



The Holy See

PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION
OF PEOPLES ON THE THEME: "ST PAUL AND THE NEW AREOPAGI"
[PONTIFICAL URBAN UNIVERSITY, 16-18 NOVEMBER 2009]

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL IVAN DIAS
PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR
THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal IVAN DIAS
Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*

On the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the [Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples](#) I would like to address my cordial greeting to you, Your Eminence, and I gladly extend it to the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops and to all the participants. I likewise greet the Secretary, the Adjunct Secretary, the Undersecretary and all this Dicastery's collaborators, together with the expression of my sentiments of appreciation and gratitude for your service to the Church in the context of the mission *ad gentes*.

The theme you are discussing at this meeting and also in the light of the Pauline Year that ended recently "*St Paul and the New Areopagi*" helps us to relive the experience of the Apostle to the Gentiles in Athens when, after preaching in many places, he went to the Areopagus and proclaimed the Gospel there, using a language that today we might describe as "inculturated" (cf. *Acts* 17: 22-31).

"At that time the Areopagus represented the cultural centre of the learned people of Athens", my venerable Predecessor [John Paul II](#) said, "and today, it can be taken as a symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 37). In fact, the reference to the event is a pressing invitation to make the most of today's "areopagi" in which the

great challenges of evangelization are confronted. You intend to analyze this theme realistically, taking into account the numerous social changes that have taken place with a realism supported by the spirit of faith that sees history in the light of the Gospel, certain, like St Paul, of the Risen Christ's presence. The words Jesus addressed to him at Corinth resound and are also comforting for us: "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you" (*Acts* 18: 9-10). The Servant of God [Paul VI](#) said effectively that it was a question not only of preaching the Gospel "but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), [1975], n. 19).

It is necessary to look at the "new areopagi" in this spirit; some of them, in today's globalization, have become common, whereas others remain specific to certain continents, as was also seen at the recent [Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops](#). Missionary activity should therefore be oriented to these nerve centres of society in the third millennium. Nor should the influence of a widespread relativistic culture be underestimated, more often than not lacking in values, which is permeating the sanctuary of the family and infiltrating the field of education and other social contexts and contaminating them, manipulating consciences, especially of the young. At the same time, however, in spite of these snares, the Church knows that the Holy Spirit is always active. Indeed, new doors are opening to the Gospel and the longing for authentic spiritual and apostolic renewal is spreading in the world. As in other periods of change, the pastoral priority is to show the true Face of Christ, the Lord of history and the one Redeemer of humankind. This requires every Christian community and the Church in her entirety to offer a witness of fidelity to Christ, patiently building the unity he desired and for which he prayed for all his disciples. Christian unity will in fact facilitate evangelization and the confrontation with the cultural, social and religious challenges of our time.

In this missionary enterprise, we may look to the Apostle Paul and imitate his "lifestyle" and his same apostolic "spirit", focused totally on Christ. With such complete adherence to the Lord, Christians will more easily be able to pass on to the generations to come the heritage of faith which can also transform the possible difficulties of evangelization. In my recent Encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#), I wanted to emphasize that the economic and social development of contemporary society stands in need of recovering attention to the spiritual life and a "serious consideration of the experiences of trust in God, spiritual fellowship in Christ, reliance upon God's providence and mercy, love and forgiveness, self-denial, acceptance of others, justice and peace.... Christians long for the entire human family to call upon God as "Our Father!" (n. 79).

Your Eminence, as I express my gratitude for this Dicastery's service to the Gospel cause, I invoke upon you and upon all who are taking part in this Plenary Assembly God's assistance and the protection of the Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, as I warmly impart my Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 13 November 2009

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