NEW EVANGELIZATION OR MISSIONARY CHURCH?

*Evangelii Gaudium* and the Call for Missionary Discipleship

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Introduction: A Shift in Terms

In the pages that follow, I would like to propose that the term and practice of a New Evangelization has subtly but effectively shifted to include a more comprehensive vision of the church that is, in the words of Vatican II, “missionary by its very nature,”¹ or, in the words of Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, a “community of missionary disciples.”² Such a shift in terminology takes into account, I believe, the situation of every local church in every part of the world, while still acknowledging the urgency for new ways and expressions of evangelization in the situations toward which the New Evangelization has been aimed. More appropriate than New Evangelization might be the terms “new phase,” “new chapter,” or “new paths” of evangelization, terms that appear with some frequency in the Apostolic Exhortation.³ A world in which the center of gravity has shifted to the Global South, which is experiencing major shifts

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³ EG 17, 287, 1, 161, 1, 11, 31, 288.
in demography in the wake of massive movements of migration worldwide, and
which has shrunken in size due to the revolutions in travel and communications is a
world that requires a missionary church, a church in which mission is “paradigmatic”
for all its activity.\(^4\) Such a missionary church is certainly joyful, enthusiastic, and
bold as it preaches and witnesses to the gospel, but such joy, enthusiasm and
boldness emerges out of a church with its doors always open, a church that listens
respectfully to the world that it serves, and that offers, above all, tenderness and
mercy to all.

The “new phase” or “chapter” of evangelization that has been inaugurated
has its roots in the Second Vatican Council, and so we begin our reflection by
revisiting that watershed moment in ecclesial and mission history.

The Missionary Church at Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council was fundamentally a “missionary council.”\(^5\) This
has not always seen clearly, especially with the ascendancy of “communion
ecclesiology” in the last decades.\(^6\) As one “revisits” the Council after fifty years,
however, its missionary spirit and style emerge rather clearly. This is true especially
in the light of the epochal changes that have been taking place in our world in the

\(^4\) EG 15.
\(^5\) Johannes Schütte, “Ce que la mission attendait du Concile,” in ed. Johannes Schütte,
\(^6\) See in particular Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops
of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church as Communion,”
last half-century since the Council’s close. As John XXIII’s articulation of his goals for the Council gained clarity in the years between 1959 and 1962, a vision emerged that the Council “would mark a transition between two eras, that is, that would bring the Church out of the post-tridentine period and ... into a new phase of witness and proclamation.” John XXIII called for aggiornamento in the church, but not for its own sake. Any renewal the Council would bring was for the sake of a more intelligible and effective preaching of the gospel.

Every one of the four major Constitutions of the Council begins with some kind of missionary commitment, and, at a crucial point during the Council the bishops insisted that a proper document on the church’s missionary activity needed to be written. The resulting Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, Ad Gentes, opened with one of the most important statements of the Council, that “the pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that it takes its origin, in accordance with the decree of

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9 This is certainly the spirit of Pope John’s opening speech. See the speech in The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbot, ed. (New York: Herder and Herder / Association Press, 1966), 710-19.
God the Father.” The Decree also opened up missionary work to a “sincere and patient dialogue” with local cultures and contexts.

Two other Council documents are important for mission as well, especially about the way in which mission should be engaged: the Declarations on Religious Freedom and on Non-Christian Religions. Mission in the mind of the Council respects people’s freedom and acknowledges God’s truth in all religious ways.

Mission was also evident in the style of the Council. It was to be pastoral, non-condemnatory, dialogical, appreciative of culture and experience. At the Council, in sum, Mission was not conceived as the church bringing a supra- or non-historical message to a people living in darkness and death, but a respectful, joyful announcement of God’s amazing presence and love in Christ, a presence and love already experienced by people before the missionary arrived. Mission was what the church was at its very core.

The New Evangelization

Vatican II’s document on Mission outlined three areas or fields where the church carries out its missionary mandate. The major emphasis of Mission is “missionary activity among the nations,” but “closely connected with the missionary

11 AG 2.
12 See AG 11.
“zeal of the church” is “pastoral activity exercised among the faithful” and “undertakings aimed at restoring unity among Christians.” As the years progressed after Vatican II, however, there seemed to be less emphasis on the ecumenical aspect of Mission (although this did not completely disappear). What began to emerge in official church documents in place of this third area of mission activity was a greater emphasis on the need to evangelize within the context of growing secularity and indifference to the church among those peoples who made up traditionally Christian nations. This emerging emphasis was eventually named the “New Evangelization.”

Ronald Witherup suggests that the roots of the New Evangelization go back “at least” to Paul VI’s 1975 Apostolic Exhortation when he speaks of the need for evangelization in the modern world. It was John Paul II, however, who began to use the term in his speeches and documents, possibly influenced, as missiologist John Gorski suggests, by the document issued by the Latin American Bishops at Medellin as far back as 1968. John Paul's first use of the term was during his historic visit to Poland in 1979, although, as the Lineamenta for the 2012 Synod on

15 AG 6.
the New Evangelization points out, the Pope used it without any particular sense
that this would be one of the hallmarks of his future teaching.\textsuperscript{19} He used it again in a
much more deliberate way in 1983, addressing the bishops of Latin America and the
Caribbean assembled in Haiti, and again in his opening address at Santo Domingo in
1992, explaining that it what was needed in Latin America today was not a re-
evangelization, but an evangelization “new in its ardour, methods and expression.”\textsuperscript{20}
Subsequently the Latin American bishops picked up the term in their 1992 General
Assembly in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, recognizing it as the “all
encompassing element” or “central idea” of the Conference.\textsuperscript{21}

It was in John Paul II’s major 1990 Mission encyclical \textit{Redemptoris Missio},
however, where the term was most fully explained, and somewhat modified from
his remarks in 1983. Given the “circumstances in which ... mission is carried out,”
the Pope distinguishes “three situations.” The first is what he calls “mission ad

\textsuperscript{19}\url{http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html}, 5. See John Paul II, Homily at the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross, Mogila, Poland, June 9, 1979), 1; \textit{L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English}, July 16, 1979, 11: \textit{AAS} 71 (1979) 865. “Where the Cross is raised, there is raised the sign that that place has now been reached by the Good News of Man’s salvation through Love. ... The new wooden Cross was raised not far from here at the very time we were celebrating the Millennium. With it we were given \textit{a sign} that on the threshold of the new millennium, in these new times, these new conditions of life, the Gospel is again being proclaimed. \textit{A new evangelization} has begun, as if it were a new proclamation, even if in reality it is the same as ever.”


\textsuperscript{21} “Conclusions: New Evangelization, Human Development, Christian Culture,” 80 (paragraph 22).
*gentes* in the proper sense of the term,” preaching and witnessing to the gospel in contexts where Christ is not known or the church is still weakly established. Second is the ordinary pastoral care of the faithful, but, third, there is “an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots ...” In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization’” (notice the revision from the Pope’s remarks in Haiti).22 The Pope goes on to insist nevertheless that these three situations of mission are not to be placed in “water-tight compartments,” and goes on further to include in the mission *ad gentes* certain “new worlds and social phenomena” and “modern equivalents of the Areopagus,” alluding to Paul’s speech at Athens in Acts 17.23 John Paul also wrote of the New Evangelization in the various apostolic exhortations that appeared after the regional Synods of Bishops that were held in preparation for the Millennium.24

In 2005 Joseph Ratzinger was elected Pope, and quite deliberately chose the name Benedict, the significance of which he explained in his first general audience. The name was to recall Benedict XV (1914-1922) who had worked to prevent World War I and worked afterwards to promote reconciliation. Probably more significantly,

22 All these quotations are from RM 33.
23 See RM 37.
however, Benedict’s name referred to Benedict of Norcia, “one of the patron saints of Europe who—according to the pope—had exercised an enormous influence on Europe’s Christian heritage,” and saved Europe from the ravages of the non-Christian migrating tribes of his time. As a Cardinal, Ratzinger had repeatedly expressed his concern for Europe in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

Especially since 1989, Ratzinger argued that “Europe has been deeply affected by the master narratives of progress and emancipation,” and has embraced a relativism that has actually betrayed genuine truth and freedom. Because of this, the church is challenged to stand as the witness to a Truth that is not the result of subjective experience, but given objectively in Revelation. The church has to be a “minority that is often opposed to ‘the spirit of the world.’” As Pope, Ratzinger would commit himself to saving Europe from the ravages of post-modernism and unbelief. In some ways Benedict, it could be said, was trying to move the church back into its less complex (at least in the eyes of many) pre-Vatican II existence through a number of policies that missiologist John Sivalon characterizes as “romantic conservatism.”

It is in this context that Pope Benedict created the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization in September of 2010. In the Apostolic Letter “Ubique et Semper” that established the new Council, Benedict acknowledged that “to speak of a ‘new evangelization’ does not in fact mean that a single formula should be developed that would hold the same for all circumstances.” Nevertheless,

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he says that churches in "traditionally Christian territories" require a “renewed missionary impulse.” Shortly afterwards the Pope announced that the theme of the upcoming Synod of Bishops in 2012 would be “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Faith,” the Lineamenta for which speaks of the New Evangelization as “primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally Christian countries.”

In actuality, both the Lineamenta and the Instrumentum Laboris, as well as the writings of Benedict XVI, broaden this understanding of the New Evangelization to a great extent. The Lineamenta speaks of the fact that the New Evangelization is about “finding new approaches to evangelization so as ‘to be Church’ in today’s ever-changing social and cultural situations,” and that the traditional distinction between sending countries and receiving countries no longer obtains. The Instrumentum Laboris, based on worldwide responses to the Lineamenta, acknowledges that the New Evangelization should be a renewal of the missionary consciousness of the entire church, and that the issues that it addresses—a certain unraveling of traditions and institutions because of the process of globalization—are present in all

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29 Benedict XVI, Homily at the Conclusion for the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English 27 (October 2010): 4.


31 Lineamenta, 9.
parts of the world.\footnote{Instrumentum Laboris, \url{http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20120619_instrumentum-xiii_en.html}, 47.} Pope Benedict’s focus, nonetheless, in his opening homily for the Synod on October 7, 2012, seemed still to be on the West when he speaks about how the New Evangelization is primarily about those who have drifted away from their baptismal commitment.\footnote{Benedict XVI, Homily at the Opening of the 2012 Synod of Bishops, \url{http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121007_apertura-sinodo_en.html}.}

Pope John Paul II had spoken several times of three aspects of the New Evangelization: its newness in ardor, methods, and expression. Although all three of these are mentioned occasionally in the pre-Synodal documents, and in the talks of Pope Benedict, the impression is given nevertheless that the first aspect receives the most emphasis.\footnote{See, for example, Lineamenta 5; see the Instrumentum Laboris, Preface, 23, 45, 62} One of the key words in the Lineamenta is “boldness,” recurring thirteen times in the document—seven times in the text, and six times in the questions that follow. In the Instrumentum Laboris we read that “our institutions need to adopt a bold and even ‘apologetic’ approach and seeks ways of publically affirming their faith, fearlessly and with a clear sense of pastoral urgency.”\footnote{See the Lineamenta, 2-11. See the Instrumentum Laboris, 138.}

In his 2012 book, Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and its Implication for the New Evangelization, theologian Ralph Martin, a consultor for the Pontifical Council, offered an extensive rationale for the New Evangelization. The book received the endorsement of some of the most important members of the Catholic hierarchy—among them Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, Cardinal George Pell of Sydney, Australia, and Cardinal Rino Fisichella, President of the
Pontifical Council on the New Evangelization. Martin’s work is largely an analysis of the concluding paragraph of LG 16, and offers a caution to a too-optimistic reading of the paragraph in terms of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, unbelievers, and even Christian believers. Martin’s conclusion is that the fact that “vast numbers” of women and men need “desperately to be invited to faith and repentance in order to be saved,” and therein lies the urgency of the New Evangelization. “It matters whether the gospel is preached or not. It matters if people believe and are baptized or not.”

Martin goes on in a final chapter to suggest that Vatican II employed a “flawed pastoral strategy” in its approach to evangelization, and that strategy needs today to be reversed. In the light of today’s situation, it is time for the church to “recover the boldness of apostolic preaching” and proclaim “the reality of God’s wrath, properly understood; and our desperate need for Christ in order for us to be reconciled with God, bringing with it an appropriate fear of the Lord.” On the last page of his text, Martin concludes that “We have not seen that ‘biblical-thought world’ [words of Pope Benedict XVI] or its ‘spirit’ adequately ‘handed on’ in the post-conciliar years. The omission needs to be corrected if the urgent call for a new evangelization is to achieve its considerable promise in the traditionally Christian nations that are not in massive apostacy and in the reenergizing of primary

38 Martin, Will Many Be Saved?, 91.
40 Martin, Will Many Be Saved?, 198.
evangelization to the unevangelized peoples of the world.”

Given the endorsement of so many churchmen in high places, and Martin’s own position of influence on the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, one might conclude that Martin’s understanding of the content and urgency of the New Evangelization is an unofficial but nonetheless authoritative statement of its vision and goals.

In his small book on the New Evangelization published after the 2012 Synod, Cardinal Donald Wherl, Relator at the 2012 Synod and now the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, cites four qualities of women and men who engage in the new evangelization: “boldness or courage, connectedness to the Church, a sense of urgency, and joy.”

Cardinal Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council on the New Evangelization, in his own short book, quotes Benedict XVI in his apostolic letter inaugurating the Pontifical Council. The Pope speaks of the need to approach the world with “missionary zeal” and a “renewed missionary drive.”

Fisichella himself speaks frequently in the book of the urgency of the New Evangelization, particularly in Europe, which needs Christianity and Christian values to be true to its deepest identity. Nevertheless, while the New Evangelization calls us to “knock on every door,” we need to approach others with a deep sense of respect and listening heart. Bold preaching needs to be balanced by witness. And although he

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41 Martin, Will Many Be Saved?, 208.
44 Fisichella, The New Evangelization, 42.
45 Fisichella, The New Evangelization, 50.
calls for a renewed apologetics, it needs to be sensitive and relevant to the particular context in which it is offered.\textsuperscript{46}

The New Evangelization before the 2012 Synod, it might be concluded, was characterized on the one hand by a new commitment to boldness in witnessing to and preaching the gospel on the one hand, and, on the other, to doing this primarily in the context of Western, secularized culture. There were certainly calls for openness and listening, but the basic tone of the Synod’s preparatory documents and the writing of some of its main protagonists focuses much more on the zeal of evangelizers to faithfully and energetically transmit the content of Christian faith in an indifferent or outright hostile context.

The 2012 Synod

While an emphasis on a new ardor or boldness in the church’s evangelizing efforts was also expressed in the Synod itself,\textsuperscript{47} some of the more striking interventions of the bishops focused more on a new attitude of humility, gentleness, and listening that needed to be espoused by the church as it renews its efforts of evangelization in the world, attitudes somewhat present in the \textit{Lineamenta} and \textit{Instrumentum Laboris}, but certainly not prominent. Bishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham, England, for example, would agree with Fisichella’s insistence on listening. Indeed, the very prerequisite for evangelization today is “profound

\textsuperscript{46} Fisichella, \textit{The New Evangelization}, 57.

\textsuperscript{47} For example, the Intervention of Cardinal Peter Erdő of Hungary, \url{http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/xx_plurilingue/b05_xx.html}. 
listening.” “There can be no effective proclamation of the faith, Longley said, ‘without an attempt to understand how the message is likely to be heard, how it sounds to others.’”

Archbishop (now Cardinal) Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila also called for the church to listen first before speaking. “The Church must discover the power of silence,” he said. “Confronted with the sorrows, doubts and uncertainties of people she cannot pretend to give easy solutions. In Jesus, silence becomes the way of attentive listening, compassion and prayer.”

Another bishop from the Philippines, Socrates Villegas from Lingayen-Dagupan, emphasized the fact that “the new evangelization calls for new humility. ... This humility will make us more credible new evangelizers. Our mission is to propose humbly, not to impose proudly.”

To give one more example, Adolfo Nicolás, Jesuit Superior General and long time Asian missionary, spoke of how humility, simplicity, generosity and joy are the tried and true ways of best communicating the gospel.

Although these interventions were still a minority voice at the Synod, they did go beyond the impression often given that the New Evangelization is simply


evangelization “revved up,”52 (or, as I have put it, saying the same old thing but saying more loudly). If Martin and, to some degree, Fisichella were advocating a move back to the time of the church before the Council, these voices at the Synod, certainly in the minority, were advocating a genuine, open dialogue of the church with today’s world. Only a listening church could offer the conditions of the possibility of an evangelization adequate to the present.

In a thoughtful presentation at a post-Synodal conference sponsored by SEDOS (“Service of Documentation and Studies”), an organization sponsored by the various missionary congregations with generalates in Rome, Enzo Biemmi suggested that the Bishops underwent three (partially realized) “conversions” at the Synod.53 First, said Biemmi, A first conversion was a move from a more extrinsic understanding of evangelization to a return to the gospel as a central feature of it. Evangelization is not ultimately a matter of being more bold or courageous, or for that matter finding new methods and language. Rather, “the problem of evangelisation is not a catechetical problem, but an ecclesiological one.”54 Only if Christians allow the gospel to shape them will they have anything to say. They need to listen both to the Spirit in the world and to the spirit of the gospel. Second, the understanding of evangelization moved in the Synod from activity based on individual conversion to ecclesial reform. Yes, says Biemmi, there dawned the

53 See Brother Enzo Biemmi, FSF, “For a Truly ‘New’ Evangelisation: A Re-Reading of the Synod,” SEDOS Residential Seminar, April 23-27, 2013. Many other papers from the Seminar were published in the SEDOS Bulletin, but this one was not. It was furnished to me by Noel Conolly, SSC, one of the speakers at the Seminar.
realization that the first, personal conversion needs to take place. Unless, however, it is coupled with real structural change in the church the lives of individual Christians will have little impact. It needs to be a church fully engaged within the world, and not just a church “before” the world.55 Third, there was a shift from thinking that evangelization is purely one-directional to the recognition that it is about dialogue and relationship. “A real dialogue occurs in which the Church leans on culture, on some of its elements; thanks to these she sees herself anew and understands the Gospel in a different way and therefore learns to live it in a different way, to think about it and present it in a fresh manner.”56

Ronald Witherup offers a reflection that might be considered another “conversion” that the Synod experienced. Writing about the list of Final Propositions from the Synod, he takes note of a “slight change in direction”57 that took place as the Synod progressed. As we have seen in the Lineamenta and the Instrumentum Laboris, and in the remarks of Benedict himself, the original intention of the Synod was to address issues arising particularly from the secularized West. Such a perspective was also seen in many of the interventions as well, and also in the Final Propositions. However, Witherup says, “a renewed emphasis on the mission ad gentes or ad extra, that is, an outreach to those who have not received the Gospel message, is now also prominent. It reinforces the notion that the church is always on mission, always outwardly oriented to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ.”58

58 Witherup, St. Paul and the New Evangelization, Location 338.
Pope Francis and *Evangelii Gaudium*: A Church of Missionary Disciples

The calls at the Synod for a more open, listening church; the shifts toward spirituality, structural reform, and dialogue; and the insistence on a renewed form of evangelization for the entire church, not just the West, are all features of the remarkable Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by the newly-elected Pope Francis in late November of 2013, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Since his election in March of the same year, Francis had astounded the world by one dramatic gesture after another—asking the crowds to pray for him when he first appeared on the balcony after his election, embracing a quadriplegic man at his inauguration, washing the feet of Muslim women on Holy Thursday, uttering his famous “who am I to judge?” when asked about gay priests, the release of a wide-ranging and frank interview. Such gestures seemed to signal an entirely new, astonishingly fresh approach not only to the Petrine Ministry but also to the witnessing to the gospel. The first Pope ordained to the priesthood after the Second Vatican Council was signalling the validity of all the Council stood for. In his commentary on the document, Italian theologian Christian Albini expressed his conviction that it “signals a new stage in the trajectory opened by Vatican II.”

Although *Evangelii Gaudium* is the expected Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, it seems to lead the church beyond the Synod's theme of New Evangelization toward a vision of the church as going forth as a “community of...

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missionary disciples.” It is perhaps significant that the term “new evangelization” appears only twelve times in this very long document of 288 paragraphs (Pope John Paul II’s mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* has, in comparison, 92 paragraphs). Perhaps significant as well are phrases, as I have already pointed out, like new *chapter of evangelization*, new *paths*, a new *phase*, new *processes* of evangelization. The Pope likewise speaks of a “new missionary going forth,” a new evangelical fervor, and new challenges to evangelization. The strong impression that the Pope gives is that he is leading the church beyond the new evangelization towards an understanding of the church that is, in the words of Vatican II, “missionary by its very nature.” As he introduces his Apostolic Exhortation he notes that the topics he reflects on in the document “help give shape to a definite style of evangelization which I ask you to adopt in every activity you undertake.”

“I dream of a ‘missionary option,’” he writes, “that is a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for

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60 EG 24. See also Albini, *Guida alla Lettura della Evangelii Gaudium*, Location 18.
61 EG 14 (3x), 73, 120, 126, 198, 239, 260, 284, 287, 288.
62 EG 1, 161.
63 EG 1, 11, 31, 288.
64 EG 17, 287.
65 EG 69.
66 EG 20.
67 EG 29.
68 EG 20. I think it quite significant that the title given to the October, 2014 Synod of Bishops is “The Pastoral Challenge of the Family in the Context of Evangelization”—not the *New Evangelization*.
69 AG 2.
70 EG 18. Italics are Francis’s.
the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her preservation.” 71 Here in one sentence is Francis’s vision for the church. The passage goes on to speak of a “pastoral conversion” that demands renewed structures, that will make “ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open,” that will call pastoral workers to go forth to preach and witness to the gospel. As Martin Tuelan, National Director of Australia’s Catholic Mission office, observes, “rather than stressing new evangelization or overseas mission, Pope Francis sees that the whole Church needs to be ‘permanently in a state of mission.’” 72 Francis echoed the 2012 Synod’s move to speak of new evangelization not only in terms of the secularized West, but as taking place in ordinary pastoral work, among people “whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism,” and in primary evangelization situations. 73 Thus, like the Synod, he offered a wider understanding of the new evangelization than the Synod’s preparatory documents, and moved that understanding toward a consistent vision of a missionary church.

There is certainly language of a “new ardor” in the document, but much more apparent are John Paul II’s two other characteristics of “new methods” and “new expressions.” 74 Evangelizers do not impose obligations, but are people who “share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious

71 EG 27.
73 EG 14, citing Benedict XVI’s opening homily of the Synod.
74 “Ardour” appears one time, in EG 288; “bold” appears 8 times, e.g. 24, 33, 47, 109. See 33 and 34 where Francis talks about new methods and expressions.
banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction.’”  

“Attraction” seems to be the chief method with which Christians engage in evangelization. Christians should not live in a way that only observes Lent and not Easter. Nor should they look like they’ve just come back from a funeral. The church always has its doors open, like the loving father in Luke’s parable who waits for his son. Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, are not “a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine for the weak.” The church needs to be a place of spirituality, healing, and liberation. It has to bring people peace, while challenging them nevertheless to communion and mission. Words that figure prominently in Evangelii Gaudium are “mercy” and “tenderness.” The church, if it is to be a credible witness to the gospel, needs to embody what it proclaims.

Inculturation of the gospel is another method, leading to new expressions that engage and attract people. Without efforts of inculturation, Christians could not to justice to the “logic of the incarnation.” Indeed, evangelization is inculturation. When we live and evangelize “in a missionary key,” the way the message will be communicated will be affected. If evangelizers just stick with traditional, orthodox

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76 EG 6.
77 EG 10.
78 EG 46.
79 EG 47.
80 EG 89.
81 For “mercy” see EG 3, 34, 37, 44, 112, 114, 164, 179, 188, 193, 194, 197, 198, 215, 252, 285; for “tenderness” see 3, 85, 88, 270, 274, 279, 288.
82 EG 117.
83 EG 122.
84 EG 34.
language, people only hear expressions that are “alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another,” and often communicate “a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian.” Evangelizers rather, need to recognize that, despite the limits of language and circumstances, their task is to “communicate more effectively the truth of the Gospel in a specific context, without renouncing the truth.” Otherwise, the goodness and the light which it can bring whenever perfection is not possible.”

Much of Francis’s message in his long treatment of the homily is summed up in the title of paragraphs 154-55: the homilist must have “an ear to the people.”

The community of missionary disciples must be “a church that is poor and for the poor.” Quoting Pope John Paul II, Francis speaks of the church as a place where “the poor feel at home.” The poor cannot be excluded from society; they are not disposable, as many regard them, and part of the church’s mission is to work for justice and inclusion of all in the processes of countries and cultures. Property and engaging in business are good, but achieve their goodness in working for the common good. This is the ideal for which the church constantly advocates.

Evangelii Gaudium, in sum, is a “game changer.” While it certainly calls the church to missionary action, and does not flinch from understanding the countries of the West and affluent countries like Australia and New Zealand as “mission

85 EG 41.
86 EG 45.
87 EG 198.
89 EG 186-216; 53-60.
90 EG 189; 203.
territories,” its more insistent call is that the church everywhere be more credible. It is this credibility that becomes the “condition of the possibility” for authentic evangelization. Francis’s “brave and enabling dream of a new more merciful and mission church with a strong commitment to the poor” is one that he urges to be more “friendly, compassionate, conversational and persuasive.” 91 Most importantly, as Australian educator Julie Morgan points out, Francis “never reduces the proclamation of the Gospel to the most deadening appeal of all, ‘try harder.’” 92 Francis has led the church beyond the new evangelization toward a missionary church, a community of missionary disciples.

Conclusion: A Church That “Goes Forth” 93

This move from an emphasis on New Evangelization to a more comprehensive missionary church is a highly significant one, both ecclesiologically and missiologically. The New Evangelization emerged out of the concern of two European popes in the context of a radically secularized Europe on the one hand and a church that, to their minds, had lost the clarity of commitment to the content of the faith in the wake of Vatican II on the other. Pope Francis’s call for a truly missionary church comes out of a totally different context, and reflects not a European interest but that of the majority world. Perhaps much of the missionary

93 EG 24.
emphasis of the Aparecida Document—a major source of *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the
source of the term “missionary discipleship”—was occasioned by a need to respond
to the growing exodus of Catholics to Evangelical and Pentecostal groups, and so
very rooted in the Latin American context.94 Nevertheless, the tone of the Apostolic
Exhortation transcends that context, and is motivated much more by more universal
missionary vision. It does not deny the vision of the New Evangelization, but takes it
further—“sublates” (*aufhebt*) it, as it were—to make it more comprehensive, and
more relevant for the entire church.

While New Evangelization tends to have as its focus those countries and
situations where Christianity has lost or is losing its influence, Francis’s community
of missionary disciples calls to mind a church that is always and everywhere aware
of its minority status, always and everywhere ready to listen, always and
everywhere eager to get its shoes “soiled by the mud of the street.”95 Rather than a
strategy to get “back to normal,” which can unfortunately be understood as “back to
Christendom,” a missionary church recognizes that the world has profoundly
changed in the wake of two devastating wars in the twentieth century, the demise of
Communist vision in almost every place in which it once had a stranglehold, and the
renaissance of the world’s major religions and in particular the ascendancy of Islam
as the world’s fastest growing religion and menacing radical parties within it. The
face of the world has changed, with what many claim is the greatest movement of
peoples in the world’s history. The amazing development of communications media

94 Conference of Latin American Bishops, Final Document of the Aparecida
Conference (2007), http://www.aecrc.org/documents/Aparecida-
95 EG 45.
in the last several decades, with computers, e-mail, mobile phones, Skype, texting, Facebook, and Twitter has made time and space almost irrelevant in today's world. Anyone can virtually be any place at any time. This is the world in which the church must witness in its life and service, and proclaim a relevant and challenging gospel message. Such a world demands more than a greater effort and enthusiasm on the part of Christians. It calls for a thorough renewal of the church in every aspect of its life and mission.

While we can still speak of the distinctiveness of pastoral work, work among people who have ceased practicing religion, and primary evangelization among people who have not yet accepted the gospel, as indeed does Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium, we can no longer divide up the world into places that are evangelized and places that are not. Every church exists in a “missionary situation.” Today, as Francis suggests, there is only a missionary church. The center of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the “Global South,” and yet these vital churches in places that were once considered “the missions” are often without adequate resources of personnel. Members of those “mission churches” have migrated to lands where there exist what were formerly considered “sending churches.” With those migrants have also come women and men of other religious ways, and so countries that have been traditionally Christian are no longer overwhelmingly so. Missionaries need not cross oceans to engage in primary evangelization; the need only walk down the streets of their home cities. In those countries as well, missionaries from former mission churches now arrive to care for those who have migrated there, to engage in primary evangelization, or to evangelize or re-
evangelize their former evangelizers. As the Western Christians find themselves in numerical decline, they have come to recognize the need to witness to and preach the gospel in new ways and with new urgency in the pluralist and secularist societies in which they live. Mission is everywhere.

Recognizing with Pope Francis (and Vatican II) the missionary nature of the church will point to the fact that there is no longer a dichotomy between every church’s missionary nature and its task of preaching the gospel in a way that requires dialogue, knowledge of, and empathy for the concrete contexts in which women and men live, as well as skills of intercultural communication. A missionary church might well profit from the experience of traditional “cross-cultural” missionaries, for that is the situation in which practically every church today exists. What once was considered a vocation for a few who worked in exotic places now has relevance for all ministers in all churches.

We are truly in a “new era” a “new phase” of mission or evangelization. The need for new confidence and ardor, new methods and expressions are certainly insights that the New Evangelization have given us, but the focus of evangelization seems to have moved with Francis to encompass the ministry of a thoroughly missionary church of missionary disciples. The task of us members of the Society of the Divine Word is to reflect on and develop ways of communicating how today’s missionary church, by the practice of prophetic dialogue,96 can participate in God’s mission in our broken-yet-graced world.

96 See SVD Fifteenth General Chapter, In Dialogue with the Word, Nr 1 (Rome: SVD Publications, 2000), esp. 30-32. See also Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder,