

## Lesson 8

### Characteristics of an Authentic Evangelist Part 1

With the massive influence of the digital world of today, each Christian has to face a great challenge of propagating if not living our faith. With this, the question at hand is how can we become effective evangelizers to others?

It is said that “the painter paints, the writer writes, the dancer dances.” Following this logic, we could say that the evangelist evangelizes. But, is this true? Is it really true that the person who evangelizes is an evangelist? In order to take Christ to others, it is necessary to experience Him first, since no one can give what he/she doesn’t have, nor love what he/she doesn’t know. Being an authentic evangelist doesn’t come out of the blue; it is the result of a gradual process that takes some time. It is a constant learning from the teacher on the part of the disciple. It’s the fruit of a close relationship, of a friendship.

That relationship according to Henriquez, (Seven characteristics of an authentic evangelist must possess) reflects on the deeds of the evangelist. How can I be an authentic evangelist? How can I give testimony to the world of what I believe and who I am? First and foremost, strengthen your own relationship with the Master; second, make a personal examination, and see if these characteristics reflect your life. If that is the case, you’re on the right track.

He enumerated seven characteristics to make us an authentic evangelist:

#### 1. A Solid Faith

This is essential, without faith, we cannot evangelize. We are not talking only of having faith in Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, but also having faith in the Church and her Teachings. He claims that he heard some people say: “I evangelize, I take Christ to others... but I don’t really agree with the pope...” How come you don’t agree with the pope? Are you Catholic or not? We must not only believe what benefits us or what we like; we must believe what God has revealed and disposes for our salvation. Our faith is complete, it cannot be a “cafeteria” faith, where we take only what we like, and leave the rest. This is why the authentic evangelist must say to the Lord: “I do believe, help my unbelief!” (Mk. 9:24), and renew daily his or her commitment to Christ, to knowing and loving Him more.

*“Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. By faith we must understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible...while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God” (Heb. 11:1-3, 12, 2).*

Kreeft has beautifully and theologically describe faith in relation to other theological virtues; hope and love with these words

“Faith first, because it is the first. It is the root, hope is the stem, and love (charity) is the flower. The flower is the fairest, the stem does the growing, but the root must come first.”

Focusing on faith, he said, “we can speak of faith (1) in a very wide, general sense, as the world speaks of it; or (2) in a biblical sense, as saving faith, or the condition for salvation; or, finally, (3) in its most technical theological sense as one of the three theological virtues.

- a. Faith in the most general sense is simply a feeling of trust in or reliance on someone (or even sometimes on no one, as in the poster where a tiny knight with a tiny sword tremblingly confronts an enormous dragon, and the caption says, in Gothic letters, “Have faith”). This is indeed naivete. “Have faith in me,” says the used-car salesman or the presidential candidate or the incompetent doctor with the divinity complex.
- b. Faith in the biblical sense of saving faith is the act by which we receive God’s own eternal life (or “sanctifying grace,” in technical theological terms). It is our fundamental option of saying Yes instead of No to God with our heart, our will, our personal center. To believe in this sense is to receive (Jn. 1:12 parallels the two terms) to receive God Himself.

St Paul argues in Romans that faith (in this sense) was even in Old Testament times the condition for salvation, for our justification of God. Abraham was justified by his faith. Go back even farther: the fall was first of all a fall of faith. Only because Eve first believe the serpent when he told her she would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit, rather than believing God when he told her that she would – only because of Eve’s faithfulness within – did she practice the faithfulness without that was the actual act of disobedience; the lack of faith is the root of disobedience. If we totally believed that obedience always worked to our blessedness, we would not disobey. Only because we must pray “Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief” do we sin.

St. Paul contrasts faith with sin when he says, “Whatever is not of faith is sin.” We usually think of sin as the opposite of virtue, and faith is the opposite of doubt. But virtue is a moral term, and doubt is an intellectual term. The opposite of moral virtue is moral vice, and the opposite of intellectual doubt is intellectual belief. Faith is deeper than either moral virtue or intellectual belief. Sin is deeper than either moral vice or intellectual doubt. faith is a fundamental Yes to God with the center of our being, and sin – the state of sin as distinct from particular acts of sin – is the fundamental No to God with the center of our being. Faith is the opposite of sin. Faith is to sin what light is to darkness.

Belief is an intellectual matter. I believe the sun will shine tomorrow: I believe I am in good health, I believe my textbooks. This is mere opinion. Faith is not a mere opinion. Opinions do not save us. Trust is an emotional matter. I trust my surgeon or my

- psychiatrist or my children. This is a precious feeling, but it is a feeling. Faith is not feeling. Feelings do not save us. Faith, however, results in or expresses itself in both belief and trust, for the prefunctional root that is the very essence of the self expresses itself in the two branches or functions of the intellectual (belief) and the emotional (trust). But faith is deeper. That is why even some people who seem on an intellectual level to be unbelievers may on this deeper level be believers, and we may be surprised to see some famous so-called atheists in heaven. And it is why some people who seem to have very little emotional faith – little trust, serenity, consolation – may nevertheless be people of great, even heroic, faith. Only God sees hearts.
- c. The third and most specific, most technical sense of faith is the sense we learned from the Baltimore Catechism. Faith is the act of the intellect, prompted by the will, by which we believe the truth of all that God has revealed on the basis of the authority of the one who has revealed it. This is essentially the definition used by St. Thomas Aquinas and medieval scholastic theology.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, each side used a different language system, and the most important and tragic split in the Church's history resulted. Protestant reformers, using faith in the biblical sense, as saving faith, insisted that the Bible clearly taught that faith alone was sufficient for salvation. They formulated their slogan *sola fides* (faith alone), on the basis of Romans and Galatians. They thought that the Catholic Church's insistence that good works were also necessary for salvation was a pagan doctrine, a compromise of the very essence of the gospel. Most evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants to this day justify their disagreement with the Catholic Church more fundamentally on this basis than on any other. They sincerely believe that Catholicism is another gospel, as Paul called Galatian legalism, and many wonder whether Catholics are even Christians.

But James clearly says in his epistle that faith without works is dead and that we are justified by works (good works, the works of love) as well as faith, working together with faith. James and the Catholic scholastic theologians were using faith in its third, narrowest sense: as just one of the three theological virtues. In this sense, hope and charity must be added to faith for salvation. Paul and the Protestants were using faith in its second, broader sense: as the root or center of all three theological virtues, not as an act of the intellect (as in Baltimore Catechism definition) but as an act of the heart (in the biblical sense) or spirit or personal center. Both sides were (and are) right, as Pope John Paul II made quite clear to the Lutheran bishops of Germany on his visit there in 1983.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Coherence of Life

St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina used to say: "Do good everywhere, so that everyone can say: 'this is a son of Christ.' Ask yourself: do my deeds reflect Jesus? Can those who see

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<sup>1</sup> Kreeft, Peter. *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, U.S.A 1988. pp. 170-172.

me say that I am an authentic Christian? (Think about it..) Do not think that coherence of life is a heavy burden, something unbearable. On the contrary, it's what gives us happiness and encourages us to continue walking on the right path. Humility is the key. By recognizing that we are in constant need of God, and that He wants to need us. We cannot evangelize, we are not the true light; but let our mission be the reflection of the Light of God. It is Christ who lives and evangelizes in us. We must ask God for humility, this is the only way we will be a living testimony of Jesus.

*"A man named John was sent from God. He came for a testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light" (Jn. 1:6-8).*

### **3. Much Humility**

What does it mean to be humble? "Humility is truth," said St. Teresa of Avila. And this is very true. We cannot be what we are not. Humility means to be a true child of God. Humility means to recognize that we are sinners. Humility means to know that without God there is nothing we can do! Humility means not to believe that we are superior than others, believing that we are better. Humility has a practical effect in every Christian's life. One is humble by being humble, and this takes some effort, too. In order to be always humble, it's necessary to practice humility. This is a very important element of evangelization. I am humble when we know that the work is not mine, but God's. When we don't take credit for something we haven't done. Whose is the Kingdom of God? Whose is the Church? Everything belongs to God, we merely collaborate, and we only contribute. Humility always, that's the Christian attitude.

*"Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but (also) everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:3-5).*