

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL

A TIME OF TRANSITION (Part 10)

EVANGELISTIC AND MISSIONARY

July 14, 2020

A simple statement of our mission is “evangelization founded on family renewal.” And we are called Missionary Families of Christ. We often describe ourselves as an *evangelistic* and *missionary* community. But are not these two words synonymous? If so, should we just use one word or the other? Actually, these two words, especially for our purposes, are often interchangeable. But there are differences between them. The use of both words enriches the meaning of who we are and what we are called to do.

How would we define these two words? *Evangelization* is the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus. Christian *mission* is doing the work of the Kingdom, which at its core, though somewhat neglected today in our Church, is the proclamation of the gospel.¹ Thus evangelization is the basic mission of the Church.²

What are the differences in meaning?

First, *mission* is the larger word and encompasses *evangelization*. Evangelization is one aspect of mission, albeit the most important and central aspect. But there are other works, which would define mission for particular organizations or people. These can be social justice work, or work with the poor, or education, or health works, or environmental activism, or family renewal, or social media, etc.

If an authentic Christian work, these works should inevitably also proclaim Christ, as he it is on whom such works ought to be rooted.³ But that is not always the case. There are works done by Christians or Christian organizations that function just like an NGO. They do works that are Christian but do not overtly proclaim Christ.⁴ In like manner, we in MFC are also about family renewal. But there are a number of Christian groups working at marriage and family that might not even mention Christ, as when talking about conjugal communication or sex.

So evangelization explicitly proclaims Christ, as salvation in him is the good news. Mission does the work of the Kingdom, furthering it in its varied aspects. It is after all about God’s love, justice and peace. Today however, for some in the Church, these works are being done apart from Christ, or at least, not directly founded on Christ. Thus modernists in our Church can speak about mercy and love but apart from the righteousness of God.⁵ If so, this does not encompass the fullness of authentic Christian mission.

A **second** difference is this: evangelization intends to bring people to conversion to Christ, and this would include conversion into the one true Church established by Jesus.⁶ It is proselytism, without the negative connotations now being applied to the word.⁷ Mission on the other hand, in doing the works of the Kingdom, is concerned about people experiencing the love and care of God. It is proclamation manifested in good works. So in a way, it could be said that evangelization and mission are about faith and good works. Evangelization brings people to faith in Jesus, while mission enables people to experience the works that ought to be a natural product of that faith.

Third, evangelization relates to the evangel (Latin *evangelium*), which means “good news,” while mission (Latin *missio*) relates to being sent off. If we are to describe the difference in secular terms, the evangel is, so to speak, the “product” that is to be “sold” to the whole world. On the other hand, mission is the act or process by which the product is sold to the world.

Jesus’ own mission was to teach, preach and heal (Mt 4:23; 9:35). As part of his public ministry, he gave authority to his disciples to drive out demons and to heal (Mt 10:1), as well as to preach (Mt 10:7). As to teaching, authority to do so was given only before Jesus ascended to heaven (Mt 28:20a). At that time, he commissioned the disciples and sent them off to proclaim the gospel (Mk 16:15) and to make disciples (Mt 28:19)

A **fourth** difference is that, for Christian groups, mission connotes going to a farther-off place, usually but not necessarily to another country,⁸ while evangelization is more of an ongoing lifestyle, which we do in the normal day-to-day circumstances of our lives. In these senses, all members of MFC are to be evangelizers, while not all will be missionaries.⁹

The very mission of Jesus himself was threefold: teach, proclaim and heal (Mt 4:23). Technically, only the second is evangelization. But necessarily, teaching is about God and healing is by the power of God. As such, these are still about the good news of salvation in Jesus. Authentic Christian mission *is* evangelization, in words and deeds. So people might ask us, what is your mission? What is it that you do for God or for the Church? For us the answer is evangelization (and family renewal).¹⁰ For this, we are sent out on mission. Mission is what we do, and what we do is to proclaim Christ.

¹ In many parts of the world, our Catholic Church has lost her apostolic zeal for mission (proclamation of the gospel leading to conversion), often preferring to just engage in social justice work.

² Jesus intended the Church he established to be a missionary Church.

³ And the intent of Christian works should be to promote and build the Kingdom of God, and that necessarily includes proclaiming Christ.

⁴ Except by the silent witness of their works.

⁵ Such is political correctness, which encourages Christians to accept, welcome, accompany and embrace sinners (which is good), without speaking to them of their sin (which is not good). This is false mercy, as sinners become complacent in their sin, and ultimately suffer the loss of their souls. Another example is the social justice warrior who works for the poor but is not as concerned about issues of spirituality or righteousness. Such a one will be passionate about immigration and climate change but will not oppose or speak against aspects of the culture of death, such as contraception or abortion or LGBT.

⁶ Jesus commissioned (gave the mission to) his disciples, saying, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). To be a disciple is to be a follower of Jesus. To be baptized is to enter into the Church Jesus established.

⁷ Proselytism simply means trying to convert someone to one's faith. A "proselyte" was a Gentile considering conversion to Judaism. Conversion to faith in Christ (which means conversion to Christianity) is indeed the intent of Jesus, for his followers to proclaim the good news and make disciples of the nations (Mt 28:19). But there are those who give proselytism a bad name, when conversion is sought by means of financial incentives or coercion or force or deception. This cannot be authentically Christian. On the other hand, there are those who do not want to proselytize but just to respect the faith of non-Catholic Christians and even those of other religions. Thus what is promoted is ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. But this falls short of the full intent of God.

⁸ Mission can be short-term or longer-term, the latter to the extent of already transferring residence to another place or country.

⁹ But in the comprehensive sense, all MFC members ought to be both evangelistic and missionary.

¹⁰ We also do works with the poor.