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Fondata nel 1927
Organo di informazione delle Pontificie Opere Missionarie
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OCEANIA/AUSTRALIA - "Aborigines and immigrants are the heart of the mission", says the Archbishop of Canberra

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The announcement of the Gospel to the Aborigines remains "the heart of the Church's mission in Australia", which confides in the young and is now engaged in the difficult task of "humanizing and de-politicizing the immigration issue": These are the main challenges of evangelization in Australia, which were traced in an exclusive interview to Fides by His Exc. Mgr. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, in ad limina visit to Rome.

How is the work of evangelization in Australia coming along?

Australia is a country with great tradition of Christian faith and even strong in sending missionaries ad extra to carry out the work of evangelization. Today we are experiencing a profound transition, where the old patterns and identities of the past are replaced by new challenges and new issues. Even the Christian faith is in a phase of rebirth. We need a new evangelization and new vitality and energy in proclaiming the Gospel: we are asking ourselves how we can do it. The change affects the Australian Church but society as a whole. It is necessary to read and draw from the past, which was a time of grace, to project into the future. The danger is introversion, folding back on oneself. As Bishops we clearly say that it is time to "put out into deep water" to deal with new forms and new frontiers of mission.

What role do the laity and the young people have in this phase?

They have a crucial role. Many say that young people are "the future" of the Church. We say that young people are the Church of the "present". The new forms of evangelization pass mainly through the work of the laity and young people. Let us look at them as advocates of new initiatives and as bearers of new energy, new ideas, new impetus to the mission in the new century.

What can be said of the mission among the aborigines?

The mission among the aborigines has always been a difficult and delicate issue. The mission started with the Benedictine monks at the time of the European settlers. The Catholic Church, despite the efforts, has never been able to powerfully flourish the Gospel seeds planted in Aboriginal communities. It is a task that is urgent for us. But if past wounds that exist between whites and natives, are not healed, the Aboriginal question will always be a sore point for the whole nation. The mission among the natives will always be at the heart of the mission of the Church in Australia, because the communities are among the poorest and most disadvantaged.

Another important challenge is that of immigration: how do you live this?

Australia has been an immigration country for over 200 years. We have a tradition of hospitality which is also the fruit of the Christian faith. This tradition now seems threatened and compromised by the way Australia is dealing with desperate people who want asylum. Unfortunately, the issue of asylum seekers has been heavily politicized and this does not help. As Bishops we say it is urgent to re-humanize and de-politicize the issue of immigrants, to be faithful to our great tradition of hospitality. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/10/2011)

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