

The Nucleus of the New Evangelization

PERRY J. CAHALL
Pontifical College Josephinum
Columbus, OH

MANY WITHIN the Catholic Church speak of the importance of the “new evangelization.” Although the term “new evangelization” has entered into popular Catholic parlance, often this term is used without much specificity. The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it aims to provide a synthesis of teaching from Church authority on the “new evangelization.”¹ This synthesis will include a discussion of the nature of the “new evangelization” in its origin, agents, and goals, the context for the new evangelization, and some basic methods of the new evangelization. This synthesis is drawn from magisterial documents and papal pronouncements in order to present the vision for the new evangelization set forth by Church authority. Secondly, this article will conclude by focusing on the often overlooked role of the family in the new evangelization. It will be proposed, relying on Church documents and papal

¹ Other attempts to synthesize aspects of the new evangelization include: Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Evangelization, New,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, 2d ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 477–80; also by Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), especially chap. 3, “The Program: Paul VI, John Paul II, and the New Evangelization”; also by Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization: What Does It Mean?” in *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2006). For other essays dealing with aspects of the new evangelization, implications of the new evangelization, and implementation of the new evangelization, see additional essays in *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others*; also see *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, ed. Steven Boguslawski, O.P., and Ralph Martin (New York: Paulist Press, 2008); and *Communio* 21 (Winter 1994) dedicated to the theme “The Church as Mission: The New Evangelization and Western Culture.”

pronouncements, that realizing the goals of the new evangelization depends predominantly on the family. In fact, the central role of the family in the new evangelization allows us to see the family as the vital core or nucleus of the new evangelization.²

I. What Is the New Evangelization? Origin, Agents, and Goals

Origin

The term “new evangelization” was first used by Pope John Paul II when he called for such an effort during his now historic pastoral visit to Poland in 1979.³ Yet, even though he invented the label “new evangelization,”⁴ John Paul II pointed to the ultimate origin of this movement in the Second Vatican Council.⁵ In one of his addresses John Paul said Vatican II “called for a new evangelization,”⁶ and he consistently maintained that the evangelization of the new millennium must refer to Vati-

² The XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops met from October 7 to 28, 2012 and focused on the topic “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” At the time of the publication of this article Benedict XVI had yet to issue his apostolic exhortation flowing from the synod. However, the *Instrumentum Laboris* which served as the agenda for the synodal assembly emphasizes “The Family, The Model-Place for Evangelization” in nos. 110–113. Accessed 5 Dec. 2012. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20120619_instrumentum-xiii_en.html.

³ Noted by Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the Polish Episcopal Conference on their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit, 3 Dec. 2005. *The Holy See*. accessed 12 Nov. 2010 www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051203_adlimina-polonia-ii_en.html. This corrects the claim that John Paul II first called for a new evangelization in Haiti in 1983 in an address to Latin American bishops (see Steven Boguslawski, O.P. and Ralph Martin, “Introduction,” in *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, vii; Dulles, “Evangelization, New,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*; Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization: What Does It Mean?” 5; Dulles, “Vatican II and Evangelization,” in *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, 11). The fact that John Paul II used the term “new evangelization” as early as 1979, toward the very beginning of his pontificate, and in his historically significant visit to Poland, shows how central the term is to understanding his entire papacy.

⁴ Avery Cardinal Dulles notes that the term “new evangelization” seems to have been used first by the Latin American bishops at their general conference at Medellin, Colombia in 1968 (see “Evangelization, New,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*). However, there is no evidence that John Paul II knew of this usage by the Latin American bishops. If he did know of it, and consciously borrowed the term, he ended up expanding and elaborating on it, thus truly making it his own.

⁵ See Dulles, “Vatican II and Evangelization.”

⁶ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization: The Complete Texts of the Holy Father's 1998 ad Limina Addresses to the Bishops of the United States* (San Diego: Basilica Press and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), Address, June 27, no. 1.

can II.⁷ The basic foundations of the new evangelization can be seen in Vatican II's reminder to the faithful: "The Church . . . is by its very nature missionary";⁸ it has "an obligation to proclaim the faith and salvation that comes from Christ" (*Ad Gentes* 5). John Paul noted that, in addition to their origin in the work of Vatican II, the foundations of the new evangelization "were laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI."⁹ In this document, Paul VI echoed Vatican II when he wrote that "the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church" and evangelization is the Church's "deepest identity" because she "exists in order to evangelize"¹⁰—a teaching John Paul II and Benedict XVI have reiterated.¹¹

Yet in using the term "new evangelization" John Paul II, following the lead of Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council, made very clear what exactly is "new" about it. First of all, it is *not* the content that is new. John Paul II said very clearly, in *Ecclesia in America*, "[T]he vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery" (*EIA* 66). Elsewhere John Paul II made it clear that we are not preaching a theory but a person.¹² Thus the gospel, like Christ, remains unchanged.

What is "new" about the new evangelization, first of all, is the situation in which the unchanging truth of the gospel must be preached at this point in history. John Paul II said, "[T]he new and unique situation in which the world and the Church find themselves at the threshold of

⁷ Noted by Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the Polish Episcopal Conference on their 'Ad Limina' Visit.

⁸ Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1992), no. 2; hereafter *Ad Gentes*.

⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994), no. 21; hereafter *TMA*.

¹⁰ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1992), no. 14; hereafter *EN*.

¹¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1999), no. 66; hereafter *EIA*. Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio* Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization *Ubicumque et Semper*, 21 Sept. 2010. *The Holy See*. Accessed 14 Nov. 2010 www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper_en.html.

¹² John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, March 17, no. 6.

the Third Millennium, and the urgent needs which result, mean that the mission of evangelization today calls for a new program which can be defined overall as ‘new evangelization’” (EIA 66). He said on another occasion, “The Gospel message remains ever the same, yet we proclaim it in a culture which is undergoing constant transformation.”¹³ As part of the new evangelization, John Paul did call for a renewed effort to make Jesus known to those who have not heard his name.¹⁴ However, he emphasized that one predominant aspect of the new situation of the new evangelization is that “some Christian cities and countries” are again “mission territory” and are in need of “re-evangelization” (RM 32). These are “countries with ancient Christian roots . . . where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living 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” (RM 33). In his document *Ubicumque et Semper* establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Benedict XVI said that the mission of the Church to evangelize “has taken on in history ever new forms and modalities according to the times, the situations and historical moments. In our time, one of its singular features has been to be confronted with the phenomenon of estrangement from the faith.” In this situation, John Paul II pointed to the need for a “new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed” (RM 30).

What is also “new” about the new evangelization is the *manner* in which the gospel must be spread in this new context. It was in his address to the Central American Bishops in 1983 that John Paul II appealed for a commitment “new in its ardor, methods and expression” (EIA 66). He insisted that “it is necessary to inculturate preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers” (EIA 70). In asking for such a commitment, John Paul II was following the program of the Second Vatican Council which said the Church, being “sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God,” must accomplish this task as Christ did—committing “himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived” (*Ad Gentes* 10). The Council went on to say that Christian teaching and life should be “adapted to the mentality and character of each culture” (*Ad Gentes* 22).¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., Address, Feb. 27, no. 5.

¹⁴ See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1990), no. 31; hereafter *RM*.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily for the Papal Mass on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, 28 June 2010. *The Holy See*. accessed 14 Nov. 2010 www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100628_vespri-pietro-paolo_en.html.

In fact, Paul VI summed up the objective of the Second Vatican Council in this theme: “to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century” (EN 2). Thus an integral part of the new evangelization is adapting the manner of spreading the unchanging gospel to fit the current cultural climate.

In a homily in which he announced his intention to create the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Benedict XVI summed up what is “new” about the new evangelization when he said it is

“new” not in its content but in its inner thrust, open to the grace of the Holy Spirit which constitutes the force of the new law of the Gospel that always renews the Church; “new” in ways that correspond with the power of the Holy Spirit and which are suited to the times and situations; “new” because of being necessary even in countries that have already received the proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁶

Benedict explained that the Pontifical Council he was creating would have as its

principal task . . . 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 the progressive secularization of society and a sort of “eclipse of the sense of God”, which pose a challenge to finding appropriate [means] to propose anew the perennial truth of Christ’s Gospel.¹⁷

Pope Benedict explained in *Ubicumque et Semper* that by necessity the new evangelization does not mean elaborating “a single formula . . . the same for all circumstances” in which evangelization takes place. Instead, in the particular social and cultural circumstances of the twenty-first century, through new ardor, methods, and expression, the “program” of the new evangelization seeks to equip the Church to proclaim the gospel in a manner adapted to the mentality and character of an age facing unique challenges, particularly the challenge of estrangement from the faith.

Agents

John Paul II, following the lead of Paul VI and Vatican II, identified agents of the new evangelization. First of all, both Paul VI and John Paul II made it clear that the new evangelization is not possible without the action of the Holy Spirit who “is the principal agent of evangelization” (EN 75;

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, May 21, no. 5.

RM 21; TMA 45). As in the beginning of the Church, it is the Holy Spirit who is the animating principle of the Church and the driving force behind its growth.

However, the Holy Spirit can effect the growth of the Church only with the cooperation of human agents. The faithful must open themselves up to the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the manner of a new Pentecost, in order to accomplish the new evangelization. In this vein, John Paul II, Paul VI, and Vatican II all made it clear that “the whole Church is missionary” (*Ad Gentes* 35) and that even though Christ passed on to the Apostles the mission he received from the Father, all members of the Church are called to participate in the basic task Jesus sends his disciples to accomplish—evangelizing (*EIA* 66). Thus, embued by the Holy Spirit, the whole Church, including each individual, is called to evangelize (*EN* 15). John Paul II consistently stressed that missionary work is the task of all the faithful and “is a right and a duty based upon their baptismal dignity” (*RM* 71). Pointing to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, John Paul II noted that Christ has given the entire people of God a share in his messianic mission as priest, prophet, and king (*TMA* 21).

Within the people of God, the ordained priest has a particular role to play in the new evangelization. Vatican II said that priests must “stimulate and maintain among the faithful a zeal for . . . evangelization” through teaching and preaching (*Ad Gentes* 39). Paul VI noted that all of the priest’s activities are aspects of evangelization, because proclaiming the Gospel “identifies . . . priestly service” and gives unity to it (*EN* 68). In one of his addresses to the bishops of the United States, John Paul II said, “It is the priest’s task to lead the faithful to spiritual maturity in Christ, so that they may respond to the call to holiness and fulfill their vocation to transform the world in the spirit of the Gospel.”¹⁸ Thus in his ministry and in his service to his parish, the priest, under the leadership of his bishop, must form and direct others in the program of the new evangelization.

It is for this reason that John Paul II said the parish should be “the center of the new evangelization.”¹⁹ He called for the renewal of parish life in all its dimensions so that the parish may incarnate the Mystical Body and exercise the offices of priest, prophet, and king.²⁰ He called for the parish to be the place where Christians are formed for evangelization and works of Christian love, noting that the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the primary moment of formation and that celebrating the

¹⁸ Ibid., Address, Mar. 17, no. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

sacraments should lead “to a deep and transforming encounter with God.”²¹ John Paul explained that the parish should be the center of the new evangelization because it should inspire “people to live the Gospel more fully and build a society imbued with Christian values.”²²

Yet, nourished by the parish, building this society imbued with Christian values is primarily the work of the laity. Vatican II underscored that the laity are of primary importance by being “a leaven” in the temporal order, directing it “from within” (*Ad Gentes* 15). The Council recalled that the principle duty of the laity “is to bear witness to Christ . . . by their life and their words, in the family, in their social group, in their professions” (*Ad Gentes* 21). Paul VI elaborated on the role of the laity when he said that the laity, whose particular vocation is to be in the world, exercises “a very special form of evangelization” (*EN* 70). While the pastors’ task is to establish and “develop the ecclesial community,” the laity must make the gospel “present and active in . . . politics, society, and economics,” and all aspects of culture (*EN* 70).

Throughout his pontificate John Paul II stressed the role of the laity in the new evangelization.²³ He emphasized that the lay faithful should be conscious of their baptismal dignity, that the laity “are largely responsible for the future of the Church,” and that the renewal of the Church “will not be possible without the active presence of the laity” (*EIA* 44). He explained that the vocation of the laity is first and foremost, in the secular world, which they “are called to shape according to God’s will” by evangelizing “family, social, professional, cultural and political life” (*EIA* 44). In an address to the bishops of the United States, John Paul II said:

The new evangelization that can make the twenty-first century a springtime of the Gospel is a task for the entire People of God, but will depend in a decisive way on the lay faithful being fully aware of their baptismal vocation and their responsibility for bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to their culture and society.²⁴

In the same address, the pope, citing a discourse of Pius XII from 1946, emphasized that “lay believers are in the front line of Church life” and need to be conscious of “not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church.”²⁵ He continued, “[L]ay people are at the forefront of the Church’s

²¹ Ibid., no. 5.

²² Including writing his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici* (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World), 1988.

²³ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, June 5, no. 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 4.

mission to evangelize all areas of human activity.”²⁶ Throughout his pontificate Benedict XVI has continued to echo John Paul II’s insistence on the irreplaceable role of the laity in the evangelization and renewal of society.²⁷

Goals

The agents of the new evangelization, with the laity at the forefront of the effort, seek to accomplish a twofold goal. The first goal is to share with others the love of Christ and thereby invite them to conversion through a *personal encounter* with him. John Paul II said, “Evangelization is the Church’s effort to proclaim to everyone that God loves them, that he has given himself for them in Jesus Christ, and that he invites them to an unending life of happiness.”²⁸ Thus the whole project of the new evangelization is founded in personal encounter with Christ. In *Ubicumque et Semper* Benedict XVI wrote, “[A]t the root of all evangelization lies not a human plan of expansion, but rather the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has wished to give us, making us sharers in his own life.”

In proclaiming this good news of God’s love made manifest in Jesus, and facilitating an encounter with him, the aim is to present the opportunity for personal conversion. John Paul II said, “[E]ncounter with the living Jesus impels us to conversion” (*ELA* 26). He said, “[T]he encounter with the living Jesus is the path to conversion, communion, and solidarity. To the extent that these goals are reached, there will emerge an ever increasing dedication to the new evangelization . . .” (*ELA* 7). John Paul II also said that conversion can be understood as “a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith,” a “faith which is total and radical” (*RM* 46). Thus the new evangelization seeks to provide the opportunity for people to encounter, or re-encounter, Christ, allowing him to shape their very lives.

Inviting others to embrace this life of faith which is total and radical, John Paul II said that the work of evangelization must bridge the gap between faith and life (*ELA* 26). He insisted that an essential part of the new evangelization is “the proclamation of moral truth,” that in “every age men and women need to hear Christ the Good Shepherd calling

²⁶ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the Polish Episcopal Conference on their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Mar. 17, no. 2; see also *RM* 2.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, June 7, no. 1; For comments on the necessity of proclaiming moral truth as part of the new evangelization, see Timothy Broglio, “Catholic Moral Teaching and the New Evangelization,” in *Catholic Moral Teaching in the Pontificate of John Paul II*, ed. Kevin T. McMahon (Wynnewood, PA: St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, 2004), 34–46.

them to faith and conversion of life.”²⁹ He pointed out that Christ shows that obedience to “God’s commandments . . . is the pathway to genuine liberation and . . . true happiness,”³⁰ and John Paul II made it clear that the new evangelization must proclaim that conversion consists in the “commitment to the Person of Jesus Christ, with all the theological and moral implications taught by the Magisterium” (EIA 53). In this vein, Benedict XVI has said, “Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel.”³¹ Thus, facilitating conversion through personal encounter with Christ is the first goal of the new evangelization.

The second goal of the new evangelization is transformation of culture. Paul VI remarked that cultures must be evangelized and “regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel” because the “split between the Gospel and culture is . . . the drama of our time” (EN 20). Thus John Paul II said, “[T]he new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture” (EIA 70), insisting that Christians “have a particular responsibility to contribute to the renewal of culture.”³² He wrote that the gospel should “penetrate the hearts of men and women . . . and permeate their cultures, transforming them from within” (EIA 70). Benedict XVI has affirmed this need for a renewed evangelization of culture. In doing so he has reminded us that we are social beings who find fulfillment only in love of God and neighbor, and he has pointed out that members of the Church have a personal, but not a private, relationship with God, since they are members of a redeemed community.³³ In fact, the second goal of the new evangelization is that the “crisis of culture must be countered by *the civilization of love*” (TMA 52). John Paul II said, “God’s grace also enables

²⁹ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address June 7, no. 1.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C., 16 Apr. 2008. *The Holy See*, accessed 14 Nov. 2010 www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_bishops-usa_en.html.

³¹ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Mar. 17, no. 6.

³² Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

³³ For elaboration on the “civilization of love” see John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994). See also Christopher J. Walsh, “Building the Civilization of Love: Recent Statements by John Paul II on Evangelizing Culture,” *Communio* 24 (Winter 1997): 780–93; Carl Anderson, *A Civilization of Love: What Every Catholic Can Do to Transform the World* (New York: Harper One, 2008); and Perry Cahall, “Civilization of Love,” in *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science, and Social Policy*, vol. 1, ed. Michael L. Coulter, et al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 200–202.

Christians to work for the transformation of the world, in order to bring about a new civilization, which my Predecessor Paul VI appropriately called ‘the civilization of love’” (*EIA* 10).³⁴ Thus, the facilitation of individual conversion through personal encounter with Christ reaches its fulfillment when these persons, entering into communion and solidarity with each other, contribute to building a civilization founded on the love they have encountered in Jesus. The individual goal and the cultural goal of the new evangelization are therefore inextricably bound together.

II. Context for the New Evangelization

While calling all the faithful to accomplish the twofold goal of the new evangelization, the two most recent pontiffs have outlined the context within which this effort is being undertaken.³⁵ They have discussed the context of the new evangelization because, as Benedict XVI has noted, a serious commitment to evangelization must include “a profound diagnosis of the real challenges the Gospel encounters in . . . culture.”³⁶ Undertaking this diagnosis, John Paul II noted that in today’s culture there is “a deep spiritual hunger . . . if not a current of despair,” and an “uncertainty” or a denial “that we can ever know the truth.”³⁷ He observed there has been a “closure of reason to . . . objective truth,” which has led to “skepticism and relativism” and a resultant “pragmatic vision of truth.”³⁸ He noted that in contemporary culture there is a “skepticism regarding the very existence of ‘moral truth’ and an objective moral law.”³⁹

John Paul II identified a “crisis of moral culture” stemming from a confusion of conscience with the “right to self-will.”⁴⁰ He observed that the notion of “freedom as personal autonomy is . . . a powerful cultural

³⁴ For other comments pertaining to the context of the new evangelization see: Arthur R. Madigan, S.J., “The New Evangelization of American Intellectual Culture: Context, Resistances, and Strategies,” in *Creed and Culture: Jesuit Studies of Pope John Paul II*, ed. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. and John J. Conley, S.J. (Philadelphia: St. Joseph’s University Press, 2004), 93–116; David L. Schindler, “Reorienting the Church on the Eve of the Millennium: John Paul II’s ‘New Evangelization,’” *Communio* 24 (Winter 1997): 728–79.

³⁵ Benedict XVI, Responses to the Questions Posed by the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C., 16 Apr. 2008. *The Holy See*. accessed 14 Nov. 2010 www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_response-bishops_en.html.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Feb. 27, no. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Address, Oct. 23, no. 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Address, June 27, no. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

force”⁴¹ and he noted “an acceleration of the human quest for freedom is one of the great dynamics of modern history in every part of the world.”⁴² He also observed that in many places the “autonomous will of the individual” is the “sole organizing principle of public life,” which is a “prescription for tyranny.”⁴³ John Paul diagnosed the root cause of the “crisis of moral culture” as “a crisis of understanding of the nature of the human person,” reminding us that “the nobility of men and women lies, not simply in the capacity to *choose*, but in the *capacity to choose . . . what is good*.”⁴⁴

On other occasions, John Paul II noted that the shadows of our day include “*religious indifference* which causes many people today to live as if God did not exist, . . . loss of the transcendent sense of human life, and confusion in the ethical sphere, even about the fundamental values of respect for life and family” (*TMA* 36). He also noted that “for many Christians, the spiritual life is passing through a *time of uncertainty*, which affects not only their moral life but also their life of prayer and the *theological correctness of their faith*” (*TMA* 36). John Paul went so far as to say there is a “*crisis of civilization*, . . . especially in the West, which is highly developed from the standpoint of technology but is interiorly impoverished” (*TMA* 52). He discussed the emergence of a society dominated by the powerful who eliminate the powerless, forging a culture of death: abortion, euthanasia, consumerism, materialism, the death penalty (*ELA* 63). On one occasion he said quite starkly, “At the end of the second millennium humanity stands at a kind of crossroads.”⁴⁵ He said there are “*signs of a new spiritual crisis*” on the personal level and the level of civilization, and, “If this crisis deepens, utilitarianism will increasingly reduce human beings to objects for manipulation.”⁴⁶ He discerned that because this “spiritual crisis . . . is . . . a flight from the transcendent mystery of God, it is . . . a flight from the truth about the human person.”⁴⁷

Before becoming pope, Cardinal Ratzinger diagnosed the true crisis of our time as the “Crisis of God.”⁴⁸ He explained that this crisis is an “empty religiosity” according to which even “Christians . . . often live as if God

⁴¹ Ibid., Address, Feb. 27, no. 5.

⁴² Ibid., Address, June 27, no. 2.

⁴³ Ibid., no. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Address, Oct. 23, no. 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love,” Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, 12 Dec. 2000. *EWTN*. accessed 2 Feb. 2010 www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

does not exist.”⁴⁹ As pope, Benedict XVI has spoken frequently of the “dictatorship of relativism” that is “a threat to genuine human freedom, which only matures in generosity and fidelity to the truth.”⁵⁰ He has noted a kind of secularism that causes faith to be viewed as a private matter; faith, rather, is to be brought to bear on business practices, medical procedures, sexual behavior, and the right to life.⁵¹ He has also noted that materialism is causing people to think science and technology make it possible to fulfill our deepest needs by our own efforts; and further, individualism, with its focus on personal freedom and autonomy, is causing people to lose sight of their dependence on others and their responsibilities toward them.⁵² He has further identified “a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred, which has even called into question foundations once deemed unshakeable such as faith in a provident creator God, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the one Saviour, and a common understanding of basic human experiences: i.e., birth, death, life in a family, and reference to a natural moral law.”⁵³

All of the preceding comments by John Paul II and Benedict XVI provide a sobering picture of the context within which the new evangelization must be carried out. However, these pontiffs have identified the barriers that must be cleared away if we are to lead others to encounter the living God.⁵⁴ John Paul II said, “In response to the spiritual crisis of our times,” we need nothing short of a radical “*healing of the mind as well as of the heart*.”⁵⁵ This is why he said in an address to the bishops of the United States, “*No demand on our ministry is more urgent than the ‘new evangelization’ needed to satisfy the spiritual hunger of our times.*”⁵⁶ Speaking also to the United States bishops, Benedict XVI said, “[T]he Church in America, at this point in her history, is faced with the challenge of recapturing the Catholic vision of reality and presenting it, in an engaging and imaginative way, to a society which markets any number of recipes for human fulfillment.”⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, Responses to the Questions Posed by the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Ubicumque et Semper*.

⁵³ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Oct. 23, no. 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., no. 3.

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, Responses to the Questions Posed by the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

⁵⁷ Conversely, one can understand the incredible harm inflicted on the efforts of the new evangelization by scandal within the Church.

III. Basic Methods of the New Evangelization

The question then becomes, “How do the faithful, all of whom are called to engage in the new evangelization, present the Catholic vision of reality in an engaging and imaginative way to promote the radical healing of mind and heart that our culture needs?” Neither Vatican II nor any of the succeeding popes have laid out a detailed program for the new evangelization. This is primarily because, as Paul VI said, methods of evangelization differ with “time, place and culture” (*EN* 40). One must remember that the overall thrust of the new evangelization is to speak the unchanging truth of the gospel in a new cultural situation in a language that the culture can understand and with which it can resonate. Yet, while being careful not to prescribe a methodology for the new evangelization that is overly specific, Paul VI did say there are methods of evangelization that have “fundamental importance” (*EN* 40). Following Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Vatican II it is possible to articulate some basic methods that must be followed if the new evangelization is to be effective.

The first and most fundamental method of new evangelization is that of authentic Christian witness. Vatican II articulated that the most important contribution a disciple can make to the spread of the faith is to live “a profound Christian life,” including prayer and penance (*Ad Gentes* 36). Paul VI affirmed this conciliar teaching when he said, “[T]he first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life” (*EN* 41; see also *EN* 21). He went on to say, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers,” and, “It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world” (*EN* 41).⁵⁸ Echoing Paul VI, John Paul II said “The first requirement of the new evangelization is the *actual witness of Christians who live by the Gospel*.”⁵⁹ He said being “evangelists of the new millennium” means “witnessing to the faith by lives of holiness.”⁶⁰ He insisted, “Christ must be proclaimed with joy and conviction, but above all by the witness of each one’s life” (*ELA* 67). He also said that in the witness which is the first form of evangelization, concern for others is the most appealing witness, as it “stands in marked contrast to selfishness” (*RM* 42). He noted that wordless witness is a silent, powerful, and effective proclamation of the Gospel, stirring up “questions in the hearts of those who see how they live.”⁶¹ Thus, before becoming pope, Cardinal Ratzinger could say, “[T]o

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, June 5, no. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Address, Mar. 17, no. 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Address, June 5, no. 4.

⁶¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love.”

evangelize means . . . to teach the art of living” and that we need the new evangelization to make the art of living known.⁶² He also noted this art can be communicated only by one “who is the Gospel personified.”⁶³

Although witness is the most fundamental method of the new evangelization, witness in itself is not sufficient. Paul VI said that in addition to witness we also need proclamation (EN 22), and he went on to say that preaching the word is “indispensable” (EN 42). Regarding the indispensability of proclaiming the gospel, John Paul II said to the bishops of the United States, “*The spirit of the new evangelization should inspire every aspect of your teaching, instruction and catechesis.*”⁶⁴ He encouraged the bishops of the United States to come to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of the faith and find “meaningful language with which to convince our contemporaries that they are called to newness of life through God’s love.”⁶⁵ He also clarified that “[t]he new evangelization . . . means that faith cannot be taken for granted, but must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness. This is the principal objective of catechesis, which, by its very nature, is an essential aspect of the new evangelization” (EIA 69).

Paul VI had affirmed that evangelization involves catechesis that transmits “fundamental teachings” in a systematic way “to form patterns of Christian living” (EN 44), and he suggested several ways for the Church to undertake this catechetical proclamation of the word in our new context. He noted that “the homily [is] an important and very adaptable instrument of evangelization,” in the celebration of all liturgies (EN 43).⁶⁶ In addition to the homily, Paul VI asserted that the Church should avail herself of modern methods of social communication (EN 45), including images (EN 42), to transmit the gospel. Linking use of social communication to preaching, Paul said mass media and social communications should be used to evangelize as from a modern pulpit, with the challenge of speaking to the individual (EN 45). Cardinal Ratzinger echoed this emphasis on using modern means of communication to spread the gospel when he said, “Everyone needs the Gospel . . . and . . . we are obliged to look for new ways of bringing the Gospel to all.”⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Mar. 17, no. 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ John Paul II also insisted that the Sunday homily is an important part of evangelization, and that the *Catechism* is an excellent preaching resource (*Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Mar. 21, no. 5).

⁶⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love.”

⁶⁷ The importance of personal contact in spreading the gospel was underscored by Cardinal Ratzinger when he said, “To proclaim God is . . . to teach how to pray.

Yet, lest one think the focus of the new evangelization is on utilizing modern technology to spread the gospel, Paul VI taught that “person-to-person” contact will always be indispensable in evangelization (EN 46). He noted that evangelization is not only the preaching and teaching of doctrine—it “must touch life” (EN 47). He continued by explaining that supernatural life must be seen to penetrate natural life—especially in the sacraments (EN 47). Thus, evangelization must lead to the sacraments (EN 47), which is the ultimate person-to-person contact.⁶⁸

Beyond witnessing to the gospel and proclaiming it in word through personal contact, with the hope of facilitating personal contact with Christ in the sacraments, the most important “method” of the new evangelization is love. Paul VI said the evangelizer must love those he evangelizes with the love of a father and a mother (EN 79). John Paul II said being involved in mission and evangelization means sharing “Christ’s burning love for souls” and the Church, love that takes “the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability, and interest in people’s problems” (RM 89).

Addressing clergy, John Paul said, “[P]riests must . . . be alert to the challenges of the world and sensitive to the problems and hopes of their people, sharing their experiences” and encouraging the faithful to “participation and co-responsibility” (ELA 39). He said a renewed parish needs “a pastor who has a deep experience of the living Christ, a missionary spirit, a father’s heart, who is capable of fostering the spiritual life, preaching the Gospel and promoting cooperation” (ELA 41). In an address to the bishops of the United States, Benedict XVI said, “When the faithful know that their pastor is a man who prays and who dedicates his life to serving them, they respond with warmth and affection which nourishes and sustains the life of the whole community.”⁶⁹ Thus, among the “methods” of the new evangelization, none is more important than love, without which the evangelizer is simply a “noisy gong or a clashing symbol” (1 Cor 13:1).

[Because] only by experiencing life with God does the evidence of His existence appear”—this includes personal, communal, and liturgical prayer (Ratzinger, “The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love”).

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

⁶⁹ For other comments on the importance of the family for the new evangelization see: Carl Anderson, “The Family: Sign of Communion in the New Evangelization,” in *Called to Holiness and Communion: Vatican II on the Church*, ed. Stephen Boguslawski and Robert Fastiggi (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007), 265–76; and also by Anderson, “The Role of the Family in the Conversion of Culture,” *Communio* 21 (Winter 1994): 765–75.

IV. The Nucleus of the New Evangelization

Having discussed the nature of the “new evangelization” in its origin, agents, and goal, the context for the new evangelization, and some basic methods of the new evangelization, what remains is to discuss the vital core or nucleus of the new evangelization—the family.⁷⁰ The family is at the very center of every aspect of the new evangelization, and without focusing on the family as both recipient and agent of the new evangelization, the goals of facilitating conversion through personal encounter with Christ and transforming culture to build a “civilization of love” will go unrealized. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II said “the future of evangelization depends in great part on” the family.⁷¹ The Pontifical Council for the Family has gone so far as to write, “The family is the heart of the new evangelization.”⁷²

That the success of the new evangelization depends on the family should be evident. First, “the Christian family . . . is the first community called to announce the gospel” (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 2), by announcing the gospel to its own members. Second, the “family is the *original cell of social life*,”⁷³ forming the first society in itself. As the original cell of society the “Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task” (CCC 2205) to lead others to encounter Christ and to transform culture by witness and proclamation. Thus, Paul VI could say the family has an evangelizing mission as “domestic church,” bearing “aspects of the entire Church,” each member evangelizing and being evangelized by each other, and together evangelizing other families and neighborhoods (EN 71). John Paul II said, “*The immediate and in many ways most important arena of the laity’s Christian witness is marriage and the family.*”⁷⁴ He explained that the family helps build a “civilization of life and love,” and “where the family is weak, all human relationships are exposed to instability and fragmentation.”⁷⁵ In his *Letter to Families*,⁷⁶ John Paul II even said “[T]he family is the center and the heart of the civilization of love,” which one must remember is one of the goals of the new evangelization. He went on to say, “Only if the truth about freedom and the communion of persons in marriage and in the family can regain

⁷⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1981), no. 52.

⁷¹ Pontifical Council for the Family, “Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage,” *Origins* 26.7 (1996): no. 20.

⁷² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d ed. (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 2207; hereafter CCC.

⁷³ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, June 5, no. 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, no. 13.

⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Mar. 17, no. 5.

its splendor, will the building of the civilization of love truly begin.” At the closing of his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, John Paul II even issued a special invitation to Catholic families to be “domestic churches” so they can be “true centers of evangelization” (EIA 76).

Thus, one can understand why John Paul II said that “ministry to families is an extremely important dimension of the Church’s evangelizing task,”⁷⁷ urging “a constant increase of pastoral initiatives directed to families” (EIA 46). He warned that the family, established by God at the beginning of creation, is being threatened by practices such as divorce, abortion, infanticide, and contraception (EIA 46). He stressed the need to reassert “that the foundation of human life is the conjugal relationship between husband and wife” (EIA 46), and that life and family must not be separated (EIA 63). He also stressed the urgent need for catechesis on marriage and family, “including a spirituality of fatherhood and motherhood” so the family can be a “domestic church” (EIA 46). In particular, John Paul II noted the need to form couples in the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* and the theological development that has followed that document.⁷⁸ He said we “must find the right language and imagery to present this teaching in a comprehensible and compelling way,”⁷⁹ and he suggested to the bishops of the United States that “the teaching of the Magisterium, the development of the ‘theology of the body,’ and the experience of faithful Catholic couples have given Catholics in the United States a uniquely powerful and compelling opportunity to bring the truth about human sexuality into a society that sorely needs to hear it.”⁸⁰

In saying that the parish should be “the center of the new evangelization,”⁸¹ John Paul II said, “The strength of parish life . . . can be judged above all from the way families pass on the faith.”⁸² He said, “The parish is a ‘family of families’ and should be organized to support family life in every way possible.”⁸³ He urged, “Since the Christian family is the ‘domestic church,’ couples must be helped to relate their family life in concrete ways to the life and mission of the Church,” and “pastoral planning should also give adequate attention to the needs of ordinary families seeking to live up to their vocation.”⁸⁴ John Paul II even pointed out that pastoral care

⁷⁷ Ibid., Address, June 5, no. 6.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Address, Oct. 2, no. 2.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Address, June 5, no. 6.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Address, Mar. 17, no. 4.

⁸¹ Ibid., no. 5.

⁸² Ibid., Address, May 21, no. 5.

⁸³ Ibid., Address, June 5, no. 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Address, May 21, no. 5.

focused on the family could enrich the priesthood itself when he stated, "Priests are called to a unique form of spiritual fatherhood and can come to a deeper appreciation of the meaning of being a 'man for others' through their pastoral care of those striving to live out the requirements of self-giving and fruitful love in Christian marriage."⁸⁵

For his part, Benedict XVI has said that "a matter of deep concern . . . is the state of the family within society."⁸⁶ He has observed that the family is declining "as the basic element of Church and society" because of practices like divorce, infidelity, postponing or foregoing marriage, decreases in sacramental marriages, and increases in cohabitation.⁸⁷ He has reiterated John Paul II's teaching that the "family is . . . the primary place for evangelization."⁸⁸ He has also insisted that bishops need to take responsibility for the pastoral care of the family and proclaim boldly that marriage is "a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, open to the transmission of life," and that this truth is a "'yes' to life, a 'yes' to love, and a 'yes' to the aspirations at the heart of our common humanity, as we strive to fulfill our deep yearning for intimacy with others and with the Lord."⁸⁹

Thus the family is, as John Paul II said in his *Letter to Families*, the "way of the Church" and, one can argue, the way of the new evangelization. The Pontifical Council for the Family called marriage preparation part of the new evangelization,⁹⁰ but one could say the same thing of any effort aimed at strengthening marriages and families. If it is true, as John Paul II taught in *Familiaris Consortio*, that the well-being of society and the good of the Church are tied to the family (no. 3), and that the very "future of the world and of the Church passes through the family" (no. 75), then the primary effort of the new evangelization must focus on strengthening the family in its identity as "domestic church" and, in turn, enabling it to function as an agent of evangelization. The family needs to encounter Christ anew and thereby be empowered to witness to the truth of the gospel, personifying it at home and in culture. The family needs to be enabled to proclaim the gospel through personal contact with others. And, the family needs to be formed to be a sanctuary of life and love, providing a consistent example of love in order to build a civilization of love. Until this happens, the goals of the new evangelization will go largely unrealized. N V

⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage," no. 2.