behaviour is not much different from that of unbelievers. When the Ryan Report on institutional abuse of children was published in Ireland in mid 2009, it was a striking fact that the terrible misdeeds it uncovered were committed by religious priests, nuns and brothers. How could they have done such unloving things if they had been truly evangelised?

In the past, bishops and priests tended to presume that all those who had received the sacraments of initiation were therefore evangelised. As a result they focused on catechesis, (i.e. Christian teaching about the faith and discipleship). However, if people suffer from a kerygmatic crisis of head, heart and hands, catechesis is like a house built on sand. As Jesus warned: 'The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash' (Mt 7:26-27). There is considerable evidence to show that when the winds of hedonistic, and materialistic values blew in the Celtic Tiger years, many Catholics failed to stand firm as far as their Christian convictions and actions were concerned. It was precisely because they were aware of this point that members of Alpha Ireland wrote a submission to a committee who were drawing up the *Catechetical Directory for Ireland*. In it they suggested that it would be important for the directory to point out that effective catechesis has to be rooted in a conscious experience of the power of the kerygma. Because the church authorities sometimes mistakenly believe that sacramentalised Christians are also fully evangelised, they expect them to carry the yoke of Christian ethics, (e.g. to do with such things as avoiding divorce and abortion). While many un-evangelised or partly evangelised Christians may have a dutiful desire to carry that yoke,

often they do not have the power to do so, because it only comes when the kerygma is experienced in a personal way. As a result, many Christians live lives of ethical defeat, disillusionment and condemnation. Consequently they associate Christianity with bad rather than good news. Is it any wonder that so many of them, especially in poorer urban areas, lapse as a result of disillusionment?

The Sacraments and the Kerygma

As has been mentioned a number of times already, it is often said that many Catholics are sacramentalised but not fully evangelised. While there is some truth in that saying, it can be misleading insofar as it implies that the sacraments are not a means of justification. It was probably because he had this idea in mind that Pope Paul VI said in EN 47: 'In a certain sense it is a mistake to make a contrast between evangelisation and sacramentalisation, as is sometimes done. It is indeed true that a certain way of administering the sacraments, without the solid support of catechesis regarding these same sacraments ... could end up by depriving them of their effectiveness to a great extent. The role of evangelisation is precisely to educate people in the faith in such a way as to lead each individual Christian to live the sacraments as true sacraments of faith – and not to receive them passively or reluctantly.' In EE 47, Pope John Paul stated that the challenge facing evangelisers 'frequently consists not so much in baptising new converts as in enabling those already baptised to be converted to Christ and his gospel.' The following points are meant to be indicative rather than comprehensive. A lot more could be said about this important topic.

a) Baptism

It has often occurred to me that by and large there is a kerygmatic dimension to many of the sacraments. For instance, in RM 47 Pope John Paul II said, 'the apostles, prompted by the Spirit, invited all to change their lives, to be converted and to be baptised ... Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37-38).' It is obvious from the scriptures, (e.g. Rom 6:4; Col 2:12), and the

Fathers of the church that it is through the sacrament of baptism that a person experiences justification. In a treatise entitled, *On Baptism*, Tertullian (160-225) wrote: 'Granted that in former days, before the Lord's passion and resurrection, there was salvation through bare faith; still, now that faith has been enlarged to include belief in the birth, passion and resurrection, there is an enlargement added to the mystery, namely the sealing of baptism.'[17]

b) Sacrament of reconciliation

Much the same is true in the sacrament of reconciliation. Speaking on the Lord's behalf, St James urged: 'Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful' (Jas 5:16). This practice was given a sacramental focus when Jesus appeared to Peter and the apostles after his resurrection. Having greeted them, 'He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23).' In the sacrament of reconciliation we receive forgiveness as a free, unmerited gift and not as a matter of good works. I sometimes say something like this before giving people absolution: 'At this moment you are approaching the crucified One on Calvary. There is nothing you can do to merit, earn or deserve the forgiveness you need. But the Good News is the fact that as you trust wholeheartedly in Jesus crucified, he pours out his unconditional mercy and love upon you free, *gratis* and for nothing. He forgives and forgets your sins forever. As Heb 8:12 assures us: "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more".'

c) The Eucharist

The Eucharist especially has a profoundly kerygmatic focus. Scripture scholar C. H. Dodd has described how the kerygma exerted a significant influence on the shaping of the liturgy. As theology developed the form and language of the church's wor-

17. *The Early Christian Fathers*, ed Henry Bettenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 144.

ship adhered more closely to the forms of the kerygma. 'It is perhaps in some parts of the great liturgies of the church that we are still in most direct contact with the original apostolic preaching.'[18] For example, in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer we read: 'In fulfilment of your will he gave himself up to death, and by rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life. And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as his first gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace.' The acclamations after the consecration are also kerygmatic in nature. One of them reads: 'Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.' Is it any wonder that Pope Paul VI said in EN 28: 'In its totality, evangelisation – over and above the preaching of the message – consists in the implantation of the church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist.' It is a striking fact that at the end of the Eucharist, the priest says to the people, 'The Mass is ended, go in peace.' Our English word *mission* comes from the Latin *missio* meaning 'sending.' In other words, the congregation are sent into the world to love and serve the Lord in many ways, one of which is the evangelisation of others. When he spoke in Dublin and Limerick in 1979, Pope John Paul II adverted to the necessary connection between the saving faith experienced during celebration of the Eucharist and everyday life. He said: 'You cannot be a genuine Christian on Sunday, unless you try to be true to Christ's spirit also in your work, your commercial dealings, at your trade union or your employer's or professional meetings. How can you be a true community in Christ at Mass unless you try to think of the welfare of the whole national community.'[19]

Speaking of the role of priests in the administration of the sacraments, the Congregation for the Clergy said in a letter to the ordained ministers of the world: 'Priests in celebrating the sacraments, act as ministers of Christ and, through the Holy

18. 'John and Paul,' *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1964).

19. *The Pope in Ireland: Addresses and Homilies* (Dublin: Veritas, 1979), 78. See also John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Hominis* par. 7.

Spirit, participate in his priesthood in a special way. Hence the sacraments are moments of worship of singular importance for the new evangelisation. It must be recalled that they have become the only effective moments for transmitting the contents of the faith. While this is true for all faithful, it is even more true for those who, having lost the practice of the faith, occasionally participate in the liturgy for family or social reasons such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages, ordinations funerals etc.'[20] While there is a lot of truth in what Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos says in the letter, surely it is a mistake to claim that a priest can evangelise only on sacramental occasions. He can also do so in the course of his pastoral work by means of such things as one-to-one contact with the people he meets and through the exercise of the charisms of power.

Popular Devotion and the Kerygma

While the liturgy is 'the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed' and 'the font from which all her power flows,'[21] popular devotion plays a complementary but subordinate role if it avoids sentimental excess, superstition, and is genuinely Christ centred. To a certain extent people's adherence to popular piety can represent an implicit protest against an overly dogmatic, ritualistic approach to God. What the supporters of popular piety are looking for are doctrines that come alive with experiential meaning. At their best, popular devotions focus on the kerygma and derive their spiritual energy from it. As Pope Pius XII stated in 1947, the purpose of popular devotion is 'to attract and direct our souls to God, purifying them from their sins, encouraging them to practice virtue and, finally, stimulating them to advance along the path of sincere piety by accustoming them to meditate on the eternal truths and disposing them better to contemplate the mysteries of the human and divine natures of Christ.'[22]

It would be hard to find an explicitly kerygmatic emphasis in many forms of popular devotion but it is evident in others, such

20. *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium*, (Dublin: Irish School of Evangelisation, 1999), 17-18.
21. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, par 10.
22. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical letter *On the Sacred Liturgy*, par 175.

as devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Divine Mercy. The former was promoted by St Margaret Alacoque (1647-1690) as a result of revelations from the Lord. Commenting on it, a church document on popular devotion states: 'It can be said that, in a certain sense, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a cultic form of the prophetic and evangelic gaze of all Christians on him who was pierced (cf Jn 19, 37; Zac 12, 10), the gaze of all Christians on the side of Christ, transfixed by a lance, and from which flowed blood and water (cf Jn 19, 34), symbols of the "wondrous sacrament of the Church".'[23] 'Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a wonderful historical expression of the church's piety for Christ, her Spouse and Lord: it calls for a fundamental attitude of conversion and reparation, of love and gratitude, apostolic commitment and dedication to Christ and his saving work.'[24] Devotion to the Divine Mercy was promoted by St Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938). On 22 February 1931 she saw a vision of Jesus with rays of red and white light streaming from his heart. She was told to have a painting made which would represent the image with the words, 'Jesus I trust in you' written at the bottom. The Lord explained: 'The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water, which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. These two rays issued forth from the very depths of my tender mercy when my agonised heart was opened by a lance on the cross. These rays shield from the wrath of my Father. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him or her.'[25] On another occasion the Lord said to St Faustina, 'I desire that priests proclaim this great mercy of Mine towards souls and sinners. Let the sinner not be afraid to approach me. The flames of mercy are burning me – clamouring to be spent; I want to pour them out upon these souls.'[26] Thanks to the support of the late John Paul II, devotion to the Divine Mercy has spread throughout the

23. *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (2001), par 167.
24. Ibid., par 172.
25. St Faustina Kaolwska, *Revelations of Divine Mercy: Daily Readings from the Diary of Faustina Kowalska*, ed George W. Kosicki (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1996), 38.
26. Ibid., 30.

Catholic world and has brought countless numbers of people into a experiential awareness of the unconditional forgiveness they received in baptism. Those engaged in basic evangelisation would do well, not only to study the kerygmatic content of devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Divine Mercy, but also to actively promote it.

Conclusion

Having looked at the nature of the kerygma, and the reasons we have for proclaiming it, the remainder of this book will focus on practical ways of doing so. As Pope John Paul II so rightly observed in par 57 of *Tertio millennio adveniente*: 'Today there are many "*areopagi*", and very different ones: these are the vast sectors of contemporary civilisation and culture, of politics and economics. The more the West is becoming estranged from its Christian roots, the more it is becoming missionary territory, taking the form of many different "*areopagi*".'[27] The word '*areopagi*' is derived from an incident in Acts 17:19- 34 when St Paul preached at the Areopagus, a hill northwest of the Acropolis in Athens where intellectuals used to meet. Pope John Paul employs the Areopagus as a symbol of the new 'places' in which the Good News must be proclaimed, and to which the mission of Christ is to be directed. He said on one occasion: 'Today these *areopagi* are the worlds of science, culture, and the media; these are the worlds of writers and artists, the worlds where the intellectual elites are formed.'[28] This book will restrict itself to answering the question, how do Catholics engage in basic evangelisation in some of these *areopagi*?

27. For more, see RM 37.
28. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 112.

Recommended Reading

- Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization* (Cincinnati : Servant Books, 2006).
- John Paul II, 'What is the New Evangelisation?' *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 105-17.
- Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994).
- Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).
- *The New Life in the Spirit Seminars Team Manual: Catholic Edition 2000*, revised and annotated by Therese Boucher (Locust Grove: National Service Committee, 2003).