

Role of the Women Religious in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church

Sr Siji Lonan, FDCC

Introduction

In the third millennium, all the people experience the challenges of modernity and post modernity. The moral, ethical and spiritual values in the world are changing from bad to worst. The economic mechanisms of today's world promote inordinate consumption and inequality, which damages the social fabric. So also, globalization has resulted in growing the individual wealth, the deterioration of one's own cultural roots and the exploitation of the poor. The increasing technological sophistication is changing the world and there are many who suffer because of incurable diseases, fear and desperation, war and violence. Many are marginalized without work, without food, without place to live in. The humanity's cry for survival and search for real joy and meaning in life compel the Church to respond like the God of Israel who heard their cry and liberated them from the cruel slavery of the Egyptians.

The Church can offer humanity the life and freedom that God gave His children through Jesus Christ. "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (Jn 4:12). A world devoid of God is a world devoid of life, love and happiness. Making God present in this world is what evangelization means. It has the aim of bringing the Good News to the whole humanity.¹ It is the joyful proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. New evangelization is the first priority for the Church today. If the Gospel is not proclaimed, heard and accepted then every other ministry is futile. The other ministries are the extension of evangelization. It is because of this that the Church leaders especially St John Paul II time and again alerted the people of God about the need of new evangelization. Through new evangelization today, Jesus is again turning His loving attention to His people, calling them to a still deeper faith and a still richer life in Him. "The New Evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized."² They are called to be God's priestly people who are commissioned to reach out in mercy to all particularly the most deprived, the most distant and the lost. Countless men and women religious have proclaimed the Gospel with selfless dedication in a wide range of situations and cultures. Their enduring commitment to the work of evangelization remains vitally important and continues to enrich the life of the Church in unique ways. But today the zeal for the kingdom is

reducing in the lives of priests and religious. As the year of consecrated life is coming to an end and having realized the importance of evangelization in the life of the church, I deem it pertinent and essential to explore the role of women religious in the evangelizing mission of the Church. In this paper, I would like to start with the explanation of the concept of evangelization by referring to the teachings of the Church and books of different authors relating to evangelization and new evangelization. After presenting the theoretical principles I apply these principles to the present way of ministering of the religious sisters in order to cull out the role of women religious in the mission of evangelization and in turn propose certain ways of being active, creative and effective in the ministries by keeping in mind their specific charism and mission. Thus, this humble effort may serve as an inspiration for all the religious who finger these pages to play their role as evangelizers in an effective and active manner wherever they are.

Understanding the Term Evangelization and New Evangelization

What is Evangelization?

Evangelization is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity (*EN*, 14). It is the proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. The word that was commonly used during the first four centuries of early Christianity was *witness*. The word

conversion was common from the fifth to tenth centuries. *Crusades* became prominent till the sixteenth century.³ The terminology *evangelization* entered the Catholic literature toward the middle of the 20th century, with the influence of protestant thinkers such as Karl Barth and others.⁴ Evangelization is a rich, complex, and dynamic reality. It is used in two senses. In the narrow sense, it means the announcement of the global Christian message to those who do not believe, that is called primary evangelization. But in a broad sense it means everything that brings human life and the world under the sway of God's word. In this second sense, evangelization practically coincides with the total mission of the Church.⁵ Evangelization is founded upon a transforming encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ. It is not just one aspect of the Church's work. The mission and evangelization form her essential identity and comprises her most innate being.⁶ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which is a true treatise on evangelization, explains the meaning of evangelization as "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EN, 18).

What is New Evangelization?

New evangelization is about bringing Christ back into the personal lives of the Christians and allowing Him to transform the world around us through His work in us. It is both about transforming the world and drawing more people through Church doors. It is a new way of responding

to the needs of the people. New evangelization helps us to recapture the first Christian community experience and invites modern generation and culture into a relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. It finds new frontiers of proclamation and provides avenues for dialogue.⁷ The very idea of new evangelization makes it clear that while being a Christian we need to renew our lives, our approach to evangelization, our methods, and our whole journey of faith. It calls for creative methods to invite and welcome members to return to the faith.⁸ The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod of Bishops (2012) reminds us that “The new evangelization does not mean a new Gospel, because ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.’⁹ The new evangelization means an adequate response to the signs of the times, to the needs of individuals and people of today, and to the new sectors with our cultures, through which we express our identity and the meaning of our lives.”¹⁰ Through new evangelization every baptised Christian renews his/her faith and deepens his/her sacramental worship so that he/she could share the Good News with family, friends and neighbours in an effective manner.¹¹

Need for New Evangelization Today

One of the reasons which the *General Catechetical Directory* states is that “in our times, however, the cultural tradition has undergone considerable change, with the result that less and less can one depend on continued transmission by means of it. Because of this, some renewal

in evangelization is needed for transmitting the same faith to new generations.”¹² In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI states that the vast and profound changes in present day society make the task of evangelization all the more urgent (*EN*, 15). The building up of human society, human progress, and the ongoing execution of human plans stimulate the concern of the people of the present age.¹³ Today many baptized have lost their interest in living the Christian life and have simply drifted away from the Church. Among those who seem to be practicing Christians, many have little or a poor knowledge of Christ. Still there are many who have not known Christ. There are also Catholics who attend Mass on a regular basis but who feel unconnected to the parish community.¹⁴ Hence, it is only through new evangelization that the Church can be helped to continue to animate the lives of the people. But the zeal for the kingdom is getting reduced in the lives of priests, and religious; the laity are moving more for secular values than religious values. Thus, there is a greater need for evangelization in our modern, fast changing and growing world.¹⁵

Teachings on New Evangelization

St John Paul II introduced the term *New Evangelization* for the first time in his homily at the shrine of the Holy Cross in Mogila, Poland on 9th June 1979 in order to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world.¹⁶ He also mentioned this concept in his address to the people of Latin

America gathered at Haiti, in 1983. Later he used this term officially in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990).¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI also uses the term *New Evangelization* and calls for the re-proposing of the Gospel to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization.¹⁸ Pope Paul VI reawakened the Church's evangelizing mission, Pope John Paul II championed the call for the new evangelization, Pope Benedict XVI has reaffirmed the need for it and Pope Francis has redoubled the efforts for the new evangelization. We shall see in a detailed way the teachings on new evangelization.

St John Paul II and the New Evangelization

New evangelization was the major theme of John Paul II's pontificate. From the very inauguration of his Petrine office he challenged the world to open wide the doors for Christ.¹⁹ The main orientation of his pontificate is summarized as "the Lord and master of history and of our destinies has wished my pontificate to be that of a pilgrim pope of evangelization, walking down the roads of the world, bringing to all people the message of salvation."²⁰ He was concerned about the reconciliation among Christians and through new evangelization he wanted to draw Christians together as one family.²¹ According to him authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization.²² He saw his programme for asserting

human rights as a vital component of the new evangelization. He insisted on the use of the new instruments of social communication in preaching the Good News of redemption. In his Apostolic Letter *The Rapid Development* he writes:

Communication permeates the essential dimensions of the Church, which is called to announce to all, the joyful message of salvation. For this reason, the Church takes advantage of the opportunities offered by the communications media as pathways providentially given by God to intensify communion and to render more penetrating the proclamation of His word.²³

In discerning the signs of the times, John Paul II expressed his conviction that evangelization is more urgent than ever, and urges the Church to commit all its energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*.²⁴ In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*²⁵ John Paul II indicates several priorities such as the universal call to holiness, the need for prayer, participation in the Sunday Eucharist, the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, a honest dependence on God's help and grace and listening to the Word and proclaiming the Word as an help for Catholic evangelization"²⁶

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and the New Evangelization

Pope Benedict XVI has made the new evangelization a central pillar and a mobilizing mission of his pontificate. He speaks of evangelization as the first and foremost task of the Church. He tells us, "There is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to

discover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”²⁷ He shares similar hopes and objectives of John Paul II regarding new evangelization.²⁸ During his homily on the Solemnity of SS Peter and Paul at the Basilica of St Paul on June 28, 2010, Benedict XVI renewed the Church’s call to the new evangelization. He clarified that the new evangelization is new, not in its content but rather in its inner thrust; new in its methods that must correspond to the times; and new because it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel to those who have already heard it.²⁹ To aid the Church in re-proposing the faith to modern society, Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization in the Vatican Curia on 28th June 2010. He proclaimed the Year of Faith and convoked a world Synod of Bishops on the theme: “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”³⁰ In *Verbum Domini* Benedict XVI points out the need for a new evangelization saying:

There are still many peoples who have not come to know the Good News, and also a great many Christians who need to have the Word of God once more persuasively proclaimed to them, so that they can concretely experience the power of the Gospel. Many of our brothers and sisters are ‘baptized, but insufficiently evangelised.’ In a number of cases, the nations once rich in faith and in vocation are losing their identity under the influence of a secularized culture (No. 96).

Pope Francis and New Evangelization

Pope Francis is a pope who captured the hearts of millions all around the world within a short period of his pontificate through his authentic and genuine witnessing life. He clearly tries to lead by example and his very life is a powerful medium of evangelization. Thus, whatever he says or does focus on evangelization. He puts the New Evangelization at the very centre of the Church and orients everything else around it. He is a model of evangelization that we can all learn a lot from him. His apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), which was released on Nov. 26, 2013, was welcomed by Catholic leaders and thinkers as a blueprint for evangelization in the 21st century.³¹ It highlights the importance of evangelization, the challenges that hinder its progress, its social dimension, pastoral value of the proclamation of the word, the evangelical value of good homilies and the need of the spirit-filled evangelizers. He challenges every Christian to actively get engaged in evangelization. He convincingly teaches that evangelization starts with our own relationship with Jesus. He exhorts the evangelizers to be joyful and be lovers of the people.

Ways of Evangelization

The evangelizing mission of the Church is a complex reality and involves different approaches and activities (*RM*, 31). To establish God's Kingdom on earth, the voice of the Lord is to be heard and made accessible and

comprehensible. The methods Jesus used to make the voice of His Father heard are the power of prayer, witnessing life, preaching and good works. There are different means that the Church uses to fulfil the evangelizing mission. Here we shall deal with some of them:

Personal Witness

The first means of evangelization for the Church is the witness of an authentic Christian life... It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity (*EN*, 41).

People today look for authenticity. Therefore, the evangelizing zeal must spring from true holiness of life. Without this mark of holiness, the Word will have difficulty in touching the heart of people.³² Christian witness is a means of proclaiming the faith and inviting others to share it. Vatican II called upon every Christian, whether bishop, priest, religious, or lay, to evangelize by word, by personal example, and by helping to transform society according to the mind of Christ.³³

According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Christian presence through witness of life, form an "initial act of evangelization" (*EN*, 21). Daily activities, living together in harmony, living as individuals of integrity, duties in the community - all these are basic *faith-witness* that demonstrate how Christian living is shaped by Christian faith and values.

Through this wordless witness, "Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live" (*EN*, 21). The message proclaimed will have an impact on our world only through the witness of believers who live the Gospel in a radical way.³⁴ The everyday moments of one's life lived with Christian charity, faith, and hope provide witness to family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and others who have stopped actively participating in the life of the Church. This witness is essential for reaching out to others in today's modern world.

Proclamation of the Word

Among the many ways of evangelization, the most obvious is the preaching of the Gospel, which the decree on the missionary activity of the Church describes as the 'chief means' (*AG*, 6) of implanting the Church. It is the word that is heard which leads to belief. "Faith is born of preaching and every ecclesial community draws its origin and life from the personal response of each believer to that preaching" (*RM*, 44; *AG*, 13). Being a follower of Christ and baptised in the name of the Triune God, every member of the Church is entrusted with this task of proclamation. This is the process through which the Christian faith is communicated to the next generation of believers. *Ecclesia in Asia* stresses the primacy of proclamation in all evangelization work,³⁵ for proclamation is considered to be the central element of evangelization. Without it,

evangelization would be incomplete and the mission of the Church would lose its cohesion and vitality (*EN*, 22).

Catechesis

Catechesis is an instruction given to the baptized, in the teaching of Christ, in order to lead them to the fullness of Christian life.³⁶ It is not wholly distinct from evangelization; indeed, it is the second stage, following upon primary evangelization, in which the basic elements of faith are proclaimed.³⁷ Evangelization and catechesis are so interconnected that it would be impossible to speak of the latter without making reference to the former. It is impossible to do catechesis outside evangelization because, as Pope Paul VI puts it, "Catechesis is a moment within evangelization" (*CT*, 18). Evangelization widens the Church, catechesis deepens her root. The evangelist may sow the seed; the catechist may water the growing plant, but only God can give the increase.³⁸ Catechesis is an action of the ecclesial community which accompanies it all her life, and is in rapport with the concrete situation of people. It gives them a mission oriented formation, in order to help them to become real evangelizers of Christ. Catechesis in the process of evangelization enlightens faith, deepens the experience of Christ in the sacraments and equips people with strength through a life of prayer.³⁹

Dialogue

The dialogue for evangelization is a call to change and transform the present worldview of the modern world

towards true wisdom and fullness of life for the whole humankind. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* speaks of dialogue as “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”⁴⁰ For the sake of interreligious harmony, mutual understanding, social transformation and effective witness for Christ, we need to engage in genuine dialogue.⁴¹ Dialogue is a nonintrusive effort to achieve reconciliation without putting any pressure on either party to change its position. It presupposes that each party wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other.⁴² Some of the parameters of an evangelical approach to dialogue include a clear affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ in Christian revelation, the need to distinguish between Christ’s own exclusive claims from those made by the institutional Church, and the willingness to discern the presence of God in others’ religious experiences.⁴³ Ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue are the two levels of dialogue. Ecumenical dialogue is not aimed to convert the participants to a new ecclesial allegiance but they are expected to challenge one another by giving grounds for their own distinctive doctrines. John Paul II asserts that Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission and it emerges from one’s faith convictions.

Liturgy

According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* the sacred liturgy is “the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.”⁴⁴ An outsider learns about the Church not so much from the social actions or the public preaching of the Church, but from the liturgy of the Church.⁴⁵ Liturgy provides context from which the Church proclaims the Gospel. In liturgy, there is the teaching element as well as the praying element. Thus, the liturgy is a true vehicle for evangelization of the people outside, both the non Catholics and non Christians and those who are already members of the Church.⁴⁶ Through the liturgy the faithful are always kept in touch with the divine realities and are made always update in their knowledge of divine things and are always challenged by things divine, giving them the conviction that they are not meant to live the way they live but to ascend continuously to the spiritual perfection.⁴⁷ The God-experience achieved in prayer and contemplation, in sacramental and liturgical life, will illumine and transform all other dimensions of evangelization. Thus liturgy is a powerful instrument for evangelization.⁴⁸

Preparation for the Reception of Sacraments

The adult model of Christian initiation is one of the great platforms of new evangelization. The preparation as well as the administration of sacraments of initiation for children involves adults, so they serve as opportunities to

catechize and deepen the faith of the community and especially the parents. It is a moment for the adult to understand the significance of sacraments and reapply them to their life. It also enkindles in them the desire to enter into fellowship with every person irrespective of religion, caste, creed and culture.⁴⁹ The liturgy of the sacraments of Christian initiation immerses the participants in the mystery of Christ and thereby helps them to centre their lives on Christ and to become heralds of Gospel message when they return to their ordinary occupations.⁵⁰ Therefore, the sacrament of initiation causes new evangelization in the adults of the Christian community.

Popular Piety

Popular piety is one of the time-tested methods of evangelization and is rich in value when it is well directed by evangelization. It can lead the multitude of people to a true encounter with God because it shows a thirst for God, which only the simple and poor can know.⁵¹ Pope Paul VI affirms it in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as he writes, "When it is well oriented, this popular religiosity can be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ" (*EN*, 48). The utilization of the catechetical instruction of valid elements in popular piety serves well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and His message (*CT*, 54). Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* brings out the importance of it by saying

“Expressions of popular piety have much to teach us... especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelization” (EG, 101).

Inculturation

The term ‘inculturation’ is being used to refer to the efforts made to relate the Gospel to culture. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* defines inculturation as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures” (RM, 52). It means the incarnation of the Gospel in the cultural forms familiar and intelligible to those being evangelized. The first cultural sector where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed is the world of communications, including the mass media.⁵² The other cultural sectors are scientific research, human rights, and international relations. To prevent our civilization from sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, these sectors need to be transformed by contact with the Gospel. They cannot be evangelised simply from outside, by words of admonition; the evangelization must come from within, by committed Christians especially the religious thoroughly familiar with the relevant disciplines.⁵³ The inculturation process has two consequences: On the one hand, the culture, which encounters and receives the Gospel or Christian faith will be purified from its human deficiencies, distortions and sinfulness and will be transformed. On the other hand,

the Gospel and the Christian faith itself will be enriched, and its Catholicity will be enhanced.⁵⁴

Media

Media has opened a vast field for evangelization. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states that “when media is put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people. The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect” (*EN*, 45). The use of group-media and self-media are apt means for evangelization *ad intra*,⁵⁵ and the other particular useful means for evangelization *ad extra*⁵⁶ are TV serials, feature films, radio and publications.⁵⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reminds the Church authorities of their duty to use and develop the mass media for the proclamation of the Word because it has “the capacity of piercing the conscience of each individual, of implanting itself in his or her heart as though they were the only person being addressed, with all their individual and personal qualities, and evoke an entirely personal adherence and commitment” (*EN*, 45). *Inter Mirifica*, the decree on the means of social communication stresses that media “contributes greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God.”⁵⁸ Media help the faith grow as they give the opportunities to spread the message

of Christ, to combat atheism, to promote justice, to make known the activities of the Church in the social and charitable spheres, to dispel wrong ideas about Christianity, to show what the Church has done in other countries, to educate the illiterate, to raise the minds to God, and to lead people in prayer.⁵⁹ Media education and film analysis are in themselves a kind of evangelization today. They help the people to realize how these films can misguide them and dictate their lives, values and beliefs.⁶⁰

Works of Charity

Down through the centuries the Church has been a leader in caring for orphans, widows, the sick and the aged. She has been prominent for establishing schools, hospitals and relief programmes. When circumstances prevent direct and immediate announcement of the Gospel, Christians bear witness to Christ very effectively by charity and works of mercy.⁶¹ In, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* Pope John Paul II declared that "The condemnation of evils and injustices through the teaching and spreading of her social doctrine is also part of the ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church's prophetic role."⁶² Evangelization in its full amplitude includes the doctrine of human rights, the promotion of the common good, and everything that can help to build a civilization of love. All have a special responsibility to evangelize secular society, including the work place through our works of charity. The value of the Gospel can vivify and transform human relations in law, politics, business and all the professions.⁶³

Evangelization as Service of the Poor and the Rich

The evangelizing mission of the Church originates from Christ's redeeming love for humankind, especially for the poor and the suffering. Church evangelizes the powerful and the rich in order to make them conscious of the misery of the poor and that the poor may really feel themselves blessed in the kingdom of God.⁶⁴ An evangelization that does not directly involve the poor, and take up their cause, their struggles and confirm their hope in a new, different society, loses its Christian density, and betrays the historical Jesus, who was a poor person in this world, and who identified Himself with the poor.⁶⁵ Evangelization calls for preferential option for poor. It is a priority of service made clear in the Church's tradition (*EA*, 34). It is an invitation to stand with the poor even when there is little that an individual can do to right the injustice that they experience. By being close to the poor, and helping the poor to rediscover and realize their dignity as humans and as children of God is to do justice to them. The promotion of justice is an integral part of evangelization.⁶⁶

Evangelization as Service of Human Development and Liberation

The area of human development is a vast area of the Church's evangelizing mission. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* that "authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization" (*RM*, 58). Social dimension of evangelization includes the whole area of social concerns, ranging from peace-building, serving the

most unfortunate, witnessing of justice, defending the integrity of creation, education and health services, to promoting family life and good government.⁶⁷ The concern for the development of those who are part of suffering humankind, will give the Christian message credibility, and make it appealing to the receivers. For the work of liberation to become a channel of evangelization the motivation behind the service which is Christ's love for all humankind and His command to love one another should be made known to the people through the works of development.⁶⁸ There is no dichotomy between preaching the Gospel and social work. Both are part of the mission of the Church that is to establish the kingdom of God in all its aspects. Thus, development is an authentic expression of Christian love that reaches out and touches both in their proximate, immediate needs and in their ultimate need for knowing the true God.⁶⁹

Having seen in a detailed manner the theoretical principles regarding evangelization, we shall now deal with the practical aspect of the topic.

Role of Women Religious in Evangelization

A woman by nature and instinct is a mother or a mother to be. By their very religious profession women religious can fulfil their spiritual motherhood in the society by being deeply involved in the evangelizing mission of the church. The special characteristics and talents of women religious make them more sensitive to the needs of the

world. *Christus Dominus*, the decree on the Bishops Pastoral Office in the Church clearly states the role of religious in the mission of evangelization: "With due consideration for the character proper to each religious community, they should enter more vigorously into external works of the apostolate" (No. 33). Religious communities of the contemplative and of the active life have so far played and still do play a very great role in the evangelization of the world. So many religious are engaged in activities such as praying, teaching, preaching, healing, caring the destitute and bring back souls to God. Today the world invites them to broaden their activity sometimes by leaving certain institutionalized ministries to others so that they themselves can undertake work among the missions and meet the needs of the changed ecclesial and social conditions. What is considered necessary is a new openness to the spirit, a new awareness to the ecclesial and social needs, a new vision and apostolic vision and a new joyful availability.

Tips to Enhance the Evangelizing Mission of Women Religious

Deepening the Desire to make Jesus known and loved

The success and efficiency of the mission of evangelization depends on the desire and motivation of the sisters in carrying out this mission. Unless their desire is strong, they cannot fulfil the goal of making Jesus known and loved. Evangelization starts with our own relationship

with Jesus. By building a strong relationship with Jesus through prayer, by recalling the preciousness of the vocation and by seeing the multitude who have not known Christ the religious can ignite their desire to make Him known. Studying the life history of their founder or foundress, the Rule of Life and the founding charism of the Institute will help the sisters to sharpen their motivation and to refocus on their goal of evangelization.

Familiarizing One's Life with the Word of God

The Bible inspires all the pastoral work of the Church, who is missionary by her very nature. At a Mass to open the World Synod of Bishops on the Bible, Pope Benedict XVI said that the knowledge of Scripture was essential to the evangelizing mission of the Church in an increasingly godless society.⁷⁰ Authentic evangelization has always been rooted in the deep genuine religious experience of God's saving power and love. Moreover, this experience will result only from those who listen to the Word of God.⁷¹ Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* writes that evangelization demands familiarity with Word of God (EG, 175). The religious being called to be the salt and light of the world need to familiarize and live the Word of God in their daily life.

Strengthening the Witnessing Life

The best way of evangelization is personal life witness. Being aware of the importance of the witnessing life, sisters need to take care of their way of life. Mission of Jesus is

mainly carried out through a life of witness. Being the followers of Jesus, sisters are called to live a simple, humble and joyful life of witness. To attain this they need to cultivate the spirit of gratefulness and contentment in their lives. So also the sisters need to consider others as better than themselves. A life of witness touches the hearts of every one wherever they are present. Hence, they need to proclaim Christ by their lives rather than by words.

Radiating a Joyful Presence

A religious who lives his/her vocation honestly is joyful. Pope Francis, meeting with Seminarians and Novices in Rome on 6 July 2013 said, "I want to say one word to you and this word is *joy*. Wherever there are consecrated people, seminarians, men and women religious, young people, there is joy, there is always joy! It is the joy of freshness, the joy of following Jesus; the joy that the Holy Spirit gives us, not the joy of the world." The religious can wake up the world only through their joyful presence, which is the fruit of their consecration and community living. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope says, "Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ" (EG, 10). By leading

lives of contagious joy religious can liberate the people from their oppression and lead them into the same joy.

Improving the Pastoral Work, Family Apostolate and Youth Ministry

Religious need to visit the families, improve their involvement in the pastoral work and youth ministry. The youth are the victims of the fast-paced developing world. Being exposed to this most enchanting and fast culture world many of them are confused and give in to instant gratification. They no longer appreciate the values handed on by their parents. Sisters need to reach out to them in their context and help them to cope with the struggles they face. They should also help their parents and families through house visits. Evangelization should begin within the family, and should speak with concern about the problems facing family life in modern society. Sisters by getting involved in the parish activities and by planning some creative programmes can create interest in the youth and elders to visit the parish often and receive sacraments. Religious through their dedicated service can really make the parishes grow and put a hindrance to the sheep stealing.

Bonding with the People of Other Religions

There is a greater need of improving sisters' relationship with people of other religions. Sisters need to seek out and approach others and speak with everyone. Many of us do not enter into dialogue with them and the

main reason for this is the negligence in the study of the language and the culture of the people. Sisters need to be really familiar with the language and the customs of the people whom they wish to gain for Christ. Having good relationship will foster dialogue with them. It is only through our dealings, interactions, celebrations and sharing that we can proclaim the Good News to them.

Overcoming the Obstacles for Evangelization

Some of the main obstacles that reduce the credibility of the life and mission of religious are the lack of poverty, tendency to avoid commitment and collaboration with the local churches, lack of responsibility in the use and manner of administering money and the way of carrying out the work of the institute, excess influence of media and modern gadgets, egoism and individuality, lack of enthusiasm and readiness to take risk and lack of compassion. Being aware of these diseases that secretly kill the evangelizing spirit of the religious is the first step in overcoming it. If they tackle them sincerely by living a life focused on Jesus Christ, the true model of religious life they can become effective missionaries in the vineyard of the Lord.

Becoming Experts in Using Modern Means of Media for Evangelization

Women religious rarely make use of modern means of communication for evangelization. Mass media is a powerful tool, which attracts multitudes belonging to all age groups, language and religion. Usage of modern means of

communication creates interest in the recipients and it is an easy way to reach them without wasting much time. Therefore, sisters should take initiative to learn the modern skills of education and make use of their talents and abilities in this field for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Reaching out to Special Categories of People

To become effective evangelizers religious need to examine whether the people under their care are sufficiently exposed to evangelization and also should ask themselves whether they have reached out to people through their ministries that are relevant instead of their traditional ministries. The answers to the questions should move them to respond to the needs of the people who are neglected and rejected. Today as the world progresses in a fast pace the Spirit calls religious to take a flight from the comforts of established institutions and to plunge into the world of marginalized. Church wants religious to become the voice of the poor such as refugees, those denied of fundamental rights, the bonded labourers, the unborn, the slum dwellers, the outcastes and the low castes, the emarginated and the villagers those who are deprived of education and medical care. Opening dispensaries in neglected areas, mobile clinics, pre-natal care and midwifery for mothers, village visiting, meeting the sacramental needs of those who are deprived of it, preparing people for the reception of sacraments, conscientizing people about their fundamental rights, helping broken families

etc. are certain forms of works that can open the hearts of the people and give the sisters an opportunity to evangelize.

Being Lovers of Nature and Ecological Educators

One of the ways to know God is through the nature around. Nature depicts the great love of the master creator God. It is the great gift of God to humanity. By taking care of the nature around, we respect the giver of this great token of love. The beauty and the order of the created things reveal the presence of God and nature is the great proof for the existence of God. The religious need to guarantee the protection of the mother earth realizing the great value of this common home. Through their ministries they need to strive to restore the damage caused by various human abuse of creation. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis says "All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment."⁷²

Walking through the Path of Mercy to evangelize

Pope Francis at the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization said, "The new evangelization must necessarily use the language of mercy, which is more about gestures and attitudes than words." Getting involved in the corporal works of mercy such as to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked,

welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead, religious can truly become channels of evangelization. So also the spiritual works of mercy particularly instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, forgiving offenses willingly, and comforting the afflicted are great locus of new evangelization. Having stepped into the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, the religious can make their works of evangelization a successful and fruitful one by adding the ingredient of mercy in all what they do and attain God's mercy.

Conclusion

“Evangelization is the mission of the Church to tell the world the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ”.⁷³ All the baptized have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel in word and action to the world in which they live. “Religious, for their part, find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization” (EN, 69). Mary the star of evangelization is the model for all women religious in the life of consecration and evangelization. She was the first evangelizer who gave Jesus to the world through her life of humility and purity. After her Son ascended, she joined with the disciples in intercession and inaugurated the first missionary proclamation. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* said, “She is the mother of the Church which evangelizes, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new

evangelization" (*EG*, 284). Another women evangelizer who took the living waters to the gentile world is the Samaritan woman. "Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (*Jn* 4:39). Also the one whom the Lord chose to make known His disciples and the world about His resurrection is also a woman evangelizer, Mary Magdalene.

Following the great model of these women evangelizers there are many women, who through their life of consecration have responded to the call of God to carry out His mission of evangelization. Religious, by bearing witness to holiness, exercise a privileged means of evangelization. Their lives of self-sacrifice are a challenge to the world and the Church (*EN*, 69). Women religious play an important role in evangelization, precisely because of their particular capacity of receptivity, of attention to those who suffer, of listening, because of their sensibility and maternity, and their peculiar capacity to love. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* affirms this by saying "I extend a special word of appreciation to the missionary religious sisters, in whom virginity for the sake of the kingdom is transformed into motherhood in the spirit that is rich and fruitful" (*RM*, 70).

The success of evangelization ultimately depends on the sharing of one's own Christ experience with others. This is the secret of the evangelization of the apostles. They said, "We declare to you what we have seen and heard

so that you also may have fellowship with us" (1Jn 1:3). St Magdalene of Canossa affirms it by saying "it is true that one who is not burning with zeal herself cannot set others aflame."⁷⁴ Only with a heart that burns with the passion for Jesus and passion for His people, we can move ever deeply into the work of spreading the love of Christ in the World. In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II emphasized in every place and circumstance, religious should be zealous heralds of Jesus Christ, ready to respond with the wisdom of the Gospel to the questions posed today by the anxieties and the urgent needs of the human heart (No. 81). Following the model of Mary, the star of evangelization every religious shall strive to be real evangelizers who break the bread of God's word to those who hunger for the truth and are in need of light.

Sr Siji Lonan, FDCC
Canossa Convent
Punavasal, Thiruvaiyaru
Thanjavur – 613 204
Tamil Nadu

Endnotes

¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18. Hereafter cited as *EN*.

² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 96. Hereafter cited as *EG*.

³ J. Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission* (Shillong: DBCIC Publications, 2008), 115.

⁴ Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 3.

⁵ CCC, 848.

⁶ Quinn, Richard J. and others, *New Evangelization in Africa* (Kenya: Pauline Publications Africa, 2005), 26.

⁷ Gilbert Choondal, "What is This New Evangelization?" *Word & Worship*, 2, 1&2 (Oct-Dec 2011& Jan-Mar 2012), 6.

⁸ Vincent Monteiro, "New Evangelization Need of the Hour," *Joskiran*, 9, 1 (2012), 30.

⁹ Heb 13:8.

¹⁰ Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris, The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), 164. Here after cited as IL.

¹¹ Murphy, "A Catechesis for the New Evangelization," 10.

¹² General Catechetical Directory (1971), 2.

¹³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

¹⁴ Vijay Shantiraj, "The Need and Urgency of Evangelization," *Word & Worship*, 2, 1&2 (Oct-Dec 2011& Jan-Mar 2012), 21.

¹⁵ Vijay Shantiraj, "The Need and Urgency of Evangelization," 21.

¹⁶ Oswald Gracias, "New Evangelization: A Prophetic and Revolutionary Call" *New Evangelization - Asian Perspectives*, eds. Joy Thomas, Victor Sagayam Zackarias (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2012), 22.

¹⁷ Gracias, "New Evangelization: A Prophetic and Revolutionary Call," 22.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, "Homily of First Vespers on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul," Vatican, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100628-vespri-pietro-paolo_en.html, accessed on 15 February 2011.

¹⁹ Gracias, "New Evangelization: A Prophetic and Revolutionary Call," 21.

²⁰ John Paul II, "The Pilgrim of Evangelization Lands in Mexico-Arrival Speech in Mexico City," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7 May 1990, 1, 12.

²¹ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 31.

²² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 58. Hereafter cited as RM.

²³ John Paul II, *The Rapid Development-Apostolic Letter to Those Responsible for Communications* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 6.

²⁴ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 36.

²⁵ Apostolic letter written by Pope John Paul II to thank the Lord for the jubilee Year and to prepare the Church to enter into the 3rd millennium with great enthusiasm to carry on the evangelizing mission of the Church.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, 30-40.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 7. Here after cited as PF.

²⁸ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 40.

- ²⁹ Benedict XVI, "Homily on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, 28 June 2010," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100628_vespri-pietro-paolo_en.html, accessed on 1 September 2013.
- ³⁰ Benedict XVI, "Motu Proprio Establishes the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization" *L' Osservatore Romano*, 20 Oct 2010, 6.
- ³¹ <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/evangelii-gaudium-pope-francis-blueprint-for-evangelization/#ixzz3tFMcToPW>
- ³² Boff, *Good News to the Poor*, 39.
- ³³ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 12.
- ³⁴ John Paul II, "Consistory of 2001: Toward Revived Awareness of the Church's Mission to the World," *The Pope Speaks*, 46, 6 (2001), 323.
- ³⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 19. Here after cited as EA.
- ³⁶ John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time," ed. Austin Flannery. *Vatican Council II, Vol II* (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 1982), 24. Hereafter cited as CT.
- ³⁷ CCC, 5.
- ³⁸ Barnes L. Mawrie, *Missionary Catechesis* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute of Publication, 2009), 44.
- ³⁹ Peter J. Murphy, "A Catechesis for the New Evangelization," *The Sower*, 33, 2 (April 2012), 11.
- ⁴⁰ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Bulletin*, 26, 2 (1991), 9.
- ⁴¹ Hwa Yung, "The resurgence of Asian Religions and Cultures- A Christian Response," *Taking the Whole Gospel to Asia Today The Fourth Asian Leadership Conference on Evangelism* (Kuala Lumpur: Asia Lausanne Committee for world Evangelization, 1996), 76.
- ⁴² Second Vatican Council, "Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews" ed. Austin Flannery. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, Vol I* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1999), 658.
- ⁴³ Hwa Yung, "The resurgence of Asian Religions and Cultures- A Christian Response," 76.
- ⁴⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10. Hereafter cited as SC.
- ⁴⁵ Feba, "Liturgy as a Powerful Weapon for Evangelization," *Aikyasamiksha*, 8, 2 (Oct 2011), 34.
- ⁴⁶ Feba, "Liturgy as a Powerful Weapon for Evangelization," 34.

- ⁴⁷ Consistory Cardinals, "Contemplation of Christ Nourishes Evangelization - Message of the Consistory Cardinals," *The Pope Speaks*, 46, 6 (2001), 326.
- ⁴⁸ EN, 23, 43-44, 47; RM 46-49, 87-92.
- ⁴⁹ Boniface Pinto, "Evangelizing the Evangelized Through A Renewed Spirituality," *Joskiran*, 9, 1 (2012), 93-94.
- ⁵⁰ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 95.
- ⁵¹ Quinn, Richard J. and others. *New Evangelisation in Africa*, 35.
- ⁵² Dulles, *Evangelization*, 97.
- ⁵³ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 97.
- ⁵⁴ Kuncheria Pathil, "New Ways of Being Church in Asia," *Evangelizing in the Third Millennium*, 60-64.
- ⁵⁵ Evangelization ad intra means faith formation of baptised Christians. 56 Evangelization ad extra means preaching Christ to non-Christians.
- ⁵⁷ Raymond Ambroise, "Social Communication at the Service of Evangelization," *Evangelization and Social Communication*, ed. Mario Saturnino Dias (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2000), 103-104.
- ⁵⁸ *Inter Mirifica*, 2.
- ⁵⁹ E.Le Joly, *Evangelisation Theory and Practice* (Bombay: St. Pauls Publications, 1986), 258.
- ⁶⁰ Jacob Srampickal, "Can Cinema be a Tool for Evangelization?" *Evangelization and Social Communication*, 99.
- ⁶¹ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 11.
- ⁶² John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41. Hereafter cited as SRS. 63 Dulles, *Evangelization*, 99.
- ⁶³ Dulles, *Evangelization*, 99.
- ⁶⁴ Bernard Haring, *Evangelization Today* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 124.
- ⁶⁵ Boff, *Good News to the Poor*, 78. 66 Jean-Yves Calvez, *Faith and Justice - the Social Dimension of Evangelization*, trans. John E. Blewett (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1994), 138.
- ⁶⁷ Joly, *Evangelisation Theory and Practice*, 251.
- ⁶⁸ Joly, *Evangelisation Theory and Practice*, 251.
- ⁶⁹ Edward R. Dayton and David A Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelizati* on (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 304.
- ⁷⁰ John Thavis, "Word of God Synod Round Up", *The Examiner*, 159 (2008) 6-7, 6.

⁷¹ Shabu Joseph, "Biblical Dimension of Evangelization" *Awakening Faith* 23 (2010) 10-12, 10.

⁷² Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 214.73 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania: The Church in Oceania* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2001), 18.

⁷⁴ Nicolai, *Magdalene of Canossa: Catechist of Her Time*, (Rome: Canossian Generalate, 1992), 94.