

Evangelii Gaudium

Chapter Two

Amid the crisis of communal commitment

Notes:

Para:

50: The Pope wants to put the exhortation in the context in which we all live and work. Not a sociological analysis but one which is in the line of an “evangelical discernment” nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit”.

51: We need to distinguish in current developments in society what might be a fruit of the Kingdom from what runs counter to God’s plan. We must choose movements of the spirit of good and reject those of the spirit of evil. Francis will consider briefly, from a pastoral perspective, factors which can weaken or restrain the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church.

52: We can only praise the progress made, in some parts of the world, in human welfare such as health, education and communications. But in much of the world, even in rich countries, life is a struggle for survival for many people. There are increases in violence, lack of respect for others and inequality. Changes in technology have led, in this age of knowledge and information, to new and often anonymous kinds of power.

53: Economies have come about that are marked by exclusion and inequality, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. The excluded are no longer society’s fringes-they are no longer even a part of it, they are the outcast.

54: The Pope is of the view that economic growth will not, of itself, bring about greater justice and inclusiveness. The culture of prosperity has deafened us to the outcry of the poor and we fail to be moved.

55: The worship of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy, and the current financial crisis are, at root, related to the denial of the primacy of the human person. The crisis lays bare the lack of real concern for human beings- man is reduced to an engine of consumption.

56: Francis points out the growth and widening of inequality. This imbalance arises from the absolute autonomy of the market place and financial speculation. The nation state fails to exercise control. This creates a new tyranny imposing its own laws and rules. There is also corruption and self-serving tax evasion. The interests of the

environment are ignored because of the thirst for power and possessions.

57: There is a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God because ethics condemn the manipulation and debasement of the person. God calls human beings to their full realization and to freedom from enslavement. "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them".

58: Economics and Finance must return to an ethical approach which favours human beings. The rich must help, respect and promote the poor.

59: Inequality leads to violence and social disorder. Greater security will not solve the problem, only the elimination of unjust social structures. It is not the "end of history" without the establishment of conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development.

60: Economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, and unbridled consumerism and inequality damage the social fabric. Weapons and violence don't resolve the violence that arises from inequality, nor does an education designed to tranquilize the poor. The poor are also exasperated by the widespread and deeply rooted corruption found in many countries-in government, businesses and institutions.

61: The Church faces various challenges to which evangelization is an antidote. These include the violent persecution of Christians and, in some societies, widespread indifference and relativism. In a philosophy where each person is guided by subjective truth, it is difficult for citizens to transcend the demands of individual gain and personal ambition.

62: Modern culture can be superficial and transient. Globalization and the revolution in communications have led to a kind of cultural imperialism which imposes on less advanced countries ethically inadequate norms. The Bishops of Africa and Asia have made clear their concerns with this process.

63: The Faith of Catholics is challenged by new religious movements, which are fundamentalist or offer spirituality without God. Secularist rationalism has left a vacuum. (When people cease to believe in Orthodoxy, they don't believe in nothing, they will believe anything!). These movements very often exploit the weaknesses of the poor (the so-called theology of prosperity). We should recognize that if the baptized fall away it is sometimes because of an unwelcoming atmosphere in our communities, a bureaucratic approach to dealing with problems or a wrong emphasis in our pastoral approach.

64: Secularization has tended to reduce the faith to the sphere of the private and personal, as well as eroding ethics, weakening the sense of personal and collective sin and increasing relativism. This has led to disorientation particularly among the young. The Church has always insisted on absolute moral norms which are valid for anyone. The moral relativism of society and the belief in the absolute rights of individuals, which are intertwined, can claim this teaching is unjust; for being prejudiced and interfering with personal freedom. This stems from the superficiality of moral discernment prevalent in secular societies. The answer is an effective critical and moral education.

65: The Church has done much good in the world and that is recognized by some in society. However, the Church finds it difficult to persuade people that when we raise matters that upset public opinion, we are doing so from the first principles from which flow the Church's good works.

66: The Pope notes the crisis with the family. Marriage is seen as a form of emotional satisfaction that can be constructed or modified as people see fit. In fact, it is not borne of ephemeral feelings "but from the depth of the obligation assumed by spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life".

67: The deleterious effects of individualism on personal relationships and family bonds needs to be countered by the Church by the teaching that our relationship with the Father demands a communion that heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds. In the face of conflict, Christians must be an example of healing, respect for others and bridge building across social divides, which contributes to social and cultural progress.

68: The value of an evangelizing culture that preserves the values of an authentic Christian humanism is a sign of the Holy Spirit. Such a culture still exists among a sub stratum of certain peoples in the West and can resist the onslaught of contemporary secularism. It has many more resources than the mere sum total of believers. It contains values of faith and solidarity capable of encouraging the development of a more just and believing society.

69: Cultures need to be evangelized in order to embed the Gospel. In Catholic countries, encouragement is needed. In others, religious or secular, new processes for evangelization are needed. Catholic cultures need to purge their deficiencies starting with the growth of popular piety.

70: Popular piety needs to avoid an individual and sentimental faith that is not authentically Catholic. We must also face up to a falling away from the faith because of failure to engage the young, failure

to bring children up in the faith and an exodus to other faith communities.

71: In the “New Jerusalem” we find the goal towards which humanity should be moving. We need to discover God in our cities. God dwells among all those who seek goodness, truth and justice.

72: The daily lives of people in the city often involve a struggle for survival. This struggle often contains an understanding which often includes a deep religious sense. We must understand this more closely so that it can form the basis for a dialogue.

73: New cultures develop in cities that offer new approaches to life that are often in contrast to the Gospel. We have to find possibilities that are more attractive and meaningful to city dwellers.

74: Evangelization must find new ways to bring the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our multicultural cities. The Church must reach those for whom cities are a place of opportunity and those for whom cities are a place of suffering.

75: Cities can be places of sin and the abuse of the weak and can be places of isolation and distrust. The Gospel is a firm basis for restoring the dignity of human life in these contexts. The process of evangelization, however, cannot be uniform and rigid but consistent with the complexity of modern cities.

76: Pastoral workers face challenges in the context of our current globalized culture. Everywhere, Christians are giving their lives in love to tend to the poor and suffering. Whatever pain and shame we feel for the sins of some members of the Church we must not forget this.

77: Where pastoral workers are adversely affected by the present globalized culture they need places where their faith is renewed and problems are shared. The Pope then proceeds to call attention to some of the temptations facing pastoral workers.

78: Pastoral workers may develop an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, as though their work was a mere appendage to their life, rather than its essence. Their spiritual and prayer life becomes nugatory and does not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. The result is an enhanced individualism, an identity crisis and a lack of fervour.

79: Media and some intellectuals show a marked scepticism and cynicism about the Church’s message (if not downright hostility). In the face of this pastoral workers can develop an inferiority complex. As a result, they want to be like everyone else and water down their Christian identity. They are unhappy with whom they are and their mission is rendered ineffective.

80: If pastoral workers fall into the error of relativism, there is the danger that they will act as if God, the poor or people who need the Gospel did not exist. They can also become obsessed with financial security, power or glory, rather than giving themselves to others in mission.

81: Lay people may feel that apostolic work may take away their free time. Some priests are obsessed with protecting their free time. An overbearing need to guard their personal freedom leads to resistance to self surrender to mission and a state of paralysis and acedia (torpor or the most extreme boredom).

82: The problem is not always an excess of activity but activity undertaken badly. Without adequate motivation and spirituality, the work is burdensome and tiring. This can result from unrealistic projects, a lack of patience, attachment to vain dreams of success, a lack of contact with real people or an obsession with immediate results.

83: This can lead to “the grey pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down into small-mindedness”. “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization.”

84: The Pope says no to pessimism. He quotes John xxiii;” we must disagree with those prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster as though the end of the world is at hand.”

85: Don't be sourpusses-say no to defeatism. We must be fully convinced of victory beforehand. As the Lord said to St Paul”My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”.

86: Some places have become spiritual deserts because of attempts to build without God, to eliminate their Christian roots, and violent opposition. Wherever the desert, from it we can discover the joy of believing, the value for what is essential for living and the need for people of faith who can become living sources of water from which others can drink.

87: Greater possibilities for communication resulting from new technology can turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone. We need to go out of ourselves and join others and avoid the bitter poison of immanence. (Indwelling: Self-enclosed, religion in one's head not shared with others).

88: “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.”

89: “The challenge is not so much atheism as the need to respond adequately to many people's thirst for God, lest they try to satisfy it

with alienating solutions or with a disembodied Jesus who demands nothing of us with regard to others. Unless these people find in the Church spirituality which can offer healing and liberation.....they will end up by being taken in by solutions which neither make life truly human nor give glory to God.”

90: Popular religiosity can foster relationships with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the Saints, by giving these devotions a face. Other movements, such as “a spirituality of well being, or a “theology of prosperity” are nothing more than a form of self-centredness.

91: “We need to help others to realize that the only way is how to encounter others with the right attitude which is to accept and esteem them along the way, without interior resistance.” We must never tire of our decision to live in fraternity-even if we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude.

92:”Here and now, especially where we are a “little flock” Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world”.” Let us not be robbed of community!”

93: We should beware of spiritual worldliness. This seeks not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being under the cloak of piety and even love for the Church. It is the charge Jesus made against the Pharisees.

94: This worldliness is fuelled in two different ways. Gnosticism (a religion based on alleged secret knowledge known only to an elite, denied to the general run of humanity) which leads to isolation and spiritual pride.”Promethean (defying traditional moral categories) neo-Pelagianism (Pelagianism was the heresy of a British monk who denied the doctrine of original sin, and thought man was perfectible without grace).In this case I think the Pope is talking about the desire of some to see themselves as a small elite who are so clever and so much more correct than the rabble that they think they are perfectible (or already perfect) they don’t need the rest of the Church. At least I think so!

95: The Pope does not like elites! He doesn’t like those whose obsession with liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige precludes any concern for the impact of the Gospel on the faithful or the needs of the present day. He abhors those who emphasise their practical skills or obsess about programmes of self –help and self-realisation, who are often seen at dinners and parties or think the Church is a business and are beneficial merely to the institution. Evangelical fervour is replaced by the empty pleasure of complacency and self-indulgence.

96: The Pope then criticizes those he says would rather be the general of a defeated army than a mere private of a unit that continues to fight. We need to work not pontificate about what needs to be done.

97. He excoriates this worldliness further and describes it as a tremendous corruption described as a good. It is avoided by making the Church go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings.

98: The Pope doesn't want discord in the Church. It seems that is the fault of the spiritually worldly, their dislike of people getting in the way of their ambitions and their desire for a spirit of exclusivity.

99: The Pope refers to discord in the world, wars and violence and by extreme individualism. He asks Christian communities to give an example of radiant and attractive witness to fraternal communion. (I think by jealousy the translator means envy.)

100: Catholics should set an example in their communities by not tolerating enmity, division and by imposing certain ideas at all costs, even to persecution. Evangelization requires you to practice what you preach.

101: We must ask the Lord to help us understand the law of love. We must put it into practice by for example, praying for those who get on our nerves.

102: The Pope wants the laity to be properly involved in the life of the Church everywhere. They need the formation to take on important responsibilities. One of the obstacles is excessive clericalism. The laity must be organised so that they can evangelise professional and intellectual life.

103: We need to create broader opportunities for a more significant female presence in the Church.

104: He rules out the ordination of women. But he instructs pastors and theologians to think seriously about the role of women in decision making in different areas of the Church's life.

105: The Pope acknowledges the failure in the past of youth ministry in not providing responses to their concerns and speaking to them in a language they cannot understand. He sees the growth of associations and movements mostly made up of young people as the work of the Holy Spirit. These must actively participate in the Church's overall pastoral efforts.

106: The Pope celebrates the work of young people in activism and volunteer work particularly in missionary initiatives.

107: The Pope notes the dearth of vocations which he puts down to a lack of contagious apostolic fervour in some communities. Where there is life and fervour vocations will arise. He calls upon Catholic communities to pray for vocations. He also says we must rethink the process of selecting candidates for the priesthood with particular regard to motivation.

108: We should listen to the young and the elderly. The young because they have new thoughts and directions and the elderly, experience to assist in avoiding past mistakes.

109: The Pope concludes this survey of the Church and Society with a message of hope-“Challenges exist to be overcome”. “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour”.

Questions for the Break out Groups:

1. How do we mitigate the divisions in society from inequality?
2. What can we do to enhance the family in our society, improving stability and repairing marriage?
3. How can we reverse the falling away from the faith?
4. How can we improve the religious formation of the young and their commitment to the Church?
5. How can we build community-
 - Among families
 - In the parish and the diocese
 - In wider society?