World Mission Conference 2014

Keynote speaker:
Rev Dr Stephen Bevans SVD

The Evangeli Gaudium Effect:
New Directions for Mission today
SPREADING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL:

Pope Francis and “Evangelii Gaudium”

Catholic Missionary Union
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I fell in love with Pope Francis

• During his inauguration as pope on March 19, 2013
• Impressed with him on the balcony
• But during the procession to the altar for his inauguration
• When he stopped the popemobile
• I fell in love with him
Here was a pope that the church needed today!

- Here was a pope who spoke constantly of tenderness and mercy
- Who washed the feet of juvenile prison detainees
- Among them Muslims and women
- “who am I to judge?”
- “Isn’t ‘apostolic palace’ an oxymoron
- Exhorted priests to acquire “the smell of the sheep”
Talked a lot about evangelization

- Often we Catholics have thought of evangelization in rather negative terms
  - “Are you saved?”
  - “Repent, Jesus is near!”
- But a caricature!
- Literally, sharing with people the good news that God is a God of incredible love and mercy
- Who can lead us to a life of meaningfulness and joy
- And who can lead the world toward peace and justice
This Evangelization is embodied in Jesus

• “God’s body language” (M. Oakley)
• “Everything he said and did...and not”
• Especially in his life and ministry
• Expressed most radically by his giving his life for us on the cross
• A life that broke the bonds of death in his resurrection
• God’s love, mercy and justice embodied as well in Pope Francis
• Why a reflection on Francis’s understanding of evangelization has to start with the man himself
Francis personifies the Joy of the Gospel

But then he goes beyond!
The problem with Christians is that they don’t look redeemed!
But this is not the case with Pope Francis!
Noel Connolly: “This is the work of a free man.”
He does look redeemed, and this is what he calls the church to as well.
We need to look redeemed!
We need to show the world that “life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating it to others.”
Not enough to preach about Christ

- And tell people about the joy that the gospel brings
- We Christians—in our ordinary lives—have to demonstrate that joy and fullness of life by the way we live
- Evangelization more about being than doing or speaking

Christians should never live like there is “Lent with no Easter”
Never “look like they have just come back from a funeral”
The church grows, not by high-pressure tactics, less by threatening people with eternal punishment. 

John Paul II: “by attraction”

“as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet”
A Church with Open Doors
Francis writes how the church should be a “Mother with an open heart”…

- The house of the father of the prodigal son
- Homily after Easter, 2014
- Church’s ministry is “door keeping”
- Always greeting people, always meeting them
- But “never the closed door. Never.”
- EG: church “is not a toll house,”
- But “the house of the father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems”
- Confessional “not a torture chamber”
- Eucharist—not prize for the perfect but medicine for the weak
“a field hospital after a battle”

- Or an emergency room in a hospital
- Richard Gaillardetz: important word is “field”
- Church has referred to itself as a healer, but pope says even more important
- Interested in basics, not burden people with what is not absolutely necessary
- Don’t ask about blood pressure or high cholesterol—you have to heal their wounds!
- “Then we can talk about everything else”
Ministers: men and women who accompany people

We've seen the pope reaching out to those traditionally on the margins—GLBT persons, divorced and remarried Catholics, couples married outside the church—Gospel needs to be “more simple, profound, radiant”

“like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans, and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin.”
A God of Mercy and Tenderness
Francis can be so “redeemed looking”

- Because he is deeply convinced that the heart of the Gospel is the good news of a loving, tender, and merciful God
- Who can transform humankind and all of creation
- Early in EG
- “God never tires of forgiving us...”
- Quotes Thomas Aquinas: “It is proper to God to have mercy, through which his omnipotence is manifested to the greatest degree.”
Further on in EG:

• “the Son of God, becoming incarnate, summoned us to a revolution of tenderness”

• This is the key to evangelization, how the church can make itself attractive

• Rather than rules and strictures, everything should begin with the reality of God’s love and God’s active work of salvation
A Life-Giving Message
Joyful way of being: *sine qua non* of evangelization!

- If the church isn’t attractive, it won’t attract.
- If men and women don’t open up to the gospel, they can’t be the people they have potential to be.
- But this doesn’t mean that Christians have to cave into values of contemporary society.
- Not at all!! Strongly critical throughout of contemporary culture.
- Still, Christians have to demonstrate that the values of the gospel are actually life-giving.
- Although sometimes hard to live by! Countercultural!
Fellow Jesuit Karl Rahner

- Great paradox!
- Ironically, the more one is open to God and the gospel
- The more human and free one becomes
- Francis may be alluding to this:
- “we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others”
So no compromise with contemporary culture!

Rather, a commitment to speak to it honestly and relevantly.

In every culture, even pretty secular ones, there are “positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived”.

“We constantly seek ways of unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness”
Just because an expression is orthodox

- Doesn’t give it evangelizing power
- Such language may have the opposite effect!
- Might give people “a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger.”
- So speaking clearly and honestly—inculturation—at the heart of evangelization
Long section on the homily

- Insists that preachers prepare well
- Do it with “an ear to the people”
- Those who preach need to do it in a way that “sets hearts on fire”
- Who knows who is in the congregation?
- A father mourning a fallen son, a widow seeking meaning in life, a young woman who has fallen in love?
- Christians have a right to a worthy homily!
Poor and for the Poor
A radical side!

• “An authentic faith—which is never comfortable or completely personal—always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.”

• First—Christians have to reach out to the poor

• Strong words about “disposable culture,” “culture of prosperity, and “idolatry of money.”
People are not just oppressed and exploited

- They are simply forgotten, “the leftovers”
- So action on behalf of justice
- In conformity with great Catholic tradition
- Very much at the center of evangelization
No simple socialist!

• Speaks of business as a “noble profession”
• Only concern is that business should be engaged in finding the common good
• But to be a faithful church, must be “poor and for the poor”
• Christians must be evangelized by the poor
• Evangelization: “an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way.”
Care, Protection of Creation!

- Increasingly part of Catholic understanding of evangelization
- Francis spoke of “protecting creation” in his inaugural homily
- EG: “the earth is our common home, and all of us are brothers and sisters”
- Coming encyclical on ecology?
Conclusion

An amazing man!

But a more amazing gospel! Francis has helped us see it afresh, and calls us to spread its amazing, transforming joy!