

What Are Characteristics Of The New Evangelization?

By Dave Nodar

In Pope John Paul II's encyclicals, speeches and other writings he uses the term new evangelization. Catholics as well as other Christians have been intrigued and interested in his frequent use of this term. What is he referring to and what are characteristics of this new evangelization'?

According to the pope, "The expression New Evangelization was popularized in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI *Evangelization in the Modern World*, as a response to the new challenges-that the contemporary world creates for the mission of the Church."¹ Pope John Paul II sees the need for a "great relaunching" of evangelization in the present life of the Church in a variety of ways.² In *Mission of The Redeemer (Redemptoris Missio)*, John Paul II presents a new synthesis of the Church's teaching about evangelization in modern times.

The pope's call to a new evangelization is a prophetic and revolutionary calling to the Roman Catholic Church. As we approach the third millennium, Pope John Paul II is re-directing and re-focusing the Church's priorities. John Paul II proclaims "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."³ The Catholic Church committing all of its energies to a new evangelization and mission to the nations is a radical change in emphasis. The reality is that the vast majority of Catholics (clergy and laity) are not inclined to evangelization. The term, evangelization, itself for most Catholics sounds Protestant. Additionally the Catholic Church is understood by many of her own members, as well as by those outside her life, to be primarily liturgical pastoral and hierarchical. One might argue: "Isn't evangelization and missionary activities something Protestants do?" Yet the Church teaches that she is missionary by her very nature, evangelization is a duty of every Christian.⁴ Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states, "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize. . ."⁵ While the notion of evangelization may seem foreign to Catholics, in light of the times we are living in, the changing world scene, the deterioration of western civilization, and the weak condition of the Church in many parts of the world, Pope John Paul II's urgent call to a new evangelization is imperative. The entire Church must come to embrace this calling and make it a normal part of Catholic life.

When Pope John Paul II uses the term "a new evangelization" he does not mean a new message. "Evangelization cannot be new in its content since its very theme is always the one gospel given in Jesus Christ."⁶ In its writings about evangelization the Church means most fundamentally the proclamation of the basic Christian message: salvation through Jesus Christ.⁷ On this foundation of the basic message of eternal life in God, John Paul II extends the notion of evangelization. He notes that there are a diversity of activities in the Church's one mission. He states that evangelization should not be limited to individual unbelievers but also addressed to non-practicing Christians and to entire cultures (those that need re-evangelizing and those who do not yet believe in Christ).⁸ When the pope talks about evangelization that is new he states "evangelization can be new in its ardor, methods and expression."⁹ It must be adapted to the people of our day.

In *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II sketches out some of the characteristics of the new evangelization. Although this presentation is by no means comprehensive I have attempted to point out some of these characteristics that distinguish the new evangelization.

1. The New Evangelization is Christocentric.

The new evangelization like all evangelization must be founded on the person of Jesus Christ and His gospel. “Evangelization will always contain -- as the foundation, centre and, at the same time, the summit of its dynamism -- a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ . . . salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy.” “The new evangelization,” according to John Paul II, “is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Savior.” This is not new in the Church’s proclamation. However I believe that Pope John Paul I’s constant emphasis and exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord is very significant for the Church at this time in history. It is very easy for us as Catholics to be distracted with the riches that God has given to the Church: her history, apostolic succession, her liturgy, her theology, the church fathers and saints, her art, etc. With so many wonderful treasures we can be, it seems, distracted from the pearl of great price. From the beginning of his papacy’ John Paul II has held the conviction that he is to proclaim, “(the Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, . . . the centre of the universe and of history.”¹² He has helped us to see what is most important both in his encyclicals and in his life.

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Upon the foundation of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, which Pope John Paul II establishes clearly in all of his encyclicals, we can see some other characteristics that distinguish the new evangelization from previous times in history.

2. The New Evangelization is the responsibility of the entire People of God.

In the past (and even presently), for most Catholics evangelization was perceived to be the work of a special group within the Church, e.g., those with a special vocation, missionaries or priests. In the new evangelization, however, it is clear that the call is to the entire people of God. When reading *Redemptoris Missio* it is striking to see the number of times Pope John Paul II states that missionary evangelization is the responsibility and calling of all Christians.”¹³ In the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II says, “I spoke explicitly of the Church’s permanent mission of bringing the gospel to the multitudes. . . who as yet do not know Christ. . . and of the responsibility of the lay faithful in this regard. The mission ad gentes is incumbent upon the entire People of God. . . missionary activity which is carried out in a wide variety of ways, is the task of all the Christian faithful.”¹⁴ “Missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses, and parishes, Church institutions and associations.”

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This is a remarkable shift in emphasis, one that I believe necessitates a pastoral plan by the bishops of the Church for helping the faithful to share in the responsibility of evangelization and the mission ad gentes. In order for all of the Christian faithful to participate in this calling to the new evangelization the reality of the life-changing, gospel message must be experienced as “good news” in each of their lives. The message of the Gospel must be heard, understood, embraced, lived and shared by all members of the Church! In order for this radical shift in emphasis to occur priority must be given to proclaiming regularly and clearly what the message of the new evangelization is.

Within this calling that is proper to all of the Christian faithful, Pope John Paul II makes distinctions of responsibility for bishops, priests, members of religious congregations, missionaries, and the laity.¹⁶ Bishops headed by the Successor of Peter are primarily responsible for work of evangelization. Priests are, by vocation responsible to stir up the missionary consciousness of the faithful. Members of religious congregations because of their consecration give testimony of the values of the Kingdom of God. Laity in their daily environments of family life and the market place have excellent opportunities to be witnesses of the Gospel. With declining number of priestly vocations in countries such as our own the importance of the laity’s responsibility in evangelization cannot be underestimated. In his address to the Latin American Bishops at Port au-Prince, Haiti in March 1983, John Paul II while speaking of the new evangelization noted three aspects which are fundamental to it. The second aspect had to do with the laity. He noted, “not only the lack of priests but also and above all the self - understanding of the church in Latin America, in light of the Second Vatican Council and Puebla, speaks forcefully of the place of the laity in the church and in society “. . . the bishops together with their churches [ought to be] engaged in forming and increasing the number of laity who are ready to collaborate effectively in the work of evangelization.” The laity must be trained and released into the service of evangelization as missionaries of the new evangelization. The Holy Spirit as the principal agent of evangelization and mission is calling all of God’s people to enter the harvest fields.

3. The New Evangelization is not just for the foreign missions

In *Redemptoris Missio*, the pope says that in today’s world from the viewpoint of evangelization we can distinguish three situations that need to be addressed differently. The first is the situation of the mission ad gentes in the proper sense of the term. Bringing the gospel to peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known. “(T)o preach the Gospel and to establish new Churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist, . . . this is the first task of the Church.”¹⁷

Second, there are healthy mature Christian communities that are fervent in their faith, have a sense of the universal mission, and in which the Church carries out her activities and pastoral care. Here he seems to describe a situation that requires pastoral care and not evangelization. Third, there is what the pope calls an intermediate situation. Within countries there are entire groups of the baptized who have lost a living sense of the faith, or no longer consider themselves members of the Church. “In this case what is needed is a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization.”¹⁸ In this third situation people need to be socialized into situations of vibrant faith.¹⁹ Some need their faith to be renewed and enlivened. Others have had little or no training in the Christian faith and essentially need to be evangelized with the basic gospel and receive formation in the faith (catechesis).

In *Redemptoris Missio*, this re-evangelization seems to be primarily what Pope John Paul II refers to when he talks of the new evangelization.

This re-evangelization is no small undertaking for the Catholic Church in the United States and in other countries such as those in central and eastern Europe as well as in Latin America. In our country it is painfully clear that many Catholics (and other Christians) have not been effectively incorporated into life in Christ.

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In the face of directly anti-gospel proclamations that are constantly being proclaimed to Christians in many countries there needs to be the clear proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and his Gospel. People need to be regularly inspired, encouraged and formed in their faith in order to live a Christian lifestyle. (There is the need for orthodoxy and orthopraxy).

Pope John Paul's helps us to distinguish between those situations needing primary evangelization (ad gentes), re-evangelization, or pastoral care. These distinctions are critical to recognize at this point in history. His summons to re-evangelization is an honest and essential assertion by the successor of Peter that must be heeded by the Church. The time is long over due to recognize that evangelization cannot be limited to the mission ad gentes.

4. The New Evangelization is directed to individuals and to whole cultures.

Pope John Paul II teaches that not only individuals but whole cultures need to be transformed by influence of the Gospel. In her missionary activity the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. By inculturation the pope means, "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through the integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures 21 "The new evangelization must strive to incarnate Christian values and open the Gospel message to human cultures. Evangelization according to John Paul should lead to, "a civilization of love." 22

5. The New Evangelization is not limited to the presentation of the basic Gospel message (kerygma) but is a comprehensive process of Christianization.

The proclamation of the Gospel is the essential first step. It is the foundation of a life long process. Evangelization according to the pope also involves catechetical instruction, moral doctrine and the social teaching of the Church. Those who are incorporated into Christ are incorporated into His Body. They are joined to God through the sacraments and the Church community. 23

6. The New Evangelization calls for a missionary spirituality

The basis of sharing the life of Christ with others is life in Christ. We are called to know Christ and to make Him known. The fundamental activity, therefore, of those called to be missionaries is receptivity to God, of complete docility to the Holy Spirit. Receiving is the condition for doing the work of an evangelist. "It is not possible," John Paul II states, "to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit." 24 In order to pass on the Gospel to others it must have first permeated our lives. "An essential characteristic "of this missionary spirituality, the pope tells us," is intimate communion with Christ." 25 John Paul II mentions some other elements of a spirituality that are essential for all those called to be missionaries. Reception of the gifts of fortitude and discernment are essential. "The missionary must

renounce himself and everything that he considered as his own up to this point, and make himself everything to everyone.”²⁶ This spirituality calls us to apostolic charity which enables us “to feel Christ’s burning love for souls, and love the Church as Christ did.”²⁷ Furthermore, John Paul’s exhorts all to the way of holiness: “Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition of everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church. The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission.”²⁸ He also notes, “the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way.”²⁹ The missionary is called to be a “person of the Beatitudes (poverty, meekness, acceptance of suffering and persecution, the desire for justice and peace, charity). He closes his call to a genuine Christian spirituality by telling us. “the characteristic of every authentic missionary life is the inner joy that comes from faith. . . the one who proclaims the”Good News” must be a person who has found true hope in Christ. “ 30

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Pope John Paul II aims the call and the challenge of a new evangelization at each of us. He is practicing what he preaches. Missionary activity, he tells us, “renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive pope’s missionary activity is renewing and revitalizing faith among the faithful! John Paul II is preaching the Gospel to the Church and to the nations. The calling he proclaims is the calling of Christ to his disciples,”come follow me.” The pope is proclaiming the fundamental truths of our faith. He is inviting us to join him on the journey in Christ. For those who would participate in the new evangelization they are called to personal communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. For those who would be missionaries in the new evangelization they must first be disciples of Christ, in living relationship with the Lord and His Church.

Pope John Paul II is helping us to see how we as Catholics can enter into a new evangelization in a way that is consistent with the Church’s teaching and tradition. He also offers to us spiritual perspective that enables us to respond in humility and hope to the difficult times that we live in.

In his call to a new evangelization John Paul II following the directives of Vatican II has helped to focus the Church on some of the crucial priorities necessary for the strengthening and renewal of the Church. Furthermore, I believe that he is proclaiming God’s call to the Church in our day in such a manner as to both address the Church’s past and present difficulties, and to prepare her for the third millennium. “How many internal tensions, which weaken and divide certain local Churches and institutions, would disappear before the firm conviction that the salvation of local communities is procured through cooperation in work for the spread of the Gospel to the farthest bounds of the earth!” ³² “Missionary activity, declares the pope, renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!”³³

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In describing the main orientation of his pontificate Pope John Paul II declared in Mexico City, May 6, 1990, “The Lord and Master of history and of our destinies has wished my pontificate to be that of a pilgrim pope of evangelization walking down the roads of the world bringing to all peoples the message of salvation.”³⁴ Since the beginning of his pontificate the Pope has taken over eighty missionary trips! He is personally committed to the priority of evangelization and the mission to the nations. He is leading the people of God into the third millennium with the conviction that the ‘nineties’ are an extended season of advent leading us to the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation. He believes that this new evangelization is very much tied up with “entering a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young Churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time.”³⁵

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Endnotes:

1. John Paul II, *Crossing The Threshold of Hope* (Knopf: New York 1994) p 114.
2. *ibid.*, p.113
3. *Redemptoris Missio*, 3
4. *Lumen Gentium* 16-17; *Ad gentes*, 2, 23 35
5. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14
6. “The Task of the Latin American bishops”, *Origins* 12 (March 24, 83)p. 659-62 - This speech may be the first time that JP II uses the term new evangelization.
7. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 18,; *Dives in Misericordia* 7; *Lumen Gentium* 1
8. *Redemptoris Missio*, 33, 37,
9. “The Task of the Latin American Bishops” *Origins* 12 (March 24. ‘83)p. 661
10. *Redemptoris Missio*, 44; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 27
11. Commissioning of Families of the Neo-Catechumenal way, Jan 3.1991. *Observatore Romano* (Eng. ed.) Jan.14,1991, p.12 noted in Dulles Avery S.J. “JP II and the New Evangelization”. *America*, Feb 1.”⁹²
12. *Redemptoris Hominis*. I
13. *Redemptoris Missio*, 1,2,3,11,23,27,30,32,37,42, 47,49, 71,72,92
14. *Redemptoris Missio*,71
15. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2
16. *Redemptoris Missio*, 63-76
17. *Redemptoris Missio*, 34
18. *Redemptoris Missio*, 33
19. *Redemptoris Missio*, 51
20. *Redemptoris Missio*, 36; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* .See 52 54 & 56
21. *Redemptoris Missio*, 52
22. *Redemptoris Missio*, 51
23. *Redemptoris Missio*,51
24. *Redemptoris Missio*, 87
25. *ibid.*, 87
26. *Redemptoris Missio*, 88 *Ad Gentes* 24

27. *ibid.*, 89
28. *ibid.*, 90
29. *ibid.*, 91 I
30. *ibid.*, 91
31. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2
32. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2 Paul VI, Message for World Mission Day. 1972
33. *Redemptoris Missio*, 2
34. Text in *Origins*. vol. 20, May 24, 1990
35. *Redemptoris Missio*, 92

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http://www.christlife.org/evangelization/articles/C_newevan.html

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Diocese of Peterborough and the new evangelization. THE PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY: To gather information on what our parishes are doing in the way of New Evangelization. Information will be used to help the Bishop of Peterborough understand the range of needs, desires and opportunities in the area of the New Evangelization. Please note that there are no right or wrong, correct or incorrect, answers to the questions that follow. We are simply trying to listen to what people are saying about important matters in the Church today, especially in regard to evangelism. Please be honest in your replies; What Is The New Evangelization? By Greg Willits We were having dinner with several other Catholics last summer, when my wife Jennifer posed the question, "What's the first thing you think when you hear the phrase new evangelization?" Around the table, everyone nodded in agreement with the hypothesis that, even though the phrase is frequently used in the Catholic Church and. The fact of the matter is that the new evangelization includes each of these approaches, and many more. With so many possibilities, coming up with a concise definition for such an important topic might cause additional trepidation for someone who is already apprehensive about any form of evangelization, new or old. Recent papers in New Evangelization, Methods for Evangelization. Papers. People. DEACONS AS APOSTLES FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION - Thesis for the Josephinum MAPS degree 06.01. More effective use of Catholic Deacons in the New Evangelization. Save to Library. Download. by Stephen Hilker. 2. New Evangelization, Methods for Evangelization, Permanent Deacon. Abstract - the role of catholic marian shrines in the diocese of Malolos in view of the new evangelization. Seen as a local Church that flocks for celebrations of the Mass across parishes around the country, this theological work explains the more.