

What is the New Evangelization?

Why is it important for priestly formation?

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Rooted in Vatican II

The proximate roots for the current magisterial emphasis on a “new evangelization” are located in the rationale and documents of Vatican II. The Council was called out of a sense that an authentic renewal of the Church’s life was necessary in order to more effectively communicate to the modern world the saving message of Christ.

As Cardinal Avery Dulles has pointed out, there was a significant shift in emphasis from Vatican I to Vatican II:

A simple word count indicates the profound shift in focus. Vatican I, which met from 1869-1870, used the term gospel (evangelium) only once and never used the terms evangelize and evangelization. Less than a century later, Vatican II mentioned the gospel 157 times and used the verb evangelize eighteen times and the noun evangelization thirty-one times. When it spoke of evangelization, Vatican II generally meant the proclamation of the basic Christian message of salvation through Jesus Christ.¹

When Pope John XXIII convened the Council he stated that its purpose was not to define new understandings of doctrine or issue condemnations but rather to find a way of presenting the perennial truth of the gospel in a more effective way to a world that was turning away from the

¹ Avery Dulles “John Paul II and the New Evangelization: What does it Mean?” in ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization* (Cincinnati: Servant/St. Anthony, 2006), 4.

Church. He also knew that an action of God was necessary to generate such renewal and so asked the entire Church to pray for a “new Pentecost.” The contemporary presentation of the gospel and the truths that flow from the gospel that one finds in the sixteen documents of Vatican II is characterized by a more biblical, Christ centered, pastorally oriented shaping of the message than had sometimes been the case in previously more philosophical, authority focused, canonically accented, magisterial documents. There is also a more explicit recognition of the work of the Spirit in renewal and evangelization. The documents of Vatican II are characterized by a reshaping of Catholic doctrine around the framework of a “hierarchy of truths”² (emphasis on the more foundational truths, while not denying the importance and relevance of less foundational truths) which had been prepared for by a theological and scriptural renewal that had taken place in the preceding decades. As John Paul II put it in *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer)³, the somewhat separate and isolated branches of theology find a new integration in Vatican II:

The so called return or “repatriation” of the missions into the Church’s mission, the insertion of missiology (in original) into ecclesiology (in original), and the integration of both areas into the Trinitarian plan of salvation, have given a fresh impetus to missionary activity itself, which is not considered a marginal task for the Church but is situated at the center of her life, as a fundamental commitment of the whole People of God. (RM, 32)

² Vatican II, *Unitatis redintegratio*, (Decree on Ecumenism), 11.

³ Magisterial documents will be identified in the text by their Latin name and English translation the first time they are cited. Afterward they will be referenced in the text by the initials of their Latin name, followed by the section number in which the citation occurs.

Lumen gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), from Vatican II, considered to be the most influential and foundational of the sixteen documents, presents a vision of evangelization, to be participated in by every member, as essential to the Church's mission.

As he had been sent by the Father, the Son himself sent the apostles (cf. Jn. 20:21) saying, "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world" (Mt. 28:18-20). The Church has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles, and she must fulfill it to the very ends of the earth By her proclamation of the Gospel, she draws her hearers to receive and profess the faith, she prepares them for baptism snatches them from the slavery of error, and she incorporates them into Christ so that in love for him they grow to full maturity Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his ability. (LG, 17)

The "great commissions" of Matthew 28 and Mark 16 are cited numerous times throughout the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents.

Ad gentes divinitus (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity) provides a theologically impressive and inspiring call to proclaim the gospel to every creature. The Council "wishes to unite the efforts of all the faithful, so that the people of God, following the narrow way of the cross, might everywhere spread the kingdom of Christ . . . and prepare the way for his coming." (AG, 1; see also AG, 23, 35-36))

Apostolicam actuositatem (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity) strongly and repeatedly teaches: “On all Christians, accordingly, rests the noble obligation of working to bring all men throughout the whole world to hear and accept the divine message of salvation.” (AA, 3)

Initial Confusion

For the first decade after Vatican II the main focus of many leaders seemed to be on issues such as the sharing of power within the Church, the setting up of consultative bodies such as parish and diocesan councils, the implementation of a vernacular liturgy, the turn towards Christian unity, dialogue with non-Christian religions, and dialogue with the modern world.

It wasn't until 1975 and the publication of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World) that some of the most foundational themes of Vatican II came to the fore. Both Paul VI and John Paul II often summarized the deepest purpose of the Council as renewal for the sake of evangelization. As Paul VI stated it, the purposes of the Council “are definitively summed up in this single one: to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the gospel to the people of the twentieth century” (EN, 2). They identified renewal in holiness as the primary renewal that the Council called for, and the primary outward fruit of such holiness, a “new evangelization.”

As John Paul put it:

“The call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness . . . *The universal call to holiness* (in original) is closely linked to the *universal call to mission* (in original). Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission.” (RM, 90)

What is Evangelization?

Evangelization, as understood in the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents, sometimes has a very broad meaning which includes all the implications of the church's work and influence, including the implications of Christian conversion for the transformation of culture and the embodiment of Christian values in political and economic life. At the same time, the core meaning of evangelization is always clearly identified in the documents as conversion to Christ.

Starting with the documents of Vatican II, and continuing with the subsequent pontifical documents on evangelization, the contemporary magisterial documents have been remarkably consistent in insisting on the priority of direct proclamation with a view toward conversion.

Paul VI made this point strongly in *On Evangelization in the Modern World*.

“There can be no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God are not proclaimed.” (EN, 22)

“Evangelization will also always contain – as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.” (EN, 27)

John Paul II continued this emphasis on the priority of direct proclamation in the document explicitly devoted to the mission of lay people, *Christifideles Laici* (The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People):

“The ‘good news’ is directed to stirring a person to a conversion of heart and life and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to disposing a person to receive Baptism and the Eucharist and to strengthen a person in the prospect and realization of new life according to the Spirit.” (CL, 33)

“Preaching constitutes the Church’s first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the kingdom in individuals and in human society.” (RM, 20)

“Jesus’ encounters with Gentiles make it clear that entry into the kingdom comes through faith and conversion (cf. Mk 1:15), and not merely by reason of ethnic background.” (RM, 13)

“The proclamation of the Word of God has *Christian conversion* (in original) as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith . . . Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.” (RM, 46)

Benedict XVI has continued this interpretation of the Council and this strong call to evangelization. Drawing heavily from both Paul VI’s and John Paul II’s documents on evangelization Benedict continues to affirm the call of every Catholic to evangelization.

The universal mission should become a fundamental constant in the life of the Church. Proclamation of the Gospel must be for us, as it was for the Apostle Paul, a primary and unavoidable duty (in original) . . . I would “confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church” (Evangeliū Nuntiandi, n. 14), a duty and a mission which the widespread and profound changes in present-day society render ever more urgent. At stake is the eternal salvation of persons, the goal and the fulfillment of human history and the universe. (*Message for World Mission Day*, October 2009, 3-4)

These papal post-Conciliar interpretations of Vatican II with their strong emphasis on evangelization are not simply “reading into” Vatican II a desired emphasis for the challenges of today, but are indeed a discernment of its deepest thrust.

What is the new evangelization?

Starting in 1983 Pope John Paul II began to frequently refer to a “new evangelization.” He made it clear that he wasn’t calling for a new gospel, but a new effort, characterized by new “ardor, methods, and expression,”⁴ and directed in a new way, not only to those who have never heard the gospel before, the traditional “mission territories” but now also to the lukewarm and de-Christianized traditionally Christian Western nations.

The new evangelization does not consist of a ‘new gospel’ Neither does it involve removing from the Gospel whatever seems difficult for the modern mentality to accept The new evangelization has as its point of departure the certitude that in Christ there are ‘inexhaustible riches’ (Eph. 3:8) which no culture nor era can exhaust These riches are, first of all, Christ himself, his person, because he himself is our salvation.⁵

He distinguished “primary evangelization” directed towards those who have never heard the gospel before, “pastoral care” directed towards those who were living as believers, and “new evangelization or re-evangelization” directed towards those from traditionally Christian culture or backgrounds “where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even

⁴ John Paul II, “The Task of the Latin American Bishop,” *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983): 659-62.

⁵ John Paul II, “Address to Bishops of Latin America,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, English Language Edition, October 21, 1992.

no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.” (RM, 33)

The Urgency of a New Evangelization

As John Paul II published his “vision or mission statement” for the Catholic Church as it entered the new millennium, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (At the Beginning of a New Millennium), he cited the collapse of Christian society as a primary reason for the need for a new evangelization.

To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be ‘servants of the Word’ in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium. Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a ‘Christian society’ which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of ‘globalization’ and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16) (NMI, 40)

The collapse of Christian society is being experienced in the Catholic Church as a “wake-up call” to the need for a renewal of fervor, both for holiness and for evangelization, rooted in the continuing reality of Pentecost.

Whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing . . . are now put to a hard test Certainly the command of Jesus: ‘Go and preach the Gospel’ always maintains its vital value and its ever-pressing obligation. Nevertheless, the *present situation* (in original), not only of the world but also of many parts of the Church, *absolutely demands that the word of Christ receive a more ready and generous obedience* (in original). Every disciple is personally called by name: no disciple can withhold making a response: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (I Cor 9:16). (CL, 33-34)

New evangelization . . . is firstly a maternal reaction of the Church to the weakening of the faith and obscuring of the demands of the Christian moral life in the conscience of her children. Many of the baptized live in a world indifferent to religion. While maintaining a certain faith, these practically live a form of religious and moral indifferentism, alienated from Word and sacraments which are essential for the Christian life. There are others, although born of Christian parents and baptized, who have never received a foundation in the faith and live in practical atheism. The Church looks on all of these with love and is particularly sensitive to the pressing duty to draw these people to

that ecclesial communion where, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, they rediscover Jesus Christ and the Father.”⁶

The Urgency of Lay Evangelization

Since a primary role of the priest is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” (Eph. 4: 12) it is important in order to fulfill this role that the priest is as well grounded in the theology of the laity as he is in the theology of orders. This obviously has implications for priestly formation. The role of the priest is not to carry out the mission of the Church all by himself but to activate baptized Catholics into lives of holiness and mission. The “new evangelization” must involve a priestly awakening to a deeper understanding of the role of priestly leadership in equipping and empowering lay holiness and mission.⁷

There has been a tendency, however, in Post-Vatican II Catholicism to drift into an understanding of this call to lay mission that diverges significantly from what the documents actually say.⁸ On the one hand, there has been a tendency to interpret the call to apostolate as a call to “power sharing” and assign roles to lay-people within the Church that aren’t really evangelistic. A lot of the focus has been, and continues to be, on lay-people becoming “active” within the church, i.e. doing readings at Mass, becoming “extraordinary” ministers of the

⁶ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium*, March 19, 1999.

⁷ Deacon James Keating has published several articles that touch on the relationship between clergy and laity. “Priestly Spirituality, Seminary Formation, and lay Mission” in *Seminary Journal*, Fall 2007; “How can Catholic Spirituality be More at the Heart of Priestly Formation,” *Seminary Journal*, Winter 2005, and “Sharing in the Pastoral Charity of Christ: Priestly Formation as Spirituality,” *Seminary Journal*, Winter 2008.

⁸ This is just one instance of much more serious doctrinal confusions that have undermined the call to evangelization in the Catholic Church, which the post-Conciliar documents also frequently address. Some of these doctrinal confusions are addressed in two chapters of the book, Ed. Steven Boguslawski and Ralph Martin, *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*. Chapters 2 and 3, by Cardinal Dulles and myself, address some of these doctrinal confusions.

Eucharist, and giving Communion, joining parish councils, serving on committees, etc. In reaction to this there has been a more recent corrective in an attempt to keep the roles of priests and laity distinct that points out that the specific nature of the lay apostolate (“apostolate” is a term normally used in these documents in a sense equivalent to “mission”) is “secular” and should focus on the influence on culture and politics through promoting Christian values. This emphasis on the secular quality of lay mission is usually silent about the responsibility to directly speak to people about Christ, with a view towards conversion.

The actual documents, however, could not be clearer, and more balanced on these points.

The *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* identifies three fields of lay participation in the mission of the Church. 1. The mission of evangelization and sanctification. 2. The mission of renewing the temporal order. 3. The mission of mercy and charity. And while this document, and others, identifies the lay-person’s unique presence in the secular order as irreplaceable, it goes on to make some remarkable statements about the priority of direct evangelization precisely in the secular environments which laypersons inhabit.

The Church’s mission is concerned with the salvation of men; and men win salvation through the grace of Christ and faith in him. The apostolate of the Church therefore, and of each of its members, aims primarily at announcing to the world by word and action the message of Christ and communicating to it the grace of Christ Laymen have countless opportunities for exercising the apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very witness of a Christian life, and good works done in a supernatural spirit, are effective in drawing men to the faith and to God This witness of life, however, is not

the sole element in the apostolate; the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers to draw them towards the faith, or to the faithful to instruct them, strengthen them, and incite them to a more fervent life (AA, 6)

The documents make clear that even if a layperson's primary field of mission is in the political, economic or social sphere or in doing works of charity, he or she continues to have an obligation to directly proclaim Christ by word, with a view towards leading others to conversion or deeper faith.

This apostolate . . . must not exclude any good, spiritual or temporal, that can be done for them. Genuine apostles are not content, however, with just this: they are earnest also about revealing Christ by word to those around them. It is a fact that many men cannot hear the Gospel and come to acknowledge Christ except through the laymen they associate with." (AA, 13)

As John Paul II put it, "The Council . . . has written as never before on the nature, dignity, spirituality, mission and responsibility of the lay faithful." (CL, 2, 9)ⁱ

The Council went beyond previous interpretations [of the lay faithful] which were predominantly negative. Instead it opened itself to a decidedly positive vision and displayed a basic intention of asserting *the full belonging of the lay faithful to the Church and to its mystery* (in original) sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. (CL, 9)

And the “especially urgent invitation” that the Council has issued to the lay faithful is finding a response. Often “repressed and buried” Christian powers are coming to life. (CL, 2, 23) “The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life Above all, there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians* (in original), for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.” (RM, 2)

As Cardinal Avery Dulles evaluated this development:

In my judgment the evangelical turn in the ecclesial vision of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II is one of the most surprising and important developments in the Catholic Church since Vatican II All of this constitutes a remarkable shift in the Catholic tradition Today we seem to be witnessing the birth of a new Catholicism that, without loss of its institutional, sacramental, and social dimensions, is authentically evangelical Catholic spirituality at its best has always promoted a deep personal relationship with Christ. In evangelizing we are required to raise our eyes to him and to transcend all ecclesiocentrism. The Church is of crucial importance but is not self-enclosed. It is a means of drawing the whole world into union with God through Jesus Christ Too many Catholics of our day seem never to have encountered Christ. They know a certain amount about him from the teaching of the Church, but they lack direct personal familiarity The first and highest priority is for the Church to proclaim the good news concerning Jesus Christ as a joyful message to all the world. Only if the Church is faithful to its evangelical mission can it hope

to make its distinctive contribution in the social, political, and cultural spheres.⁹

As John Paul II put it in his 1990 Encyclical on evangelization, *Mission of the Redeemer*:

“I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.” (RM, 3)

Implementation

For many centuries the predominant understanding of Catholics in the “first world” was that evangelization was something that especially dedicated people did (priests, nuns, and the occasional professional lay missionary), in the “third world.” But as Pope John Paul II has pointed out, the territory that an average Catholic parish covers in Europe or North America or Australia, for example, now may include people from different cultures and religions who have never heard the gospel before, as well as people who perhaps come from “Christian backgrounds” but no longer follow Christ, and an even smaller number of those who actually live as disciples. In other words, “primary evangelization,” “new evangelization or re-evangelization” and “pastoral care” are all now part of the average Catholic pastor’s job description although few have been re-written to adequately express the new situation, nor has seminary training fully grasped the implications for the needed revision in preparation for ordination.

⁹ Avery Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization” in Avery Dulles, *Church and Society* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) , 96-100.

The Code of Canon Law makes clear that the pastor of the parish is responsible for all those who live within its boundaries, not just the “practicing Catholics.”

“The Pastor . . . is to make every effort with the aid of the Christian faithful, to bring the gospel message also to those who have ceased practicing their religion or who do not profess the true faith.” (Canon 528)

While implementation of the new evangelization on the parish level is just at its beginning stages, there has been a very widespread acceptance of the need for a new evangelization in leadership circles. Many bishops and bishops’ conferences have affirmed the need for a new evangelization, and have issued pastoral letters to that effect, faced as they are, with declining membership and the growth of a hostile culture in the Christian “heartlands.” Given the general aging of the Catholic priesthood in the United States, Canada, Europe and Oceania, along with greatly reduced numbers, there is generally little energy or time to reflect on the change of mentality that is needed to address the new situation of de-Christianization. Calls to a “new evangelization” are generally perceived by over-worked clergy as a demand to add just another burden to their already overburdened responsibilities. It is generally seen as another burden, perhaps to be satisfied, by appointing a committee, or in a few cases, hiring an “evangelist,” or occasionally holding special evangelization events.

Clearly what Vatican II and the recent Popes have been calling for is not satisfied by such steps, as useful as they may be. As John Paul II put it in talking about the need to recover the fire of the early Church following Pentecost if the new evangelization is to be effective:

This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of ‘specialists’ but must involve the responsibility of

all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups. (NMI, 40)

The message here is that the call to evangelization is addressed to each Christian and can't be delegated to "specialists" or committees. Obviously the role of the priest is absolutely crucial in teaching lay Catholics the reality of their call to holiness and evangelization, instructing them in their meaning, and guiding them in their mission. Nor is it adequate to occasionally have special evangelization events, as useful as they may be. What is being called for and what is necessary is evangelization becoming part of the baptized Catholic's fundamental identity and part of their everyday way of life.

It is clear that for many who bear the name of Catholic a more "genuine contact with Christ" is needed for such a call to evangelization to even begin to make sense. Paul VI makes clear that evangelization needs to start with the Church itself.

Even for those who are considered "devout" Catholics, a real conversion is needed, to seeing themselves not just as concerned with their own holiness and works of Christian service but consumed with a passion to share Christ with others.

For this, of course, a "new Pentecost" is needed, appropriated on a personal level.¹⁰

Here and there priests and parishes have made the transition from "maintenance to mission" and developed a more evangelistic mentality as part of the fabric of Catholic parish life.¹¹

¹⁰ Dr. Mary Healy's essays in this volume touch on the need for a new Pentecost.

From my own vantage point as a lay person teaching in a Catholic seminary, Sacred Heart Major Seminary in the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit (www.shms.edu) and leading a Catholic evangelization ministry that is worldwide in scope (www.renewalministries.net) I see many encouraging signs.

A number of years ago the Archbishop of Detroit at that time, Cardinal Adam Maida, decided that a serious enough institutional response to the call of John Paul II to a “new evangelization” had not yet been made. He decided to refocus the mission of the seminary (Sacred Heart Major Seminary) and give it a new motto: “Preparing Heralds for the New Evangelization.” Bishop Allen Vigneron, at that time Rector, (and now our Archbishop) and Fr. Steven Boguslwaski O.P. at that time Academic Dean (and now President of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington D.C.) were entrusted with implementing the reorientation. That is what we are attempting to do with our approximately 100 seminarians and 350 lay students. Over a period of years we introduced some basic courses on the theology, spirituality, and pastoral practices of evangelization, along with opportunities for “hands on” experience. These courses have been introduced into all our graduate level degree programs, including our S.T.L. The S.T.L. (Licentiate in Sacred Theology) is a Pontifical Degree that we offer through the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (The Angelicum) in Rome. The S.T.L. degree at Sacred Heart is a degree in Pastoral Theology with a focus on the “new evangelization.”

In our work in Renewal Ministries we are heavily engaged in television and radio evangelization as well as ongoing mission work in partnership with nationals in more than 25

¹¹ A book which is sensitive to the actual situation of Catholic parishes today and the challenge of moving from “maintenance to mission” is *From Maintenance to Mission*, Fr. Robert Rivers (New York: Paulist Press, 2005). Also, the book edited by myself and Peter Williamson, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization*, (Cincinnati: Servant/St. Anthony, 2006) contains many chapters that demonstrate an unfolding of the “new evangelization” in a variety of parish settings and mission contexts.

countries. We are seeing a great openness to the reality of the “new Pentecost” and the flowering of a “new evangelization” in many of these countries and promising partnerships among clergy and laity as well. On a number of these mission trips we are able to bring along seminarians whose horizons are greatly expanded.

There is a long way to go, but we have begun.
