

PART I

Theological Summary of the New Evangelization

“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.”⁶ In his very first general audience, Pope Francis challenged all the baptized to “move beyond a dull or mechanical way of living our faith, and instead open the doors of our hearts, our lives, our parishes, our movements or associations, going out in search of others so as to bring them the light and the joy of our faith in Christ.”⁷ Intensifying our lived faith and opening ourselves and our faith communities more fully to all people—especially in our parishes, schools, and other ministries—are the goals at the heart of the New Evangelization. As the preparatory document for the Synod on the New Evangelization said, it is no longer time for us as Church to be about “business as usual.”⁸ To take up the challenge of Pope Francis, we must be missionary disciples, called to witness to Christ in every aspect of our lives.

What Is Evangelization?

The mission of evangelization is concisely summarized in the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis statement, *Disciples Called to Witness*:

The Church’s *ad gentes* (“to the world”) mission given to her by Christ is the proclamation of the Good News to those who do not know him. The historical and social circumstances of the twentieth century prompted the Church to renew her mission to evangelize. This renewed vision of evangelization includes, as Pope Benedict XVI has stated, the challenge to “propose anew” the Good News to all of the Christian faithful, most especially to those of the faithful who are absent from the Lord’s Table.⁹

Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that “the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus, which we have received, the experience of salvation, which urges us to even greater love of him.”¹⁰ The proclamation (*kerygma*) of the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the Kingdom of God is at the core of evangelization.¹¹ “Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us.”¹² This love that comes from the risen Christ cannot be confined within the believer or the community of faith, the Church. “Faith becomes operative in the Christian on the basis of the gift received, the love which attracts our hearts to Christ (cf. Gal 5:6), and enables us to become part of the Church’s great pilgrimage through history until the end of the world. For those who have been transformed in this way, a new way of seeing opens up, faith becomes light for their eyes.”¹³ All the baptized are part of the Church’s mission of evangelization.

“To evangelize, one bears witness to God’s Revelation in Jesus through the Holy Spirit by living a life imbued with Christian virtues, by proclaiming unceasingly that salvation is offered to all people through the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and by preaching hope in God’s love for us.”¹⁴

Who Is Called to Evangelize?

All who are baptized are called to evangelize because “when the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment.”¹⁵ The evangelizing efforts of the baptized are not simply focused on those who have not heard of Christ. They are also directed toward our brothers and sisters who no longer join us around the Lord’s table. Furthermore, the baptized disciple of Christ is also continually evangelized through ongoing renewal of faith and living out that same faith. This is accomplished particularly through regular and frequent participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. This sacramental life fully lived leads the baptized disciple to share the virtues of faith, hope, and charity as one sent by Christ into a world in need of his transforming love. The parish community should furthermore nourish the baptized as “evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.”¹⁶

What Is the New Evangelization?

While the need for a renewed evangelization of the baptized was first formally articulated by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and stems back to the calling of the Second Vatican Council, it was St. John Paul II who, in 1983, formally called this pastoral strategy the “new evangelization.” This New Evangelization is new, not in the content of the message of the Gospel, but in its “ardor, methods, and expression”¹⁷ and its audience, namely those communities and peoples in the West who once bore the name Catholic but no longer do. This is precisely the point made by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 when he called for a “renewed evangelization” and “finding appropriate means to propose anew the perennial truth of Christ’s Gospel”¹⁸ to those in need of evangelization, both those who are already baptized but have left the practice of the faith and those who have yet to hear the message of the Gospel. “He clarified that the New Evangelization is new, not in content but rather in its inner thrust; new in its methods that must correspond to the times; and new because it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel to those who have already heard it.”¹⁹

The New Evangelization is a call for all of us to have a deeper encounter with Christ, best expressed in a simple, confident, informed, and joyous witness to the faith, which attracts others and invites them to wonder what secret is motivating the Christian disciple. Pope Francis affirms that the New Evangelization is a “summons addressed to all”²⁰ and connects this inner thrust with an outward movement of all the baptized as missionary disciples. “In our day Jesus’ command to ‘go and make disciples’ echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth.’”²¹ Our time should be as Pope Francis says, “a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!”²²

The New Evangelization: Renewal and Conversion

The work of the New Evangelization invites the baptized to renew their own faith in a way that leads to the evangelization of others—ultimately transforming our culture with the love of the Lord and his teaching. Personal faith renewal is a continual process of conversion, a journey

deeper into an ever-new life of faith. It is fundamental to the work of the New Evangelization. The goal of the New Evangelization, however, is always geared toward others. By the work of the Holy Spirit, each baptized person is continually encountering Christ in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as well as in the Sacred Scriptures and other people. After reflecting, praying, and experiencing a deep conversion and renewed confidence in the gospel message, a follower of Christ goes outward to evangelize others. The evangelized becomes the evangelizer. This involves outreach to those inactive in their faith, as well as embracing the mission *ad gentes* (to the nations). A community of renewed believers continues to go outward, ultimately leading to the evangelization of society and culture. Evangelizing the culture furthermore involves bringing the gift of *communio* (communion) to secularism, relativism, materialism, and individualism. As Pope Francis teaches, our life of faith calls us to work toward transforming the world. “Faith is truly a good for everyone; it is a common good. Its light does not simply brighten the interior of the Church, nor does it serve solely to build an eternal city in the hereafter; it helps us build our societies in such a way that they can journey toward a future of hope.”²³

“If it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.”²⁴ The work of the New Evangelization is done primarily through the witness of faith by the baptized in their everyday lives. “A Christian life lived with charity and faith is the most effective form of evangelization.”²⁵ We cannot give what we do not have. Therefore, cultivating a life of faith is essential to helping others to do so.

The work of the New Evangelization also invites the Church as a whole to ever-deeper renewal—a call to move from maintenance to mission.²⁶ As Pope Francis teaches, “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.”²⁷ Let us, therefore, envision and pray about ways of renewing the culture of faith within our own parishes and communities. Let us continue to create communities where those who have been renewed can find continued nourishment and strength in their journey of faith.

A Deeper Encounter with Christ: Formation for Discipleship

The work of the Holy Spirit permeates all of the work of the evangelization. The task of evangelization is ongoing and sustained by the Holy Spirit who leads a person to a life of passion and holiness culminating in a world transformed by Jesus Christ. Missionary discipleship takes place within the context of evangelization and begins with an encounter with Christ. We look to Jesus, the Master who personally formed his apostles and disciples, as the model of evangelization. Christ gives us the method: “Come and see” (Jn 1:46), “Follow me” (Mt 9:9), “Remain in me” (Jn 15:4), and “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). The method includes *encounter*, *accompany*, *community*, and *send*. This method is formation for missionary discipleship. It leads the believer to become a disciple and from there for the disciple to become a missionary.

“Do not be afraid! When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: ‘I am with you always’ (Mt 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus never leaves anyone alone! He always accompanies us.”²⁸ What awakens the disciple is an encounter with Jesus Christ, who accompanies the person, calls to community, and then sends the disciple on mission to the world. The remainder of this section will examine the *encounter*, *accompany*, *community*, and *send* methodology of missionary discipleship formation.

1. Encounter

The purpose of evangelization is to lead people to encounter Christ.

Encounter Jesus Christ

The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.²⁹

This personal encounter is the key event in the life of every disciple that changes the direction of life, as we see happen so often in the lives of