



EVANGELIUM CONFERENCE 2009

by Neil Addison, Secretary, Liverpool Circle

When a beautiful young woman raises her right eyebrow and furrows an otherwise flawless forehead it can be more eloquent than a lengthy speech. I had just mentioned to the 16 year old daughter of friends that I had spent the weekend at a conference for young Catholics and though she is too well brought up to ask outright "What are you, a greying, slightly podgy Catholic male of a previous generation, doing at a conference for the, young, dynamic and beautiful?" her raised eyebrow asked the question at full volume and a very fair question it was too.

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I had actually been invited to the Evangelium Conference of 2009 to talk about Religion and the Law and it was certainly an inspiring and life enhancing experience even for the grey haired and podgy such as myself. This was the second conference organised by two priests, Fr Andrew Pinsent and Fr Marcus Holden, who are the authors of a course on the Catholic faith known as the Evangelium course. The Course materials can be purchased from CTS and include illustrated presentations and students manuals, which collectively make use of the best of modern technology to explain the Catholic Faith. I personally think it is much superior to the well known Alpha course but Alpha is probably the best known comparison I can make.

Oratory School

Anyway, having devised the course, the two priests organised the first Evangelium conference in 2008 and I was invited to the second in 2009. Held in the Reading Oratory School the conference was for young Catholics between 18 and 30 and was sponsored by the CTS, whose director had to leave early to join his wife who was giving birth to their 6th daughter.

Variety

There was a wide variety of speakers in the main conference room interspersed by five minute talks from a range of Catholic Organisations. I spoke about the Thomas More Legal Centre and it is amazing how much you can say in five minutes. There was a variety of discussion seminars and a group learning Gregorian Chant.

I have to admit what struck me most strongly was the racial and cultural variety of the young people who attended and their vitality and intelligence. I confess I had a slight expectation of meeting the Americanised Bible Camp clones so frequently parodied by Louis Theroux but they were a group of attractive, lively, pleasant young adults united by a deep and informed love of their faith who wanted to discuss it and learn more about it.

Converts

One point that did astonish me was when one of the speakers (a Catholic priest who is a convert) asked how many of the people attending were converts and over a quarter of those present raised their hands.

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In an age when there seems to be an assumption amongst many Catholic Clergy and Bishops that they are engaged in the orderly management of decline it was heartening to see that intelligent modern young people can be converted to Catholicism when it is presented to them in a straightforward, way.

Latin and English Masses

As was only to be expected there were frequent but not compulsory religious services, Latin Mass each morning and a full English Mass in the afternoon. What was interesting for me to observe was

that the English Mass was completely faithful to the wording of the "New" Liturgy but also completely traditional with incense, Communion Rails and the Priests facing the Altar during the Consecration. I have no strong feelings about the Tridentine Mass but I have to confess I liked attending the "New" Mass done in a Traditional way. I have attended "normal" Parishes for many years and have got used to the "Tesco Queue" approach to taking communion but taking Communion kneeling is different, it is reverential, it makes Communion more meaningful and it emphasises in a physical way the spiritual meaning of the sacrament.

Modern Liturgy

A particular bonus was the presence of the Gregorian Chant Group giving us beautiful examples of what they had learnt in their sessions and the whole experience made me realise the potential to have a truly Catholic experience whilst using the Modern Liturgy.

Parents of the Future

I came away from Evangelium surprised how much I enjoyed it and was inspired by it to realise that there is hope for the future of the Church in Britain. It can be said that the numbers involved (150) isn't great but Christ did pretty well with Twelve and the important thing is to start somewhere and these young people, as the teachers, the politicians and the parents of the future, can have an immense influence on the wider world.

£95 per person

I feel that Evangelium is the sort of initiative that the Church needs to support if it is to have a future and I do wonder if Catenian Circles might think about sponsoring a young adult to attend the next conference in 2010.

We are not talking about vast sums, £95 per person plus travel is a small investment for the future of the faith.

I put it forward as a suggestion for Circles to consider, further details are on the Evangelium website www.evangelium.co.uk

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