

‘THE NEW EVANGELISATION’ AND THE NEW ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Reflections on an Emerging Scene

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IN OCTOBER 2010, Pope Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation as a dicastery of the Roman Curia in his *motu proprio Ubicumque et Semper*.¹ The move signalled the continuing significance of ‘the new evangelisation’ in the mind of the pontiff, an expression which has come to stand for, among other themes, a renewed commitment to ‘re-make the Christian fabric of ecclesial community itself.’² Of course, the ‘new evangelisation’ was a central theme of Benedict’s predecessor, John Paul II, and the late pope’s beatification in May 2011, together with the establishment of the new curial department and an upcoming Synod on the subject, have served only to strengthen the momentum of this missionary impulse.³

The intent of this article is to shed light on the theological principles that underpin the promotion of the new evangelisation and to examine the new ecclesial movements as principal agents of this concern. It will be argued that the prominence of the ecclesial movements at the forefront of the Church’s evangelising mission, or at least their conscious claim of this task, invites study of their relation to the local church and their pastoral practice. It will be noted that while the ecclesial movements express, quite positively, the charismatic and universal dimensions of the Church’s life, their practical insertion into the life of particular churches, that is, dioceses, has been problematic. The tendency of some groups to

absolutise their own religious experience and evangelical approach can, it is intimated, obscure the genuine catholicity or breadth of the Church’s mission. These comments hope to contribute towards discussion of the new evangelisation and the promise and challenge of ecclesial movements within that project, ahead of the Ordinary General Assembly in October 2012, ‘The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.’

Origins of the ‘New Evangelisation’

The first appearance of the ‘new evangelisation’ in magisterial teaching can be traced to John Paul II’s 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*.⁴ Promulgated on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s missionary decree *Ad Gentes*, and building on the mission of the laity as affirmed in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the encyclical situates a new missionary impulse within the context of changing ecclesio-cultural realities.⁵

Distinct from though related to the universal mission *ad gentes*, the ‘new evangelisation’ is directed specifically toward those traditionally Christian nations to whom the Gospel is known but whose faith nevertheless lacks fervour and genuine witness in life. John Paul II writes,

... 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 baptised 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. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelisation’ or a ‘re-evangelisation.’⁶

As such, the stated goal is the reappropriation of the Gospel in those cultural contexts which have known Christ, accepted him and then rejected him. The new evangelisation, as it appears in *Redemptoris Missio*, seeks the (re)conversion of those peoples who have ceased to practice their faith ‘while continuing to live in a culture which in large part has absorbed gospel principles and values.’⁷ There is evidence that the primary audience that John Paul II had in mind for this reanimation was Western Europe.⁸

It is also in *Redemptoris Missio* that John Paul II singles out the emerging ‘ecclesial movements’ as a particular expression and instrument of this renewed missionary endeavour:

I call to mind, as a new development occurring in many churches in recent times, the rapid growth of ‘ecclesial movements’ filled with missionary dynamism. When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of local churches and are welcomed by bishops and priests within diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God both for new evangelisation and for missionary activity properly so-called. I therefore recommend that they be spread, and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life and to evangelisation, within a pluralistic view of the ways in which Christians can associate and express themselves.⁹

Indeed, John Paul II’s encouragement and support of such movements as Opus Dei, the Neocatechumenal Way, the Focolare Movement, and Catholic Charismatic Renewal—all predominantly lay but typically including clerical and religious members enjoined by the charism of a founder—was to be a central mark of his pontificate and evangelical concern to the end.¹⁰ In his 2001 Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II further af-



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firmed the new ecclesial movements as a manifestation of the dynamism of the Spirit renewing the life of the Church from within, ‘a vitality that is God’s gift and a true ‘springtime of the Spirit.’¹¹ It is to the particular promise and challenge of these movements, formally affirmed as ‘a true gift’ for the new evangelisation, which we now turn.

The New Ecclesial Movements

It is clear from the foregoing papal statements that the advance of the new evangelisation and the growth of the new ecclesial movements have been closely aligned, albeit not identical. The renewed evangelical mission of the Church *ad extra*, particularly in the so-called ‘First World,’ presupposes the constant interior renewal of the Church itself, a task to which the new ecclesial movements offer themselves. Indeed, conscious of ‘fatigue’ in many Christian communities and the danger this presents to the proclamation of and instruction in the faith, the *lineamenta* for the forthcoming synod commends the ‘newness and vitality’ which the ecclesial movements bring to the life of the Church.¹²

An awareness of the potential of the movements in this regard has driven institutional support of the movements’ activities, resulting in growth that has been no less than extraordinary. There are an estimated one million members of the Neocatechumenal Way around the world in more than 20,000 small communities while the Catholic Charismatic Renewal claims a presence in some 220 coun-

tries and contact with over 120 million Catholics.¹³ The close affiliation of the movements with the new evangelisation is also reflected in the newly-formed Pontifical Council which includes among its consultors the vicar-general of Opus Dei, Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, the president of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Fr Julian Carrion, and the co-initiator of the Neocatechumenal Way, Kiko Arguello.

It can be said that the increasing presence of the ecclesial movements amidst the local churches expresses, quite positively, a renewed imagination about the possibilities of Christian life and community. As Hanna affirms, the movements incarnate central aspects of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, most especially a renewed baptismal appreciation, an avid sense of the universal call to holiness, and a related and intense missionary zeal.¹⁴

The movements can also be interpreted as continuous with the Council in their expression of the charismatic dimension of the Church's mystery, a dynamic element that was fruitfully recovered at the Council through a return to the pneumatology of St Paul. *Lumen Gentium*, for instance, affirmed the bestowal by the Holy Spirit of 'different hierarchic and charismatic gifts' (LG 4), given for the building up of the Church (LG 12), and directed toward a saving mission in the world (LG 30-31). The vigorous lay apostolic activity at the heart of the new ecclesial movements coheres well with these themes.¹⁵

However, while reflecting the renewed spiritual consciousness nurtured by the Council's teachings, particularly among the laity, the practical integration of the new ecclesial movements into existing ecclesial structures and culture has been anything but straightforward. It is notable that the Second Vatican Council, while acknowledging the Spirit's guidance by 'different hierarchic and charismatic gifts,' did not further develop the relationship between these charismatic and institutional aspects. Systematic reflection of this kind may have been advantageous, particularly

in light of the discord that has since arisen between a number of movements and the parochial structures of the diocese. The most recent instance is the tension between the Neocatechumenal Way and the Catholic bishops of Japan, a situation which will be considered.

Given the prominence of the new ecclesial movements in dioceses around the world, and their self-understanding as 'agents of the new evangelisation,' the difficulties related to their insertion in the local church call for reflection. Indeed, John Paul II himself, while affirming the new movements as a 'providential response' to an increasingly secular milieu, also raised the challenges that the movements face in their journey toward 'ecclesial maturity.'¹⁶ In particular, he stressed the need for the new ecclesial movements to submit to the discernment of competent ecclesiastical authorities, namely the bishops, if the authenticity of their charism was to be safeguarded.¹⁷ Commentators have also raised the need of inculturation as an ongoing issue for some movements.¹⁸

Before examining specific examples of such difficulties, however, it is helpful to consider the thought of Joseph Ratzinger on the ecclesial movements for his analysis as Cardinal-Prefect, and then interventions as pope, raise important questions regarding their accountability and influence. The pastoral practice and potentially political character of the movements is indeed significant as the promotion of a new evangelisation gains both momentum and *gravitas* in theology as well as in pastoral planning and practice.

Benedict XVI on the New Ecclesial Movements

Benedict XVI's overall support of the new ecclesial movements, which he has affirmed as 'signs of hope,' can be interpreted not only in the light of the legacy of his predecessor but also in relation to his previous analysis of their ecclesial significance as Prefect of the



Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁹ In an important 1998 article, 'The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements,' Ratzinger draws parallels between the new ecclesial movements and the irruption of monasticism that surfaced as early as the third century.²⁰ While the apostolic thrust of the new movements clearly differs from the contemplative character of monasticism, they nevertheless share, Ratzinger points out, an intense desire to live the *vita evangelica*, that is, to allow the Gospel to shape the whole of one's life.²¹

Perhaps the most interesting congruence identified by Ratzinger is that while monasticism did not develop as a separate institution alongside the normal Church, its communities were, all the same, 'obliged to accept the fact that the movement to follow Christ radically cannot be completely merged with the local church.'²² He thus concludes, 'So much is clear: the monastic movement creates a new centre of life that does not abolish the local ecclesial structure of the post-apostolic Church, yet does not completely coincide with it, but is active within it as a vitalising force.'²³ In the same way, the new ecclesial movements are brought forward as a vital expression of the Spirit that cannot simply be aligned or contained within traditional diocesan structures.

Another pertinent aspect of Ratzinger's analysis is that the new ecclesial movements, like monasticism, are affirmed as a group by which the 'universalistic' aspect of the Church's nature and mission is reinvigorated and reaffirmed, and so a force that serves, in this way, 'the spiritual vitality and truth of the local churches.'²⁴ In other words, the spiritual potency and tensive ecclesial location of the new movements—stretching beyond but nevertheless active within the local church—works to resist an absolutisation of local ecclesial structures. For Ratzinger, the movements work against any one-sided emphasis on the particular at the expense of the essential universality of the Church.²⁵ It is in their distinct trans-local organisation that the new

ecclesial movements are, in principle, fruitful aids toward the ongoing integration and complementarity of the charismatic and institutional within the Church.

Pastoral Challenges

However, as in many aspects of ecclesial life, the pastoral reality has not always lived up to the theological promise outlined and very real difficulties have emerged in the relation between various ecclesial movements and local churches. In the case of the Neocatechumenal Way, the Japanese experience is particularly striking.

In January 2011, the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ) called for priests and lay men and women to assist in confronting the purported 'damage' caused by the presence and activities of the Way which has maintained communities in Japanese dioceses since the 1970s. The president of the Bishops' Conference, the Jesuit Archbishop of Osaka, Leo Jun Ikenaga, stated plainly, 'In those places touched by the Neocatechumenal Way, there has been rampant confusion, conflict, division, and chaos.'²⁶ The bishops' concerns related to the Way's custom of celebrating separate liturgies within the parish, an apparent lack of ecclesial accountability, and a distinct culture within the Way, grounded in the spirituality of their founder, Kiko, which has been found to be at great variance with the normal procedure of parish life.²⁷ The appeal for the assistance of the clergy and laity in the address of the Way came after the Japanese episcopal conference appealed to Pope Benedict to have the movement removed from their dioceses. It was a request that was formally denied.²⁸

It is noteworthy that this has not been the only instance in which new ecclesial movements have sought affirmation from Rome when their ministry has been thwarted or gone unrecognised by a local bishop. In 1988, *The Tablet* reported tensions between members of the Italian episcopacy, including the Arch-

bishop of Milan, Cardinal Martini, and Communion and Liberation over the movement's formation program, including the character of their instruction in Catholic social doctrine.²⁹ In this instance, the *Cielini*, as members of Communion and Liberation are also known, obtained support from John Paul II who is purported to have reproved the president of the Italian Bishops' Conference for their lack of enthusiasm for the movement.³⁰

These incidents bear out Ratzinger's identification of the 'universalistic' dimension of the new ecclesial movements in a particular way. It is clear that there often exists a strong and direct affiliation between the new ecclesial movements and the papacy. This is evident not only in the case of the Neocatechumenal Way in Japan but also in the situation of Opus Dei which in 1982 was given the status of a 'personal prelatore' by John Paul II.

While Ratzinger himself affirms this complementarity, between the 'universal ecclesial realities' of the movements and the Petrine office as 'bishop for the whole Church,' such a 'symphony,' as Ratzinger puts it, can cast the movements with a particular type of authority, undeniably political in character, in the midst of the local church.³¹ The relative autonomy of the new ecclesial movements from parochial structures can, if oversight is not suitably exercised, lead to groups making absolute their own religious experience, to the exclusion of other forms of Christian discipleship, catechesis and mission. Alert to the danger, Hanna observes 'a close alliance between a centralised papacy and international movements can breed an 'elitist arrogance' in the movements and undermine the Church's collegial and episcopal structure which is according to our faith *jure divino*.'³²

It is clear in the Japanese case that the often immediate, and perhaps politically expedient, relation between the new ecclesial movements and the papacy can have material consequences for the authority of local bishops in the pastoral care of their dioceses. Furthermore, it can be recognised that any tendency

toward exclusivity, absolutisation, or divisive pastoral practice among the ecclesial movements in the context of local churches has the potential to obscure, or even hinder, the reception of 'the new evangelisation' more broadly, as an imperative project for all the baptised rather than simply a few.

Concluding Remarks

Historical experience has surfaced both the promise and ongoing tensions which lie at the heart of the new ecclesial movements as a distinct presence within the local church. As prominent claimants of 'the new evangelisation' to date, and an undoubted presence in its future expression, the questions concerning the integration of the movements with parochial structures and the character of their pastoral practice remain pertinent. The particular Petrine orientation of a number of the movements, which can be engaged as a source of ecclesiastical status or power, dovetails with a theological emphasis on the ontological and temporal priority of the universal church over the particular as expressed in the writings of Ratzinger.

It must be said that if the historical effect of the new ecclesial movements is not to contradict their original meaning, sensitivity is called forth to the essential 'catholicity' of the Church's evangelising mission. This 'inclusive' and 'expansive' breadth, as Dulles describes it, calls for the creative reception and mutuality of both the universal and particular in the Church's life, as well as the charismatic and institutional.³³ Applied to the evangelising mission of the Church, a spirit and practice of exchange and complementarity between the new ecclesial movements and the structures and culture of the local church will prove vital, particularly as the theme of 'the new evangelisation' comes to greater clarity in magisterial thought and, it is hoped, ever more urgent and dynamic expression in Catholic life.

As the *lineamenta* for the forthcoming

Synod on the New Evangelisation points out, with acumen, 'Perhaps...the problem of unfruitfulness in evangelisation and catechesis today can be seen as an ecclesiological problem which concerns the Church's capacity, more or less, of becoming a real community, a true fraternity and a living body ...'³⁴ It could

be intimated that our awareness of the 'catholicity' of God's own life, a presence that cannot be limited to any one historical form or exhausted by a single missionary practice, will be essential to the realisation of such a vibrant community and the future flourishing of its evangelising mission.

NOTES

1 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio Ubicumque et Semper*, *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 20 October 2010, 6; also available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper_en.html, accessed 4 July, 2011.

2 Ibid. The original citation is *Christifideles Laici* 34.

3 The *lineamenta* for the forthcoming Bishops' synod assembly appears at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html, accessed 4 July, 2011.

4 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 33. Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html, accessed 4 July, 2011. The first reference to a 'new evangelisation' came on 9 June 1979 during a homily by John Paul II in Mogila, Poland. Then, in 1983, in an address to Latin American bishops at the 19th Plenary Assembly of CELAM, the pontiff called explicitly for 'a new evangelisation: new in its ardour, its method, and expressions.' See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta_en.html and http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1983/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830309_assemblea-celam_it.html, accessed 4 July, 2011.

5 For an analysis of *Redemptoris Missio* in light of these magisterial antecedents, see Richard Rymarz, 'John Paul II and the 'New Evangelisation': Origins and Meaning,' *Australian eJournal of Theology* 15/1 (2010). Available at http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/225396/Rymarz_evangelization_GH.pdf, accessed 4 July, 2011.

6 *Redemptoris Missio* 33.

7 *Redemptoris Missio* 37.

8 Rymarz cites the testimony of John Paul II's private secretary, Stanislaw Dziwisz, who confirms, 'The idea [of the new evangelisation] came to him when he noticed—especially during trips—that there was an urgent need to reinvigorate Churches in old Christian countries. He thought this was particularly true of Europe.' See Richard M. Rymarz, 'The New Evangelisation: A Look at the Growing Range of Reference,' *Compass Theological Review* 44/2 (2010), 24; original reference, Stanislaw Dziwisz *A Life with Karol: My Forty-Year Friendship with the Man Who Became Pope*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 159.

9 *Redemptoris Missio* 72.

10 The precise definition and range of an 'ecclesial movement' remains somewhat elastic. While Opus Dei is, in canonical terms, a 'personal prelature' and resists the description as an 'ecclesial movement,' it is where the Church most often includes them. The same applies to Catholic Charismatic Renewal which does not trace its lineage from an individual founder but is, nevertheless, usually included among the movements. In a letter to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements in May 1998, John Paul II defined a movement, in general terms, as 'a concrete ecclesial entity, in which primarily lay people participate, with an itinerary of faith and Christian testimony that founds its own pedagogical method on a charism given to the person of the founder in determined circumstances and modes.' See John Paul II, 'Movements in the Church,' *Laity Today* (1999), 18.

11 John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 42. Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html, accessed 4 July, 2011.

12 *Lineamenta*, 'The New Evangelisation for the

Transmission of the Catholic Faith,' 15.

13 Estimates provided at <http://www.zenit.org/article-19743?l=english> and <http://iccrs.org/en/index.php/ccr>, accessed 4 July, 2011.

14 Tony Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2006), 265 and *passim*.

15 It is notable that some Latin American commentators have interpreted the implementation of 'the new evangelisation' as discontinuous with the reforms of Vatican II, reading it as 'a partial break with some progressive currents unleashed by the Second Vatican Council and a conservative redeployment of others,' as a 'resurgent conservatism' and even a "romanization" of post-Vatican II innovations, an attempt to absorb some reformist elements in ways that do not challenge the power structure within the church, while disqualifying others as too ideological or reductive.' See Anna L. Peterson and Manuel A. Vasquez, 'The New Evangelization in Latin American Perspective,' *Cross Currents* 48/3 (1998): 311-329.

16 John Paul II, 'Address to the Delegates on the Occasion of the Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and the New Communities,' *Laity Today* (1999): 22.

17 *Ibid*.

18 See John Thornhill, 'Influential 'New Ecclesial Movements' Face Challenge of Inculturation,' *Australasian Catholic Record* 84/1 (2007), 67-79.

19 See Benedict XVI, 'Message to the Participants of the Second World Meeting of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities,' available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20060522_ecclesial-movements_en.html, accessed 4 July, 2011.

20 Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements,' *Communio* 25 (Fall 1998), 492.

21 *Ibid.*, 492.

22 *Ibid.*, 493.

23 *Ibid.*, 493.

24 *Ibid.*, 493.

25 This is a theme taken up by Ratzinger in his much publicised debate with Cardinal Walter Kasper. For an overview of this debate, see Kilian McDonnell, 'The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,' *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 227-250.

26 See <http://www.ucanews.com/2011/01/13/japanese-bishop-seeks-lay-help-with-neo-cats>, accessed 4 July, 2011.

27 It is significant that similar concerns about the Way have been expressed by bishops and clergy around the world, including in the French diocese of Nancy where the parish of Pulnoy-Cerville became the centre of conflict in 1992, the Clifton diocese in the UK which, in 1994, ordered an inquiry that concluded the presence of the Way in its parishes was 'completely divisive and destructive' and in Jerusalem where the Latin patriarch, Michel Sabbah, reproved Neocatechumenal communities in 2007 for their suspect liturgical practice and their resistance to inculturation. For details of the Clifton Enquiry, see Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 62-72. Strong criticisms of the movements can also be found in Gordon Urquhart, *The Pope's Armada*, (New York, Prometheus, 1999) and Luca Diotallevi, 'Catholicism on the way to Sectarianism? An Old Hypothesis for New Problems,' *Concilium* 3 (2003): 107-121.

28 For an account of this response, see <http://www.zenit.org/article-31392?l=english>, accessed 4 July, 2011.

29 Robert Moynihan, 'Valiant for God, the New Movements 1,' *The Tablet* (20 February, 1988), 8.

30 Antonio Gaspari, 'Communion and Liberation: Crusaders for Catholic Integrity,' *Inside the Vatican* (1996); available online at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/ISSUES/COMLIB.TXT>, accessed 4 July, 2011.

31 Ratzinger, 'The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements,' fn. 20, 499.

32 Hanna, *New Ecclesial Movements*, 261.

33 Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 71.

34 *Lineamenta*, 'The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Catholic Faith,' 2.