What Church for What Evangelization? Lumen Gentium in Senegal

Armel Duteil C.S.Sp.

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons

Part of the Catholic Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
The fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council is an opportunity to take stock of the life of our churches. I would like to propose here some reflections on the missionary life of the Church in Senegal from the document *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), henceforth LG and *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church), henceforth AG.

**The Catholic Church in Senegal: The Challenge of Evangelization**

A little history. From 1763 to 1848, the priests of the Holy Spirit, sons of Claude Poullart des Places, evangelized the French territories in St. Louis and in Gorée. The Seminary of the Holy Spirit, made particularly responsible for the apostolic prefecture of Senegal since 1779, took charge of the recruitment of priests. On the 28\textsuperscript{th} of September 1842, Rome creates the Apostolic Vicariate of the Two Guineas with Monsignor Barron as the Apostolic Vicar. The 13\textsuperscript{th} of September, 1843 Monsignor Barron leaves for Senegambia with five priests and three brothers of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary founded by Father Libermann, most of whom die before the end of the year! Libermann writes a letter to Eliman, the king of Dakar, Suleiman, his nephew, and all the leaders of the people on the 31\textsuperscript{st} of January, 1848 saying: “My heart is with the Africans.” As always, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church!”

At present, Senegal is about 90% Muslim and 5% Catholic. The Church then is very clearly the minority. The church of Senegal is very alive, all the bishops have been Senegalese for several decades. Senegalese priests now number more than one hundred in the diocese of Dakar alone. Vocations are numerous; there are priestly ordinations every year.

The churches are filled every Sunday and the different Christian groups are numerous, those which attract the most people being the choirs and the charismatic groups. The different structures and services of the church are assured. But one must recognize that Christians are more engaged in the church than in society, more concerned about a life of personal prayer than about a collective effort to fight against injustices. The Christian community remains centered on itself and enclosed in its own problems. The Apostolic Exhortation on the Christian Faithful has not been assimilated – it has not passed into practice.
The missionary Congregations are present and numerous in the archdiocese. Senegalese men and women religious are numerous in the international Congregations. And there exists an indigenous Congregation of Brothers and two female religious Congregations, one of which, moreover, sends members as missionaries outside the country.

As for the Spiritans, FANO (Foundation of Northwest Africa) became a Spiritan Province on October 2, 2014. It encompasses four countries: Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau and Mauritania. 64 confreres are working in FANO, originating from 19 circumscriptions, and 43 young people are in formation. Ten confreres are working abroad in other countries.

One then finds oneself in the presence of a church very much alive! But what of the missionary dimension?

**Evangelization in the Praxis of Jesus**

At Christmas, the angels sing (Luke 2:10-14) “I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people … and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (NABRE). And it is exactly for this that he makes known the birth of his son, not to the religious leaders of Israel, but first to the poor, to men rejected and considered sinners, the shepherds, (Luke 2); and then, to the pagan wise men come from the east (Matt 2:1-12). And when Mary and Joseph present their child at the Temple to consecrate him to God, Simeon sings, “for my eyes have seen your salvation which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the gentiles” (Luke 2:30-32). This idea that God loves and saves all men is already very present in the First Testament (for example, Isaiah 12:4; 54:2; 56:7).

The Gospel addresses itself to the poor and the little people of society, to those who suffer and are treated unjustly. When Jesus explains his mission at Nazareth, he refers to the prophet Isaiah saying: “The Spirit of God is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Luke 4:18, 21). Consequently, the Gospel is for all, and first of all for the poor. The preaching of the Gospel demands that we first of all seek to free captives and the blind of all types, in their heart but first in their bodies.

Evangelization consists of actions (to build up the Kingdom). When Jesus preaches the Gospel, he begins by healing the sick (Matt 15:29); he drives out evil spirits. He feeds the crowd (John 6:1) before teaching about the Bread of Life (John 6:25).
Indeed, proclamation is accomplished by actions and by words. Evangelization is a matter of witnessing. People can hinder us from speaking, but they cannot stop us from living the Gospel. As Jesus stated it: “You will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans” (Matt 10:18). All men have a desire to be happy. If we are happy in living the Gospel, they will have a desire to come with us to encounter Christ. For the Gospel is Good News.

The Gospel is a welcoming and a giving of thanks. Jesus crosses the borders without stopping to go to the other side of the Jordan (Mark 10:1) into Samaria (John 4:4) or into the region of Genesareth (Mark 6:53). He heals the sick and those who are possessed by evil spirits without rejecting anyone; he teaches everyone without distinction; he loves all people; he is hospitable to all. But more than that, he recognizes the action of the Holy Spirit in the heart of pagans, and he gives thanks to God his Father for it. He remarks that it is only the cured Samaritan leper who comes to say thanks to him. He says of the Roman officer (Matt 8:10) “in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” And he draws from it the conclusion “many will come from the east and the west, and will recline … at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.” Likewise, Jesus sends the Samaritan woman, a pagan, to make him known to the people of her village – pagans like herself (John 4:28).

Jesus does not omit saying to the Pharisees that which the prophet Jonas did to call the pagans of Nineveh to conversion, and the Queen of Sheba who came to listen to King Solomon (Matt 11:20-25). He himself will say: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32). And before going up to heaven, he will say to his disciples: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15) - here the respect for creation, ecology - and in quest of that they “will drive out demons” (Mark 16:17).

Saint Paul and Evangelization

Paul himself devoted all his energy to establishing Christian communities throughout the whole Roman Empire. But he wanted open and missionary communities which announce the Gospel to all. He exclaims “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16); not only woe to me if I do not implant the Church. And he affirms “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 1:17). He adds that “God wills everyone to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4).

*Lumen Gentium* and Evangelization

The document *Lumen Gentium* from the Second Vatican
Horizons 67

The Church can be read as a commentary on the praxis of evangelization by Jesus and Paul. Let us read some citations.

LG 9: The Church “is also used by him as an instrument for the redemption of all...for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity.” A sacrament is an efficacious sign but not the final and unique objective. “The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). The Church is the sign and the means of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. But, it is not the kingdom in itself, nor all alone.

AG 2: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.” The Trinity is the total and reciprocal gift of the three persons in love. The mission is to make all men enter into that love and to teach them to give themselves to their brothers, by the example and with the aid of the Trinity. As LG 48 states it, “Christ (…) has established his body, which is the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation.”

Preamble 4: “The Church sees herself essentially in the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord, which includes the spiritual, moral, and human development of every man, woman, and child. At the same time, she contributes to the well-being of all people, mending divisions, and elevating human dignity to the measure by which Christ reconciled it to the Father.”

For a New Evangelization in Senegal

What is lacking in my opinion for a true evangelization is a theology of the kingdom of God. Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God on earth. And Paul explains: “the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk” (1 Co 4:20), “it is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rm 14:17). To evangelize is to enlarge the kingdom, a kingdom which is for all. It is to enlarge “life and truth, grace and holiness, justice, love and peace” (Preface of the Solemnity of Christ the King).

The mission of the Church is not only to teach and to baptize, but also and foremost to permit all people to live the values of the Gospel, even if they do not enter into the Church. That is to say, to make the kingdom of God come, not only for Christians and for the Church, but for everyone – not only for persons individually or one by one, but for all peoples, all...
societies, for the entire world, and even the entire creation, as Christ said before leaving this earth (Mark 16:15) and as Paul explains (Rm 8:19-23). The Church must not work for herself. It is at the service of the kingdom (see *Gaudium et Spes*).

**Some Consequences for the Church of Senegal**

Here is how things look seen from the parish of Notre Dame of Cap Vert in Pikine, in the large suburbs of Dakar where I work. What is seriously lacking is the knowledge of theology and praxis of the Kingdom of God, and of its distinction and complementarity with the Church. At the official and theoretical level, the Church is open to all. The Third Plan of Pastoral Action for the four years which are coming has taken up again the four objectives of the preceding Plan: communion, sanctification (liturgy, prayer, sacraments, catechesis), witness (evangelization and dialogue), and service (dignity and the rights of humankind, reconciliation, justice, peace, development), but in practice, the emphasis is placed on the first two objectives. And when the last two objectives are put into action, it is often in favor of Christians alone.

The base of the Church in Senegal is the parish, and Christians like to meet each other there. The problem is that Christian life has a tendency to limit itself to parish life, and the Church then risks focusing on itself and not be oriented outwardly. Furthermore, parish life is especially turned toward prayer and liturgy. It is clear that liturgy is the summit of Christian life. But what worth is a summit without a base? In any case, Christian life certainly cannot limit itself to prayer and liturgy.

Catechesis is an essential aspect of the life of the Church and it directly concerns evangelization and the missionary dimension of the community. What seems to attract these catechumens is the friendship and family spirit which reigns in the Church and also the beauty and quality of the prayers and liturgy, and likewise the support systems of the Christian communities and of Caritas. But a lot of the newly baptized are content to participate at mass on Sundays. They lack a true involvement in the Church and in society and a real concern for the evangelization of their brothers and sisters. The themes taught in catechesis should certainly be reviewed to respond more to the needs of the people and to the current evolution of society.

The EBC (Ecclesial Base Communities) are the Christian family in the localities. During these meetings, Christians left to themselves, little by little, end up simply reciting the rosary. Of course prayer is essential to Christian life, but it must result...
in a transformation of life and action in the milieu where one
finds himself. In order to become a Christian family which takes
charge of the evangelization of all, these communities should
have concern for the life of all the inhabitants and to be engaged
with the other persons to build the kingdom of God. What is
necessary is a true formation and reflection on what a Christian
community of the locality must be.

The organizations, of friends and fraternities, as for example
those of Catholic Women, seem often content with prayers
among Christians, participation in religious feasts, especially to
do the cooking, playing in that case a role of animation with
beautiful clothing, renewed at each holiday. One can admire
their dedication, their courage and their generosity. But that must
not stop one from asking the question: wouldn’t it be better to
direct all these efforts also toward evangelization?

In Catholic education, we operate schools of the classic
type and where scholars obtain diplomas. We take care of the
students of our Catholic schools, and we congratulate ourselves
on our excellent results in exams. There are many associations
of Christian teachers, but those meet more for retreats, when
not for outings, dinners, evening dances and parties. For the
students, there are some chaplaincies in public and non-Catholic
private schools. But one seeks more to group Christian students
for sharing of the Gospel which often limits itself to discussions
that do not result in concrete actions, rather than making the
school advance as such, concerned for all students, Christian
or not. In short, the Church seems more preoccupied with its
works than with the common good and the progress of all. One
needed to invest much more in new forms of education, as for
example community schools and new forms of instruction. We
should think of the other students, especially the more deprived.
At the moment when instruction is meeting grave problems
in the country – incessant strikes, lowering of standards, lack
of education - one doesn’t even feel the concern of Christian
teachers engaged in the public or private sector, much less of
union involvement. The Church should involve itself in the
whole school milieu and seek to respond to the needs of education
in the country – and to fight against all forms of injustice and
inequality that one encounters in these schools. The JEC (Young
Christian Students), the Catholic students’ action, is practically
non-existent. Likewise, the JOC (Young Christian Workers) no
longer exists. That has direct consequences on evangelization or
rather the lack of evangelization.
Youths like to participate in large gatherings or pilgrimage walks but which really do not transform their life, for these are big demonstrations which do not have any follow-up. How move to concrete, organized, consistent and well thought-out actions in order to sustain this evangelization of the young by the young? The young Christians have a tendency to meet among themselves in their associations, but they are not so present in the ASC (Socio-Cultural Associations) and organizations of other youths in their areas. They meet to make festivities and organize evening dances. The main activities are lucrative: dinners, concerts and paying parties to earn money. This money is then used for meals or outings or to buy outfits, tee-shirts, or uniforms but absolutely not to help the most poor, even those who belong to the groups in question. What much attracts the youth and adult Christians are the charismatic movements. One can ask numerous questions on the type of evangelization which they put into operation. What attracts Christians much more than engagement in their milieu of life are, for example, choirs where people spend numerous hours practicing songs several nights per week, and religious concerts which end in dances. In our Eucharistic assemblies, the people no longer sing. The theme of the JMJ, World Youth Days, of this year was: “Youths, actors of the new evangelization.” That shows concern for evangelization in our diocesan Church, but that does not result in a true involvement of the young for evangelization – either for the development of the country or for the support of the most disadvantaged.

The Church is known in the country for its social activities, in particular for its health centers, its centers of formation for women, its schools. One appreciates it that all people, regardless of distinction of religion or other distinctions, can take advantage of these services. It is then a living and active witness of the love of Christ, open to all. The social activities of the Church interest the non-Christians. They admire the dedication and selflessness of its members. But one can ask if that is not first of all because they profit from it. Does that lead to knowing and encountering the person of Jesus Christ, who is moreover the basis and foundation of our involvements?

For many, Caritas is more an organization to assist only needy Christians than an organization of the Church to aid all the poor and underprivileged, whatever their religion may be. And it often limits itself to distribution of gifts from abroad, instead of trying to put in place some projects for development taken up by the people themselves, and to arrive at a change of mentality: to pass from receiving assistance to responsibility, from charity to development. In any case, Caritas seems very little involved in...
transforming the society and defending the rights of the poor, or even simply to educate them and give to them the means to work and take charge of themselves.

The Justice and Peace Commission could also be a veritable force of evangelization, but it remains very weak and is absent in numerous parishes. Certain teams are active during elections. But we have not taken advantage of that action in order to continue to work with the ONG, Non-Governmental Organizations, and other organizations of civil society. Regarding all these activities, it seems that one is often content to make the traditional forms of aid to the poor work, but one is not sufficiently attentive to the new forms of poverty which currently arise, in order to respond to the needs in an appropriate manner.

Regarding the political involvement of Christians, there has been some effort on the side of the hierarchy to push Christians to involve themselves in the life of the city. A certain number of Christians are involved in politics, but they are still too few. And it remains to ascertain in what measure their faith and the Gospel are at the basis of their involvement and of their actions? And what support the Church is going to give them for that?

The media can be an important tool for evangelization. In Senegal, we are fortunate to have not only a Catholic radio station, but especially the possibility to intervene in different public and community television and radio broadcasts. Unfortunately, we do not have the concern to introduce Jesus Christ and the Gospel to the Muslim population which is by far the majority and thus the largest number of listeners. We prefer to televise masses, priestly ordinations and religious professions without ever taking the care, on the level of vocabulary, to present things in an understandable manner for non-Christians.

It is sure that a certain evangelization is accomplished despite everything in the schools, the centers of formation, the dispensaries and other actions of the Church and that by way of all the social activities of the Church, the spirit of the Gospel and the knowledge of Jesus Christ certainly takes place. But this evangelization would need to be reflected upon as such, and to be more organized in order to go further and especially deeper. We are ready to receive people among us but much less to go toward them, and still less to accept the values and the spiritual riches that they could bring to us. As Christ admired the faith of the Roman centurion (Matt 8:5) and heard the call of the Syro-Phoenician woman to go among the pagans (Mark 7:26).
For in a country of a great Muslim majority, our priority must be to evangelize the Muslims. Not to baptize them, they will not accept this, but to permit them to live the values of the gospel in their own religion, in the manner of Jesus Christ. They will not be in the Church, but they will be in the kingdom of God. Already a certain number of Muslims live their religion and understand the Quran differently and in a more spiritual manner, thanks to their contact with Christians. For example, not to limit themselves to the fast but to seek a true conversion at the time of Ramadan, following the manner of Christians of observing Lent. And also in the manner of praying, more personal and from life, going beyond only reciting formulas. Or still to live their faith in love, and not only keep the Ten Commandments in a way at times moralistic and external.

We can ask ourselves conversely, in what measure the faith of Christians is purified and expanded by their life in common with the Muslims. In fact, Muslims call us to a respect of God much greater: “God is God and there is no other God than God.” They remind us of the importance of prayer and of manifesting our faith publicly. The seriousness with which they fast during Ramadan interrogates us on the way we observe Lent. How many Christians too sure of their faith are ready to let themselves be interrogated by the Muslims? For there cannot be any evangelization without dialogue or acceptance of the other. For many, evangelization means conversion to Christianity, baptism and entry into the Catholic Church. One does not have the idea that one can evangelize Muslims who remain Muslim – that is to say to permit them to live their Islamic faith in the spirit of the Gospel as Jesus did with the people of other religions that he encountered.

It would also be necessary to reflect on the evangelization of the traditional culture and religion, and as much on the evangelization of this modern world which gains more and more strength in Africa.

The Church should become much more aware that it is a minority and draw conclusions from that. Jesus said, “do not be afraid any longer, little flock” (Luke 12:32). He also said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13). A little salt is sufficient to give some taste to every dish. But still it is necessary that it be integrated, dissolved into the food, present and acting. Even if the light of the Church is not under the bushel, it remains still too often enclosed in the house. It has not yet been mounted on the hilltop to enlighten all (cf. Matt 5:14). The leavening of the Gospel shared among Christians must be present in the human dough of society (cf. Matt 13:33). Moreover, Jesus said, “You are
the salt of the earth” and not only the salt of the Church. “You are the light of the world,” not only the light of the Christian community.

The missionary Congregations will have to live more fully their missionary charism. For the religious priests, what we often expect of them is to maintain parishes, much less to work in society for evangelization as such. It is absolutely necessary that the members of the missionary Congregations rediscover their energy and the concern for evangelization and that they return to their charism. Even if they work in a parish, it should be open to all, with the concern for the most poor and that they do not let themselves be locked up in parish activities.

The religious Brothers and religious women seek especially to make their works function as they have always done, instead of seeing new sectors of modern life which need to be evangelized. There are new areas of lack of faith, just as there are new areas of poverty and injustices in which we need to be involved. But still we must seek a true evangelization in the sense of dialogue and of sharing of the faith without proselytizing.

That demands a true spiritual renewal. And also a formation: that the students be more interested in a pastoral missionary formation than in diplomas. And that after the basic formation, we be not content only to send certain ones to train in philosophy, theology, liturgy, canon law..., but also others in the human sciences - education, health, development, justice and peace, animation of groups… If not, how will they be able to work with those sick of Aids and Ebola, with prostitutes, street children, immigrants, and the marginalized, in order to fight for human rights and to help the poor take charge of themselves, and of so many other things.

“Our Father … thy kingdom come!”

Senegal
Endnotes


2 Notes et Documents, X, 24 (These tomes, fifteen in all, contain the correspondence of the Venerable Father Libermann).


6 Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World; “the joys and hopes of humankind”), 7 December 1965.