

To know the hope to which God calls us: The task of the new evangelization for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston

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**TO KNOW THE HOPE TO WHICH GOD CALLS US:
THE TASK OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON**

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree
From the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Ecclesiastical Faculty)

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December 2015

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ABBREVIATIONS

EA *Ecclesia in America*

EG *Evangelii Gaudium*

EN *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

IL *Instrumentum Laboris* for Synod of Bishops 13th Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*

Lin *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Bishops 13th Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*

RM *Redemptoris Missio*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Europe and North America, the Catholic Church appears to be experiencing a decline. Against a backdrop of increasing effects of secularism and individualism that devalue religious faith, the church continues to be dogged by revelations of continued malfeasance of some clergy, including bishops, with regard to the sexual abuse of children. In many parts of the Church, there are decreasing numbers of people who remain involved in Church-related activities. Indeed, in the Archdiocese of Boston, less than one quarter of the faithful now regularly participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. In Boston and other local churches, pastoral planning efforts are underway to re-distribute diminishing human and financial resources so that the Church's efforts toward the realization of God's Kingdom can continue while posing minimum threat to parishes—the spiritual homes of the faithful.

Writing four decades ago, Pope Paul VI cited a “lack of fervor” as an obstacle to the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ that is “all the more serious because it comes from within” and is “manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope.”¹ Building on the work of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI called for a “new evangelization” through which the Church is itself evangelized and, imbued with a “renewed missionary impulse,” engages in the work of sharing the good news of God's love with all people.² Pope Francis put his own stamp on the New Evangelization with his

¹ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Nuntiandi” On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), no. 80.

² Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter in the Form of Motu Proprio “Ubicumque et Semper” of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization* (September 21, 2010), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque=et-semper_en.html (accessed January 28, 2012).

apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in which he emphasized the importance of relationships, especially the Church's relationship with the poor.

The New Evangelization is a church-wide, multi-faceted initiative to reinvigorate baptized persons with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this paper I look at the New Evangelization through a North American lens, but with a special focus on the local church of Boston.

There are many definitions of New Evangelization, reflecting its multiple aspects. Often, evangelization is narrowly conceived as apologetics that focuses on church discipline, as proclamation of the Word of God, or in terms of inviting "inactive" Catholics to return to the sacramental life of the Church. But the New Evangelization is also about the renewal of one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ (which, by definition, means the renewal of one's relationship with the Christian community), an ongoing process of conversion and reconciliation, and a commitment to social justice, understood as participation with Jesus in the work of bringing about the Kingdom of God. Evangelization efforts directed primarily or exclusively toward those who no longer actively participate in the sacramental life of the Church constitute an unbalanced approach to animating the Church.

Evangelizers and the evangelized are often thought of as mutually exclusive groups; but, the new evangelization must involve all of the baptized in the ongoing work of renewing our relationship with Jesus and recommitting ourselves to the challenges of discipleship. Thus, evangelization is not something we do to other people, but with other members of the Christian community. A focus on conversion and reconciliation as aspects of the new evangelization can facilitate the Church's continued healing from the sexual abuse crisis and from the pain of the loss of familiar parish structures as resources are reallocated. An emphasis on developing a relationship with the poor with whom Jesus identified can lead the Church to become a church of

the poor, working with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, the agent of evangelization, to bring to fruition the Kingdom of God.

My purpose in writing this thesis is to present the new evangelization not merely as a program for “re-churching” individuals, but as a way of life that engages the church of Boston as it seeks to renew its hope in God’s promise of eternal life in God.

I begin by using the writings of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis and documents related to the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization to present the new evangelization as it is described by those using the term. I first provide a brief introduction to each of the ecclesial documents used, highlighting ideas that are unique to each document. Then, taking the documents together, I outline some of the principal themes found in them: the context and content of the New Evangelization, the Church and the poor, Christian witness, conversion, reconciliation, Christian hope, and apologetics.

Evangelization must address the current needs and context of the people being evangelized. In the second chapter, I present Cardinal Seán O’Malley’s vision for the New Evangelization as outlined in a pastoral letter he wrote to the people of the Archdiocese of Boston. Using results of surveys and analyses by David Couturier, William D’Antonio, and others, I describe the present situation of the Church with regard to attitudes toward the Church and varying levels of enthusiasm for its message as expressed by different generations of Catholics. When considering the hurt and turmoil experienced by people who now question their relationship with the Church in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis, one observes that there are many parallels between the church of Boston and the church in Ireland. Insights from Irish writers, Enda McDonagh, Ned Prendergast, and Kevin Egan help articulate the concerns many have for the future of the Church and their role in it. Those who have distanced themselves from

the Church still have an active role to play in its evangelization as I show through the work of Jon Sobrino and Ormond Rush.

In the third chapter I discuss the Church's *communio* that is addressed by several themes found in the new evangelization. Through conversion and reconciliation, the Church's *communio* moves toward healing. Using the work of Bernard Häring, Bernard Lonergan, Donald Gelpi, Karl Rahner, Richard Rymarz, and others, I present a theology of conversion in terms of a loving relationship with God who has first loved us. Conversion is our response to the reconciliation with God that is brought about in Christ Jesus and is the process by which we commit ourselves to reconciliation as a way of life. Using the work of Robert Schreier, Monika Hellwig, James Dallen, Scott Detisch, and others, I outline a spirituality of reconciliation and present some practical aspects of reconciliation, including the celebration of the Rite of Penance.

In the fourth chapter, I use the work of Bryant Myers, Jon Sobrino, Julio Labayen, Antonio González, Peter Henriot, Roberto Goizueta, Leonardo Boff, and others to describe the mystery of the poor, what it means to be a church of the poor, and the relationship between the Church and the poor as reflected in attitude and action. I offer some practical suggestions for implementing this aspect of the New Evangelization in the church of Boston.

Finally, I conclude by using the work of Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, and Josef Pieper to outline a theology of Christian hope that presents hope as the courage to accept God's eternal, unfathomable love and the challenges of Christian discipleship.

According to the 2012 Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, the goal of evangelization is to "create the possibility" for an encounter and relationship with Jesus. To create the possibility for people to encounter Jesus Christ in faith, the implementation of the New Evangelization in the Archdiocese of Boston at this point in its history must focus on two

aspects: healing the inner life of the Church, its *communio*, through a process of conversion and reconciliation and engaging the Church in the *missio* given it by Jesus by becoming a church of the poor.

Chapter 1

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

One of the difficulties in speaking about or implementing the “New Evangelization” is the lack of a clear and concise definition of the expression. The term, evangelization, is itself problematic. Indeed, when developing a national plan for evangelization in the United States, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops acknowledged that the word evangelization “raises uncomfortable images” for American Catholics; those images include overbearing preachers haranguing their congregations or masses of people being exploited in order to grow a mega-church or ministry.¹ There are, however, many understandings of new evangelization that together reflect the Church’s multi-faceted mission to share the message of God’s love with the world. In this chapter, I will use several ecclesial documents to present an understanding of the new evangelization as it is described by those who have introduced the term. I will begin with a brief orientation to each of the ecclesial documents used, highlighting ideas that are unique to each document. Then, taking the documents together, I will outline some of the predominant themes found in them.

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002), no. 24.

Key Documents

Pope Paul VI

Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” On Evangelization in the Modern World (December 8, 1975)

Written ten years following the close of the Second Vatican Council, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* revisits the question pondered during the Council regarding the intelligibility of the Christian message to the people of the twentieth century.² It presents as “the central axis of evangelization” (EN, 4) faithfulness to the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus Christ and faithfulness to the people to whom the Church is instructed to proclaim the Gospel. Written at the request of the Fathers of the 1974 Synod of Bishops whose work had focused on evangelization, the exhortation echoes three questions the Synod had considered: Where is the Gospel’s “hidden energy” that moves one’s conscience? How effectively does that energy transform people of the modern era? and How best can the Gospel be transmitted so that its transformative power is realized (EN, 4)?

At the time of the writing of the apostolic exhortation, there were urgent calls from Latin America for the liberation of oppressed and marginalized people. As a response, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* includes an extensive treatment of true liberation as the salvation brought about through Jesus Christ. While acknowledging the need for liberation from temporal evils, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* cautions that genuine human liberation addresses more than the temporal and physical needs of people. Because it involves all aspects of human life, true liberation also has a “spiritual dimension” that is compatible with the Gospel proclamation of the Kingdom of God where true happiness and freedom are found in the eternal love of God (EN, 30-39).

² Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Nuntiandi” On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), no. 2. (Subsequent references to this work are given in parentheses in the text with the designation EN, followed by the section number).

Evangelii Nuntiandi takes a dim view of those who no longer practice the Christian faith and describes their resistance to evangelizing efforts as “inertia and the slightly hostile attitude of the person who feels that he is one of the family, who claims to know it all and to have tried it all and who no longer believes it” (EN, 56). Nevertheless, the document asserts that evangelization must respectfully consider the actual lives and the modes and means of communication of the people being addressed (EN, 63).

There are two sections of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that resonate with people concerned with the life of the Church and that find an echo in later documents on new evangelization. The first concerns “the witness of an authentically Christian life” as “the first means of evangelization” (EN, 41). This means of evangelization is more powerful than words or teachings and is used by those who are committed to live in the communion of love of God and neighbor. This section concludes with the assertion:

It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus—the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity. (EN, 41)

The second section of note addresses impediments to evangelization and focuses on a lack of spiritually based enthusiasm—an obstacle that has dogged evangelizers over the centuries:

Such obstacles are also present today, and we shall limit ourselves to mentioning the lack of fervor. It is all the more serious because it comes from within. It is manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope. We exhort all those who have the task of evangelizing, by whatever title and at whatever level, always to nourish spiritual fervor. (EN, 80)

The document concludes with an exhortation to persist in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Fear of violating the religious freedom of others is not to

be used as an excuse for failing to proclaim God’s mercy and love; such proclamation is the “duty” of every Christian to proclaim and the “right” of all people to hear (EN, 80).

Pope John Paul II

Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Christifideles Laici*” on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (December 30, 1988)

Written following a synod on the vocation and mission of the laity twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, *Christifideles Laici* is an urgent call to action for all the lay faithful to be the Church’s “[presence] in the various sectors of the world, as a sign and source of hope and of love.”³ In the face of increased secularization and “de-Christianization” that mute the message of the Gospel, John Paul II called for a “re-evangelization” of the Church that would result in stronger faith communities committed to Jesus and his message.⁴ Such communities would support and animate the lay faithful as they engaged in worldly activities geared toward human development, such as education, scientific research, and the creative arts.⁵

***Redemptoris Missio*: An Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate (December 7, 1990)**

At the outset of this letter, John Paul II establishes its place firmly in the tradition of teachings concerning the Church’s evangelization mission: it is written twenty-five years after the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Missionary Activity and fifteen years after *Evangelii*

³ John Paul II, *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Christifideles Laici” on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988), no. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 4, 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 42, 44.

Nuntiandi. The letter was written to bolster the Church’s missionary activity *ad gentes* when it appeared that support for it had “waned.”⁶ John Paul identified three “situations” in the world that call for the Church’s evangelizing activity: communities where Jesus and his Gospel are “not known” and where the Church engages in mission *ad gentes*; committed faith communities where the Church is active and also engages in pastoral care; and an “intermediate situation . . . where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel” (RM, 33). This last situation calls for a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization” (RM 33) that supports and is supported by the Church’s wider mission *ad gentes* (RM 2, 64).

Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Ecclesia in America*” on the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America (January 22, 1999)

Ecclesia in America was written following a special synodal assembly dedicated to the promotion of justice and solidarity throughout the Americas as part of a new evangelization. Writing 500 hundred years following the initial voyage of Christopher Columbus to what was later called America, John Paul II hailed 1492 as “the great year of grace when America welcomed the faith”⁷ and urged all Americans, from northern and southern hemispheres, to encounter Jesus in the unique, “complex reality” that is America (EA, 13). Reminding his readers that the Church in America has engaged in many endeavors geared toward helping the

⁶ John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*: An Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate,” in *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, ed. William R. Burrows (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), no. 2. (Subsequent references to this work are given in the text with the designation RM, followed by the section number).

⁷ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in America” on the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America*, http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/ecclesia_in_america.pdf (accessed August 25, 2011), no. 75. (Subsequent references to this work are given in the text with the designation EA, followed by the section number). The Bishops of the United States provide a more balanced look at Columbus’s voyage and acknowledge the “disease, death, exploitation, and cultural devastation” at the hands of European settlers while recognizing and extolling the contribution of those missionaries who brought the Gospel of Christ to America. See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples*, no. 63.

poor and others in need (EA, 18), John Paul also cautioned that there was a distinction between what individual Christians, following their well-formed consciences, could do in the political arena and what the Church as a whole could do in that same arena (EA, 27). The pope clarified that the Church was called, not to a “re-evangelization” but to a “new evangelization new in ardor, methods, and expression” (EA, 6).

Apostolic Letter “*Novo Millennio Ineunte*” (January 6, 2001)

At the end of the Great Jubilee of the birth of Christ and the beginning of a new millennium, John Paul II called for a renewal of the initial enthusiasm for proclaiming the faith that was demonstrated following the first Pentecost.⁸ As a renewal of an ongoing effort in the Church and based on Sacred Scripture, the new evangelization is not a “new program” but a “re-kindling” of the Church’s “sense of mission” made more urgent in the face of globalization by which the intermingling of cultures had diluted the Christian message and way of life.⁹

Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI

In an address to catechists in December 2000 on the subject of the new evangelization, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger stressed the continuity of the Church’s mission to evangelize: “The Church always evangelizes and has never interrupted the path of evangelization.”¹⁰ Introducing a theme that was to be repeated during his pontificate, Ratzinger presented the image

⁸ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” To the Bishops, Clergy and Lay Faithful at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* (January 6, 2001), no. 40, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jpii_apl_20010106_novo_millennio-ineunte_en.html (accessed August 20, 2012).

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 29, 40.

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “On the New Evangelization” (address to catechists and religion teachers at the Jubilee of Catechists, Rome, December 10, 2000), part I, section 1, http://www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm (accessed August 25, 2011).

of the mustard seed—one need not be concerned with attracting large numbers of people back to the Church; the effects of the new evangelization are in God’s hands.¹¹

During the papacy of Benedict XVI, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addressed the concern of many that evangelization that encourages people to convert to Catholicism is an infringement of their religious freedom. The Congregation’s response to that concern was that it was “a great good for every human person”¹² to know the truth about God and God’s relationship with human beings. While respecting people of other religions, as befits the Gospel message, all Catholics have the “right and duty” to proclaim their faith so that others may have access to the “fullness of the means of salvation.”¹³

In *Ubicumque et Semper*, his September 21, 2010 apostolic letter establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Benedict XVI recalled the work of his predecessors, Paul VI and John Paul II, with regard to evangelization. He joined their efforts for a “renewed missionary impulse” to assist the Church in proclaiming the Gospel, especially in situations of increasing secularization where the Gospel had once been heard, but is now forgotten. Benedict charged the Pontifical Council with several tasks including promoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church “as an essential and complete formulation of the content of the faith for the people of our time.”¹⁴ In an address to the Pontifical Council following its first

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (December 3, 2007), no. 7, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20071203_nota-evangelizzazione_en.html (accessed November 5, 2011).

¹³ Ibid., no. 12.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter in the Form of Motu Proprio “Ubicumque et Semper” of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization* (September 21, 2010),

meeting several months later, Benedict reiterated the need to proclaim the Gospel with “renewed vigor.” He recalled the teaching of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that the Church could evangelize most effectively through a life lived in faithfulness to the Gospel, “the ever new proclamation of the salvation worked by Christ that makes humanity participate in the mystery of God and in his life of love, and opens it to a future of strong, sure hope.”¹⁵

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and to further call attention to the need for the Church to address the “profound crisis of faith” affecting many Catholics throughout the world, Benedict announced a Year of Faith—“a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Savior of the world.”¹⁶ Through a greater commitment to new evangelization, the Church could “rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”¹⁷

Synod of Bishops 13th Ordinary General Assembly (October 2012)

After consultation with various curial offices, Bishops’ conferences, and leaders of religious orders from around the world, Pope Benedict XVI convened the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2012 for the purpose of addressing the “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” In order to prepare the bishops for the assembly, *Lineamenta*, or guidelines, were drawn up to facilitate consultation with people from different aspects of Church membership, including parishes and lay associations. Input

article 3, no. 5, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque=et-semper_en.html (accessed January 28, 2012).

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Address to Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization* (May 30, 2011), <http://originsplus.catholicnews.com/proxy.bc.edu/databases/origins/41/106/4106.pdf> (accessed August 25, 2011).

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter “Porta Fidei”* (October 11, 2011), no. 2, 6, <http://originsplus.catholicnews.com/databases/origins/41/21/4121.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2012).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

gathered from the discussions was used to prepare the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or agenda, for the synodal assembly.¹⁸ The *Lineamenta* identified six “sectors” in need of the new evangelization: culture, especially Western culture in which secularism has diminished the role of God in people’s lives; the social sector in which globalization and the mobility of people challenge the confines of geography and culture leading to “new forms of solidarity”; the changing means of social communications that introduce the risk of an increased individualism and a decrease in critical thought; the economy and the widening gap between rich and poor; research in science and technology that can seem to be the only source for answers to life’s questions; and civic and political life where the Gospel message can inform activities toward the development and cooperation among people and the safeguarding of creation.¹⁹

As a fruit of their discussion, the Synod Bishops issued a final list of 58 propositions, or main points, for Pope Benedict’s consideration. Among the propositions was a renewed emphasis on the centrality of Sacred Scripture to the task of evangelization accompanied by the use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a teaching tool.²⁰ The synod stressed the importance of solid formation of lay people as evangelizers. Two ideas unique to the final list of propositions are the appreciation of beauty as an attribute of God that “should always be a

¹⁸ Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, constitutes his official response to the bishops’ synod on the New Evangelization, but it differs markedly in scope and content from the conclusions the bishops summarized in their “Final List of Propositions.” I include the *Lineamenta*, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, and the Final List of Propositions in this paper in order to provide a broader picture of the thinking on the new evangelization.

¹⁹ Synod of Bishops 13th Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith “Lineamenta”* (February 2, 2011), no. 6, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xii-assembly_en.html (accessed February 4, 2012). (Subsequent references to this work are given in the text with the designation Lin, followed by the section number)

²⁰ Synod of Bishops 13th Ordinary General Assembly, *Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops The New Evangelization and the Transmission of the Christian Faith “Final List of Propositions”* (2012), no. 11, 29, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b33_02.html (accessed June 13, 2013).

special dimension of the new evangelization” and the stewardship of creation, a sign of God’s goodness that is shared among all people.²¹

Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013)

Following the resignation of Pope Benedict, newly-elected Pope Francis responded to the request of the Synod Fathers for an apostolic exhortation regarding evangelization. Francis considered several of the synod’s 58 propositions, but much of the document reflects his “own concerns about this particular chapter of the Church’s work of evangelization.”²²

For Francis, our personal encounter with Jesus not only brings great joy, but also challenges the church to minister “in a missionary key” (EG, 33) by “going forth from our own comfort zone” (EG, 20) to bring the Good News to wherever it is needed. Francis criticizes a “spiritual worldliness” that causes the Church to inordinately focus on practices or image, safely distancing itself from people’s real-life problems (EG, 95). Francis, who places great importance on relationships, “prefer(s) a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets ...” (EG, 49). Encounters with others are not to be filtered by electronics (EG, 88), but follow the model of Jesus whose passionate love brought him in close contact with his people (EG, 268, 269). This “social dimension of evangelization” (EG, 176) is critical to communicating the Gospel message about our life in communion with God and with each other (EG, 177, 178).

Francis writes at length regarding “two great issues” related to the social aspect of evangelization, “the inclusion of the poor in society, and ... peace and social dialogue” (EG,

²¹ Ibid., no. 20, 56.

²² Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), no 16. (Subsequent references to this work are given in parentheses in the text with the designation EG, followed by the section number).

185). The poor are an integral part of the Church, so much so that a Church community that fails to reach out to the poor and assist them could fall apart (EG, 207). Beyond economic disadvantages and exclusion from communities, Francis considers the “lack of spiritual care” to be “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer (EG, 200).” The Church’s participation in social dialogue with cultures, political states, the sciences, and other religions can facilitate the development of peoples able to live in genuine peace that is more than the absence of war or violence (EG, 218, 238).

Throughout his exhortation, Francis criticizes an overemphasis on structures and “playing it safe.” The Gospel challenges the Church to deeper and fuller relationships with God and with others, especially the poor. Throughout the text, Francis offers practical suggestions for the Church’s work of evangelization, including some for the preaching of homilies.

Principal Themes

Having given a general overview of the papal and ecclesial documents that address the new evangelization, I will now treat the documents together and outline some principal themes that provide insights regarding the nature and purpose of the new evangelization.

Context of the New Evangelization: Christianity and a Changing World

It is evident in the ecclesial documents that address the new evangelization that the writers are preoccupied with the decreasing influence of the Church and Christian values in the lives of individuals and in society at large. As the documents note, evangelization as “the grace and vocation proper to the Church”(EN, 14) has always been central to the Church’s existence; but, the situation that the church faces in the world today prompts urgent calls for a renewed effort for this task. Western European and American cultures at one time enjoyed a “unitary cultural matrix” in which the practices and values of the Christian faith were accepted and

supported.²³ Several phenomena have conspired to damage the “Christian fabric of society,” chief among them being secularism and globalization.²⁴

Secularism is the condition in which people ignore, forget, or reject God; God has no relevance to human existence.²⁵ Even people committed to serving the needs of their fellow human beings address only the physical, worldly aspects of human existence, ignoring the spiritual and transcendent dimensions that make us fully human (RM, 11).

The phenomenon of globalization has resulted in an “interweaving of cultures and religions” in parts of the world that previously had been Christian.²⁶ As they become a smaller and smaller minority in some parts of the world, Christians are challenged to maintain their distinct identity through religious practices, especially weekly attendance at Sunday Eucharist.²⁷

The de-Christianization of the western world brought about through secularism and globalization affects both the individual Christian and the community as a whole. When a “sense of the sacred” is lost, one no longer trusts in God’s care, recognizes Jesus as Savior, or shares “basic human experiences” with a community.²⁸ This “crisis in Christian life,”²⁹ also called a “crisis of faith,”³⁰ is characterized by a “separation of the Gospel from life” such that one no longer considers that “the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response ... to the

²³ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 2.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Ubicumque et Semper*.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Address to Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization*.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 2.

problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society.”³¹ The Church itself is fragmented, comprising people who remain committed Christians alongside the alienated baptized (RM, 33). Faced with this situation, the Church’s “permanent evangelization” made up of the celebration of Eucharist and other sacraments, proclamation of the Word, and engagement in works of justice and charity must be supplemented by a new evangelization that uses “new ways of bringing the Gospel to all.”³²

The Content of Evangelization: God’s Love for All Humanity

Though new ways of proclaiming the Gospel may be needed, the Gospel itself remains unchanged. Firm belief in a loving personal God is strongly evident in the Church’s writing on new evangelization. The “starting point” for evangelization is an “encounter with the Lord” (EA, 3), Jesus Christ, who is himself the Good News, “the living and personal Gospel.”³³ In Christ Jesus, the “message and the messenger” are one and the same—the Incarnate Word of God proclaims God’s love for all of humanity through his words, actions, and his very being (RM, 13). It is through this love that Jesus “attracts to himself the people of every generation”³⁴ and shows them the Kingdom of God—God alive and acting in our lives.³⁵

The love of God and relationships that are centered on that love are at the heart of evangelization. The loving communion of the Triune God is shared with all humanity in the Incarnation. God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ to show to all of humanity

³¹ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no 34.

³² Ratzinger, “On the New Evangelization,” part I, section 1.

³³ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 7.

³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 7.

³⁵ Ratzinger, “On the New Evangelization,” part II, section 2.

God's love and to offer a share in eternal life in the Kingdom of God. The mystery of God's love and saving power made manifest in Jesus Christ is "the hinge on which all evangelization turns (RM, 44)." Evangelization means to bear witness to this truth of God's love (EN, 26). We experience the love of God in our encounter with Jesus Christ that "takes place in the faith received from and lived in the Church ..." (EA, 68). The community of those who have personally encountered Jesus Christ finds the source of its communion in the Triune God so that the Church is "the reflection in time of the eternal and ineffable communion of the love of God"³⁶ It is the Church's duty to live and share the gift of communion it enjoys with a loving God such that the Church lives as "*the home and the school of communion.*"³⁷ To successfully discharge this duty, a "spirituality of communion" is necessary. A spirituality of communion centers on the loving Triune God whose life in us compels us to truly regard others as brothers and sisters whose positive attributes are God's gift to us and whose troubles and burdens we willingly share.³⁸ Because of God's love, every human being "*is immensely holy and deserves our love*" (EG, 274, emphasis in the original) as we accompany them on their journey toward God (EG, 169).

Having been transformed by our own encounter with Jesus Christ, we are driven to tell others of our experience of a loving God so that they too may enjoy the love of God as it is experienced by the Church (EA, 68). Every human being has the right to know of God's love for all humanity and God's promise of eternal life for all in the loving communion of Father, Son,

³⁶ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 18, 31.

³⁷ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 43 (emphasis in the original).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

and Spirit that is made possible through Jesus Christ.³⁹ For this reason, the Church “with doors always wide open” (EG, 47) has “this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples” (RM, 3). The Church’s “basic task” is to teach the faith and how to be a disciple and assist people in developing their own relationship with Jesus and his Father (Lin, 20). The “root” of evangelization is “the desire to share” with others God’s gift of God’s self.⁴⁰ Jesus is at the center of what the Church proclaims and teaches in Scripture and Tradition to all peoples through the centuries, but today the message must be “translated” for the unique pastoral situation of each community throughout the world.⁴¹ The new evangelization is not “a new Gospel,” but a “new response” to people’s need to know and experience the love of God, a response that is “adapted” to the situations of today (Lin, 23).

The task of evangelizing belongs to every member of the Church according to one’s unique place in the Church (EN, 66) and must be performed with deep respect for those being evangelized. Of primary importance is fidelity to the Good News being proclaimed—its content must remain unchanged. Evangelizers must not engage in proselytizing, but, rather, “respect the inner sanctuary of every individual’s conscience” where God speaks and one responds in freedom (EA, 73). Evangelizers must carefully consider the actual lives of those being evangelized—their language, customs, and unique questions (EN, 63). The consideration given to the diversity of circumstances of the people hearing the Good News for the first time must also be extended to long-established local churches whose members need to hear the Gospel

³⁹ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 34.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, *Ubicumque et Semper*.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 29.

anew.⁴² The challenge of the New Evangelization is to lead both practicing Christians and those seeking God to hear the call of God in the concrete reality of their individual lives (Lin, 19). Engagement with other people and cultures in the context of proclaiming God's Good News brings to light fresh perspectives on the Gospel.⁴³ The relationship between evangelizers and those being evangelized becomes that of a common search for a closer relationship with God since, "to proclaim fruitfully the Word of the Gospel one is first asked to have a profound experience of God."⁴⁴ The New Evangelization provides a fresh opportunity for Church communities to accept the Spirit's guidance toward deeper communion in the Triune God⁴⁵

Noteworthy in the documents is the emphasis on the Person of Jesus Christ who announces the universal call to holiness, inviting all into communion with the Father in the Spirit. The focus on relationships is reflected in the understanding of what the Kingdom of God is and what it is not. Reproving those whose concept of the Kingdom of God is limited to temporal considerations focused on people's economic and political concerns (RM, 17), the writers of the ecclesial documents assert that the Kingdom of God is "not a thing a social or political structure, a utopia"⁴⁶ but is "a *person* ... Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God" (RM, 18, emphasis in the original). Though invisible, the God whose Kingdom Jesus proclaims in his actions and by his being is the God who is actively, intimately involved in our

⁴² Benedict XVI, *Ubicumque et Semper*.

⁴³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note*, no. 6.

⁴⁴ Benedict XVI, *Ubicumque et Semper*.

⁴⁵ Synod of Bishops 13th Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith "Instrumentum Laboris"* (May 27, 2012), no. 46, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20120619_instrumentum-xiii_en.html (accessed August 20, 2012). (Subsequent references to this work are given in the text with the designation, IL, followed by the section number).

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, "On the New Evangelization," part II, section 2.

lives. Jesus presents to us “the God that knows us, listens to us; the God that enters into history to do justice.”⁴⁷ Those who claim to belong to or work for the coming of the Kingdom of God cannot ignore its transcendent dimension—human beings need to know that they are loved by God (IL, 23). It is by living in God’s love that human beings live as their authentic selves. The “nature” of the Kingdom of God is that of a loving communion of all human beings with God and with each other (RM, 15). Indeed, as a counter to unhealthy individualism, the Church must teach and demonstrate that our relationship with God “heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds” (EG, 67).

The Church is not itself the Kingdom of God, but is its “seed, sign, and instrument,” bound inseparably to it and to Jesus (RM, 18). As Jesus gave special attention “to those on the margins of society” and preached the Good News to the poor (RM, 14), so, too, must the Church have loving regard for the poor and those in special need, all the while taking care not to neglect the “transcendent and spiritual realities” that belong to eternal salvation (RM, 20).

The Church and the Poor

The central goal of the new evangelization is to bring people to an encounter with the Lord. It is possible to encounter Jesus in several places and times in the Church: in sacred scripture as it is explained and prayed with in the Church; in the sacred liturgy where Jesus’ presence is experienced in the Sacrament itself and in the presider and community who celebrate; and in the poor with whom Jesus identifies himself (EA, 12).

Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God’s Kingdom, in part, through amazing signs—feeding multitudes, healing the sick, and raising the dead to life—but, the most important sign is that “the humble and the poor are evangelized, become his disciples and gather together ‘in his

⁴⁷ Ibid., part II, section 4.

name' in the great community of those who believe him" (EN, 12). In its service to the poor, the Church must follow the example of Jesus in his actions and way of life. Without being exclusive, the Church must love the poor, making them among the first to be evangelized by people who have themselves adopted Jesus' "simplicity of manner and his choices" (EA, 67).

The Church in America and elsewhere has ably demonstrated a preferential love for the poor through its many charitable works carried out in schools, hospitals, and social service agencies (EA, 18). But these great works on behalf of the poor and those having special needs are evangelizing—showing "God's infinite love for all people"—only when this service "faithfully reflect(s) the attitude of Jesus" (EA, 18). As Jesus was at home with the poor, so must the Church ensure that "the poor feel at home" within each Christian community.⁴⁸ In her good works, the Church must "incarnate" solidarity with the poor and work towards the day when no one lives as an outcast from the rest of humanity (EA, 58).

A new evangelization urges those who are wealthy "to become true brothers and sisters of the poor" not only by becoming advocates of the poor or by addressing their physical needs, but also by embracing a "more austere way of life" that ultimately leads to modes of economic development that reflect religious and ethical considerations (RM, 59). In fact, the growing economic disparity between the northern and southern hemispheres challenges local churches to respond by living "the evangelical ideal of poverty" (IL, 56). Christian communities who assist the poor and who live simply themselves can be powerful witnesses to the Gospel in a world that focuses on possessions (IL, 71). Service to the poor and a simple lifestyle in welcoming

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 50.

solidarity with the poor provide clarity to the message of the Gospel such that “the charity of *works* ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of *words*.”⁴⁹

For their part, the poor, who “share in the *sensus fidei*” evangelize the Church by their witness to God’s saving power in their lives (EG, 198-9). The realization of our failure to love the poor as Jesus does prompts us to seek reconciliation and communion through the process of conversion (See EA, 58). In this sense, the poor are “both recipients and actors in the New Evangelization.”⁵⁰

Christian Witness and the Church

As the ecclesial documents make clear, the Church’s efforts at evangelization rely primarily on “the witness of an authentically Christian life” that is provided by the Church’s “conduct and by her life ... her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus ...” (EN, 41). Every member of the Christian community is called to a lifestyle that is “genuinely credible” and “convincing” in order to effectively proclaim God’s Good News to people desperately needing to hear it in the difficult situations of contemporary society.⁵¹ The renewal of the Church itself is furthered “through the witness offered by the lives of believers” who “are called to radiate the word of truth” that Jesus entrusted to the Church.⁵²

The documents on the new evangelization make scant mention of events surrounding the scandal of clergy sexual abuse of children that roiled many Christian communities. A brief acknowledgment that “since her origins, the Church has had to deal with ... the sinfulness of her members” is accompanied by an exegesis on the gospel story of the two disciples on the road to

⁴⁹ Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁰ Synod of Bishops, *Final List of Propositions*, no. 31.

⁵¹ Benedict XVI, *Address to Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization*.

⁵² Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 6.

Emmaus who had failed to grasp and pass on Jesus' life-giving message (IL, 38). A reference to the "counter-witness of some of the Church's members" cites "scandals" along with insensitivity to people's needs and "unfaithfulness in one's vocation," but does not specifically mention harm done to children (IL, 69). As another indication of their unwillingness to grapple with crimes against children, Church leaders caution readers not to underestimate the power of the devil or the "mistaken way" that individuals can exercise their God-given free will as causes for failings (IL, 69). Nevertheless, the new evangelization does demand "courage to denounce the infidelities and scandals in the Christian communities" that are evidence of a "spiritual decline" in the work of witnessing to the Gospel (IL, 128). "Deep regret" for the scandals involving priests is expressed, along with a commitment to the support and renewal of faithful priests as the "primary agents of the New Evangelization."⁵³

Conversion and Reconciliation

As a corrective to the Church's failings, the Synod Fathers propose "the practice of penance as conversion" (IL, 128). Indeed, Church members are called to be "witness[es] of humility" so that they are able "to make a personal and communal examination of conscience" on the way to once again becoming faithful witnesses to Jesus and the Gospel he proclaimed (RM, 43). For this reason, the sacrament of Reconciliation is a "very important" aspect of the New Evangelization.⁵⁴ The Church, in "constant need of being evangelized" must engage in a process of "constant conversion and renewal," evangelizing herself so that the Church can evangelize others "with credibility" (EN, 15).

⁵³ Synod of Bishops, *Final List of Propositions*, no. 49.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The working definition of conversion as a dimension of the New Evangelization is provided by the New Testament term, *metanoia* (EA, 26). *Metanoia* connotes a “change of mentality” where one rethinks his or her reasons for behaving a certain way (EA, 26). *Metanoia* also means a change of heart so that one undergoes “a total interior renewal” (EN, 10). The struggle “between good and evil, between faith and fear” provides the backdrop for conversion to take place.⁵⁵ Hearing the Good News in the midst of this turmoil compels one to a change of life “and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the “starting-point of authentic conversion” is an encounter with Jesus (EA, 12). Meeting Jesus in prayerful study of Sacred Scripture, in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the praying community, and through encounters with the poor lays the foundation for and brings to fruition true conversion (EA, 12).

Conversion does not comprise a single event in one’s life, but is “a dynamic and lifelong process” of continually turning away from an inordinate focus on mundane concerns and turning toward God (RM, 46). The “goal of conversion” is to live a life that is completely under the direction of the Holy Spirit and that is in accord with the “new vision” presented in the Gospel (EA, 29, 32). A person on the journey of conversion “begin[s] to see one’s life through the eyes of God”⁵⁷ and becomes committed to Jesus “with all the theological and moral implications taught by the Magisterium of the Church” (EA, 53). Yet, Christian life is not only about morality. Jesus’ message focuses on relationship: God offers us the “gift of a new friendship ... communion with Jesus and thereby with God.”⁵⁸ Communion with Jesus leads us to communion

⁵⁵ Ibid., no. 22.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 33.

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, “On the New Evangelization,” part II, section 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

also with others who belong to the Church as Christ's Mystical Body and to solidarity with people, especially the poor, whom we serve in the name of Jesus (EA, 26). Conversion that begins with a personal encounter with Jesus brings us into communion with the Triune God and the Church and into solidarity with all God's people; conversion brings us out of isolation and into relationship such that "a new 'We,' of the common path of God" is created.⁵⁹

Christian Hope

As noted earlier in this paper, several of the ecclesial documents echo the concern expressed by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* regarding a lack of "spiritual fervor" in the Christian community that impedes the Church's efforts at announcing God's Good News. This "lack of fervor" is manifested chiefly by a "lack of joy and hope" (EN, 80). Hope is essential, not only for the Church, but for all of humanity, especially during trying times (Lin, 25). The "content" of Christian hope is God who is made known to us in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Consequently, when this hope is lacking, "it affects the very tenor of our Christian communities" (Lin, 25) and their "very fabric" is "(worn) thin" (IL, 168). Although the Church has the "principle and source of hope—Jesus Christ ... living among us through his Spirit who allows us to experience God," it has often failed to make this hope real in the lives of individual Christians and failed to make hope the "basis for life in the Church" (IL, 166) and for its work.

A hopeful sign for the Church is the adoption by Christians and non-Christians alike of Gospel values such as a commitment to peaceful ways of life and to justice and freedom, respect for the life and rights of human persons, and recognition of the dignity of women and of their role in society (RM, 86). These signs of the Kingdom of God inspire us to respond in Christian hope to the work of the new evangelization with a greater desire for God's Kingdom (RM, 86)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

that “has its beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity” (EN, 27). The challenge of evangelization “includes the preaching of hope” in what God has promised through Jesus Christ (EN, 28). The preaching is to be accomplished by the work, deeds, and way of life of individual Christians and Christian communities so that the “Christian gift of hope” is brought to all facets of human life (Lin, 16).

Apologetics

Noting that there is little mention of God in the public forum, those setting the agenda for the Synod on the New Evangelization recognized the need for Christian institutions, including parishes, to “adopt a bold and even ‘apologetic’ approach” to living out the Christian faith and proclaiming it to others (IL, 138). The current situation in the world and in the Church presents an opportunity of a “new season of witnessing” to the Christian faith that is inspired by and guided by the Spirit (Lin, 16). The new form of apologetics is the responsibility of all the baptized who must show to all people in all sectors of the world that the Christian faith, a life lived according to the Gospel, is “a valid response” to the problems that affect all people (IL, 118). A life lived “with the gentle power” coming from our relationship to the Father that is brought about through our communion with Jesus in the Spirit constitutes the basis of our proclamation that the hope and salvation brought by Jesus is for the entire world (IL, 119).

The Fathers of the Synod on the New Evangelization have called upon theologians “to develop a new apologetics of Christian thought, that is a theology of credibility.” This “new apologetics” will enable the Church to successfully present intellectual arguments showing the compatibility of faith and reason when dialoging with “people of good will” regarding the human condition.⁶⁰ But the new apologetics is not solely an intellectual pursuit; it “must be complete,”

⁶⁰ Synod of Bishops, *Final List of Propositions*, no. 17.

encompassing the personal and public lives of individuals as well as the interior community life and exterior missionary activities of the local church. A “complete” response to the questions of others regarding the Christian faith provides an effective and credible means of “[communicating] the gift of Christian hope” to all people (IL 120).

A Myriad of Definitions

From the foregoing, we can see a variety of complementary themes that help us form some notion of what New Evangelization is. Yet, even the Synod Fathers acknowledged the lack of a “clear and precise” definition of new evangelization because of the newness of the concept to ecclesial and pastoral settings (Lin, 5). The new evangelization is often described in the negative—by what it is not. The new evangelization is not an exercise in self-sufficiency by which the church withdraws into herself following the same old pastoral programs in an attempt to maintain the *status quo* (Lin, 10), nor does it constitute a negative judgment of those same programs (Lin, 5). As a “complex process made up of varied elements” (EN, 24), evangelization encompasses not only the task usually associated with evangelizing, that of preaching and proclaiming the Gospel through the spoken word, but also the challenge of making one’s way of life a means by which not only is Jesus made known to others but he is made present to them through one’s actions.⁶¹ Because evangelization addresses people in the unique situations of their lives in the world, the new evangelization constitutes a “new response to the needs of humanity” that is “adapted” to the new times and cultural situations with which people identify (Lin, 23).

In order to effectively proclaim Jesus in contemporary situations, the new evangelization must be a “frame of mind, a courageous manner of acting and Christianity’s capacity” to

⁶¹ See Ratzinger, “On the New Evangelization,” part I, section 2 and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note*, no. 2.

understand and respond to the cultural milieu in which the church must make its way, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus (Lin, 6).

The scope of work for the new evangelization is centered on Western Christianity, without operating there exclusively (IL, 86-7), and addresses the need of practicing Christians and those seeking God to hear personally in their lives God's invitation to holiness (Lin, 19). To effectively evangelize, the Church is called to engage all of the baptized in a "process of renewal" and examination of the church's life and activity through an examination of one's own faith life, especially as it relates to the proclamation of the Gospel (IL, 77). Thus, the new evangelization is also a "spiritual reawakening and the reanimation of a process of conversion which the Church asks of herself, all her communities and all the baptized" (IL, 88). Because the Holy Spirit is the agent of renewal in the Church, the new evangelization constitutes an "invitation" to church communities "to place greater trust in the Spirit who guides them in the course of history" (Lin, 19).

Conclusion

We have seen the new evangelization described as a "complex process," a "frame of mind," a "manner of acting," a "process of renewal," a "spiritual reawakening," and an "invitation." But the Church's mission of evangelization carries one central message: God loves all human beings and calls us all into loving communion with God and with each other. This Good News is made manifest in Jesus and comes alive for us through our encounter with Jesus in faith. The role of evangelization in the life of faith is elegantly expressed in this statement from the agenda for the Synod on the New Evangelization:

The Christian faith is not simply teachings, wise sayings, a code of morality or a tradition. The Christian faith is a true encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ. Transmitting the faith means to create in every place and time the conditions which lead to this encounter between the person and Jesus Christ. The goal of all evangelization is to

create the possibility for this encounter, which is, at one and the same time, intimate, personal, public and communal. (IL, 18)

The Church's *raison d'être* is to evangelize—to make it possible for all of humanity to encounter Jesus. The Church must adopt a missionary impulse, but there are challenges to the Church's efforts at evangelization. Some of these challenges are internal, such as the widely publicized poor witness of its members; other challenges, such as globalization and secularism, are external.

Reconciliation with God and others and conversion, by which is meant a change of heart so that one is more oriented toward the person of Jesus, are necessary for the Church as a whole and for individual Christians so that all may be open to Jesus and his teaching on the Kingdom of God and on God's love for all, especially the poor. Because of their dependence on God and Jesus' special concern for them, the poor are agents and primary recipients of the new evangelization. The Church is called, not only to provide assistance to the poor, but to become a Church of the poor.

The times and circumstances in which we seek to encounter Jesus are constantly changing. For this reason, evangelization is always “new” as, attentive to the signs of the times, the Church shares the Good News proclaimed by Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection. The speed with which cultural, economic, and societal developments have taken place around the globe and the magnitude of these developments present growing challenges to the Church's mission to evangelize. In order for the Church to continue to “create the possibility” for people to encounter Jesus, it must engage in an evangelization effort that is new, writ large.

In the next chapter, I discuss the context in which evangelization must take place in North American local churches, giving particular emphasis to the Archdiocese of Boston, and propose areas of emphasis for our evangelization efforts.

Chapter 2

A NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

In 2002, revelations of sexual abuse of children by some members of the clergy and the inadequate response from their superiors that effectively led to further abuse, shocked, angered, and disheartened the people and priests of the Archdiocese of Boston. At the same time, diminishing financial resources and declining numbers of priests to staff parishes forced the Archdiocese to undergo a drastic “reconfiguration” process that closed some parishes and merged others, generating pain and anger among people who lost their spiritual homes. As a way to recover from past pain and loss and to ready the church of Boston for the future, the Archdiocese is currently in the midst of a process of pastoral planning that involves collaboration and the sharing of limited resources among parishes. The stated goal of the collaborative process is to ready parishes for the work of the New Evangelization.¹

As noted earlier, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* asserts that efforts at evangelization must take into account the concrete lives of the people being evangelized. In this chapter, I will outline some aspects of the context in which the new evangelization must work in North America, much of which is applicable to the Archdiocese of Boston. First, I will present a vision for evangelization in the Archdiocese of Boston as sketched in a pastoral letter by Cardinal Seán O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston. Second, I will use the work of sociologists of religion to present the various ways that different generational cohorts conceive themselves as Catholics. Next, I will discuss the various ways the sexual abuse crisis has affected people’s relationship to the Church.

¹ See Archdiocese of Boston, *Disciples in Mission: A Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Boston* (August 30, 2012), <http://www.disciplesinmission.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Disciples-in-Mission.pdf>. (accessed September 17, 2012).

The sexual abuse crisis prompted many Catholics to distance themselves from the Church. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between “active” Catholics, who are generally considered the evangelizers, and “inactive” or “lapsed” Catholics, who are usually thought of as among those needing to be evangelized. This section considers how all of the baptized, whether or not they remain “active” in the Church, are called to evangelize while in need of being evangelized.

The New Evangelization and the Archdiocese of Boston

On Pentecost Sunday 2011, Cardinal Seán O’Malley, archbishop of Boston, issued *A New Pentecost: Inviting All to Follow Jesus*, a pastoral letter on the evangelization of inactive Catholics that has become the basis for the collaborative process for pastoral planning in Boston. Based largely on the United States Catholic Bishops’ *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (2002), the letter calls upon Catholics to turn their focus from an insular life within a church that meets their consumerist needs outward toward “those who have drifted away from the church.”² As the first disciples who had cowered in fear were transformed by the Holy Spirit into disciples eager to live out the mandate given them by Jesus, so too, Catholics today, guided and transformed by that same Spirit, are called to evangelize. The imperative to evangelize is so strong that Cardinal Seán insists that it is “criminal” not to share with others “the power of the Gospel and the sacraments.”³

Central to the evangelizing effort is the conversion of individuals and of the church as a whole. For Cardinal Seán, conversion “consists in knowing not just about Jesus but in actually

² Cardinal O’Malley, “A New Pentecost: Inviting All to Follow Jesus,” *Origins* (June 30, 2011): 123, <http://originsplus.catholicnews.com/databases/origins/41/08/4108.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2012).

³ *Ibid.*, 126.

knowing Jesus” and is an ongoing process for both active and inactive Catholics.⁴ The parish is the “chief venue” for evangelization to take place, but evangelization is not a separate ministry in which only professional staff members are engaged.⁵ Evangelization is the responsibility of all who have been baptized and confirmed and “the reason for the parish’s existence.”⁶ Cardinal Seán asserts, “The spirit of conversion ... should radiate through all the ministries so that the call to conversion is experienced and celebrated as part of each parishioner’s life of faith.”⁷ Ongoing conversion is needed within parishes so that church “consumers,” those who expect to receive something from the church, will become true disciples, reaching out to others as sharers in the mission of Jesus.⁸

To illustrate some practical aspects of evangelization, Cardinal Seán turns to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.⁹ The corporal works of mercy, such as feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless, are carried out by organizations such as Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services and by various health care organizations, meal centers, and shelters. But people also “seek longingly for hope and meaning ... just as the hungry seek for bread,” so the spiritual works of mercy—instructing, counseling, comforting, forgiving, praying—must also be practiced and integrated into parish and personal life through evangelization.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 125-6.

⁹ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Cardinal Seán insists that interactions with those not active in the sacramental life of the Church be centered on the love of God. Active parishioners are to pray for inactive Catholics while inviting them to return to the church and reminding them that their desire for God is a God-given gift. Active parishioners are to listen attentively to the questions and concerns of those who are absent from the Church while making them feel that they are still a part of the Church. Finally, active church-goers are to share their own story of faith.¹¹ Cardinal Seán sums up the reason for evangelization: “We evangelize so that people can know the purpose for which they are made and so that as many as possible will be brought to Christ and ultimately, through Christ’s saving love, to the eternal presence of God in heaven.”¹²

At the heart of Cardinal Seán’s approach to evangelization is the importance of relationships: the relationship of the individual Christian and the Church community with Jesus who brings us into closer relationship in God; relationships among active parishioners; and parishioners’ loving interaction with those who are absent from the Church. In practice, however, it appears that “new apologetics” is the Archdiocese of Boston’s focus for the new evangelization as evidenced by Cardinal Seán’s homily during the opening Mass for the Year of Faith and by the emphasis given apologetics by The Theological Institute for the New Evangelization. The Institute, operated by the Archdiocese, is providing training and ongoing formation to pastoral teams planning for the new evangelization.

As with other local churches, the church of Boston is home to Catholics of all ages. The nature and degree of each Catholic’s affiliation with the Church is shaped in no small way by the life experiences common to their respective generation. In the next section, I present some of the

¹¹ Ibid., 123.

¹² Ibid., 125.

characteristics and concerns of various age groups of American Catholics that are reflected by the Catholics of Boston.

Various Experiences of Church

Between 1987 and 2011, William D’Antonio and a team of sociologists of religion conducted five surveys of American Catholics in order to measure their commitment to the Church and its beliefs and practices and to delineate some generational differences with regard to attitudes toward the Church. Although representing the larger milieu of American Catholicism, the results of the survey studies reflect many aspects of what David Couturier terms, “the geography of faith”¹³ —the society and culture in which the faith is lived—in Boston.

D’Antonio and his team identified three major cohorts of Catholics: pre-Vatican II Catholics, Vatican II Catholics, and post Vatican II and Millennial.¹⁴ More recent surveys identified a fourth grouping, Hispanics, who play a prominent role in the western and southwestern United States.¹⁵

Pre-Vatican II Catholics (born before 1940) came of age during a time when Catholics were still a disadvantaged class in American society. Many of them were newly arrived immigrants and victims of discrimination and prejudice.¹⁶ For them, the Church provided assistance, security, and stability. David Couturier terms pre-Vatican II Catholics the “builder

¹³ David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap., “The Catholics We Are Becoming” (keynote address, 38th Annual Conference on Pastoral Planning and Council Development, Chicago, IL, April 10, 2011), 1, [http://www.cppcd.org/pdf/11_convention/The%20Catholics%20we%20are%20Becoming_Revised_1\(Couturier\).pdf](http://www.cppcd.org/pdf/11_convention/The%20Catholics%20we%20are%20Becoming_Revised_1(Couturier).pdf) (accessed February 11, 2012).

¹⁴ William V. D’Antonio, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 148-9.

¹⁵ William V. D’Antonio, Michele Dillon, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 54.

¹⁶ D’Antonio, *American Catholics Today*, 148.

generation” because of the churches, schools, hospitals, and other institutions they built, the purpose of which was to assist Catholics in maintaining their faith in a hostile environment while, at the same time, quickly moving them out of the ranks of the marginalized.¹⁷ Highly dependent on the Church during a critical time in their lives, pre-Vatican II Catholics remain “highly committed to the Church” as an institution.¹⁸

Vatican II Catholics (born between 1941 and 1960) inherited a legacy of institutions that helped ensure their success as they prepared to embark on careers and raise families in an environment that had become more welcoming to and accepting of Catholics in the higher echelons of society.¹⁹ It was the boomer generation’s responsibility to keep and spread the faith even as they assimilated into mainstream American society.²⁰ However, influenced by a rapidly changing and more religiously tolerant American society, Vatican II Catholics were not as strongly attached to the Church as pre-Vatican II Catholics.²¹

Post-Vatican II Catholics (born after 1960) and Millennial Catholics (born after 1987) have experienced a higher standard of living than previous generations of Catholics and very little anti-Catholic sentiment. Consequently, “they have not needed the Church for social protection.”²² Moreover, younger Catholics, trying to negotiate their way in an uncertain economy, delay making long-term commitments regarding work and family and make these decisions long past the stage of church-based formation programs, such as confirmation

¹⁷ Couturier, “The Catholics We Are Becoming,” 3.

¹⁸ D’Antonio, *American Catholics Today*, 148.

¹⁹ Couturier, “The Catholics We Are Becoming,” 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4, 5.

²¹ D’Antonio, *American Catholics Today*, 149.

²² *Ibid.*

classes.²³ Because, as David Couturier argues, the Church has not kept pace with the needs of young adult Catholics, young people demonstrate a lack of interest in institutional religion and instead “improvise” their approach to religion,²⁴ taking an “individualistic” approach.²⁵

The surveys showed that, despite differences in their attachment or commitment to the Church, with older Catholics “far more likely” than younger Catholics to have a strong affiliation with the Church,²⁶ American Catholics, as a whole, remain committed to their Catholic identity.²⁷ Central to this identity is belief in the resurrection of Jesus, devotion to Mary as the Mother of God, and an appreciation of the importance of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.²⁸ Respondents to the surveys over the years also rated commitment to the poor as very important to Catholic identity. Indeed, survey results showed that “helping the poor is almost as core to Catholics’ identity as their belief in Jesus’s resurrection”²⁹

Comparison of the results of various surveys over the years revealed changes in opinions regarding what constitutes a good Catholic. For example, according to the 2011 survey, a higher percentage of Catholics (60% in 2011 compared with 44% in 2005) considered it possible to be a good Catholic without helping the poor.³⁰ Yet, a substantial majority of respondents (88% in

²³ Couturier, “The Catholics We Are Becoming,” 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 6, 7.

²⁵ D’Antonio, *American Catholics Today*, 149.

²⁶ D’Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition*, 58.

²⁷ D’Antonio, *American Catholics Today*, 148.

²⁸ D’Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition*, 48.

²⁹ Ibid., 48.

³⁰ Ibid., 50.

2011) found it “personally meaningful” that the Church cares for the poor.³¹ The survey authors do not explain the incongruity, in this and other issues, between Catholics being personally uninvolved in an important Church practice, yet supporting the Church’s role in that same practice. The disparity between belief and actual practice could indicate a lack of understanding regarding baptism and the responsibility to which each person is called to live the faith. Because the Church is all of the baptized, not just the hierarchy or those with a formal or professional role in the Church, one goal of the new evangelization is to help Catholics consider the Church, not only as an institution, but as a community of baptized persons who are committed to the way of life Jesus shows us.

Reflecting on the survey results, David Couturier considers them in the context of “Catholic well-being,” a sense that being Catholic fits well with a person’s life and that the Church addresses their needs and engages in activities consistent with their vision for the Church.³² In considering the well-being of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Boston, Couturier, former director of pastoral planning for the Archdiocese, identified the clergy sexual abuse scandal as one of “three major crises that created a ‘perfect storm’ of pastoral pain for laity and clergy alike.”³³ The other two crises are a “reconfiguration” of the archdiocese that saw 60 parishes close within a brief period of time and a financial crisis. It is this “pastoral pain” that must be addressed as part of the Archdiocese of Boston’s pastoral plan for evangelization.

In the next section, I describe the reaction of Catholics in Ireland to the sexual abuse of children by their clergy—a reaction that mirrors that of many in Boston.

³¹ Ibid., 53.

³² Couturier, “The Catholics We Are Becoming,” 7.

³³ Ibid., 8

Concern for the Future

During an interview with the archdiocese's newspaper, *The Pilot*, at the beginning of his short tenure as Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia of the Archdiocese of Boston, then-Monsignor Robert Deeley spoke of the main issues and priorities facing the local church. Deeley stressed the importance of remembering the "serious harm" the sexual abuse crisis has caused and the need for continued healing. He added, "We cannot pretend in any way that we have moved beyond this crisis. It has to be there with us as we move forward."

Over thirteen years have passed since the explosion of revelations of sexual abuse of children by some members of the clergy, yet new reports of similar abuse taking place anywhere in the world serve to re-ignite flames of anger in some, while further dampening others' enthusiasm for church-related activities. The primary victims of clergy sexual abuse are the abused children themselves, their families, and their friends and classmates who, in many cases, learned of the abuse only long after it had happened. Irish behavioral scientist Kevin Egan identifies as "secondary victims" of the abuse "the ordinary decent Catholics ... who placed their faith in an institution that betrayed their trust."³⁴ Many of these "ordinary Catholics" had provided financial and other support to Church leaders and had been slow to realize the truth of the revelations of wrong-doing by their clergy and bishops. For them, "their sense of loss is linked to a sense of shame because they identified so closely with the institution."³⁵ Indeed, the closer one's affiliation with the Church, "the greater the impact of the scandal"³⁶ as the churches

³⁴ Kevin Egan, *Remaining a Catholic after the Murphy Report* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: The Columbia Press, 2011), 30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

and schools constructed and supported by the pre-Vatican II and Vatican II Catholics became places of danger and suffering for their children and grandchildren.

As a response to the scandal, many who were closely connected to the Church engaged in some form of “distancing ... either consciously or unconsciously.”³⁷ In the early days of the crisis, many in Boston practiced a form of distancing by withholding their financial support, especially that for archdiocesan-wide programs. Egan cites other forms of distancing such as a reluctance to pray or engage in other religious practices while intensifying criticism of the Church.³⁸ Boston Catholics experienced these forms of distancing as well and many today continue to limit their involvement in the life of the Church.³⁹

In the aftermath of the scandal and the release of detailed reports and studies of the sexual abuse of children by clergy in Ireland, Ned Prendergast, an educator working in faith development for Catholic schools in Ireland, proposes a positive, constructive “spiritual response” that would help the Church move forward. This “spiritual response” begins with “gratitude”—gratitude for the truth, that victims and their families were finally believed, for the recognition of everyone’s sinful frailties, and for “the renewed chance to build the people of God ...”⁴⁰ Prendergast asserts that this is “a new season in the Church’s history”—one that calls for *metanoia* as an essential element of authentic Christianity.⁴¹ Many in Boston and throughout America have called for reforms of the Church and its structures. Prendergast argues that reforms

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ There are other factors contributing to a decline in church attendance and participation, but the sexual abuse crisis hastened that decline.

⁴⁰ Ned Prendergast, “In Brokenness We Awaken,” *The Furrow* 61, no. 4 (April 2010): 202.

⁴¹ Ibid, 203, 202.

must challenge the Church to renew its commitment to its mission and “[reignite] the church’s passion for the poor, the outcasts, the abused, the silenced, the un-believed.”⁴² Irish moral theologian Enda McDonagh adds that effective reform requires that all of the baptized (lay and clergy alike) reclaim the priesthood conferred on them in the sacrament of baptism and together, as the People of God and the Body of Christ in the world, follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance for the Church’s renewal.⁴³

The Irish writers have articulated well the pain that Irish and Boston Catholics have experienced as a result of the sex abuse crisis. But they have also proposed ways that the Church can move forward without ignoring the scandal on the one hand, and without allowing painful memories to hinder movement toward a renewed Church on the other. Ned Prendergast reminds us that the mission the Church has been given continues. He warns, “It would be a tragedy indeed if we spent our energy fulminating about abuses in the past while oblivious to the suffering of children under our noses.”⁴⁴

Evangelizers and the Evangelized

As noted earlier, Cardinal O’Malley’s pastoral letter on evangelization expresses his regard for those baptized Catholics who do not actively participate in the life of the Church. He urges parishioners to welcome them and to “ease their feeling of estrangement” while being open

⁴² Ibid., 203.

⁴³ Enda McDonagh, “The Murphy and Ryan Reports: Between Evangelising and Priesthood,” in *The Dublin/Murphy Report: A Watershed for Irish Catholicism?*, ed. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: The Columba Press, 2010), 116-119.

⁴⁴ Prendergast, “In Brokenness We Awaken,” 205.

to their “questions and concerns.”⁴⁵ In this section, I consider the relationship between evangelizers and those being evangelized in the New Evangelization.

During Lent of 2011 as part of its program for the new evangelization, the Archdiocese of Boston initiated the “Catholics Come Home” campaign. The first phase of this outreach effort was a series of television spots aimed at “lapsed” Catholics. The messages focused on the good work of the church over the years and the consolation and peace offered individuals who avail themselves of the sacrament of reconciliation and worship with the community once again. The tone of the messages is one of welcome, but evangelization is presented as a one-way street—the “fallen-away” Catholics are in need of evangelizing and those who have remained with the Church (*i.e.*, those active in its sacramental life) are ready to provide it.

This mode of evangelization with its missionary outreach is not new; it models an older version of mission, one that Donal Dorr describes as depicting the “sending-out image” of mission. According to this model of mission, clergy, assisted by lay people, bring their knowledge of God to others “taking little or no account of the prior presence and activity of God in the world,” including the secular world.⁴⁶ Jon Sobrino describes this approach to evangelization as one in which it is “taken for granted that evangelizers preach a God whom others do not yet know but whom they (the evangelizers) already know.”⁴⁷

As baptized people, each of us has a sense of the faith—a sense of how the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church. Those baptized Catholics whose active participation in the life of the Church opens them to the work of the Spirit contribute to the sense of the faith of all the faithful, the

⁴⁵ O’Malley, “A New Pentecost,” 123.

⁴⁶ Donal Dorr, *Mission in Today’s World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 189.

⁴⁷ Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and The Poor* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 294.

sensus fidelium.⁴⁸ Ormond Rush contends that there is a “secondary source” for determining the *sensus fidelium*—“those baptized Catholics who in a variety of ways are not fully ‘faithful’ to their baptismal commitment through ongoing participation in the sacramental life and mission of the church”⁴⁹ The Spirit can and does work through “inactive” Catholics even though they may engage in fewer sacramental opportunities for encountering the Spirit.⁵⁰ Through the efforts of the Spirit, the secondary source of the *sensus fidelium* can be helpful to the Church, especially in its efforts to effectively evangelize “disaffected” Catholics.⁵¹ Rush notes that, as a secondary source of the *sensus fidelium*, these Catholics “raise questions that may be a genuine call to greater fidelity to the Christ life.”⁵² They also can offer insights on challenges facing contemporary Christian life so that the Church is better able to respond to newly raised questions in a way that is intelligible to today’s Catholics while remaining faithful to the Gospel message.⁵³ Indeed, for some in Boston who distanced themselves from the Church, their leaving was intended as a prophetic action as they shook the dust from their feet in protest over actions of the Church that were counter to the message of Jesus. A challenge for the new evangelization is to engage all baptized persons in the Church’s work of recommitting itself to its authentic mission.

⁴⁸ Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 247.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 248.

⁵³ Ibid., 249.

Cardinal O'Malley wrote of the transformation of culture as an effect of the Church's efforts at evangelization.⁵⁴ Donal Dorr writes of another avenue for evangelization and reminds us that "the Spirit speaks not only in the church but also in the world" and notes that many ideals and moral values that promote human dignity have come from "non-church sources."⁵⁵

From the foregoing, we see that evangelization is not unidirectional—from the Church outward only—but is a process by which everyone with the Spirit's guidance can evangelize as well as be evangelized. A church open to the Spirit as it speaks through a variety of sources—"active" Catholics, "inactive" Catholics, and today's secular world—is enabled to "find new answers and new solutions to new questions and new challenges, but all in the light of the God revealed through what Jesus Christ ... has taught and done and is."⁵⁶

An approach to evangelization that attends to how the Spirit, the agent of evangelization, is working in and through all people and all aspects of God's creation is one in which the Church recognizes its reliance on God, rather than imagines that God is reliant on the Church. Evangelization then becomes what Anthony Gittins calls "*mission in reverse*" where "God [is] taking the church to the world rather than the church taking God."⁵⁷ Through its encounters with those to whom God takes it, the Church is itself evangelized and converted.

⁵⁴ O'Malley, "A New Pentecost," 124.

⁵⁵ Dorr, *Mission in Today's World*, 63.

⁵⁶ Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 296.

⁵⁷ Anthony J. Gittins, "Mission for the Twenty-First Century in North America," in *Papers from the Symposium and Consultation Celebrating The 100th Anniversary of the Foundation of Techny and The 125th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Society of the Divine Word*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder (Chicago: CCGM Publications, 2001), 155 (emphasis in the original).

Conclusion

John Paul II identified three areas where Jesus can be encountered: the reading of sacred scripture, the celebration of the liturgy, and care for the poor (EA, 12). Yet, with less than 20% of Catholics in Boston attending weekly celebrations of the Eucharist, the likelihood of encountering Jesus in scripture and liturgy becomes remote. Nevertheless, despite differences in level of commitment to the Church, various age groups of American Catholics share common core beliefs. Among these is a belief in the importance of caring for the poor, making this a good starting point for encountering Jesus for “active” and “inactive” Catholics alike. Surprisingly, although many Catholics applaud the efforts of Church organizations that help the poor, they believe that, as individuals, they can be good Catholics without helping the poor. This situation indicates a need for conversion so that people accept their responsibility as baptized persons, making their own the beliefs of the Church so that they take their proper place in its mission.

The clergy sexual abuse crisis is part of our story as a Church. The lessons learned from what has been a source of “pastoral pain” can serve us as we move toward healing and safeguarding the *communio* of the Church. The crisis has made plain to us the failings of the Church, but our anger, sorrow, and disappointment can move us toward reconciliation and reform so that we become alert to other injustices to children, the poor, and others who are vulnerable.

The Holy Spirit, who directs the hearts of those who are open to the Spirit, calls all the baptized, no matter their formal relationship with the Church, to recommit themselves to the work of the Kingdom of God, the mission to which Jesus committed his life. For evangelization efforts to create the possibility for the Church of Boston to encounter Jesus, “new apologetics”

must be complemented by other aspects of the New Evangelization: conversion, reconciliation, and care for the poor.

In the next chapter, I focus on conversion as a lifelong process of “falling in love” with God and on reconciliation as it is celebrated in the Rite of Penance and as it is experienced in a community in need of healing.

Chapter 3

CONVERSION AND RECONCILIATION

In his pastoral letter on evangelization, Cardinal Seán O'Malley cites personal and communal conversion as the starting point for evangelization.¹ O'Malley describes conversion as an ongoing process that takes place “in the hearts of believers” and that “consists in knowing not just about Jesus but in actually knowing Jesus.”² The Cardinal argues that encouraging people in the work of developing a close, personal relationship with Jesus that leads to authentic discipleship is the “task” of parishes so that they become communities of welcome and reconciliation.³ In this chapter, I will present a more detailed theology of conversion and of reconciliation—two processes that are essential to healing and sustaining the *communio* of the Church as it grows in the love of God.

Conversion

Responding to God's Love

Conversion is often thought of in terms of a person's turning away from evil to do good. Yet, as we saw in the first chapter, Christian life involves more than living according to certain moral principles. In Jesus, God offers us the “gift of a new friendship ... communion with Jesus

¹ Cardinal O'Malley, “A New Pentecost: Inviting All to Follow Jesus,” *Origins* (June 30, 2011): 123, <http://originsplus.catholicnews.com/databses/origins/41/08/4108.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2012).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 126.

and thereby with God.”⁴ It is not revulsion to evil that prompts one to conversion, but, rather, the love of God, who desires to draw human beings into the divine communion of Father, Son, and Spirit. Rahner observes that God not only calls us to live in the divine communion, but “gives what he asks;” God’s call “is both Jesus Christ himself, as the presence of the Kingdom of God in person ... and his Spirit ... as God’s self-communication”⁵ Bernard Häring describes “the very core” of God’s call to us to convert as “pure glad tidings: Return home, for the kingdom of heaven has come to you!”⁶ Conversion is our acceptance of this good news; it is our free, continued response in the affirmative to God’s universal call to holiness.

God not only issues the invitation to conversion, but also gives us the means by which we can respond to that invitation. Bernard Lonergan notes that human beings have been given a unique “capacity for self-transcendence” by which “one is not locked up in oneself.”⁷ It is the capacity to question, explore, and care about the universe—the capacity, ultimately, to search for God.⁸ This “capacity” to transcend oneself becomes “an actuality when one falls in love.”⁹ For one who falls in love, all aspects of one’s life—thoughts, emotions, actions, and decisions—have their source in that love such that “one’s being becomes being-in-love.”¹⁰ The relationship of love transforms one’s very being. Religious conversion, according to Lonergan, means falling in

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, “On the New Evangelization” (address to catechists and religion teachers at the Jubilee of Catechists, Rome, December 10, 2000), part II, section 1, http://ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm (accessed August 25, 2011).

⁵ Karl Rahner, “Conversion,” in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 204.

⁶ Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ*, trans. Edwin G. Kaiser, C.P.P.S (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1961), 392.

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 104-105.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰ Ibid.

love with God who has first “grasped” us and is “God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.”¹¹

“Being in love with God”¹² transforms all aspects of our lives; the process of conversion is multi-dimensional, occurring “on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments.”¹³ Donald Gelpi identifies five types of conversion corresponding to various aspects of life that intersect with and inform each other: intellectual, affective, religious, and two types of moral conversion. All of the forms of conversion involve a “decision to pass from irresponsible to responsible behavior in some distinguishable realm of human experience.”¹⁴ A person living responsibly recognizes the necessity of being accountable to God, self, and others.¹⁵ Rather than accept creedal statements at face value, a person converting intellectually examines one’s own beliefs, checks the methods used to arrive at those beliefs, and then continues to accept the beliefs as true or rejects them as false.¹⁶ During affective conversion, a person resolves to better appreciate beauty and aims to become better balanced emotionally.¹⁷ There are two types of moral conversion: personal moral conversion, in which one turns from following self-centered motives to considering the effects of one’s decisions on others, and

¹¹ Ibid., 240, 241.

¹² Ibid., 105.

¹³ Bernard Lonergan, “Theology in Its New Context,” in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 13.

¹⁴ Donald L. Gelpi, *Adult Conversion and Initiation*, vol. 1 of *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 17.

¹⁵ Donald L. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience: A Reflective Process for RCIA Participants and Others* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 26.

¹⁶ Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 33 and *Adult Conversion and Initiation*, 17.

¹⁷ Donald L. Gelpi, *The Sacraments of Ongoing Conversion*, vol. 2 of *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), vi-vii and Gelpi, *Adult Conversion and Initiation*, 17.

socio-political conversion, in which one no longer stands by idly in the face of unjust processes and institutional structures, but works with others toward reforms that will benefit the common good.¹⁸ The fifth form of conversion is religious conversion in which one “responds to an encounter with God.”¹⁹ For the Christian, that encounter is mediated by Jesus Christ.

Although the various types of conversion can interact with one another, there is no requirement for them to do so, nor is there a particular order in which the forms are to occur. As Lonergan notes, “there is no fixed rule of antecedence and consequence, no necessity of simultaneity, no prescribed magnitudes of change.”²⁰ One may experience one type of conversion that then effects a change in one’s relationship with God or one’s changed relationship with God can affect one’s actions, decisions, and perspective in various aspects of life. Each person’s experience of conversion is different from another’s. What is key to the conversion experience is “that first there is God’s gift of his love” that reveals to us the world as God sees it.²¹

God’s gift of love is a fundamental message for the new evangelization. One of the ways to communicate this message is through the homily. In his instruction on homilies, Pope Francis notes that what is “essential” is that God’s love “has always the last word” (EG, 151). Francis also notes that there needs to be a balance among homily topics so that the more important themes are mentioned more frequently (EG, 38) with an “ear” to “what it is that the people need to hear” (EG, 154).

¹⁸ Gelpi, *Adult Conversion and Initiation*, 17 and *The Conversion Experience*, 31.

¹⁹ Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 37.

²⁰ Lonergan, “Theology in Its New Context,” 13.

²¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 243.

Becoming a Community of Disciples

So far, we have seen conversion described in terms of God's action in an individual's life and of one's personal relationship with God. But conversion has a communal aspect as well. Bernard Häring describes conversion in terms used for the relationship of Jesus with the Father—conversion is “the unique friendship of the child with its heavenly Father.”²² As is the case with Jesus, the converted Christian cares about who and what God cares about, “enter[s] into the intentions of God towards the world and the earthly community,” and is in “active solidarity with the concerns of the kingdom of God.”²³ Because Jesus' loving self-surrender to God and his service to the kingdom of God ultimately led him to the cross, the cross is a “test” of the authenticity of our conversion.²⁴ The cross means more than shouldering our personal trials and tribulations related to home, health, and personal relationships. The cross is assumed with and for others; it involves taking on another's suffering as one's own, then working to alleviate that suffering by our cooperation with the reign of God. Conversion “seen through the prism of the cross” leads us beyond concern for our own personal salvation and “urges us to face the redemptive need of our world,” living the example of Jesus.²⁵

Radical Christian conversion and participation in the work of Jesus that includes acceptance of the demands of the cross are marks of the authentic discipleship to which God

²² Häring, *The Law of Christ*, 393.

²³ Bernard Häring, “The Characteristics of Conversion,” in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 216, 219.

²⁴ Regis A. Duffy, “The Praxis of Conversion,” in *Initiation and Conversion: Major Presentations Given at the 1984 National Meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions*, ed. Lawrence J. Johnson (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1985), 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

calls us.²⁶ Central to discipleship is a close relationship to Christ Jesus who draws us into relationship with each other in the communion of the Church.²⁷ Through the Church's teaching, shared tradition, and sacramental life that are experienced in community, Christians are enabled to manifest a "faithful presentation of the person of Christ" so that those encountering the Church, the Body of Christ, may better learn and experience who Jesus is.²⁸ The communion of the church thus facilitates the central aspect of the new evangelization, the encounter with Jesus Christ,²⁹ and makes possible the faithful proclamation of Christ within the Church and in the wider world.³⁰

The Church is more than an organization or association of people with a common understanding of who Jesus is and a concern for the well-being of others in the world. Using the work of Yves Congar and Jerome Hamer, Richard Rymarz characterizes the communion of the Church as having an invisible vertical aspect, "the connection that the people have with God that distinguishes the Church from a conventional assembly" and a visible horizontal aspect, the communion among the people that is formed in Christ Jesus and sustained by the Holy Spirit.³¹ Both of these aspects must remain in balance lest the Church become nothing more than "a highly personalized structure" in which the people are united by "a very loose self-described

²⁶ Richard Rymarz, "The New Evangelization in an Ecclesiological Context," *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 779, 781.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 780.

²⁸ Richard Rymarz, "Conversion and the New Evangelization: A Perspective From Lonergan," *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010): 761.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Rymarz, "The New Evangelization in an Ecclesiological Context," 776.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 778.

affiliation.”³² Recognition of the divine, present and at work, in both aspects of Church communion is key to an authentic vision of the Church.³³

Rymarz observes that a challenge for the new evangelization is that “many Catholics ... are content with a less demanding, more worldly form of association” and eschew the cost of true discipleship.³⁴ To meet the demands of authentic discipleship, Christians need to be “sustained by a communion with other disciples” who practice “an active, living faith.”³⁵

Monika Hellwig reminds us that “Jesus is ... the embodiment of the divine love humanly in the world” and that communities of faith are to be “the embodiment of the embodiment which is Jesus.”³⁶ The formation of such communities is the Church’s mission. Hellwig asserts:

More fundamental than any of the obviously religious or “churchy” activities, more fundamental than hierarchic or clerical functions, more fundamental than institutional unity and doctrinal orthodoxy and continuity, is the task of being community, the task of a genuine, practical, far-reaching sharing of life and resources and ideals and mutual respect and support.³⁷

The Archdiocese of Boston is developing new ways of living in faith communities through its process of forming parish collaboratives as it prepares for the new evangelization. But, the formation of Church communities is not only a prelude to the new evangelization; it is a critical element of the new evangelization. It is as a community of disciples, sharing life that has its source and sustenance in the triune God, that the Church is the Body of Christ in the world.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 781.

³⁵ Ibid., 780.

³⁶ Monika K. Hellwig, *Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion: The Sacrament of Penance for Our Times*, Rev. ed. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984), 23.

³⁷ Ibid., 23-24.

The community of disciples assists one another in the work of being converted. Gelpi reminds us that “conversion does not happen once and for all. The business of conversion lasts a lifetime.”³⁸ The radical conversion that is required for authentic discipleship is an ongoing process interrupted often by our failures as individuals and as a Church community to be “beings-in-love” with God. When we fall out of love with God, we fall out of love with the people God draws to Godself; we are at odds with the reign of God, at odds with God’s desires for the world. For the times when we fall out of love with God, reconciliation, which makes conversion possible, is needed to restore us to right relationship with God and with the Church’s *communio*.

Reconciliation

God’s nature is relational: God is in relationship with God’s self as the loving communion of Father, Son, and Spirit; God desires to bring all of humanity into God’s loving *communio*, into loving relationship with God and with each other. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reconciled humanity with God making it possible for human beings to hope for a share in God’s life. The community brought together by Jesus and sustained by the Spirit, the Church, “is the most striking presentation to humanity of the reconciliation accomplished by God in Christ.”³⁹ The Church’s mission is served by its sacramentality. James Dallen notes: “The church ... as sacrament, does not simply offer either information about salvation or access to it. ... The church sacramentalizes salvation by witnessing to the reality of reconciliation and working to achieve it.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 102.

³⁹ James Dallen, “Reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance,” *Worship* 64, no. 5 (September 1, 1990): 389, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, (accessed September 29, 2012).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Sacraments of Reconciliation

The Church celebrates reconciliation especially in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Through baptism, individuals are welcomed into a community that shares “the life of the God who befriends people.”⁴¹ In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church enters into the mystery of Jesus’ cross and resurrection and, as the Church sings in the Easter Proclamation, rejoices in the wedding of heaven to earth and in humanity’s reconciliation with God. As is the case with conversion, reconciliation does not begin with us, but is initiated by God who offers reconciliation as “pure gift” of “unstinting mercy.”⁴²

The Church is a sign of the reconciliation that has been and is yet to be accomplished in Christ Jesus. As individual Christians and as a Church community, we experience difficulty and exhibit shortcomings in our efforts to witness to God’s reconciling work. As noted earlier in this paper, one of the impediments to the Church’s mission of making God’s salvation known and experienced in the world and in the Church itself is the poor witness of the Church’s members that hampers its mission of evangelization. Monika Hellwig describes sin as “deliberate or unrecognized detachment from God ... the placing of ultimate trust in anything other than God, even the placing of trust in moral behavior or good conduct.”⁴³

Jesus presents the model for sinless behavior which is not described in terms of human conduct, but, rather, in terms of the mutual love of Jesus and his Father.⁴⁴ “It is the fully effective love of the Father for him and in him that transfigures him to dazzling realizations of the

⁴¹ Ibid., 388.

⁴² Hellwig, *Sign of Reconciliation*, 26, 25.

⁴³ Ibid., 21. An example of inordinate trust in the semblance of good conduct is provided by bishops who were complicit in the sexual abuse of children by hiding the crimes of clergy in order to preserve an unsullied image of the Church.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

possibilities of being human in the image and likeness of God.”⁴⁵ Jesus’ life shows us that human fulfillment is found in a life of holiness; it is found in the love of God and in self-giving service to God’s love. The quest for holiness, for the most fulfilling way to live human life, centers on the person of Jesus and is not undertaken in isolation either from God or from other human beings.⁴⁶ The Church, gathered in Jesus’ name and guided by the Spirit, interprets scripture, shares the teaching tradition, celebrates the truths it discerns in ritual, and assists one another to better know Jesus.⁴⁷

Sacrament of Penance

In the celebration of baptism and Eucharist, the Church’s principal sacraments of reconciliation, the Church “is the clearest human embodiment, after Jesus, of the mystery of reconciliation.”⁴⁸ The sacrament of penance, or reconciliation, or confession⁴⁹ has meaning only within this larger context of the Church’s reconciling nature and actions;⁵⁰ yet, it is often the first sacrament thought of when considering reconciliation. Indeed, the bishops of the synod on the new evangelization called the sacrament of penance “the privileged place to receive God’s mercy and forgiveness” and requested “that this sacrament be put again at the center of the pastoral

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Dallen, “Reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance,” 390.

⁴⁹ In this paper, I will use the term, “sacrament of penance” to distinguish this sacrament from other sacraments of reconciliation.

⁵⁰ Hellwig, *Sign of Reconciliation*, 13, 14.

activity of the Church.”⁵¹ But parishioners maintain a general aversion to the sacrament of penance as evidenced by a steady decline in the frequency of its reception.

Scott Detisch suggests that the sacrament of penance has fallen out of favor because of an emphasis on private, individual confession of sins in a ritual that minimizes the role of the Church community and the penitent’s place in that community.⁵² Penitents familiar with scriptural accounts of Jesus’ compassionate, merciful dealings with an unscrupulous tax collector or an adulterous woman are looking to experience within the sacrament of penance today that same kind of intimate encounter with a forgiving Jesus.⁵³ Such immediate encounters cannot be replicated successfully today and penitents are often disappointed in the “often awkward, unfulfilling mediated experiences in the ritual moments of penance and reconciliation” that occur despite the best efforts of pastoral confessors.⁵⁴ As people of first-century Palestine experienced “the embodiment of God’s forgiveness” in a face-to-face physical encounter with Jesus, so today’s penitents must “experience the vividness of Christ’s forgiveness and love in their own context of living” through sacramental symbols.⁵⁵

The Church’s task is to ensure that the language and ritual of the sacraments faithfully symbolize the mystery of Christ’s presence so that “sacramental moments” in the sacrament of penance can be “understood as encounters with the same Christ whose offer of forgiveness and

⁵¹ Synod of Bishops, *Final List of Propositions*, no. 33.

⁵² Scott P. Detisch, “The Sacrament of Reconciliation: In Need of a Second Naiveté,” *Worship* 77, no. 3 (May 1, 2003): 196, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 29, 2012).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 196, 202.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 196, 199, 203.

healing is presented in a different way,” that is, through the ministry of the church community.⁵⁶ Detisch argues, however, that the current predominant practice of individual confession fails to “embody effectively the power of Christ’s forgiveness.”⁵⁷ What penitents need is a sacramental experience that is not “disconnected from the community of believers,” but that takes place within “authentic reconciling communities” that can “[embody] the healing, reconciling ministry of Christ today.”⁵⁸

James Dallen agrees that an emphasis on the forgiveness of individual sinners compromises our understanding of the nature of the church and its mission as a reconciling community. Dallen studied how the theology of the sacrament of penance developed over the centuries and observes that the diminishment of the symbol of community began in the Middle Ages and continues to have implications for the understanding of conversion and reconciliation. He writes:

Conversion was no longer a matter of being transformed into community but of individuals changing their behavior. Reconciliation was no longer sharing the mystery of Christ as community but forgiveness of sins. Both conversion and reconciliation were viewed from a one-sided and individualistic perspective: instead of conversion, the avoidance of sin; instead of reconciliation, the forgiveness of sin; instead of the experience of the community’s love, example, and prayer, a set of commandments, a list of virtues and vices, and the ritual of confession and absolution.⁵⁹

Continuing study of the sacrament of penance retrieved an understanding of the community’s role in reconciling penitents so that they could be once again on the path of conversion.⁶⁰ Beginning decades before the Second Vatican Council and continuing since the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 200, 202.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 209.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dallen, “Reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance,” 392.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 394, 395.

Council, there has been a gradual return to the “realization that the love of God is experienced in and through the love of other human beings” and that “[r]econciliation with the church is the sign and cause of reconciliation with God, the way we experience reconciliation with God.”⁶¹ The introduction to the 1973 *Rite of Penance* reflects the teaching of the Council in its instruction that the sacrament of penance reconciles the faithful to the church that is, in turn, working on behalf of their conversion.⁶² The introduction to the rite explains that the entire church community is involved in the “work of reconciliation” and is “the instrument of the conversion and absolution of the penitent through the ministry entrusted by Christ to the apostles and their successors.”⁶³

Detisch points out, however, that because the sacrament of penance is not celebrated in a manner that reflects this reality, many of the faithful find themselves trapped in “an endless cycle of committing sins, going to confession, receiving penance and absolution, and then eventually returning to one’s pattern of sins.”⁶⁴ Forgiveness of individual sinners remains an indispensable part of the sacrament of penance, however. Confession of one’s sins is an expression of accountability to God, oneself, and others that, as was mentioned earlier in this chapter, is an important aspect of conversion. Although not reflected in the way the rite is celebrated, the forgiveness of the individual sinner does take place within the larger context of relationship. Indeed, Pope Francis reminds us that scripture teaches that sin is a “rupture” in our relationships

⁶¹ Ibid., 397.

⁶² Catholic Church, *Rite of Penance* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1975), no. 4.

⁶³ *Rite of Penance*, no. 8.

⁶⁴ Detisch, “The Sacrament of Reconciliation,” 208, 209.

with God, our neighbors, and the created world—relationships that are the very foundation of human life.⁶⁵

As part of a communal celebration of the sacrament of penance, the assembly listens to a homily and takes part in an examination of conscience that is often facilitated, frequently taking the form of a litany.⁶⁶ The themes presented in the homily and each element of the litany can broaden an individual's perspective on sinfulness. Awareness of one's own weaknesses jolts one out of self-satisfaction and complacency regarding the need for forgiveness. A carefully prepared, thoughtful communal celebration of penance can help the assembly awaken to areas in need of reconciliation within its own community.

A Reconciling Community

To effectively witness to the reconciliation brought about by God in Christ Jesus, the Church must become reconciled among its members, reconciled within its *communio*. The sexual abuse crisis and its aftermath caused great pain for many people of the Archdiocese of Boston, especially the victims of abuse and their families. Although the actual crimes were committed decades ago and the abuse was publicly revealed some years ago, the release of a new movie about *The Boston Globe's* investigative reporting team that uncovered details of the abuse, and the release from prison of perpetrators of abuse serve to rekindle painful memories. It is a temptation to want to “move on” and put the sexual abuse crisis behind us, but Robert Schreiter, who has written extensively on reconciliation, cautions against a “hasty peace” that seeks to

⁶⁵ Francis, *Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si” On Care for Our Common Home* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015), no. 66.

⁶⁶ *Rite of Penance*, no. 26.

suppress the memory of the victims' suffering and, in so doing, forgets about the victims and the causes and effects of their suffering.⁶⁷

Schreiter presents three components of the reconciliation process: reconciliation involves listening to the stories of victims and waiting for their wounds to heal; reconciliation requires attention to God's healing work and compassionate accompaniment of victims as they heal; and reconciliation calls for those who are reconciled to act as prophets who recognize oppression and call others to repentance.⁶⁸

Schreiter makes clear that reconciliation is not a procedure or skill set that is used to arrive at a desired outcome, but "something that is discovered: the power of God's grace welling up in one's life."⁶⁹ Thus, reconciliation is "more of a spirituality than a strategy."⁷⁰ For the Christian, reconciliation begins with God and is made present to us through Jesus whose cross and resurrection demonstrate that evil has no lasting power over us.⁷¹ Reconciliation is a continuation of the creating work of God; it "is not just restoration; it brings us to a place where we have not been before."⁷² A spirituality of reconciliation can help the Archdiocese of Boston continue its work of assisting victims of sexual abuse and addressing their changing needs as they and the entire community continue to heal.

⁶⁷ Robert J. Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a Missionary Task," *Missiology: An International Review* 20, no. 1 (January 1992): 6, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed September 29, 2012).

⁶⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 71-73.

⁶⁹ Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a Missionary Task," 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 7, 8.

⁷² Ibid., 8.

Another aspect of the *communio* of the Archdiocese of Boston in need of healing is the pain caused by a hasty parish reconfiguration process that resulted in the closing of a large number of parishes and churches in a short period of time. Now the Archdiocese is engaged in a more measured program of forming parish collaboratives so that resources can be shared. This process, too, will be painful as personnel and parish organizations change. Reconciliation, seen as God's power at work creating new ways for the church of Boston to be and to experience *communio*, is an essential component of the pastoral planning process. Pope Francis urges, "Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds" (EG, 67).

During each season of Lent, the Archdiocese of Boston opens all of its churches and chapels for a few hours one night a week so that individuals may come to confess their sins and receive absolution. With the theme, "The Light is On for You," there is a sense of welcome being extended by the church community to the repentant sinner, but the image of the church as a reconciling community is not otherwise conveyed. Although the introduction to the *Rite of Penance* explicitly states that "[c]ommunal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance,"⁷³ communal celebrations of the sacrament rarely happen. Use of the rite for reconciliation of individual penitents remains the norm. The goal and task of the church is to be and to become a community—to create "a new 'We,' of the common path of God,"⁷⁴ but current sacramental practices support the path of individualism.

⁷³ *Rite of Penance*, no. 22.

⁷⁴ Ratzinger, "On the New Evangelization," part II, section 1.

Communal celebrations of the sacrament of penance and non-sacramental penitential celebrations⁷⁵ can help heal interpersonal and communal bonds. Monika Hellwig contends that one “task” of such communal celebrations is “to listen with deep compassion” to the suffering of others, knowing that Jesus unites all suffering to his own.⁷⁶ Early in Cardinal Seán’s tenure as Archbishop of Boston, the Archdiocese offered several prayer services for reconciliation at which victims of clergy sexual abuse told their stories and were embraced by the community. More recently, Voice of the Faithful piloted healing circles, meetings of small groups that listen to stories of the victims of clergy sexual abuse, in order to assist them in the healing process.

Stories of suffering in which “sin is revealed” can be shared with the assembly by direct testimony of individuals or groups, by reports, or other types of presentations.⁷⁷ The “cry of pain” of people in our local community and in the larger world who suffer from abuse, neglect, or deprivation can raise “awareness of one’s own sinfulness including much yet hidden from oneself.”⁷⁸

Conclusion

Two key components of the new evangelization, conversion and reconciliation, speak to growth in our relationship with God and with all that God loves and to continued formation and healing of relationships within the *communio* of the church and beyond.

Both conversion and reconciliation are God’s initiative. A loving God invites and enables us to turn in love to God. We are to strive to become “beings-in-love” with God, loving God with our whole, heart, soul, mind, and strength. Such a transformation involves ongoing, life-long

⁷⁵ *Rite of Penance*, no. 36.

⁷⁶ Hellwig, *A Sign of Reconciliation*, 153.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

conversion in every aspect of our being—intellectual, affective, moral, and religious. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the Father’s love. It is the task of Christians to become a community of authentic disciples of Jesus, united with him in the Spirit and committed to the concerns of God’s reign so that the good news of God’s love is made known to all the world. The Church’s homilies and public statements are useful vehicles for frequently communicating the message of God’s love within and beyond the Church. If the love of God is a predominant theme in a high proportion of homilies and public statements of the church, this increases the probability that people, including casual or infrequent church goers, will hear the news God wishes to share with them in the circumstances of their lives.

The Church strives to be what it is and what it is yet to be, a *communio* that is a sacrament of God’s love and that places all its trust in that love. As a sacrament of salvation, the Church is a sign of the reconciliation between God and humanity that God accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The sacraments of reconciliation enable the Church to both express and seek this reconciliation. The sacrament of penance can serve to make the community of disciples aware of previously unrecognized sinfulness that harms relationships within the Church’s *communio* and with God. Such awareness can prod the *communio* toward the practical work of seeking reconciliation with its hurting members and with people throughout the world who have been harmed through our sinfulness.

Communal celebrations of the rite of penance and penitential celebrations can help the local church to counter individualism and self-centeredness and re-set it on the path to becoming a community of authentic disciples. Authentic disciples do not avoid the cross, but open themselves to the cares and concerns of all whom God loves, especially those in special need.

In the next chapter, I explore the relationship of the Church to those for whom God has special care, the poor.

Chapter 4

BECOMING A CHURCH OF THE POOR

The goal of the New Evangelization is to help persons encounter Jesus and grow in relationship with him so that, through Jesus and in the Spirit, they may be brought into relationship with the Father in the loving communion of the triune God. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, one of the principal themes of the New Evangelization is the centrality of the poor in the life of the Church. Jesus demonstrated his love for the poor by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, bringing the dead back to life, and sharing the lot of the poor, ultimately suffering their fate on the cross. The Church, as a community of disciples of Jesus, seeks a deeper relationship with Jesus through its own relationship with and care for the poor. As indicated by survey results I presented in the second chapter of this thesis, diverse cohorts of Catholics view commitment to the poor to be a core element in the life of the Church. The Church's engagement with the poor, then, becomes an avenue for evangelization that both attracts and challenges "active" and "inactive" Catholics.

The previous chapter concerned the Church's inner life, its *communio*, which is formed and sustained in the love of the triune God. In this chapter, I will focus on the church's *missio*, its cooperation with the Spirit in continuing the work of Jesus to bring to fruition the Kingdom of God. Jesus as "the Gospel in person" identified with the poor (EG-209); it is through a

relationship with the poor that the church can become a “living witness” to the Gospel by “making present the reality that is being proclaimed,” that God is love.¹

Defining the Poor

Before proceeding further, it would be helpful to consider what constitutes poverty and about whom we are speaking when using the term “the poor.” Both terms represent the variety of ways that economic, social, and moral situations affect people’s well-being. Bryant Myers, who has worked for decades in international relief and development, observes the lack of “a unified theory of poverty” and suggests that we need to “keep using a family of views” in order to become aware of the various types and causes of poverty.² For Jon Sobrino, even the term, economic poverty, is not a limited concept, but “expresses a deep human, anthropological, and social need: the difficulty of forming a home, a human life, an *oikos*.”³

Our own place in the world influences how we identify poverty and whom we recognize as poor.⁴ Sobrino, originally from Western Europe, admits that his experience in Latin America has enabled him “only gradually ... to hear and understand the cries of women, indigenous people, and Afro-Americans.”⁵ For his part, Pope Francis specifically names “the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous people, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned ... migrants,” victims of human trafficking, unborn children, and “women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence” as representative of “new forms of poverty and

¹ Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and The Poor* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 270-272.

² Bryant L. Myers, *Walking With The Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, rev. and expanded (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 132.

³ Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside The Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 24.

⁴ Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 106

⁵ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 25.

vulnerability” (EG, 210-213). Francis goes even further, including “creation as a whole” among “weak and defenseless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation” (EG, 215). Residents of Massachusetts have become painfully aware of the presence among us of abused and neglected children who are silent and invisible in life and nameless in death. These examples illustrate political scientist Peter Henriot’s “very simple and very clear” definition of the poor: “the economically disadvantaged, the materially deprived, who as a consequence suffer powerlessness, exploitation and oppression.”⁶

Myers cautions that how we describe poor people reflects the attitude of the nonpoor toward the poor and influences their interactions with the poor. When the poor are spoken of solely in terms of material lack or “deficit,” the spiritual aspect of people’s lives is ignored and the social implications of poverty, including issues of power, are not attended to. A “deficit” view of the poor can lead the nonpoor and even the poor themselves to consider the poor as “defective and inadequate,” lacking the material, social, intellectual, and spiritual gifts that God has bestowed upon the nonpoor. The nonpoor are then inspired to fulfill the needs of the poor, but in such a way that “the poor are reduced to passive recipients, incomplete human beings whom we make whole through our largess.” Myers contends that this “messianic” attitude in which the nonpoor believe themselves, rather than God, to be the saviors of the poor “is not good for our souls.”⁷

In addition to the varying perceptions of poverty and of the poor among the nonpoor, there are diverse ways that poor people themselves endure poverty. Sobrino identified five categories describing the lived reality of people who are poor. The five categories or

⁶ Peter J. Henriot, *opting for the poor: The Challenge for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: Center of Concern, 2004), 43.

⁷ Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 113-115.

“dimensions” of poor people express varying degrees of agency on the part of the poor. The “*materially*” or economically poor are “those for whom staying alive is their primary task;” the threat of death from lack of basic necessities looms large in their everyday life. The “*dialectically* poor” are those who would not be poor except for the oppressive actions of others who deprive them of work or its benefits. The dialectically poor are rendered invisible, powerless social outcasts by those who assume power by taking what is not theirs. The third category identifies the “*consciously* poor” who have come to realize that, contrary to what they may have been led to believe, their material poverty is not “natural and inevitable.” The “*liberatively* poor” are those consciously poor who, recognizing their own abilities, organize and take action to effect change on behalf of the poor. Finally, there are the “*spiritually* poor,” who are not necessarily poor economically, but are grateful for the material goods and agency they possess. The spiritually poor remain open to God and to God’s will as they take the side of the poor with no regard for what it may cost them. In short, they incorporate the beatitudes into their daily reality and “are the poor with spirit.”⁸

From the foregoing we see the difficulty of neatly defining poverty and clearly identifying who are the poor. Myers notes “that poverty is a complicated social issue involving all areas of life—physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual.”⁹ Further, what we are able to recognize as poverty is conditioned by “our world view, education, and training.”¹⁰ Sobrino argues, however, that the term “poverty,” despite the lack of precision regarding its meaning, “is irreplaceable as an expression of the denial and oppression of humanness, an

⁸ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 58-59.

⁹ Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 132.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

expression of the need, the contempt, the voicelessness, and anonymity that millions of human beings have suffered.”¹¹

Becoming a church of the poor requires remaining open to recognizing poverty in its varied and changing forms and acknowledging the poor as people with God-given dignity, rather than as nameless abstractions.¹²

The Mystery of the Poor

The starting point for becoming a Church of the poor is our faith in Jesus who identified with the poor throughout his life, in his crucifixion and death, and in his being raised from death.

Spanish theologian Antonio González notes that Matthew’s account of the gospel, especially with regard to the final judgment, teaches that the Kingdom of God “is not exercised principally in the clouds or in souls,” but is active in history, in the lives of actual people who are rescued from evil and its effects.¹³ Jesus made the Kingdom of God manifest as he healed the sick raised the dead to life, defended women, came to the aid of widows, and showed special care for children. God, in Christ, took upon Godself “the fate of all the victims of history,” suffering on the cross the consequences of sinful offenses against the poor and marginalized, including that of apparent abandonment by God.¹⁴ God, while remaining God, “[experienced] abandonment by God” without “a rupture in the divinity” of the triune God.¹⁵ González explains:

God is not only the Son who assumes the fate of all the victims of history and the punishments presumably destined for sinners. On the cross God continues to be the good

¹¹ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 24.

¹² Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 106.

¹³ Antonio González, *The Gospel of Faith and Justice*, trans. Joseph Owens (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153, 154.

Father who makes the sun to shine on the just and on sinners. Only in this way can God justify all the victims while at the same time making possible a historical way toward reconciliation.¹⁶

On the cross, God remains united in Godself while also remaining fully united to humanity through Jesus who, as victim of humanity's injustice and powerless to overcome evil, surrenders to death. Because Jesus was "completely faithful within history," God raised Jesus from death.¹⁷ In his resurrection, what Jon Sobrino terms "the supreme symbol of victory over death and over the wretchedness of history,"¹⁸ Jesus is brought to fullness of human life. God's resurrection of Jesus overcomes the ultimate loss: abandonment by God on the cross.¹⁹ The Jesus event makes fulfillment of human life possible for all of humanity and makes the proclamation of this reality the task of the Church, which must remember that the "risen Lord is the crucified Jesus."²⁰

The resurrection of Jesus "launches a movement" committed to conquering suffering and death in the world—a movement that is faithful to God and to God's reign.²¹ It is this "movement" that constitutes the mission of the Church of the poor. For the Church to be faithful to God and to God's reign means that the Church proclaims the Kingdom of God, not only in word, but also in deed. While a personal relationship with a loving God is essential to Christian life, that same God reigning within us compels us to make "the life of society ... a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity" (EG, 180).

¹⁶ Ibid., 154.

¹⁷ Sobrino, *The True Church*, 88.

¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹ Ibid., 89.

²⁰ Ibid., 87-89.

²¹ Ibid., 87.

The Church does not exist solely for the personal benefit of its members, but is commissioned to act in the world to uphold the dignity of all of humanity, especially the poor and others whose worth is unrecognized or ignored. The foundation of the Church's commitment to the poor and to their cause is our belief in Jesus, the God-man who became poor (EG, 186). This constitutes the mystery of the poor: that the Spirit of Jesus, by placing the poor and their concerns at the center of the Church's life, "recreates" the Church.²² Dorothy Day, who spent decades living among the urban poor in America and working on their behalf, summarizes the mystery of the poor in terms of love:

That they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for Him. It is the only way we have of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.²³

A "recreated" church of Boston would be enabled to set its priorities for the future in a way that best manifests love for the poor and to discover anew its mission in service to the Kingdom of God.

In the next section, I discuss one aspect of love of the poor, the option for the poor.

Option for the Poor

The Spirit of Jesus animates a "recreated" Church to exercise the option for the poor, committing itself to what God accomplished in Jesus who became poor, sided with the poor, endured their suffering, and was resurrected by God. Filipino Bishop Julio Labayen offers his practical view of what it means to have an option for the poor:

²² Ibid., 93.

²³ Dorothy Day, "The Mystery of the Poor," *The Catholic Worker*, April 1964. <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/articles/189.pdf> (accessed October 13, 2015).

It means to look at the world—its reality and history—through the eyes of the poor. And specially the poor who have come to open their eyes to their human dignity and destiny, and are prepared to do something about these matters if they have not yet taken destiny into their hands.”²⁴

The Church has an option for the poor because “God—and his Christ—have already opted” for the poor and we are “[following] God’s lead.”²⁵ Option for the poor is an “ideal” that Donal Dorr contends “carries the same kind of moral weight” as the beatitudes and it is a “serious moral invitation” that no Christian may lightly ignore.²⁶

The poor have agency, not only on their own behalf, as Labayan’s definition suggests, but are also “privileged instruments of God’s providence,”²⁷ bringing God’s grace and humanizing values so that a society of self-centered individuals can be transformed into a community in solidarity.²⁸ Option for the poor, then, “is not just a matter of *giving to* them, but of *receiving from* them.”²⁹ A challenge for the nonpoor in living the option for the poor is believing that God can come to us in the poor.³⁰ This is not to say that the poor are better or holier people than the nonpoor, as “there is sin and ignorance among the poor as well,” but that the struggle for justice and human dignity is intensified among those who more keenly experience their lack.³¹

²⁴ Julio X. Labayan, *to be the church of the poor*, ed. Denis Murphy (Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia,, 1986), 31-32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30, 31.

²⁶ Donal Dorr, *Mission in Today’s World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁸ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 53.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (emphasis in the original).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

³¹ Labayan, *to be the church of the poor*, 32.

Peter Henriot cautions against what he terms a “reductionist” approach to exercising the option for the poor, narrowing the option to mean only full-time work in direct contact with the poor. This limited approach makes the option “the exclusive virtue of a privileged few rather than the demanding vocation of all.”³² Henriot proposes that the option for the poor can be applied in a variety of ways, each appropriate to the abilities and life circumstances of the individuals and communities exercising the option.

Henriot argues that the option may be practiced negatively or positively. The “negative” option for the poor simply means taking no action that could cause harm to the poor.³³ This variation of the option may include refusing to buy certain products or to patronize particular businesses where unfair labor practices are followed.³⁴

The “positive dimension” of the option for the poor has “affective” and “effective” components. The “positive *affective* aspect” of the option for the poor involves letting the stories of the poor emotionally touch us and bringing the poor into our prayer.³⁵ The “effective” aspect of the option for the poor can be carried out “directly” by people who work in immediate contact with the poor in settings such as schools, prisons, or healthcare facilities, or “indirectly” by people engaged in advocacy, research, and education who work for “the transformation of society so that the poor are not suffering.”³⁶ Henriot strongly advocates for the indirect effective option for the poor as a “valid and authentic exercise,”³⁷ arguing that it challenges people to

³² Henriot, *opting for the poor*, 37.

³³ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39 (emphasis in the original).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

offer more than charity, but to also work for the transformation of society. The indirect effective option includes people as participants in the option for the poor whether or not they have direct contact with the poor.

Despite how the term may sound to American ears that are bombarded by paeans to choice, the option for the poor is not optional for the Christian. Exercising the option for the poor means, in part, that we have the poor in mind, or, more importantly, in our hearts, and consider the impact on the poor whenever we deliberate a course of action, such as with regard to what we eat or wear, what kind of car we drive, or which public policies or business practices we endorse. As a church community opting for the poor, we keep the poor in our prayer, provide for their spiritual and physical needs, and include them in the pastoral planning process. Exercising the option for the poor as part of the New Evangelization includes ensuring that the poor and homeless feel comfortable in our places of worship and are welcome at parish activities lest they suffer what Pope Francis calls “the worst discrimination ... lack of spiritual care” (EG, 200). A broad understanding of the option for the poor and the variety of ways that it can be exercised affords individual Christians and Church communities many opportunities to be in relationship with the poor.

In the next section, I will look at how a Church of the poor is distinguished from other altruistic organizations that do good things for the poor and take up their cause.

A Church of the Poor

Many people of good will, Christian and non-Christian alike, show concern and exercise care for the poor. Indeed, Antonio González observes that humanist ideals related to solidarity that lead people to perform charitable works and engage in political activity on behalf of those in

need “are integrated into the Christian message.”³⁸ The distinction between a lived Christian faith and humanism, González argues, is the radical nature of the gospel which challenges people to go beyond good ethical behavior when relating to the poor. The Christian is called to surrender possessions, become poor, and then live a humble life as part of a community.³⁹ With the adoption of such a gospel-inspired way of life, a transformation of the world becomes possible—a transformation that does not rely on wealth or power.⁴⁰ Lacking the requirement for such a radical way of life within a community where all are equally respected, humanism can still operate under the rubric of wealth and power and runs the risk of “[reproducing] the evils that it criticizes.”⁴¹

Similarly, Christianity loses credibility unless it actually has communities “in which poverty and domination are in fact being overcome.”⁴² Being a Church of the poor involves standing for and with the poor “experiencing some of their vulnerability, and their sense of being powerless and on the margins.”⁴³ Because we do not easily embrace vulnerability and powerlessness, we hamper our efforts to become a Church of the poor. Roberto Goizueta argues that our reluctance to engage with those who are weak and vulnerable is rooted in our fear of our own fragility—a fragility and insecurity that is the lot of all of humanity.⁴⁴ As a result of our fear, we try to immunize ourselves against the insecurities of life by shunning those who are

³⁸ González, *The Gospel of Faith and Justice*, 67.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 68.

⁴² Ibid., 68-69.

⁴³ Donal Dorr, *Time for a Change: A Fresh Look at Spirituality, Sexuality, Globalisation and the Church* (Blackrock, Co Dublin: The Columba Press, 2004), 19.

⁴⁴ Roberto Goizueta, “To the Poor, the Sick, and the Suffering,” in *Vatican II: A Universal Call to Holiness*, ed. Anthony Ciorra and Michael Higgins (Mahwah: Paulist, 2012), 71.

weak and powerless and, in so doing, we fail to come near to heal their wounds.⁴⁵ Goizueta strongly contends that such avoidance is akin to ignoring the wounds of the crucified and resurrected Christ and “is *the* mortal sin ... for it leads inevitably to the death of others and, indeed, to our own death.”⁴⁶ For those who are “Boston Strong” to become a Church of the poor, it is necessary to face squarely the vulnerability we share with all people that puts us at the mercy of a loving God.⁴⁷

Jon Sobrino goes further to distinguish a Church of the poor from a Church for the poor with regard to where we locate the poor. A Church for the poor is based partly on ethical considerations regarding what must be done for the poor who are somehow considered to be independent of the Church. A Church of the poor, by contrast, is not defined only by what it does for the poor, but by what it is because of the poor.⁴⁸ Theologically, Sobrino places the poor at the very center of the Church with the Spirit of Jesus who is present in the poor and acts through them to transform the Church.⁴⁹ Pope Francis, too, moves the poor from the margins of the Church to “the center of the Church’s pilgrim way” and sees the new evangelization as an opportunity to recognize God’s saving work in the poor (EG, 198).

One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

Sobrino uses the four marks of the Church, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, to “judge” the Church of the poor in order to ascertain that it is, indeed, a true Church, if not the true

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁷ See Ibid., 78.

⁴⁸ Sobrino, *The True Church*, 92.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 93

Church.⁵⁰ The Church of the poor, in turn, will support the validity of the four marks. Sobrino insists that the poor of Matthew 25 be taken into consideration as “proofs of Christ’s presence in the Church.”⁵¹

The Church is one because of its origin in the one Lord, the crucified Jesus who is raised from death, the one God, the Father who remains creatively active in human history, and the one Spirit who continuously renews humanity.⁵² According to Sobrino, this unity is not fully realized unless the poor, whose faith and love are manifest in the sharing of each other’s burdens, are welcomed in the Church as active agents who share in all aspects of the Church’s life—its theology, as well as its struggles.⁵³

The Church of the poor finds holiness in God who affirms what belongs to “the world of love and grace” and condemns “the world of sin.”⁵⁴ The poor teach the Church that love means restoring to dignity those who have been “dehumanized” and that “sin is what kills human beings.”⁵⁵ The Church becomes holy when it follows Jesus, the faithful Servant of the Lord, by siding with the suffering people of the world and “[trying] to transform this suffering into resurrection.”⁵⁶ For Sobrino, all other paths to holiness, including the sacraments, “find their importance” in light of the path trod with the world’s poor and suffering.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 100-102.

⁵³ Ibid., 102-103.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 107, 108.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 109, 110.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 110.

The catholicity of the Church concerns the relationship of the local Church to the universal Church and to the world.⁵⁸ Because most of humankind is poor, Sobrino argues, the Church of the poor is more truly a sacrament of the unity of God with human beings, and of the unity of human beings among themselves, “than other forms of Churchly existence are.”⁵⁹ Although there are local differences in the way service to the poor is rendered around the world, “when this service is given there is catholicity” that “takes the form of mutual help, mutual inspiration, mutual enrichment.”⁶⁰ Catholicity is then understood as “mutual responsibility within the Church” as each local Church “gives what it has to offer to the building of the universal Church.”⁶¹

The Church of the poor is apostolic in its continuation of the mission that Jesus gave to the apostles to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God.⁶² The presence of the poor, “the oppressed majorities,” reminds the Church that the Kingdom of God is not yet realized.⁶³ The Church’s mission to proclaim the Kingdom is twofold: the Church is to proclaim the Good News and “to unmask what passes itself off as good news but is in fact a set of sinful structures.”⁶⁴ The Church’s mission to proclaim the Word is complemented by “the concrete application of the message proclaimed” so that “the Good News become[s] a Good Reality.”⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 114.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 114, 115.

⁶¹ Ibid., 115.

⁶² Ibid., 116.

⁶³ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 120.

Having shown that the traditional marks of the Church, when considered from the side of the poor, “verify” the Church of the poor, Sobrino takes pains to make clear that the Church of the poor is not a separate Church, nor it is a Church without any weaknesses.⁶⁶ Because it places crucified people at its center and does not approximate a world power, “the Church of the poor is in its structure the true way of being a Church in Jesus” and is “most like the Church that is a continuation of Jesus.”⁶⁷

Solidarity

The virtue of solidarity, which the bishops of the United States have termed “the most challenging virtue of our time,”⁶⁸ figures prominently when considering the Church’s relationship with the poor. Pope Francis sees solidarity in terms of the proper distribution of goods and the transformation of structures to make them more just. But such activity is not possible without “the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (EG, 188). The United States bishops claim that “in the Christian life, no distinction can be made between the giver and the receiver.”⁶⁹ But solidarity that is called for by the poor is practiced “in a world of unequals.”⁷⁰ Sobrino considers the distinction between the poor and nonpoor critical to preserving the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 122-124.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God’s Children* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002), 23.

⁶⁹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1999), 16.

⁷⁰ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 64.

uniqueness of solidarity “in the sense of unequals bearing one another mutually.”⁷¹ One-sided giving could lead to “imposition and domination” on the part of the giver.⁷² Poor people and nonpoor people in solidarity mutually give and receive, offering “the best that they have, in order to arrive at being ‘with one another.’”⁷³

Among the “best” that nonpoor people have to give are material goods needed to sustain life and the means for attaining these goods through education, training, and employment. For the nonpoor, “solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them,” and accomplishing this through structural transformation that results in a more fair and equal distribution of goods (EG, 189). The nonpoor are frequently in a position to advocate for the poor, to “speak what the people would say if they had the freedom to say it.”⁷⁴ This presupposes that the nonpoor have first listened to the poor. Finally, the nonpoor have the option to “be poor” by adopting a simple lifestyle or living among the poor so as to better “be *with* the people” who are poor.⁷⁵

The “best” that the poor have to give concerns the well-being of the Church itself. We often think of the poor as objects of the Church’s mission activity and forget that they, too, are part of the Church’s *communio* and, as such, have the same obligation to evangelize. Pope Francis reminds us that the poor share in the Church’s *sensus fidei* and can teach the Church what they have come to know about “the suffering Christ” through their own hardships (EG, 198). Indeed, Sobrino argues that the poor “offer the Church the place for *finding* [God]:” in

⁷¹ Ibid., 63-64.

⁷² Ibid., 63.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Labayan, *to be the church of the poor*, 41.

⁷⁵ Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

Jesus who undergoes suffering and death as the result of sin; in the Father who resurrects Jesus, saving him from sin and death, and in the Spirit who, through the poor, shows the Church its mission.⁷⁶ The suffering of the poor is a sign that God's Kingdom is not yet fulfilled. The presence of the poor reminds the Church of its obligation to proclaim the Good News in the face of opposition to the Kingdom of God.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The purpose of the New Evangelization is to reacquaint people with the Good News of the Kingdom of God and to help them enter into deeper relationship with Jesus who brings them into closer communion with the Father and their Spirit. Scripture teaches that Jesus is present in the least, the poor who are hungry, thirsty, unclothed, sick, imprisoned, or strangers.⁷⁸ One can, therefore, encounter Jesus through relationship with the poor and in service to them.

In North America, the poor are often hidden and suffer injustices because of the impersonal nature of complex social, economic, and political structures.⁷⁹ But the poor living in abject poverty in other parts of the world, many of whom grow our food or manufacture our clothing, also command our attention. As I noted in chapter 2, Catholics, in general, are convinced that the Church should care for the poor, but are ambivalent concerning their personal role in that effort.

⁷⁶ Sobrino, *The True Church*, 93, 88, 95 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷⁸ Mt. 25:31-46.

⁷⁹ Labayan, *to be the church of the poor*, 98.

The Catholic bishops of the United States lament that the Church's social justice teachings are not well known and that "social ministry remains the task for too few."⁸⁰ The bishops call for more action on behalf of the poor, but also for an increase in consciousness regarding the poor in the United States and around the world.⁸¹ Among avenues for the Church's mission to the poor, the bishops suggest prayer, teaching, charitable outreach, advocacy, and legislative action. The Church's mission to the poor is directed to itself as well, as parishioners mature in solidarity, growing in relationship to the poor who are Jesus in our midst.

Charitable giving is a common response to the needs of the poor. Sharing the fruit of their own labor, donors develop relationships with organizations assisting the poor and become aligned with their cause. The organizations, for their part, introduce donors to the poor by sharing the stories of the poor through various media such as printed materials, videos, and internet sites. Hearing from the poor themselves regarding their struggles can lead to action to correct harmful structures or even to work that is in direct contact with the poor.

The bishops urged parishes and various Church-sponsored agencies to "develop links" with each other "in order to enhance service and advocacy at the parish, diocesan, national, and international levels."⁸² These "links" could help ensure that organizations, such as Catholic Charities or Catholic Relief Services, have significance for parishioners beyond a second collection that receives only perfunctory notice in the parish announcements or bulletin. Commitment on the part of pastors and parish leaders to make better use of existing resources,

⁸⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *In All Things Charity*, 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

such as Catholic Relief Services' CRS Rice Bowl for Lent, can help families, school groups, and small faith communities in the parish grow in their relationship with the poor.

Justice educator Suzanne Toton points to another challenge to the development of solidarity with the poor—the decreasing number of parishes located in inner cities and rural areas and available to serve the poor. The result is that “churches are far removed from the poor and not in any sustained relationship with them.”⁸³ As the Church of Boston forms collaboratives among parishes to conserve resources, the effect on the poor must be considered when decisions are made regarding locations for liturgical celebrations, religious education, parish gatherings, and residences for clergy. Toton argues that the “church’s separation from the poor” discredits the Church’s teaching as it would be difficult for the Church to “understand what good news to the poor is when its knowledge of the poor is so limited.”⁸⁴ Cardinal Seán’s living in the cathedral rectory in the inner city, instead of the mansion traditionally reserved for the archbishop of Boston, is a prophetic action symbolizing the Church’s commitment to the poor and the humility necessary to be in solidarity with the poor.

Without engaging the poor and their struggles, the Church’s efforts at evangelization risk failure. As Leonardo Boff puts it, evangelization that ignores the poor “loses its Christian density.”⁸⁵ Boff continues:

The poor, as poor, whether or not they are good, are the object of the Father’s love and Jesus’ option. . . . It is in the poor that we perceive the nature of God: not a Being detached from our miseries, but a God who hears the cry of the oppressed, a God who acts in history, constructing the reign for men and women in freedom. No approach to evangelization may leave this perspective out of account, under pain of actually losing

⁸³ Suzanne C. Toton, *Justice Education: From Service to Solidarity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006), 59.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelization: Good News to the Poor*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 78.

God and the lord Jesus who appeared in the form of a suffering servant among the poor.”⁸⁶

Herein is the most challenging aspect of becoming a church of the poor—“accepting and maintaining the understanding that a mystery is made present in the poor.”⁸⁷ Sobrino maintains that failure to see the mystery of the poor as an element of faith places the option for the poor “always in danger of being watered down and manipulated.”⁸⁸ Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus whose eyes were opened after they had failed to recognize Jesus because they were hoping for someone other than a suffering servant,⁸⁹ the Church needs to become open to the many ways that God shares God’s love with us. Evangelization that prayerfully attends to the poor and their suffering will be a “new apologetics,” indeed.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Sobrino, *No Salvation*, 20.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lk 24:13-35.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION: HOPE AS CHALLENGE AND OBLIGATION

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Pope Paul VI stressed the importance of using the “most suitable and effective” methods for communicating the gospel to people in the concrete circumstances of their lives (EN, 40). Among methods of evangelization he gave pride of place to “the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one’s neighbor with limitless zeal” (EN, 41). In this paper, I have shown how several key elements of the new evangelization can contribute to these two aspects of Christian life. A focus on conversion and reconciliation can serve to heal and strengthen the bonds of communion within the Church as it responds to God’s call to live in the love of the divine *communio*. Accepting the challenge of becoming a Church of the poor brings the Church into closer relationship with the poor and with Jesus who is present in the suffering poor.

At the heart of the content of the new evangelization is the love that God has for all of humanity—a love that God invites everyone to share for eternity in the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom or Reign of God, all of humanity, indeed, all of creation, finds fulfillment in the love of God. Signs of the Kingdom include loving communion among God’s people, reconciliation among people and nations, and justice for the poor and oppressed. The absence of these signs indicates that the Kingdom is not yet fully realized.

The Church's mission is to be a sacrament of the hope to which we are called—eternal, loving communion with the Father, the Son, and their Spirit. But, as Richard Lennan observes, “in every age of the Church's life, the call to embody hope has been addressed to a flawed people.”¹ Indeed, “the witness of an authentically Christian life” is often found lacking in the Church. Looming large in the consciousness of many who live in the world of Western Christianity (Christian and non-Christian alike) today is the specter of the counter-witness presented by the scandal of the sexual abuse of minors by priests—a scandal made worse by the behavior of bishops who enabled continued immoral and criminal behavior through cover-up and the attempted preservation of an image of the Church as incapable of sin.

Through the scandal, the Church itself has demonstrated in dramatic fashion that the Kingdom of God is “not yet” here. As individual Christians and as a community, the Church makes its way amid the suffering and injustice of the world, frequently succumbing to temptations that make it a partner to evil. But the mission of the Church is to cooperate with the Spirit in bringing the Kingdom of God to fruition. The “state of being on the way” to the fulfillment of the Kingdom and of human life, while in the midst of its non-fulfillment, is what Josef Pieper terms, “the inherent ‘not yet’ of the finite being.”² Nevertheless, the “*status viatoris*” is fundamentally oriented toward the realization of the Kingdom—toward eternal life with God.³ The God-given virtue that helps us to maintain this direction toward God, hope, is a

¹ Richard Lennan, “The Church as a Sacrament of Hope,” *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 248.

² Josef Pieper, *On Hope*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 12-13.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

“steadfast turning” to God and to God’s promise to humanity.⁴ Hope, then is “the proper virtue of the ‘not yet.’”⁵

Jürgen Moltmann reminds us that Christian hope, unlike optimism, does not close its eyes to suffering, but faces it while persevering toward a better future.⁶ The experiences gained from living through events, such as the sexual abuse crisis, the Boston Marathon bombings, or more personal tragedies, teach us that we can recover from sorrow and disappointment. We do not ever return to where we were before the unsettling event, but arrive at something new—a future in which our hope has “become wise”⁷

Christian hope is absolute trust in God who raised Jesus from death and who is, as Karl Rahner describes, “absolutely and eternally uncontrollable and incalculable” by us human beings.⁸ Rahner calls Jesus’ death on the cross in which he surrendered completely to the will of the Father—surrendered to the future of God—“the most radical act of hope.”⁹ As disciples of Jesus, Christians who remain “on the way” are “[commanded]” to have this kind of hope—the courage to be completely vulnerable before God—that moves one forward from a sure, safe, but unfulfilled, present toward whatever God holds in store for us in the Kingdom of God.¹⁰

To have Christian hope does not mean that we sit back and passively await the Kingdom. Rahner argues that to hope as a Christian means having “a continually revolutionary attitude”

⁴ Ibid., 26

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 14.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Hope*, vol. 10 of *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), 259.

⁹ Ibid., 255.

¹⁰ Ibid., 257, 259.

that brings us toward the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God through our engagement in the affairs of the world.¹¹ Christians who hope do not accept the *status quo* in the Church or in the wider society, but work toward the transformation of the Church and society so that the Kingdom of God can be made present in them. The work of transformation, of recreating the Church and societal structures, is ongoing until the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

The task of the New Evangelization is to remind people of the hope to which we are called and to recommit us to the Good News of God's love for all creation—the love ultimately expressed by Jesus on the cross—so that, as disciples of Jesus, we are inspired anew to be ambassadors of God's love in the world.

In this thesis I have argued for several principle themes of the New Evangelization to be emphasized by the Archdiocese of Boston at this stage of our history.

The need for continued healing from the sex abuse crisis and the creation of new bonds of communion as new faith communities are formed during the archdiocese's pastoral planning process call for a New Evangelization that focuses on conversion and reconciliation.

Many parishioners already demonstrate care and concern for the poor and suffering and are engaged in charitable works. A New Evangelization that brings the church of Boston closer to becoming a Church of the poor enriches those efforts on behalf of the poor, reinvigorates the faith, and gains credibility for the Church as it proclaims God's Good News.

¹¹ Ibid., 257.

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