Re-evangelisation of parishes

Master of Philosophy in Religious Education and Pastoral Theology

Assignment:
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Module: Liturgical and Catechetical dimensions of Evangelization

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<td>CCL</td>
<td>The Code of Canon Law</td>
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<td>GDC</td>
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<td>DM</td>
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<td>RM</td>
<td><em>Redemptoris Missio</em></td>
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INTRODUCTION

The rapidly changing context of the world has raised concern about means and methods of evangelization in different social, economic, political and religious situations. “New evangelization” or “re-evangelization” is a new paradigm in the mission of the Church to be herald of the Good News of Salvation. The emerging model of Gospel proclamation, called “new evangelisation” can be traced back to Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*. RM distinguishes three situations in the context of today’s evangelization. First, there are “peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups”. In this context the missionary activity of the church is “mission ad gentes in the proper sense of the term”. Second, “there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission”. The missionary activity of the Church toward these communities is defined as “pastoral care”. Thirdly, “there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel”. Missionary activity of the Church towards these communities requires “new evangelization” or “re-evangelization”.

The African Church is going through these changes, and we are faced with innumerable problems in our continent. Some of them are summarized in *Evangelium Vitae*. In this Encyclical Letter Pope John Paul II describes the modern world in terms of contrast between the “culture of life and the culture of death”. He expressed his concern that the “culture of life” was disappearing because of the loss of “contact

1 RM 33
2 EV 23
with God” and the “eclipse of the sense of God and man”\(^3\). This is actually seen through suffering being inflicted to humanity in general and Africa in particular.

When African Synod fathers met in Rome, they discerned that the problems of the continent were real and needed urgent attention. So there was a necessity to adapt the proclamation of the Gospel to different situations and contexts of Africa in the New Millennium. This came about as their response to the appeal made by Pope John Paul II to African Synod to adopt a new evangelization and a new Pentecost: “It was meant to invoke the Holy Spirit to help Africa destroy the innumerable towers of evil dotted around the whole face of our continent”\(^4\). The African Synod had to evaluate evangelization and give a prophetic message to the challenge of the African continent problems. This was considered to be a way of promoting, consolidating and proclaiming the “Gospel of life in our culture of death”\(^5\) in Africa.

Bishop Peter K. Sarpong, in his article “The African Synod and the powerful word of God in evangelization at the threshold of the Third Millennium” underlines the tragedies, uncertainties and the decadent values of the contemporary African society. This situation affects our parishes in different ways. The African society is faced with many “towers of death”, namely arrogance, greed, selfishness, and ethnocentrism. These “towers of death” include callousness, power-drunkenness, bribery and corruption, hedonism, sadism, atrocities of all untold proportion, legalised abortion, and prostitution\(^6\). The proclamation of the Good News of salvation was seen as the way of bringing hope to our continent as it will be developed throughout this article.

We will illustrate useful approaches and means for re-evangelization of our parishes. It is an attempt to respond to the challenge to proclaim the mysteries of Christ anew in the context our wounded and broken continent so the Gospel and Eucharist become the source of strength and transformation.

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3 EV 21
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
This article will consist of three sections, the liturgical renewal in parishes as a response to the challenge of re-evangelization, catechetical renewal of our parishes and biblical pastoral ministry. The three sections will be presented in their interconnectedness as complementary means of re-evangelization of our parishes.

SECTION I: LITURGICAL RENEWAL IN PARISHES AS RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF RE-EVANGELIZATION

1.1. Communitarian dimension of liturgy

When a human person is turned to God, his innermost being is drawn to the Creator. He experiences this attraction in the innermost recesses of his being. He longs to sing, to praise and to rest in God. A human person is a worshiper by nature. Liturgical activity offers him the opportunity to meet God in the depth of his soul so that he may proclaim the magnitude and the splendour of God’s glory. His longing for God is expressed in the Psalm:

“Oh God, you are my God—for you I long! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless, and without water. So I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips offer you worship!” (Ps 63:2-4).

Since he is a being with others, he achieves this aspiration in a community where he shares faith and practice Christian living in his relationships with others. This communion of beings springs from the origins, when God created them male and female. They fulfil themselves and fructify their gifts in the community. A human person is a social being; he exists in relationships with others. He is also connected to the Divine by the fact that there is the presence of the Divine image in him. St. Augustine emphasizes the dynamic of the person as the image of God as follows: “…

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7 Cf. GS 12
the person is the image of God to the extent that he or she moves towards God, disfigures this image to the extent that he turns away from God”.

Within the framework of these inter-relations, between God and his people, and people among themselves, human existence becomes an engagement with God through others. The baptized who share in God’s life are sent to their brothers and sisters with a clear mandate from the Lord: “Go out to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).

This proclamation takes place in liturgical gatherings and at the Sunday Eucharist. Christians are reformed by the Word of life and strengthened by the Eucharist to go and proclaim the mysteries of Christ. The celebration of Sunday liturgy is a community exercise and has a transforming power. Joyce Ann Zimmerman describes this reality as the Body of Christ identified celebrating Christ’s mysteries:

First, we are never alone in celebrating or living this mystery. We are the Body of Christ, a community joined with one another by sharing a common identity. Second, the paschal mystery is how we must live every day. The dying and the rising [rename] our everyday Christian when we are being faithful followers of Jesus.

1.2. Liturgical Education of the parish community

New evangelization of our parishes should promote renewal of the community by providing community members with liturgical instruction. We assume most of the times that people understand why they celebrate. We presuppose that they have grasped the meaning of symbols that accompany liturgical activities. We may not be realistic by making such assumptions. There could be people in the assembly who consider the Mass as a show because of luck of understanding and knowledge of the mysteries we celebrate. Do they know the significance of water mixed with wine

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9 The original reads: “defines”, but for the sake of grammatical correctness, ‘defines’ has been changed to ‘define’.
10 J. A. Zimmerman, “Catechesis promotes knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the Sacraments: Or: Liturgical catechesis: Doing a Divine “Sit-In”, in Catechist, vol. 40, Iss. 3, p. 3
before the consecration? What is the meaning of gestures performed by the celebrant and words he pronounces?

So liturgical catechesis should be part of parish on-going programmes. This formation is vital for a meaningful and a more active and fruitful participation in the liturgy.

1.3. Liturgy and God Seekers

There are people who are hungry of the Word of God. Sometimes they appear like visitors in our liturgical services. Those are God seekers. They are still hesitant to surrender to Christ. Sometimes they come to liturgical celebrations as guests. Some are our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues or just residing around the Church build. They may have decided to come one day, and see what goes on when drums resound, and people are singing in the church. They are curious about that. They are without any knowledge of the richness of the Gospel of Christ. They do not know whether what the community of the faithful celebrates and proclaims makes sense or is worth living.

Donald D. La Salle, in his article “At the threshold of the Assembly: Liturgy, the New Evangelization, and the New Millennium” describes those God seekers as “those at the edges of our assemblies”. They need our attention so that they may share with us their first experience of participating in a liturgical celebration. Do we offer them the opportunity? Do we ask them to share how they feel after hearing the Word of God for the first time in our assemblies? Offering them “evangelical hospitality” is a process of new evangelization: “When the hospitality of a community has made people feel at ease, they begin to talk about their questions, their concerns, and their hurts. A welcome that leads to listening has initiated the process of new evangelization”\(^\text{11}\). When they feel welcomed, they stay; otherwise they go and will never come back because they did not experience evangelical hospitality. It was as if they went to a stadium and it ended there. The meaning of fellowship celebrated in liturgical action becomes embodied when the brotherhood or sisterhood we

\(^{11}\) D. G. La Salle, “At the threshold of the Assembly: Liturgy, the New Evangelization, and the New Millennium”, in Liturgical Ministry, vol. 8 (1999), p. 186
proclaimed is sustained outside of the church, when people interact as brothers and sisters, showing interest in others.

Our parishes will grow if they become a home to everybody and a place where people feel welcomed regardless of their “accidental” differences such as colours, races, origins, etc. Funerals and wedding celebrations are places where lots of people meet from different backgrounds. Our proclamation of Word at these occasions should make an impact on the lives of all those who turn up for these events: “…the presider can break open the Word in a way that provokes people to reflect about their own situations in lives and become fascinated by the salvation in Jesus”\(^\text{12}\).

### 1.4. Liturgy as instrument of evangelization

The content of liturgical celebration is the mysteries of Christ. The gathered assembly proclaim and celebrate salvation realized in Jesus Christ. At Sunday liturgy, the community of the faithful revives the memorial of Christ, his self-giving as the expression his supreme love for the whole humanity. He makes himself present in the Word proclaimed and in the Broken Bread as he did to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. The presence of Christ thus experienced in the Broken Bread inspires trust in him and stimulates growth of faith. The Assembly gathered at the Eucharist rediscover the meaning of events of the present life; they are filled with joy and courage: “The full, active, and conscious participation of the assembly in the action of the Eucharist is also an act of evangelization since it is a means by which the faithful show that their adherence to Christ through their baptism has made a difference in their lives and has become a source of joy and courage”\(^\text{13}\).

In the context of the African continent, which is torn by hatred, violence, wars, inter-ethnic clashes, liturgical celebrations should become a place where people from various cultural backgrounds, races, tribes are brought together in Christian fellowship to encounter the person of Christ the Saviour. He continues to offer himself to us in the Eucharist so that by receiving his Body and Blood we may be transformed by his love.

\(^{12}\) D. G. La Salle, op. cit., p. 187

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 186
Re-evangelization from liturgical perspective consists of proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ as the principle that transforms humanity. To achieve that, he left a legacy, the new commandment: “love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how the world will know that you are my disciples” Jn 13:34-35. It is love that can change the face of the earth. This is the ultimate meaning of Eucharist: “those who eat the body and drink the blood of Christ desire to be identified with him. They want to become one with him; they want to make their own his gesture of love so that they too may give their lives for their brethren just as he did”\textsuperscript{14}.

Our parishes should proclaim the Good News of hope as the Synod Fathers expressed it: “To Africa, which is menaced on all sides by outbreaks of hatred and violence, by conflicts and wars, evangelizers must proclaim the hope of life rooted in the Paschal Mystery”\textsuperscript{15}. In order to bring transformation in our African continent, our Christian communities, after meeting the Lord in our liturgical gatherings, should be transformed into places where unselfish love prevails over utilitarian, materialistic, and hedonist practises, and above hatred. The baptized should commit themselves to justice and peace, inter-religious dialogue and charitable works.

The new commandment of love should be a life-style for the baptized that have been plunged into “death-claiming and life giving water”. We die in our sins and rise to new life by the power of the Holy Spirit. We become heirs with Christ of extraordinary grace that makes us share in God’s life. This gives us our identity of being God’s children. As Christ’s disciples, we share in his life. We identify ourselves to Christ by our own self-giving to others. Joyce Ann Zimmerman explains this reality in the following lines:

[...] baptism commits us to enter into the very life Jesus lived; as disciples, we are members of his Body and continue his saving ministry in our broken and wounded world. When tragedy strikes, we are challenged to embrace the passion of Christ. This is how we make sense of all that happens in our lives.

\textsuperscript{14} A. Fernando, Celebrating feats and solemnities: commentary on the readings (Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2001) p. 119
\textsuperscript{15} EA 57
Everything is an opportunity to live Jesus’ passion and, through death, to come to new life\textsuperscript{16}.

This point is very important because it underlies the reason for many people leaving the church. They are seeking solutions to their problems. They don’t have strong faith to embrace the passion of the Lord. They go to prophets, the \textit{sangomas}, to witchdoctors and practise witchcraft. Pope Benedict XVI during his visit in Angola stigmatised the practice of witchcraft in Africa. It bears marks of disgrace and infamy to Christians. It is only a liturgical activity of the community that can carry the Good News and bring transformation in the lives on the faithful because “Liturgy itself is an act of evangelization. The goal of evangelical activity is to make the mystery of Christ present and accessible to people in such a way that they can respond and be transformed by the presence of that mystery\textsuperscript{17}.

\section*{1.5. Contextualization of liturgy:}

Attempts have been made to adopt a contextualized approach towards proclamation of Christ’s message through liturgy. These efforts however have not been so smooth because of the complexity of people’s cultural setups. The use of symbols in liturgy in some African churches has been very much laudable. Nevertheless, progress is needed to adapt sacramental symbols and rites to local traditions so that the whole mystery of Christ is celebrated and proclaimed in a way that touches lives and cultures of people:

From this point of view, the liturgy is called to play an important role. As an effective way of proclaiming and living the mysteries of salvation, the liturgy can make a valid contribution towards the elevation and enrichment of specific manifestations of the culture of a people. It will therefore be the task of competent authority to see to the inculturation of those liturgical elements which, following artistically worthy models; can be changed in the light of current norms\textsuperscript{18}.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item J. A. Zimmerman, “Catechesis promotes knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the Sacraments: Or: Liturgical catechesis: Doing a Divine “Sit-In”, in Catechist, vol. 40, Iss. 3, p. 3
\item D.G. La Salle, op. cit., pp. 182-191
\item EA 87
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
A liturgical gathering is the privileged place to celebrate the sacraments. It is an opportunity for a Christian community to encounter the Lord. It demands of us to be cleansed from our unworthiness so that we may be ready to meet the Lord. The following topic will deal with the Sacrament of Reconciliation in our parishes.

1.6. Revitalizing the Sacrament of reconciliation

It has been observed in the recent years that confessionals are less and less visited by the faithful to meet God in the Sacrament of reconciliation. The sacrament of Holy Communion is received sometimes as if the Body of Christ was ordinary bread. It seems that the believers are losing the redeeming character of Christ suffering, death and resurrection. The life-giving nature of the sacrament of Reconciliation needs to be revitalized in our parishes. When we commit sin we are dead. It does mean that we die physically, but rather we loose the great sense of living and feel miserable, and our inner peace is gone. We disfigure the image of God in us, as St. Augustine expresses it when he describes the dynamic of the person as image of God. It is our going back to the Father that can make us live again. In the parable of the “Merciful Father”, it is mentioned twice that the son who was dead: “this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found” (Lk 15:24). And towards the end the Father will tell the elder son: “… now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again, he was lost and has been found” (Lk 15:32). God’s forgiveness restores life in us.

God does not take away our freedom; he respects what we want to make of our lives. At the same time, he keeps on searching for us and waiting for us. God shows us his tenderness and compassion in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus offered himself and became obedient to die on the cross for our sinful humanity. Pope John Paul II makes the following remark in his Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misercordia*, on the mercy of God: “[…] the Cross of Christ, on which the Son, consubstantial with the Father, renders full justice to God, is also a radical revelation of mercy, or rather of

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19 D.L. Schindler, op. cit., p. 734
the love that goes against what constitutes the very root of evil in the history of man: against sin and death"²⁰.

The loss of the “sense of God” implies the loss of the sense of sin. If God is considered “dead” in people’s lives, all evil doing become acceptable. David L. Schindler states the following the “death” of God: “the problem of the ‘death’ of God is a problem already among the ninety percent who profess belief in God, presumably sincerely”²¹. It is hard to find the baptized among people practicing materialism, hedonism, individualism and other dehumanizing theories. There are believers who go to church but their daily actions do not reflect the truth of what they believe.

Efforts of our parishes toward a new evangelization should consist of revitalizing the sacrament of Reconciliation. Integral liberation of humanity from the bondage of sin is a key factor for social transformation because “sin is the ultimate source of our problems”. Sin destroys lives. It affects political, economic, and moral structures of the society. Pope John Paul II advocated a “new” theology of liberation that would free the world from cultural difficulties resulting in indifference to the atrocities of modern people generated by sin: “Our culture desperately needs moral and social reform, but in the more basic context of liberation from the slavery of sin”²².

Conversion is a demand of new evangelization, not only for the priests, but for all the faithful: “… a new evangelization invites people to enter a continuing process of conversion that unfolds through life”²³. Called to exercise the ministry of teaching, sanctifying and ruling in the person of Christ²⁴, sacred ministers need also a continuing renewal. They share the fragility and brokenness of our humanity. In spite of their apostolic zeal priests should be holy people who can inspire the faithful by example. They need to journey with the people of God to conversion.

Liturgy and catechesis are linked as instruments of evangelization. Liturgy is the place where new members who have joined the Catholic faith are educated about the

²⁰ DM 8
²¹ D.L. Schindler, op. cit., p. 744
²² D.L. Schindler, op. cit., p. 745
²³ D. G. La Salle, op. cit., p. 191
²⁴ Cf. CCL 1008
truths of the faith we profess so that then can surrender to “God’s actions”, be transformed and become Disciples of Christ. This is the task of liturgical catechesis. And we shall develop that comprehensively under the following section.

SECTION II: PARISH CATECHETICAL RENEWAL

2.1. Catechesis as component of evangelization

Catechesis is an essential component of evangelization. Faith develops from the first contact of a person with the Gospel message. But this faith is not yet mature because it lacks a profound knowledge of its content, and the awareness of the doctrinal teachings of the Church. This initial stage of encounter of a person or a community with Jesus Christ proclaimed in the Gospel opens that person or that community to a journey of discovering the person of Christ. This leads to conversion and to conscious discipleship. Adherence to the Gospel goes through a process of maturation that is achieved through catechesis. It promotes the knowledge of faith and provides liturgical education. This allows the catechized to participate actively and meaningfully in the liturgy: “Catechesis also aims at giving moral education and initiation to prayer, to community living and to mission. In this way the catechized are equipped enough to witness the Gospel they have received”.

2.2. Renewal and contextualization of parish catechesis

In order to re-evangelize our parishes, sustainable efforts are required to renew and contextualize parish catechesis. Catechetical programmes need to be adapted to different cultural contexts so that the truths of faith are passed on in a language and by means which are easily accessible to the local people. The Gospel message should permeate the culture and transforms cultural practises, which are incompatible with the message of Christ. This can be attained through:

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25 J. A. Zimmerman, op. cit., p.2
26 Cf. GDC 85-86
a listening to the culture of the people, to discern an echo... of the Word of God; a discernment of what has an authentic Gospel value or is at least open to the Gospel; a purification of what bears the mark of sin (passions, structures of evil) or of human frailty; an impact on people through stimulating a radical conversion to God, of dialogue, and of patient interior maturation.  

This adaptation should cover different aspects of the rituals when celebrating the sacraments. The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults provides the opportunity to use symbols or other elements of the local people that are acceptable for the rites. However such effort needs to observe the criteria for inculturation, notably “compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the Universal Church.”

P.C. Phan in his article, “Catechesis as an instrument of Evangelization: reflections from the perspective of Asia” speaks of different contexts of inculturation of Catechesis and the need to adapt catechesis according to different age groups, e.g., adults, infants and young children and young people, and the aged. Catechesis for special situations needs to target the disabled and the handicapped, the marginalized (e.g. immigrants, refugees, nomads, travelling people, the chronically ill, drug addicts, prisoners) the professionals (e.g. workers, artists, scientists, university students), and rural and urban people.

Adequate programmes of reaching out need to be worked out by parishes so that the formation of faith will also promote education for inter-religious dialogue, commitment to issues of justice and peace and integrity of creation. In a world falling prey to hatred, individualism, violence and all sorts of dehumanizing practices, catechetical and religious education in parishes should emphasize the presence of the divine image in each human person. We all are created in God’s image; we are brothers and sisters, children of God.

Liturgy and catechesis are intertwined. They aim at achieving the same goal, namely celebrating the mysteries of Christ and handing down the “truths of our faith to those who come after us”. Faith we receive in celebrated in the liturgy and goes through a

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27 GDC 204  
28 GDC 109  
29 This section if quoted from GDC 189-192 by Peter C. Phan in his article “Catechesis as an instrument of evangelization: reflections from the perspective of Asia” published in Studia Missionalia 48 (1999) pp. 300-301
maturation process through catechesis. Being members of the Body of Christ, each baptized conforms himself to Christ in order to become a sign of hope to our society. A society that Joyce Ann Zimmerman describes as follows:

A society that hallows rugged individualism, in which families are scattered and neighbours are strangers, in which loneliness and homelessness are pandemic, and in which parishes are clustered or becoming mega churches, it is sometimes hard to imagine how we can have any sense of being a Christian community.

2.3. Family catechism and catechesis at Grass-root level

The growing size of some parishes is no longer offering opportunity to church members to know each other. With the emergence of Small Christian communities, which constitute the church in the neighbourhood, the faithful are able to inter-relate. In small Christian community, it is easier to foster communion and participation in church activities and break with individualism. When Christian families come together to pray and share the Word of God, they become a model of the Church operating at the grass-root level. The Word of God consolidates relationships among families and they acquire the sense of belonging to a big Christian family where people care for one another. In this way they can revive African traditional values such as solidarity, communion in service and sharing responsibility. Such practises become the source of community strength.

The Congolese Bishop’s Conference (Democratic Republic of Congo) encouraged the emergence of basic Christian communities and set a pastoral programme for different activities to be organised by the Christian communities, which should be built on African solidarity. A Christian community is:

the normal setting for shared responsibility on the part of all the members: a setting for sharing of material and spiritual goods, a setting where people know each other and respect each other sufficiently to allow them to share their faith-

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30 J. A. Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 3
experiences in personal way, a setting where functions and roles are diversified and distributed in forms of ministry and service for the life of the whole\textsuperscript{31}.

The Church begins with families. That is where catechesis should start. It will help children to grow up knowing Christian values. Parishes need to emphasize the urgent need for family catechesis, as well as catechesis at the grass-root level. From the family which is a domestic church, the parents should be the first catechists as they pass on truths of faith their households. They can use local symbols, “legends, stories, proverbs, riddles and common discussion”\textsuperscript{32}, which are more appropriate to teach Catholic faith to their children. Family life can be consolidated by regular sharing of the Word of God. This can be a way of preventing families from being disintegrated.

The basic Community should be the community of faith, hope and love, a community of prayer and service, and an apostolic community reaching out to the marginalized, the aged, ministering to the sick, the married couples, the youths, the lapsed and the needy. It should identify itself with early the Christian community.

2.4. Parish catechetical planning

A more comprehensive approach to catechesis, and emphasize on praxis of Catholic faith is one of the demands of evangelization. The General directory for catechesis elucidates that in the following words:

In the exercise of its function the Church is appreciative of every means that may be of service, but it relies especially on those which are essentially its own. Chief among these is catechetical instruction, which illumines and strengthens the faith, develops life in harmony with the spirit of Christ, stimulates a conscious and fervent participation in the liturgical mystery and encourages men to take an active part in the apostolate\textsuperscript{33}.

In order to achieve its goal, catechetical planning at parish level should consider different conditions and contexts of life. Methods of catechising should be adapted to the situation of those to be catechised. A more comprehensive and appropriate

\textsuperscript{31} B. Ugeux & P. Lefevbre, op. cit., p. 20
\textsuperscript{33} GE 4
approach is required for catechesis to age groups, the marginalized, professional groups, for “special situations, mentalities and environments”\(^{34}\).

After exploring the dimensions of liturgy and catechesis in the process of re-evangelization our parishes, we shall now look into Biblical pastoral ministry and its role in new evangelization.

**SECTION III: BIBLICAL PASTORAL MINISTRY**

3.1. Biblical ministry in Re-evangelization of parishes

The general situation of Africa is alarming. Africa has fallen prey to “towers” of death. Our communities have lost the sense of community life that early Christian communities experienced. There is growing selfishness, greed, individualism and ethnocentrism. It is rare nowadays to be concerned with the misery of people in our neighbourhood. Our neighbours are “strangers” to us. Genocide and inter-ethnic cleansings have become a more appropriate word to express what is going on in some of our communities. Horrible crimes being committed against people whom we do not consider ours. Genocide in Rwanda, in Darfour region, and in many other parts of the continent are just a few examples of this situation of hated against one another.

Moral behaviour is deteriorating. We are faced with scenes of prostitution, abortions, the phenomenon of human trafficking and early pregnancies. It is really a “culture of death” prevailing over the inviolable character of life. It is sad to see that African vitality that characterised our traditional societies whereby life was sacred and cared for till old age, is gradually disappearing.

In this context, the role of Scripture seems determinant as it carries the Good News of Salvation. The Bible brings hope to human communities. The Love that God showed to the children of Israel is extended to our world today. As the Israelites went astray, making gods they adored, human communities today have their deities they adore and

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worship (e.g. money, pleasure, etc.). The Word of God reminds us of the journey of the children of Israel, the hope of liberation, the promise of Salvation, and above all God’s loving compassion and forgiveness.

Re-evangelization of our parishes should emphasize the role of Scriptures in family, basic community and parish life. We need to discern God’s will when we look at the disfigured face of our continent. To achieve that, the Word of God should resound far beyond building structures we call churches. Donald G La Salle makes the following remark about proclamation of the Gospel of Christ:

If the new evangelization is to be an invitation for those who remain unaffected by the message of the Gospel to hear it anew, then it needs to take place where people live – in neighbourhoods, around kitchen tables, and in workplaces. Nevertheless, the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist can have an impact on the ability of Christian communities to be bearers of Good News.35

3.2. Dynamic approach to biblical pastoral ministry

Biblical pastoral ministry offer a range of diversified means to promote the Word of life in our parishes. These are Bible study groups meetings, regular Gospel sharing in families and in small Christian communities, animating Basic Bible Seminars and Bible Spirituality Seminars. Another way of consolidating the Gospel of life is to introduce “lectio divina”36 in our liturgical proclamation. The Scriptures say that the Word that comes from the mouth of God is powerful, living and active, and never returns to Him in vain (Is 55:11).

As the sense of community is disappearing because of growing individualism, the Bible “reminds us of the need to live in community”. It warns against hatred, sadism, murder, violence, crimes, abuses and evils that are become the new way of describing

35 D.G. La Salle, op. cit., p. 183
36 L. Bouyer describes lectio divina as “… personal reading of the Word of God during which we try to assimilate its substance; a reading in faith, in a spirit of prayer, believing in the real presence of God who speaks to us in the Sacred text, while the monk himself strives to be present in a spirit of obedience and total surrender to the divine promises and demands”. This definition was quoted by M. Magrassi, 2000. Praying the Bible. An introduction to Lectio Divina, Parakou, Verbum Bible, p. 18
our communities: “every one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him” (1 Jn 3:15).

Our parishes should promote biblical catechesis in our liturgical reform so that individuals and communities will develop their interest in meditative reading of Sacred Scriptures. The Word of God will really become a “Good News” when it is read and preached in such a pay that it touches the lives of many. “Lectio divina” gives that opportunity of familiarizing oneself with the Living Word. Spiritual reading and constant study of the Scriptures help to build intimate relationship with the Triune God we meet in the Bible as Father Creator, the Son Redeemer and the Spirit Sanctifier. Liturgy and catechesis will be empty if there in no Word proclaimed. Bishop Mariano Magrassi relates catechesis, liturgy to the ministry of the Word by acknowledging that liturgical reform will be unsuccessful if biblical catechesis is not taken into consideration. He states the following:

Many have insisted that without a corresponding biblical catechesis liturgical reform will end up a failure on the pastoral level. We will have renewed rites, but there will be no active, conscious, or full participation in them. That is all. Biblical catechesis will not be able to plant the Word of God in the hearts of the faithful unless it is so animated by diligent contact with the Word that its message becomes genuine “good news".

Re-evangelization or our parishes should create conditions that allow the faithful to have frequent reading and study of divine scriptures. Regular personal contact with the word of God will help to grow in knowledge of Christ: “Ignorance of Scriptures in ignorance of Christ” (DV 25).

Biblical catechesis is fundamental in pastoral ministry because it lays foundation for a meaningful liturgical celebration, catechetical and religious education and a conscious discipleship. We cannot be followers of a Master we do not know. Growth in knowledge and love of Christ will strengthen us and empower us to live out our baptismal vocation to share in the priestly, kingly and prophetic life of Christ.

37 M. Magrassi, op. cit., p. 1
At the end of this section, we come to understand that liturgy, catechesis and the ministry of the Word are interconnected. Any liturgical and catechetical renewal on pastoral level needs to consider biblical catechesis. This is the key to success in pastoral reforms our parishes would wish to embark in as process of re-evangelization.

CONCLUSION

In this article we tried to show the context in which “re-evangelization” or “new evangelization” was developed by John Paul II. We glanced at both Encyclical Letters Redemptoris Missio and Evangelium vitae. We became aware of the changing context of mission and the problem inherent to integrity of life. Pope John Paul II in Evangelium Vitae describes this problem as loss of the “sense of God and of man” and the contrast between the “culture of life” and “the culture of death”. In EV, Pope John Paul II advocated the “culture of life”. The “cultures of death” was sustained by dehumanising principles we listed earlier, which generate violence, hatred, destruction of life and all the sufferings inflicted to humanity today.

We came to understand that the dignity of the human person lies on the presence of the divine image in each person. Looking into innumerable brutalities against life and others, we realized new evangelization was urgency for our continent. Our parishes are the ground proclaiming anew the message of Christ that will bring about hope and promote the dignity of the human person.

We presented three main instruments deemed fundamental to carry out the message of salvation: Liturgical renewal of our parishes was described as response to the challenge of new evangelization. In this section we indicated that liturgy has a community dimension. It should also help God seekers to join full Christian fellowship. As essential component of evangelization, liturgy should the place where the sacraments are celebrated in a meaningful way. At Sunday Eucharist the
community of the faithful experiences the joy of Christ’s presence in his Word and in the Broken Bread. But because of our unworthiness of our humanity, there was necessity to revitalise the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and embark our parishes into a journey of continuing renewal and conversion.

To achieve that liturgical catechesis, beside, handing down the truths of faith should emphasise the redeeming character of Jesus’ death and Resurrection that has brought liberation from sin and new life.

Catechesis and liturgy are interconnected. We have demonstrated how the truths of faith are handed down within the framework of liturgical celebration. In order to achieve fully its task, catechetical programmes need to be renewed and contextualized. It means catechesis should be adapted to various situations and conditions of people’s life.

Since the Church begins a family, the domestic Church, family catechism and catechesis at grass-root level need to be promoted to respond to the challenge of fast growing parishes where members of the same community are strangers to each other.

The ministry of the Word should be promoted because the Word of God has a transforming power. It reveals to us God, the Merciful Father, and his Son, Jesus our Saviour.

Biblical ministry should be incorporated in parish regular activities. Family and small Christian communities should have regular studies of Scriptures. This can be done through basic bible seminars, *lectio divina*, bible study groups, bible spirituality seminars so that the message of Christ may go far beyond the boundaries of our church building structures and parishes.

All the three themes dealt with in this article, namely liturgy, catechesis and biblical ministry are interconnected as they all intend to achieve the same goal, which is to proclaim the mysteries of Christ, his life, death and resurrection as the source of joy and salvation.
Re-evangelization of our parish will continue to be urgency as long as the face of the earth remains disfigured and haunted by towers of death. The culture of the Gospel, the “Culture of life” will always need to be promoted, consolidated and proclaim as a way of restoring the dignity of life and save the whole creation. Salvation of the creation would mean that human persons become aware of the presence of the Divine in each other. This exercise demands adequate means to resurrect the image of God in every creature. This continues to be the challenge new evangelization.
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