



### Discovering beauty and goodness in the New Evangelization

This June's meeting of the American bishops in San Diego was devoted to the New Evangelization, and there was no avoiding the question: what has happened to the flock of Christ? Why have so many of His sheep wandered away? Why are the scattered scattered?

The scattered are not gathered with the flock, it's true; but, in spite of the terrible sex abuse scandal, they're not gone altogether. Many identify themselves as Catholics who don't go to church. They haven't stopped believing in Christ, but they can't seem to find Him in their Catholic experience. They feel, as we all do, the inhibiting pressure of a culture in flight from worship, a culture that will not kneel down. Be spiritual if you wish, it counsels, but don't be religious. You can believe, but you don't have to belong. Follow the Good Shepherd—as long as you're the only sheep in His flock.

Looking at the flock of Christ today, we can draw a helpful distinction between (1) the *catechized but unevangelized*--those who've been taught *about* Jesus but have not met Him personally—and (2) the *evangelized but uncatechized*--those who have had a personally transforming encounter with Christ but have not been taught how to go on meeting Him in His Church. The New Evangelization comes back again and again to the indispensable centrality of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. What can

we do to help make this happen more widely and lastingly?

Maybe, as a number of speakers suggested, we should “lead with the beautiful” because “beauty captures the imagination.” In the novel/television series *Brideshead Revisited* the unbelieving narrator first marvels at the *beauty* of the English manor from which the book takes its name; he is then drawn by the *goodness* of one who lives there, Lady Marchmain: he wants to be good as she is good. In the end he finds himself unable to resist the *truth* of the faith that underlies both her goodness and the beauty of the manor she inhabits; so he becomes Catholic himself. The beautiful leads to the good, and the good leads to the true.

Reversing this sequence by presenting the truths of the faith first might have stopped the movement to conversion in its tracks. A seven-year-old boy at his first game in Yankee Stadium may find baseball to be a beautiful game. Wanting to be good at it himself, he may take up T-ball. Many games later he will discover that the infield-fly rule makes sense. Try to persuade him of this truth right off the bat, however, before he knows how good it feels to hit his first solid single to center, and his baseball career will end before it begins.

The logical order (truth, goodness, beauty) may not easily lead to conversion. It begins and ends differently than the evangelical order (beauty, goodness, truth). “Come and see,” Jesus says to His first disciples. When they saw His glory in the miracle of His goodness at the wedding in Cana, St. John tells us, they “believed in Him.” The beauty of Jesus' love for us leads us to do good as He did and discover that what He says is true. (Ask yourself if this is not how it works with you.)

This way of thinking only confirms Pope Paul VI's insight 40 years ago: people today are persuaded not so much by words as by *witness*. A beautiful life, new life in Christ, radiates goodness; it testifies to the truth that sets us free. If we live such a life, each of us can play a unique and irreplaceable part in the drama of the New Evangelization.