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THE SEMANTIC METAMORPHOSIS OF "EVANGELIZATION"

Formulating a Definition of Evangelization Based on Action, Content, and Result

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From Mission to New Evangelization: A Historical Overview

As may be observed in both the Old and New Testaments, the term "evangelization" has Biblical roots. J. Kroeger states that

> etymologically, the English term "evangelization" is traced to the concept of the Gospel, translated back to its form in Latin (evangelium) or Greek (εὐαγγέλιον), reduced to its root "evangel," augmented by the suffixes "-ize" (connoting action or causality) and "-ation" (signifying a process). The result is the long word "evangelization" which means the process of making the Gospel known.[1]

The Catholic Church has practiced this Biblical notion of evangelization (albeit employing other terminology) throughout its lengthy history. A. Dulles, in his concise tracing of Catholic evangelization, points out the following historical markers:

[1]J. Kroeger, *Human Promotion as an Integral Dimension of the Church's Mission of Evangelization: A Philippine Experience and Perspective since Vatican II—1965–1984* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1985), 14.

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1) the occurrence of the verb "evangelize" (εὐαγγελίζω), which means to proclaim good news, in the Septuagint, particularly in the historical books, Psalms, and Deutero-Isaiah;

2) its frequent appearance in the New Testament, particularly in Luke, Acts, and the Pauline writings;

3) the systematic involvement of the Catholic Church in evangelization throughout its existence, from the early stages of the Christian Church to the early Middle Ages, when monks evangelized most of Europe, and the discovery of the New World in the 15th century, which spread the faith to the Americas, Africa, and Asia;

4) the crisis of evangelization that happened during the Counter-Reformation, when Catholic teaching leaned toward ecclesiastical and domestic concerns while Protestants focused on evangelical activity;

5) the Church's increasing preoccupation, through time, with pastoral care and the defense of doctrines while Catholic missionary activity continued minimally within some orders and societies; and

6) the eventual reentry of evangelization terminology into Catholic thought by the middle of the twentieth century, from religious educators who promoted kerygmatic theology to John XXIII's evangelistic initiatives toward the Second Vatican Council.[2]

As for exactly when the term "evangelization" began to circulate, a variety of theories exist. The Oxford English Dictionary traces the use of the word "evangelize" to as early as 1382 CE in John Wycliffe's translation of Isaiah 40:9.[3] R. Fisichella posits the probability that

[2]A. Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 1–5.

[3]"Thou that euangelisist to Sion" (Isa. 40:9). See s.v. "evangelize," in J. Murray, H. Bradley, W. Craigie, & C. Onions, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* Vol. 3

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it was Erasmus of Rotterdam who first used the word in Catholic terminology—also in the late fourteenth century—albeit as a derogatory term associated with "Lutheran fanaticism."[4] The negative association of the verb "to evangelize," which was deemed "too" Protestant, eventually led to its cessation from Catholic usage from the time of the Council of Trent. The word "mission" was considered the more appropriate one for Catholic terminology,[5] with other preferred terms being "missionary activity, the propagation of the faith, and the planting or extension of the Church."[6]

J. Gorski surmises, however, that the noun "evangelization" was actually coined during the 18th century when Protestants began to rediscover the value of missionary activity.[7] Even as the Catholic Church tended to its wounds from the Reformation and shifted its focus to fixing its own backyard, Protestant churches did not send missionaries to the New World for up to two centuries after the deaths of Luther and Calvin for a variety of reasons.[8] The first organized

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). The term can also be traced to the late fourteenth century, directly from the ecclesiastical Latin *evangelizare* and from the Old French *evangeliser*, meaning "to spread or preach the Gospel."

[4]R. Fisichella, *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2012), 17–18.

[5]Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, 18.

[6]A. Dulles, *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988–2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 87.

[7]J. Gorski, *From "Mission" to "New Evangelization": The Origins of a Challenging Concept* (New York: Maryknoll Missionary Vocations, 2015). See also J. Gorski, "From 'Mission' to 'Evangelization': The Latin American Origins of a Challenging Concept," in P. Grogan & K. Kim, eds., *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context and Practice* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 31–44.

[8]Catholic missions dominated from 1500 to 1700 CE such that they "won more converts in the pagan world than [they] lost to Protestantism in Europe." Among the reasons for the dearth of Protestant missions were: 1) the theology taught by the reformers, namely, that the Great Commission was pertinent only to the ancient Apostles and that predestination assured the conversion of the heathen

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Protestant missionary projects began in the early eighteenth century, attributed mainly to the Danish-Alle and Moravian missions. This rediscovery of mission, coupled with the Evangelical Awakening under John Wesley and George Whitefield (also in the eighteenth century), eventually snowballed into zealous efforts for both theological and actual missionary activity on a global scale.[9] It is in this context that the modern term "evangelization" was developed.[10]

The mainstream use of evangelization terminology in Catholic circles was eventually observed during Vatican II and the 1974 Synod of Bishops. This does not mean, however, that the concept of evangelization was new to the Church; rather, it was more of a transition from the traditional terminology of mission to the language of evangelization. As Kroeger stresses, "the *idea* is not new to the Catholic Church, but the wide use of the *term* is of recent years."[11] Nevertheless,

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even without human intervention; 2) the small membership within Protestant churches because of the war against Rome and the Counter-Reformation; 3) the isolation of Protestant Europe from the lands of the New World; and 4) the absence of religious orders, which were vital for the early world missions, from the Protestant churches. See J. Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), 73–75.

[9]Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission*, 75–82. This is a very general description of the Protestant development of missions particularly because a synthesis of overall Protestant missionary thought is difficult, due mainly to numerous de-centralized Protestant activities and the independence of established Protestant churches. See J. Comby, *How to Understand the History of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 139–140.

[10]A. Dulles also notes the contribution of Protestant theologians, particularly K. Barth, to this development. See Dulles, *Church and Society*, 88.

[11]Kroeger emphasizes the Biblical roots of the term "evangelization" and that its foundational essence has always been in Catholic thinking:

> The Gospel is centered on the person of Jesus Christ; evangelization is the revealing and unfolding of the mystery of Christ; it proclaims and manifests the richness of the love of the Lord. Thus, evangelization as the proclamation of the good news of Jesus is a foundational concept

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the use of such terminology in Vatican II marked a profound shift in the Catholic Church's missionary focus. In the documents of Vatican I (1869–1870), the words "evangelize" or "evangelization" were absent and the term "gospel" was employed only once. In Vatican II almost a century afterwards (1962–1965), the word "gospel" was used 157 times, the verb "evangelize" 18 times, and the noun "evangelization" 31 times.[12] Evangelization terminology suddenly became part of the Catholic mainstream seemingly out of nowhere, especially given that it used to be considered the exclusive domain of Protestants.[13]

True to form, the Catholic Church used its intellectual and theological resources to develop the notion of evangelization even further. From John XXIII's simple hope in 1961 to "bring the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel"[14] to Paul VI's revolutionary thrust toward "a new period of evangelization"[15] in 1975, the term "evangelization" became both buzzword and battle cry of the Church as it approached the new millennium. Indeed, a flurry of Church documents dealing with evangelization—from papal pronouncements to statements by continental synods—was produced in the decades following Vatican II.

> of the Christian faith; yet, its specific terminological usage in Catholic circles was only recently popularized by Vatican II and the 1974 Synod of Bishops. (Kroeger, *Human Promotion as an Integral Dimension of the Church's Mission of Evangelization*, 15)

[12]"The Task of the Latin American Bishop" (taken from John Paul II's address to the Episcopal Conference of Latin America [CELAM] on March 9, 1983), in R. Martin & P. Williamson, eds., *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 26.

[13]Dulles states that for a majority of Catholics, "the very term has for them a Protestant ring" (Dulles, *Church and Society*, 87).

[14]John XXIII, *Humanae Salutis*, in W. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), 703.

[15]Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [Evangelization in the Modern World] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), no. 2. Hereafter referred to as EN.

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John Paul II eventually introduced another term in 1979—"new evangelization."[16] He emphasized that while the content of evangelization remained the same, this renewed impetus in the spreading of the Gospel was a "new proclamation" directed specifically toward "the new millennium, in these new times, these new conditions of life."[17] It was to be a renewal of evangelization characterized by newness in "its ardor, its methods, and its expressions."[18]

In his detailed tracing of the development of the concept of the new evangelization—from John Paul II's first use of the term to subsequent discussions of it in various Church Synods—S. Canilang ultimately distills the modern Church's evangelizing mission into three distinct yet interdependent areas: 1) *missio ad gentes*, 2) pastoral work, and 3) new evangelization. *Missio ad gentes* covers all evangelizing activity intended for peoples, cultures, and contexts that know neither Christ nor the Gospel as well as areas with a glaring lack of Christian communities. Pastoral work, on the other hand, is directed toward thriving Christian communities that are marked as having adequate ecclesial structures, a vibrant communal life of faith, and commitment to the universal mission. Lastly, new evangelization is oriented toward areas where the Christian faith had previously taken root and yet where people 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."[19]

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[16]John Paul II popularized the term "new evangelization" and brought it to mainstream awareness, although he was influenced by Monsignor Luigi Giussani, founder of *Comunione e Liberazione*, who stressed the need of Western culture for a "new evangelization" or a new determination to preach Christ to the world. See R. Barron & J. Allen, Jr., *To Light a Fire on the Earth* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017), 115–116.

[17]John Paul II, "The Cross of Nowa Huta: A New Seed of Evangelization," *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition (July 16, 1979): 11.

[18]"The Task of the Latin American Bishop," 28.

[19]S. Canilang, *The New Evangelization: The Development of the Concept and Its Comprehensive Meaning* (Quezon City: ICLA Publications, 2013), 81.

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It can be observed at this point that the semantic metamorphosis from "mission" to "evangelization" to "new evangelization" was not due simply to changes in Catholic jargon; indeed, such language shifts signaled profound changes in missionary focus. For Dulles, "all of this constitutes a remarkable shift in the Catholic tradition," one which he calls a significant "evangelical turn."[20] The thrust of Catholic missionary efforts in the Middle Ages, focused as these were on converting nonbelievers and bringing them into the confines of the hierarchical Church, was not evangelical. By the time of Vatican II, however, evangelization itself became the thrust, incorporated within the institutional, sacramental, and social dimensions of the Church. It was directed by John Paul II's call for a "new evangelization," toward "a new quality of evangelization and methods attuned to the sensibility of our times."[21]

R. Cantalamessa, in mapping out the movement of the Church toward the modern notion of the new evangelization, incisively identifies four "great waves of evangelization" in Church history. The identification of these waves clearly shows the various contexts in which mission and evangelization flourished, and Cantalamessa uses them as a springboard for discussing mistakes to avoid and examples to imitate in the contemporary pursuit of a new evangelization. These periods of increased or renewed missionary activity are condensed in Table 1.

It may be observed, in summary, that the Church's understanding of evangelization evolved over time due to shifting historical contexts. There was the initial post-Easter proclamation of the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ, which was spread by individual Christians who organized Christian communities throughout the Greco-Roman world. With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the discovery of the New World in later centuries, this initial proclamation became missionary activity in the form of civilizing, educating, and catechizing other peoples and converting them to the Christian faith. Its goal then was propagation, expansion, and instruction. Meantime, in the Old World, missionary activity became "less evangelical and more ecclesiastical" as

[20]Dulles, *Church and Society*, 97.

[21]See a summary of this evangelical turn in Dulles, *Church and Society*, 96–100.

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the Catholic Church, in the face of opposition during the Reformation, "became more preoccupied with the instruction and pastoral care of her own members than with reaching out to new audiences."[22] The faith became "rather static" as Western Europe was divided into Catholic and Protestant states.[23]

Wave	Period	Objective	Protagonists
First	1st to 3rd centuries	conversion of large parts of the Roman empire	bishops; personal initiatives
Second	4th to 9th centuries	conversion and civilizing of the pagan world; re-evangelization of Europe after the barbarian invasions	monks
Third	16th century	conversion of the inhabitants of the New World	friars; religious orders
Fourth	current era	re-evangelization of the secularized, post-Christian Western world	laity

Table 1: Four Waves of Increased Missionary Activity in the Church[24]

By the time of Vatican II, however, evangelization had germinated within Catholic language and marked a return to its Biblical, evangelical, and kerygmatic roots such that it once again focused on the "confident proclamation of the basic message of God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ."[25] A "new evangelization" was then heralded by John Paul II in anticipation of the celebration of five hundred years

[22]Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, 2.

[23]"The Task of the Latin American Bishop," 26.

[24]Summarized from R. Cantalamessa, *Navigating the New Evangelization* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2014), 1–47.

[25]Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, 3.

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since the first evangelization of the Americas as well as of the second millennium since the Incarnation.[26] It called for emulation of the commitment and generosity of the pioneers of evangelization but in new ways, methods, and expressions, and its goal was to reach out not only to formerly Christian areas where large groups of Christians no longer identified themselves as active members of the Church but also to the entire secularized culture the Church finds herself immersed in.[27]

We can thus see the notion of evangelization coming full circle—from the *evangelion* being proclaimed at the beginning of Church history, to missionary activity marked by conversion and expansion, to the notion of evangelization as a return to our kerygmatic and evangelical roots, and now to the new evangelization that seeks to evangelize with new fervor, methods, and expressions.

Key Church Documents on Evangelization

After understanding its provenance and evolution, the next step is to examine key Church documents that deal with the term "evangelization" (see Table 2).

Date	Title	Description	Importance
Nov. 21, 1964	*Lumen Gentium* [Light of the Nations]	Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (promulgated by Paul VI)	defines the nature, mission, and identity of the Catholic Church in relation to the modern setting; calls on the laity to sanctify the world and bring Christianity into their temporal affairs

[26]Dulles, *Church and Society*, 90–96.

[27]Cantalamessa, *Navigating the New Evangelization*, 42. The XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops states that "the new evangelization is primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally Christian countries." See the preface of *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (*Lineamenta*, XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops) (Vatican City: The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011).

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Date	Title	Description	Importance
Nov. 18, 1965	*Apostolicam Actuositatem* [Apostolic Activity]	Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity	recognizes the importance of the laity in the life and mission of the Church; recognizes the diversity of the lay apostolate; identifies fields and forms of the lay apostolate; encourages laypersons in their Christian service
Dec. 7, 1965	*Ad Gentes* [To the Nations]	Vatican II Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church	treatise on matters regarding mission work and activity; stresses the need for dialogue with culture as well as cooperation among various agencies and denominations
Dec. 7, 1965	*Gaudium et Spes* [Joys and Hopes]	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (promulgated by Paul VI)	emphasizes the Church's need to be completely immersed in human affairs; emphasizes the role of the Church within the world rather than being concerned only with spiritual matters
Dec. 7, 1965	*Presbyterorum Ordinis* [Order of Priests]	Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests	defines the roles and duties of priests in the modern world; although concerned mostly with ministerial details regarding the priesthood, it integrates the Eucharist in the work of evangelization and calls on priests to learn the methods of evangelization
Dec. 8, 1975	*Evangelii Nuntiandi* [Evangelization in the Modern World]	Apostolic Exhortation (Paul VI)	deals comprehensively with the subject of Catholic evangelization; stresses the role of every Christian—not just ministers and the religious—in spreading the Good News; highlights important matters concerning evangelization: theological bases, holistic approaches, content, methods, beneficiaries, etc.

Date	Title	Description	Importance
Dec. 30, 1988	*Christifidelis Laici* [The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People]	Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (John Paul II)	points out the gift and responsibility of the laity in the mission of the Church; summarizes Church teaching on lay involvement in human society
Dec. 7, 1990	*Redemptoris Missio* [The Mission of the Redeemer]	Encyclical (John Paul II)	points out the urgency and need for missionary activity; a call to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization
Oct. 11, 1992	*Catechism of the Catholic Church*	Catechism (promulgated by John Paul II in *Fidei Depositum*)	gives a summary of the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church; contains several references to the Church's mission as well as on evangelization and evangelical instinct
1999–2003	*Ecclesia in Africa; Ecclesia in America; Ecclesia in Asia; Ecclesia in Oceania; Ecclesia in Europa*	Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations (John Paul II)	deals with the topic of the new evangelization in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000; addresses the question of evangelization within the contexts and needs of each continent
Jan. 6, 2001	*Novo Millennio Ineunte* [At the Beginning of the New Millennium]	Apostolic Letter (John Paul II)	outlines the priorities of the Church for the third millennium; as the summons for a new evangelization is repeated, it calls for a deepening spirituality based on prayer, contemplation, and holiness
Oct. 16, 2003	*Pastores Gregis* [Shepherds of the Flock]	Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (John Paul II)	outlines the duties of bishops at the beginning of a new millennium; reminds bishops of their primary ministry of evangelization
Dec. 3, 2007	Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization	Doctrinal Note (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)	clarifies the relationship between missionary activity and respect for the religious freedom of all peoples; deals with the anthropological, ecclesiological, and ecumenical implications of evangelization

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Date	Title	Description	Importance
Oct. 11, 2011	*Porta Fidei* [Door of Faith]	Apostolic Letter "Motu Proprio Data" (Benedict XVI)	stresses the importance of the new evangelization during the opening of the Year of Faith; emphasizes the importance and necessity of having a living faith before transmitting it to others
2011–2012	*Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum Laboris* [LIL] (The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith) [NETCF]	Working documents of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops	comprehensive treatise on the new evangelization; calls for engagement with cultural, economic, social, and religious spheres of human activity; deals with the urgent issues of secularization, migration, and globalization
Nov. 24, 2013	*Evangelii Gaudium* [The Joy of the Gospel]	Apostolic Exhortation (Francis)	focuses on the social dimension of evangelization; touches on many areas and contexts that need to be engaged with in the primary mission of evangelization

Table 2: Major Catholic Documents on Evangelization[28]

A review of Vatican II documents reveals several definitions for evangelization. *Lumen Gentium* (LG) states that

> this evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.[29]

[28]The inventory begins with Vatican II documents due to the semantic reason that the word "evangelization" was popularized only during Vatican II and not because the Church was uninvolved in the proclamation of the Good News before then. See EN 2.

[29]Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], in A. Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), no. 35.

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In *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA), the evangelization and sanctification of human persons are treated jointly as the apostolate of the laity. Descriptions include "the penetration and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel," "the formation of a Christian conscience among [the laity] so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life," and "to engage in conversation with others, believers, or non-believers, in order to manifest Christ's message to all peoples."[30] In *Ad Gentes* (AG), the words "mission" and "evangelization" become interchangeable:

> "Missions" is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ.… The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root.[31]

From a simple understanding of evangelization as the spreading of the Gospel,[32] AG expands the term to include the incorporation of believers into the ecclesial life:

> The chief means of the planting referred to is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To preach this Gospel the Lord sent forth His disciples into the whole world, that being reborn by the word of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23), [humankind] might be joined to the Church through baptism—that Church which, as the body of the Word Incarnate, is nourished and lives by the word of God and by the eucharistic bread (cf. Acts 2:43).[33]

It also directs lay people to cooperate with the work of evangelization "as witnesses and at the same time as living instruments" whereby

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[30]Paul VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* [Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity], in Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*, nos. 2, 20, and 31.

[31]*Ad Gentes* [Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church], in Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*, no. 6. Hereafter referred to as AG.

[32]AG 35.

[33]AG 6.

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"they share in [the Church's] saving mission."[34] This cooperation is described, especially in the context of areas already considered to be Christian, in particular activities of evangelization, such as

> by nurturing in themselves and in others a knowledge and love of the missions; by stimulating vocations in their own family, in Catholic associations, and in the schools; [and] by offering subsidies of every kind, that they may offer to others that gift of Faith which they have received gratis.[35]

In *Gaudium et Spes*, where the Church's relationship with the secular world is the main theme, respectful and culturally appropriate evangelization is stressed:

> For, from the beginning of her history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, insofar as such was appropriate. Indeed this accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelization.[36]

In *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO), the sacramental life of the Church is integrated with the notion of evangelization even though most of the document is focused on the life and vocation of the priesthood. In a crescendo of emphasis, PO first points out that all the sacraments, apostolates, and ministries of the Church are "tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it" before stating that "the Eucharist shows itself as the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel."[37] Here is where the sacramental life of the Church and the work of evangelization are profoundly linked within Catholic thought.

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[34]AG 41.

[35]AG 41.

[36]Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], in Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*, no. 44.

[37]Paul VI, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* [Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests], in Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*, no. 5.

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Considered to be the primary ecclesial document on evangelization after Vatican II and, in Francis's opinion, "the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day,"[38] *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), surprisingly enough, has no singular definition for evangelization. The closest it gets to one is in the following statement about the Church:

> She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.[39]

This multi-pronged description is not without reason—*Evangelii Nuntiandi* acknowledges early on that "it is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization" through any simple definition, stating that

> any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it. It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential claims.[40]

The many descriptions of evangelization in EN, mentioned in sections 17 through 24, give more of an umbrella explanation that shows the wide scope of the subject. These are, among others,

1) "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity" (18);
2) "transforming humanity from within and making it new" (18);
3) seeking to convert, "through the divine power of the message [the Church proclaims,] both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in

[38]Francis, Address to Participants in the Pilgrimage from the Diocese of Brescia (Vatican Basilica: June 22, 2013).

[39]EN 14.

[40]EN 17.

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which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs" (18);

4) "upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, [humankind's] criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration, and models of life which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (19);

5) letting humankind's culture and cultures have an encounter with the proclaimed Gospel (20);

6) proclaiming the Gospel through wordless witness or the "silent proclamation of the Good News" (21);

7) "a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus" whereby the name, teaching, life, promises, kingdom, and mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are proclaimed (22);

8) a proclamation that reaches full development, resulting in entry into the ecclesial community that is expressed through sacramental acts (23);

9) acceptance of the Word for one to eventually evangelize others as well (24); and

10) "a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative." (24)[41]

The wide scope of descriptions points to several directions and to different levels, although Kroeger points insightfully to the first definition—"bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity" (18)—as possibly the best among them all, given that it aptly covers everything that needs to be addressed by evangelization. "All the strata of humanity," Kroeger observes, is a statement that encompasses every human dimension that needs to be reached, such as the physical and

[41]EN 17–24.

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spiritual needs of a person, social development and human liberation, and entire cultures and demographic sectors.[42]

Apart from the activity of evangelizing itself, the content of evangelization is also given importance in EN. The document identifies the primary elements of evangelization, which consist of "the essential content, the living substance, which cannot be modified or ignored without seriously diluting the nature of evangelization itself," and its secondary elements, "whose presentation depends greatly on changing circumstances."[43] Thus, while the indispensable content of evangelization is the living Gospel of Jesus Christ, the presentation of this content is adaptable and flexible in various contexts and epochs.

It would be helpful at this point to go deeper behind the scenes in the making of EN, particularly as there are concise insights from those who crafted the documents for the study and discussion groups in preparation for the 1974 Synod. Given the many meanings of the word "evangelization" and for the sake of clarity, the definition chosen for the working group was evangelization "as the activity whereby the Church proclaims the Gospel so that faith may be aroused, may unfold and may grow."[44]

In *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), John Paul II uses the words "evangelize" and "evangelization" eighty-two times but without providing a concise definition. Many descriptions related to missionary activity are

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[42]J. Kroeger, interview with author (Quezon City: February 9, 2018).

[43]EN 25.

[44]"Guidelines for the Preparation of the Roman Synod, 1974" [GPRS], in *Evangelization in Asia Today: Part One* (Quezon City: Cardinal Bea Institute/Loyola School of Theology, 1974), 1–2. The guidelines reveal three possible definitions: 1) every activity whereby the world is transformed in any way in accordance with the will of God and of the Creator and Redeemer; 2) the priestly, prophetic, and royal activity whereby the Church is built up according to Christ's intention; and 3) the activity whereby the Gospel is proclaimed and explained, thereby awakening living faith in non-Christians and fostering it in Christians (e.g., through missionary preaching, catechetics, homiletics, etc.). A slightly modified version of the third definition is adopted by the guidelines.

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expounded upon in the document, and witnessing and proclamation are frequently emphasized. RM's tackling of evangelization vis-à-vis its roots in the Biblical tradition, its fundamental elements, and its thrust on the integral development of the whole person is also a valuable insight.

Possibly the simplest description of evangelization in RM lies in its conclusion where John Paul II makes the following statement: "Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations."[45] This formula may be clear and helpful in describing the missionary mandate of the Church, that evangelization is "the bringing of the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations." An analogous definition may be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), which was also released during the pontificate of John Paul II: "Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, 'that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life.'"[46]

Just as in RM, the CCC's description of evangelization contains three elements: 1) the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ 2) by word and 3) by witness or testimony of life. While RM calls on the faithful to evangelize "all people and nations," the CCC challenges laypersons to evangelize those they encounter in their daily lives. RM, however, delves even deeper into evangelization and explores its roots in the Biblical tradition. It incisively examines the content of evangelization by pointing to the original evangelistic proclamation of Peter and Paul in six missionary discourses found in the Acts of the Apostles (2:22–29; 3:12–26; 4:9–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–43; and 13:16–41). Described as "model speeches," the common denominator of these discourses is that they "proclaim Jesus and invite those listening to

[45]John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* [On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate] (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), no. 92. Hereafter referred to as RM.

[46]*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Manila: Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and Word & Life Publications / Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), nos. 219 and 905.

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'be converted,' that is, to accept Jesus in faith and to let themselves be transformed in him by the Spirit."[47] Here we find two important elements of those who are evangelized: being brought to conversion and accepting Jesus in faith.

It is important to note at this point that RM repeatedly stresses the notion of holistic evangelization which addresses the needs of the whole person. For example, it connects evangelization with human development in the following statements:

1) "Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all [humankind]…." (11)

2) "The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer.… A commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also a witness to the Gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed toward integral human development." (42)

3) "The mission ad gentes is still being carried out today, for the most part in the southern regions of the world, where action on behalf of integral development and liberation from all forms of oppression is most urgently needed. The Church has always been able to generate among the peoples she evangelizes a drive toward progress." (58)

4) "*Missionary activity* brings light and an impulse toward true development, while a new evangelization ought to create among the wealthy a realization that the time has arrived for them to become true brothers and sisters of the poor through the conversion of all to an 'integral development' open to the Absolute." (59)[48]

[47]RM 24.

[48]RM 92.

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In an assessment of RM, Kroeger states that "the document speaks of mission, evangelization, and salvation in a holistic fashion" and that this direction toward integral evangelization reflects the trajectory of both Catholic missiological thinking and magisterial teaching.[49]

Thirty-seven years after *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* was crafted as an *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL) for the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.[50] Several key terms that may describe the Church's understanding of evangelization, this time coined the "new evangelization," appear therein. Mentioned across several pages, these descriptions of evangelization, among others, are as follows:

1) Its goal is, "as always, the transmission of the Christian faith" accomplished by "proclaiming and bearing witness to the Christian life through the catechumenate, catechesis and works of charity" (iv).

2) It is directed primarily to those who, "despite being baptized, have drifted from the Church and Christian practice … so that they can rediscover the beauty of their Christian faith and the joy of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus in the Church and the community of the faithful" (v).

3) "Transmitting the faith means to create in every place and time the conditions which lead" to a "true encounter and relationship with 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" (11).

[49]J. Kroeger, "Saint John Paul II and *Redemptoris Missio*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 52:1 (2015): 28–29.

[50]*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (*Instrumentum Laboris*, XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops) (Vatican City: The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012). Hereafter referred to as IL.

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4) Evangelization is "intricately bound together" with conversion and the call to holiness (14).

5) "The transmission of the faith is the goal of evangelization which, according to the divine plan, is to bring all people through Christ to the Father in the Spirit" (17).[51]

All these descriptions from LG to IL are listed herein to stress, once again, that there is no singular definition for evangelization. For the Catholic Church, it is a complex and multi-faceted enterprise that must be treated holistically and integrally. Nevertheless, the most concise description may probably be from Francis's 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG). While there is no explicit definition of evangelization in this document, the subtitle "Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World"[52] may already contain a simple definition of evangelization—that it is in essence the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world. It is arguable that the Church, with its comprehensive and wide-scale appreciation of the subject, could settle for this apparently clear and concise definition, brief and seemingly limited as it may be.

Kroeger's identification of five principal elements under the label "integral evangelization" would be helpful at this point. In his comprehensive studies of Church documents on evangelization, particularly AG, EN, and RM, he stresses that an overview of the many facets of evangelization yields five principal elements, namely,

1) *Presence and witness.* This "initial act of evangelization" is the basic faith-witness of Christians in their daily activities whereby one's life becomes the template that shows how the Christian faith is lived.

[51]IL iv, v, 11, 14, and 17.

[52]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World] (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013).

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2) *Commitment to social development and human liberation*. This "service of humanity" is the product of one's faith convictions such that it results in "serving the most unfortunate, witnessing to justice, [and] defending the integrity of creation" and impacts all areas of social concern "ranging from peace-building, education, and health services to promoting family life and good government."

3) *Interreligious dialogue*. Given that most Christians are immersed in pluralistic and diverse cultures especially in the Church in Asia, one's evangelizing activity takes on an interreligious dimension such that the Christian shares the faith through the dialogues of daily life, deeds of service, religious experts, and faith experience.[53]

4) *Explicit Gospel proclamation and catechesis*. This "telling of the Jesus story" is the clear and comprehensible manner by which the Christian shares the faith through witness and testimony. This comes in the form of teaching, preaching, catechesis, and personal communication.

5) *Liturgical life, prayer, and contemplation*. This "God-experience" is the fuel that illumines and powers evangelization. It is likewise the direction which the evangelizer points to such that others are drawn into the communal and sacramental dimension of the life of faith.[54]

[53]The four forms of dialogues are summarized in the 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (#42) by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

[54]J. Kroeger, "Exploring the Insights of Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 51:3 (2014): 257–260. See also Kroeger, "Saint John Paul II and *Redemptoris Missio*," 34–38.

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Putting the Pieces Together: Action, Content, and Result

The quest for a definition of evangelization in Church documents has yielded many descriptions thus far. It would be helpful for the sake of clarity to distill these into the following categories: 1) actions or activities that describe evangelization, 2) the content of evangelization, and 3) its desired results. Grouping the manifold descriptions into these three areas may yield patterns and commonalities that may help in extracting a workable definition of evangelization.

Source	Action	Content	Result
LG 35	announcing Christ by living testimony as well as by spoken word	Christ	
AA 2		the spirit of the Gospel	the penetration and perfection of the temporal order
AA 20		the spirit of the Gospel	the formation of Christian conscience
AA 31	engaging in conversation with others; manifesting Christ's message to all persons	the message of Christ	
AG 6	preaching the Gospel; planting the Church	the Gospel	
AG 6	preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ	the Gospel of Jesus Christ	that men and women be reborn by the Word of God; that men and women might be joined to the Church through baptism
AG 41	sharing in the Church's saving mission		love of the missions; stimulation of vocations; sharing the gift of faith with others

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Source	Action	Content	Result
GS 44	adapting the Gospel to the grasp of all; accommodating preaching	the Gospel	
PO 5	preaching the Gospel	the Gospel	unity with the sacramental life of the Church; partaking of the Eucharist
EN 14	preaching and teaching; being a channel of grace; reconciling sinners with God; perpetuating Christ's sacrifice in the Mass	Christ	
EN 18	bringing the Good News to all strata of humanity	the Good News	transformation of humanity from within and making it new
EN 18	proclaiming the message	the Gospel	conversion of the personal and collective consciences of peoples
EN 19	preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas	the Gospel	upsetting of humankind's criteria of judgment
EN 20	proclaiming the Gospel	the Gospel	regeneration of culture through an encounter with the Gospel
EN 21	silent proclamation	Christ; the Gospel	stirring of questions about the faith among peoples

Source	Action	Content	Result
EN 22	clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus	the Lord Jesus, whereby the name, teaching, life, promises, kingdom, and mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are proclaimed	
EN 23	proclamation	the Gospel	adherence to the kingdom; entrance into the Church; entrance into the ecclesial community
EN 24			the person evangelized goes on to evangelize others
GPRS	the Church proclaiming the Gospel	the Gospel	that faith may be aroused, unfold, and grow
CCC	proclaiming Christ by word and the testimony of life	the Gospel	
RM 92	bringing the Gospel by witness and by word	the Gospel	
RM 24	proclaiming Jesus	Jesus	conversion; acceptance of Jesus in faith and transformation in him by the Spirit

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Source	Action	Content	Result
RM 22–23	proclamation; witness	the Gospel; Jesus Christ	profession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, transformed by the Gospel; experience of complete liberation from sin and evil; life of communion in God and with one another
NETCF (LIL)	proclaiming; bearing witness; creating the conditions that lead to a true encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ	the faith; Jesus Christ	transmission of the faith; rediscovery of the beauty of the Christian faith and the joy of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus in the Church and in the community; conversion
EG	proclamation	the Gospel	

Table 3: Descriptions Categorized by Action, Content, and Result

Commonalities among the actions, contents, and results in Table 3 give a clearer picture of what evangelization is according to official Catholic documents. Evangelization in action is chiefly about proclamation by word and witness. Its content is principally about Jesus Christ and the Gospel, and its desired fruits are mainly conversion and transformation. All other descriptions of evangelization filter down to these fundamental elements.[55] Thus, by harnessing the action-content-results template, the following definition may be derived from official Catholic documents: Evangelization is, in its deepest essence, the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through word and witness to help bring about conversion and transformation.

[55]It is understandable, given the wide range of vocabulary available to the English language, that several words may be deemed appropriate for describing the action, content, and results of evangelization. In pursuing a comprehensible definition and a possible simple root to its complex facets, this investigation posits all the descriptions—in terms of action, content, and results—that may be distilled into the fundamental elements of evangelization.

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