

Proclamation of the Saving Mission of Jesus Christ as Essential to the New
Evangelization: Insights from *Fides et Ratio* and *Veritatis Splendor*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the essential role of proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in Blessed Pope John Paul II's New Evangelization. The process of evangelization is defined in terms of proclamation, followed by the acceptance of faith and conversion of the one being evangelized. Following the innovation of the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II reiterates that it is the responsibility of all Catholics to participate in evangelization. Another of the key themes of the Council, inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue is compared and contrasted with evangelization in general, and proclamation in particular, to further clarify the appropriate roles of each. Two landmark Encyclicals written by John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* and *Veritatis Splendor* are reviewed for their insights. Both Encyclicals are seen as correctives of societal trends like rationalism and relativism that will undermine efforts to implement the New Evangelization if they are not addressed.

April 16, 2013

Since its reintroduction into the Catholic vocabulary at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the term evangelization has been a consistent emphasis of the *magisteria* (teaching authorities) of subsequent Popes. Blessed Pope John Paul II was the first to use the term “New Evangelization” on June 9, 1979 on his first papal pilgrimage to Poland.¹ He developed and supported this initiative, through his encyclicals and other writings. Since his election in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI has written and spoken on the New Evangelization, established a pontifical council for promoting it and convened the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to discuss it.²

The deliberations of the assembly have been synthesized into a final list of propositions that will form the basis for the Apostolic Exhortation to be drafted by the recently elected Pope Francis. While at this stage the list has no doctrinal weight it does provide a helpful account of the discussions at the synod. As currently written, the propositions provide greater clarity on the emphasis on proclamation in recent papal documents. Both the message of the New Evangelization and the requirement of all Christians to proclaim it are more

¹ John Paul II, *Mass at the Shrine of the Holy Cross*, Apostolic Pilgrimage to Poland, Mogila, Poland, June 9, 1979. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta_en.http

It was significant that the Holy Father mentioned the nearby community of Nowa Huta in his homily. At the time the new community was built, the Communists had insisted there would be no church. Parishioners were recruited by the door to door canvassing of Bishop Wojtyla and the priests of the diocese. Wojtyla said Christmas Eve Mass in the open air for 18 years in Nowa Huta until the Polish authorities permitted the new church to be built and occupied. The new Pope was not allowed to visit Nowa Huta as part of this pilgrimage. See George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff St. Books, 1999), pps. 189-190, 302.

² The title of the Synod was: *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, “XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY: Lineamenta”, Oct. 7-28, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html.

explicitly stated.

The foundation of all initial proclamation, the kerygmatic dimension, the Good News, makes prominent an explicit announcement of salvation. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3-5). The ‘first proclamation’ is where the kerygma, the message of salvation of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, is proclaimed with great spiritual power to the point of bringing about repentance of sin, conversion of hearts and a decision of faith.³

Furthermore, the requirement for all Christians to know the saving mission of Jesus Christ and to be willing and able to share that message with others is emphasized.

To proclaim the Good News and the person of Jesus is an obligation for each Christian, founded in the Gospel: “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” (Mt 28:19). At the same time, it is an inalienable right for each person, whatever one’s religion or lack of religion, to be able to know Jesus Christ and the Gospel. This proclamation, given with integrity, must be offered with a total respect for each person, without any form of proselytizing.⁴

³ XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 7-28 October 2012, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin # 33, Proposition 9, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b33_02.html.

⁴ Ibid., Proposition 10. The CDF had previously defined the term proselytism. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), endnote 49. While the term had been popularly used in the past as a synonym for missionary activity, it has recently taken on a more negative connotation which the CDF adopted, defining it as the “promotion of a religion by using means, and for motives, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, that is which do not safeguard the freedom and the dignity of the human person.” It is assumed that the same definition is used here in the Synod Propositions.

At the same time, the propositions treat the related topic of dialogue: with other Christians, with other religions, with science and finally in the “court of the gentiles” – with other people of good will.⁵ In particular, Proposition 53 states: “The dialogue with all believers is a part of the New Evangelization.” Proposition 55 integrates both dialogue and proclamation in the same recommendation.

Reconciling these propositions could be problematic, especially in their implementation. What is the Synod saying about the approach of Catholics toward people who have not heard or accepted the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ? Is each Catholic’s responsibility to enter into a dialogue about their different perspectives on religion? Or do they have an obligation to proclaim the good news? Does dialogue eliminate the need for proclamation? Does the correct answer lie somewhere in the middle of these two options, or possibly in a combination of them?

These are important questions. As the New Evangelization is implemented at the Diocesan and Parish levels scarce human and financial resources will need to be focused for greater effectiveness. Precise objectives for the program and initiatives will ensure that participants are trained properly and resources are allocated wisely. As with any project of organizational renewal, lack of clarity in purpose and direction can jeopardize proper implementation. In addition, each term must be carefully defined to facilitate clear discussion and planning. It is arguable that failure to do so in the documents of Vatican II has led to confusion in the post-conciliar period.

⁵ Ibid., Propositions 52-55.

What is the New Evangelization?

As John Paul II is the originator of the term, his writing will be used to define “New Evangelization” for the purposes of this thesis. In his 1990 Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, the Pope emphasized the importance of mission in general and the New Evangelization in particular for the life of the Church. He described the New Evangelization as a process of re-evangelization in territories once considered to be Christian where the practice of the faith has substantially declined.⁶ This clearly defines the word “new”.⁷ In the same Encyclical the Pope emphasized the relevance and urgency of the mission “*Ad Gentes*” or among the nations that had not yet received the gospel of Christ.⁸ At several points in the Encyclical he combines the New Evangelization and the mission *Ad Gentes* under the heading of “missions” and sometimes uses the word “evangelization” interchangeably with “mission”.⁹ In a section of the document called the “Paths of

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio - Encyclical Letter*, 1990, para. 33.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html.

⁷ For further elaboration of the meaning of the word “New” for John Paul II see p.35.

⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 30.

“Missionary Activity Is Only Beginning Our own time, with humanity on the move and in continual search, demands *a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity*. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. *He is the principal agent of mission!* . . . Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed. Today all Christians, the particular churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit.”

Mission” he describes the ways of mission that have particular importance for the Church. This provides a framework of essential elements of mission (or evangelization) that will be very helpful in defining evangelization from his perspective. Furthermore, he returns to these themes in future Encyclicals.

In a multicultural society like Canada, the distinction between New Evangelization and mission *Ad Gentes* is subtler and possibly less important.¹⁰ Canada includes people who have an historical connection to Christianity as well as significant communities of people of other religious backgrounds. This country also has a growing segment of its population that does not claim any religious belief. Since a Canadian program of New Evangelization would likely encounter people from all of these groups, it would be impractical to restrict the program only to those who had a historical connection to Christianity. In the Encyclical the Pope makes it clear that he understands this pastoral concern.¹¹ For the purposes of this thesis, written for the Canadian milieu, the New Evangelization is directed towards all those who do not know or accept Christ, regardless of their religious background. This must also include Catholics, even those who regularly

¹⁰ Perhaps the Pope could more readily distinguish between the New Evangelization’s focus on a “Christian” country and the general evangelizing mission of the Church “*ad gentes*” due to his own experience of a more culturally and religiously homogenous milieu in Poland.

¹¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para.3. See also para. 34: “. . . the boundaries between *pastoral care of the faithful, new evangelization and specific missionary activity* are not clearly definable, and it is unthinkable to create barriers between them or to put them into watertight compartments. . . . The churches in traditionally Christian countries, for example, involved as they are in the challenging task of new evangelization, are coming to understand more clearly that they cannot be missionaries to non-Christians in other countries and continents unless they are seriously concerned about the non-Christians at home. Hence missionary activity *ad intra* is a credible sign and a stimulus for missionary activity *ad extra*, and vice versa.” Of course, specific evangelization strategies may be tailored differently for unique groups.

attend Mass for example.¹² The definition of evangelization used in this thesis therefore generally follows the “Ways of Mission” described by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*. What makes it “new” is that it is being applied in a territory where there has already been a previous wave of evangelization, and, as will be discussed later, incorporates changes based upon the lessons of history.

Based on this, the core content and process of the New Evangelization as defined in this thesis has four essential aspects:

1. **Proclamation:** In Jesus Christ, salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy.¹³ Through Christ’s crucifixion, death and resurrection, God accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, God bestows “new life” on believers that is divine and eternal.¹⁴ In this thesis this will be referred to as the saving mission of Jesus Christ, the Good News or the *Kerygma*.

¹⁵ The hearer of the message is invited to open herself or himself to the gift of faith and to turn away from sin. The proclamation is inspired by faith.¹⁶

¹² Pope Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - Lumen Gentium*, 1964, para. 14. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

¹³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 44. “Evangelization will always contain - as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism - a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy”

¹⁴ Ibid., para. 44. “The subject of proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died and is risen: through him is accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death; through him God bestows ‘new life’ that is divine and eternal.”

¹⁵ Ibid., para. 44. “This is the “Good News” which changes man and his history, and which all peoples have a right to hear.”

¹⁶ Ibid., para. 45. “Proclamation is inspired by faith, which gives rise to enthusiasm and fervor in the

2. **Response – Faith:** The first response of the person being evangelized is to accept the gift of faith in Christ, receive it and understand it more fully.¹⁷
Faith is an infused theological virtue, a supernatural gift that comes from God's grace. It cannot be attained by the use of reason alone.¹⁸
3. **Response – Conversion:** The second response of the person being evangelized is conversion, a change in behaviour to conform with the moral teaching of Christ as taught by the Church.¹⁹²⁰ This involves the

missionary." The Acts of the Apostles uses the word *parrēsia* to describe this attitude, a word which means to speak frankly and with courage: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 'And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness,' while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus.' And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4: 13, 29-31).

This term is found also in St. Paul: "We had courage in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the face of great opposition" (1 Th 2:2); "Pray...also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph 6:18-20).

¹⁷ Ibid., para.44. "Faith is born of preaching, and every ecclesial community draws its origin and life from the personal response of each believer to that preaching."

¹⁸ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City; Washington D.C.: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; United States Catholic Conference, 2000)., paras.153, 154.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 44. "In the complex reality of mission, initial proclamation has a central and irreplaceable role, since it introduces man 'into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ' and opens the way to conversion."

²⁰ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation - *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Dec. 8, 1975, para.18, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html. "The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs."

person's ongoing collaboration with the grace of God through word and deed, manifesting God's goodness throughout the world.²¹

4. **Responsibility:** All Christians have the responsibility to humbly evangelize others. There must be a relationship of love and caring between the one bringing the good news and the one receiving it. Related to this, methods of evangelization must respect the decision of the will of the one being evangelized. There is no place for coercion, manipulation or trickery. On the contrary, in an authentic evangelization experience the Holy Spirit facilitates a spiritual communion between the proclaimer and the one who hears and responds to the message.²²

Other important components of the New Evangelization are beyond the scope of this thesis, and therefore cannot be discussed in the detail that they deserve. The Pope emphasizes the importance of Christian witness through a life lived that is consistent with the gospel message.²³ While no Christian is perfect, a life of holy Christian discipleship provides essential credibility for the evangelizer. Nevertheless, a holy life would not properly be considered an evangelical life without some evidence of the proclamation of the *Kerygma* in words.²⁴ In addition, the Pope is careful to link conversion with baptism, the other

²¹ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston, Mass.: St. Paul Books & Media, 1993), para. 64.

²² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 44. This proclamation is to be made within the context of the lives of the individuals and peoples who receive it. It is to be made with an attitude of love and esteem toward those who hear it, in language which is practical and adapted to the situation. In this proclamation the Spirit is at work and establishes a communion between the missionary and his hearers, a communion which is possible inasmuch as both enter into communion with God the Father through Christ.

²³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, paras. 42, 43

²⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, para. 22.

sacraments of initiation and Church membership.²⁵ The sacrament of baptism is the ordinary means of justification for the uninitiated, accomplishing the union of the new Christian with the family of faith through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. Using sacramental preparation to explicitly connect the celebration of the sacraments to an encounter with Jesus Christ and his saving power helps ensure the fruitfulness of the sacrament. Finally, in situations of poverty, illness or some other deprivation the basic material and health needs of the one being evangelized must be met in order for the message to have credibility. Even care for the poor and needy, however, so central to the Christian life of charity, is not in itself evangelization without an accompanying proclamation of the saving mission of Jesus Christ.²⁶ All three: the witness of a Christian life, sacramental initiation and concern for the physical wellbeing of the poor and the marginalized are important components of a successful evangelization process. However, involvement in them cannot remove the Christian's responsibility to proclaim

²⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 46-49. For example, the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation and Reconciliation provide the opportunity for the person being evangelized to respond to the proclamation that has been made to them. (See aspects 2 and 3 above.) While the sacramental liturgies may seem self-explanatory in this regard, they will still need to be explained to those experiencing them using an evangelical hermeneutic. This will help maintain the essential intellectual and emotional connection with Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery and thereby help to ensure the fruitfulness of the sacrament.

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Homily of the Holy Father Pope Francis*, Missa Pro Ecclesia with the Cardinal Electors, Sistine Chapel Thursday, 14 March 2013.

"We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord. When we are not walking, we stop moving. When we are not building on the stones, what happens? The same thing that happens to children on the beach when they build sandcastles: everything is swept away, there is no solidity. When we do not profess Jesus Christ, the saying of Léon Bloy comes to mind: 'Anyone who does not pray to the Lord prays to the devil.' When we do not profess Jesus Christ, we profess the worldliness of the devil, a demonic worldliness."

Christ with words, whenever it is possible to do so.²⁷ In addition, practical strategies and training will need to be developed to help new evangelizers gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be able to share the good news of Jesus Christ accurately, effectively and with due sensitivity to the feelings and circumstances of the person being evangelized. These components of the New Evangelization all represent important topics that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

This thesis will demonstrate that according to John Paul II, proclamation of the saving mission of Jesus Christ is an essential part of any program or activity the New Evangelization. Proclamation will be defined as the use of any medium to communicate the Good News in words to someone who doesn't know or fully accept it, yet wants to hear it. The formal process of catechesis can be the *locus* of explicit proclamation and play an essential role in assisting the understanding of the faith and moral teaching. However, far more people in need of the New Evangelization are found outside formal catechetical programs than within. In this thesis, it is understood that proclamation should occur everywhere, and not just in a formal catechetical environment.

It is arguable that proclamation of the good news is foreign to the average Catholic who would like to respond to the Pope's call to action. It is also controversial given modern culture's affinity for rationalism and relativism. It has become very unfashionable to claim to know the truth about spiritual or other non-quantifiable topics in the modern world. Using a historical analysis of

²⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 44. "Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission".

evangelization through the ages, this thesis will explain why it is so difficult for modern Catholics to embrace this challenge. The use of undefined terms in the Council documents has led some to conclude that dialogue is the most appropriate vehicle for conversations between Catholics and those who do not know Christ. Some theologians see dialogue is the new proclamation and pluralism as the will of God. This view questions whether traditional evangelization is actually necessary in today's world. In this thesis dialogue will be defined as "a conversation between people who have different beliefs or perspectives for the purpose of promoting greater understanding between participants or those they represent." This will be contrasted with another popular definition that insists on a rethinking of both parties' pre-dialogue positions and commitments as an essential element of the process.

In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II categorically states "salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization."²⁸ But in the same paragraph he also says "Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission."²⁹ What are we to make of these apparently contradictory comments? Is it possible that parties could engage in dialogue, deemed to be part of the evangelizing mission, without the Catholic party ever proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ? How does the Holy Father see the interplay between these two strategies?

²⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 55.

Avery Cardinal Dulles has suggested that dialogue has become a competitor of proclamation in the hearts and minds of theologians, members of the hierarchy and lay Catholics in the years since Vatican II. A careful reading of two of John Paul II's Encyclicals will clarify these questions as well as provide explanations for why this may be happening. The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998) will explain that revelation is the source of the truth that the Church claims to know, contrary to the tenets of rationalism that supports the hegemony of the human mind alone as the source of all truth. An earlier Encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) will uncover the irreconcilable conflict between Catholic moral teaching and relativism. Through two of its signature modalities, rationalism and relativism, modernism undermined evangelization by claiming that it was not possible for the human mind to know the truth about God or the behaviour that would lead all people to beatitude through God's grace. The historical analysis and the discussion of each Encyclical will uncover the fundamental differences between proclamation and dialogue that will suggest how they can be used together in the implementation of the New Evangelization.

Chapter One: Seeds of Uncertainty – Vatican Council II, Evangelization, Proclamation and Dialogue

While evangelization is as old as the Church itself, the recent reemergence of the term in Catholic theology only dates back to Vatican II. This reintroduction coincided with the advent of the term “dialogue” which was another innovation in the Council documents. In the years after the Council, different interpretations emerged about the meaning of dialogue and how it should relate to evangelization. Some of these interpreters suggested that dialogue is the new evangelization, and even that religious pluralism is the will of God. The latter statement essentially questions the need for evangelization *per se*. While this might be viewed as outside of the scope of this thesis it is an important aspect of the discussion. If it is not God’s will that all people have the opportunity to have explicit faith in Christ, why should we be concerned about whether proclamation is or is not essential? These contrary voices will need to be considered if we are to demonstrate that proclamation is an essential element of the New Evangelization.

This Chapter will outline the history of evangelization in the Catholic Church to provide a backdrop for the use of evangelization and dialogue in the Council documents. It will demonstrate that commentators during and after the Council have at least two definitions of dialogue in play, which probably has exacerbated the confusion in the post Vatican II Church on this topic. It will show that while one definition has a precedent in scripture, the other does not. Finally, it will consider John Paul II’s attempted clarification of the interplay between evangelization and dialogue in *Redemptoris Missio*. Subsequent chapters will

consider two additional papal encyclicals by John Paul II to further demonstrate why proclamation is so important to the New Evangelization.

Sources in Scripture and Tradition

In his last book before his death, Avery Cardinal Dulles defined evangelization in the New Testament in these words:

. . . the verb “to evangelize” means to proclaim with authority and power the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The evangelist is one sent by Christ and endowed with a corresponding charism from the Holy Spirit. The preached word comes from God and arouses saving faith in those who believe it.³⁰

Note the similarity between this summary and the first two aspects of the definition of evangelization used in this thesis. The verb to evangelize, *euangelizō* in Greek, appears throughout scripture, even though it is translated differently in modern translations. In the Old Testament, it is found in the historical books, the Psalms and Isaiah.³¹ For example, Isaiah 52:7 reads:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, **bearing good news**, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, “Your God is King!” (Isaiah 52:7).³²

In the New Testament, the word appears frequently in Luke, Acts and the letters of St. Paul. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus says:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to **bring glad tidings** to the poor (Luke 4:18).

³⁰ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), p.1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

³² All scripture citations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*, unless otherwise noted.

The letter to the Corinthians contains what is perhaps St. Paul's most famous reference to evangelization:

If I ***preach the gospel***, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! (1 Cor. 9:16).

The unique and essential role of Jesus Christ in the salvation of people is also a clear New Testament theme. In John 14:6, Jesus says "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." In the book of Acts, Peter defies the high priest, rulers, elders and scribes when he plainly tells them that his ability to heal the poor lame beggar came from Jesus Christ. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). These verses affirm Jesus unique role as the source of salvation and as mediator between God and humanity. Given Christ's identity and essential role in salvation there is an obligation to make him known to all so that they may believe and have eternal life. As St. Paul says:

For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:13-15).

Christ sends his followers on the mission of spreading this good news and promises to be with them throughout the process.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age“ (Matthew 28:18).

This mandate has been fulfilled in various ways throughout the history of the Church. The apostles spread out after the resurrection to share the Good News of Christ and to establish local churches. St. Paul and his associates joined in this evangelical effort. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* John Paul II recalls “... the mysterious call that drove St. Paul to cross the border between Asia Minor and Europe (cf. Acts 16:9-10). This led to the first evangelization of Europe.”³³ St. Paul eventually travelled as far as Rome to spread the gospel (cf. Acts 28:16).

During the first centuries of the early Church, established Christian communities came into contact with migrating people who accepted the gospel and became Christian. Because many of these were not able to comprehend the mystery in its fullness, they fell into the errors of heresy that were a persistent problem during this time.

In the early middle ages monks such as St. Benedict and St. Boniface in the west and Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the east evangelized the whole of Europe erecting monasteries, churches, schools and hospitals.³⁴ The 15th century saw Catholic missionaries accompany European explorers on their expeditions to the Americas, Africa and Asia. This activity initiated churches in areas where the gospel had not been preached previously. In some places, the missionary effort

³³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1995), p.106.

³⁴ Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, p.2. It is interesting to note that In 1980, Pope John Paul II declared Sts. Benedict, Cyril and Methodius co-patron saints of Europe, perhaps hoping to spark a new evangelization of that continent through their intercession.

was sullied by the deleterious effects of the inevitable clash of cultures and the human weaknesses of those involved. Nevertheless, strong indigenous local Churches now stand in the continents where the seeds of missionary endeavour were sown.

According to Cardinal Dulles, the Protestant Reformation marked a turning point for Catholic evangelization, insofar as:

words like *gospel* and *evangelical* were taken over by Protestants and became suspect to Catholic ears. Catholics put the accent not so much on the announcement as on teaching, not so much on the message of salvation as on the moral law, the Church and the sacraments. Their missionary activity was therefore less evangelical and more ecclesiastical.³⁵

In response to the Protestant Reformation the Council of Trent stated that the gospel “was the source of all saving truth and moral discipline and was to be preached to every Creature”.³⁶

In the modern period, the Church focused on protecting her members from heresy. Missionary work continued but was conducted by specialized apostolic religious orders and societies, who generally did not directly involve the average lay Catholic in their work. The 19th century saw many missionary orders and congregations founded in the Church. Two examples in the early 1800’s were the Oblates of Mary Immaculate founded by St. Eugene de Mazenod and the Sisters of Charity founded by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Both groups had a significant impact on the establishment of a Catholic culture in Nova Scotia.

³⁵ Ibid., p.2.

³⁶ Ibid., p.2, citing DS 1502.

Previous Attempts to Deal with Modernist Philosophies

The Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* by Pope St. Pius X is a representative example of the posture of the Church regarding the philosophies of the modern period at the beginning of the 20th century. Published in 1907, it is a scorching critique of modernist philosophy and those that promoted it both within and outside the Church. The Pope is particularly concerned about relativistic and rationalist tendencies that challenge the capacity of the Church to be the interpreter of the revelation of God. According to the Pope, the connection between faith and reason had been severed in modern philosophy. Reason's scope had become restricted to what could be perceived by the senses and hence could not elevate the mind to God. Since unaided reason was unable to say through quantitative analysis that God existed, rationalism avoided these truths altogether, relegating faith to a subjective phenomenon in which all religions were equally true. Faith became subject to science, as science used a concept of vital immanence to confine faith to the status of a natural phenomenon. While Pius X's critique would find resonance with the thought of John Paul II, the tone and the proposed remedy were dissimilar. Pius X required that any candidate for the role of educator in a Catholic university or seminary "who in any way is found to be imbued with Modernism is to be excluded . . . from these offices, and those who already occupy them are to be withdrawn."³⁷ In addition, Bishops were to take care that books infected with the modernist

³⁷ Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, *Encyclical on the Doctrines of the Modernists*, 1907, para. 48. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis_en.html

mindset were not to be written or published in their dioceses, and were to be removed from seminaries and universities. Watch Committees were to be set up in each Diocese to discuss and root out modernist influences within the local Church. The whole document echoes the tone of the anathemas of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council and is full of harsh personal criticism of modernism and those who espouse it. There are two significant aspects of this kind of approach that were to reverberate into the Council deliberations and which directly impact the discussion in this thesis. First, a combative, confrontational relationship between the church and the world was seen to discourage opportunities for evangelization. Secondly, all actions seem to have been taken by clergy and religious to protect lay people from modernist ideology without apparently explaining to them why these philosophies were destructive. While it is undeniable that the Pope had the best interests of the laity at heart, the action was patriarchal and tended to support clericalism. When in the late modern period after Vatican II various materials used for reading and study espoused a more heterodox approach, the laity were left ill equipped to discern the distinction between the authentic teachings of Christ and the tenets of modernism in the materials they were given. The strategy of Pius X was reactive and defensive rather than proactive and innovative. The danger of continuing to use the same tactic in subsequent papacies is that it could not respond properly to the significant changes that were happening in the developed world with the advent of modernism.

Rebirth of Evangelization in the Modern Period

Fortunately, during the next two generations in Europe after the era of Pius

X, the Holy Spirit gave birth to an innovation that was as old as the Church itself. By the middle of the twentieth century, evangelization had experienced renewed interest among Catholics due to Karl Barth and other Protestant writers. This culminated in a rebirth of Catholic evangelical theology. Catholic religious educators “promoted a new style of *kerygmatic* theology in which evangelization was taken to mean a confident proclamation of God’s offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.” The sermons of Peter and Paul, taken from the book of Acts, were studied as “models of revitalizing the faith in de-Christianized sections of Europe.”³⁸

Cardinal Angelo Roncalli seems to have been heavily influenced by this *kerygmatic* movement during his exposure to it while he was Papal Nuncio to France.³⁹ As Pope John XXIII, he opened the Second Vatican Council with these words:

The Church's solicitude to promote and defend truth derives from the fact that, according to the plan of God, who wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4), men without the assistance of the whole of revealed doctrine cannot reach a complete and firm unity of minds, with which are associated true peace and eternal salvation.⁴⁰

Note that the Pope views the Church as the depository of truth, having the role of promoting and defending it so that “all men might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”. In his view, revealed doctrine must be shared with other

³⁸ Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, p.3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁴⁰ Pope John XXIII, *Address at the Opening of Vatican Council II*, 11 October 1962, <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/pope0261i.htm>.

people so that they may achieve true peace and eternal salvation that is the salvific will of God. While he does not use the word evangelization, he describes taking the revealed doctrine outside of the Church, and sharing it with people for their salvation.

The aspirations of the Pope who summoned the Council featured prominently in the Council documents. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, began with these words:

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.⁴¹

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, started with the same sentiment.

Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith . . . this present council wishes to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love.⁴²

Both documents began with an unmistakable reference to the proclamation of the gospel message for the purpose of all people coming to believe in Christ. This represents aspects one and two of evangelization as defined in this thesis. The ultimate goal is incorporation into one body, the Church, through baptism.

“the Church both prays and labors in order that the entire world may become the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the

⁴¹ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, para. 17.

⁴² Pope Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation - Dei Verbum*, 1965, para.1.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

Holy Spirit, and that in Christ, the Head of all, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator and Father of the Universe.”⁴³

Lumen Gentium described the specific role of the Church in evangelization. The Church is the means by which her members are incorporated into Christ and gradually transformed into the Divine Image. The Council also signaled that people and cultures that have seeds of goodness within them are not destroyed but brought to perfection as they are drawn into union with Christ.

She gives them the dispositions necessary for baptism, snatches them from the slavery of error and of idols and incorporates them in Christ so that through charity they may grow up into full maturity in Christ . . . whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples is not only saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man.⁴⁴⁴⁵

The Council emphasized that the laity have a crucial role to play in the process of evangelization. They are asked to go forth as powerful proclaimers of the faith and are compared to a sacrament as the presence of Christ in the world. Evangelization is described as living a life that is conformed to the gospel and is therefore an ongoing profession of Christian faith, which includes telling people about the good news of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the *locus* of this evangelical activity is primarily in the world.⁴⁶ The evangelical mission of the laity is also

⁴³ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, para.17.

⁴⁴ Where earlier translations of Church documents use the term “man” or “men” they were meant to include both genders. This approach to quotation of Church documents will be used throughout the thesis.

⁴⁵ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, para.17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para.35. Just as the sacraments of the New Law . . . prefigure a new heaven and a new earth, so too the laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for, when they courageously

strongly affirmed in the *Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity*. The emphasis on the requirement of verbal witness by the laity in this text justifies quoting it at length.

There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men to belief and to God . . .

However, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life . . .

Since, in our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen—each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning—to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, para. 6).⁴⁷

This teaching specifically addresses the role of the laity in explicit terms.

Witnessing with one's life is important to the integrity and credibility of the message. Witnessing with words (or proclamation) is essential to helping the non-believer acquire faith and the believer to cultivate their faith. This demonstrates that proclamation is an essential component of evangelization in the minds and hearts of the Council Fathers. Finally, all lay people have a clear

join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.

⁴⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Decree on the Apostolate of Laity - Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.

responsibility to explain, defend and properly apply Christian principles in accordance with the mind of the Church. These points support aspects one, two, and four of the description of evangelization in this thesis.

Note the dramatic change in strategy from Pius X to Vatican II. Under Pius X, the clergy and religious protected the lay people from even hearing about harmful philosophies. By Vatican II, less than 60 years later, lay people were asked to participate personally in defending the truth against these philosophies. Given that the term evangelization had not been used for 500 years, that it had not been the responsibility for lay people since apostolic times, and they had received little preparation, it was not surprising that generally, the laity were slow to respond to this initiative of Vatican II.

The Advent of Dialogue

John XXIII expressed his hope for the Council during his opening address. The Council Fathers followed this direction in the preparation of the documents. According to Cardinal Dulles however, the important emphasis on evangelization was lost as the content of the council documents was relayed to the laity. “Vatican II became known for what it had said about the distribution of power in the Church, the reform of the liturgy, ecumenism, interfaith relations, and the dialogue with the modern world . . .”⁴⁸

If this is true, then it is important to understand what the Council meant by dialogue and how much doctrinal weight it was given in relation to evangelization. Was dialogue meant to be preferred to evangelization? Was it a replacement for

⁴⁸ Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium.*, p. 3.

evangelization? It will not surprise us to discover that there was more than one definition of dialogue circulating among scholars and observers of the Council.

The word dialogue appeared in 10 of the 16 final documents of Vatican II. Fr. John O'Malley, prominent American scholar of the Council, attributes this emphasis to the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* of Paul VI published on August 6, 1964 in the middle of the Council's deliberations. In this document, Paul VI used the word dialogue a total of 77 times.⁴⁹ Fr. O'Malley traces the source of the term in the encyclical to Martin Buber's (1878-1965) important work *I and Thou*.⁵⁰ This book, written in 1923, saw all of human existence as an encounter with the other. Buber explained his philosophy using the word pairs of *Ich-Du* (dialogue) and *Ich-Es* (monologue) to categorize the modes of consciousness, interaction, and being through which an individual engages with other individuals, inanimate objects, and all reality in general.⁵¹ In some ways this work could be interpreted as a reaction against the declining relational emphasis in interpersonal communications in the modern era. Through the advent of modern technology and philosophy, the emphasis on rationalism led to people relating to others as objects (I - it) rather than as persons (I - you or I - thou).⁵² This led to disastrous consequences in the 20th century resulting in the dehumanizing of people through

⁴⁹ John O'Malley, S.J., "Dialogue and the Identity of the Council" a presentation at a conference entitled "Vatican II After Fifty Years: Dialogue and Catholic Identity" held at Georgetown University, October 11, 2012 http://www.georgetown.edu/OMalley-Dialogue-and-Identity-of-Council/document/1242773469086/O'Malley-Dialogue%26Vat2-10-11-12_REVISED.pdf

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pps. 56, 57.

wars, dictatorship, materialism, poverty and an overemphasis on technology at the expense of authentic human development.

At a recent conference on the theme of dialogue and Vatican II, Fr. O'Malley reviewed the New Testament text for examples of dialogical discourse. He admitted that the predominant mode of conversation by Christ and the apostles with others is proclamation. He asks the rhetorical question:

If assertion is such a characteristic form of Christian discourse—perhaps even the authentic form—how can Vatican II make such a big deal of dialogue, which seems to be the very opposite of assertion and proclamation?⁵³

Even the dialogues between Christ and Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), and his followers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:1-35) are deemed by Fr. O'Malley to be “teaching moments, geared to vindicate his position.” He asserts that: “These dialogues, however, do not correspond to what dialogue meant in the twentieth century . . .”⁵⁴ Fr. O'Malley defines modern dialogue in the following way:

Dialogue is a synonym for conversation. Its first purpose is simply to understand the Other—to know where he or she is “coming from,” to use the vulgar expression. Dialogue consists in speaking and listening. And, after listening, letting what one has heard sink in. While dialogue implies that each of the partners begins the conversation holding certain positions and even convictions, it also seems to imply a willingness to be affected by the conversation—to learn from the other, to be enriched by the other, and

⁵³ John O'Malley, *Dialogue and the Identity of the Council*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Fr. O'Malley did not explicitly indicate that he had considered Acts 17:16-34, which is St. Paul at the Aeropagus in Athens. St. Paul did use a “dialogical” style in that he utilized a number of images from Athenian culture in his address. However, since he did end up speaking of the resurrection that would disqualify this exchange as a dialogue using Fr. O'Malley's definition.

in some measure to rethink one's positions or convictions.⁵⁵

This definition of dialogue is different from the one used throughout this thesis in one essential respect – it requires that both dialogue partners be prepared to rethink their positions or convictions.

Fr. O'Malley's definition is also not the same as the definition of evangelization used in this thesis. The evangelist needs to be prepared to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to anyone willing to hear it. Because of this, the conversation cannot be described as dialogue in the modern sense, according to Fr. O'Malley. In evangelization there can be no openness to rethink one's positions or convictions on the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Do others define the word dialogue in the same way as Fr. O'Malley? In *Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI makes a profound plea for the Council Fathers and the laity to resist the temptation to cast off the teaching of the Church in favour of a *rapprochement* with the modern world. I quote the segment in its entirety to demonstrate the sharp contrast of this approach with Fr. O'Malley's definition of dialogue.

Indeed, sometimes even the apostolic desire for a ready passport into secular society and the determination to make oneself acceptable to men and particularly to the youth of today, prompts certain people to lay aside the principles which characterize our faith and to reject the sort of dignity which gives meaning and force to our determination to make contact with others and makes our teaching effective. Is it not, perhaps, true that some of the younger clergy and religious, in their laudable endeavor to come closer to the masses and to particular groups, aim at becoming like them rather than different from them? By this worthless imitation they forfeit the

⁵⁵ John O'Malley, *Dialogue and the Identity of the Council*, p. 3.

real value and effectiveness of their endeavors.

We must be in the world, but not of it . . . It will be well for us if Christ, who lives always to make intercession for us, includes us moderns in the wonderful prayer He addressed to His heavenly Father: "I pray not that thou should'st take them out of the world, but that thou should'st keep them from evil."⁵⁶

Apparently, Paul VI sees an important distinction between the wisdom of the Church as represented in her treasured deposit of faith and the wisdom of the world. He exhorts the members of the Church to hold fast to the faith and to share it with others. This influences his definition of dialogue. Again, the following segments are quoted to illustrate the contrast with Fr. O'Malley's definition.

The very nature of the gifts which Christ has given the Church demands that they be extended to others and shared with others. This must be obvious from the words: "Go, therefore, teach ye all nations," Christ's final command to His apostles. The word apostle implies a mission from which there is no escaping. To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, We will apply the word "dialogue."⁵⁷

Our dialogue, therefore, presupposes that there exists in us a state of mind which we wish to communicate and to foster in those around us. It is the state of mind which characterizes the man who realizes the seriousness of the apostolic mission and who sees his own salvation as inseparable from the salvation of others. His constant endeavor is to get everyone talking about the message which it has been given to him to communicate.⁵⁸

Pope Paul VI seems to be using the term dialogue virtually synonymously with proclamation as defined in this thesis. He asks Catholics to adopt a

⁵⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter on the Church - Ecclesiam Suam*, August 6, 1964, para.49, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html

⁵⁷ Ibid., para. 64.

⁵⁸ Ibid., para. 80.

persuasive approach that respects the human dignity and autonomy of the partner to the communication. Gone are the condemnations and *anathemas* of the bygone era. The motivation is to communicate in love. There is no option for the message to be compromised however.

What definition did the Council adopt? *Gaudium et Spes*, for example, uses the English word dialogue twelve times.⁵⁹ Eight times it is translated from *colloquium* (conversation, conference, discourse) and four times from *dialogus* (dialogue, conversation).⁶⁰ At least one author has suggested that there is significance to this distinction.⁶¹ The term *dialogus* is used, for instance, in reference to the dialogue between the Church and the world (para. 40), among groups and nations regarding matters of common concern (para. 43) and among church members on how to approach societal problems (para. 56). Fr. O'Malley's definition of dialogue might be relevant for all of those settings where *dialogus* is used in the initial document. It is interesting to note that they all relate to circumstances where theological commitments are not at risk of being compromised.⁶²

Theologians interpreted the emphasis on dialogue in the documents in various ways after the close of the Council. Authors like Gregory Baum saw

⁵⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – Gaudium et Spes*, para., 7 December, 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁶⁰ Leo F. Stelton, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 46, 73.

⁶¹ Ann Michelle Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: Dialogue in the Language of the Second Vatican Council* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishers, 2006).

⁶² Note that the reference to *dialogus* in para. 40 is footnoted to *Ecclesiam Suam*.

dialogue as the new proclamation.⁶³ Baum was a *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council and played an advisory role in the drafting of several Council documents. In dialogue, according to Baum, both parties express their respective positions and reflect on what God may be saying to them in the discussions. The Christian party “sounds” the gospel in a language that can be understood by their partner. As Baum wonders whether religious pluralism is the will of God, the purpose of dialogue shifts from spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to helping different religions to live together peaceably. From his perspective, the Church has supported this view.

In several declarations made after the council, the Vatican adopted an entirely new approach to religious pluralism. Instead of looking upon religious pluralism as a historical defect eventually to be corrected by religious unity in Jesus Christ, the Church now recognized religious pluralism as part of God’s creation, encouraged inter religious dialogue and cooperation, and invited the world religions to a common witness to the invisible order in a world increasingly committed to secularism.⁶⁴

For Baum, dialogue seems to imply greater respect for the non-Christian partners in contrast to other “neo-exclusivist” approaches. Baum commends “kenotic ecclesiology” a theological practice of self-dispossession that gives up any claim of a comprehensive grasp of the truth. He asserts that God’s word is in scripture and tradition but is also in the world. “The church needs the world to become truly church”⁶⁵ In this view, the world becomes the educator of the church who is in dialogue with it. It would appear that this approach would be in

⁶³ Gregory Baum, *Faith and Doctrine* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), p. 116.

⁶⁴ Gregory Baum, “Post World War II Catholicism,” in *The Church Confronts Modernity* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), p. 288.

⁶⁵ Gregory Baum, *Faith and Doctrine*, p. 117.

opposition to the thesis statement that proclamation of the good news of Christ is essential to evangelization.

Fr. O'Malley would not go that far. Despite his appreciation of the merits of dialogue he does not see it displacing proclamation. This would be an "utter betrayal of the transcendent message of which it is the herald."⁶⁶

A lack of complete clarity on this issue seems to remain. At a 2004 conference, Bishop Stephen J. Blaire, at that time Chair of the US Bishop's Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, made this comment in his opening address:

I believe that one of the great days for the religions of the world occurred at Assisi in 1986 when the Holy Father led the World Day of Prayer for Peace. The Christian churches, ecclesial communities, Jews, and many religions of the world were represented in this prayer for peace. A just world, a world of peace, a world of right relations, are all intimately connected to the coming of the Kingdom of God. **Proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom, and preparing for the Kingdom is a work of Evangelization.** It is not stretching the point to see interreligious dialogue and interreligious prayer as integral to the work of the new evangelization.⁶⁷

It is important to note that elsewhere in his address, Bishop Blaire says that dialogue is not evangelization. It appears from this quotation that Bishop Blaire is saying that proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom is what happened in Assisi in 1986, when it was in fact a joint prayer for peace with representatives of other religions, or more properly a "dialogue". He seems to not equate the proclamation

⁶⁶ John O'Malley, S.J., *Dialogue and the Identity of the Council*, p.19.

⁶⁷ Bishop Stephen J. Blaire, et.al., *Catholic Evangelization in an Ecumenical and Interreligious Society* (Washington: Secretariat for Evangelization United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), p. 6. (Emphasis added).

of the coming of “the Kingdom” with the proclamation of the saving mission of Jesus Christ who is the King.⁶⁸

The extensive use of the term dialogue in the Council documents has led some observers to an interpretation of Vatican II that emphasizes the posture of Catholics with others as one of listening, discussing and understanding rather than proclamation as defined in this thesis. Martin Buber, who originated the use of the term, was concerned primarily with the depth and quality of interpersonal interaction, not with the content. Reading these various authors, it is unclear whether dialogue qualifies as evangelization when it is unaccompanied by proclamation. For theologians like Gregory Baum, pluralism is the will of God and the purpose of dialogue (read “the new evangelization”) is simply to promote greater human understanding. Fr. O’Malley’s definition of dialogue can result in reconsidering positions and beliefs even though he acknowledges dialogue should never supplant proclamation. As late as 2004, Bishop Blaire characterized interreligious dialogue, like the 1986 meetings in Assisi, as an integral component of the proclamation of the Kingdom that is essential to the New Evangelization. So many varied interpretations belie a lack of consensus on what constitutes evangelization and a lack of certainty about the posture of Catholics with those who do not share the faith. While it is difficult to state this categorically, at least

⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para.18.

“The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else *a person* with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God. If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed.”

some of these authors seem to suggest that the goals of evangelization can be met without recourse to proclamation, which is the opposite of our thesis.

A Decline in Missionary Evangelization

Whether due to the variety of competing interpretations of the Council documents or the effect of the predominant philosophies of the time, missionary evangelization began to decline in the ten years after the Council. In response to this trend, Pope Paul VI called a synod of Bishops on evangelization in 1974, and published the summary of the Synod in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975. In that document he said “ We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church . . . She exists in order to evangelize . . .”⁶⁹ Furthermore, silent witness alone was not sufficient. “There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.”⁷⁰ Culture itself should be evangelized: “every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.”⁷¹ Why this clarity on the essential nature of proclamation? Cardinal Dulles maintained that the Pope saw a relationship between an increased emphasis on dialogue and declining missionary activity:

⁶⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, para.14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, para. 20.

“In his effort to correct what he regarded as an excessive emphasis on the dialogic and sociopolitical, the pope was deliberately emphasizing proclamation through word and personal testimony. He was opposing what may be called “theological crosscurrents” which would promote local community at the expense of Catholic universalism, interreligious dialogue at the expense of proclamation, and social action at the expense of religious practice.”⁷²

Proclamation needed to be restored to ensure that the missionary nature of the Church was retained.

The New Evangelization and Dialogue

John Paul II continued this emphasis on proclamation, initiating the program of the “New Evangelization” during a 1983 visit to Port au Prince, Haiti. He was looking ahead to 1992 – the 500th anniversary of the arrival of missionaries to the new world.⁷³ He proposed that it was time to make a commitment to a new evangelization - “new in ardor, methods and expression.” The new evangelization would come from a sincere desire to share Christ with others, its methods would include personal communication and the use of modern technology and would be expressed with respect and without coercion. In John Paul’s memorable words, Catholics were to “propose rather than impose” the message of the gospel.

In his 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II explicitly rules out a false irenicism that would compromise on essential theological commitments.

Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses

⁷² Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium.*, p. 21.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.30. As noted previously, John Paul II’s first use of the term was in 1979. (See footnote 1). Commentators such as Dulles would suggest that the New Evangelization became a “program” in 1983.

the fullness of the means of salvation.⁷⁴

In this document the Pope spoke of the need for primary evangelization in regions where Christ and the Gospel are not yet known, and re-evangelization in those areas where Christians have lost a living sense of the faith. He added an important clarification. “Authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization.”⁷⁵ In other words, economic or social development must go hand in hand with evangelization. Just as it is futile to express concerns for someone’s soul while their bodily needs go unmet, so also inattention to proclaiming conversion through Christ can hamper social justice efforts. For example, in some developing countries, aid is diverted to the pockets of corrupt ruling elites. In such a situation, a conversion of hearts is required before the aid can get into the hands of those who need it most. He also emphasized the prophetic role of the laity to proclaim the gospel in word and deed and to courageously identify and renounce evil. This supports the fourth aspect of the definition of evangelization proposed earlier.

It is in this Encyclical that the Pope comes closest to clarifying the relationship between inter-religious dialogue and proclamation. In the opening paragraphs of the document he asks the rhetorical question: “Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has it not been replaced by inter-religious dialogue?”⁷⁶ He defines inter-religious dialogue as a “method and means of

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para.55

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

mutual knowledge and enrichment”⁷⁷ and asserts that it is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*. God is present among the people of the world through the Holy Spirit, evident in the behaviour of people and the content of religions, even when they contain “gaps, insufficiencies and errors.”⁷⁸ At the same time, the Pope asserts that “salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization.”⁷⁹ He goes on to say that both dialogue and evangelization are required components of the mission *ad gentes* but that they must be both intimately connected and distinct. They “should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.”⁸⁰ The Pope uses an example contained in a letter written to the Bishops of Asia, which bears quoting in full as it demonstrates the inter-relationship and yet the distinctness of evangelization and inter-religious dialogue in the thought of John Paul II.

"Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the way, and the truth and the life.'...The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people. "Indeed Christ himself "while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed *the need for the Church*, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door." Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that

⁷⁷ Ibid., para.55.

⁷⁸ Ibid., para. 55.

⁷⁹ Ibid., para. 55.

⁸⁰ Ibid., para. 55.

*the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.*⁸¹

The Pope makes a number of important points simultaneously in this section of the document. First, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as “the way the truth and the life” is a duty for all Christians. This statement has extensive support in scripture and the *magisteria* of numerous Popes already cited. Secondly, this duty must be exercised even with the knowledge that salvation through Christ can come to followers of other religions who are not visibly joined to the Church. In addition, when Catholics conduct dialogue they must do so with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation. Note that the Pope would clearly disagree with Gregory Baum’s contention that dialogue is the new evangelization and that pluralism is the will of God. John Paul II’s statements would also seem to rule out Fr. O’Malley’s definition of dialogue, at least in respect to matters requiring negotiation of Catholic doctrine. Dialogue operates within its own rules that must be honoured, but at the same time the Catholic participant has an obligation to remain true to the primacy of Christ and the status of the Church as the ordinary means of salvation. Most importantly, dialogue does not dispense with evangelization. It seems clear from this quotation that John Paul II would agree generally with the thesis statement that proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is essential to the New Evangelization.

However, the Pope’s position becomes somewhat less clear when one considers the following statement.

⁸¹ Ibid., para. 55.

Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions.⁸²

After having said that dialogue does not dispense with evangelization, he now says that inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. There are four ways to reconcile these statements that on the surface appear somewhat contradictory. First, proclamation of the *Kerygma* could occur within an interreligious dialogue as each party shares their beliefs with the other. Second, to be sensitive to the people who are being evangelized and to further deepen the interpersonal relationship, a "dialogical" approach could be utilized that would promote mutual knowledge in contrast to a one-way flow of information. This interpretation might respond to the concerns articulated by Martin Buber about the lack of interpersonal encounter in many modern communications. Third, John Paul II may simply be using the word dialogue as a synonym for conversation as did his predecessor Paul VI in *Ecclesium Suam*. The fourth possibility is that he foresees that interreligious dialogue and evangelization could be undertaken simultaneously in two different initiatives at the same time, for instance in the overall program of a Bishop's Conference.

Regardless of the numerous possible rationalizations, some uncertainty remains. It is clear that dialogue can stand on its own as a legitimate activity of the Church. But under what circumstances can it be called part of the New Evangelization?

Why is this important? As we will see in the following chapters there are

⁸² Ibid., para., 55.

significant cultural pressures that tend to interpret categories and behaviour in light of rationalism and relativism, due to the influence of modernity. Any lay person, religious, deacon, priest or Bishop who wishes to implement the New Evangelization according to the mind and heart of John Paul II will realize that they are likely to be criticized, misunderstood and opposed by those who subscribe to the prevailing philosophy of the modern age. The proponents of evangelization are likely to be apprehensive and, if given the choice according to strictly human considerations, would prefer the strategy of dialogue rather than proclamation to be aligned with rationalism and relativism, thus relieving them from the discomfort of being a “sign of contradiction” in modern culture. They may ask themselves: Do we need to risk alienation, hurt and upset among our friends and acquaintances by suggesting that their faith is lacking in this important aspect? Since it is possible to be saved without explicit faith, is proclamation worth the risk to the relationship? The next two chapters will clarify these questions by demonstrating the fundamental differences between dialogue and evangelization.

Despite the challenges of the modern cultural and philosophical landscape, John Paul II continued to be optimistic about the prospects for the New Evangelization as the end of the second millennium of Christian history grew closer. His emphasis on evangelization focused on the Jubilee of the Year 2000, predicting the advent of a “great springtime for Christianity.”⁸³ It was during that

⁸³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para.86. “If we look at today's world, we are struck by many negative factors that can lead to pessimism. But this feeling is unjustified: we have faith in God our Father and Lord, in his goodness and mercy. As the third millennium of the redemption draws near, God is preparing a **great springtime for Christianity**, and we can already see its first signs.” The date of the publication of the

memorable year that he stunned the world by publicly asking for forgiveness for the sins committed by members of the Church, some of which were motivated by a misguided evangelical sense.

The call for a new evangelization was repeated often in the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. In *Light of the World*, Benedict said:

. . . we really are in an age in which a new evangelization is needed; in which the one gospel has to be proclaimed both in its great enduring rationality and in its power that transcends rationality, so that it can reenter our thinking and our understanding in a new way.⁸⁴

A key theme for this Pope was the importance of a personal encounter with Christ. He reminded Catholics that they are called to testify to the supernatural dimension of their lives, becoming joyful heralds of the resurrection of Christ. He insisted that science itself cannot provide answers to all of the questions that lie in the depths of the human heart. For Benedict XVI, only Christ could fulfill the deepest longings of the human person.

Benedict XVI took some unprecedented steps to make the New Evangelization a priority for the universal Church. He has established a Pontifical Council to promote it and has held the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to discuss it. This segment from the *lineamata* (preparatory documents) for the Synod underlines the importance of this effort.

encyclical, Dec. 7, 1990, was just over one year from the fall of the Berlin Wall, on Nov. 9, 1989. This startling development in Berlin may have been an encouragement for the Pope who had lived with Soviet oppression in his native Poland for 44 years, and may have added to his enthusiasm that the oppressive “sinful structures” in western culture might also be overcome.

⁸⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Light Of The World - A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), p.136.

A new evangelization means to share the world's deep desire for salvation and render our faith intelligible by communicating the *logos* of hope (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15). Humanity needs hope to live in these present times. The content of this hope is "God, who has a human face and who 'has loved us to the end.'" For this reason, the Church is, by her very nature, missionary. We cannot selfishly keep for ourselves the words of eternal life, which we received in our personally encountering Jesus Christ. They are destined for each and every person. Each person today, whether he knows it or not, needs this proclamation.⁸⁵

Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia expressed the intensity and urgency with which many members of the Episcopacy have adopted the call to the New Evangelization in the following excerpt from a recent address.

If we do not know and love Jesus Christ, and commit our lives to him, and act on what we claim to believe, everything else is empty. But if we do, so much else is possible – including the conversion of at least some of the world around us. . . . Do we believe in Jesus Christ, or don't we? And if we do, what are we going to do about it?⁸⁶

Summary

Proclamation has a strong foundation in Scripture and in the early Tradition of the Church. Even in the period after the Reformation, when mission was the operative word, proclamation was the guiding principle. According to Cardinal Dulles, the advent of dialogue as a phenomenon after Vatican II, coupled with prominent modern philosophical trends, have dampened enthusiasm for proclamation and the New Evangelization among Catholics. This has led to several interventions by the Papal Magisterium since Vatican II to encourage evangelization. It is certain that John Paul II, the initiator of the New

⁸⁵ The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, "XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY: Lineamenta", para.25.

⁸⁶ Chaput, Archbishop Charles, "Catholics and the American Future," *First Things*, November 11, 2011, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2011/11/catholics-and-the-next-america>.

Evangelization, considered proclamation to be essential to the initiative. It is just as certain that he did not intend for activities related to dialogue to interfere with proclamation that was a part of either the New Evangelization or the mission *Ad Gentes*. Dialogue was effective in helping remove misunderstandings, heal old wounds and restore relationships, but was not a substitute for evangelization. The use of dialogue is in marked contrast with previous papal strategies, like those of Pius X that were more defensive and reactive in nature. The involvement of lay people in ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to encounter Christ was an innovation of Vatican II.

Despite the clear statements in scripture, ancient tradition, Vatican II and in the writings of subsequent Popes, many will ask why proclamation is so important to the mission of the Church, as Dioceses implement the program of the New Evangelization. Isn't belonging to a Church a matter of personal preference? Isn't one faith just as good as another? Why do we need to bother with evangelization if members of other faiths can be saved by the action of the Holy Spirit? As this issue involves the mobilization of millions of Catholics worldwide it is important to clearly understand the motivation of this call to action.

Two landmark encyclicals *Fides et Ratio* (1998), and *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) describe the impact of the New Evangelization on the mind and heart of the Christian. Each encyclical will be discussed in light of the philosophical or theological trend that it set out to correct. Rationalism and relativism will be demonstrated to be antithetical to the New Evangelization. Other documents of the *magisterium* will also be used to illustrate finer points – such as *Dominus Iesus: on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and The Church*.

Through this process, we will come to acknowledge the substantial differences between evangelization and dialogue that will motivate Catholics to view proclamation as central to the vitality of the Catholic faith.

Chapter Two: *Fides et Ratio* and the New Evangelization

Fides et Ratio was written at the beginning of the Third Millennium, to “rehabilitate the question of truth in a world characterized by relativism.”⁸⁷ The encyclical is in itself an act of evangelization insofar as it proclaims that Jesus Christ, as the fullness of the revelation of God, is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). This proclamation is an essential element of the New Evangelization, for if Jesus is not the fullness of truth then he cannot speak to all people and must be confined to a particular culture, place and time. Furthermore, God continues the communication of the revelation of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to all who will believe. For John Paul II, revelation involves much more than a simple epistemological exercise, it is a spiritual transformation that helps the recipient achieve their *telos*, an eternal life of beatitude with God. While revelation has an important communal dimension and defined content (Scripture and Tradition) it is also a process of enlightenment in which God shares the True Word with each person through the Holy Spirit.

In making these assertions, John Paul II comes into direct conflict with those philosophical trends that have sought to limit discussion of truth to the merely quantifiable. For the purposes of this thesis rationalism will be defined as “the theory that human reason, rather than experience, authority, or spiritual revelation, provides the primary basis for knowledge.” While the rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz) had proposed a philosophy that separated revealed truth from human thought, later modern philosophers like Comte,

⁸⁷ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p.184.

Darwin, Marx and Freud excluded God altogether. The “new atheists” of the third millennium, like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens, have set out to convince others that faith is ultimately destructive. Against this trajectory, John Paul II endeavours to restore the reach of reason’s competence to all those areas inaccessible to the scientific method. His goal is to reestablish a faith / reason synthesis like that achieved in the medieval period by such thinkers as St. Thomas Aquinas. The Pope maintains that reason and faith have a symbiotic relationship in which each one needs the other to provide the maximum benefit to humanity.

The relevance of *Fides et Ratio* to this thesis comes from its author’s declaration that Jesus Christ is the fullness of truth. Because proclamation of the saving mission of Jesus Christ depends on the veracity of revelation, various critiques of John Paul II’s assertion have to be considered. Five critical approaches will be discussed: the religious, the cultural, the historical, the political and the material. Regarding these critiques, John Paul II will insist that revelation cannot be subject to reason. For him, the role of reason is to make revelation plausible through discussion and argument so that the supernatural gift of faith can be received. This has traditionally been called apologetics.

The encyclical describes the first two aspects of evangelization outlined in the previous chapter and touches on the fourth.⁸⁸ When the *kerygma* is proclaimed the process of revelation in the hearer may begin through the power of the Holy Spirit. The content of what is proclaimed will normally consist of

⁸⁸ The four aspects of evangelization are Proclamation, Response – Faith, Response – Conversion and Responsibility.

revelation. The acceptance of faith, a theological virtue, is the response of the hearer to revelation. Finally, John Paul II describes the role of bishops and theologians in making the content of revelation better known and understood in the world, which represent particular examples of the requirement for all to evangelize.

John Paul II has some important assignments for dialogue in the encyclical including a philosophical discussion on the true, the good and the beautiful and a “demanding critical dialogue” with philosophical thought designed to express the full metaphysical dimension of truth.⁸⁹

Revelation

At the very heart of *Fides at Ratio* is an assertion of the unique and essential role of Jesus Christ in the process of sharing the revelation of God with each person who seeks it. A great gulf exists between the God who is “totally other” and the human person, who is material. God is creator, infinite, eternal, all holy, and all-powerful. Humanity is created, finite, short-lived, sinful and of limited strength. Jesus, who combines two natures in one person, is the “bridge” or the means of access of humanity to God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus seeks out a relationship with each human person. This begins with an encounter, and results in the sharing of the knowledge of the divine life with the person who receives him.

⁸⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio - Encyclical Letter*, Sept. 14, 1998, para. 103-105, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html.

This initiative is utterly gratuitous, moving from God to men and women in order to bring them to salvation. As the source of love, God desires to make himself known; and the knowledge which the human being has of God perfects all that the human mind can know of the meaning of life.⁹⁰

The word knowledge used in this sense is not simply an intellectual exercise, but the beginning of a relationship between Christ and the human person.

Jesus Christ is the unique mediator between God and humanity and is the source of salvation for all people. This truth was reiterated in *Dominus Iesus: on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and The Church* (2000).

Issued with the approval of John Paul II by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it reaffirmed traditional teaching about the essential role of Christ and the Catholic Church for the salvation of the world. It is worth quoting this segment because of the clarity of language, the points of emphasis and the unequivocal nature of the statement.

From the beginning, the community of believers has recognized in Jesus a salvific value such that he alone, as Son of God made man, crucified and risen, by the mission received from the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit, bestows revelation (cf. *Mt* 11:27) and divine life (cf. *Jn* 1:12; 5:25-26; 17:2) to all humanity and to every person.

In this sense, one can and must say that Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute. Jesus is, in fact, the Word of God made man for the salvation of all. . . . "It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's centre and goal: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (*Rev* 22:13)".⁹¹

⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, para. 7.

⁹¹ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (August 6, 2000), para. 15.

The role and message of Jesus is central to the Christian faith and has a direct bearing on every human person – He is the Word of God who took on human flesh to make God known (John 1:1-18). Note that Christ bestows revelation and Divine Life on all humanity and on every person. The Church is the corporate keeper of Divine Revelation, which has two sources. Sacred scripture consists of the biblical canon. Sacred tradition is recorded in the definitive teaching of Popes and Councils. Nothing in tradition contradicts scripture, read as a complete work, and in the various senses it was intended.⁹² At the same time, all of the faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth. “They have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit who instructs them and guides them into all truth.”⁹³ This makes revelation God’s living process of communicating knowledge of the transcendent Divine life to people. While revelation can also be considered a body of rational knowledge like the contents of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, its source is the True Word of God revealed through the Holy Spirit to believers throughout the ages.

The process of revelation was challenged by the rationalist critique of the 17th and 18th centuries.

At the First Vatican Council, the Fathers had stressed the supernatural character of God's Revelation. On the basis of mistaken and very widespread assertions, the rationalist critique of the time attacked faith and denied the possibility of any knowledge which was not the fruit of reason's

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

⁹² Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paras. 113-114.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, para. 91.

natural capacities. This obliged the Council to reaffirm emphatically that there exists a knowledge which is peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason, which nevertheless by its nature can discover the Creator. This knowledge expresses a truth based upon the very fact of God who reveals himself, a truth which is most certain, since God neither deceives nor wishes to deceive.⁹⁴

The use of the word “supernatural” here is significant as it refers to knowledge that is beyond the reach of the human person without God’s revelation. St.

Thomas Aquinas held that unaided human reason could discern that God is real, but that more advanced knowledge of God required the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to unlock the treasury of God’s self disclosure.⁹⁵ These statements describe a truth absolute, another kind of knowing, the certainty of which is guaranteed by the promises of Christ and the protection of the Holy Spirit. This assertion is clearly articulated in the documents of Vatican II:

By this Revelation, then, the deepest truth about God and human salvation is made clear to us in Christ, who is the mediator and at the same time the fullness of all Revelation”.⁹⁶

At this point we see clearly the gulf between God and humanity. Knowledge of God is accessible to people through reason, a natural faculty of the human being created by God. But human reason, unaided by grace, cannot provide the fullness of truth, the transformation, and ultimately the salvation that results in Divine filiation for all eternity.

⁹⁴ John Paul II, “*Fides Et Ratio*,” para. 8. The First Vatican Council was held from 8 Dec. 1869 to 20 Oct. 1870.

⁹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed. (Lond.: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1920), sec. 109.

⁹⁶ Paul VI, *Dei Verbum*, para. 2.

Response: Faith

When faced with an encounter with the God who reveals God's self, the human person has to choose whether or not to entrust themselves to God. The act of entrustment is an expression of the virtue of faith infused into the human person by God's grace.

The Annunciation provides the archetype for this phenomenon (Luke 1:26-38). Mary received the revelation of the angel Gabriel. She was prepared from the moment of her conception for this moment of decision. She gave her *fiat* and thereby consented to step into the river of grace that would carry her towards the fulfillment of the will of God for her and for all of humanity.

According to John Paul II it is in the process of entrustment that the human person paradoxically finds freedom and the truth of what it means to be human. In this sense, the human person is following the example of the self-emptying (or *kenosis*) of the Divine Word who took on human nature in Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5-11). Note the distinction between the self-emptying described here, and the use of the term by Gregory Baum, in which the dialogue partners empty themselves of all preconceptions in order to be completely open to the person. For John Paul II, the commitment to the revealed truth of Christ opens the door to understanding and transformation of the believer into the image of Christ.

There are two senses in which freedom is used in this context. The requirement for the assent to God's plan demonstrates that God does not want to coerce our obedience to God's will. Secondly, the choice to do God's will leads to greater fulfillment of the human person according to the Divine plan, while disobedience leads to slavery and greater selfishness. Once God is revealed to

someone, they are obliged to give to God the obedience of faith, by the authority of God's absolute transcendence. This profound gift is set within the context of a personal communication with God that asks the person's reason to be open to a whole new way of knowing. In the words of John Paul II: "This is why the Church has always considered the act of entrusting oneself to God to be a moment of fundamental decision which engages the whole person."⁹⁷

True freedom is found in the act of faith in which the human person gives her or himself over to the will of God. In doing so, the person cooperates with the grace of God and restores that which was lost through the disobedience of the Fall. There can be no freedom in disobedience to the Creator's grand design for the human person – this behavior can only lead to slavery born of selfish attention to the individual's needs over the needs of others.

People who have been evangelized give their lives to Christ, essentially returning the gift received previously. They discover the truth about the meaning of life through their faith in Jesus Christ.

The truth of Christian Revelation, found in Jesus of Nazareth, enables all men and women to embrace the "mystery" of their own life. As absolute truth, it summons human beings to be open to the transcendent, whilst respecting both their autonomy as creatures and their freedom. At this point the relationship between freedom and truth is complete, and we understand the full meaning of the Lord's words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (*John 8:32*).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*, para. 13.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 15.

This message has been difficult to hear in the modern world. A period of significant technological advancement, particularly within developed countries, has led to a sense that reason alone is sufficient to ensure the future development of the human race. Rationalism has led to a greater focus on immanence than on transcendence. Revelation is seen to be a product of the era in which it was received, and like everything else old, is an impediment to progress. John Paul II sees sin as central to this phenomenon. The original hubris of the Garden of Eden is being replayed as human reason oversteps its proper boundaries to taste evil and gain knowledge of something that is contrary to God's will. "All men and women were caught up in this primal disobedience, which so wounded reason that from then on its path to full truth would be strewn with obstacles."⁹⁹ What follows is an important point for evangelists; sin continues to be an impediment to discovering the truth.

If human beings with their intelligence fail to recognize God as Creator of all, it is not because they lack the means to do so, but because their free will and their sinfulness place an impediment in the way.¹⁰⁰

The Pope suggests that only the cross of Christ can reach across the divide between reason turned in on itself and God. Perhaps the suffering caused by a life lived without Christ might eventually lead someone to open up to the God who offers hope and mercy.

Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of

⁹⁹ Ibid., para. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., para. 19.

faith, it is capable of accepting the “foolishness” of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet.¹⁰¹

In the second chapter of his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul boasts not of his worldly wisdom but about the cross of Christ.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:1-8).

The ultimate message, which is the antidote for sin, is Christ, the Son of God, crucified to take away the sins of the world, who rose again to demonstrate his power over death. This is the message of the New Evangelization, summarized in the oft-quoted passage from the gospel of John: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., para. 23.

Role of the Church

The role of the Church for John Paul II in this process can be summed up in the phrase “*diakonia* of truth”.¹⁰² The Church is the bearer of God’s revelation which provides a knowledge that is certain and absolute, or true for all people. She has always insisted that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, and that she alone is equipped with the fullness of the means of salvation. Whatever elements survive in other communions come from the Catholic fullness and belong by right to her. These statements were adopted by Vatican II and affirmed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its declaration *Dominus Iesus*.¹⁰³

As revelation is a gratuitous gift from God, it should never be a source of pride.

Underlying all the Church's thinking is the awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself (cf. 2 Cor 4:1-2). The knowledge which the Church offers to man has its origin not in any speculation of her own, however sublime, but in the word of God which she has received in faith (cf. 1 Th 2:13).¹⁰⁴

The role of the Church is both exalted and humbled; privileged to be the bearer of such good news, the Church must recognize that God is the source of all the truth that she claims. While the Church is essential to the process of evangelization, the content of the proclamation is the good news of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰² Ibid., para. 2.

¹⁰³ Martin, Ralph; Boguslawski, Steven, ed., *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*, para. 7.

After having accepted the message of Christ, the Christian's next step is to be baptized (if they have not already done so) and to join (or rejoin) the Church. The Catholic Church, as the mystical body of Christ, calls all believers into spiritual and physical union.^{105 106}

The Church has experienced the ultimate truth about human life in knowing Jesus, and has a dual role in participating in the shared struggle for the truth and proclaiming the truth already known. The Holy Father has no difficulty asserting that the Church is in possession of the truth, is engaged in a struggle for greater clarity, and recognizes that the fullness of truth will only be known in the final encounter with Christ in heaven. There is a responsibility therefore to fully participate in the search for truth and also to proclaim Jesus Christ to others.¹⁰⁷

John Paul II expresses concern that modern philosophy, and to a lesser extent society itself, seem to have relinquished the search for transcendent truth. Modern philosophers have shifted from a study of being to the concept of

¹⁰⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note*, para. 12. "Therefore, the work of ecumenism does not remove the right or take away the responsibility of proclaiming in fullness the Catholic faith to other Christians, who freely wish to receive it."

¹⁰⁶ As mentioned earlier, those who have accepted Christ should be encouraged to participate in the relevant sacrament – Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation or Reconciliation.

¹⁰⁷ John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*, para. 2 "The Church is no stranger to this journey of discovery, nor could she ever be. From the moment when, through the Paschal Mystery, she received the gift of the ultimate truth about human life, the Church has made her pilgrim way along the paths of the world to proclaim that Jesus Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn 14:6*). It is her duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a quite special kind: the *diakonia of the truth*. This mission on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity's shared struggle to arrive at truth; and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God: 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully' (*1 Cor 13:12*)."

knowing. They have not made use of the human capacity to know the truth and have “preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.”¹⁰⁸

Without the influence of faith continuing to bring truth to the forefront, reason can be reduced to a variety of subjective opinions, or narrowed to the study of only that which can be quantified. The Holy Father believes it is the role of the teaching authority of the Church to intervene to articulate the extent to which various philosophies are at odds with the faith.

In making this discernment, we Bishops have the duty to be “witnesses to the truth”, fulfilling a humble but tenacious ministry of service which every philosopher should appreciate, a service in favour of *recta ratio*, or of reason reflecting rightly upon what is true.¹⁰⁹

As Christ respects the freedom of the person to choose to entrust themselves to him, so the Church does not force people to accept revelation. As the bearer of God’s revelation, however, the Church has a crucial role to play in making the truth better known. Bishops are called to be witnesses to the truth. Theologians are challenged to make renewed efforts to communicate the truths of the faith to the world. The chief purpose of theology is to provide “an understanding of Revelation and the content of faith.”¹¹⁰ Philosophers are asked to study philosophy in a way that is responsive to the claims of theology and is open to incorporating the transcendent values of revelation into their inquiry. John Paul II

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., para. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., para. 50.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., para. 93.

sees that Jesus Christ is the answer to all of humanity's questions. It is in this movement from the "heart of the Church" to the world that the New Evangelization is situated.

The previous three headings support aspects one, two and four of the definition of evangelization proposed in this thesis. Revelation provides the content of the proclamation and describes the process by which the person gains understanding of what has been proclaimed. Faith is the response of the person being evangelized to the inspiration and revelation brought through the Holy Spirit. The section on the Role of the Church restates the responsibility of everyone in the Church to spread the good news, and provides specific direction for certain members. The next section explores the role of reason, and considers the effect of the decline of popular trust in reason both within philosophy and in the broader western culture.

Role of Reason

What is the role of reason for John Paul II? Once human reason is open to revelation and understands it, it can guide the will towards right actions. Reason can provide a means of communication of the truths provided through the supernatural process of revelation. Demonstrating the reasonableness of Christian revelation to others makes it possible for them to be open to revelation in their lives. Reason provides a safeguard against the temptation to fideism. And as the Pope will suggest, reason provides the possibility of a philosophy that is open to contemplation of the true, the good and the beautiful as a kind of *protoevangelium*.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was able to articulate a coherent

synthesis of faith and reason. The following quotation from John Paul II illustrates the interdependence of the two.

More radically, Thomas recognized that nature, philosophy's proper concern, could contribute to the understanding of divine Revelation. Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason. Illumined by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge of the Triune God. Although he made much of the supernatural character of faith, the Angelic Doctor did not overlook the importance of its reasonableness; indeed he was able to plumb the depths and explain the meaning of this reasonableness. Faith is in a sense an "exercise of thought"; and human reason is neither annulled nor debased in assenting to the contents of faith, which are in any case attained by way of free and informed choice.¹¹¹

Aquinas saw no need to fear reason, but did acknowledge that faith needs to set reason free from the "fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin." For John Paul II reason does not "pass judgment on the contents of the faith, something of which it would be incapable, since this is not its function."¹¹²

St. Thomas, writing in the 13th century, could not have imagined the radical split between faith and reason in modernity, in which reason was held to be superior to faith, and the capacity of the person to attain knowledge of objective spiritual truth was viewed skeptically. John Paul II writes of some of the philosophical trends that have afflicted the modern period. Historicism suggests that truths that have been identified in one historical period are only relevant to that period and are not helpful in today's world. Modernism holds, among other things, that new theological proposals should not be judged in light of revelation

¹¹¹ Ibid., para. 43.

¹¹² Ibid., para. 42.

received previously, regardless of how long it was held to be true. The rise of modernism had been aided by dramatic technological successes that gave the impression that human progress was inexorable and that the modern era need not consider the lessons of history. Closely connected to this viewpoint is scientism that holds that only those truths that can be proven by scientific inquiry are valid. Pragmatism is an attitude of mind that does not allow judgments based on ethical principles. An example of pragmatism is when democratic governments make moral decisions that are contrary to the natural law on the basis of the will of the majority or on judicial decisions.¹¹³

Possibly because of these philosophical trends John Paul II often distinguishes reason from “right reason” which is reason purified and protected by revelation. Rationalism and its philosophical progeny eventually exclude revelation, relying instead on the human mind to resolve all problems. Ironically, even rationalism itself has been undermined in the last several decades.

Since the last century, however, the affirmation of the principle of immanence, central to the rationalist argument, has provoked a radical questioning of claims once thought indisputable. In response, currents of irrationalism arose, even as the baselessness of the demand that reason be absolutely self-grounded was being critically demonstrated.¹¹⁴

The rising power of technology in the modern era helped fuel the belief that anything was possible for human reason. Religion was seen to be a hindrance to human progress.

But 20th century developments like two World Wars, several bloody

¹¹³ Ibid., para. 87–90.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., para. 91.

revolutions, an arms race, ecological destruction and the failure to correct an unjust distribution of the world's resources made many realize that rationalism had not delivered what it had promised. The response was the advent of post modernism, which tarnished and then began to corrode the belief in "secular reason". For some, this evolved into nihilism, a philosophy that is the denial of all foundations and the negation of objective truth.

One thing however is certain: the currents of thought which claim to be postmodern merit appropriate attention. According to some of them, the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral. In their destructive critique of every certitude, several authors have failed to make crucial distinctions and have called into question the certitudes of faith.

This nihilism has been justified in a sense by the terrible experience of evil which has marked our age. Such a dramatic experience has ensured the collapse of rationalist optimism, which viewed history as the triumphant progress of reason, the source of all happiness and freedom; and now, at the end of this century, one of our greatest threats is the temptation to despair.

Even so, it remains true that a certain positivist cast of mind continues to nurture the illusion that, thanks to scientific and technical progress, man and woman may live as a demiurge, single-handedly and completely taking charge of their destiny.¹¹⁵

The Pope does not say in this document whether the post modern period provides an opportunity for a fairer hearing of the gospel message. The fifteen years that have elapsed since the encyclical was published have provided additional distance from the modern period, and added to the capacity to see modernism in a more objective light. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the modern period was that it did not see itself as an historical era with its own frame

¹¹⁵ Ibid., para. 91.

of reference but as the ultimate fulfillment of the destiny of the human person. An historical analysis provides a critical lens with which to evaluate theological theories of the period to determine the extent to which they were consistent with revelation or, rather were attempts to reconcile revealed truth with prevailing cultural norms. This provides an opportunity to critique and question modernity, which was an environment that proved to be very hostile to the faith.¹¹⁶

What is at stake?

The Pope is concerned that the citizens of the modern world have experienced an avalanche of competing philosophies and theories and because of this are tempted to abandon the search for truth. Many wonder whether it still makes sense to search for meaning, at all. This has resulted in what the Pope calls the “crisis of meaning”.

A philosophy which no longer asks the question of the meaning of life would be in grave danger of reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth.¹¹⁷

The Pope is concerned with the philosophical trajectory, and in particular with the movement towards nihilism. He sounds an ominous note, a sobering departure for a Pope who is normally optimistic about the future of humanity.

¹¹⁶ The era of post-modernity may open theology to new approaches to the expression of the transcendent. See for example Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), particularly Ch.5 for a post-modern phenomenological approach. The following text is a reading of the “Eucharistic moment” from the meeting on the road to Emmaus:

“The Word at the Eucharistic moment does not disappear so much as the disciples who eating his body and drinking his blood discover themselves assimilated to the one whom they assimilate and recognize inwardly; the Word does not disappear so much to their sight so much as they themselves disappear as blinded individuals”, p. 151.

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*, para. 81.

Quite apart from the fact that it conflicts with the demands and the content of the word of God, *nihilism* is a denial of the humanity and of the very identity of the human being. It should never be forgotten that the neglect of being inevitably leads to losing touch with objective truth and therefore with the very ground of human dignity. This in turn makes it possible to erase from the countenance of man and woman the marks of their likeness to God, and thus to lead them little by little either to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope. Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery. ¹¹⁸

John Paul II sees the pursuit of truth as essential to maintaining human dignity. Giving up on the search for truth, and the desire to conform one's life to it inevitably will lead to slavery to individual self interest. For a society, the implications are even more disastrous. The reference to "will to power" echoes of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) the controversial German philosopher whose thought has been connected by some to the rise of Nazism in his native country.¹¹⁹ One might also recall Cardinal Ratzinger's reference to the "dictatorship of relativism" in 2005 after the death of John Paul II. His remark came from his concern that in a society in which the search for truth is deemed futile, power eventually becomes the determining factor in political decision-making. Without the recognition of God as the source of truth, there is no higher value to provide political accountability. In those circumstances, might is right.¹²⁰

John Paul II was intimately acquainted with this scenario through his own first-hand experience of the atheistic Nazi and Communist regimes in his native

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 90.

¹¹⁹ Philip Stokes, *Philosophy: 100 Essential Thinkers* (London: Arcturus, 2002), 146.

¹²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Light Of The World*, p.50.

Poland. For the Pope evangelization impacts not only individual salvation but also the spiritual health of whole nations.

What needs to happen?

John Paul II ends his encyclical with a call to restore the close relationship between faith and reason. He urges all philosophers to “explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the beautiful to which the word of God gives access.”¹²¹ He also calls upon Christian philosophers to develop a “philosophical reflection, which will be both comprehensible and appealing to those who do not yet grasp the full truth which divine Revelation declares.”¹²² This type of philosophical dialogue is seen as a kind of “*protoevangelium*” that prepares its participants for the reception of revelation through an appreciation for the true, the good and the beautiful.

In addition, the Christian philosopher is asked to enter into a “demanding critical dialogue” with philosophical thought and tradition to express the full metaphysical dimension of truth.¹²³ We can safely infer that this would be a dialogue in which the integrity of theological commitments would remain intact, in contrast to Fr. O’Malley’s definition.

Criticism of the argument of the encyclical

In 2003 Cardinal Ratzinger summed up *Fides et Ratio* in this way: “The encyclical is quite simply attempting to give us courage for the adventure of

¹²¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, para. 103.

¹²² *Ibid.*, para. 104.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, para. 105.

truth”¹²⁴ The central assertion of the encyclical is that the fullness of truth is knowable and can be found in the person of Jesus Christ. Secondly, the Catholic Church is the servant of this revelation and has the fullness of the means of salvation. These pronouncements are glaring in a modern or postmodern context in which skepticism about claims of truth is the default position. Nevertheless, believing the truth of Christianity and having the courage to proclaim it are essential for evangelization. Since rationalism has challenged revelation at its roots in the developed world, Catholics may be reluctant to participate in the New Evangelization. In the next section the criticisms of the encyclical’s central assertion will be considered to determine if they have merit.

Five different critiques will be examined, and a sample counter argument will be provided for each.

- a. **The “multiplicity of religions” critique** – There have been many thousands of religions since the beginning of time. How can one religion claim to know the truth? Also, religions that believe that they have the truth seem to promote intolerance of other viewpoints that have led to war.

A response - The multiplicity of religions is an important datum in anthropology. It tends to support the premise that human beings in general have an innate desire to understand the transcendent and that there is truth to be uncovered in that realm. Therefore, restricting philosophical enquiry to what can be measured will omit a central component of human experience.

Claims of truth are unpopular in the modern world as they are perceived to

¹²⁴ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 184.

lead to intolerance and discrimination. John Paul II maintains that this need not be the result.

To believe it possible to know a universally valid truth is in no way to encourage intolerance; on the contrary, it is the essential condition for sincere and authentic dialogue between persons. On this basis alone is it possible to overcome divisions and to journey together towards full truth, walking those paths known only to the Spirit of the Risen Lord.¹²⁵

Knowing a universally valid truth does not mean that one is entitled to force someone else to believe it. The declining political power of the Church, especially in the developed world, may eliminate the risk of discrimination by the Church against those who disagree with her claims. Ironically, this might position the Church well for the advent of the New Evangelization. A Church that has no worldly power is more likely to attract new members based on a free, informed choice.

b. The cultural critique – Historically, Christianity comes out of a Middle Eastern and European cultural milieu. The “Christian” culture, once powerful because of the political power of the countries where it was operative, no longer has anything to contribute to other world cultures. In fact, Christian culture has ceded dominance to what is now called the secular culture in those countries where it first developed.

A response - One of the critiques of some of the previous waves of evangelization is that the missionaries, merchants, explorers and colonists did not properly discern which aspects of their message were Christian and

¹²⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, para. 109.

which were Eurocentric. So, for example, it was important in some residential school settings to teach the children about Christ, and to make them look and sound European. The legitimate concern that previous missionary ventures had elements of “cultural imperialism” was addressed in the teaching of Vatican II.¹²⁶ Observation of the cultures of the world throughout history demonstrates that they are not static and are subject to change particularly through new encounters with other cultures. Also, cultures can have aspects that can be seen to be more or less good. For instance, German culture in the late 1930’s had an anti-Semitic element. Therefore, it is not helpful to consider all cultural values as sacrosanct. The Christian message is for all cultures, as was demonstrated on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). Currently, the Church is growing in those lands that were former European colonies despite the decline of the faith in Europe. There is no homogenous Christian culture, but instead Christianity is inculturated in almost all the countries on earth.¹²⁷

c. The historical critique - Christ was a man of antiquity who had a particular “frame of reference” and approach to life conditioned by his milieu. Therefore he is as relevant today as a character in an ancient novel.

A response - Evangelization is about helping people be open to an encounter with Christ, who is as real today as he was two thousand years ago. The proof of this is in the ongoing impact that Christ has had on

¹²⁶ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, para.17.

¹²⁷ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, pps. 193-204.

believers' lives since his ascension. Treating Christ as only an historical figure limits people's access to a relationship with him. This is a common modern scholarly practice, which has the effect of immunizing the reader from encountering the Person.¹²⁸ The modern scholar may know a lot about Christ but may not know Christ. To truly know Christ one must cultivate a personal relationship with him through scripture reading, prayer and regular participation in the sacramental life.

- d. The materialist critique** – Truth claims generated by the so-called encounter with a “transcendent reality” are like superstitions that will eventually be dispelled with sufficient education, development and modernization. The scientific method is the only dependable way to determine truth. Religions are exclusive clubs for people who believe that God has been speaking to them. This gives inadequate personalities a sense of superiority.

A response – The restriction of philosophy and other social sciences to material and quantifiable inquiries is an unjustifiable limitation on reason that even the classical rationalists would not have supported. Cardinal Ratzinger noted that the scientific method had become the canon of academic methodology in the social sciences. He insisted that discussions of truth must also be acknowledged as serious and scholarly.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

¹²⁹ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 191.

The pervasive influence of mass marketing in capitalist economies has had an inordinate impact on culture, resulting in a heightened societal emphasis on materialism. Materialism has hidden costs: to the environment, to families who cannot keep up to artificial expectations and to the developing nations who are held to a lower standard of living by an unjust global distribution of wealth. There is already evidence that human beings are treating themselves and others as commodities, leading to a tragic impact on respect for the dignity of the human person.

The person who has had no previous exposure to the transcendent can feel excluded by Christian witness that stresses revelation prematurely without the development of a sufficient trust relationship with the evangelizer at a natural level. This requires a balance for the evangelist – too much emphasis on revelation can create distance, while too little impoverishes the message. Christian love should be inclusive of all, and the evangelist should communicate the humility of Christ and his followers by words and actions.

e. The political critique – Claims of truth justify going against the will of the majority and proponents can even impose their will on religious and other minorities. This type of thinking allows for theocracy or fundamentalist states.

A response – Everyone has a variety of motivations for how they act within a political community. It would be undemocratic for the state to suggest that one type of motivation was permitted for political action and another is not. If a Christian's relationship with Christ informs how they act within a given polity, their contribution should be received the same way as anyone else who is informed by their religion or even their atheism. Each promotes their

idea of the common good, and in a democracy the majority decides.

Christians should not be forced to take actions against their conscience, as their commitment to faith is more sacrosanct than their allegiance to unjust laws of the polity.

Discussions about Jesus Christ as “the way, truth and the life” led to strenuous theological debates in the aftermath of Vatican II, which coincided with the period of highest cultural impact of modernity. For the developed world, enhanced global communication and travel, general fatigue with war and an increasingly global economy led to the promotion of universal human rights and a renewed desire to understand and work with different races, religions and cultures. As a result, claims to truth, especially truth that applied to all people became suspect. Two main theological perspectives on truth emerged within Catholic theology:

- Inclusivism – This view holds that Christ is the fullness of the truth and that other religious traditions have elements of that truth which come from Christ. While Christ is the unique mediator between God and humanity, Christ can offer salvation to members of other religions under certain conditions. Two theologians who espoused this approach are Karl Rahner, and Hans Urs Von Balthasar.¹³⁰ This

¹³⁰ Karl Rahner in Don A. Pitmann, Ruben L.F. Habito and Terry C. Muck, eds. *Ministry and Theology in Global Perspective: Contemporary Challenges for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996) pps. 87-93. “If on the one hand, we conceive salvation as something specifically Christian, if there is no salvation apart from Christ, if according to Catholic teaching the supernatural divinization of man can never be replaced by good will on the part of man . . . and if on the other hand God has really . . . intended this salvation for all men – then these two aspects cannot be reconciled in any other way than by stating that every human being is really and truly exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace which offers an interior union with God, and by means of which God communicates himself whether the individual takes up an attitude of refusal or acceptance to this grace.”

view, which was the one that emerged from the Council, will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

- Pluralism – From this perspective, there are many truths and the followers of no one religion can claim that its revelation is the most true or complete. This approach would not propose Christ as the standard by which all other religions are judged. Hans Kung suggests that religions should be evaluated by other criteria – such as the extent to which a religion could be said to be *humane*, or the extent to which a religion is consistent with its *own beliefs*.¹³¹ Paul Knitter suggests what he refers to as a “*soteriocentric criteria*” for religions to evaluate themselves – including the “preferential option for the poor or non-persons.”¹³²

Cardinal Dulles responded to approaches like these at a lecture at a Conference on the New Evangelization at Sacred Heart Major Seminary. He referred to a pervasive societal attitude that is a major barrier to evangelization.

It is an exaggerated form of egalitarianism that puts every religion, every conviction, and every moral practice on the same level, giving no higher status or authority to any particular creed or group.¹³³

Essentially, if there is no sense of an objective or absolute truth then truth becomes completely a matter of the subject. Cardinal Dulles elaborates:

For a summary of the insights of Hans Urs von Balthasar and other representative authors, see an excellent summary in Paul Griffiths, “One Jesus, Many Christs?” *Pro Ecclesia* 7:2 (Spring, 1998), pp. 152-171.

¹³¹ Hans Kung in Pitmann, Habito and Muck, eds. *Ministry and Theology in a Global Perspective*, p.110.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.117. “these criteria have to be formulated and concretized in the actual practice of liberation for the oppressed.” Despite the use of the prefix “*soterio*” Dr. Knitter is referring to salvation through relief of material poverty and not from condemnation due to sin.

¹³³ Cardinal Avery Dulles, “Vatican II and Evangelization” in Steven Boguslawski and Ralph Martin, *The New Evangelization* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), p.13.

The two contrasting attitudes lead to very different views of salvation. According to Christian orthodoxy, God brings about salvation by sending his divine Son as redeemer of the world. Those who accept him as Savior, believing and following his teaching, will attain the eternal life he came to give. Since faith is the gateway to saving truth, Christians have powerful motives to spread the faith, that is, to evangelize.

The democratic, egalitarian view sets all religions on the same level, just so many human efforts to speak of the divine. This view leads to an attitude of religious indifferentism. Some say that, while Jesus may be the savior of Christians, other religions have other savior figures, the Lord Buddha, the Lord Krishna, or some other real or mythical personage. Non-Christians can work out their salvation, whatever that may be, wherever they are. Why should we try to convert them to Christianity if it is just one of many options?¹³⁴

It should be clear by now that John Paul II would advocate the first approach rather than the second. The following quotation from his first encyclical is a succinct summary of his viewpoint.

Consequently, we have become sharers in this mission of the prophet Christ, and in virtue of that mission we together with him are serving divine truth in the Church. Being responsible for that truth also means loving it and seeking the most exact understanding of it, in order to bring it closer to ourselves and others in all its saving power, its splendour and its profundity joined with simplicity.¹³⁵

He clearly articulates the truth of the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church, indicates that these truths are universally applicable and insists they are divinely revealed. He also decries a widespread attitude in society that truth is entirely subjectively determined.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pps. 15–16.

¹³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis - Encyclical Letter*, 4 March 1979, para.19, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_en.html.

Recent times have seen the rise to prominence of various doctrines that tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain. A legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth. Even certain conceptions of life coming from the East betray this lack of confidence, denying truth its exclusive character and assuming that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines, even if they contradict one another. On this understanding, everything is reduced to opinion; and there is a sense of being adrift.¹³⁶

While Kung and Knitter propose what appear to be objective criteria, their definitions expose their own personal values about what is important in religion. In the end, John Paul II asserts that the only truly objective standard is what Jesus Christ has told us about Christian faith. After all, the role of the evangelist is to proclaim the merits of Christ, being always aware that Christians too have not lived up to the standard set by the Lord.

Based on this analysis, Cardinal Dulles sounds a warning about confusions that have arisen about the nature of dialogue.

Some believe that, for dialogue to occur, the parties must cease to hold their own doctrines with certitude and be prepared, as a result of the dialogue, to modify or renounce their faith. One author declares "Dialogue is not possible if any partners enter it with the claim that they possess the final, definitive, irreformable truth." Treating their own commitments as tentative, they look for a doctrinal compromise. Each participating group, according to this theory, should be prepared to surrender some of its own traditions for the sake of the concord.¹³⁷

This description sounds similar to Gregory Baum's recommendation of "kenotic spirituality" introduced in the previous chapter, or Fr. O'Malley's definition of dialogue. According to Cardinal Dulles the Catholic understanding of dialogue

¹³⁶ John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio*, para. 5.

¹³⁷ Avery Cardinal Dulles in Boguslawski, Steven et. al., *The New Evangelization*, p.17.

requires not compromise but agreement in the fullness of the truth. The Catholic party cannot discard the revealed truths of faith because to do so would offend the God who revealed them.¹³⁸

Conclusion

The major thrust of the encyclical is the reaffirmation of the truth of Christian revelation in light of the Enlightenment assertion that faith is a matter of subjective opinion. Revelation has been under continuous attack throughout the modern era and particularly after the advent of classical rationalism. The faith that Christ is the fullness of the revelation of God is an essential presupposition for the practice of evangelization.

Those involved in the dialogue requested by the Pope must consider the cautions raised by Cardinal Dulles. John Paul II calls for Christian philosophers to develop a philosophy that responds to the requirements of theology, as part of an “evangelization of culture”¹³⁹ This can be seen as a logical elaboration of the definition of evangelization adopted in this thesis. In addition, the Pope also calls on Christian philosophers to develop a philosophy that will allow discussion on the true, the good, and the beautiful with those who are not open to the fullness of revelation.¹⁴⁰ This philosophy would operate as a kind of *protoevangelium* as a way

¹³⁸ Ibid., para. 17–18.

¹³⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, para. 103. “Philosophy moreover is the mirror which reflects the culture of a people. A philosophy which responds to the challenge of theology’s demands and evolves in harmony with faith is part of that “evangelization of culture” which Paul VI proposed as one of the fundamental goals of evangelization. . . . This attention to philosophy too should be seen as a fundamental and original contribution in service of the new evangelization.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., para. 104. “Reflecting in the light of reason and in keeping with its rules, and guided always by the deeper understanding given them by the word of God, Christian philosophers can develop a reflection

of preparing some for a future proclamation of the gospel message. There is no suggestion that there is any room, in either of these proposals, for negotiating away truth in the context of dialogue.

The encyclical highlights a crucial distinction between evangelization and dialogue, which is the essential role of grace in evangelization. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent in evangelization, when, in conjunction with the *fiat* of those involved, grace brings about the proclamation, the revelation, and the response of faith. This distinguishes evangelization from dialogue in an absolutely essential way. While evangelization always requires grace to be efficacious, dialogue can be successful even if it operates on the natural level of reason alone.

The emphasis on grace is significant and may be a way to protect an evangelization program from the unintended influences of rationalism. When revelation is thought of as a material object, like a syllabus, a handout or a tutorial it risks being seen the same way as any other educational content. For example, proclamation in a catechism class can be confused with teaching of secular material in a school. When revelation is described as a process of encounter with the real person who is Jesus Christ, it retains its supernatural character, power and appeal. Furthermore, when evangelists sense that Christ is really present in the process, their fears of contradicting prevailing secular cultural norms can be overcome.

The next chapter will consider John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, which defends the *magisterium's* truth claims against relativism, a key component

which will be both comprehensible and appealing to those who do not yet grasp the full truth which divine Revelation declares.”

of modern philosophy. The content of evangelization is expanded beyond the *kerygma* to include the moral teaching of the Church. Throughout all of these discussions we will continue to propose that the proclamation of the universal saving mission of Jesus Christ by the faithful is an essential element of the New Evangelization as described by the *magisterium* of John Paul II. Through Jesus Christ all can receive the God's revelation, and experience the transcendent truth that passes all understanding.

Chapter Three: *Veritatis Splendor* and the New Evangelization

John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, was issued in 1993 primarily to respond to a crisis in moral theology within the Roman Catholic Church.

Developments in philosophy and culture in the modern era had led to corresponding innovations in moral theology that had caused traditional teaching to be questioned. New teaching began to assert itself in Catholic universities and seminaries in the years after Vatican II. There was a definite sense that traditional Catholic moral teaching needed to change to bring it up to date with modern ideas. The most serious example of this phenomenon was the controversy that arose after the reconfirmation of traditional Catholic teaching on the regulation of births by Paul VI in 1968. This led to very public dissent by a number of theologians at the time. Discontent continued to grow in the decade that followed.

Soon after he assumed the papacy in 1978, John Paul II signaled that he would support and promote traditional moral teaching.¹⁴¹ In a series of Wednesday audiences in the early 1980s, he laid out his “Theology of the Body”, an explanation of how traditional Christian teaching on sexuality safeguarded the integrity and sanctity of the human person. This teaching described the creation of a new human person in the sexual act between a husband and wife as a profound manifestation of the divine life of the most Holy Trinity. He challenged the modern acceptance of the variety of modes of sexual expression as contrary to the intrinsic nature of the human person. He criticized the deluge of sexual images in modern marketing campaigns that led to the objectification and

¹⁴¹ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio: On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1981), para.29.

commoditization of the human person. He challenged modern sexual mores asserting that they interfered with open and honest communication between women and men. His thesis was that humanism without God would not, in the end, protect the interests of humanity.¹⁴²

Veritatis Splendor was designed to clearly articulate traditional principles of moral theology so that the Church could see the infiltration of patterns of reasoning from modernity and turn the tide against moral relativism and the false autonomy of conscience from truth. Other voices within the Church welcomed the modern trends, seeing the changes in moral theology as a fulfillment of a process of “*aggiornamento*” begun at the Council.¹⁴³ Regardless of one’s perspective, it was clear that modernity, like a great wave, had crashed over the bow of the “bark of Peter”. Whether the boat should have succumbed depends upon one’s perspective on the debate that ensued in the aftermath of the Council.

John Paul II expressed the rationale for the encyclical in this way:

Today, however, it seems *necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching*, with the precise goal of recalling certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied. . . At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth.

In particular, the question is asked: do the commandments of God, which are written on the human heart and are part of the Covenant, really have the capacity to clarify the daily decisions of individuals and entire societies? Is it possible to obey God and thus love God and neighbour, without respecting these commandments in all circumstances? Also, an

¹⁴² Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003), pps.1-8.

¹⁴³ Baum, Gregory, “Post World War II Catholicism,” pps. 291–295.

opinion is frequently heard which questions the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality, as if membership in the Church and her internal unity were to be decided on the basis of faith alone, while in the sphere of morality a pluralism of opinions and of kinds of behaviour could be tolerated, these being left to the judgment of the individual subjective conscience or to the diversity of social and cultural contexts.¹⁴⁴

These comments frame the debate well, and clearly identify the fault lines between traditional moral teaching and alternative proposals that were gathering support. By the time this Encyclical was issued in 1993, a generation had grown up since the very public dispute between many theologians and Paul VI. Twenty-five years after *Humanae Vitae* the actual practice of the lay faithful diverged dramatically from the traditional moral teaching of the Church on sexual ethics. Few lay people knew about the innovative explication of the teaching on human sexuality by the charismatic John Paul II. In the intervening years, those theologians who disagreed with Paul VI continued to teach and publish trying to reconcile disagreement with moral teaching with membership in the Church. Many priests and bishops supported this theological development, given that they were faced with a laity that largely rejected the teaching on sexuality on the one hand, and a clear responsibility articulated by successive Popes to teach the flock that had been entrusted to them on the other. What resulted was a new theology that was designed to bridge the gap between the traditional moral teaching and the lived reality of the majority of the laity of the Church. There are two fault lines that John Paul II identifies – the first is the split between freedom and truth; the second is the split between faith and morality. Each will be dealt with in the following paragraphs. The implications for the New Evangelization are

¹⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 4.

significant. Since the goodness of human actions determine the extent to which God is active and alive in the subject, moral teaching must form part of the content of the New Evangelization. This Chapter will demonstrate that the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is essential to the New Evangelization and that, according to John Paul II, that proclamation should include the moral teaching of the Church.

Freedom and Truth

In *Veritatis Splendor* the Pope goes to great lengths to explain the connection between freedom and truth. Modern thinking equates freedom with the ability of the human person to make choices and carry them out. Advances in technology and standard of living can lead to a sense of entitlement to autonomy and control over one's environment. From this perspective, moral teaching can seem to be a restrictive imposition of rules from outside the person and therefore, dehumanizing. John Paul II makes the scriptural story of Jesus encounter with the rich young man the focal point of the encyclical.

And behold, one came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:16-22 – RSV).

This Matthean narrative is specifically cited by the Pope as a demonstration of the incorporation of the Decalogue into the *corpus* of Christ's teaching. The Pope

sees a fundamental relationship between human freedom and the Divine Law. Against an antinomian sentiment derived from St. Paul's opposition to the early Christians who relied on the Mosaic Law for justification, John Paul II says that the commandments are at the service of the practice of love. Since love creates restrictions on one's behaviour, it requires self-discipline and grace to carry out. The result of this discipline is freedom.¹⁴⁵ The encyclical quotes St. Augustine: "Therefore, since some weakness has remained in us, I dare to say that to the extent to which we serve God we are free, while to the extent that we follow the law of sin, we are still slaves".¹⁴⁶

Yet the keeping of the commandments is only the necessary first step for the rich young man. He is being called to even greater freedom from his possessions. The fact that the rich young man actually rejects the call and walks away indicates that Christ does not coerce obedience and that people must decide to align their will with God's will for them. The decision to renounce selfishness in favour of service to others is not just a onetime occurrence but a recurring requirement and essential hallmark of a Christian way of life. Despite the fact that many walk away from Christ, the calling is addressed to everyone.

Both the commandments and Jesus' invitation to the rich young man stand at the service of a single and indivisible charity, which spontaneously tends towards that perfection whose measure is God alone: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt 5:48*).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 18.

This sets a very high standard for human behavior. Catholic theology holds that human nature was dramatically wounded through the Fall in the Garden of Eden and as a result human beings are born with the effects of the original sin. Even after baptism, human beings suffer from *concupiscence*, the tendency to gravitate towards selfishness. It can only be overcome by grace.

Those who live "by the flesh" experience God's law as a burden, and indeed as a denial or at least a restriction of their own freedom. On the other hand, those who are impelled by love and "walk by the Spirit" (*Gal* 5:16), and who desire to serve others, find in God's Law the fundamental and necessary way in which to practice love as something freely chosen and freely lived out. Indeed, they feel an interior urge — a genuine "necessity" and no longer a form of coercion — not to stop at the minimum demands of the Law, but to live them in their "fullness".¹⁴⁸

This is not simply a matter of accepting a teaching or espousing a doctrine. It is a daily commitment to being transformed into the likeness of Christ, despite many temptations to the contrary. Followers of Christ are exhorted to "hold fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father." Furthermore, "Jesus asks us to follow him and to imitate him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you'" (*Jn* 15:12).¹⁴⁹

According to John Paul II, this complete gift of self, taught by example, and made possible by Christ, represents true freedom for the human person. Far from doing all that is possible or permissible, it limits the range of human action but

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 18.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 19-20.

expands the capacity of the human being to love and therefore to imitate God. This achieves the essential vocation of the human person, which is to know, love and serve God and hence to obtain the perfection of freedom. The person is transformed as she or he lays down their own will to become formed in the image of Christ.

Challenges of the Modern Era

The awareness of the grand and noble destiny of the human person must inevitably lead to evangelization: “the most powerful and stirring challenge which the Church has been called to face from her very beginning.”¹⁵⁰ John Paul II’s description of evangelization resonates with his own enthusiasm for the task. This is tempered, however, by a realistic assessment of the modern era.

At least for many peoples, however, the present time is instead marked by a formidable challenge to undertake a “new evangelization”, a proclamation of the Gospel which is always new and always the bearer of new things, an evangelization which must be “new in its ardour, methods and expression”. Dechristianization, which weighs heavily upon entire peoples and communities once rich in faith and Christian life, involves not only the loss of faith or in any event its becoming irrelevant for everyday life, but also, and of necessity, *a decline or obscuring of the moral sense*. This comes about both as a result of a loss of awareness of the originality of Gospel morality and as a result of an eclipse of fundamental principles and ethical values themselves. Today’s widespread tendencies towards subjectivism, utilitarianism and relativism appear not merely as pragmatic attitudes or patterns of behaviour, but rather as approaches having a basis in theory and claiming full cultural and social legitimacy.¹⁵¹

The Holy Father refers to three modern tendencies that affect the way people think about moral decision-making – subjectivism, utilitarianism and

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., para. 106.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., para. 106.

relativism. Moral subjectivism sees the individual subject as the source of moral values. The philosophical writings of Rene Descartes (1596 -1650) and Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) have been associated with this philosophical approach, although their thought has greater dissimilarities than congruencies. Descartes, already mentioned in the previous chapter, saw human thought as the only sure proof of existence, and despite his attempt to prove the existence of God, his *Meditations* became known as the definitive work of epistemological skepticism. Kierkegaard saw religious belief to be a matter of passion, not reason. "One must choose to believe in God passionately and personally, not as a mere intellectual exercise. An authentic belief requires its force from within, as a 'leap of faith' without the guidance of reason to reassure us that what we are doing is right or true."¹⁵² Utilitarianism is an ethical theory holding that the proper course of action is the one that maximizes overall "happiness". The earliest proponents of utilitarianism were Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Bentham, the founder of the system, said that what is good for humanity is the attainment of pleasure and the absence of pain. In questions of right and wrong, what is right is that which promotes the greatest happiness of all. Both Bentham and Mill were radical liberals. Mill "makes it quite clear that we should only be concerned with morality in those aspects of life that require sanctions to deter specific kinds of conduct. Otherwise a person is morally and legally free to pursue their life as they see fit."¹⁵³ Relativism is a mode of thought that holds that

¹⁵² Stokes, *Philosophy*, p. 145.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

there are no principles or ethics that have absolute truth or validity, merely opinions that have only subjective value according to differences in perception and frame of reference. The Sophists are the earliest philosophers linked to this approach, dating back to 5th century BC. They are referred to mainly in Plato and Socrates, their opponents. Protagoras was a proponent of this approach and an opponent of Socrates. His argument in one well known interchange could be summarized as "What is true for you is true for you, and what is true for me is true for me."¹⁵⁴ Modern relativists include authors such as Bernard Crick (1929 - 2008), Paul Feyerabend (1924 - 1994), and Joseph Margolis (1924 -). Feyerabend, the Austrian born philosopher of science, said the following in his 1975 book called *How to Defend Society Against Science*:

“...And it is of course not true that we have to follow the truth. Human life is guided by many ideas. Truth is one of them. Freedom and mental independence are others. If Truth, as conceived by some ideologists, conflicts with freedom, then we have a choice. We may abandon freedom. But we may also abandon Truth. “

Each of these theories provides a way of thinking about moral decision-making. What they have in common is that the measure of the goodness of a human action is within the human person as opposed to being measured against the standard for human behaviour revealed by God in Jesus Christ. Either because they do not believe that God exists, or because they do not accept Jesus Christ as his Son, people have chosen to find another way to determine what is good or bad for their lives.

¹⁵⁴ Plato, *Protagoras Dialogue*, 5th century B.C.,
http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plato_protag_1.htm.

There are, of course, valid critiques of all of these theories. The critique of subjectivism and relativism is similar. When relativism claims that absolute truth does not exist, then it is making an absolute statement that is, by its very nature self contradictory. Secondly, pure relativism makes it difficult for disparate groups to make decisions regarding a common future direction. Utilitarianism can also be challenged on the grounds of subjectivity: who gets to decide what course of action will promote the greatest pleasure and prevent the greatest pain? Despite these valid critiques, all three of these ideologies have had a significant impact in shaping the modern milieu with which John Paul II is attempting to communicate. The Pope sees truth as guaranteeing freedom insofar as the human person needs the Word of God to restore her or his sight and proper relationship with God and the world. For him there is only one answer: Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. The philosophers are finding truth in their own reason, feelings, experience, and theories of human behavior. Many have given up the search for a universal truth as the impossible quest, depending more on subjective realities. What is lost, argues John Paul II, is the sense of solidarity among people who belong to a community that is the preserver of the corporate truth revealed by God through the ages. In an age of skepticism, without this kind of authority, individuals are left on their own to learn a truth that works for them, from scratch, since modernism suspects historically learned truths. Ironically, the process of searching for truth as an individual results in greater vulnerability to market and cultural influences which proceed to reduce the person to a mere consumer of products. If truth dies then there is a danger that human subjectivity can be too closely aligned with the self-interest that lies thinly disguised just

below the surface of the human skin.

Both the past and present day “masters of suspicion” would perceive the Roman Catholic *magisterium* to be intent on subjugating the faithful to their ideas for reasons, one might assume, of self-aggrandizement, maintenance of organizational inertia or possibly the raw exercise of power. Yet it is difficult to see how self-interest could be motivating any of our most recent Popes to promote traditional moral teaching. It could be argued that it would be much easier for them to capitulate to the modern moral theories. They would certainly have been more popular in the western world. Instead, in *Veritatis Splendor* the Pope runs headlong into a direct conflict with relativism. He opens the Encyclical, with these words:

. . . the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself . . .

Jesus Christ, the "light of the nations", shines upon the face of his Church, which he sends forth to the whole world to proclaim the Gospel to every creature (cf. *Mk* 16:15). Hence the Church, as the People of God among the nations, while attentive to the new challenges of history and to mankind's efforts to discover the meaning of life, offers to everyone the answer which comes from the truth about Jesus Christ and his Gospel. The Church remains deeply conscious of her "duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, so that she can offer in a manner appropriate to each generation replies to the continual human questionings on the meaning of this life and the life to come and on how they are related".¹⁵⁵

The authority he claims for Christ, and the role he espouses for the Church run in sharp contrast to the modern tenets of relativism. Ironically, the key question is whether our modern cultures are willing to tolerate voices that espouse truth. The

¹⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, paras. 1-2.

current conflict in the United States between the Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) around forced mandates for health insurance coverage is a relevant example. The relativistic approach that there are equally valid attitudes to birth control is being imposed upon others who hold different views. The USCCB believes that contraception is damaging for individual people and society in general and will not participate in the practice. The Pope seems to demonstrate prescience in the following excerpt from the *Veritatis Splendor*.

This is *the risk of an alliance between democracy and ethical relativism*, which would remove any sure moral reference point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible. Indeed, "if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism."¹⁵⁶

Faith and morality

The second fracture identified by Pope John Paul II is the distinction between faith and morality – between belief and behavior. The last half-century has seen a significant decline in institutions that promote Catholic culture. Halifax, Nova Scotia is an excellent example. Fifty years ago, the city had two Catholic universities, Catholic hospitals and numerous Catholic schools. Today, that entire infrastructure has been secularized with the exception of two private Catholic schools. For most youth who attend Church, Catholic culture consists of Mass once per week and one hour of religious education. In addition, the broader cultural milieu and the institutions that promote it have been strongly influenced

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., para. 101.

by the philosophical theories described previously. This has created a situation where even regular Mass attendees have greater fluency and loyalty to relativism than to the type of Catholic belief and practice articulated by John Paul II.¹⁵⁷

The problem seems to be more extreme in Europe. Benedict XVI, Marcello Pera and others suggest that after 1960, Europeans abandoned traditional Christian moral norms in large numbers, replacing them with continuously changing relativistic ethics.¹⁵⁸ For example, the technological developments that allowed the temporary or permanent suppression of fertility, without requiring abstinence, led to a decline in the importance of families and to population decline. Ironically, the current dearth of population in Europe is being addressed through immigrants, many of whom are Muslim who in their attempt to establish absolute values also come into conflict with moral relativism.

Clarifications of Moral Theology

In light of these dramatic philosophical, cultural and sociological challenges, and sometimes because of them, theological theories arose that attempted to reconcile Roman Catholic moral teaching with the attitudes and behaviours of the laity and the broader secular culture. The correction of these theories was part of the reason for the drafting of this encyclical.

Church teaching on the role of conscience in making moral decisions was

¹⁵⁷ Cardinal George Pell, "Human Dignity, Human Rights and Moral Responsibility" (presented at the conference *Catholic Moral Theology in the Pontificate of John Paul II*, St. Charles Borromeo, October 4, 2003), <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7799>.

¹⁵⁸ John Vinocur, "Politicus: What the Pope Meant: His Co-authors View," *International Herald Tribune* (Rome, October 2, 2006), http://www.marcellopera.it/index_en.php?page=english_zoom.php&sct=7&cnt=17.

in urgent need of clarification. Theologians writing in the years after the Council had proposed a way to excuse immoral actions, based upon the actor's lack of knowledge that the act was wrong. The seed of this idea originated with St. Thomas Aquinas, but got expanded to include actions that while known to be contrary to the moral law, were done anyway because the actor could not agree with that law. This view essentially legitimized dissent from moral teaching, giving Catholics the false assurance that should they dissent, the action would not constitute a sin.¹⁵⁹ John Paul II's response to this problem restated the traditional teaching and reemphasized the importance of looking at the objective nature of the action.

The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good, whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandments he accepts. "Conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-à-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behaviour".¹⁶⁰

Individual conscience could therefore not establish the moral law. The teaching authority of the Church is the servant of the truth, and the faithful are called to form their consciences in light of that truth. True freedom is to be found in giving oneself entirely to Christ through obedience to the teaching.

Christians have a great help for the formation of conscience *in the Church and her Magisterium*. As the Council affirms: "In forming their consciences

¹⁵⁹ Cardinal George Pell, "Human Dignity, Human Rights and Moral Responsibility".

¹⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 60.

the Christian faithful must give careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is by the will of Christ the teacher of truth. Her charge is to announce and teach authentically that truth which is Christ, and at the same time with her authority to declare and confirm the principles of the moral order which derive from human nature itself ". It follows that the authority of the Church, when she pronounces on moral questions, in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of Christians. This is so not only because freedom of conscience is never freedom "from" the truth but always and only freedom "in" the truth, but also because the Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it; rather it brings to light the truths which it ought already to possess, developing them from the starting point of the primordial act of faith. The Church puts herself always and only at the *service of conscience*, helping it to avoid being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine proposed by human deceit (cf. *Eph 4:14*), and helping it not to swerve from the truth about the good of man, but rather, especially in more difficult questions, to attain the truth with certainty and to abide in it. ¹⁶¹

Note that for the Pope the moral teachings of the Church are synonymous with the teachings of Christ and are found deep within the hidden reality of every human heart. Moral teaching is therefore not an imposition of the freedom of the human person but instead safeguards the humanity of the person, made by God. Furthermore, the Decalogue and the natural law have universal applicability. Even if ignorance might in some cases affect the subject's culpability for a sin, it does not affect the harm that was done in the commission of the act. That is a permanent result of the sin.

The Pope also set out to counteract new moral theories dealing with salvation. Traditional Catholic moral teaching held that the commission of one mortal sin was sufficient to lose the state of grace and if not confessed could lead to an eternity separated from God.¹⁶² Mortal sin required three essential

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, para.60.

¹⁶² Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1861.

conditions: grave matter, full knowledge of the moral seriousness of the action, and complete consent.¹⁶³ New moral theologies had proposed a higher threshold, the so-called “fundamental option” which is a profound choice to separate oneself from God. John Paul II challenged this theological theory in in *Veritatis Splendor*.

In point of fact, man does not suffer perdition only by being unfaithful to that fundamental option whereby he has made "a free self-commitment to God". With every freely committed mortal sin, he offends God as the giver of the law and as a result becomes guilty with regard to the entire law (cf. *Jas* 2:8-11); even if he perseveres in faith, he loses "sanctifying grace", "charity" and "eternal happiness". As the Council of Trent teaches, "the grace of justification once received is lost not only by apostasy, by which faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin".¹⁶⁴

The Holy Father was required to follow this teaching due to the witness of scripture and the precedent of previous Church teaching.

Both of the modern theological innovations discussed had widespread acceptance in theological and seminary settings. The sexual revolution, the profound influence of relativism, the prominence of the philosophies referred to above, and the distrust for authority all led to a laity that was no longer prepared to follow moral admonitions from the Pope or even Christ, for that matter. Many felt that innovations in traditional moral theology were required to maintain organizational coherence within the Church. Rather than effect a *rapprochement* with these powerful cultural trends, John Paul II insisted on the correctness of the traditional teaching and went even further – he included moral teaching as part of the content of the New Evangelization. John Paul II cites Jesus who called

¹⁶³ Ibid., para. 1857.

¹⁶⁴ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para.69.

people to faith and conversion (Mk. 1:15) and St. Peter who held out a new life to be lived and a new way to follow (cf. Acts 2:37-41; 3:17-20).¹⁶⁵

The Call to Conversion

John Paul II sees Christian conversion as the aim of proclamation, a “complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith.”

Conversion is a gift of God, a work of the Blessed Trinity. . . . it gives rise to a dynamic and lifelong process which demands a continual turning away from "life according to the flesh" to "life according to the Spirit" (cf. Rom 8:3-13). “Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.”¹⁶⁶

This clear statement by John Paul II supports the third aspect of the definition of evangelization offered in the first chapter, and provides another consideration that clearly distinguishes between dialogue and proclamation. Dialogue accepts the perspectives and premises of the dialogue partner; proclamation is designed to convert them if they are at odds with the demands of the gospel. The call to conversion implies a change in behaviour from sinful actions to a life of righteousness. The Holy Father asserts that evangelization will produce its most impressive fruit when people who are living lives that are consonant with Christ’s message proclaim him. The Holy Spirit is the prime motivator of the prophetic Christian life.

The Spirit of Jesus, received by the humble and docile heart of the believer, brings about the flourishing of Christian moral life and the witness of holiness amid the great variety of vocations, gifts, responsibilities, conditions and life situations. As Novatian once pointed out, here

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., para. 107.

¹⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para. 46.

expressing the authentic faith of the Church, it is the Holy Spirit "who confirmed the hearts and minds of the disciples, who revealed the mysteries of the Gospel, who shed upon them the light of things divine. Strengthened by his gift, they did not fear either prisons or chains for the name of the Lord; indeed they even trampled upon the powers and torments of the world, armed and strengthened by him, having in themselves the gifts which this same Spirit bestows and directs like jewels to the Church, the Bride of Christ."¹⁶⁷

In the Pope's view, the Christian faithful are saved by Christ, encouraged by the witness of the martyrs, empowered by the Holy Spirit, living the authentic moral life and sharing it with others. The moral life is a basic requirement of following Christ, and is at least a first step that can lead to greater acts of self-giving. It requires the willingness to accept the truth and the self-renunciation to live it out, leading to true human freedom in the mind of the Pope. Any dichotomy between truth and freedom disappears. The Holy Father reaffirmed traditional moral teaching and called upon all members of the Church not only to live it out but to share it with others. This removes the dichotomy between faith and moral behavior within the believer. It calls on believers to be solid in their faith and to challenge modern trends that undermine moral living.

The most basic critique of the Pope's approach is that he claims to speak of a universal truth about the human person. If this truth is so universal, why is there so little consensus about its content, both outside the Church and even within it? Cardinal George Pell of Australia stated in 2003 that:

There has been no period in Church history where such a range of moral teachings has been rejected and the rejecters have continued to insist on remaining within the Church and aspiring to change Church teaching. Also

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., para. 108.

there has probably been no period in Church history where so many have been able to do this without effective retribution.¹⁶⁸

For Cardinal Pell the answer to this question lies at the feet of modernity, which he refers to as the “acid rain” of the Christian faith. The current lack of fidelity that he describes is not without precedent in the history of the Church. In the fourth century, in the period between the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople, the majority of Catholics (and for a time, the Emperor) supported the Arian heresy.

The second objection is that if, as John Paul II says, human reason can be clouded by the effects of original sin, why should people listen to a human being asserting the truth about God? All that the Holy Father says must be consistent with the teaching of Christ, as represented in Sacred Scripture and preserved in Tradition. The assistance of the Holy Spirit was promised to the Church by Christ for the purpose of accurately teaching about Christ in every time and place. The Church functions as an organic community guarding the deposit of divine revelation that has come to various members at various times for the benefit of the whole body throughout the world and throughout time. The Holy Father speaks not of himself but of Christ who is the wholly virtuous one. The Church is made up of human beings who are sometimes caught up in the transcendent, and sometimes weighed down by the mundane. Members of the Church frequently fail in their intention to follow Christ. But in proposing Christ they need not fear their human weakness, as he who they propose will not disappoint.

Others may criticize the tone as one of triumphalism, or having an aura of superiority. Some will argue that the Pope should not make so much of Jesus as

¹⁶⁸ Cardinal George Pell, "Human Dignity, Human Rights and Moral Responsibility."

“the way, the truth and the life” and instead acknowledge other religious paths to God, an approach said to have a greater spirit of humility. Cardinal Timothy Dolan addressed this question at the 2012 conclave in Rome:

“Be not afraid,” we’re told, is the most repeated exhortation in the Bible. After the Council, the good news was that triumphalism in the Church was dead. The bad news was that, so was confidence! We are convinced, confident, and courageous in the New Evangelization because of the power of the Person sending us on mission -- who happens to be the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity – because of the truth of the message, and the deep down openness in even the most secularized of people to the divine. Confident, yes! Triumphant, never! What keeps us from the swagger and arrogance of triumphalism is a recognition of what Pope Paul VI taught in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: the Church herself needs evangelization! This gives us humility as we confess that *Nemo dat quod non habet*, that the Church has a deep need for the interior conversion that is at the marrow of the call to evangelization.¹⁶⁹

One can recognize in John Paul II a great humility demonstrated by the numerous apologies for the sins of members of the Church as preparation for the Jubilee 2000 celebration, his tireless work in ecumenism and his eagerness to reach out in brotherhood to other religions. But his confidence in the saving power of Jesus Christ is the driving force behind the New Evangelization – one that focuses on both Catholic and non-Catholic alike who are open to hearing the message. He knows the wisdom of the world. The accomplished scholar who holds two PhD’s is well aware of the “masters of suspicion” and the prevailing philosophies of his time. He is aware of the perceived hegemony of the prevailing values in the developed world and the widespread dissent on moral teaching

¹⁶⁹ Cardinal Timothy Dolan, “We Gather as Missionaries, as Evangelizers” (presented at the Consistory of Cardinals, Rome, February 20, 2012), <http://www.zenit.org/article-34324?l=english>.

among many in his own Church. Yet he bravely, or foolishly depending on one's point of view, proposes that truth is accessible to the human person, that truth is a person, Jesus Christ and that following *his moral teaching*, is the best way for humanity to be most fully human. He knows that in following this path he will be rejected, ridiculed, betrayed and ignored. This seems to be humble service, the opposite of triumphalism.

Concerns about the effects of relativism on society have also been reflected in the papacy of Benedict XVI since his reference to the topic at the conclave that elected him Pope. He returned to this subject during an interview with Peter Seewald. He acknowledged that in our modern world truth has become suspect because intolerance and cruelty have occurred in its name. "No one will dispute that one must be careful and cautious in claiming the truth. But simply to dismiss it as unattainable is really destructive."¹⁷⁰ To suggest that the truth is beyond the reach of human beings is tantamount to saying that we are not capable of having ethical values. This leaves the discernment of right and wrong to the will of the majority, and the rise of Nazism in the 1930s in Germany is an example of how majorities who reject divine revelation spawn tyranny.

Yet truth cannot be imposed.

The truth comes to rule, not through violence but through its own power; this is the central theme of John's Gospel; when brought before Pilate, Jesus professes that he himself is the Truth and the witness to the truth. He does not defend the truth with legions but rather makes it visible through his Passion and thereby also limits it.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Benedict XVI, *Light Of The World.*, p.50.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.51.

Paths to Salvation?

The opposite opinion, that there are many, equally effective ways to God and salvation has often been supported by references to *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. In particular, paragraph 22 has often been cited in this regard.

The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the firstborn of many brothers, received "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of "the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23): "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. **But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.**

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. 31 For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.¹⁷²

The concern here is the bolded phrase in the last quoted paragraph: "All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way." This could be interpreted as saying that a person need only be of good will and have grace working in their hearts to be saved. Read on its own, this statement suggests a low threshold for salvation since grace is available to everyone.

¹⁷² Paul VI, *Gaudium Et Spes*, para. 22 (Emphasis added).

Gaudium et Spes was written by a team headed by a French sociologist. The main critique of the document came from the German Bishops, no doubt encouraged by two of their *periti*, Frs. Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger.¹⁷³ Their input was sought, and may be responsible for the clear differences in style among the various sections of the final document. I can find no record that the German bishops were critical of this particular passage, but their general critique of the document was the theological accuracy of the wording. *Gaudium et Spes* was called a “Pastoral Constitution”, a new name for Church documents, implying less doctrinal weight than a document like *Lumen Gentium* which was a “Dogmatic Constitution”. This title may have been chosen as a compromise with those Bishops who felt that the document should appear as a simple letter to the faithful. The document has recently been criticized by theologians for an overly idealistic view of the human person, and a highly naïve assessment of the prospects for dialogue with the modern world.¹⁷⁴

Para. 22 of course, must be read in context of the previous documents and the Tradition of the Church. In fact, footnote 31 directs us to para. 16 of *Lumen Gentium* that clarifies the ambiguity and establishes a clearer and stricter standard.

Those who:

through no fault of their own

¹⁷³ John W. O’Malley S. J., *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Boston: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 249.

¹⁷⁴ Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2003).

do not know the gospel of Christ and his Church

but who seek God with a sincere heart, and

moved by grace

try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience

MAY achieve eternal salvation.

Or

Those who:

without any fault of theirs

have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and

not without grace

strive to lead a good life

God will not deny them the assistance necessary for salvation.

This observation is the subject of a recent book by Ralph Martin, a prominent American scholar of the New Evangelization. His thesis is that confusion about the necessity of Christian faith for salvation has had the effect of removing an essential motivation for the New Evangelization. He argues that a particular interpretation of para. 22 of *Gaudium et Spes* has added to this problem, and that it should be read in light of para. 16 of *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁷⁵

In the nearly fifty years since the close of the Council, para. 22 of *Gaudium et Spes* has been interpreted as a development in the Church's teaching on salvation. Taken out of context, and read in light of the modern relativist

¹⁷⁵ Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012).

perspective, what para. 22 said about the possibility of salvation for those who do not explicitly know Christ could be interpreted as the norm, rather than the exception for salvation. Acceptance of this approach could result in a de-emphasis on evangelization as defined in this thesis, and a shift to greater emphasis on dialogue. In the years following the Council, this sentiment grew, supported by the modern aversion to the concept of an objective truth that can be known by the human person.

Unfortunately, the possibility of salvation gradually became the probability of salvation for all persons of good will. A good and loving God, it was thought, could tolerate no less. Modernity's idealistic faith in the "secular" human being extinguished the doctrine of original sin and the concept of mortal sin was dealt a deathblow by an expanded notion of conscience that had greater affinity with Kant than Aquinas. The natural law was a dead letter because it could not be proven empirically. Conscience thereby lost its anchor to the truth and became somewhat arbitrary. All of these factors not only took away the imperative for evangelization, but also the impetus for all religious observance. Churches emptied, vocations dried up and the institutions that the Church had taken centuries to build were dismantled. God was everywhere anyway. But when he is everywhere, he is also nowhere in particular.

This approach was explicitly challenged by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a Doctrinal Note on evangelization published in December 2007.

The Churches commitment to evangelization can never be lacking . . .
The relativism and irenicism prevalent today in the area of religion are not valid reasons for failing to respond to the difficult but awe inspiring

commitment which belongs to the nature of the Church herself and is indeed the Churches “primary task”.¹⁷⁶

While acknowledging that non-Christians can be saved in ways known only to God, the Doctrinal Note stresses the importance of knowing Christ.

The revelation of the fundamental truths about God, about the human person and the world, is a great good for every human person, while living in darkness without the truth about ultimate questions is an evil and is often at the root of suffering and slavery which can at times be grievous.¹⁷⁷

The results of the Synod are even more explicit on this point. It states categorically that “evangelization is necessary for the salvation of all”¹⁷⁸ and then goes on to quote the conclusion of paragraph 16 of *Lumen Gentium*.

But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (cf. *Rm* 1: 21, 25). Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, ‘Preach the Gospel to every creature’ (*Mk* 16:15), the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.¹⁷⁹

This statement reminds us that while it is possible for people to be saved without knowing Christ, evangelization is necessary because those who do not know Christ are often deceived by the Evil One and end up serving him to the peril of their souls, and to the detriment of their earthly and eternal beatitude. Also, it is important to remember that para. 16 of *Lumen Gentium* is referring to

¹⁷⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, p. 22.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁷⁸ XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 7-28 October 2012, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin, proposition 6.

¹⁷⁹ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, para. 16.

the offer of grace only. It is safe to assume that there would be a requirement for the subject to accept this offer and to live their life according to the norms of the moral law to the extent that they have had access to it. It is conceivable that the subject might not accept that offer, or, having accepted it, not follow through on the requirements of the moral life. This raises some concerns about the fate of people in this category.

Some of the modern complacency on this topic in Roman Catholicism is due to the theology of Karl Rahner, SJ who proposed the idea of the “anonymous Christian”, someone who could be justified through their implicit Christian faith. But even Fr. Rahner warns that it is not possible to conclude that an explicit proclamation of the *Kerygma* is superfluous for such an anonymous Christian: “because the individual who grasps Christianity in a clearer, purer and more reflective way, has, other things being equal, a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian.”¹⁸⁰ Mere possibilities can become probabilities of salvation when after an explicit proclamation, a person accepts faith, is converted and baptized, has access to the sacraments, and leads a virtuous life. They also experience the tremendous benefit of knowing Christ, and have the capacity to influence others for him throughout their life.

Neither should we assume that all people will be saved. Cardinal Dulles and others have concluded that due to the radical nature of human freedom, the condemnation of some is possible.¹⁸¹ While there are numerous scripture

¹⁸⁰ Karl Rahner, SJ in Pitmann, Habito and Muck, eds. *Ministry and Theology in a Global Perspective*, p.92.

¹⁸¹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, “The Population of Hell”, *First Things*, May 2003
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/08/the-population-of-hell-23>

passages, and consistent evidence in pre-modern Tradition confirming this, too much emphasis on this aspect can lead to morbid fears of condemnation and a commitment to Christ borne of fear, rather than out of love. On the other hand, no one should be presumptuous about the mercy of the Lord. Love and the potential of eternity with Christ should be sufficient motivators for Christians to proclaim what they have freely received, without using fear, threats or coercion. It will, of course, be interesting to read the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis based on the proposals of the Synod on the New Evangelization.

Summary

In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II supported traditional Catholic moral teaching against the relativism of the modern era. He reminded the Church that the only true freedom was in a life conformed to Christ that followed his moral teachings as preserved by the Church. He limited the capacity of conscience to excuse sin through ignorance. He emphasized the importance of virtuous human actions that, along with God's grace, can gradually conform the human person to Christ. One of the goals of proclamation is to encourage acceptance of faith and conversion to Christ. By including moral teaching in the *corpus* of the New Evangelization, he emphasized the importance of a conversion of the heart and a change in behaviour consistent with the inherent dignity of the human person. A formal process of dialogue would not be an appropriate vehicle for this type of

The author quotes John Paul II from a General Audience talk of July 28, 1999.

"Eternal damnation remains a possibility, but we are not granted, without special divine revelation, the knowledge of *whether or which* human beings are effectively involved in it. The thought of hell-and even less the improper use of biblical images-must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom within the proclamation that the risen Jesus has conquered Satan, giving us the Spirit of God who makes us cry "Abba, Father! (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6)."

conversation. In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II signaled that some sins could be serious enough to jeopardize not only earthly happiness, but also eternal beatitude. This was a sobering step by the Pope and seems to have been followed by similar cautions in subsequent documents of the magisterium of the Church. All of these developments heighten the importance of proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the message or to those who have heard but have fallen away. Given the shifts in popular Catholic moral theology in the period after the Council, *Veritatis Splendor* marks a dramatic course change that may increase the challenges of sharing this teaching with the faithful, many of whom may not be familiar with its contents.

Conclusion

Theologians such as Avery Cardinal Dulles have identified a trend among Catholics since Vatican II to promote dialogue at the expense of proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Dialogue is constructive when it creates a forum for representatives of different religions to meet to discuss their respective positions, and to clarify areas of agreement and disagreement. It can prevent misunderstandings and help heal historical wounds. It can promote cooperation in joint projects. When the dialogue is conducted among Christians it has the potential of helping to fulfill the Lord's command "that they all be one". Dialogue is a key component of the mission of the Church, and if executed properly, supports rather than hinders effective evangelization.

Proclamation is not only essential to the New Evangelization it is the responsibility of all believers. It initiates the process of evangelization allowing the one being evangelized the opportunity to open herself or himself to the gift of faith and to accept the grace of conversion. It can be the first step towards baptism or a renewed commitment to a life of faith. It is different from dialogue in two key respects: grace is necessary for its proper fulfillment and it involves a proposal by the evangelist for the other party to convert to Christ. Because of this, it can directly play a part in someone's salvation. It has been central to the mission of the Church since apostolic times.

Dialogue has an important role to play in the search for truth, especially when the conversation is with those who are not presently prepared to accept the faith. But dialogue should never be motivated by veiled pluralism and a desire to negotiate away theological commitments, even though that might be the reigning

cultural perception. This misunderstanding has been a cause of confusion for over 50 years.

Consider, for instance, the 1960 meeting between John XXIII and Geoffrey F. Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury. This was an historic first meeting between a Pope and a leader of the Anglican Communion. What did it mean?

Some may have thought that the Catholic Church was going to change its doctrine to bring it into line with that of the Anglicans. Several aspects of Catholic teaching were seen to be problematic in the modern era - including birth control, divorce and remarriage and the primacy of the Pope. On all of these the Anglican Communion had taken stands more in keeping with modern trends. Indeed the main reason that such a meeting was not held earlier was because it might have led to confusion among the Catholic faithful. Was the Catholic Church capitulating on its long held beliefs? Fisher himself said of the meeting:

"We are each now running on parallel courses; we are looking forward, until, in God's good time, our two courses approximate and meet. We talked as two happy people, who had seen a good deal of the world and of life, and of the Churches"¹⁸²

A plausible explanation of Blessed Pope John XXIII's decision to embark on a mission of dialogue can be found in a section of his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* called the "Error and the Errant."

It is always perfectly justifiable to distinguish between error as such and the person who falls into error—even in the case of men who err regarding the truth or are led astray as a result of their inadequate knowledge, in matters either of religion or of the highest ethical standards.
A man who has fallen into error does not cease to be a man.

¹⁸² Rowan Williams, "Geoffrey Fisher, 99th Archbishop of Canterbury", *The Archbishop of Canterbury*, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1259?q=paul>.

He never forfeits his personal dignity; and that is something that must always be taken into account. Catholics who, in order to achieve some external good, collaborate with unbelievers or with those who through error lack the fullness of faith in Christ, may possibly provide the occasion or even the incentive for their conversion to the truth.¹⁸³

John XXIII, being a career diplomat, could quite easily understand how one religious leader could meet another, extend the hand of Christian friendship and cordiality and even after extensive and fruitful dialogue continue to agree to disagree on essential points. Nevertheless, his intention was not widely known nor understood. It was also the beginning of the mass media's role of interpretation and communication of significant Church events. Benedict XVI has commented on this trend, which started with the Council and continues today, "The Council came into the world in the interpretation devised by the media more than with its own documents, which are hardly ever read by anyone."¹⁸⁴ How many of the laity, or even the clergy, would have read the written statements of John XXIII *verbatim* prior to the age of the internet? Even priests and bishops would have been at a loss to explain the Pope's bold gesture, leaving the media to interpret the event for the average Catholic. The summoning of Vatican II with the theme of *aggiornamento* or updating, seemed to many to signal an upcoming

¹⁸³ Pope John XXIII, *Encyclical Pacem in Terris of John XXIII*, 11 April 1963, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html.

See also "Pope John XXIII - Address at the Opening of Vatican Council II - 11 October 1962." "The Church has always opposed these errors, and often condemned them with the utmost severity. Today, however, Christ's Bride prefers the balm of mercy to the arm of severity. She believes that, present needs are best served by explaining more fully the purport of her doctrines, rather than by publishing condemnations."

¹⁸⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Light Of The World.*, p.65.

change in Church teaching which would bring it “up to date” with modern times. Changes in liturgy and Church architecture seemed to some to be an attempt by the Church to bring itself into line with Christian denominations. Changes to teaching were surely not far behind.

In fact, nothing could have been further from the mind of John XXIII as he summoned the Council. In his opening speech he said “The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously.”¹⁸⁵ He emphasized this point several times in this speech.

The word dialogue seems to have prolonged this confusion in the years since the Council. Defined in light of the predominant modern posture of relativism, the word had connotations of a tacit approval of a pluralism of truths, in which differences could be overcome through negotiation without the need of God’s grace or personal conversion. Within Church documents dialogue was more synonymous with “conversation”, and did not affect the Church’s primary role in the “*diakonia* of the truth.”

No one can defend sectarianism, especially when it leads to violence or discrimination. But to maintain that the truth cannot be known is contrary to Christian faith. Christians believe in revelation, which comes through the grace that lifts humanity out of the blindness of the human condition and moves it toward the transcendent light of Christ. Notice how quickly the man born blind

¹⁸⁵ John XXIII, *Address at the Opening of Vatican Council II*, 11 October 1962.

becomes a fearless evangelist to the scribes and Pharisees when his sight is restored.

The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing' (John 9:30-33).

For this reason, a reemphasis in the local Church on Jesus Christ as “the way, the truth and the life” will be an important component of a successful New Evangelization program. In addition, it is essential that the supernatural nature of the evangelization process be understood. Evangelization is, at its heart, a transcendent phenomenon that is the work of the Holy Spirit who freely gives faith, the desire for repentance and conversion to Christ to the one being evangelized, if they accept it. Evangelization is totally dependent on the grace of God, and on the willingness of human beings to respond to that grace. It all begins with proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Finally, there should also be a way to incorporate the thoughts of Martin Buber on the interpersonal qualities of effective communication. The behaviour of the evangelist must be consistent with the Christian message of love, humility and respect in order to be effective. If evangelization is not motivated by the love of Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit, it will not be good news.

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