



Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

I. THE GROWTH OF SECULARISM

- A. Rise of the “nones”
- B. Culture does not support faith
- C. Church seeks to “Christify” the world

II. JOYFUL EVANGELISM

- A. Cardinal Timothy Dolan
- B. Reaching young people

III. WHAT IS THE NEW EVANGELIZATION?

- A. Pope John XXIII: *Lumen Gentium* – “the light of the nations”
- B. Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)
 - 1. Missionary Council
 - 2. Noah’s Ark analogy – let the life out of the boat
- C. Pope Paul VI
 - 1. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)
 - 2. The Church is a mission.
- D. Pope John Paul II
 - 1. Background of Second Vatican Council and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*
 - 2. 1983 – New Evangelization is “new in its ardor, methods, and expression.”
 - 3. Baptized into a missionary vocation

“[We must go] to meet the people, not [wait] for the people to come to us. Missionary fervor does not require extraordinary events. It is in ordinary life that mission work is done.”¹

– Pope Francis

For many Catholics, “evangelization” is a strange and terrifying word. It conjures up someone standing in the doorway asking if you’ve been “saved,” or a slick television preacher putting on an elaborate show. But the Catholic view of evangelization is quite different. It simply means spreading the Good News.

The term goes back to the Old Testament, where in the book of Isaiah we read of a herald, running ahead of the people who are returning from exile. He proclaims that God has triumphed over all their enemies (Is 52:7) and by sharing this good news of salvation, he *evangelizes* them.

The same term appears throughout the New Testament. Jesus stands in the Temple and reveals his mission to “*evangelize* the poor” (Lk 4:18). After his death and resurrection, the Apostles continue Jesus’ mission to “*evangelize*” (Acts 5:42)—they proclaim the good news of the risen Lord.

VATICAN II AND LUMEN GENTIUM

In the centuries that followed, evangelization remained the Church’s central focus, but in 1959 the Church added a new dimension. Just three months into his pontificate, Blessed Pope John XXIII launched an ecumenical council. The Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, was important for many reasons but especially for sparking the movement we now call the New Evangelization.

Pope John announced the Council while sitting beside a large globe, symbolic of the Council’s aim. Vatican II was not intended as an isolated or inward-focused event. It was emphatically outward and global in scale.

During his announcement, Pope John used a biblical phrase confirming this direction, one that would become popular throughout the Council and even served as the title of one its major documents. The phrase was “*lumen gentium*”—Latin for “light of the nations” (Is 49:6). As Vatican II pointed out, Christ is the light of the nations and the Church is the excited bearer of that light. Therefore her constant aim, and the major goal of Vatican II, is to share that light with the world — to evangelize.

RETELLING THE CATHOLIC STORY

“The ‘new’ evangelization [is designed] to re-propose, in fresh and positive ways, the Church’s faith and teaching to post-Christian societies that think they know Christianity and have rejected it. Think of a person waving a hand over his face, saying, ‘Yeah, yeah, we know what the Church has to say on that one’ —that’s what modern society is like. You engage people with that attitude by being surprising, by showing how they don’t, in fact, know what the Church says. Then, when you’ve got their attention, you can tell the real story—the story they thought they knew but in fact didn’t.”²²

– Austen Ivereigh, Coordinator and Co-Founder of *Catholic Voices*

EVANGELICAL CATHOLICISM

“The late French journalist Andre Frossard was a convert to Catholicism from the fashionable atheism of his class, an atheism that was once a Parisian intellectual fad but that has taken on a much harder, Christophobic edge across the twenty-first-century Western world.

When Frossard saw John Paul II at the Mass marking the beginning of the Pope’s public ministry on October 22, 1978, he wired back to his Paris newspaper, ‘This is not a pope from Poland; this is a pope from Galilee.’ It was a brilliant metaphor that illustrates in one rich biblical image the nature and task of Evangelical Catholicism.

The [evangelical] revival that reached its fulfillment in John Paul II and Benedict XVI...is inviting the Catholic Church to Galilee, and then beyond Galilee. The Catholic Church is being invited to meet the Risen Lord in the Scripture, the sacraments, and prayer, and to make friendship with him the center of Catholic life. Every Catholic has received this invitation in Baptism: the invitation to accept the Great Commission, to act as an evangelist, and to measure the truth of Catholic life by the way in which Catholics give expression to the human decency and solidarity that flows from friendship with Christ the Lord.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, Evangelical Catholicism challenges all of the people of the Church, lay, consecrated religious, or ordained, to have the courage to be Catholic; to have the courage to take the Gospel in its fullness beyond Galilee and out to the nations.”²³

– George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*

In 1962, three years after announcing the Council, Pope John officially opened it, expressing hope that it would “bring the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel.”²² And so it did. As Avery Cardinal Dulles pointed out, this missionary aim was clear from the Council’s first documents:

“*The two great constitutions of Vatican II, those on the Church and on revelation, open on a strongly evangelical note. Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, begins with the assertion that Christ is the light of all nations...which brightens her countenance as she proclaims the gospel to every creature (LG 1). Dei Verbum, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, begins [by affirming that the] Church... wishes to hand on Christ’s message ‘so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe; by believing, it may hope; and by hoping, it may love.’ (DV 1)*”²³

Vatican II marked a significant advance in the Church’s evangelization, especially in the language it used. The Council steered away from the juridical and condemnatory language from past councils and instead spoke with a new voice, one that was warm, pastoral, and welcoming — a language much more conducive to evangelization.

POPE PAUL VI

In the decade following Vatican II, most commentaries on the Council overlooked its emphasis on evangelization, focusing more on authority, the liturgy, and dialogue with other religions.

Additionally, many Church leaders became preoccupied with growing confusion over the Church’s teachings on sexuality and morality.

However in 1974, Pope Paul VI brought the Church’s focus back to evangelization. He called for a Synod, a special gathering of bishops from around the world, to answer such questions as: Why had many countries with deep Christian roots drifted away from the faith? Why did evangelistic methods that worked ten, twenty, and thirty years ago seem suddenly ineffective? And why did we lose that

evangelistic zeal that captured the early Church and energized her greatest missionaries?

In response to these questions, the Synod fathers petitioned Pope Paul to inaugurate “a new period of evangelization.”²⁴ The Pope responded one year later with the landmark document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi (On Evangelization in the Modern World)*. The text reaffirmed evangelization’s central role recognizing it as “the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”²⁵

The Pope also asserted that evangelization entails more than individual conversion. It pertains to whole societies and cultures, too:

“...evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”²⁶

POPE JOHN PAUL II

A young bishop from Krakow, Poland, participated in the Second Vatican Council, and he also played a major role at the 1974 Synod on Evangelization. Both experiences heightened his passion for spreading the Good News, so it’s not surprising that when he became Pope John Paul II he made evangelization a core theme of his papacy. He saw it as “the primary service that the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity.”²⁷ And he also sensed the need for a renewed emphasis—a fresh, missionary impulse.

While visiting his Polish homeland in 1979, the Pope announced, “A *new evangelization* has begun, as if it were a new proclamation, even if in reality it is the same as ever.”²⁸ While the Gospel message remains the same, we must adapt the ways we communicate it. He reiterated that in 1983 while addressing the bishops of Latin America, offering a threefold description of this new movement:

“[We need] a new evangelization... new in its ardor, methods, and expression.”²⁹

OUR SUPREME DUTY

While the New Evangelization is rooted in several key events and figures, with good reason we recognize Blessed Pope John Paul II as its iconic leader. He coined the phrase “New Evangelization” in 1979 and embodied it throughout his long pontificate. Pope John Paul II traveled to more countries and was seen by more people than any pope in history. He used his platform to reinvigorate the faith everywhere.

Yet despite his great personal success, he emphasized that the New Evangelization is not a one-man show:

“This [new sense of mission]...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.”¹⁹

In his pivotal 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II wrote 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.”²⁰

Today, as the Church continues to pour her energies into evangelizing all people, each of us plays a significant role.

POPE BENEDICT XVI

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI succeeded Pope John Paul II, and he made it one of his central concerns to carry on and extend his predecessor's legacy, especially the New Evangelization. In 2012, he aligned three major events to definitively launch the New Evangelization after years of slow growth. First, the Pope declared a Year of Faith beginning on October 11, 2012 and extending to November 24, 2013. He designed the Year to help renew our relationship with the Lord and to encourage us to share the Faith with others. The Pope explained that faith "makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness."¹⁰ The stronger our faith, the more eager we are to share it.

The Year of Faith also commemorated two anniversaries that advanced the New Evangelization: the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II and the twentieth anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope Benedict understood that in order to proclaim our faith, we have to know it, a fact confirmed within the *Catechism* itself: "From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to 'evangelize,' and to lead others to the 'yes' of faith in Jesus Christ."¹¹

Second, the Pope established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. He appointed twenty bishops to the new Vatican department, including American Cardinal Timothy Dolan, and charged them to:

*"...promote a renewed evangelization in the countries where the first proclamation of the faith has already resonated, and where Churches with an ancient foundation exist but are experiencing a progressive secularization of society... a sort of 'eclipse of the sense of God.'"*¹²

Third and finally, the Pope held a special Synod on the New Evangelization in October 2012, which gathered over 250 bishops in Rome. Like the 1974 Synod, the discussions were thoughtful and wide-ranging, revolving around new ways "to help... people encounter the Lord, who alone fills our existence with deep meaning and peace."¹³

WHAT IS THE NEW EVANGELIZATION?

"The New Evangelization [is] directed principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life...[It's meant] to help these people encounter the Lord, who alone fills our existence with deep meaning and peace; and to favor the rediscovery of the faith."²¹

— Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily at opening of Synod on the New Evangelization*

WHAT IS THE NEW EVANGELIZATION?

Several popes and events have shaped the New Evangelization, each providing a unique touch, but a natural question arises: what is this movement, and how is it different from other forms of evangelization?

The Church's missionary work traditionally has three dimensions. First, the Church directs *ordinary evangelization* toward practicing Catholics, fueled by the Sacraments. As the recent Synod noted, "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself."¹⁴ This type of evangelization strengthens those within the pews so that they're better able to evangelize others.

Next, the *mission ad gentes* proclaims Christ and his Church to non-Christians. This used to occupy most of the Church's evangelistic energy but has become less common today, especially in the Western world. Most people know something of Christ and Catholicism.

The third and most recent dimension is the *New Evangelization*. The New Evangelization does not declare a new message—Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8)—and it doesn't involve coercing or manipulating someone into conversion. As Pope John Paul II said, "The Church proposes; she imposes nothing."¹⁵ Also, the New Evangelization is not about boosting numbers. Shrinking participation remains a concern for the Church, but this fresh proclamation involves far more than just getting people into pews. It aims for personal conversion and the renewal of entire cultures, both of which are difficult to quantify.

So then, what makes the New Evangelization new and different? First, it's new in whom it's directed toward. It primarily aims to engage inactive Catholics and de-Christianized cultures. Therefore, to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, the difference between the *mission ad gentes* and the New Evangelization compares to the difference between a man attempting to woo a young maiden and a man attempting to reanimate a relationship with a cynical divorcee. The first involves new attraction, the second rediscovery. The New Evangelization helps Catholics re-connect with a Person they once knew, and perhaps even liked, but have since drifted from.

Second, the New Evangelization is new because of who does it. It's not limited to priests, religious orders, and full-time missionaries. All baptized Catholics share responsibility for the New Evangelization, especially the laity. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that "evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God"¹⁶ and Pope Paul VI echoed that, "It is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize."¹⁷

Third, the New Evangelization is new because it operates in a new context. Our society differs vastly from that of a hundred years ago, fifty years ago, or even twenty years ago. Evangelization must always adapt to the surrounding culture to be effective. We need to study it, learn the resistances to faith, and then shape our methods and expressions appropriately.

With these three traits—a new aim, new agents, and a new context—the New Evangelization has marked the most exciting and significant shift in the Church's missionary activity in the last 500 years. As Cardinal Avery Dulles observed, the Church is witnessing "the birth of a new Catholicism that, without loss of its institutional, sacramental, and social dimensions, is authentically evangelical."¹⁸

The great intentions of John XXIII, the new language of Vatican II, the outward focus of Paul VI, and the incessant missionary drive of recent popes have all culminated to birth the New Evangelization, a movement aimed at spreading the *lumen gentium* to a darkened and de-Christianized world.

FURTHER READING

Books:

Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church (Basic Books, 2013) by George Weigel – A blueprint for applying the New Evangelization to every aspect of the Church, from lay people to priests, bishops, the liturgy, and more.

Evangelization for the Third Millennium (Paulist Press, 2009) by Avery Cardinal Dulles – A compilation of talks and articles on how Vatican II, Pope Paul VI, and Pope John Paul II paved the way for the New Evangelization. Cardinal Dulles also examines the relationship of evangelization to apologetics, catechesis, and ecumenism.

John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others (Servant, 2006) edited by Ralph Martin – Essays covering several elements of the New Evangelization such as its theological roots, ecumenical dimensions, and practical strategies for day-to-day evangelism.

The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles (Paulist Press, 2008) edited by Steven Boguslawski and Ralph Martin – A series of talks on the greatest challenges presented by the New Evangelization from distinguished thinkers such as Avery Cardinal Dulles, Francis Cardinal George, Fr. John Richard Neuhaus, Fr. Francis Martin, and Dr. Edwin Hernandez.

The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference (Gracewing Publishing, 2012) by Rino Fisichella – The president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization explores its effects on culture, politics, beauty, and art.

The New Evangelization: What It Is and How it Affects the Life of Every Catholic (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012) by Ralph Martin – A concise 35-page eBook offering background on the movement and practical ways to live it out.

Church Documents:

Ad Gentes (1965), Vatican II – The Second Vatican Council's decree on the Church's missionary activity.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975), Pope Paul VI – The most important modern Church document on evangelization. It urges all Catholics—priests, religious, catechists, parents, and lay faithful—to evangelize in their daily lives.

Redemptoris Missio (1990), Pope John Paul II – Pope John Paul's encyclical on the Church's missionary activity which emphasizes the urgency of evangelization today.

Ubicumque et Semper (2010), Pope Benedict XVI – Apostolic letter which established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and outlines its mission.

QUESTIONS

For Understanding:

1. What images come to mind when you hear the word “evangelization”? How do those images compare with the biblical perspective? (Isaiah 52:7, Luke 4:16-21, Acts 5:42)

2. What makes the New Evangelization different from other forms of missionary activity? What is the message that should be shared? (Hebrews 13:8, 1 Peter 3:13-16)

3. In what new ways did the Second Vatican Council influence evangelization?

4. How did Pope Paul VI refocus the purpose of the Church in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*? (CCC 849-850)

5. How did Blessed Pope John Paul II describe and advance the New Evangelization?

6. Why do we need a New Evangelization in a historically Christian country like the United States?

For Application:

1. The Church says that before you can evangelize, you must be evangelized yourself. What steps can you take to better understand or internalize the Good News?

2. What barriers prevent you from evangelizing more? How can you overcome them?

3. Which people in your life need to be re-introduced to Christ and to the Gospel or brought home to the Church?