

John Paul II and the “New Evangelization”:

Origins and Meaning

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Abstract: The key reference point for the new evangelization is the encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II. In order to better understand this document this paper argues that it needs to be discussed in the light of a historical continuum starting with the documents of the Second Vatican Council and continuing through postconciliar writings such as Pope Paul VI’s apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The new evangelization is John Paul’s conception is a response to new cultural realities. In this regard, it an example of the Catholic understanding of tradition as both conserving the essentials of the past as well as responding to new situations and challenges. In John Paul II thought the new evangelization expresses a Pauline emphasis on inner conversion to Christ as a basis for outreach to others and to the wider culture.

Introduction

For Pope John Paul II, this new phase of evangelization was not new in the sense of being an innovation that moved beyond the Church’s traditional mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all nations. However, a renewed focus on evangelization emerged from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and in the social reality of many countries such as Australia.¹ Pope John Paul II identified three elements in the Church’s commitment to evangelization. The first was the essential missionary focus of the Church on proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to those who have not

¹Avery Dulles. *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 144-149.

heard it.² This remains the proper, or classical, sense of the term. The second element focused on those with strong Christian affiliation who were “fervent in their faith and Christian living”.³ However, there was a third, intermediary element, it is from here that the new evangelization takes its meaning.

Particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his gospel. In this case what is needed is a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization”.⁴

The Pope’s understanding of evangelization is encapsulated in *Redemptoris Missio*. In his view evangelization is fundamental to the Church’s mission and has its origins in the Trinity itself.⁵ It is always focused on faith in and a personal encounter with Christ, and this results in a profound experience of conversion.⁶ Evangelization is the task of the entire Church and is concretely located in the activity of the local Church.⁷ Finally evangelization seeks to engage and transform culture, takes place in a variety of contexts and should, therefore, be creative in a bold range of expressions so as to address new situations.⁸ In order to better understand the teaching contained in *Redemptoris Missio*. It is necessary to explore the document and how it emerged from a renewed sense of evangelization first spelled out in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and developed especially by Pope Paul VI.

² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, in J. Michael Miller (Ed) *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, (Huntington, Indiana; Our Sunday Visitor Inc, 1996). Church is used to signify the Catholic Church unless otherwise stated.

³ RM, 33.2.

⁴ RM, 33.3.

⁵ RM, 46.

⁶ RM, 41-49.

⁷ RM, 72.

⁸ RM, 32.

From Vatican II to Pope John Paul II'S New Evangelization

Schindler argued that the intellectual origins of the new evangelization can be traced to John Paul II's Christocentric reading of *Gaudium et Spes*.⁹ In the Pope's anthropology, each person is created in the image and likeness of God. Thus, each one has inalienable rights and inviolable dignity.¹⁰ The fundamental task of the Church is to promote and defend this dignity at every opportunity. Dulles described this vision of John Paul II as a prophetic humanism, "the central and unifying task of the Church, for John Paul II, is to rediscover and promote the inviolable dignity of every human person".¹¹ Although many are immersed in cultures which do not value the transcendent, people of today cannot avoid profound the existential questions that emerge in their search for meaning and purpose.¹² Their searching is rooted in their origins as creatures of God. A sense of unease or incompleteness is part, therefore, of the human condition.¹³ Human history can be seen, then, as a long tale of the search of people for answers about their existence, origins, final destiny and, perhaps most urgently, a clear sense of how to live. For many this search is unfulfilled,

⁹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, in Austin Flannery (Ed), Vatican Council II. The Sixteen Basic Documents, (Northport, N.Y: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). David L. Schindler, Reorienting the Church on the Eve of the Millennium: John Paul II's New Evangelization, *Communio*, 24(Winter), 1997, 729-779. For a sense of how John Paul II interprets *Gaudium et Spes* see John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York: 1994), 48-50.

¹⁰ GS, 12. Dziwisz, remarks that John Paul contribution to the Council was "[the] reassertion of the centrality of the person within a robust Christocentric framework". Stanislaw Dziwisz, *A Life with Karol: My Forty-Year Friendship with the Man Who Became Pope*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 19.

¹¹ Avery Dulles, 'The Prophetic Humanism of John Paul II' in *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), at 142-156, 143.

¹² Kenneth L. Schmitz. *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II*, (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1993); John Saward, *Christ is the Answer: The Christ-Centred Teaching of Pope John Paul II*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

¹³ Robert F. Harvanek. 'The Philosophical Foundations of the Thought of John Paul II', in John M. McDermott (ed), *The Thought of Pope John Paul II: A Collection of Essays and Studies*. (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1993), 1-23, esp. 2-4.

no more so than in the past few centuries when human questioning has often been resolved in violent and contradictory ideologies.

For Pope John Paul II, these existential and unavoidable questions find their ultimate resolution in an encounter with the living Christ, who is preeminently experienced in communion with the Church. In *Gaudium et Spes* this is expressed as Christ uniting himself in some way with every human being.¹⁴ The presence of Christ, therefore, reaches into every aspect of human culture because of the divine identity of each person. To evangelize, then, is not to impose, but seek to address a profound human need, to prove something that is lacking but which is sorely needed. One of the tasks of the Church is to proclaim this message in many situations where culture is seen in far more positivistic terms and where discussion of God is pushed to the margins of public discourse.¹⁵

In its witness to Christ, the Church has a cultural role of synthesis in its effort to relate Christian faith to particular cultures. Nevertheless a genuine synthesis has yet to be achieved.¹⁶ Indeed, in many places, the dominant cultural forces push people further away from the Gospel.¹⁷ This is particularly the case in many western, developed countries despite their ancient Christian traditions, and even in countries such as Australia, despite a period of unprecedented missionary growth in previous centuries. In order to make Christ known, the Church, which of its very nature is missionary, must adopt a new posture with new strategies and approaches compared to more traditional modes of evangelization. In this new approach, responsibility for evangelization is broadened, not to devalue the role of priests and religious,

¹⁴ GS, 22.

¹⁵ GS, 56.

¹⁶ David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future; Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, *Origins* 20, October 4, 1990, 273.

but to include the whole ecclesial community. Hence, the laity have a critical role in the new evangelization.¹⁸ The Pope's renewed emphasis on the evangelizing role of the laity builds on Vatican II's teaching on the mission of the laity as it is expressed in the document, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.¹⁹

The contribution of the laity was further promoted in the apostolic exhortation of 1988, *Christifideles Laici*.²⁰ This document spelled out the role of the laity as integral to the missionary activity of the Church.²¹ The involvement of the laity in "temporal affairs and earthly activities" is seen as essential if the Church is to fulfill its role as a leaven in society.²² To illustrate this point, the scriptural image of "laborers in the vineyard" was used to underline the obligation of all the people of God, not just the clergy and professed religious, to proclaim the Kingdom.²³ The unity of the Church as a communion of individual believers comes from their communion with Christ: "from the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ".²⁴ The ecclesial identity of the laity was underlined by Pope John Paul II when he stressed that being part of this communion was

¹⁸ Giovanni Magnani, Does the So-Called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status? In Rene Latourelle (Ed), *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty Five Years After (1962-1987)*, Volume One, (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 569-633.

¹⁹ Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, in Austin Flannery (Ed), *Vatican Council II. The Sixteen Basic Documents*, (Northport, N.Y: Costello Publishing Company, 1996).

²⁰ Peter V. Hai, 'A Study of John Paul II'S Theology of the Laity in Ecclesia in Asia with Reference to the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences', *Australian EJournal of Theology*, 2007, Pentecost Edition.

²¹ John Paul II Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*. (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1988)

²² CL, 15- 17. See also United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 'Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium'. *Origins*, 10, November 27, 409-415.

²³ CL, 2. At the same time *Christifideles Laici* reiterates the difference between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of all believers see CL, 23. See also Lawrence Jurcak, 'An Apostolic Presbyterate of the New Evangelization', *Seminary Journal*, 2005, 11(1), 79-86.

²⁴ CL, 18. .

both a gift and a task for lay people, one which directs them to a closer union with God.²⁵ This idea recalls the great conciliar theme, spelt out most clearly in *Lumen Gentium*, where all are called to holiness, which is an inner conversion marked by a strong personal relationship with Christ.²⁶ With their communal life centred in Christ, all members of the Church act in the unity of the Holy Spirit in their outreach to the world. *Christifideles Laici* clearly related the common responsibility for mission to an authentic ecclesial existence. The imperative of evangelization flows from membership in the Church, where all share St Paul's sense of the critical nature of their vocation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel".²⁷

Emerging social conditions add critical urgency to the evangelizing responsibility of the laity. In Australia, and many other countries, the numbers of those in ordained ministry or who are professed religious is steadily declining. In addition the connection of many people, including Catholics, to the Church through parish networks is becoming far more tenuous. The people most likely to come into contact with those who have "lost a living sense of the gospel" are lay people in the course of their everyday professional and personal lives. When traditional approaches are proving ineffective, new types of lay associations with a specific evangelical focus are required.²⁸ This aspect of the new evangelization is often discussed, namely the emphasis on using new methods in the task of evangelization.²⁹ In an often reported speech to the bishops of Latin America in Haiti in 1983, John Paul II

²⁵ CL, 20. See also Avery Dulles, 'The Mission of the Laity' in *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 485-497.

²⁶ LG, 78. See also William E. May, 'Evangelization: The Apostolate and the Personal Vocation of Laymen and Women,' in William E May (Ed) *The Church's Mission of Evangelization: Essays in Honour of the Most Reverend Agostino Cacciavillan*, (Steubenville: Franciscan University Press, 1996), 265-286.

²⁷ 1 Cor 9:16.

²⁸ Avery Dulles, 'John Paul II and the New Evangelization', *America*, 166(3) 23-29. 1993.

²⁹ William J. Levada, 'New Evangelization Requires a New Catechesis', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1998, 1543, January 7, 11. (All references to *L' Osservatore Romano* in this thesis are to the English version).

commented on current changed social conditions affecting the Church's mission, and the need to find innovative solutions to these new realities. Evangelization then needs to be renewed in at least three senses; "[in] its ardor, methods and expression".³⁰ One example of this new approach is given in *Christifidiles Laici* where the new media of mass communication is described as an evangelical tool in that it is one way of narrowing the gap between faith and culture.³¹

In his writings on the new evangelization John Paul II made frequent reference to two documents. The first was the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes* (AG).³² Extensive use of this established continuity between the teaching of the Council and his own thought, "on the one hand we can rediscover, and, as it were-read the magisterium of the last Council in the whole previous magisterium of the Church, while on the other we can rediscover and re-read the whole preceding magisterium in that last Council".³³ Miller has noted that a characteristic feature of John Paul II's encyclicals is the manner in which he embedded his teaching in that of the Second Vatican Council. To illustrate this, he noted that in the twelve encyclicals written prior to 1996, John Paul II made over 170 references to *Lumen Gentium* and about 130 to *Gaudium et Spes*.³⁴ The theological orientation of *Ad Gentes* draws heavily on *Lumen Gentium*, in that it sees the Church as a sacrament.³⁵ Based on this sacramental ecclesiology, the first chapter establishes a doctrinal focus for the whole document, and parallels the missionary life and activity of the

³⁰ John Paul II, 'The Task of the Latin American bishops', *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983), 659-62.

³¹ CL, 44. Avery Dulles, *The New World of Faith*, (Huntington, In.: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), 115-117

³² Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, in Austin Flannery (Ed), *Vatican Council II. The Sixteen Basic Documents*, (Northport, N.Y: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 2-5.

³³ John Paul II, *Sources of Renewal, The Implementation of Vatican II*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 40.

³⁴ J. Michael Miller (Ed), *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, (Huntington, In.: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996), 29.

³⁵ AG, 1

Church with the Trinitarian life of God. Just as the life of the Trinity is understood as dynamic movement, the Son and the Spirit being sent by the Father into the world, so the Church looks beyond itself and sends out its members to bring the salvation of Christ to all.³⁶

The central concern of *Redemptoris Missio*, establishing the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, is thus seen as a legitimate development of conciliar teaching, as the Council did not envisage any decrease in missionary fervor in the post conciliar period.³⁷ Indeed in a speech made prior to the Council, Pope John XXIII remarked, "The purpose of the Council is, therefore, evangelization".³⁸ In *Ad Gentes* missionary evangelization is seen as an essential manifestation of ecclesial life, a point captured well in the opening sentence of the document, "the Church on earth is by its very nature missionary".³⁹ In *Ad Gentes* evangelization is never seen as being tangential to the life of the Church, it is always an area of perennial importance.⁴⁰ It cannot then be properly described as an activity undertaken by a small number of specialists, but something which should mark, to some degree, all the people of God. *Ad Gentes* maintains, nonetheless, the traditional conception of Christian mission as an outreach to "two billion people-and their number is increasing day by day - who have never, or barely, heard the gospel message".⁴¹ Seeing the agents of evangelization in wider terms opens up the possibility of viewing mission not as something only directed to the "mission lands" of the third world, but an

³⁶ AG 3.

³⁷ Carl, E. Braaten, 'A Papal Letter on the Church's Missionary Mandate', *Dialog*, 30, 182-183, 1991. Timothy O'Donnell, 'The Crises of Faith and the Theology of Mission: A Reflection on Redemptoris Missio', *Faith and Reason*, 18(3), 5-13, 1992.

³⁸ Quoted in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), vol 1, 439.

³⁹ AG, 2. The New Dictionary of Theology notes that in recent times the discussion of mission has been closely connected with evangelization and "a distinction between the two is often seen as formal and arbitrary, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Eds), (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc, 1987), 664-668. .

⁴⁰ Suso Brechter, 'Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity', in Herbert Vorgrimler (Ed), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1987), Vol IV, 87-183.

⁴¹ AG, 10.

activity which can be carried out wherever Christians find themselves.⁴² As most Christians are not clerics or part of religious congregations which have a particular missionary focus, one of the principal means of evangelization is the witness given by Christians in the conduct of their daily lives. This implicit broadening of the concept of the missionary agent is an important antecedent for the new evangelization, aimed as it is at regions which have a Christian heritage.

For all Christians, wherever they live, are bound to show forth, by the example of their lives and by the witness of the word, that new man put on at baptism and that power of the Holy Spirit by which they have been strengthened at Confirmation. Thus other men, observing their good works, can glorify the Father.⁴³

The second document quoted extensively in *Redemptoris Missio* is the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, which was written in 1975, after the third general assembly of the Synod of Bishops on evangelization.⁴⁴ This is regarded as one of the major documents of the pontificate.⁴⁵ Paul VI set out a number of themes which reappeared in the writings of Pope John Paul II on the new evangelization. Indeed John Paul II acknowledged that the foundation of the new evangelization can be found in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.⁴⁶ The document identifies a group of countries in the western world to which new evangelization is addressed, namely, “ a very large number of baptized people who for

⁴² William R. Burrows, ‘Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity’, in Timothy E. O’Connell (Ed) *Vatican II and its Documents: An American Reappraisal*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986), 180-197.

⁴³ AG, 11.

⁴⁴ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, On Evangelization in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1975).

⁴⁵ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI, the First Modern Pope*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 651.

⁴⁶ “ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. Obtained 5/6/2008 from, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_10111994_tertio-millennio-adveniente_en.html,21

the most part have not formally renounced their baptism but who are indifferent to it”.⁴⁷

Evangelization is seen as central to the Church’s mission and identity, and is a task that brings with it new challenges in contemporary culture:

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.⁴⁸

The centrality of mission is underlined in the first chapter of the document which is entitled, “From Christ the evangelizer to the evangelizing Church”. Christ is portrayed as the template for evangelization, the one who transforms the Church from an evangelized to an evangelizing community. An inseparable link is thereby established between the Church, Christ and evangelization. By identifying the Church with the evangelizing Christ, Pope Paul VI reiterated the Trinitarian nature of mission set out in *Ad Gentes*. He linked evangelization with other essential actions of the Church such as, teaching, reconciling sinners and “perpetuating Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection”.⁴⁹ Evangelization, then, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is a theological and pastoral concept rich with ecclesial and missiological connotations. It is at the heart of the Church’s identity and mission.

Pope Paul VI identified a range of qualities that characterized the evangelizing Church.⁵⁰ A predominant feature is a clear and unambiguous proclamation of Jesus as

⁴⁷ EN, 56.

⁴⁸ EN, 5.

⁴⁹ EN, 4.

⁵⁰ EN, 6-16.

Lord.⁵¹ Evangelization does not, however, stop at this kerygmatic proclamation. It includes dimensions of inner and ongoing transformation.⁵² In this respect, evangelization is not restricted to a historical and temporal project. Its horizon is eschatological in that it connects the person and the community with eternity, a transtemporal realization, as it links the person and the community with the world to come through a profound personal encounter with Christ.

Evangelization is comprehensively person-centred, in its historical and eschatological range. Here, Pope Paul VI appealed to the exemplary character of Jesus' own ministry. In the conduct of his ministry, Jesus encountered people from all walks of life—in this way evoking something of the mission of the laity in the Church's mission to the world. The ecclesial vocation of the laity positions them in a world of limitless contacts often beyond the direct influence of the ordained ministry. In his concern to privilege the secular involvement of the laity, he wrote: "Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization".⁵³ Whilst not denying the importance of ordained ministry or the witness of the consecrated life of religious communities, Paul VI's strong emphasis on the laity laid the foundation of the new evangelization. Accordingly, ministry emerges as an activity that engages the whole Church.⁵⁴

Evangelii Nuntiandi shows a refined anthropological appreciation of the influence of culture. In some respects, it must be recognized that contemporary culture is driven by priorities that are contrary to the Gospel, and at odds with its values. This conflict

⁵¹ EN, 22.

⁵² EN, 23.

⁵³ EN, 70.

⁵⁴ Robert Christian, 'Priestly Formation for a New Evangelization', *Seminarian*, 1991, 31(Jan-Mar), 18-134.

is not a new feature in the relationship of the Church and the world. To current situation in countries such as Australia is not unusual or exceptional. While not repudiating the openness to the world envisaged in *Gaudium et Spes* and other conciliar documents, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* introduces a cautionary note, especially given the present cultural situation, which Paul VI sees in particularly dramatic terms:

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or, more correctly, of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.⁵⁵

Clearly, then, the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the essence of evangelization, must appreciate the cultural context in which it is conducted. He points out that the gospel is not identical with any particular culture but it is within a certain culture that it is proclaimed and mediated.⁵⁶ A critical enculturation is needed, however, if the Gospel is to take root, or be planted again in any culture—especially in the highly secularized milieu of contemporary societies –as is the case in Australia.⁵⁷ This enculturation rests on a proclamation of the gospel, both by word and by deed and an understanding of how a particular culture mediates meaning, especially in relation to foundational beliefs. It is a mistake, however, to see sensitivity to culture and a strong emphasis on missionary proclamation as in tension with each other.⁵⁸ Even a brief examination of some of the cultural settings in this part of the world bears this out.

⁵⁵ EN, 20.

⁵⁶ EN, 21, 40.

⁵⁷ Philip Gibbs, 'The Transformation of Culture as New Evangelization for the Third Millennium in Oceania', *Studia Missionalia*, 1999, 48, 327-347.

The essential content of evangelization, what the Church has to offer, is both a witness to the presence of God and to life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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.⁵⁹

The notion of evangelization as expressed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is not only a call to personal conversion, it is also sees conversion on a wider social tableaux, that is in communal terms. There is no tension between these two aspects and they need to be seen in harmony. Indeed personal conversion and evangelization of culture are inextricably linked. Cultures allow individuals to develop social and other networks, and these are pivotal in assisting the transmission of meaning in both personal and communal sense. To evangelize culture therefore, is an indispensable part of the process of individual catechesis because it recognizes the importance of community. This acknowledges the importance of community in mediating meaning. This does not stop at infrequent, episodic or superficial efforts at accommodation, but must aim for a far more profound engagement with the symbols, history, meaning and values that animate the culture in question. Here, the Pope insists that enculturation cannot work “in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their [i.e., the cultures] very roots”.⁶⁰ To evangelize a culture in its entirety does not allow the mission of the Church to be atomized into any number of individual contacts, if only for the reason that no individual existence can be

⁵⁹ EN, 27.

⁶⁰ EN, 20.

abstracted either from the world of nature, from the social setting of human life, or from the culture that moulds the meanings and values that animate society itself.⁶¹ The critical vehicle for the evangelization of culture remains, however, the witness and activity of individuals who have themselves been deeply transformed by the action of God in their lives. It is a mistake to see evangelization of culture, certainly in countries such as Australia, as a prelude to individual conversion.⁶² Both occur in close unison and are dependent upon each other.

Redemptoris Missio

Redemptoris Missio sets forth Pope John Paul II's explicit teaching about the new evangelization. Published in 1990, in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, *Redemptoris Missio* was John Paul II's eighth encyclical letter, and it stands out as a key document in his pontificate. The very title "the mission of the Redeemer" anticipates the Pope's presentation of the mission of the Church as flowing from the mission of Jesus himself.

In the encyclical, John Paul II reaffirmed the basic missionary nature of the Church as it is treated in the conciliar and in post-conciliar documents. The impulse to mission has shaped the history of the Church from its very beginnings.⁶³ As Urena has pointed out, one of the goals of the encyclical goals is to revive the sense of mission in changed social circumstances. The Church by its very nature is missionary. From this flows an obligation to

⁶¹ GS, 53.

⁶² Alfonso Nebreda, 'The Preparation of the Message', in Mark Link, (Ed), *Faith and Commitment*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1965), 113-135.

⁶³ This point is spelt out in Urena, *Missionary Impulse*, 19, 94-102.

evangelize, not as an act of proselyzation but as one of service.⁶⁴ John Paul II saw evangelization, in its purest form, as an encounter with the Christ described in the terms of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed.⁶⁵ In this context, and using Acts 4:12 as a source text, he claimed, “There is no salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given by mortals by which we must be saved”. This he reiterated that Christ was the only redeemer of humanity.⁶⁶ He noted that the message of St. Paul was given in contrast to the prevailing polytheism of his day, which was marked by a multitude of rather weak and at times vindictive gods battling for supremacy. The Pauline God, by contrast, was compelling and powerful, indeed was the Word made flesh (John 1:14). . There is a clear implication for the task of the Church today in proclaiming Christ, not in the dichotomous terms of “Jesus of history” and “Christ of faith”, but as the indivisible Incarnate Word.⁶⁷ As such Christ’s salvific action ensures full communion with God through the actions of the Holy Spirit. Urena commented that this understanding of Christ as the only Redeemer of humanity, contrasts with what he calls “parallel salvific mediation”, a view prominent in many theological circles, often in response to the issue of the eschatological situation of the multitudes who have never heard the gospel.⁶⁸ While some theologians and philosophers claim that Christ does not represent a unique and essential salvific reality, Pope John Paul II, maintains the unique status of Christ as Redeemer, but does not imply that salvation is restricted to those who believe in Christ and have entered the Church. He recognizes that:

⁶⁴ RM, 46.

⁶⁵ RM, 4.

⁶⁶ RM, 5.

⁶⁷ RM, 6.

⁶⁸ Urena, *Missionary Impulse*, 97.

Today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept gospel revelation or to enter into the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions.⁶⁹

Elaborating on the Trinitarian foundation of mission, John Paul noted that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission, and the principal witness to the living Christ.⁷⁰ As Urena pointed out, a contemporary approach to evangelization that is rooted in *Redemptoris Missio* proceeds on the basis of the harmony of the Holy Spirit's activity in Jesus Christ.⁷¹ Echoing *Gaudium et Spes* John Paul asserted that the Holy Spirit allows all the possibility of sharing in the Paschal mystery.⁷² The harmony of the Holy Spirit and Christ is further spelt out thus:

This is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit.⁷³

In the context of John Paul II's Christological understanding of mission, the heart of evangelization is found in the proclamation of Christ the Savior, whatever the situation might be.⁷⁴ Consequently, the goal of evangelization is not an imposition of Christian doctrine such that it would mean merely a passive acceptance of orthodox teachings in faith or morals.

⁶⁹ RM, 10.

⁷⁰ RM, 21.

⁷¹ Urena, *Missionary Impulse*, 101.

⁷² RM, 28, cf GS, 10, 15, 22.

⁷³ RM, 29.

⁷⁴ RM, 44, cf EN, 27, AG, 13.

Because this externalism has compromised the Church's missionary efforts, at least to some degree, in the past, John Paul placed special emphasis on an evangelization that derives from and leads to a personal encounter with Christ.⁷⁵ Because of this personalist focus, John Paul II, echoing the teaching of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stated that evangelization must aim to bring about an internal conversion of heart and mind, in an authenticity built on "a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel".⁷⁶ The critical sign of this conversion of mind and heart is the desire to communicate the Gospel of Christ to others. Authentic Christian life is oriented to mission and evangelization.⁷⁷

Redemptoris Missio seeks, then, to promote "a new awareness that missionary activity is something for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations".⁷⁸ In this, it is the activity, not of individuals alone, but of the whole Church. In this regard, John Paul II reiterated the importance of the laity as missionary agents. He recalled the prominence given to lay involvement as expressed in the writings of Pius XII, through to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and subsequent papal teachings, including his own.⁷⁹ The new evangelization is based on the conviction that mission is the responsibility of all members of the Church. Moreover, it is not now a matter of sending out missionaries to other lands, but of awakening to the need for Christians in secularized cultures to evangelize their fellow citizens when, despite the evangelization that occurred in the past, society is no longer animated by the Gospel. The new evangelization, then, does not replace previous missiological expressions of witnessing to Christ, but enlarges the

⁷⁵ John Paul II, 'Commissioning of Families of the Neo-Catechumenal Way', *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 14, 1991, 12.

⁷⁶ RM, 46, cf EN, 20.

⁷⁷ John Paul II Address to Bishops of Southern Germany on their Ad Limina Visit, *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 23, 1992, 5-6.

⁷⁸ RM, 2.1.

⁷⁹ RM, 71.

understanding of mission by taking into account the different contexts of today's world. These new realities must be recognized. Accordingly, John Paul II proposed a more flexible, creative and informed approach to missionary work, given the variety of contexts in which it operates. In light of these differences, the local ecclesial community, with its familiarity with regional conditions, bears a special responsibility for mission in the pluralistic societies of today: "Mission is seen as a community commitment, a responsibility of the local church".⁸⁰

Evangelization must involve an engagement with culture. On this point, John Paul II extended Paul VI's approach as expressed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He specified two principles: "compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church".⁸¹ Again, echoing Paul VI, John Paul admitted that the optimism of the past decades regarding positive engagement with wider culture may have been, to some extent, misplaced. The "new springtime" envisaged by some has not eventuated, especially in the missionary outreach to other nations.⁸²

With this in mind, John Paul II set out the cultural context of mission in today's world, in section IV of his document. The scope of missionary activity is evoked in the title of this section: "the vast horizons of the mission *Ad Gentes*". The mission is a huge theatre of activity, and much of this is still the traditional work of missionaries in foreign lands, largely in the developing world with a comparatively brief history of Christian witness. However, the scale of the mission is enlarged when one considers a new evangelization in those regions not traditionally regarded as mission areas. As John Paul II remarked, "even

⁸⁰ RM, 27.

⁸¹ RM, 54.1.

⁸² RM, 2.2.

before the Council it was said that some Christian cities and countries had become mission territories; the situation has certainly not improved in the years since then”.⁸³

New means are called for, but the essence of the mission tradition must be preserved. For example, the Pope had no intention of undermining the traditional conduct of mission work, and certainly no wish to discourage “persons who have a special vocation to be life-long missionaries *ad gentes*”.⁸⁴ Moreover, all mission work relies on an ecclesiastical mandate in that “the bishops, as shepherds of the particular churches, are ultimately responsible for evangelizing efforts.”⁸⁵ Now, however, the context is broadening, to include those who have not heard the gospel, those who are part of Christian communities, and those in between who have lost a living sense of the faith.⁸⁶ This “in between” or intermediary group is most clearly the focus of the new evangelization. Quoting Acts 17:22-31, *Redemptoris Missio* describes St Paul addressing the Areopagus as an ancient metaphor for reaching out to this intermediate group. On his arrival in Athens, Paul had spoken without inhibition to a learned assembly in one of the great cultural centres of the ancient world. He proclaimed Christ to an audience that was intellectually and philosophically sophisticated—perhaps not unlike the educationally privileged classes who, though disaffected from traditional religious practices, still search for life’s meaning, and so are a special concern of the new evangelization.⁸⁷

In summary, *Redemptoris Missio* captured a number of essential components of John Paul II’s understanding of the new evangelization. The new evangelization arises out of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar writings, most notably

⁸³ RM, 32.1.

⁸⁴ RM, 32.3, 66.

⁸⁵ RM, 63.

⁸⁶ RM, 33.1-33.3. RM, 34.2.

⁸⁷ RM, 37.4.

Evangelii Nuntiandi. The Church is missionary in an ontological not functional sense. This is based on its Trinitarian nature and is expressed in scripture, most notably in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles. At the centre of the Church's missionary identity is the proclamation of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the redeemer of humanity. This proclamation of Christ takes place within a variety of cultural contexts but is never subservient to them. The new evangelization needs to take serious account of the cultural context in which it takes place. A better understanding of culture assists in the proclamation of the gospel and facilitates not so much learning about Christ but an encounter with him. Because the Church is missionary all the faithful are called to evangelize.

Conclusion

The new evangelization can be expressed in a number of dimensions, all of which however can be traced back to an intimate and life changing encounter with Christ. From this encounter flows the power to engage and critically shape culture. It allows specialists to see their disciplines as a centre of evangelization, for example, for philosophers to use their expertise to critically engage in a dialogue with others. The new evangelization must have a public face, one that is seen by others. This can occur only if it is rooted in a personal and intimate union with Christ. This argumentation gives helps to give Catholicism an evangelical sharpness manifested in a desire to spread the gospel by proclamation and witness.

The more radical the conversion to Christ, the more intense the commitment to the new evangelization reiterated in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* which emphasized the focal

reality of Christ in the life of the Church and its mission of evangelization,⁸⁸ Here the model for conversion is St Paul. The sign of this conversion is a desire to preach the gospel. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel."⁸⁹ A common⁹⁰ element in all of this discourse is the notion of the new evangelization as transformative. It radicalizes the life of the Christian. From a number of starting points the new evangelization leads the individual into a new and deeper relationship with Christ that transforms both personal and private life. One clear manifestation of this transformation is a renewed emphasis on taking the gospel of Christ to the public domain in whatever way best reflects the interest and expertise of the individual. The new evangelization then moves from a private and personal encounter with Christ to proclamation.

⁸⁸ Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 2000).

⁸⁹ 'NML, 40.

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