

GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES: CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION FROM VATICAN II INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

by Tony Bosnick

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"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." ([Matthew 28:19-20](#))

On Evangelization in the Modern World

Evangelii Nuntiandi (12/8/75) was a key moment in the life of the post-conciliar Church. Paul VI wrote: "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" (EN, 14).

Evangelizing means:

- bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ
- into every human situation
- seeking to convert individuals and society
- by the divine power of the Gospel itself.

We are also challenged to evangelize the culture "in a vital way... taking the person as the starting point (EN, 20): care and respect for the elderly, concern for the poor and needy, care for children, for the vulnerable. This calls us to meet the culture and transform it in Christ in specific ways: death penalty, debt reduction, health care for the children of the poor, opposition to activities that destroy human dignity-pornography, prostitution, holding a person in economic and psychological slavery. It calls for fostering a culture or civilization of life.

Mission of the Redeemer

John Paul wrote in 1990: "I sense 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" (RM, 3).

A Grace of Vatican II

Vatican II is a providential event of the 20th century. Pope John Paul II called it "a providential event, whereby the Church began the more immediate preparation for the Jubilee of the Second Millennium" (TMA, 18). Since Vatican II, numerous Vatican documents have unfolded major themes related to evangelization. These themes include:

1. The Church is missionary. John Paul teaches: "Parishes in America should be distinguished by their missionary spirit, which leads them to reach out to those who are far away" (Church in America, 41).
2. The universal call to holiness. (LG, 39)-"The encounter with the living Jesus Christ is the path to conversion, communion, and solidarity" (Church in America, 7).
3. The call to full participation in the mission of Jesus. -"It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle" (CL, 3).

The New Evangelization

John Paul began to speak of a "new evangelization" in 1983, introducing the expression on a visit to Latin America. The new evangelization is "new in ardor, new in methods, new in expression."

It is directed to three "situations" or groups:

1. those who do not believe in Christ (*ad gentes*)
2. the Christian community itself
3. inactive Catholics

It differs from evangelization as it was understood in the past by:

1. calling for the participation of every Catholic
2. by being distinct from foreign missions
3. by being directed to cultures as well

Go and Make Disciples

In response to EN of Paul VI and the new evangelization of John Paul II, the U.S bishops in 1992 issued *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*.

It has three main goals:

1. **Goal 1-to live our faith fully:** "To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.
2. **Goal 2-to share our faith freely:** "To invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith."
3. **Goal 3-to transform the world in Christ:** "To foster gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ."
4. **Many Tributaries, One River**
5. Evangelization is becoming a central focus of the Church's understanding of its mission and focus. This is a multi-cultural, multi-national understanding, which began in Rome (in an official way) and has spread through the whole Church.

Evangelization: A New Springtime and a Great Harvest

Challenges facing us:

- to "own" evangelization as the essential mission of Church
- to strengthen commitment to implement the goals of GMD
- to develop new values and a new evangelizing spirituality
- to find new and effective ways to evangelize culture

John Paul continues to teach: "We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' ([1 Cor 9:16](#)). **This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which 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. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as *the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups*"** (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40).

Questions for Personal Study and Small Groups

1. Read [Jer 20:9](#), [1 Cor 9:16](#) and [2 Cor 5:20](#). How does your life reflect what John Paul teaches: "Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him"?
2. How were you evangelized? What are the central points of your own journey of coming to know Jesus? What can you draw from your own experience that might be helpful in evangelizing others?
3. In what ways do you take up the call to evangelize in your daily life situations? Do your attempts reflect the "new evangelization"-that is, are they new in "ardor, methods, and expression"? How?
4. Why is it important that Christians "evangelize the culture"? How can you grow in your ability to embrace and proclaim all the Church teaches about the elements of the culture of life?
5. Read and meditate on [Lk 5:1-11](#). How will "going deeper" in our life with God, as individuals and as a Community, affect our ability to "let down our nets for a catch"?