

New World, New Pentecost, New Church: Pope John Paul's II's understanding of 'New Evangelisation'

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Abstract: Pope Benedict XVI's recent announcement of the establishment of a Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation once more raises the question of the meaning of 'new evangelisation'. The aim of this essay is to establish just what is 'new' in 'new evangelisation'. This will be done through an analysis of how Pope John Paul II used the term and employed the concept. The author argues that although in *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II used the term to refer to the re-evangelisation of formerly Christian nations in the 'developed' world, his initial use of the term was in the context of the 'developing world', and that his use of the concept extended to the whole of the Church's mission, including the mission *ad Gentes*. He also maintains that Benedict XVI's understanding of 'new evangelisation' is essentially the same. The author concludes by giving his own 'synoptic' account of John Paul II's understanding of 'new evangelisation' – how in that understanding the Holy Spirit is bringing about a 'new world' more open to receive the Gospel, and that the same Spirit, through a 'new Pentecost', is giving birth to a 'new Church' better prepared to proclaim the Gospel.

Key Words: John Paul II; Benedict XVI; Avery Dulles; *Redemptoris Missio*; mission *ad Gentes*; new evangelization.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI announced the establishment of a Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation. This Council has been given

the specific task of promoting a renewed evangelization in countries where the first proclamation of the faith already resounded, and where Churches are present of ancient foundation, but which are going through a progressive secularization of society and a sort of 'eclipse of the sense of God,' which constitutes a challenge to find the appropriate means to propose again the perennial truth of the Gospel of Christ.¹

This 'charter', together with the fact that the new Council does not replace the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, shows that its purpose is to spur new efforts at spreading the Gospel in the developed world - the regions where Christianity was once dominant, but has been weakened by strong secularising trends. In light of this

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Pope's Homily at Vespers for Sts. Peter and Paul", Zenit.org, ZE100662806 – 2010-06-28, <http://www.zenit.org/article-29734?l=english>.

initiative it seems timely to look once again at what Pope John Paul II meant by 'new evangelisation' so as to assess what the task of this new Council should be, and how the Catholic faithful can participate in this 'new evangelisation'. Latter in this essay I shall also address the question of whether Benedict XVI's understanding of 'new evangelisation' might differ substantially from John Paul II's.

A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF NEW EVANGELISATION

The most immediate question is - what was 'new' about John Paul II's concept? Was it merely a renewed effort to bring people to faith or back to faith in Christ and membership of the Church? Was it simply the latest in a long line of calls for a 're-evangelisation' which stretches back to the Young Christian Workers, the '*Mission de France*' and the 'worker priests',² or was there something genuinely 'new' about it? And how 'extensive' was this 'new evangelisation' to be? Was it understood to be coterminous with the entire mission of the Church, or with only a part of that mission, that part which concerned the 're-evangelisation' of 'post-Christian' nations?

Although John Paul's II first use of the expression 'new evangelisation' was to the Latin American Bishops at Port-au-Prince in 1983,³ there were some intimations of the concept at the 1979 General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla. The theme of that conference was evangelisation at present and in the future of Latin America. The context of the conference was the relationship between liberation theology in Latin America and the understanding of evangelisation given by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.⁴ There Paul VI had moved beyond the notion that evangelisation was limited to proclamation and catechesis, noting that it included the regeneration of cultures and the creation of a new society, a "civilisation of love".⁵ For him, human development and liberation were profoundly linked with evangelisation, in as much as they should be a result of evangelisation, but they did not fall within the definition of evangelisation.⁶ He believed that the great danger for evangelisation was its secularisation, its reduction to a merely temporal project.⁷

In light of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Latin American Bishops at Puebla maintained that the Church in Latin America should scrutinize the 'signs of the times' so that its evangelising efforts would "contribute to the construction of a new society that is more

² For some works on earlier attempts at re-evangeliation see Oscar Arnal, *Priests in Working-Class Blue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986); Joseph Cardijn, *Laymen in Action* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964); Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *France, Pays de Mission?* (Paris: Editions de Cerf, 1943).

³ Avery Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," *America* 166:3 (1992): 52-59, 69-72, at 55. John Paul II claimed that he derived the expression from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. See Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London, Jonathon Cape, 1994) 114. Paul VI did refer to a "new period of evangelisation" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 3) but did not explicitly use the expression 'new evangelisation'.

⁴ See Third General Conference of Latin American Bishop: Puebla – Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America - Conclusions (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979).

⁵ This phrase, often used by John Paul II, was first used by Paul VI in his address at the closing of the Holy Year, "Sensitive love in the defence of life", 31 December, 1975.

⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1976) nos. 31-35. (Hereafter EN).

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 32.

fraternal and just".⁸ In his opening address John Paul II expressed the same theme. He said:

We cry out once more: Respect the human being, who is the image of God! Evangelize so that this may become a reality, so that the Lord may transform hearts and humanize political and economic systems, with the responsible commitment of human beings as the starting point.⁹

However, he also went a step further than Paul VI. Rather than saying that human promotion and liberation were 'profoundly linked' to evangelisation, he stated that "works on behalf of justice and human promotion" were an *indispensable part* of the Church's evangelistic mission, not just a result.¹⁰ Furthermore, in a homily given on the day before the opening of the conference, he stated that:

We have come here, not so much to re-examine the same problem [as at the 1968 Medellín Conference of Latin America Bishops]...as to rework it in a new way, a new place, and a new historical moment...[now] the Church is looking for new ways to comprehend the mission it received from Jesus Christ more fully and carry it out in a more dedicated fashion.¹¹

When John Paul II first used the expression 'new evangelisation' in 1983 he reminded the Latin American Bishops that their next General Conference in 1992 would mark the 500th anniversary of the first evangelisation of the Americas. So that this anniversary should gain its full meaning, he said that the Church in Latin America needed to commit itself to a new evangelisation, "new in ardour, methods, and expression".¹² He maintained that this 'new evangelisation' must not be a simple return to the missionary methods of a former era.¹³ It needed to be new because Latin America has special needs - secularisation, corruption and grinding poverty - which the earlier practice of evangelisation did not meet.¹⁴ The new evangelisation needed to deepen the faith of Christians, create a new culture open to the Gospel message, and promote the social transformation of Latin America.¹⁵

After this date John Paul II used the phrase 'new evangelisation' on many occasions and on every continent. After 1987 he linked this new evangelisation with the preparation for the great Jubilee in 2000.¹⁶ In *Redemptoris Missio* he specifically identified new evangelisation with the re-evangelisation of nations which had, to a large extent, lost their Christian faith.¹⁷ He portrayed this 're-evangelisation' as a response to the spread of religious indifference, secularism and atheism in many nations where Christian faith and

⁸ Puebla: Conclusions, paragraph 12.

⁹ Puebla: Conclusions, "Opening Address", III, 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., "Opening Address", III, 2.

¹¹ Ibid., "Homily at Guadalupe," 4.

¹² Pope John Paul II, "The task of the Latin American Bishops," *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983) 661.

¹³ Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," 57.

¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1991) no. 33. (Hereafter RM).

life had formerly flourished, as well as to the divorce of Christian faith from the way in which many Christians live their lives - the separation of faith and culture.¹⁸

This preliminary analysis indicates that John Paul II saw new evangelisation as a response to a new situation. He saw the Church faced with new challenges in the form of secularism, atheism and religious indifference, the separation of faith and culture, and the growth of poverty and injustice in many parts of the world. Also, he saw that the Church was developing a new awareness of its need to respond to these challenges by deepening the faith of Christians and their witness to the Gospel, as well as creating new societies that embody the truths of the Gospel. We should note that the initial context was not the need to re-evangelise the 'developed' or 'first world', but the need for a renewed evangelisation of Latin America in the face of not only secularisation, but also the need for authentic social transformation.

TWO ANALYSES OF NEW EVANGELISATION

Two essays which I have found especially helpful for understanding 'new evangelisation' are those by Lorenzo Albacete and Avery Dulles.¹⁹ Albacete pointed out the need to understand 'new evangelisation' within the historical context wherein it was first announced; the ongoing Latin American debate about liberation theology, especially in regard to the relation between gospel and culture.²⁰ At Puebla, John Paul II identified the truth about the human person as the decisive question for liberation theology. He insisted that this truth could only be completely understood within the mystery of Christ, and that any anthropological analysis that did not accept this mystery would lead to a false understanding of human liberation. Any analysis not based on the mystery of Christ led to a faulty ecclesiology and, as a consequence of this, a faulty anthropology.²¹ However, according to Albacete, John Paul II was not content with criticism of liberation theology's anthropology. The question of the relation between evangelisation and culture put forward by liberation theology still had to be addressed. For Albacete, 'new evangelisation' is the response to this question. The anthropological basis of 'new evangelisation' is to be found in the theological anthropology articulated by John Paul II.²²

Dulles presented what he called a 'synoptic' view of what John Paul II meant by new evangelisation. According to Dulles, John Paul II saw that the commemoration of the first evangelisation of the Americas and of the year 2000 Jubilee of the Incarnation both gave reason for the Church to reflect upon the context of evangelisation today. The current needs were not identical to those of the past. Hence, contemporary evangelisation required a new quality and new methods.²³

Underlying this call, Dulles saw a development in theological understanding. The foundation of this development is what John Saward has called a pneumatological

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1989) no. 34. (Hereafter CL).

¹⁹ See Lorenzo Albacete, "The Praxis of Resistance," *Communio* 21 (1994): 612-630, and Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," 52-59, 69-72.

²⁰ Albacete, "The Praxis of Resistance," 612-613.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 615.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," 55-57.

Christocentricity;²⁴ “that the living Christ is, through the Holy Spirit, the chief agent of evangelisation”.²⁵ Consequently, new evangelisation is derived from a close, personal relationship with Christ on the part of those who bear the Gospel message. For their hearers new evangelisation “is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour”.²⁶

Because evangelisation “is the witness which the Son of Man bears to himself, perpetuated in the mission of the church”,²⁷ new evangelisation “must be ecclesial in an even deeper sense” than the past.²⁸ By this, Dulles meant that it must be carried out by the whole Church’s membership and by each local Church.²⁹

From the perspective of the situation faced by the Church in the world Dulles noted that: “Our times offer special challenges and special opportunities.”³⁰ One of these is a new relationship of dialogue with other religions, a recognition of ‘seeds of the Word’ outside of Christianity and Judaism. John Paul II’s idea of new evangelisation embraces this dialogue as a part of proclaiming the Gospel.³¹ Another challenge and opportunity facing the Church today is a new understanding of the significance of ecumenism for evangelisation: Christian disunity as an obstacle to new evangelisation, and real but imperfect communion as a way of facilitating it.³²

According to Dulles, other challenges which must be met by a new evangelisation are secularism, indifference, atheism, political ideologies opposed to the Gospel, a culture of death, the negative results of urbanisation, the communication revolution, hedonism, consumerism; in short, a new cultural world, the new *areopagus*,³³ which has to be met by a Christian message presented in a new language, with new techniques and a new psychology.³⁴ The development of a new Christian ‘culture’ raises the whole question of the relationship between the Gospel and culture, not just in this new world culture, but with every individual culture.³⁵ Finally, the growing human concern for justice has raised the question of the relationship between evangelisation and justice. The new

²⁴ John Seward, *Christ is the Answer: The Christ-centered Teaching of John Paul II* (New York: Alba House, 1995) 23.

²⁵ Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” 57.

²⁶ Pope John Paul II, “Commissioning of Families of the Neo-Catechumenal Way,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, January 14, 1991, 12. Quoted in Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelisation,” 57.

²⁷ Pope John Paul II, “Address to the Bishops of Brazil on their Ad Limina Visit to Rome,” February 24, 1990, *L’Osservatore Romano*, March 26, 1990, 8-9. Quoted in Dulles, “John Paul and the New Evangelisation,” 58.

²⁸ Avery Dulles, *Why Catholics don’t evangelize and why they must: John Paul II and the New Evangelisation*, 12. This is a pamphlet version of Dulles America article, which differs slightly from that article. In the America article the text reads “new evangelization is for that reason a work of the church.”

²⁹ Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” 56 & 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 59. See also Roch Kereszty, “Why a New Evangelisation: A Study of its Theological Rationale,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 594-611, at 609.

³² Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” 59.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 69. See also Kereszty, “Why a New Evangelization,” 608-609. Cf. Carl Anderson, “The Role of the Family in the Conversion of Culture,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 765-775, at 774.

evangelisation must integrate the building of a new civilisation of love into the mission of the Church.³⁶

Dulles noted that all of these phenomena are both challenges and opportunities: on the one hand, people are “sinking more deeply into materialism and despair”, on the other hand there is, “an anxious search for meaning”.³⁷ New evangelisation needs to recognise the nature of these challenges and opportunities, and respond appropriately to them.³⁸

The final point made by Dulles is that he believed that new evangelisation is actually bringing about “the birth of a new Catholicism that, without loss of its institutional, sacramental and social dimensions, is authentically evangelical”.³⁹ In his judgment the ‘evangelical turn’ in the ecclesial vision of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II was one of the most surprising and important developments in the Catholic Church since Vatican II.⁴⁰ However, he believed that pre-conciliar kerygmatic theology and Vatican II itself did the groundwork for this development.⁴¹ Overall, Dulles regarded ‘new evangelisation’ as John Paul II’s response to fundamental developments in awareness and self-understanding, both of the Church and the human race as a whole. In the Church there has been a shift from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism, from ‘hierarchology’⁴² to the universal priesthood of believers and a new self-awareness by the Church of its own nature and purpose. In humanity as a whole there has come into being a new cultural world, a new *areopagus*,⁴³ indeed, a self-awareness of the human person as a cultural being, bringing to prominence the question of the relationship of the Gospel to culture.

DOES NEW EVANGELISATION HAVE MORE THAN ONE MEANING?

Apart from the question of what might be ‘new’ in new evangelisation, the differing contexts in which John Paul II used the term prompt one to ask whether or not he used this phrase in different senses and, if so, are these senses consistent? Also, what is the relationship between new evangelisation and mission *ad gentes*, that is, to those peoples who have never been substantially evangelised?

Dulles noted that, in *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II seemed to put a different slant on ‘new evangelisation’, identifying it especially with those areas where large numbers of Christians have become estranged from their faith, compared with areas which have yet to hear the Gospel for the first time, and thus require a first or ‘primary’ evangelisation.⁴⁴ Dulles’ comment upon this is that the compartmentalisation in John Paul II’s thought was not rigid. Dulles wrote:

³⁶ Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” 69.

³⁷ Ibid., 59. See also Angelo Suquia, “The New Evangelization: Some Tasks and Risks of the Present,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 515-540, at 525.

³⁸ Suquia, “The New Evangelization,” 525.

³⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1957) 45.

⁴³ RM no. 37.

⁴⁴ Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” 56-57.

When John Paul II speaks of new audiences requiring first evangelisation he mentions not only new geographical areas but also new cultural sectors such as the inner cities, migrants, refugees, young people, and the 'new humanity' whose formation depends greatly on the mass media of communication.⁴⁵

Apart from this comment, Dulles did not attempt to investigate whether or not the two apparent senses of 'new evangelisation' are compatible. He left open the question of the relationship between the mission *ad gentes* and the 'new evangelisation'. Is the mission *ad gentes* a part of or parallel to 'new evangelisation'? I shall address this question below.

NEW CHALLENGES TO THE MISSION *AD GENTES*

In *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II attempted to address some new theological ideas that he saw as a threat to the Church's mission, and in particular to the mission *ad gentes*.⁴⁶ Foremost amongst these was a perceived objection to the exercise of the mission *ad gentes*, at least as traditionally understood, coming not from non-Christians, but from within the Church itself. Faced with this he attempted to show the continued and essential relevance of this mission, understood as the explicit proclamation of Christ to non-Christians, followed by their conversion and incorporation in the Catholic Church through baptism.⁴⁷

For John Paul II, particular Christological and ecclesiological errors underpinned the foregoing objection. He saw in these ideas a denial of the absolute uniqueness of Christ and the Church. He contradicted those who advocate a 'Kingdom-centred' mission as opposed to a 'Church-centred one'; a mission *ad gentes* which aims to help non-Christians become 'more human', build a more just world and enable them to practise their own religion more faithfully rather than one which strives to bring non-Christians to explicit faith in Christ and membership of the Church. He disagreed with those who thought that 'common ground' may best be found with other religions by presenting the Kingdom of God theocentrically rather than Christocentrically.⁴⁸

John Paul II also responded to those who would eliminate any distinct mission *ad gentes* within the overall mission of the Church.⁴⁹ It would appear that he saw this as another way in which the validity of the mission *ad gentes* was being undermined.⁵⁰ In answer to this position he offered an analysis of the then contemporary missionary situation which identified three different situations in the one mission of the Church: specific missionary activity amongst non-Christians, the pastoral care of mature and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 57. Cf. RM no. 37

⁴⁶ RM nos. 4 & 11.

⁴⁷ Jose Comblin, "The Novelty of Redemptoris Missio," in William R. Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue* (New York: Orbis, 1994) 231-238, at 232.

⁴⁸ Saward, *Christ is the Answer*, 102-103. According to Augustine Kanjamela, some Indian theologians regard Redemptoris Missio as being written, in part, to call into question some missiological stances taken by them. See Augustine Kanjamela, "Redemptoris Missio and Mission in India," in Burrows, *Redemption and Dialogue*, 195-205, at 198.

⁴⁹ RM no. 32.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

healthy local churches and the 'new evangelisation' of those who are no longer Christian.⁵¹ In doing so, he set the mission *ad gentes* within the context of the global mission of the Church.⁵²

Furthermore, in the face of the argument that the traditional distinction between missionary and non-missionary territories was no longer valid,⁵³ he offered a new categorisation of the 'field' of the mission *ad gentes*. Instead of the traditional identification of this 'field' geographically, he proposed three new boundaries; territorial, sociological and cultural. The first boundary retained the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church's mission. The second boundary nominated new social phenomena, such as urbanisation, youth, migration and the increasing divide between rich and poor as mission 'fields'. The third boundary identified as mission 'fields' new cultural *areopagi*, the foremost being the revolution in communications. Also identified as mission 'fields' were developments such as peacemaking, human development and liberation, human rights, concern for the ecology, the arts, scientific research and international relations.⁵⁴

NEW EVANGELISATION AND THE MISSION *AD GENTES*

Dulles has drawn our attention to the fact that in *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II restricted his meaning of 'new evangelisation' to the re-evangelisation of former Christians, distinguishing it from the mission *ad gentes*.⁵⁵ In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II had a number of strong motives for explicitly distinguishing between a new evangelisation of post-Christian situations and the initial evangelisation of non-Christians. He wished to combat the ideas that it is no longer necessary for the Church to attempt the concrete conversion of non-Christians to Christianity because such attempts are contrary to respect for conscience and human freedom. He also wanted to challenge the ideas that human development should be the ultimate goal of the Church's mission, or that the proposition that Christ is the only Saviour contradicts the premises of inter-religious dialogue.⁵⁶ He also wanted to dispel the notion that since the Church has only one mission, the distinctive features of the proclamation of the Gospel to those who have had no kind of exposure to it can be ignored. Furthermore, he wanted to counter the notion that since all Christians are missionaries there is no need for anyone to have a life-long vocation to be missionaries *ad gentes*.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ibid., no. 33. See Marcello Zago, "Commentary on *Redemptoris Missio*," 56-90, at 58; and Comblin, "The Novelty of *Redemptoris Missio*," 231-238, at 234, both in Burrows, *Redemption and Dialogue*. It is worth noting that in his announcement of the establishment of a Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation, Benedict XVI mentioned three situations which do not agree exactly with John Paul II's. Rather, Benedict XVI said, "There are regions in the world that still wait for a first evangelization; others that received it but need more profound work; others still in which the Gospel put down roots a long time ago, giving place to a true Christian tradition, but where in the last centuries – with complex dynamics – the process of secularization has produced a grave crisis of the sense of the Christian faith and of belonging to the Church." See the "Pope's Homily at Vespers for Sts. Peter and Paul".

⁵² Comblin, "The Novelty of *Redemptoris Missio*," 232.

⁵³ RM no. 32.

⁵⁴ Zago, "Commentary," 58; and Comblin, "The Novelty of *Redemptoris Missio*," 235.

⁵⁵ RM no. 33. See Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," 56-57.

⁵⁶ RM nos. 3-4.

⁵⁷ Ibid., nos. 31-32.

Whilst the necessity of distinguishing the mission *ad gentes* from other forms of evangelisation in *Redemptoris Missio* can be accepted, it is my conviction that, even within that document, John Paul II applied the principles of 'new evangelisation' to the entire contemporary mission of the Church, whatever its particular context. He believed that a new era in the life of the Church was beginning, one which included the mission *ad gentes*. In *Redemptoris Missio* he wrote:

Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young Churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time.⁵⁸

According to John Paul II, this new missionary age is being brought about by God himself. He believed that God was preparing the world anew for the sowing of the Gospel through a hidden work of grace within human hearts. John Paul II saw the new self-understanding of the Church and its mission being applied to the mission *ad gentes* through: The priority of evangelisation through witness of life,⁵⁹ the proclamation of Christ rather than the Church,⁶⁰ the call to conversion as well as baptism,⁶¹ the establishment of local Churches as signs of God's presence in the world,⁶² the need for Christian unity to fully convince non-Christians of the truth of the Gospel,⁶³ the need to incarnate the Gospel in each culture⁶⁴, the need to recognise and acknowledge all that is good and true in other religions,⁶⁵ the fact that human development and liberation from evils of every kind are integral parts of the mission *ad gentes*,⁶⁶ and the fact that every Christian is called to participate in this mission in some way.⁶⁷ He even saw repeated the lamentable presence of the 'mystery of iniquity'⁶⁸ in the mission *ad gentes*. In *Redemptoris Missio* he stated:

Nevertheless, in this 'new springtime' of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency...missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium. Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church's missionary thrust towards non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ.⁶⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., no. 92.

⁵⁹ Ibid., no. 42.

⁶⁰ Ibid., nos. 44-45.

⁶¹ Ibid., nos. 46-47.

⁶² Ibid., no. 49.

⁶³ Ibid., no. 50.

⁶⁴ Ibid., nos. 52-54.

⁶⁵ Ibid., nos. 55-57.

⁶⁶ Ibid., nos. 58-59.

⁶⁷ Ibid., nos. 71-72 & 77-85.

⁶⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul's Publications, 1986) no. 33. (Hereafter DEV). The phrase 'mystery of iniquity' appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. It refers to a mysterious working of evil in the world, which began with Adam, and will be fully revealed immediately before the second coming of Christ.

⁶⁹ RM no. 2.

According to John Paul II, the Church has also become aware of those developments in the world, including the non-Christian world, which affect the practice of its mission - urbanisation, mass migration, the spread of refugees, often caused by poverty and injustice, the development of a new youth culture,⁷⁰ the need to evangelise the modern *areopagai* of the mass media, culture, scientific research and attempts to promote international dialogue,⁷¹ and the search for meaning and the spiritual dimension to life in the face of the hollowness of materialism and consumerism.⁷² He recognised that these and other changes, for example, the struggle between the culture of life and that of death,⁷³ have become world-wide phenomena.

Did John Paul II's thinking about the mission *ad gentes* fit into this more comprehensive picture which equates new evangelisation with the whole contemporary mission of the Church? I believe that when he included the mission *ad gentes* in 'new evangelisation' his thinking was consistent. When defending the concept of a distinct mission *ad gentes*, I think that he restricted the meaning of 'new evangelisation' to the re-evangelisation of former Christians. Yet in other contexts I think that his concept of 'new evangelisation' embraced the entire mission of the Church in the contemporary world. I think that although it is justifiable for Benedict XVI to call the new Council for the re-evangelisation of the profoundly secular societies of the 'developed world' the Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation, it would be a serious misconception if we failed to understand that John Paul II wished the principles of 'new evangelisation' to be applied in every missionary situation.

DOES BENEDICT XVI DIFFER FROM JOHN PAUL II ON NEW EVANGELISATION?

Given that Benedict XVI's new Council for New Evangelisation is being established to promote a renewed evangelisation of countries in the 'developed world', does it follow that Benedict XVI's understanding of 'new evangelisation' is more limited than that of John Paul II? Even a brief perusal of Benedict XVI's homily in which he announced the establishment of the new Council reveals that such is not the case. After quoting Pope Paul VI's statement in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that evangelisation "is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity", and how Paul VI gave voice to "the great conciliar yearning to evangelize the contemporary world, a yearning that culminated in the decree 'Ad Gentes,' but which permeates all the documents of Vatican II," he states how John Paul II "developed this missionary project."⁷⁴ He goes on to say that:

John Paul II presented 'live' the missionary nature of the Church, with the apostolic journeys and with the insistence of his magisterium on the urgency of a 'new evangelisation': 'new' not in the contents, but in the interior impulse, open to the grace of the Holy Spirit who constitutes the force of the new law of the Gospel and who always renews the Church; 'new' in the search of ways that correspond to the force of

⁷⁰ Ibid., no. 32 & 37.

⁷¹ Ibid., no. 37.

⁷² Ibid., no. 38.

⁷³ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1995) no. 28 and passim.

⁷⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, "Pope's Homily at Vespers for Sts. Peter and Paul", 2010-06-28.

the Holy Spirit and are adapted to the times and the situations; 'new' because necessary also in countries which have already received the proclamation of the Gospel.⁷⁵

For our purpose, the key word here is 'also'. For Benedict XVI, 'new evangelisation' defines the whole present day mission of the Church, a mission which must *also* be carried out in countries which have already received the proclamation of the Gospel. Further investigation reveals that Benedict XVI's understanding of the nature of 'new evangelisation' is essentially the same as that of John Paul II.⁷⁶ However, Benedict XVI adds a nuance that, while not contradicting anything said about 'new evangelisation' by John Paul II, sounds a cautionary note. Benedict XVI warns against the 'temptation' of impatience,

the temptation of immediately finding great success, in finding large numbers. But this is not God's way. For the Kingdom of God as well as for evangelization, the instrument and vehicle of the Kingdom of God, the parable of the grain of mustard seed is always valid (see Mark 4:31-32). The Kingdom of God always starts anew under this sign. New evangelization cannot mean: immediately attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using new and more refined methods. No -- this is not what new evangelization promises. New evangelization means: never being satisfied with the fact that from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew; never thinking that the fact that different birds may find place among the branches can suffice -- rather, it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow. (Mark 4:26-29)⁷⁷

I do not think that these are meant to be words of discouragement, as much as too say 'Well, if it doesn't work, we tried our best'. Nor do I think, as some seem to, that Benedict XVI is resigned to a 'remnant church'. Rather, they are words of wisdom, echoing those of Mother Teresa, that God asks us to be faithful, not successful. They echo the experience of St Peter Chanel, who at the time of his martyrdom on the island of Futuna had not made a single convert. They echo the conviction of St Paul - "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (1 Corinthians 3:6)

A NEW WORLD

I will now give my own 'synoptic' view of John Paul II's understanding of 'new evangelisation'. Besides the conviction that a new era in the life of the Church has begun, I think that he believed that we have entered a new era in human history as a whole. According to him, this history is providential. God intervenes in human affairs.⁷⁸ No human person exists entirely outside the influence of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ However, the Holy Spirit is not the only influence upon contemporary humanity. According to John Paul II there are two tendencies at work in the contemporary world, one to reject God and the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "The New Evangelisation," Zenit.org, ZE0106232 - 2001-06-23, <http://www.zenit.org/article-17125?l=english>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul's Publications, 1994) no. 17. (Hereafter TMA)

⁷⁹ DEV passim.

other to search for God. The negative tendency is to reduce the human person to what he called a horizontal dimension with no openness to the Absolute.⁸⁰

According to John Paul II, this tendency springs from human pride in human achievements. The growth of religious indifference and atheism, especially in the form of secularism, is related to the great human advances in science and technology which have given rise to a new expression of the original temptation faced by the human race and recounted in the third chapter of Genesis; the wish to become 'like God'. By removing all bounds to liberty, people have "cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God, or simply retain him without meaning in their lives, or out-rightly reject him, and begin to adore various 'idols' of the contemporary world".⁸¹ In this new world which believes it does not need God, human beings no longer understand or value themselves as creatures made in the image of God. The human person becomes an object at the mercy of those who have power rather than a responsible subject endowed with conscience and freedom.⁸²

John Paul II believed that, paradoxically, this tendency has proved to be fertile soil for its opposite. It has been unable to extinguish the human longing and need for religion. When human beings, prompted by their conscience, have the courage to face the fundamental existential questions about suffering, death and the purpose of human life they are confronted with the same realisation that faced St. Augustine: 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.' (*Confessions*, I, 1) This has led to "an openness to a spiritual and transcendent outlook towards life, the renewed interest in religious research, the return to a sense of the sacred and to prayer, and the demand for freedom to call upon the name of the Lord".⁸³

According to John Paul II, these two opposing tendencies are a result of the very nature of the human person and the effect of sin on that nature. We find both that we are powerful and weak, able to act nobly or basely, open to freedom and slavery, love and hatred. The forces we have unleashed are in our own hands and either we can control them or are enslaved by them.⁸⁴

John Paul II believed that we are in an ambivalent situation. We live in a world which "has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and existence itself".⁸⁵ On the one hand there is still a deep resistance to grace based, in part, on our pride in our achievements, as well as an uneasiness about the whole concept of 'mercy'.⁸⁶

On the other hand he believed that there were doubts, fears and questions in the heart of modern people. "There is unease and a sense of powerlessness regarding the

⁸⁰ RM no. 8. Cf. Pope John XXIII *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), IV: AAS 53 (1961), 451-453.

⁸¹ CL no. 4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no. 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

⁸⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Dives et Misericordia* (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1991) no. 10, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 9. (Hereafter DM)

⁸⁵ RM no. 2.

⁸⁶ DEV no. 2.

proposed response that man knows he must give.”⁸⁷ There is an increase in “existential fear”.⁸⁸ When *Dives in Misericordia* was written this fear was often that of nuclear destruction. At the present moment it is perhaps more of international terrorism, civil strife in many countries and ecological destruction. John Paul II claimed that this was happening “*against the background of the gigantic remorse* caused by the fact that, side by side with wealthy and surfeited people and societies, living in plenty and ruled by consumerism and pleasure, the same human family contains individuals and groups *that are suffering from hunger*.”⁸⁹

As well as this unease and crisis of conscience, some are asking existential questions. What is our true nature? Why, in spite of so much progress, have we been unable to eliminate suffering, evil and death? What is the nature and purpose of these three realities? What good are all our human achievements when we must pay so high an existential price?⁹⁰

What is the significance of these developments for the contemporary mission of the Church that John Paul II called ‘new evangelisation’? He believed that the work of the Holy Spirit in the world has more fully prepared it to listen to the Gospel message. The Spirit has already prepared the world for the new evangelisation. Thus the Church should approach its mission with a renewed energy, hope and confidence. John Paul II held that the collapse of oppressive ideologies and political systems, the growth in what he called Gospel values among peoples, the unifying effect of contemporary communications and the stimulation of the search for the truth about God and the human person caused by the soullessness of secularism had presented the Church with new opportunities to evangelise. In *Redemptoris Missio* he said that:

God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelisation and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.⁹¹

Yet, paradoxically, he also saw more resistance to this Gospel. This paradox is grounded in the mystery of the divine economy, which has “linked salvation and grace with the cross”.⁹²

I think that there were two convictions underlying this paradox. The first is alluded to directly in the preceding quotation - that the way to glory is through sharing in the sufferings of Christ, that the preaching of the Gospel has itself to undergo a kind of death in order to rise in human hearts. The second conviction, which is related to the first, is that the ‘mystery of iniquity’⁹³ ultimately serves the mystery of Christ, or, as St. Paul has put it, where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. (Romans 5:21) To put it another way, God

⁸⁷ Ibid., no. 10.

⁸⁸ Ibid., no. 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., no. 10, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 10.

⁹¹ RM no. 3.

⁹² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Melbourne: Advocate Press, 1979) no. 11. (Hereafter RH)

⁹³ DEV no. 33.

is at work in the world, and through the Holy Spirit seeks to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.⁹⁴ This conviction of the Holy Spirit brings about either one of two possible results in individuals, repentance or hardness of heart - that is, turning away from sin or committing the sin against the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is to be expected that the more the Gospel is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, the more violent human reactions to it will be, in terms of both acceptance and rejection. Either people will be "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37) or they will become infuriated. (Acts 5:33 & 6:54)

A NEW PENTECOST

Just as God is opening before the Church a humanity more fully prepared to accept the Gospel message, so too John Paul II believed that God is equipping the Church to proclaim it more effectively. He believed that the Holy Spirit is simultaneously preparing the world to receive a new evangelisation and preparing the Church to engage in it. The new evangelisation is both an effect of and response to a new Pentecost.⁹⁵ John Paul II believed that the prayer of Pope John XXIII for a new Pentecost has been answered by the Holy Spirit - that Vatican II has indeed ushered in a new Pentecost in the Church, making "the Spirit newly 'present' in our difficult age".⁹⁶

Like the original Pentecost, the source of this new outpouring of the Holy Spirit is Christ himself. John Paul II said to the bishops of Latin America that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord who guides the Church to the fullness of truth and renews the revelation of God in her in a new Pentecost. He urged them to turn their hearts to Christ, to be open to Christ and to welcome the Holy Spirit, "so that a new Pentecost may take place in every community".⁹⁷

John Paul II believed that the effect of this new Pentecost on contemporary evangelisation could be as powerful as that of the original Pentecost.⁹⁸ He believed that the result of this new evangelisation, empowered by a new Pentecost, will be a new Church, one which is the seedbed for a new humanity, one which will know the love, joy and peace of the Lord. In his address to the bishops of Latin America he stated:

Be open to Christ, welcome the Spirit, so that a new Pentecost may take place in every community! A new humanity, a joyful one, will arise from your midst; you will experience again the saving power of the Lord and 'what was spoken to you by the Lord' will be fulfilled. What 'was spoken to you'... is his love for you, his love for each one, for all your families and peoples... Today the Lord is passing by. He is calling you. In this moment of grace, he is once again calling you by name and renewing his covenant with you. May you listen to his voice so that you may know true, total joy and enter into his peace (cf. Ps. 94:7, 11)!⁹⁹

⁹⁴ DEV no. 27. Cf. John 16:7.

⁹⁵ Pope John Paul II, "May Mary's Prayers Guide Latin Americans to a New Pentecost," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Angelus reflection for Sunday 23, 1992, 8.

⁹⁶ DEV no. 26.

⁹⁷ Pope John Paul II, "Address to Bishops of Latin America," *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 21, 1992, p.10, sec.30.

⁹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Homebush NSW: St Paul Publications, 1993) no. 108.

⁹⁹ John Paul II, "Address to Bishops of Latin America," p.10, sec.30.

John Paul II believed that if Christians were docile to the Holy Spirit as he works in this new Pentecost a “new springtime of Christian life”¹⁰⁰ would burst forth in the new millennium.

A NEW CHURCH

John Paul II believed that through a new Pentecost the Holy Spirit is not only empowering the Church with a new ardour to evangelise, but also forming a new depth of self-understanding in the Church which is a prerequisite for a new evangelisation. This new consciousness, which he also calls ‘self-awareness’, is a deeper grasp of her own nature and mission, her divine mystery and human mission.¹⁰¹

However, even while the Holy Spirit is inspiring this new consciousness within the Church, that same ‘mystery of iniquity’ at work in the world at large continues to make inroads amongst Christians and work in direct opposition to the new evangelisation. According to John Paul II the consciousness of some Christians reduces rather than adds to the understanding of God, the Church, its mission, and the human person. It involves a secular understanding of the human person rather than one which “embraces the whole person...and opens up the wonderful prospect of divine filiation”.¹⁰² I believe that the new consciousness of which he spoke was ultimately derived by him from *Lumen Gentium* - that the Church is a sign and instrument of communion with God and amongst every human person,¹⁰³ and that it is missionary by its very nature, its mission being to bring every person into the aforesaid communion.

According to John Paul II, the Holy Spirit has given the Church a new awareness of the nature of her mission. She has received a deeper awareness that her *raison d’être* is to reveal the Father to humanity, through the Son. The reason for her existence is to enable us to ‘see’ the Father in Christ.¹⁰⁴ He believed that this new consciousness of the Church that she is the “sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God and the unity of all mankind”¹⁰⁵ must lead to a “universal openness”¹⁰⁶ to the whole human race so that

all may be able to find in her ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Eph 3:8)...Such openness, organically joined with the awareness of her own nature and certainty of her own truth...is what gives the Church her apostolic, or in other words her missionary, dynamism, professing and proclaiming in its integrity the whole truth transmitted by Christ.¹⁰⁷

John Paul II believed that since the Church exists to make the Father known, a new consciousness was developing that every activity of the Church must have communion with Christ as its ultimate goal.¹⁰⁸ Not only must every activity of the Church be

¹⁰⁰ TMA no. 18.

¹⁰¹ RH no. 3.

¹⁰² RM no. 11.

¹⁰³ Lumen Gentium no. 1. (Hereafter LG).

¹⁰⁴ DM no. 15.

¹⁰⁵ RH no. 3, quoting LG no. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., no. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., no. 7.

evangelical, but every person in the Church must also be so. Rather than remaining the province of a few specialists, part of the Church's new consciousness should be that all are called to be missionaries.¹⁰⁹

This new consciousness of the Church also involves a profound shift in the immediate goal of evangelisation. Rather than simple membership of the Catholic Church and the acceptance of Catholic doctrine, that goal has become 'conversion'. By this John Paul II meant a personal encounter with the Lord and a transformation of the person by the Holy Spirit. In fact, his language on this point often mirrors that of evangelical Protestants. Thus, evangelisation "is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour".¹¹⁰ The Gospel must be "directed to stirring a person to a conversion of heart and life and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; to disposing a person to receive Baptism and the Eucharist and to strengthen a person in the prospect and realisation of new life according to the Spirit."¹¹¹

Moreover, John Paul II recognised that evangelisation often needs to begin with those who are already Catholics, since it is possible that they "have lost or have never had the chance to experience Christ personally: not Christ as a mere 'paradigm' or 'value', but the living Lord: 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn 14:6)".¹¹²

John Paul II also believed that this lack is causing serious injury to the Church's mission and even to her very existence. Addressing the massive defection of Catholics in Latin America to the so-called 'sects', he recognised that their very success often lay in providing more completely for the needs of the human person, including that which is most satisfying, a personal encounter with God.¹¹³

John Paul II held that an indispensable part of this personal conversion that is required at this moment in history is repentance. In order to repent it is necessary for the Church to know her sins, which requires an examination of conscience. Realising the need for such an examination is a genuine development in the Church's consciousness, one which, as John Paul II pointed out, is implied in *Lumen Gentium*.¹¹⁴

Although he urged all Catholics to carry out this examination, John Paul II carried it out, in a general sense, on behalf of the Church. In doing so he identified three major kinds of sin in need of repentance. These are sins against Christian unity,¹¹⁵ past sins of intolerance and violence against those who did not agree with the Catholic faith,¹¹⁶ and present day sins of religious indifference, ethical relativism, culpable theological error, disobedience to the apostolic witnesses, participation in the violation of human rights, and failures to fully respond to the gift of the Holy Spirit which was the Second Vatican

¹⁰⁹ CL no. 33.

¹¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, "Commissioning of Families of the Neo-Catechumenal Way," 12.

¹¹¹ CL no. 33.

¹¹² Pope John Paul II, "New Catechism Will Promote National Recatechising Effort," *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 24, 1993, 3.

¹¹³ Pope John Paul II, "Address to Bishops of Latin America," 7, sec. 12.

¹¹⁴ TMA no. 33. Cf. LG no. 8.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 34.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 35.

Council.¹¹⁷ To this list could be added past sins of injustice against the Jewish people.¹¹⁸ I think that this self-examination was unprecedented in the Catholic Church and marked a new stage in the development of the Church's self-understanding. It implied that such a repentance and purification is necessary if the Church's mission to evangelise the contemporary world is to meet with any substantial success. The Lord's first command in the Gospel of Mark is 'Repent, and believe the Good News'. (Mark 1:15) How often do we attempt the second without first obeying the first?

According to John Paul II, the contemporary need for the personal conversion of Christians is also at the heart of a realisation of the need for Christian unity at this moment in the history of the Church's mission. In *Ut Unum Sint* he wrote:

Passing from principles, from the obligations of the Christian conscience, to the actual practice of the ecumenical journey towards unity, the Second Vatican Council emphasises above all *the need for interior conversion*. The messianic proclamation that 'the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand', and the subsequent call to 'repent, and believe in the Gospel' (Mk 1:15) with which Jesus begins his mission, indicate the essential element of every new beginning - the fundamental need for evangelisation at every stage of the Church's journey of salvation. This is true in a special way of the process begun by the Second Vatican Council, when it indicated as a dimension of renewal the ecumenical task of uniting divided Christians. '*There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart.*' (UR 7)¹¹⁹

Indeed, in John Paul's II eyes, working for the unity of the Church is an indispensable prerequisite for the new evangelisation. Without it, the world will not believe the Gospel.¹²⁰ In his encyclical on ecumenism, He explicitly made his own the words of Paul VI, that in our current disunity, work for ecumenism is actually a *means* of evangelisation, and that the absence of such work seriously impedes evangelisation.¹²¹

According to John Paul II, another part of the Church's new consciousness lies in its attitude to non-Christian religions. He took what he said about ecumenism and applied it "although in another way and with due differences - to activity for coming closer together with the representatives of the non-Christian religions".¹²² As with ecumenism, he saw such dialogue as responding to what the Holy Spirit has said to the Church at Vatican II, and a recognition by the Church that the Spirit of truth operates "outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body".¹²³

For John Paul II, Vatican II was "the beginning of a new era in the life of the Church".¹²⁴ Its "enormously rich body of teaching and *the striking new tone* in the way it presented this content constitute as it were a proclamation of new times".¹²⁵ He believed that the Council was the beginning of the immediate preparation for the new

¹¹⁷ Ibid., no. 36.

¹¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, Homily for 1st Sunday of Lent, 12 March, 2000.

¹¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (Homebush: St. Pauls, 1995) no. 15. (Hereafter UUS)

¹²⁰ RH no. 6 & RM no. 50.

¹²¹ UUS no. 98, quoting EN no. 77.

¹²² RH no. 6.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ TMA no. 18.

¹²⁵ Ibid., no. 20.

millennium.¹²⁶ For him, new evangelisation was the contemporary expression of evangelisation, that is, the contemporary expression of the entire priestly, prophetic and royal mission of the Church. He believed that it is being carried out by a new Church, born of the Holy Spirit in a new Pentecost, and is addressed to a new World, born of the selfsame Spirit - a new, 'evangelical', 'pentecostal' Catholic Church.

John Paul II believed that the end of this new evangelisation would be a "*new springtime of Christian life* which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee".¹²⁷ However, he also believed that this new springtime of "a new humanity, a joyful one [which] will experience again the saving power of the Lord",¹²⁸ was not a foregone conclusion. It would only come to pass "if Christians are docile to the Holy Spirit".¹²⁹

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¹²⁶ Ibid., no. 18.

¹²⁷ TMA no. 18.

¹²⁸ John Paul II, "Address to Bishops of Latin America", 10, sec.30.

¹²⁹ TMA no. 18.