

# Evangelization by You(Tube): Digital Proclamation of the Gospel Today

Author: Michael Rossmann

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:108072>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2017

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

# **Evangelization by You(Tube)**

**Digital Proclamation of the Gospel Today**

**Michael Rossmann, SJ**

**Boston College School of Theology and Ministry**

**STL Thesis**

**December 2017**

## INTRODUCTION

*“We’ve got the greatest story ever told, but we don’t know how to tell it. The church has a problem communicating, and it’s time to change.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Catholic Church in the United States has woefully underutilized new media<sup>2</sup> for evangelization. The Church is no novice when it comes to communications. Saint Augustine wrote the first spiritual autobiography. Renaissance painters communicated the divine to illiterate masses. J.R.R. Tolkien and Graham Greene wrote some of the most popular novels of the twentieth century. Mother Angelica was an innovator in cable television. But Catholics, at least in the United States, have not had a similar impact in new media. While popes have repeatedly expressed the need to use new tools to proclaim the Gospel, the Church has been slow to take up the charge. Something is missing. This absence becomes even more apparent when one looks at how the digital landscape continues to evolve. Online video is playing an increasingly significant role, but no modern-day Fulton Sheen has emerged as a leader in this medium. Creative proclamation of the Gospel today must include the use of new media, and online video offers rich opportunities for Catholic lay people to evangelize the world.

Modern popes have repeatedly emphasized the need to use emerging media for evangelization. Pius XI inaugurated Vatican Radio in 1931. Pius XII encouraged the use of film and television. Paul VI wrote in 1975 that his era was already “characterized by the mass media or means of social communication” and that “the Church would feel guilty before the Lord if

---

<sup>1</sup> Center for Church Communication, “About Us,” *Church Marketing Sucks*, Web.

<sup>2</sup> “New media” generally refers to “those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing” Robert K. Logan, *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 4. Thus, new media do not include print media, radio, or television.

she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect.”<sup>3</sup>

John Paul II wrote that the internet offers “magnificent opportunities for evangelization”<sup>4</sup> and said that the world of cyberspace is a summons to proclaim the Gospel message.<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis has called the internet “something truly good, a gift from God.”<sup>6</sup> He has included the “digital highway” in talking about the need for the Church to be “out on the streets.”<sup>7</sup> Many today feel guilty about how much time they spend online, but these popes explain that we should feel guilty if we *don’t* use the internet – to evangelize, that is.

Still, something is missing in the Catholic Church’s online presence. We have been slow to pour new “wine” into these new digital “wineskins.” Catholics seem more likely to argue with each other in the comments section about who is really Catholic than to use digital tools to share the Gospel in a way that is joyful, accessible, and attractive. John Paul II already lamented in 1990 how Catholics had neglected the “Areopagus” of modern communications.<sup>8</sup> This neglect has continued as new media have emerged.

When looking at the digital landscape today, online video offers a fertile arena for proclaiming the Gospel. Digital video is exploding in growth. In recent years, images and video have been displacing text in their relative importance on social media. YouTube has over one billion active users. Facebook has more than two billion and Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, said, “If you fast-forward five years...most of the content that people see on

---

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, The Vatican, 8 Dec. 1975, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel,” The Vatican, 12 May 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis. “Communications at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter,” The Vatican, 24 Jan. 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Vatican, 24 Nov. 2013, 49.

<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. The Vatican, 7 Dec. 1990, 37.

Facebook and are sharing on a day-to-day basis is video.”<sup>9</sup> Of course, many online videos are trivial; some may even be harmful. Still, an evangelizer should not run away from this medium simply because most people do not use it to promote the greater glory of God. An evangelizer needs to practice Gospel values while still engaging in our modern Areopagus of social media. This is increasingly how people communicate today.

Not only is online video growing in importance, but digital video is a particularly valuable tool for reaching the increasing number of young people who do not identify with any religious institution. Many articles in recent years have highlighted the emergence of “nones” and the “spiritual but not religious.” Such young people are unlikely to go to church but are likely to watch videos shared by their friends on social media. Online video is a tool for evangelization that could reach people in ways that other forms of evangelization do not. There are rich possibilities for lay people to share with their peers how their encounter with Christ has made a difference in their lives.

The primary digital evangelizers will need to be the laity. People on social media share interesting content with their friends and family. This is unlikely to come from the bishops. The laity’s use of media to evangelize is both a need and an opportunity for the Catholic Church. The internet offers a space for all the baptized to live out their calling as missionary disciples. Tools like YouTube and Facebook offer particularly powerful opportunities for the laity to give an evangelizing witness that is accessible to their peers. And with the internet, no ecclesial authority can stop the laity from speaking.

The use of digital video is not meant as a substitute for other tools of evangelization.

---

<sup>9</sup> Jason Lederman, "Mark Zuckerberg: Within Five Years, Facebook Will Be Mostly Video," *Popular Science*, 6 Apr. 2016.

Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized the need for face-to-face encounter with others.<sup>10</sup>

Face-to-screen “encounter” is not the same. We still need to proclaim the Word through non-digital means. Liturgy and sacraments are just as important as ever. And few would take us seriously without a commitment to service and justice.

Still, new media are a tremendous complement to other forms of evangelization. Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that mass media and social communication “enable the Good News to reach millions of people” and that “the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means.”<sup>11</sup> People share items on social media with their friends (or at least Facebook “friends”). A video shared on social media may open the door to deeper conversations with a person of faith whom the viewer trusts. Additionally, Pope Francis has discussed the need for a pastoral strategy that “would actually reach everyone.”<sup>12</sup> As important as good liturgy is, it is not as helpful for reaching those who cannot or would not set foot in a church. New media are an important part of an evangelization strategy that attempts to go out “to the nations” (*ad gentes*) today.

### **Project Overview:**

Chapter One of this paper will look at the religious landscape of the United States, highlighting the increasing number of “believing non-belongers” and the lack of a cohesive culture of Catholic families, schools, and neighborhoods that helps pass along the faith. I will also highlight the precipitous drop in the number of Catholic sisters, brothers, and priests in the U.S. and its implications for evangelization. Additionally, while Church documents have repeatedly called lay people to evangelize the world, the internalization of this call has been

---

<sup>10</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

<sup>11</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35.

wanting among many lay Catholics. These developments in the religious environment have occurred while new media have become increasingly significant in the lives of people today. These digital tools and the emerging norms of digital culture have profound implications for the Church.

In light of this religious environment, I will argue in Chapter Two that an “evangelizing Catholicism” that emphasizes proclamation of the Gospel and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is necessary today. I will first look at *Redemptoris Missio*, the 1990 encyclical from Pope John Paul II that emphasized explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ as the primary task of evangelization. A number of American Catholic theologians and public intellectuals have since identified the need for a more “evangelical Catholicism.” Their emphasis on the need to go out and explicitly proclaim the Gospel finds much resonance with the documents from the Latin American Bishops’ gathering at Aparecida and with the teaching of Pope Francis, particularly in *Evangelii Gaudium*. New media will be an important part of an effective “evangelizing Catholicism” that is “out on the streets.”

Who, then, will be the digital evangelizers? Chapter Three will identify the needs and opportunities for the laity to emerge as leaders in evangelization. Virtually anyone can log on to Facebook and attempt to engage in evangelization if he or she chooses. With tools such as online video, the laity have more possibilities for reaching people than ever before. Their evangelizing work can also fight clericalism<sup>13</sup> and its accompanying problem of bad preaching.

After looking at the work of popes and theologians in Chapter Two and discussing the potential impact of the laity in Chapter Three, Chapter Four will move back down to the ground

---

<sup>13</sup> During a homily in 2016 Pope Francis said, “The evil of clericalism is a very ugly thing!” “Pope: Clericalism Distances the People from the Church,” *Vatican Radio*, 13 Dec. 2016.

– or, rather, the screen – in order to see what we can learn from those who have already used online video for evangelization. Many Catholic initiatives in the U.S. leave something to be desired. There are even fewer successful examples coming from the laity. A look around the Web, however, reveals that non-Catholic and non-U.S. groups are finding more success. A megachurch from Australia, an American Mormon “vlogger,”<sup>14</sup> and a Pentecostal married couple from Brazil point to possible ways that Catholic laity could also harness the power of online video to proclaim the Gospel.

### **My Location:**

I have skin in the game. Nearly all of my childhood classmates were Catholic. Today, most of these friends are more likely to go to brunch than to church on Sunday morning. They are good people, but many have no serious desire for organized religion. This pains me. I am a Jesuit priest. I find abundant life in my relationship with Jesus Christ – nurtured by my belonging in the Catholic Church – and I want others to similarly find such joy and life. It is this desire to share the Gospel with others that underlies my project.

My paper will mostly use sources and examples from the United States. This is what I know best. Still, especially when simultaneous translation gets better every day, digital tools open up possibilities for evangelization to anywhere and from anywhere. One can see this in some of the examples of successful digital evangelization that I will feature.

I have spent the past six years writing and editing for *The Jesuit Post*, an initiative of Jesuits in formation that uses a variety of digital media to offer a Jesuit, Catholic perspective on our contemporary world. My experience with digital evangelization is the impetus for this

---

<sup>14</sup> A video blogger

paper. I agree with Vincent Donovan that “every theology or theory must be based on previous missionary experience, and that any theory or theology which is not based on previous experience is empty of words, of use to no one.”<sup>15</sup> Still, there are relatively few Catholics in the U.S. doing interesting digital evangelization. Of those engaged, even fewer are writing about it theologically. While my experience is relatively limited – and while digital evangelization must increasingly come from the laity – this paper attempts to contribute to an area that is seriously underdeveloped.

---

<sup>15</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), xiii.

## CHAPTER ONE: The U.S. Catholic Context Today

*“We must not think of it as a ‘virtual’ space that is somehow less important than the ‘real’ world. If the Church is not present in this space, if the Good News is not proclaimed ‘digitally’, then we risk abandoning the many people for whom this is where they ‘live.’”<sup>16</sup>*

### The Emergence of “Believing Non-Belongers” – and Not Simply “Nones”

The “nones” have risen. Whenever Pew publishes its latest “Religious Landscape Survey” of the U.S., there is a flurry of articles describing the apparent decline of church affiliation, particularly among young people. The most recent study found that the “nones” – those who profess no faith affiliation – now constitute nearly 23% of the country’s adult population.<sup>17</sup> This number has skyrocketed in recent decades. As late as 1991, only 6% of Americans said they had no religious affiliation.<sup>18</sup> Among Americans between the ages of 18 and 29, Pew found that 35% are “nones.” *CNN* religion editor Daniel Burke summarized the latest Pew findings with an article entitled “Millennials leaving church in droves, study finds.”<sup>19</sup> The numbers look particularly bleak for U.S. Catholics. More than 10% of Americans identify as former Catholics. Additionally, those raised in Catholic households are much more likely to say they have no religious affiliation as adults, as compared to those who grew up in Evangelical Protestant households.

Still, as much attention as the “nones” have received, the label can be misleading. Most “nones” are not hedonistic atheists who hate religion. In many ways, the beliefs and practices

---

<sup>16</sup> Paul Tighe, “Digital Media: A Version of the Pulpit,” *Priesthood Today: Ministry in a Changing Church*, edited by Eamonn Conway, (Veritas, 2014), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Wormald, “Religious Landscape Study,” *Pew Research Center*, 11 May 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Betsy Cooper et al, “Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion-and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *PRRI*, 22 Sept. 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Burke, “Millennials Leaving Church in Droves, Study Says,” *CNN*, 14 May 2015.

of young adults today look largely similar as compared to other generations, even if surveys indicate that there has been a considerable change in self-professed identity. Rodney Stark dives deeply into the numbers to paint a more nuanced picture. Stark recognizes how more people today say their religious affiliation is “none” as compared to the early 1990s. However, he also notes how church attendance did not decline during this same period, and the number of atheists did not increase.<sup>20</sup>

If “nones” have increased but atheists have not, one must look at what has happened among the non-atheist “nones.” In 1990, most Americans who rarely, if ever, stepped foot in a church still said that they were Catholic or Presbyterian or some other religious tradition when asked by a pollster. Today, however, more say “none,” by which they seem to mean “no actual membership.”<sup>21</sup> Millennials seem particularly willing to identify as “nothing in particular.” Nearly 80% of millennials who have low levels of religious commitment state that they have no religious affiliation, but only 54% of Americans in the Silent and Greatest generations who have little or no religious observance say that they are unaffiliated. Many older Americans still say they have a religion even if they do not practice it.<sup>22</sup> In looking at the increase of the “nones,” Stark explains, “*The entire change has taken place within the nonattending group, and the nonattending group has not grown.*”<sup>23</sup> The “nones” have grown in surveys, but that does not mean fewer people attend church. Ed Stetzer writes that people now “feel comfortable freeing themselves from a label that was not true of them in the first place,” but “the Church is not

---

<sup>20</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World Is More Religious than Ever*, (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2015), 190.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory A. Smith and Alan Cooperman, “The Factors Driving the Growth of Religious ‘Nones’ in the U.S.,” *Pew Research Center*, 14 Sept. 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Stark, 190, emphasis in original.

dying. It is just being more clearly defined.” Their stated affiliation has changed, but their church attendance – or lack thereof – has not.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, “none” does not describe the actual beliefs and practices of those who say they do not identify with any religious group. Many still believe religion is important and occasionally attend a congregation.<sup>25</sup> Christian Smith in *Souls in Transition* notes how young adults are just as likely as older adults to believe in life after death.<sup>26</sup> Stark writes that apart from the atheists, most of the other nones pray – sometimes very often. Most even believe in angels.<sup>27</sup> “Believing without belonging,” a phrase coined by sociologist Grace Davie, more accurately describes many of the supposed “nones.”<sup>28</sup> Their spirituality does not necessarily look like their parents and grandparents, but there is some sort of spirituality present in the lives of most young people, including most of the “nones.”

While New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins have received much attention in the last decade, they do not represent most of the religiously unaffiliated, particularly millennial “nones.” Among unaffiliated Americans, 68% said that their last time attending a religious service was primarily positive; only 20% said it was mostly negative.<sup>29</sup> Christian Smith found that for most young adults, religion is “not particularly threatening.”<sup>30</sup> Mike Hayes observes that millennials often have a less negative impression of religion than was the case for his Gen X

---

<sup>24</sup> Ed Stetzer, “The State of the Church In America: Hint: It's Not Dying,” *Christianity Today*, 1 Oct. 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 176.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, (Oxford University Press, 2009), 89.

<sup>27</sup> Stark, 190.

<sup>28</sup> John L. Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*, (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 61.

<sup>29</sup> Betsy Cooper et al.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, 144.

counterparts, “who found religion to be for crackpots and weak-minded people.”<sup>31</sup> That is generally not the perception among millennials.

Still, just because people have some sort of spirituality and do not see religion as the root of all evil does not mean that spirituality is central to their lives. Christian Smith notes that most emerging adults believe in God and an afterlife and maybe even Jesus Christ, “but those religious ideas are for the most part abstract agreements that have been mentally checked off and filed away. They are not what emerging adults organize their lives around.”<sup>32</sup> Smith explains that for many young people, religion is “simply not a big deal, not something of central importance that most would expect to recurrently come up in discussions.”<sup>33</sup> For the “nones,” 72% say they do not spend much time thinking about God or religion in their day-to-day lives.<sup>34</sup> This is not what gets them out of bed in the morning. For many young adults today, the idea of religious commitment is met with a shrug.

Any effort to evangelize young adults today must take into account these trends in their spiritual lives. Robert Putnam and David Campbell note that most “nones” are “not actually ardent secularists.”<sup>35</sup> Many say in surveys that religion is important. But it’s just not important to *them*, at least not on a day-to-day basis. An evangelizer has to show *why* they should care, why it would be meaningful for their lives. Evangelizers need to go out to them and cultivate a desire for religious belonging. Simply waiting to welcome “nones” until they show up at church will leave most unreached.

---

<sup>31</sup> Mike Hayes, *Googling God: the Religious Landscape of People in Their 20s and 30s*, (Paulist Press, 2007), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, 154.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Jones et al.

<sup>35</sup> Putnam and Campbell, 176.

## Lack of a Catholic Culture that Passes along the Faith

U.S. Catholics have become as American as apple pie – and Catholic culture has become more like pie crumbs. Previously in the U.S., Catholic cultures or subcultures “transmitted the faith as if by osmosis.”<sup>36</sup> That, however, is no longer the situation, at least for most Catholics whose families have been in the country for multiple generations. When most Catholics grew up with two Catholic parents, lived in Catholic neighborhoods, went to Catholic schools, and identified with the local parish – and when non-Catholics saw them as outsiders – people had a stronger sense of Catholic identity. This distinctive, cohesive Catholic culture helped pass along the faith.

But the Catholic ghetto is no more. Anglo Catholics moved to the suburbs. Catholic identity became fractured. The Sexual Revolution, increase in divorce rates, and new questions around sexuality affected all religious groups, including Catholics. Mark Massa writes that Catholics became “all but indistinguishable as a group from their fellow citizens in terms of ethical values, social mores, and cultural tastes.”<sup>37</sup> William Portier calls the “dissolution of the subculture...the defining event for twentieth-century American Catholicism.”<sup>38</sup> The number of Catholics has continued to increase, but American Catholic culture – if it exists – has become far more fractured.

The absence of a Catholic subculture then raises new questions related to evangelization. More than three million fewer students now attend Catholic elementary schools

---

<sup>36</sup> George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*, (New York: Basic, 2013), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team*, (Crossroad Pub. Co., 1999), 10.

<sup>38</sup> William L. Portier, "Here Come the Evangelical Catholics," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 31, (2004), 54.

as compared to 1965,<sup>39</sup> and future projections for Catholic school enrollment are dire. Portier identifies how Catholic identity is “voluntary in a way that it was not when Catholic school enrollment peaked just after mid-century.”<sup>40</sup> Catholics today spend much of their time at school, work, and possibly the home with people of other – or no – faith traditions. George Weigel writes that one cannot walk down a major street in a large city “without having the ‘plausibility structure,’ their Christian way of understanding How Things Are and How Things Ought To Be, sensorily assaulted at every turn.”<sup>41</sup> One is bombarded by alternative religious and moral options. One has to choose to be Catholic in ways that were not the case in a previous generation. John Allen writes that “faith has to be preached because most people no longer imbibe it from neighborhoods, schools or even families.”<sup>42</sup> The lack of a distinctively Catholic culture makes evangelization even more necessary.

### **Fewer Priests, Sisters, and Brothers**

Not only has the Catholic subculture that helped pass along the faith disappeared, but those historically charged with evangelization have significantly declined in number. The last 50 years have seen a large drop in the number of Catholic priests in the U.S., particularly from religious communities. The number of sisters and brothers has dropped even more precipitously. The number of religious sisters in the U.S. has fallen from about 180,000 in 1965 to about 50,000 in 2014.<sup>43</sup> Of those who remain, more are over the age of 90 than under 60.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> CARA, “Frequently Requested Church Statistics,” *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*, Web.

<sup>40</sup> Portier (2004), 54.

<sup>41</sup> Weigel, 20.

<sup>42</sup> John L. Allen, “The Triumph of Evangelical Catholicism.” *National Catholic Reporter*, vol. 43, no. 35, 31 Aug. 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Lipka, “U.S. Nuns Face Shrinking Numbers and Tensions with the Vatican,” *Pew Research Center*, 8 Aug. 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Mary E Bendyna and Mary L Gautier, “Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference,” *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*, Aug. 2009.

The percentage decline among male religious has been comparable. Religious priests and brothers numbered 42,000 in 1970 but were fewer than 18,000 in 2015.<sup>45</sup> This has happened as the Catholic population has continued to grow. The ratio of priests to Catholics is now about one to 1,600 in the United States.<sup>46</sup>

This has profound implications for evangelization. The Second Vatican Council fathers described the importance of “certain institutes which take as their own special task the duty of preaching the Gospel.”<sup>47</sup> John Paul II reaffirmed the “continuing validity and relevance of the specific missionary vocation of these institutes,” calling them “absolutely necessary.”<sup>48</sup> Still, talking about their necessity does not prevent their decline in many countries.

This then raises significant questions. William Burrows explains that religious communities were historically “zones of evangelical intensity.”<sup>49</sup> They were charged with sharing the faith through their teaching and preaching. Such communities inculcated a personal transformation that was the “prerequisite ‘strategic knowledge’ necessary to be a missionary of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> This does not simply appear out of thin air; it is the result of intentional and lengthy training. Today, however, many of those who have undergone such a transformation are now in their 70s, 80s, or 90s. Burrows identifies how recent popes have called for a “new evangelization” but writes that they have not “made provisions for overcoming the dearth of

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed., (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 268.

<sup>47</sup> Vatican II, “Ad Gentes: On the Mission Activity of the Church,” 7 Dec. 1965, 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 66.

<sup>49</sup> William R. Burrows, “Catholics, Carey’s ‘Means,’ and Twenty-First Century Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 343, July 2010, 131.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

personnel needed to carry it out.”<sup>51</sup> Religious women and men continue to do great work, but with far fewer and far older religious, their ability to shoulder the New Evangelization is limited.

### **A Lack of Enthusiasm for Evangelization among Lay Catholics**

We can't rely on Catholic culture to pass along the faith. We have to actively evangelize, but there are far fewer sisters, brothers, and priests. The laity must then take the lead. And, of course, they have the right and duty to evangelize flowing from their baptism. However, a lack of enthusiasm for evangelization among the laity may be the greatest obstacle to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ today.

It's not for a lack of instruction. There are ample statements in the post-Vatican II Church about the missionary vocation of all the baptized, but many Catholics have not internalized the message. John Paul II identified the “waning” missionary activity and various difficulties that had “weakened the Church’s missionary thrust toward non-Christians.”<sup>52</sup> He stated that his 1990 encyclical was meant “to help overcome” such a tendency. He longed for the faithful to recognize that “*missionary activity is a matter for all Christians.*”<sup>53</sup> While one cannot discount the growth of the Church in recent decades, especially in Africa and Asia, few would say that the time in the United States since his encyclical on mission has been the “new springtime” that John Paul II hoped for. The teaching is clear; the missionary practice among the laity is not always as evident.

Pope Francis has largely continued the same message as John Paul II. He has written passionately about how “in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1, his emphasis.

become missionary disciples.”<sup>54</sup> Still, many Catholics in the U.S. do not actually see themselves as being responsible for evangelization. According to a study by *Barna*, only 34% of U.S. Catholics agree with the statement, “I, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people my religious beliefs.”<sup>55</sup> Scott Hahn writes, “Try as they might (and they have tried), the Church’s popes, for all their talk about evangelization over the past forty years, have not convinced the majority of people sitting in parish pews on Sundays that evangelization is ‘a Catholic thing.’”<sup>56</sup> Despite what Pope Francis writes, many of the baptized don’t actually see themselves as missionary disciples.

There are many reasons for this lack of internalized responsibility for evangelization. As strong as Church teaching since Vatican II has been with regards to the priesthood of all believers and the universal call to holiness, this was not always the felt experience of Catholics, especially before the Council. One also cannot ignore the changing social location of many Anglo Catholics in the United States. Using H. Richard Niebuhr’s models from his classic *Christ and Culture*, Mark Massa identifies how American Catholicism up until the mid-twentieth century largely fit Niebuhr’s “Christ above Culture” model. Since then, however, the “Christ of Culture” model has largely defined Anglo-American Catholicism.<sup>57</sup> Less than half of young Catholics today even believe that the Catholic Church has “more truth” than other religions.<sup>58</sup> It’s no wonder that many do not feel any need to share their faith with someone of another tradition. Additionally, one cannot ignore the loss of morale stemming from the clergy sex

---

<sup>54</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119.

<sup>55</sup> “Is Evangelism Going Out of Style?” Barna Group, 17 Dec. 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Scott Hahn, *Evangelizing Catholics: A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization*, (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014), 28.

<sup>57</sup> Massa, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Allen, 73.

abuse scandal. A 2016 study found that 32% of young adults who left the Catholic Church cited the scandal as a primary reason for leaving.<sup>59</sup> There is no shortage of reasons why Catholics lack zeal for evangelization.

Even those who believe that they should share their faith may not feel they have sufficient competence to do so. Martin Pable identifies how many contemporary Catholics do not have a clear knowledge of their beliefs and thus feel unable or unwilling to try to explain them if challenged.<sup>60</sup> In practice, Catholics have tended to prioritize professional catechesis and faith formation over personal proclamation and witness. Even if people have had a deep encounter with Jesus Christ and an abiding love for his Church, if they have no formal training in catechesis, they can easily feel it is not their role to proclaim the Gospel and publicly witness to their faith. They often censor themselves.

With so many historical factors pushing against the internalization of the call to evangelize, a papal statement will not be sufficient for lighting the fire for *being* missionary disciples. In order for people to take up the call to evangelize, they have to experience Christ in such a way that they cannot help but want to share him with others. They need to see how they, too, can be – and cannot help but be – witnesses to the Gospel. Burrow's description of how religious communities were "zones of evangelical intensity" is instructive. Such intensity did not arise from an encyclical. Such communities produced personal transformation over time. And, Burrows writes, "So little seems to have been done to nurture the sort of communities that alone will produce the functional equivalent of the religious order

---

<sup>59</sup> Betsy Cooper et al.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Pable, "Why Don't Catholics Share Their Faith? *America Magazine*, 11 June 2015.

‘missionaries’ for this ‘new evangelization’?”<sup>61</sup> One can point to new ecclesial movements that exemplify evangelical intensity, but these are largely the exception. Few U.S. Catholics are part of communities that nurture personal transformation that leads to evangelical fervor. Young people have few dedicated evangelizers close to them in age. The conditions from which evangelical activity bubble forth are sorely lacking in the U.S. Catholic Church today. It’s no surprise we see a lack of evangelizers.

### **The Digital Areopagus and the Explosive Growth of Online Video**

Digital technology has transformed our lives in recent decades. An adult in the U.S. now spends more than ten hours a day looking at a screen of some sort.<sup>62</sup> That’s more than we sleep! With the widespread adoption of mobile devices, Pew found that among young adults, 36% report they are online “almost constantly,” and 92% of teens go online at least daily.<sup>63</sup> This is not simply an American phenomenon. Internet connectivity and smartphones are proliferating around the world. *The Economist* predicts that 80% of the world’s adult population will have a smartphone connected to the internet by 2020.<sup>64</sup> Increasingly, we live and move and have our being online.

One of the significant developments in this increasingly prominent digital landscape has been the explosive growth of online video. YouTube is *massive*. Started in 2005, YouTube amassed more hours of video in its first five years of operation than the entire history of American television programming.<sup>65</sup> YouTube now has more than a billion active users.

---

<sup>61</sup> Burrows, 134.

<sup>62</sup> Jacqueline Howard, “Americans at More than 10 Hours a Day on Screens,” *CNN*, 29 July 2016.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> “Planet of the Phones,” *The Economist*, 26 Feb. 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Craig Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2014), 175.

Collectively, they watch nearly five billion videos on YouTube every single day.<sup>66</sup>

It's not just YouTube. More than 500 million people watch video on Facebook every day.<sup>67</sup> Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, said that they are trying to "move towards a world where video is at the heart of all our services."<sup>68</sup> Facebook prioritizes video over text in its algorithm such that when one shares a video, it is much more likely to rise to the top of the News Feeds of that person's friends. On a personal level, I see how *The Jesuit Post*, which until recently remained a text-dominant project, now has less of a reach in an increasingly video-dominant environment. Like many publications, we heavily depend on Facebook to share our work. If one does not adapt to the video-friendly changes in Facebook's algorithm, then people are far less likely to see one's content. More and more, video is drowning out text in the social media landscape.

### **Survival of the Wittiest**

Our increasingly digital Areopagus of today has profound implications for the Church. In the digital "Wild West," anyone with an internet connection can post online. The gatekeepers are gone. But while anyone can post, only the strong survive. Craig Detweiler writes that in the Areopagus of social media, "it is often survival of the wittiest."<sup>69</sup> On social media, users often do not actively search for content from people and organizations; rather, their friends share content from many different sources that then appears in one's "feed." It is a "rowdy,

---

<sup>66</sup> Danny Donchev, "YouTube Statistics - 2017," *Fortune Lords*, 23 Mar. 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Kurt Wagner, "Facebook Says Video Is Huge -- 100-Million-Hours-Per-Day Huge," *Recode*, 27 Jan. 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Alex Kantrowitz, "Zuckerberg Says Video Will Soon Be The Heart Of Facebook," *BuzzFeed*, 27 July 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Detweiler, 178.

aggregated mélange,”<sup>70</sup> where one might find baby pictures, followed by a political op-ed, followed by a cooking video. People engage content that makes them laugh or think or feel happy. If content is boring or disconnected from their lives, the vast majority of people will simply tune it out – or never actually see it. If their peers are not interested to share the content, it will not reach others’ feeds.

As repeatedly as popes have emphasized the need to use new media to proclaim the Gospel and as significant as online video is today, Catholics are not doing so well. Craig Detweiler writes that many churches are playing catch-up when it comes to digital video, “resorting to pale imitations more suitable for GodTube than the broad and sometimes cruel marketplace of ideas on YouTube.”<sup>71</sup> In its algorithm, Facebook does not prioritize Church content because of 2,000 years of Christian history. Online, the Church has to compete in the same social media environment where every business and pop star vies for users’ attention.

It can be cruel. YouTube videos from the USCCB routinely have under 200 views. “Despacito,” the hit song of 2017, has more than four billion. Detweiler writes, “For centuries, synagogues, churches, and mosques have dispensed wisdom and advice to nearly captive audiences. They had minimal competition for time, attention, and resources.”<sup>72</sup> That is no longer the case. Online, these religious institutions face immense competition for people’s eyes and ears. If content is not interesting or attractive, few will notice. It will get buried by everything else online.

### **A Different Measure of Authority Online: Content over Credentials**

Online, content matters more than credentials. People vote on what is important with

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 176.

their views and shares.<sup>73</sup> One could be a bishop and have a doctorate, but if he cannot produce a convincing message online, people will not care. If one has no formal education but shares a message that is attractive, people will pay attention. Authority must be earned. And on social media, it's earned by communicating regularly and rapidly – and in a way that connects with people. If traditional authorities do not speak up, then “instant experts” can arise.<sup>74</sup>

An example of such an “instant expert” is Jefferson Bethke. In 2012, the then-22-year-old Christian rap artist posted a four-minute poem on YouTube entitled, “Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus.” It has more than 32 million views (and counting). Many criticized the viral video – including experts with far more theological education than Bethke – but it was Bethke who struck a chord with millions of viewers.

The popularity of a video like “Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus” represents a significant challenge to the Church’s traditional way of doing things. It’s not only the content of Bethke’s message that many have found problematic. Rather, this emergence of instant online “experts” represents “a massively disconcerting shift for church systems that have for centuries invested in processes for credentialing clergy as religious professionals.”<sup>75</sup> One does not need to undergo an ontological change to preach on YouTube. One does not even need to study theology. One only needs an internet connection – and a charismatic personality helps.

Such a change must surely instill fear in some of the traditional religious leaders, for it is changing who people see as a legitimate authority. Any “theoblogian” can develop a following. John Allen writes that laity from different theological and political perspectives are “effectively

---

<sup>73</sup> Yes, “share” has become a noun in the language of social media.

<sup>74</sup> Campbell and Garner, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Missiology for the U.S.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 335.

competing with the bishops as the public face and voice of the Catholic Church.”<sup>76</sup> Not only are we long past the days when “Father knows best,” but now “Father” is often drowned out by those who use media more effectively.

### **You Can’t Control but You Can Contribute**

The Church is wrestling with these new realities. The landmark document “The Church and Internet” from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications takes a positive view of the internet’s potential, though the reader also sees the council’s uneasiness with this emerging reality. The document notes how the proliferation of sites calling themselves “Catholic” is confusing. As a response, they recommend that “a system of voluntary certification at the local and national levels under the supervision of representatives of the Magisterium might be helpful” so that users have “a reliable guide to what expresses the authentic position of the Church.”<sup>77</sup> But YouTube does not require an imprimatur. One does not need to get “certification” in order to publish online – let alone from the Magisterium, which has not exactly been the paragon of tech savviness.

Plus, timeliness matters. The online news and commentary cycle is relentless. If one does not respond to an event within hours – or at least within the first day or two – one misses the *kairos* moment. Not only is encouraging voluntary certification from the Magisterium unrealistic, but it would also be deadly for the Church’s relevance. The Facebook algorithm privileges trending topics and buries content that is outdated. Social media requires that one respond in real time – at least if they want people to hear. Telling people that they first need to get the green light from ecclesial authorities would result in missing conversations when they

---

<sup>76</sup> Allen, 209.

<sup>77</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, “The Church and Internet,” The Vatican, 22 Feb. 2002.

are actually taking place. Antonio Spadaro notes how the duty of the Magisterium to “watch over the people of God so that they remain in the truth that frees them” seems “to be irreconcilable with the logic of the Web” and its algorithms that prioritize trends.<sup>78</sup> It must be difficult for some members of the Magisterium to adjust to this new reality, but there is no other option. We are not going back to a pre-internet age.

Rather than futilely trying to control who speaks for the Catholic Church, the only effective response is to make a contribution – in real time, and in a way that people notice. John Allen writes, “If officialdom wants to project a different image of the Church, it will have to do so through effective communications strategies rather than through edicts.”<sup>79</sup> The Catholic Church cannot ask the people at YouTube to take down a video like “Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus.” Instead, the Church has to *show* why someone who really loves Jesus should love his Church. The Church must communicate in a way that people actually notice and then want to share with their friends. There is much on YouTube that the Church would find objectionable, but the only way of flushing out that which is negative is by producing good content. If Catholics really believe that the Church is a source of truth and beauty and goodness, then there is nothing to fear. But there is much work to do.

---

<sup>78</sup> Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*, (New York: Fordham UP, 2014), Kindle location 845.

<sup>79</sup> Allen, 210.

## CHAPTER TWO: The Sociological and Theological Necessity of an Evangelizing Catholicism

*“Attempting to be modest and self-critical, [Catholics] often fail to proclaim their faith with confidence, if at all.”*<sup>80</sup>

### ***Redemptoris Missio***

In looking at how to respond to the present U.S. context that is characterized by believing non-belongers, a lack of fervor for evangelization, and an increasingly digital Areopagus, John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio* is a helpful place to start. Robert Schreiter describes it as “certainly the most important encyclical letter on mission in the twentieth century.”<sup>81</sup> While one could argue that many of John Paul’s hopes for a “new springtime”<sup>82</sup> for Christian mission have not been realized, many of the issues and concerns John Paul identified are just as relevant as ever. John Paul wrote that “missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith.”<sup>83</sup> He saw evidence that Catholics were floundering to commit to missionary activity. He described “entire peoples and cultural areas of great importance” that “have not yet been reached by the proclamation of the Gospel.”<sup>84</sup> Even in traditionally Christian countries, he identified “a need not only for a new evangelization, but also, in some cases, for an initial evangelization.”<sup>85</sup> With this encyclical, John Paul II intended to fan into flame a fire for evangelization. Tom Forrest describes the message of the encyclical as

---

<sup>80</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, as quoted in Hahn, 33.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Schreiter, “*Redemptoris Missio* in the Development of Missiological Thought,” *Simposio “A Dieci Anni Dalla Redemptoris Missio,”* 19 Jan. 2001.

<sup>82</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

“evangelize or else.” Forrest says that it is less a work of theology and more “a call to arms, a call to action.”<sup>86</sup> Clearly, John Paul II saw that there was evangelizing work to do.

John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* explicitly describes why evangelization is just as necessary as ever.<sup>87</sup> He identifies how some wonder whether it has been replaced by inter-religious dialogue or human development. Moreover, if a non-Christian can be saved and is not going to burn in hell, one can question why there should be missionary activity.<sup>88</sup> So, why mission? John Paul writes, “Every person has the right to hear the ‘Good News’ of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling.”<sup>89</sup> Christians, then, “may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness.”<sup>90</sup> Rather than evangelization being an *imposition*, every person deserves the chance to hear this Good News. Evangelization, then, is “the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world.”<sup>91</sup> John Paul II recognizes that there are doubts about mission, and he says forcefully in this encyclical that there are answers to all those doubts.

John Paul II centers everything on Jesus Christ. Commentators frequently describe *Redemptoris Missio* as Christocentric. This was deliberate. Roger Schroeder explains that John Paul II became concerned that “the significance of Christ and the church was not being sufficiently upheld by some theologians and missionaries.”<sup>92</sup> During a time of both worldwide resurgence of non-Christian religions and a perceived “tendency to pluralism and indifferentism

---

<sup>86</sup> As quoted in Schreiter, “*Redemptoris Missio* in the Development of Missiological Thought.”

<sup>87</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 11.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Roger P. Schroeder, “Catholic Teaching on Mission after Vatican II: 1975-2007,” *A Century of Catholic Mission Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, (Wipf & Stock Pub, 2015), 115.

among many Christian theologians, missiologists and even missionaries,”<sup>93</sup> John Paul II puts Christ at the center of this encyclical on mission.

In many ways, John Paul II was continuing what he had been doing since the beginning of his pontificate. In the second paragraph of *Redemptoris Missio*, the Pope cites his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, which begins, “The redeemer of humanity, Jesus Christ, is the center of the universe of history.” William Portier writes, “In the midst of the ball of confusion, he reaffirmed the centrality of Christ... At a time when many still expected fully formed Catholics to keep sliding down the subculture’s educational chutes, he knew that living churches must evangelize or die.”<sup>94</sup> John Paul II recognized how a hesitancy to talk about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ had cooled the fire for evangelization. He used *Redemptoris Missio* to shout from the rooftops that the Good News of Jesus Christ “changes man and his history.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Greater Focus on Proclamation**

We, then, have to proclaim this. In addition to being centered on Christ, *Redemptoris Missio* has a clear focus on proclamation. John Paul II timed the release of *Redemptoris Missio* to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, the Vatican II Decree on Missionary Activity, and the fifteenth anniversary of Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. John Paul II cites both documents frequently, but one sees a different emphasis, especially as compared to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

Paul VI had greatly expanded the notion of evangelization. He writes in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that “evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to *those who*

---

<sup>93</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 324.

<sup>94</sup> William L. Portier, “Here Come the Nones! Pluralism and Evangelization after Denominationalism and Americanism,” *Religious Studies Faculty Publications* (2013), 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 44.

do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.”<sup>96</sup> At the same time, he describes evangelization as “a complex process made up of varied elements.”<sup>97</sup> Evangelization for Paul VI includes activities such as a commitment to human advancement and liberation. He states 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.”<sup>98</sup> He argues that proclamation is essential but is “only one aspect of evangelization.”<sup>99</sup> Additionally, when he does talk about proclamation, he emphasizes the importance of Christians’ “wordless witness” that will “stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live.”<sup>100</sup> All Christians are called to wordless witness, and by doing this, “they can be real evangelizers.”<sup>101</sup>

One sees a greater emphasis on explicit proclamation in *Redemptoris Missio*. John Paul II writes that “the first form of evangelization is witness,”<sup>102</sup> but states very clearly that “proclamation is the permanent priority of mission.”<sup>103</sup> He mentions that the Church cannot “deprive men and women of the ‘Good News’ about their being loved and saved by God.”<sup>104</sup> He states that “*dialogue does not dispense from evangelization.*”<sup>105</sup> While recognizing that the “first form of witness is *the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community,*”<sup>106</sup> John Paul II expects more than “wordless witness.” When most of

---

<sup>96</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15, his emphasis.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>102</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 41.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, his emphasis.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

humanity does not know Christ, explicit proclamation of the Gospel is absolutely necessary. John Paul writes that “all peoples have a right to hear” how God bestows new life through Christ.<sup>107</sup> And to hear it, Christians need to proclaim this Good News.

John Paul is not *disagreeing* with Paul VI – in fact, he quotes him copiously – but his different emphasis flows from an awareness of how the religious landscape had changed since Paul VI published his apostolic exhortation fifteen years earlier. Paul VI opened all sorts of possibilities for what “evangelization” could be, but John Paul II identifies a need for proclamation, particularly when the number of “those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase.”<sup>108</sup> In the background of *Redemptoris Missio* is also the awareness that the Evangelical and Pentecostal groups with the greatest fervor for evangelization were also oftentimes the fastest growing. John Paul II describes an “urgency of missionary activity”<sup>109</sup> in that people have a right to hear about the fullness of life in Christ.

That will not happen without focus. When one makes a long list of what evangelization can be in order not to “impoverish” the “reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism,”<sup>110</sup> one also risks letting Christians off the hook when it comes to proclamation. Virtually any Christian could tell himself that he gives “wordless witness” to his faith. In 1984, the Secretariat for Non-Christians<sup>111</sup> issued a document that lists “principle elements” of mission: “presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1, his emphasis.

<sup>110</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 17.

<sup>111</sup> This was later renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

catechesis.”<sup>112</sup> Almost everyone who sees such a list could check the box as an evangelizer if they participate in liturgy or volunteer to help the poor. Of course we need to pray. Of course we need to commit ourselves to justice. But such activities are not enough for sharing the fullness of life in Christ with the billions who do not know him. John Paul writes, “No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”<sup>113</sup> There’s no wonder Tom Forrest described *Redemptoris Missio* as “evangelize or else.”

### **The Need for an “Evangelizing Catholicism”**

In recent decades, a number of U.S. Catholic theologians and public intellectuals have made an assessment of the religious landscape similar to John Paul II and have called for an “evangelical Catholicism” or “evangelizing Catholicism.” Evangelical Catholics are “evangelical” in the sense of emphasizing the need to proclaim Christ and share one’s personal experience of God’s grace. They frequently describe their experience of “friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ.” The first use of “evangelical Catholicism” in American Catholic discourse dates to David O’Brien’s 1983 biography of Isaac Hecker,<sup>114</sup> the founder of the Paulist Fathers. Since then, prominent works describing a similar trend have included Keith Fournier’s 1990 book *Evangelical Catholicism*, William Portier’s 2004 *Communio* article “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” and George Weigel’s 2013 book *Evangelical Catholicism*. “Evangelical Catholicism” also appeared as the number-two trend in John Allen’s book *The Future of the Church*. The theologians who have written about this emerging reality describe it somewhat differently, but

---

<sup>112</sup> Secretariat for Non-Christians, “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission,” The Vatican, 10 May 1984.

<sup>113</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Portier (2004), 35.

there tends to be much overlap in what these thinkers are describing.

Evangelical Catholics see their faith “as a matter of personal choice rather than cultural inheritance.”<sup>115</sup> One sees this clearly in the writing of Fournier and Weigel. Fournier writes that an evangelical Christian “is one who believes the good news about Christ and proclaims it. In other words, an evangelical Christian *is* a Christian.”<sup>116</sup> The implication, then, is that one who is not actively engaged in explicit proclamation is not *really* Christian. Weigel goes so far as to describe the “phenomenon of the baptized Catholic pagan.”<sup>117</sup> He states that one is not Catholic just because “your parents submitted you to a certain religious ritual when you were an infant.” Rather, he writes, “You are a Catholic because you have met the Lord Jesus and entered into a mature friendship with him.”<sup>118</sup> Evangelical Catholics do not simply “inherit” their faith; they choose it – and chose to share it.

Those writing about the emergence of evangelical Catholicism have come from different places along the ecclesial spectrum. One would be hard-pressed to find two more different writing styles or theological perspectives than those of George Weigel and William Portier, who would never write about “baptized Catholic pagans.” Still, they both identify the importance of evangelical Catholicism for the future – and present – of the Catholic Church. Portier writes, “Despite my affection for liberal Catholics, I agree with Weigel's judgment that they don't have the juice to pass on the faith to future generations... This is why, for the past fifteen years, I have been telling anyone who would listen that the future of the church will be evangelical.”<sup>119</sup>

These writers are looking around at where there are signs of new life in the Catholic Church and

---

<sup>115</sup> Allen, 56.

<sup>116</sup> Keith A. Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics*, (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1990), 21.

<sup>117</sup> Weigel, 67.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>119</sup> William L. Portier, “More Mission, Less Maintenance,” *Commonweal*, 12 Apr. 2013.

find that “evangelical” often describes young Catholics who are active in their practice of the faith. John Allen cites “eruptions of evangelical Catholic energy,” such as World Youth Day celebrations or annual meetings of the Communion and Liberation movement.<sup>120</sup> Of course, even the largest Catholic gatherings represent a small fraction of the Church, but theologians of varying ecclesiologies are seeing that there is energy today in what can be described as evangelical Catholicism.

An evangelical form of Catholicism is particularly important because of the lack of a cohesive Catholic culture in the U.S. Weigel is interested in what forms of Catholicism actually have a vibrant future. And he is deeply critical of what he calls “progressive Catholicism” and “its inability to transmit the faith to successor generations.”<sup>121</sup> Weigel contrasts the growth of African Catholicism with the “infertility” of progressive Catholicism that one often sees in “the religious wasteland of Western Europe, the part of the world Church that adopted the progressive project most enthusiastically.”<sup>122</sup> Weigel argues, “History, not argument, has shown the implausibility of progressive Catholicism as a strategy to empower the Church for mission in the third millennium.”<sup>123</sup> According to Weigel, the future Catholic Church is evangelical.

For anyone who has read Weigel over the years, his attack on progressive Catholicism is not at all surprising. But Weigel, in an interesting plague-on-both-your-houses approach, argues that “Catholic traditionalism is also an implausible, indeed impossible, model for living Catholicism.”<sup>124</sup> The Catholic “ghetto” in the U.S. disappeared long ago. The cohesive Catholic culture maintained by families, schools, and neighborhoods is no longer present. A

---

<sup>120</sup> Allen, 58.

<sup>121</sup> Weigel, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

traditionalism that simply calls for the Church to return to the 1950s “denies the reality of the conditions under which the Gospel must be proclaimed in the twenty-first century.”<sup>125</sup> We are not going back in time. Just as John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* emphasized certain elements of evangelization in light of changing circumstances, George Weigel – the author of the most famous biography of John Paul II – is similarly interested in what ways of being Church have a future today.

The answer, according to those writing about evangelical Catholicism, is a Catholicism that emphasizes a relationship with Jesus Christ. Portier writes, “If Catholicism is no longer a working culture, we are thrown back on the one thing necessary, the one thing that matters. Only one thing lasts, and that is Jesus Christ, the center of the universe and of history.”<sup>126</sup> Weigel writes, “Friendship with Jesus Christ is at the center of Evangelical Catholicism.”<sup>127</sup> He continues, “Evangelical Catholicism begins not with *knowing about* Jesus, but with *knowing* Jesus.”<sup>128</sup> Most young people in the U.S. today are not antagonistic towards the Church; many simply do not think about it. Religion is often far from their minds. In order to draw such people towards committed Christian practice, those writing about evangelical Catholicism argue that the Church must present a message that is centered on Jesus Christ.

While those writing about evangelical Catholicism frequently have a Christocentric emphasis, the most dynamic forms of Christianity today frequently make ample room for the Spirit – a point often missed by writers in the Global North. Charismatics and Pentecostals have grown from a “handful” in 1900 to several hundred million today. They are expected to be

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Portier (2013), 15.

<sup>127</sup> Weigel, 31.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 57, his emphasis.

more than one billion by 2050.<sup>129</sup> There are an estimated 120 million Catholic Charismatics alone – or about 11% of the global Catholic population.<sup>130</sup> Even though Charismatics frequently emphasize evangelization, Weigel never even mentions them in *Evangelical Catholicism*.<sup>131</sup> Writers like Weigel and Portier helpfully emphasize the importance of friendship with Jesus Christ, but some of the fastest growing Christian groups around the world indicate that the Holy Spirit is also an important part of an attractive Christian message today.

Young people today – just like young people of any age – are hungry for something. And, John Allen writes, “Their formative experience wasn’t growing up in a rigid, stifling Church, but rather a rootless secular culture.”<sup>132</sup> Christian practice that feeds their hunger for identity has a future. Milquetoast Catholicism does not. One may see the practices of some young evangelical Catholics as “conservative,” but John Allen argues that this is not the most helpful label, for “there's little cultural Catholicism these days left to conserve.” Rather, he writes, evangelical Catholicism is “a way of pitching classical Catholic faith and practice in the context of pluralism, making it modern and traditional all at once.”<sup>133</sup> Eucharistic adoration, for example, is a practice that is popular with many young Catholics who could be described as evangelical. Rather than it being “conservative,” however, one could see the very act of spending time in silence without a phone as countercultural. Young people are hungry for identity, and there is an opening for the Church to feed such a hunger.

---

<sup>129</sup> Jenkins, 10.

<sup>130</sup> Allen, 384.

<sup>131</sup> Weigel is not alone. Many Catholic theologians and intellectuals in the Global North have been blind to such developments. For example, Ian Linden’s 300-page book entitled *Global Catholicism* manages not to mention the 11% of Catholics around the globe who are Charismatics.

<sup>132</sup> Allen, 57.

<sup>133</sup> Allen, “The Triumph of Evangelical Catholicism.”

This requires proclamation. Allen writes, “In a pluralistic age, faith has to be preached because most people no longer imbibe it from neighborhoods, schools or even families.”<sup>134</sup> The Church cannot expect young people to simply absorb the faith through osmosis; the Church must make an intentional evangelizing effort. The Church has to *show* why a relationship with Jesus Christ makes a difference in one’s life and why participation in his Church is a commitment worth making. And we need more than simply “wordless witness.” Portier writes, “An evangelical ethos demands public witness that goes beyond what a Catholic of my generation understands by ‘good example.’”<sup>135</sup> Instead, Portier writes that we need “active forms of witness in ‘public’ spaces.”<sup>136</sup> Catholics need to be willing and able to say to their friends and co-workers why they follow Jesus Christ and belong to the Church. In words that echo John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, Weigel writes, “The timidity (or selfishness) that precludes offering others the possibility of friendship with the Lord Jesus is unworthy of those whom he calls to be his witnesses.”<sup>137</sup> Many Catholics still do not see explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ as a “Catholic thing” – or, if they do, it’s a thing for “Father.” But without a cohesive Catholic culture that passes along the faith, it’s an evangelical form of Catholicism that has a future. Confident proclamation of why following Jesus makes our lives more abundant is necessary for those who call themselves Christian.

The laity must play an important role in this evangelizing form of Catholicism. Evangelical Catholicism is not the work of a clerical clique. Rather, those advocating for a more evangelical form of Catholicism have a very high view of the laity. Weigel dedicates an entire

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Portier (2004), 44.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Weigel, 87.

chapter in his book to the lay vocation. He considers being a Christian a “full-time occupation”<sup>138</sup> – and not just for priests and bishops. He argues that “the Church cannot evangelize or sanctify the world if the Church is imagined to be a kind of clerical game preserve into which the laity are occasionally permitted entry in order to observe what’s going on.”<sup>139</sup> Rather, he argues, “*The Church* is every baptized Christian, and every one of those baptized Christians is called to both holiness and mission.”<sup>140</sup> He believes that “the lay vocation is evangelism: of the family, the workplace, and the neighborhood, and thus of culture, economics, and politics.”<sup>141</sup> The “universal call to holiness” has emerged as a key aspect of post-Vatican II Catholic thought. Weigel wholeheartedly supports this lay call to holiness — and mission.

Scott Hahn in his book *Evangelizing Catholics* makes a similar argument. He writes that the whole Church – most definitely including the laity – must promote the New Evangelization “using all available means – conversation, personal witness, media... It’s about simple acts of kindness, simple challenges issued in love, and simple questions asked with sincerity.”<sup>142</sup> One does not need to look far to find opportunities for evangelization. It can start at home, in the workplace, and on social media. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Vatican II’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, repeatedly mentions the laity’s apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. However, Hahn argues that rather than heeding the decree’s call to be the salt of the earth and light of the world, “many lay people came to believe that living their faith meant

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., his emphasis.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>142</sup> Hahn, 13.

taking on a liturgical role during the Mass.”<sup>143</sup> As enriching as it is to have lay lectors and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, such liturgical participation cannot replace the call upon the laity *after* the words, “Go forth, the Mass is ended.” We receive the Body of Christ in order to *be* the Body of Christ in the world. That includes proclamation of the Good News.

Some may be skeptical. Some may question what it is that evangelical Catholics mean by “evangelization.” Richard McBrien writes, “Some Christians assume a militant posture. They call for renewed efforts at ‘evangelization’ understood not in the broad and comprehensive manner of Pope Paul VI’s 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.”<sup>144</sup> Of course, we need the work for justice and peace and everything else that constitutes “comprehensive” evangelization. Additionally, an evangelizing form of Catholicism should not be “militant.” But it should be intentional. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* is saying we need focus. The cohesive Catholic culture in which Richard McBrien grew up no longer exists. Unless there is intentionality around proclaiming the Gospel and promoting friendship with Jesus Christ, there won’t be much of a future for the Catholic Church. When one looks at which Christian churches are growing and which are not, the growing churches are much more likely to emphasize proclamation. When one looks at the young adults in the U.S. who actually show up in the pews today, they share much more in common with the thinking of John Paul II than with Richard McBrien.

There is much work to do. While schools and parishes often encourage people to perform community service – and then brag about how many hours they put in – they rarely call the laity to explicit proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Frank DeSiano writes,

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>144</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), 268.

“We spread the Gospel by our actions, to be sure, but also by the ways we speak to others about faith and help make it a possibility for them.” And he concludes, “We Catholics are entirely too reluctant in this area.”<sup>145</sup> Few Catholics are burning out because they are proclaiming the Gospel too much.

While Church documents can rightly mention the “responsibility” of all Catholics to be agents of evangelization, something is missing if we view the work of evangelization merely in terms of duties. An evangelizing form of Catholicism is grounded in an encounter with Jesus Christ and his Church – an encounter that makes one unable *not* to share such Good News. It’s the attitude of Saint Paul, who writes that “the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14) to share this gift with others. Evangelizing Catholicism is not so much about “defending” the faith but giving to others a gift one has previously received. It’s not about showing how someone else is wrong but about sharing one’s experience of abundant life in Christ.

This must be grounded in joy. This is Good News – at least it is in theory. Non-Christians may not always *see* that, especially when Christians fight with each other about who is really Christian. John Paul writes, “The characteristic of every authentic missionary life is the inner joy that comes from faith... the one who proclaims the ‘Good News’ must be a person who has found true hope in Christ.”<sup>146</sup> And Lord knows we could use more joy! It’s the joy that one feels at World Youth Day with young people from all over the world marching through the street and spontaneously singing. Evangelizing Catholicism is not so much about being right as it is about being on fire. And when the faithful are on fire with the Spirit, they cannot help but joyfully share that gift with others.

---

<sup>145</sup> Frank P. DeSiano, *The Evangelizing Catholic: a Practical Handbook for Reaching Out*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>146</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 91.

Ultimately, I argue that “evangelizing Catholicism” is a more helpful term to describe the form of Catholicism needed for the twenty-first century, rather than “evangelical Catholicism.” Without a doubt, “evangelical Catholicism” is the more common term used by scholars and public intellectuals, but this term carries heavy baggage. Even when “evangelical” is used as an adjective to describe a way of being Catholic, the word calls to mind all sorts of associations with Evangelical Protestants. “Evangelizing Catholicism” connects with the drive in recent decades for a New Evangelization while also sidestepping the unhelpful baggage associated with the term “evangelical.”

While George Weigel has written the most important book about “evangelical Catholicism” – entitled, sure enough, *Evangelical Catholicism* – Weigel may not be the best messenger of this way of being Catholic. Weigel writes, “The evangelical Catholic’s joyful embrace of life is an expression of the gratitude that the radically converted and deeply faithful disciple feels for the friendship of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>147</sup> And yet, “joyful” is not the first word to describe Weigel’s writing over the years; pugnacious would be a more accurate description. “Evangelizing” is also used the word used by both Scott and Frank DeSiano – two authors who not only write *about* the importance of joy and charity but who better *show* it in their writing.

Additionally, “evangelizing” more clearly evokes the activity of going out and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Those who are “evangelizing” are always in process; they never complete their call to evangelize and be evangelized. Desiano writes that

---

<sup>147</sup> Weigel, 49.

evangelization “calls everyone – believer and unbeliever – to conversion and reconversion in spiritual growth and discovery.”<sup>148</sup> “Evangelizing Catholicism” emphasizes this ongoing process.

### **The Evangelizing Catholicism of *Evangelii Gaudium* and Aparecida**

The concluding document from the meeting of the Latin American Bishops at Aparecida in 2007<sup>149</sup> and the actions and writing of Pope Francis further show the importance of this evangelizing Catholicism today. While also giving more attention to the Holy Spirit than John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* and the bishops at Aparecida put an encounter with Christ front and center. They use the language of all the baptized being “missionary disciples.” These documents illustrate what I have been calling “evangelizing Catholicism.”

One cannot understand Pope Francis or the bishops at Aparecida without seeing their conviction that an encounter with Jesus Christ makes all the difference in the world. The bishops at Aparecida write, “The greatest poverty is that of not recognizing the presence of the mystery of God and his love in the life of the human being.”<sup>150</sup> They argue that “Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation for all peoples,” and that the “greatest treasure” we can offer people is helping to facilitate for them an “encounter with Jesus Christ Risen, our Savior.”<sup>151</sup> They quote Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* in saying, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon

---

<sup>148</sup> Desiano, 20.

<sup>149</sup> The fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean met in May 2007. The theme for their gathering was “Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that our peoples may have life in Him.” Then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio headed the drafting committee of the conference’s concluding document. Many of the prominent themes of the Aparecida document have appeared in the teaching of Pope Francis.

<sup>150</sup> Aparecida, 405.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

and a decisive direction.”<sup>152</sup> This encounter with the Lord makes all the difference.

Pope Francis continues where the Latin American Bishops left off. He writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters.”<sup>153</sup> Christians, notes Francis, have been “entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life.”<sup>154</sup> This “infinite love” is “never out of date” and is the only thing that can cure “our infinite sadness.”<sup>155</sup> With Jesus, Pope Francis writes, “life becomes richer” and “it is easier to find meaning in everything.”<sup>156</sup> Francis writes that the foundation for all evangelization is the personal conviction that “it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him.”<sup>157</sup>

What Pope Francis and the Latin American Bishops are describing is the antithesis of how many young adults view religion today. For many emerging adults, religious ideas are often “abstract agreements that have been mentally checked off and filed away,” rather than being what they “organize their lives around.”<sup>158</sup> Pope Francis is saying that nothing can replace friendship with Jesus Christ. He writes that what should trouble our consciences is that so many “are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.”<sup>159</sup> Jesus is the answer to our search for meaning. It is this encounter that we should organize our lives around.

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>153</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 265.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Smith, 154.

<sup>159</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49.

When we have had such an encounter with Jesus Christ, we cannot but proclaim Him to others and hope to facilitate their encounter with the Lord. The bishops at Aparecida write that for those “who have experienced the living encounter with Him... we want to share this incomparable happiness with others every day.”<sup>160</sup> Pope Francis repeatedly echoes this same sentiment in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Francis writes, “The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received... What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known?”<sup>161</sup> While we can speak of evangelization as the responsibility of all the baptized, *Evangelii Gaudium* often does not describe evangelization in terms of a duty. Rather, Pope Francis more often describes evangelization as that which we cannot *not* do after receiving such an incredible gift.

Facilitating an encounter with Christ has to be the Church’s priority. During a long conversation with then-Cardinal Bergoglio less than a year before he became pope, George Weigel told Bergoglio that he was perhaps the first Latin American ecclesial leader he knew who had not complained about “sheep-rustling” by Pentecostal and Evangelical groups. Weigel reports that Bergoglio responded by saying, “When Catholicism lost the allegiance of its faithful in Latin America, that was because the Catholic Church had forgotten to proclaim Christ the Lord and had failed to offer friendship with him as the royal road to human happiness and flourishing.”<sup>162</sup> Francis and the bishops are stating that those who have encountered Jesus Christ cannot sit idle while so many have not entered into friendship with Him. This treasure, this experience of abundant life, comes with a task. We need to facilitate others’ encounter with the Lord.

---

<sup>160</sup> Aparecida, 364.

<sup>161</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 264.

<sup>162</sup> Weigel, 262.

This includes explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ. Francis makes clear that wordless witness is insufficient. Francis writes that “all of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord.”<sup>163</sup> He cites John Paul II in saying that “there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord.”<sup>164</sup> The promotion of justice, for example, is an essential component of evangelization, but John Paul II and Francis seem to say that if people never testify to the one who calls them to the work of justice, then it is not “true evangelization.” Francis describes “the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work” and quotes John Paul II in saying that “evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority.”<sup>165</sup> This is a *patient* and *progressive* process. It requires time, listening, and the willingness to be evangelized by others, especially the poor. This proclamation is the most important task for the Church today.

When this proclamation of the Gospel is so important in the thought of Pope Francis, his message is akin to Nike’s famous advertising slogan: “Just do it.” For Francis, “the joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.”<sup>166</sup> Thus, he states, “It is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear.”<sup>167</sup> There’s no time for waiting. Fear is not an acceptable excuse. Francis notes that after Saint Paul’s encounter with Jesus Christ, he “immediately proclaimed Jesus.” He then provocatively asks, “So what are we waiting for?”<sup>168</sup> Rather than

---

<sup>163</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 121.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

wasting time talking about “what needs to be done,”<sup>169</sup> Francis says, *just do it*. Get out there and proclaim the Gospel!

This work of proclamation does not require extensive training or travel. Francis argues that “all of us are called to mature in our work as evangelizers,” but that, too, is not an excuse for inaction.<sup>170</sup> While there is always a need for others to be “constantly evangelizing us,” this does not mean that we should postpone the evangelizing mission; rather, each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus “wherever we are.”<sup>171</sup> The time for proclamation is now. The place is here. Francis writes that we have a daily responsibility for informal preaching that can take place in the middle of a conversation with neighbors or even strangers. He continues, “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”<sup>172</sup> We can always grow in our ability to proclaim the Gospel, but a willingness to do what we can, where we are, and with those we meet is what Francis is advocating.

### **Creative Adaptation**

Francis and the Latin American Bishops do not spell out exactly how one proclaims or the words one should use. In fact, they emphasize the need to adapt the language of proclamation to the context. Francis writes that we should not communicate the Gospel message “by fixed formulations learned by heart or by specific words which express an absolutely invariable content.”<sup>173</sup> Rather, this communication can and should happen “in so

---

<sup>169</sup> Francis notes that in Spanish this is the sin of “habriaqueísmo” (*Evangelií Gaudium*, 96).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

many different ways.”<sup>174</sup> Our *mission* today is not new, notes Francis, “but the *language* by which the Gospel is proclaimed must be *renewed*” in order to “speak to the cultures in the world today.”<sup>175</sup> The bishops at Aparecida make many similar points. They write, “The proclamation of the gospel cannot ignore contemporary culture, which must be known, evaluated, and in a certain sense assumed by the Church, with a language understood by our contemporaries.”<sup>176</sup> They note that many people are unhappy “not so much with the content of Church teaching, but with the way it is presented.”<sup>177</sup> It’s not just *what* we say that is important but also *how* we say it.

This proclamation of the Gospel requires creativity. Francis notes that the new evangelization “calls for courage, creativity and the decision to take paths which are at times yet uncharted.”<sup>178</sup> Francis writes that “pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’”<sup>179</sup> Instead, he invites everyone “to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.”<sup>180</sup> What this will look like will inevitably vary from context to context, but what should not differ, according to Francis, is the need for boldness. “We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word,” he writes.<sup>181</sup> Francis gives few details in *Evangelii Gaudium* about how to proclaim the Gospel other than saying it should not be the way we have

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Pope Francis, “To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization,” The Vatican, 29 May 2015, his emphasis.

<sup>176</sup> Aparecida, 480.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 497.

<sup>178</sup> Pope Francis, “To Participants at the International Pastoral Congress on the World’s Big Cities,” The Vatican, 27 Nov. 2014.

<sup>179</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 167.

always done things.

### **The Need for New Media**

Today, evangelizing Catholicism that is bold and creative must include the use of new media. The Latin American Bishops recognize our current “technology revolution”<sup>182</sup> and quote Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in saying that mass media and social communication “enable the Good News to reach millions of people” and that proclamation “cannot do without these means.”<sup>183</sup> The bishops also cite John Paul II in saying that “the new world of cyberspace is a summons to the great adventure of using its potential to proclaim the Gospel message”<sup>184</sup> and that “the Internet can offer magnificent opportunities for evangelization.”<sup>185</sup> They also note how “the use of new media” can be a new pastoral strategy for “seeking and reaching out to those who are distant.”<sup>186</sup> Recognizing the tremendous potential of new media for the proclamation of the Gospel, the bishops at Aparecida commit themselves to “support and optimize the creation by the Church of its own communications media.”<sup>187</sup> Clearly, this is a priority for the bishops at Aparecida.

While Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* does not follow the example of the bishops at Aparecida in explicitly emphasizing the use of mass media to proclaim the Gospel, there is much in the apostolic exhortation that gives support for using digital tools for proclamation. Pope Francis discusses the need for a pastoral strategy that “would actually reach everyone.”<sup>188</sup> With its tremendous potential for reaching the masses, new media would seem to be part of

---

<sup>182</sup> Aparecida, 484.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 485.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>188</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35.

the equation. Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* also encourages people to be creative in how they evangelize and “find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are.”<sup>189</sup> When the average American now spends more than ten hours a day in front of a screen, finding ways to communicate Jesus “wherever we are” would seem to include the digital landscape. For Francis, every Christian “is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.”<sup>190</sup> Even if we are physically in Boston or Buenos Aires, much of the time we spend “here and now” is online. This, then, is space for evangelization.

### **Not the Whole Story**

This does not in any way mean that digital proclamation is a replacement for in-person evangelization. The bishops at Aparecida – the very same bishops who emphasize the need for spending “hours, weeks, or years of our life” with the poor<sup>191</sup> – note that “the mass media generally do not replace personal relationships or local community life.”<sup>192</sup> Francis warns against those who “try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy” and mediate relationships “by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command.”<sup>193</sup> Nothing replaces in-person encounter.

One can also raise concerns about how deeply one can share the Gospel amid the noise of the internet. Francis quotes John Paul II in saying that “evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority.”<sup>194</sup> The internet is not exactly known for promoting patience or depth. Pope

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>191</sup> Aparecida, 397.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 489.

<sup>193</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 110.

Francis describes “the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications.”<sup>195</sup> After the 2016 U.S. presidential election, we are also more aware of the possible influence of “fake news.” In such an environment, that “patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” can be difficult to hear. Instead, people may encounter “fake religion.”

Additionally, even if one sees digital tools as a tremendous complement to in-person ministry, rather than a replacement, one can still raise concerns about digital evangelization. The bishops at Aparecida describe many “faces of the new excluded,” including “those excluded by technological illiteracy.”<sup>196</sup> The number of people with access to the internet and smartphones has exploded around the world since their meeting in 2007, and yet there are many who are still excluded by technological illiteracy. These concerns of the bishops can be coupled with the insistence by Pope Francis that “every person is worthy of our giving.”<sup>197</sup> Francis writes, “Who are *the first to whom the Gospel message must be proclaimed?* The answer, found so often throughout the Gospel, is clear: it is the poor, the little ones and the sick, those who are often looked down upon or forgotten.”<sup>198</sup> Rarely do the poor have equal technological access. Depending too heavily on a digital strategy for evangelization risks excluding the privileged recipients of the proclamation of the Gospel.

### **Evangelizing Catholicism on the Digital Highway**

Still, despite these and many other concerns that one could raise, when Francis looks at the internet, he takes a largely positive outlook. One of the most talked-about lines from

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>196</sup> Aparecida, 402.

<sup>197</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 274.

<sup>198</sup> Pope Francis, “Message for World Mission Day 2015,” The Vatican, 24 May 2015, his emphasis.

*Evangelii Gaudium* is how Francis prefers “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”<sup>199</sup> He has subsequently extended the metaphor to include the digital highway. In his message for World Communications Day in 2014, he noted, “Those ‘streets’ are the world where people live and where they can be reached, both effectively and affectively. The digital highway is one of them, a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope.”<sup>200</sup> Those who have used digital tools to evangelize know very well the experience of feeling “bruised” and “hurting” from the work; personal attacks can be quite common in the comments section. It may seem easy to write a tweet of 140 characters, but that does not mean it is easy to face the internet trolls while trying to convey the joy of the Gospel. Still, there is so much potential. By using the internet, Francis writes, the Christian message can reach “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).<sup>201</sup> We cannot *not* use these tools.

In addition to using the internet to reach many people, Francis even argues that “the internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.”<sup>202</sup> Of course, triviality and superficiality run rampant on social media. Still, Francis sees the internet as a gift from God with tremendous potential for forging real relationships. In his address for World Communications Day in 2016, Francis notes, “Emails, text messages, social networks and chats can also be fully human forms of communication. It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is

---

<sup>199</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49.

<sup>200</sup> Pope Francis, “Communications at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter,” The Vatican, 24 Jan. 2014.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal.”<sup>203</sup> Digital evangelization can be immensely relational. Readers and viewers often leave comments and send messages, and people online can share deeply about themselves. The bishops at Aparecida discussed the “digitally excluded,” but one cannot ignore how there are also many who are *included* as a result of using digital tools.

Antonio Spadaro, S.J., a friend and advisor to the Pope, makes a similar point in his book *Cybertheology*. He notes that many can “dismiss the Internet as a parallel reality (that is, one that is separate from our everyday lives).” Instead, he writes, the internet is “an anthropological space that is deeply intertwined with our everyday lives.”<sup>204</sup> This, too, is “real life.” Of course, the internet and social media are not immune from contributing to “bubbles” or “echo chambers” where one sees things that already confirm one’s view of the world. Still, digital spaces offer opportunities for hearing about others’ experiences and deepening existing relationships.

Video in particular offers great opportunities for the encounter that Pope Francis continually emphasizes. In my own experience of both writing articles and making videos online, not only is the average video much more popular in terms of views, but the comments are more positive. It’s far more difficult to assume the worst about people when you can see and hear them. The reciprocity of online video is much less than an in-person encounter. Giving a thumbs-up is not the same as sharing a meal. It is, however, a personal way of sharing one’s story that can reach the masses.

Additionally, if we are going to “actually reach everyone” as part of an evangelizing

---

<sup>203</sup> Pope Francis. "Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter." The Vatican, 24 Jan. 2016.

<sup>204</sup> Spadaro, Kindle location 146.

Catholicism, then a digital strategy must be a significant part of the equation. For many believing non-belongers, religion is simply not a big deal in their day-to-day lives. Very few are militant atheists, but they have other things going on. They are unlikely to seek out formal religious practice on their own. Simply telling non-practicing Catholics to “come home” to Mass may be a hard sell. The Church has to go to them when they are unlikely to go to the Church.

At the same time, there is an openness to religion and spirituality. The great majority of “nones” believe in God. Many pray regularly. More than two-thirds of religiously unaffiliated Americans report that their last time attending a religious service was a positive experience.<sup>205</sup> Considering that many of them pray regularly and believe religion is important, one can reasonably expect that some would be open to a YouTube video that shows how they could live a more fulfilling life. Evangelizing Catholicism is about going to where people are and communicating the Gospel in a way that is accessible. That very much includes using their mediums of communication. Evangelizing Catholicism has to use the digital highway.

---

<sup>205</sup> Betsy Cooper et al.

### **CHAPTER THREE: Missionary Disciples' Opportunities for Digital Evangelization**

*"If Catholics have an Achilles heel, it's that we believe that the popes and bishops are the cause of and solution to all of our problems... That is not how change happens. It happens because creative people in the church realize when a moment is upon them, and they stand up and respond to it."<sup>206</sup>*

#### **Online Spaces for Lay Contributions: The Gatekeepers are Gone**

One cannot adequately talk about digital evangelization without looking at who will be the evangelizers. While there is space for priests and religious to use digital tools to proclaim the Gospel – in fact, there are no limits as to who can get involved with the endeavor – lay people need to take the lead in digital evangelization. It's not just a need; it's also an opportunity for the Catholic Church. Online, there is nothing stopping the laity but themselves. On social media, the laity are the ones best positioned to reach their friends and family with a message that is accessible and interesting. With little stopping them, they can experiment and see how best to communicate the Gospel today. Additionally, the new spaces for lay contributions created by the internet could also enable the Church to better realize the call of all the baptized to be missionary disciples.

Online, "the gatekeepers are gone," as those who study technology often note. There is no approval process one has to pass through to blog, tweet, or create a YouTube channel. In 2006, *Time* (in)famously named "You" its Person of the Year. While many criticized the decision as a gimmick, it reflected a shift to a more participatory online culture. If people want to say they are writing or speaking from a Catholic/Christian perspective, no one can stop them. No priest or bishop can prevent someone from going on YouTube and personally sharing how "he

---

<sup>206</sup> John Allen in Michael Freedman, "'Vaticanologist' John Allen Addresses Popularity And Philosophy Of Pope Francis During NU Talk," *Niagara University*, 11 Nov. 2016.

or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>207</sup> No one can stop you from using Facebook as a way to “move out in all directions to proclaim that evil and death do not have the last word, that love is stronger.”<sup>208</sup> Jefferson Bethke, the creator of “Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus,” shows how anyone can have a platform. Karl Vaters, in a provocative article in *Christianity Today*, notes, “The era of needing approval from anyone but God and ourselves to produce and distribute the eternal truths of the Gospel in fresh, new ways to millions of people is long gone.”<sup>209</sup> One could use her webcam and start proclaiming the Gospel today.

Social media thus offers a space for all the baptized to live out their call as missionary disciples. Pope Francis emphasizes how “it is Baptism that makes every lay faithful a missionary disciple of the Lord, the salt of the earth, the light of the world.”<sup>210</sup> YouTube and Facebook video offer tremendous new avenues for the laity to be that salt and light. Vloggers of all sorts have already illustrated how one can amass a personal following online. Now, one can use the very same tools to try to promote the following of Jesus. When many of us spend so much of our time online, digital tools are a natural way by which the baptized can be those agents of evangelization that Pope Francis envisions.

Of course, just because one puts something up on YouTube does not mean many people will see it, but if people are charismatic – or lucky – their work can go “viral” and reach millions of viewers. John Allen writes that Mother Angelica showed that in the media world, at least initially, “you don’t need deep pockets, sophisticated technology, or extensive delivery

---

<sup>207</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

<sup>208</sup> Aparecida, 548.

<sup>209</sup> Karl Vaters, “The Gatekeepers Are Gone: What’s Holding Your Ministry Back?” *Christianity Today*, 19 Oct. 2015.

<sup>210</sup> Pope Francis, “To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity,” The Vatican, 17 June 2016.

platforms. All you need is one charismatic personality whom people will crawl over hot coals to see or hear, and everything else will take care of itself.”<sup>211</sup> Now, with so many more options for producing independent content online, there are fewer “hot coals.” If you post an attractive message online, people can find you.

With the gatekeepers gone, content that appeals to a diversity of interests can emerge. As much as Allen celebrates the tenacity of Mother Angelica in overcoming obstacles to establish EWTN, the network has in some sense become a new “gatekeeper” – or monopoly – in Catholic television. Few would say that EWTN represents the diversity of American Catholicism, but there is no alternative Catholic programming in many areas. Online, however, the equation completely changes. People do not need to fit EWTN’s model of Catholicism to broadcast online. They can share their own way of being Catholic and connect with viewers EWTN may not.

Additionally, *better* content can emerge. The recent history in Catholic media does not necessarily show that good content comes from large entities with significant resources. Allen notes how Mother Angelica was scrappier and more effective, whereas better funded television efforts, including one supported by the U.S. bishops’ conference, failed.<sup>212</sup> Looking at the recent Catholic media history, Allen writes, “It has been independent Catholic initiatives that have had the best luck.”<sup>213</sup> And, with the shift to new media, the potential pool of talent from which new content can emerge is much greater. EWTN is no longer the only Catholic game in town. Television networks no longer compete just with other networks for eyeballs; rather, they have to contend with millions of independent content creators on YouTube and Facebook. There is

---

<sup>211</sup> John L. Allen, “We Shall Not Look upon the Likes of Mother Angelica Again,” *Crux*, 28 Mar. 2016.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Allen, 201.

now the potential for people who are determined and charismatic to produce appealing content that shows how life with Jesus Christ makes a difference.

One lay American Catholic who has had a significant impact online for more than a decade is Rocco Palmo. His blog, *Whispers in the Loggia*, covers Church news and gossip. John Allen notes, “Without any official ecclesiastical standing, Palmo is arguably more influential than most statements from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in determining what many Catholics talk about and think about.”<sup>214</sup> Palmo is creative and knows how to use digital media. While few but the already converted would be interested in much of Palmo’s content, he serves as an example of how a Catholic layman can use these tools to reach a large audience. Other lay Catholics could use online video not just to share Church gossip but to share Jesus Christ with those who do not know him.

### **More Experimentation Because of Reduced Barriers to Entry**

Not only are the gatekeepers gone, but digital tools have massively reduced the “barriers to entry” for evangelization. This has the potential to change the status quo. Pope Francis writes, “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized... So what are we waiting for?”<sup>215</sup> And online, there is much less one has to wait for in order to get personally involved. One interested in evangelization can “just do it.” If someone is upset because the preaching at her church is horrendous and she knows she can do it better, she can set up her webcam and share what she has to say. One likely has the tools she needs to evangelize in her bedroom. She doesn’t even need to get out of bed!

When it comes to mission, money matters. And not having to spend money opens up all

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>215</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119.

sorts of new possibilities. When most people think of a missionary, they think of someone who travels to a distant country for a long period of time. This missionary model has produced much fruit, but it also requires tremendous resources. By no means is digital evangelization meant to replace other models of proclamation, but it does allow for cheaper alternatives. One does not need to travel around the world to reach the unreached. One does not need to start a television or radio network to communicate to the masses. One can evangelize online and still keep her day job. Most of us already possess the technology to produce content that could potentially reach millions of people. Upgrading one's technology to produce better digital content often costs less than an international flight. Additionally, learning how to edit videos and use YouTube and Facebook does not require expensive schooling. In fact, there are already free video tutorials on YouTube that can teach you almost anything you would want to know about how to use these tools. Pope Francis asks, "So, what are we waiting for?" With all the cheap digital resources, one has fewer excuses for not evangelizing.

Not only does the internet make it possible to reach people around the world for very little money, but the internet can also reduce obstacles to evangelization for those closer to home. For many of us, sharing a Christian message with someone we will never meet is easier than sharing the same message with friends or co-workers. We may fear that the people in our lives would see us as religious weirdos – or disregard what we have to say because they know the skeletons in our closet. The internet not only reduces the money needed for some forms of proclamation, but it can also reduce social awkwardness.

Online, people often feel freer to share – and ignore – than they do in person. Bringing up Christ in conversation with one's colleague may be intimidating, but interspersing the

occasional Christian video among the variety of things one posts on social media can be much easier. Of course, many of one's friends on Facebook may skip over it, but some may not. One could find that the same colleague he was afraid of talking to about Christ "liked" the video he shared. That, then, could facilitate a deeper conversation in person or an invitation to join him at church. Interactions in virtual space can lead to encounters in physical space. The social media landscape is a "rowdy mélange,"<sup>216</sup> and most friends will quickly pass over most of what one shares. Still, exactly because it is perfectly normal for one to share a variety of content online, the internet can provide low enough barriers to entry to encourage people who would otherwise be intimidated to try evangelization.

Another way digital culture can reduce the barriers to entry for evangelization is by eliminating much of the fear of failure. There is a different logic on social media. If someone trying to evangelize posts something that does not connect with people, it's not a big deal. If it's uninteresting, then people won't share it. And if few people share it, then few people will see it. On Facebook, most people see content based on what shows up in their "feed." And if content is not interesting and people do not share it, it will appear in the feeds of very few people. If something resonates with people such that they share it and comment on it, however, then it can go viral. Online, people are bombarded by content from different sources. If an evangelizer does not produce interesting content that rises above the noise, then the great majority of people will never see it.

Lay people are in a prime position to capitalize on this logic of social media. Facebook and Twitter move *fast*, and their algorithms privilege topics that are "trending." If an event

---

<sup>216</sup> Detweiler, 174.

happens in the world that calls for a response, a bishop may need to consult several advisors before publishing anything so as not to say something that might reflect poorly on the Church. This is reasonable, but it also takes time – and all too often the conversation on social media has moved on. Lay people may not feel the same pressure to say something perfectly. They could respond quickly. If their tweets, posts, or videos do not attract interest, other social media content will drown them out. But it just may be that their post goes viral before a bishop finally publishes his statement.

Digital culture has also changed the possibilities for effective evangelization because of immediate feedback. A church does not need to engage in lengthy and expensive market research to evangelize online. One does not have to hand out surveys that may only be answered by people with the most extreme views. Instead, Google Analytics can tell you about the location, sex, age, and education of one's readers. One can see on Facebook and YouTube exactly how many people have viewed a video and gain a great sense of what resonates with people based on their comments and average viewing time.

This opens up new opportunities for being a listening Church. The bishops at Aparecida write, "We bishops, priests, permanent deacons, religious men and women, and lay men and women are called to assume an attitude of ongoing pastoral conversion, which entails listening attentively and discerning 'what the Spirit says to the churches.'"<sup>217</sup> Of course, the number of views on YouTube does not necessarily reflect what the Spirit is saying to us, but it would be foolish to think that what people view, like, and share is unimportant. The Church has to at least "listen" to the data that is there. Donald McGavran writes, "No one was ever saved by

---

<sup>217</sup> Aparecida, 366.

statistics, but then, no patient was ever cured by the thermometer to which the physician pays such close attention.”<sup>218</sup> One cannot put a number on people’s relationship with God or quantify the spiritual life. But there’s also nothing spiritual about ignoring the wealth of statistics that are sitting there for the Church to learn from.

Through my work with *The Jesuit Post*, I’m able to see exactly how an article or video “performs.” Of course, an article could have few views but still make an enormous impact on an individual’s life, just as a highly viewed piece of clickbait may not help anyone. The number of views does not give the whole picture. One should also not try to dilute the Gospel in order to get more likes. Still, by seeing which articles are widely shared and viewed – and which aren’t – we gain insights into what is resonating with people. McGavran writes that statistics “can be of marked value to any church that desires to know where, when, and how to carry on its work.”<sup>219</sup> When we listen to the data, we become better ministers.

The internet not only lowers the barriers to receiving feedback, but digital feedback is often *better* than the feedback one receives for in-person ministry. Just because people tell a priest, “Nice homily, Father” as they’re walking out of church *does not mean it was actually a nice homily*. They may have thought it was horrible, but they were just trying to be nice. There are often no formal structures in place to tell ministers that they aren’t connecting with people. However, if someone produces online content and sees that there’s very little interest, one can quickly see that this was not resonating.

### **A Bottom-Up Challenge to Clericalism**

Evangelization by means of online video also opens up opportunities for lay people to

---

<sup>218</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 68.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

fight the problem of clericalism. Pope Francis is keenly aware of how clericalism has prevented the laity from fully exercising their missionary responsibility.<sup>220</sup> He has repeatedly lamented clericalism in the Church, calling it “evil” and “a very ugly thing.”<sup>221</sup> Francis writes passionately about the need to overcome clericalism, but even when we have not yet rid the Church of this problem, the internet offers an arena for the laity to evangelize. Francis recognizes how in some places the laity have not received room to speak and act.<sup>222</sup> With the internet, however, they *can* speak and act. No one can stop them but themselves.

Digital tools more fully equip the laity to live their baptismal call as the people of God. Central to “evangelizing Catholicism” is the work of lay people. This has to go beyond the church walls and into the world. While one could argue that there have been many unrealized opportunities for lay people to go out and evangelize, many of the most natural spaces for evangelization, such as the pulpit, have been occupied by clergy. The 2004 Vatican document “Redemptionis Sacramentum” states, “The homily on account of its importance and its nature is reserved to the Priest or Deacon during Mass.”<sup>223</sup> The same document notes that lay people may preach in a church outside of Mass “only on account of a scarcity of sacred ministers in certain places, in order to meet the need, and it may not be transformed from an exceptional measure into an ordinary practice.”<sup>224</sup> But the document doesn’t say anything about social media. Previously, there were not as many venues for lay preaching, but now a live microphone on YouTube is waiting for anyone to grab.

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>221</sup> “Pope: Clericalism Distances the People from the Church,” *Vatican Radio*, 13 Dec. 2016.

<sup>222</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 102. This is not only because of the clergy. One can find historical examples of lay people influencing the clergy and preventing other lay people from having a voice.

<sup>223</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament, “Redemptionis Sacramentum: On Certain Matters to Be Observed or to Be Avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist,” The Vatican, 25 Mar. 2004.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

This could be unsettling to clergy who previously had no “competition” from inside the Church. Ecclesial authorities could fear that some who call themselves Catholic might criticize or misrepresent Church teaching. The 2002 document from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications recommended that the Magisterium supervise a system of “certification” for any Catholic content on the internet.<sup>225</sup> But the toothpaste isn’t going back in the tube. The laity have more space than ever to share with the world what their experience with Jesus Christ and his Church has been. By speaking from a similar experience, they could also connect with lay people more effectively. Rather than simply viewing the greater voice of the laity as “competition,” the emergence of new media offers opportunities for greater partnership between the laity and clergy in the common work of evangelization.

This will require doing things differently. In an unscripted address to young people in Paraguay, Pope Francis encouraged them to “make a mess” – a mess, he said, that “gives us a free heart, a mess which gives us solidarity, a mess which gives us hope.”<sup>226</sup> The bishops at Aparecida advocated “moving from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry.”<sup>227</sup> The Church has to go out to young people and use the language and examples that are relevant to them to share the Good News. One of the most popular articles that I have ever written was entitled “Lady Gaga the Theologian.” I argued that Gaga gave a great lesson on the mercy that Pope Francis has talked so much about. A few commenters thought I was a heretic – in an article in which I mostly quoted Scripture and statements from the Pope – but more than 50,000 people read it. It is often such forms of

---

<sup>225</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, “The Church and Internet.”

<sup>226</sup> Philip Pullella and Daniela Desantis, “Pope Closes South America Trip Urging Youths to ‘make a Mess,’” *Reuters*, 13 July 2015.

<sup>227</sup> Aparecida, 370.

communication that are “messy,” that push the boundaries a bit, that require communicators to get their hands dirty that are what resonate with people.

This is far more likely to come from the laity. A priest often feels the need to fulfill certain priestly expectations. A lay person can feel freer to “make a mess.” Moreover, lay people are the vast majority of the people of God. Creative content that connects with people is far more likely to come from them than from the relatively few clergy.

If ecclesial authorities feel threatened by what others who call themselves Catholic/Christian say online, then they, too, can join the conversation. They, too, can write articles and make videos and do the work of communicating a message that resonates with people. But they will have to hustle. An ontological change is not factored into the Facebook algorithm. What appears in people’s News Feeds is largely based on whether others find something interesting enough to like, comment on, and share it. Nothing is stopping priests and bishops from producing such share-worthy content, but they will have to present a message that will rise above the noise on social media.

Until recently, clergy have had a near monopoly on Catholic preaching. Rarely do monopolies produce ideal outcomes. Of course, some priests and deacons are fantastic preachers. But all too often the people of God have suffered – or just been bored to death. Now there are more alternatives. Today, even if lay people are not allowed to preach at Mass, lay Catholics can find great preaching online – or do it themselves! Brad Christerson and Richard Flory note that Christians “are less likely to be impressed by or be a satisfied ‘consumer’ of the sermons or activities of their local congregation when the sermons, blogs, or live-streamed activities of more interesting speakers or more spectacular events around the world

are easily available.”<sup>228</sup> There’s now another game in town.

The competition from online preachers may push clergy to be more effective in proclaiming the Gospel. When one is no longer stuck with the clergy of one’s parish, there will likely be less tolerance for bad preaching. People can vote with their feet – and their clicks. A pastor who is losing parishioners – or at least losing their interest – could be pushed to improve. Additionally, when deacons, priests, and bishops share their preaching online, they can gain a better sense of how good it is. Someone who thinks he’s God’s gift to preaching may find that very few people actually like what he has to say. Digital communication is not just going in one direction. Viewers give feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Not only can the producer of the content see the number of views, but *everyone* can see the number of views. If lay people are able to generate a much bigger following through their effective preaching, this is public information. If a priest gets more thumbs down than thumbs up, everyone is able to see that as well. This could motivate preachers to improve.

Part of the way the Church can overcome the problem of clericalism is by removing some of the “bushel baskets” that prevent the God-given gifts of the laity to shine. Digital tools offer great opportunities for people to share their light – and for others, including the clergy, to see them. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis quotes John Paul II in saying, “The priest – like every other member of the Church – ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized.”<sup>229</sup> While the laity have never been lacking in God-given gifts, ecclesial structures have not always facilitated or encouraged their sharing, particularly in ways that could evangelize the clergy. Just because a lay person can now preach on YouTube does

---

<sup>228</sup> Brad Christerson and Richard Flory, *The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders Are Changing the Religious Landscape*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2017), 16.

<sup>229</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 164.

not mean that clergy will necessarily pay attention, but a light that now shines for all to see is much harder to ignore than one covered by a basket.

### **New Possibilities for Evangelization that “Would Actually Reach Everyone”<sup>230</sup>**

As important as it is, this bottom-up challenge to clericalism is not the main reason for encouraging lay people to use digital tools to practice an evangelizing form of Catholicism. Rather, the goal is to help people find “the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>231</sup> John Allen writes, “Ultimately, the purpose of promoting lay activism is not to remedy ecclesiastical imbalances or to reshape public perceptions of the Church, but rather to extend the Church’s mission of sanctifying the world.”<sup>232</sup> And if the laity also overcome some of the problems of clericalism in this endeavor to sanctify the world, even better! Vincent Donovan writes, “It is not so much that priests must decrease, as that Christians must increase.”<sup>233</sup> And an important way Christians can “increase” today is by evangelizing online.

There is much work to do. Pope Francis discusses the need for “a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone.”<sup>234</sup> Especially when there are far fewer religious sisters, brothers, and priests, the laity have to take the lead. And in a religious landscape shaped by the emergence of believing non-belongers, digital evangelization is a significant aspect of that strategy that “would actually reach everyone.”

If people don’t come to the Church, then the Church has to go out to them. According to a 2016 study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), 66% of millennial

---

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>232</sup> Allen, 215.

<sup>233</sup> Donovan, 114.

<sup>234</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35.

Catholics attend religious services “a few times a year or less often.” Only 14% of those who identify as Catholic attend at least once a week.<sup>235</sup> This is why digital video is an important part of an evangelizing Catholicism that attempts to “actually reach everyone.” Paul VI called mass media and social communications “a modern and effective version of the pulpit.”<sup>236</sup> When young people rarely hear from the *actual* pulpit, using digital video becomes even more important. They may rarely go to church but could be willing to watch video content that their friends share. If the Church wants to reach everyone, they have to use the digital highway.

Additionally, effective evangelization today – digital or otherwise – simply cannot happen without the work of the laity. Lay people, of course, are “the vast majority of the people of God,”<sup>237</sup> and evangelization today cannot happen “without the collaboration of the faithful laity.”<sup>238</sup> The laity play an even greater role in digital evangelization because they are in a prime position to reach those in their personal networks. Peer-to-peer sharing shapes social media. Content appears in one’s Facebook News Feed because one’s friends are posting and sharing it. Scholars who have written about the emergence of “new power” note that we are increasingly attracted to “authenticity” and less concerned with perfection or expertise.<sup>239</sup> Those who use social media to share how they have found abundant life with Jesus may have a bigger impact on those who know them and see their authenticity than any theological expert or ecclesial authority. In talking about a missionary style that actually reaches everyone, Pope

---

<sup>235</sup> “Sacraments Today Updated,” 1964 blog edited by Mark Gray, *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*, 16 Aug. 2016. These figures do not include weddings and funerals.

<sup>236</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45.

<sup>237</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 102.

<sup>238</sup> *Aparecida*, 213.

<sup>239</sup> Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms, “Understanding ‘New Power,’” *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 2014.

Francis notes that the message has to “concentrate on the essentials.”<sup>240</sup> Lay Catholics who have never studied theology may not feel they are experts on the faith, but a lack of expertise is now less of a hindrance. Those on social media are far more likely to be interested in their friend’s authentic witness than an expert’s opinion. Lay people are on the front lines of digital evangelization.

Not only is online video becoming increasingly significant in how people spend their time, but it also offers unique opportunities for evangelization by lay people. Much of priests’ education is text-based. Not surprisingly, many priests and bishops have used writing as a tool for evangelization. Far fewer clergy, however, have much experience with video. A video editing class is rarely – if ever! – part of a seminary’s curriculum. If Mark Zuckerberg is correct in predicting that video will increasingly be the dominant online medium of communication, then we will need lay people to contribute to the conversation.

Antonio Spadaro has written about how the Church is not called to be a “broadcaster of content” as much as it is meant to be “a ‘witness’ in the context of broader relationships.”<sup>241</sup> The content on YouTube and Facebook video is a mix of work done by professionals and amateurs. Celebrity pop singers have some of the most-viewed videos, but most videos are published by “normal” people for their friends and family. Online video offers rich possibilities for lay people to share with their friends – and ultimately their friends’ friends – how their encounter with Christ has made a difference in their lives. At times, they may simply show their insightful, joyful selves and leave people to make the connection between their manner of being and their faith. At other times it could include explicit discussion of Christianity. An

---

<sup>240</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35.

<sup>241</sup> Spadaro, Kindle location 877.

evangelizing form of Catholicism, led by the laity, needs to make greater use of these tools than the Church in the U.S. has thus far.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Lessons Learned from Digital Evangelizers

*“There is simply no other way to learn than trying things out knowing full well they may not work. This idea represents a huge cultural shift for churches accustomed to the posture of establishment.”<sup>242</sup>*

### A Need to Integrate the Christian Message into the Culture of Digital Media

In addition to highlighting the need for what I have called an “evangelizing Catholicism,” John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio* makes an important analysis of emerging media. He published this encyclical the same year as the invention of the World Wide Web. While John Paul could not have imagined all the new internet-based media that would emerge, his discussion of modern communications was prescient. Calling the world of communications “the first Areopagus of the modern age,” John Paul highlighted how “the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media” but that “to some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected” by the Church.<sup>243</sup> He wrote that the Church must not only *use* mass media “to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching,” but that the Church must also “*integrate* that message into the ‘new culture’ created by modern communications.”<sup>244</sup> This new culture, writes John Paul, arises from “the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.”<sup>245</sup> It’s not simply that we have new media tools. Rather, a new culture develops when such tools change how we see ourselves and communicate with one another.

---

<sup>242</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, (New York: Morehouse, 2014), 67.

<sup>243</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 37.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

Using a biblical analogy, I argue that John Paul II is saying that the Church must pour new “wine” into the new media “wineskins.” It is not enough to rely on previous styles of communication in a new world of digital technology. Internet media have indeed brought “new ways of communicating” and a “new psychology.” What worked in 1975 when Paul VI wrote *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was not as effective in 1990 when John Paul II wrote *Redemptoris Missio*. And the media “wineskins” have continued to change drastically since that encyclical.

Recent popes have emphasized a need for adapting the Christian message for the new cultures that are emerging. In *Ecclesia in America*, John Paul II wrote, “For the new evangelization to be effective, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the culture of our time in which the social communications media are most influential.”<sup>246</sup> He argued, “Contemporary reality demands a capacity to learn the language, nature and characteristics of mass media” in order to achieve “a genuine inculturation of the Gospel.”<sup>247</sup> Benedict XVI continued this message in his assessment of the emerging digital culture. He discussed the need to use the “new languages” that had emerged in order to make the Gospel accessible to people. He wrote, “In the digital environment the written word is often accompanied by images and sounds.”<sup>248</sup> The Church must use the styles of communication that are normative online.

James Martin echoes much of what these popes have said but does so from a wealth of personal experience in digital communication. Martin asks, “The church longs to reach the young, but is it willing to speak not only in the language of young people, but in the modes they

---

<sup>246</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, The Vatican, 22 Jan. 1999, 72.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Pope Benedict, “The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word,” The Vatican, 16 May 2010.

use?”<sup>249</sup> He argues that just as Jesus spoke in a way that people understood, we must do the same today.<sup>250</sup> Martin recounts how a priest rolled his eyes upon hearing that Martin tweets 140-character “homilies” each morning, as if Twitter was “beneath” the Church. Even if we can question some potentially harmful aspects of social media, *this is where people are*. We have to share an inculturated message that makes sense in the digital context. Martin writes, “If Jesus could talk about the birds of the air, then we can surely tweet.”<sup>251</sup> Simply bemoaning the fact that young people – or priests – use services like Twitter and Snapchat is not going to help the Church inculturate the Gospel in the new digital cultures that continue to emerge.

### **Examples of Old “Wine” in New “Wineskins”**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a long way to go to live out what Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have taught about integrating the Christian message into the culture of emerging media. The USCCB shows a clear effort to share the Gospel by using the new digital “wineskins.” They’ve had a YouTube channel for nearly a decade, and their output is significant. They have produced about 400 videos. However, in the online landscape of the survival of the wittiest, they aren’t exactly thriving. They have fewer than 10,000 subscribers to their YouTube channel – or about 0.01% of Catholics in the United States. Most of their videos have fewer than 200 views.<sup>252</sup> Of course, views are not the whole story. Something with many

---

<sup>249</sup> James Martin, SJ, “Status Update: How Well Is the Church Reaching out to People in the Digital Age?” *America Magazine*, 04 July 2011.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> “United States Conference of Catholic Bishops - About,” YouTube, 11 Jan 2008. Statistics are current as of November 10, 2017. An examination of their view totals reveals some perplexing statistics. For their videos published before August 2017, almost all of their “daily reflection” videos have fewer than 200 views. Many have fewer than 100. Then, something changes. All of the daily reflection videos as of August 1, 2017 show views of more than 20,000. At the same time, most of these videos that supposedly have more than 20,000 views do not have a *single* “like” or “dislike” – a highly unusual event for something that was seen by thousands of people. Of the twenty-two USCCB daily reflection videos with

views may not have much depth. Still, as views are closely related to the number of people sharing a video, a very low number of views often indicates that the video did not connect with people enough for them to want to share it with others.

The weaknesses of the USCCB's use of digital video go deeper than having few views. While they're at least trying to use digital video, there is an odor of old wine in these new wineskins. Many of their videos are reflections on the daily readings, normally given by priests, that show no clear effort to integrate into digital culture. There is no music or sound effects. There are no images. It is particularly fascinating to read Benedict XVI's description of the importance of images and sound in the digital environment and then look at the USCCB daily reflections that show one person speaking in front of a static background. The USCCB media team doesn't seem to be listening to Pope Benedict!

Good content is not enough. One can find many homilies and articles online with a good message, but, as Paul Tighe writes, "It is not clear if they speak to a younger public that is fluent in a different language, a language rooted in the convergence of text, sound and images."<sup>253</sup> Tighe makes no mention of the USCCB specifically, but his questioning is pertinent to their digital video effort. The average time someone actually watches a video on Facebook is *ten seconds*.<sup>254</sup> The norm on social media is scrolling to the next item in one's feed unless something grabs the user's attention. The USCCB's online video effort shows little evidence of attention-grabbing content.

---

more than 20,000 views, the only one with a like or dislike is the one that I personally disliked in order to make sure that a viewer can respond. Yes, viewers *can* show their approval or disapproval, but it seems as if viewers either have no opinion or, most likely, that *actual* views are closer to the 100 views they consistently received before August 2017.

<sup>253</sup> Tighe, 113f.

<sup>254</sup> Marko Saric, "The State of Facebook Video In The Year 2017: Video Length Up, Time Watched Down," *Business 2 Community*, 2 May 2017.

The USCCB’s YouTube channel also does not show a willingness to listen. Their channel does not allow viewers to leave comments on their videos. YouTube is part of *social* media, but by disabling comments, it seems as if the USCCB is only interested in being “social” in one direction. This runs counter to the norms on social media, further illustrating a lack of integration into this digital culture. It can seem as if the bishops conference is not willing to hear what people really think. Brad Christerson and Richard Flory note that today, “believers increasingly expect to be active participants in religious activities rather than passive consumers of religious information.”<sup>255</sup> The USCCB is using relatively new tools, but with no space for viewers to give feedback, they are not inculturating their message into the new cultures that have arisen as a result of these digital tools.

Of course, there is a broader Catholic presence on YouTube than just the USCCB channel, and new initiatives continue to emerge. *Catholic Women Preach*, started in November 2016, features the preaching of a diverse group of Catholic women.<sup>256</sup> They post a “preaching video” – they intentionally avoid the word “homily” – of a woman breaking open the readings from the lectionary for every Sunday and major feast day. While the initiative is much newer than the USCCB YouTube channel, their videos generate more views than many produced by the USCCB.

Still, as excited as I have been to see an initiative featuring women preachers and as highly as I respect the women I know who are part of the project, I have been unable to sit through many of their videos. This may have something to do with my limited attention span, though it likely speaks to something deeper. Like many of the videos from the USCCB, all the

---

<sup>255</sup> Christerson and Flory, 16.

<sup>256</sup> “Catholic Women Preach - About,” YouTube, 22 July, 2016.

videos by *Catholic Women Preach* feature a static view of a single person preaching on the readings from the lectionary. Looking at a single preacher is normal in a liturgical context. Online, however, a constant shot of one person speaking seems like a “talking head.”

Length also makes a critical difference. The preaching videos of *Catholic Women Preach* are typically between seven and ten minutes long – about the length of an average Sunday homily – though some are as long as seventeen minutes. While the length is often appropriate in a liturgical context, YouTube is not a parish. Few people leave Mass during a long or boring homily. Online, however, it’s survival of the wittiest. People are free to stop when they lose interest. *And they do*. The default is “walking out” – or scrolling to the next item in one’s News Feed. Articles about how to make effective online videos repeatedly mention the need to be concise. Most recommend not going beyond two minutes.

The videos of *Catholic Women Preach* also suffer from a lack of listening. *Catholic Women Preach* similarly prevents users from commenting on their YouTube channel. This is particularly striking because CWP gives a forum to a diverse group of women who might not otherwise have opportunities to preach. Their spirit of inclusion does not extend to hearing from their viewers in the form of comments. Additionally, the great majority of the YouTube videos from *Catholic Women Preach* do not have a single “like” or “dislike.” They put out new content every week, but they do not get much public feedback. “Web 2.0” is characterized by interactivity and participation. Even if the videos of *Catholic Women Preach* appear on YouTube, one would hesitate to call this Web 2.0.

Additionally, *Catholic Women Preach* uploads videos to YouTube but not Facebook. While this may seem like a technical point, it reflects a lack of integration into the culture of

contemporary social media. The Facebook algorithm greatly privileges “native” video content over videos shared from YouTube, its fierce rival. What this means is that a video that is directly uploaded to Facebook will get about ten times more views and shares<sup>257</sup> as the same video that was first uploaded to YouTube and then shared on Facebook as a YouTube link. Knowing this, many groups like *America Media* and *The Jesuit Post* will directly upload all of their content both to Facebook and YouTube to get the greatest reach. *Catholic Women Preach* does not. They have a Facebook page, but they only use it to promote their non-native content. As a result, the Facebook algorithm buries their content, and fewer people encounter their Scriptural reflections. It would be silly to spend hours preparing a homily but then not use a microphone when preaching in a large church. Similarly, it seems shortsighted that *Catholic Women Preach* limits the number of people who benefit from the hard work that went into their reflections by not using Facebook effectively.

Videos from the USCCB and *Catholic Women Preach* show that even if groups are using the new digital “wineskins,” they are not necessarily pouring new “wine” into this different context. Walter Ong showed how print culture is not just oral culture that is written down; it’s actually a different culture. Similarly, an effective digital evangelizer recognizes that digital culture is not just a broadcast model of communication that is then put online. Digital culture is more participatory. People expect a space to leave comments. Social media users have notoriously short attention spans, so only content that keeps their attention survives. Additionally, the Facebook and YouTube algorithms shape what people see. What may have worked in print or in a liturgical context might flop in this different digital culture. An

---

<sup>257</sup> John Koetsier, “Facebook: Native Video Gets 10X More Shares Than YouTube,” *Forbes*, 13 Mar. 2017.

evangelizer not only has to use digital tools but also understand the culture such tools have created.

### **More Successful Catholic Initiatives**

Not all is lost. While one can find many examples of U.S. Catholic initiatives that fail to pour new wine into the new digital wineskins, some American Catholics have been able to use digital media effectively. Robert Barron has been a pioneer. Now an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Barron's evangelical output is prodigious. He has written books and articles, created multiple film series, hosted a radio show, and given countless talks on television and in person. He has also been the most famous Catholic vlogger in the U.S. Barron created a YouTube channel less than two years after YouTube started and has produced nearly 500 YouTube videos.<sup>258</sup> Barron vlogs about issues both in the Church and the wider culture. He surprises atheists by his ability to engage in intellectual conversation and makes Catholics appreciate the beauty of their faith. He does tremendous work.

One look at his YouTube channel shows that he has not slowed down since becoming bishop. He has continued to produce a new YouTube video about once a week since his consecration – in addition to his writing, speaking, and work in radio and TV. One can seriously question how he has that many hours in a day. He also has more than 1.5 million followers on Facebook – a massive reach.

Still, one can question whether Barron is as much an innovator in digital evangelization as he once was. Being a bishop must affect not only what he says but also how fast he can say it. For example, he produced a video entitled “On Charlottesville and America’s Original Sin”

---

<sup>258</sup> "Bishop Robert Barron - About." *YouTube*. Word On Fire, 10 Feb. 2007.

after the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in October 2017. It was a thoughtful reflection on something in the news – exactly the sort of thing that Barron has done so well for many years. But it was published eighteen days after the rally. Responding to something eighteen days after it happened is an *eternity* on social media. It’s not surprising, then, that the video does not have many views for Barron’s standards. It’s not even among his 300 most popular videos on YouTube.<sup>259</sup> Additionally, even though video has emerged as an increasingly dominant medium on Facebook, Barron has underutilized Facebook video as he has continued to focus on YouTube. He is undoubtedly still one of the Catholic leaders in digital evangelization in the U.S., but his responsibilities may prevent him from being on the cutting edge.

Father James Martin at *America Media* has been one of the most popular Catholic writers and speakers in recent years. Like Bishop Barron, he has communicated effectively across multiple platforms. More than 550,000 people follow him on Facebook. Unlike Barron, who rode the first wave of YouTube, Martin’s use of online video is relatively recent. But as video has become more significant in recent years, Martin has been able to adapt and use this increasingly dominant medium effectively.

A comparison of Martin’s and Barron’s video responses to the Charlottesville rally is telling. During the week the rally and the various responses by President Trump were in the news, *America Media* published a video entitled, “Fr. James Martin on Charlottesville: ‘White supremacy is the opposite of Jesus’s message.’” With a much faster response, Martin produced a much bigger reaction than Bishop Barron. More than 1.1 million people viewed Martin’s video

---

<sup>259</sup> As of November 10, 2017.

on Facebook, and many more saw it on other social media platforms.<sup>260</sup> Martin was able to speak in real time with a substantive message that thousands of people felt moved to share with their friends. It illustrates the potential of online video as a tool for sharing a Christian message with a massive audience.

Of course, these two examples of successful Catholic evangelizers from the U.S. are both clerics.<sup>261</sup> There has not been a lay Catholic “star” sharing online video content comparable to Barron or Martin. Of course, Barron and Martin do not work alone. Through *Word On Fire* and *America Media*, they work with talented teams of lay people who do much of the work behind the scenes to produce the content featuring Barron and Martin. Still, when Barron and Martin are the face of such evangelizing efforts, it can seem as if this is what Catholic digital evangelization must look like. Of course, that’s simply not the case. One does not need to be a bishop or priest to evangelize digitally.<sup>262</sup> Still, lay Catholics in the U.S. have not had as much success at this point.

### **Lessons from Elsewhere**

U.S. Catholics have much to learn when it comes to using online video for proclaiming the Gospel. Hillsong Church has much to teach. Hillsong is a Pentecostal megachurch that started in Australia in 1983. They have since opened up churches in major cities around the world. They are particularly known for their music,<sup>263</sup> and an estimated 50 million Christians

---

<sup>260</sup> Bishop Barron’s Charlottesville video only appeared on YouTube, and a YouTube view is not necessarily worth the same as a Facebook view. Facebook counts it as a “view” if someone sees a video for at least three seconds. On YouTube, only a viewing of 30 seconds or more counts. Still, Barron’s Charlottesville video has about one-twentieth the number of views as Martin’s Facebook video.

<sup>261</sup> Fr. Mike Schmitz of *Ascension Presents* is another priest who has emerged as a popular communicator online. His videos on Facebook and YouTube have received millions of views.

<sup>262</sup> At the same time, one could argue that a member of the clergy often has a “head start” in being able to reach a large audience.

<sup>263</sup> Technically, Hillsong Church has different musical groups and YouTube channels, including *Hillsong*

sing Hillsong songs in church every weekend.<sup>264</sup>

Hillsong Church masterfully uses digital video. In addition to *Hillsong Channel*, a 24-hour-a-day broadcast television network, they use digital video to disseminate their music. While videos from the USCCB routinely get under 200 views and the most popular video from Bishop Robert Barron has about 365,000 views, Hillsong is in another galaxy of success. The different YouTube versions of their hit song “Oceans” collectively have more than 200 million views.<sup>265</sup> Numbers do not mean everything, but those numbers are hard to ignore. They are connecting with people all around the world.

Not only is the content produced by Hillsong notable for its extensive reach, but their online presence inspires Christians from the around the world to make their own contributions. Hillsong Church does not operate in a world of Web 1.0. Those who listen to their songs and watch their videos are not mere consumers of content. Rather, they share their videos with their friends on social media, they leave comments and likes, and they even make their own covers of Hillsong songs.

A comparison with some of the most prominent Catholic initiatives is striking. Unlike the YouTube videos from the USCCB and *Catholic Women Preach*, Hillsong allows comments. And do people ever comment! The YouTube versions of “Oceans” have generated more than 60,000 comments. Many in the comments section profess their love for Jesus. A remarkable number of people mention dark moments from their lives and how the music of Hillsong has helped them. Many offer prayer requests; many others say that they will pray for these YouTube strangers. None of this happens, of course, in the non-existent comments sections of the USCCB and

---

*United, Hillsong Worship, and Hillsong Young & Free.*

<sup>264</sup> *Hillsong: Let Hope Rise*, Dir. Michael John Warren, Prod. Jonathon Bock, 2016.

<sup>265</sup> Statistics are current as of November 10, 2017.

*Catholic Women Preach* YouTube channels.

Hillsong has also inspired Christians from around the world to cover their music. Hillsong produces content that is accessible and attractive to people from all over the world, and then their fans produce their own versions of Hillsong songs. Not only does this spread Hillsong's Christian message, it also empowers thousands of ordinary believers to make their own personal contribution – and put it online for even more to see and hear. Fan-made videos vary tremendously in style, language, setting, and equipment. A YouTube search for “Hillsong” followed by “Russian,” “Japanese,” or almost any other language will produce a dizzying array of results showing videos made by Hillsong fans around the world.

In one memorable scene from *Hillsong: Let Hope Rise*, a 2016 feature-length documentary, the producers wove together various fan-made videos to produce a diverse tapestry of “Mighty to Save” by Hillsong United. The compilation includes young people singing in English, Portuguese, German, French, and sign language. One sees a young mother washing clothes by hand, a group of twentysomethings outside a gothic church, and a children's choir from East Africa. One woman uses a ukulele; another group sings their own Reggae version of the song. People proudly sing in front of the Eiffel Tower, a Brazilian flag, and snow-capped mountains. Such videos are unmistakably *Hillsong* but undoubtedly *different*. This isn't a Pentecostal form of McDonaldization; this looks more like the Body of Christ.

A comparison with some of the best digital video evangelization efforts by Catholics from the U.S. reveals a stark difference. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* wrote, “Inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts... It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and

not be exclusively the result of erudite research.”<sup>266</sup> These covers of Hillsong songs are the bottom-up work of fans and not the top-down imposition of experts. The vast majority of Catholics are not bishops with doctorates like Robert Barron or charismatic priests who work at media companies like James Martin, but it is all too easy for Catholics to think that the work of evangelization is for the “experts.” Hillsong videos, however, inspire people around the world to share their gifts and their faith online.

A Mormon vlogger offers another example of evangelization from which the Catholic Church could learn. Shay Carl Butler, known on YouTube as Shay Carl, is one of the most popular vloggers ever. The videos on his family’s “SHAYTARDS” channel, which has nearly five million subscribers, have more than 2.6 *billion* views. Few of his family’s videos talk about religion directly, but in one eighteen-minute video entitled “ARE THE SHAYTARDS CHRISTIAN???” Butler confidently explains the basics of the Mormon faith. He does this while he is shaving and getting ready in the morning. The video is informative, but it seems like an ordinary guy sharing his faith, rather than an expert giving a lecture. The everyday setting makes it seem as if the Mormon faith shapes his entire being. The video has nearly 600,000 views – far more than any YouTube video by Bishop Barron.

Some may understandably have no interest in watching a video of someone shaving, but Butler indicates how there is space online for ordinary Christians to give witness to their faith through joyful living. When asked about why millions of people watch videos of his family – doing things as ordinary as shaving – Butler said, “Because inside I think people want a happy

---

<sup>266</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 54.

family... And I think that is why a lot of people watch, to get hope that they can have that.”<sup>267</sup>

And some not only want a family like Butler’s, but also a faith. Multiple people have joined the LDS Church after first encountering Mormonism through the joyful living of the “Shaytards.”<sup>268</sup>

Butler does not feel the need to have “Jesus talk” all the time, but he’s also not afraid to talk about his faith. Exactly because the great majority of his videos are about “normal” things, followers who otherwise would not have watched a “religious” video see his witness of faith and may seek to learn more.

Butler offers a model that other lay evangelizers could follow. John Taylor writes that “the vast majority of mankind” is not going to find God through a “cerebral” form of religion.<sup>269</sup> Of course, there is a value in someone like Bishop Barron offering a smart defense against one of the New Atheists, but most people who do not practice religion would have no interest in a video of a priest talking about atheism. Butler and his family offer something different. He is well spoken, but he sounds ordinary, not cerebral. Butler and his family illustrate how not only is there is a space for lay Christians to use digital video to share their everyday lives but also how this can be an effective form of evangelization.

A Pentecostal couple from Brazil offers another example of how lay people can use digital video to evangelize. Thiago and Ihasmyn Lobos use a YouTube channel,<sup>270</sup> blog, and social media presence to share their Christian faith. Frequently using humor and grounding their work in Scripture, the couple address everyday issues experienced in relationships. They

---

<sup>267</sup> Tad Walch, “Alcoholism Prompts YouTube Star Shay Carl to Halt Production of 'Shaytards,' Enter Rehab,” *Deseret News*, 22 Feb. 2017.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1972), 221.

<sup>270</sup> “Sr e Sra Lobos – About.” YouTube, 13 Apr. 2014.

produce new content every week and are extremely clever. In May 2017, the couple produced a parody video of the 2017 hit song “Despacito,” the first video on YouTube to reach four billion views. The video by Mr. and Mrs. Lobos, “Jesus Cristo,” uses the same tune as “Despacito” and starts with a similar club scene, but the lyrics and video attempt to show the emptiness of a life without Christ. The video has received nearly four million views between YouTube and Facebook.

Mr. and Mrs. Lobos, both in their mid-twenties, mention no degrees in theology or technology on their “bio” page. However, in the digital landscape that privileges content over credentials, this is not an obstacle. They state that their mission is to influence young adults and adolescents to live for God. And they “just do it.” They communicate in a fun, accessible manner and deal with issues that are relevant to the lives of the young people they try to reach. Their website looks fresh and professional, and their videos produce a legion of likes and comments.

Thiago and Ihasmyn Lobos are but one example of a larger effort to use digital tools to evangelize in Brazil. The country has been a site for explosive growth among Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Many of these groups have effectively used new media to reach people, many of whom were nominal Catholics. But the story has not ended there. Edward Cleary looks at the Catholic Church in Brazil and writes that the “competition with non-Catholic religious groups, particularly the Pentecostals...has generated a vibrancy that is exceptional.”<sup>271</sup> The growth of Pentecostalism has pushed Catholics to be more intentional about evangelization and the use of new media. Cleary writes that “while Latin American theologians were taking up themes of

---

<sup>271</sup> Edward L. Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011), 130.

evangelization and debating ways to accomplish it, Charismatics, along with others, felt they knew exactly what to do – use mass media.”<sup>272</sup> Even if the institutional Catholic Church has often been slow to adapt to the new digital landscape, lay Catholic Charismatics in Brazil, like their Pentecostal peers, have been much faster.

Charismatics in Brazil have gained particular attention through music and the use of social media. Marcelo Rossi, a Catholic priest and musician, has been one of the most prominent faces of the Catholic Church in Brazil in recent decades because of his music and use of emerging media. His YouTube channel has more than 140 million views – more than five times the number of views for Bishop Barron’s videos. By no means is Rossi alone among Brazilian Catholics. Many lay ecclesial movements in Brazil are active in using new media for evangelization.

The evangelizing effort of Charismatics in Brazil indicates that it does not take someone with a wealth of expertise to evangelize online. One also does not need a professional media company to produce videos for social media. But people do need the fire to evangelize and the internalized sense that this is their responsibility. The religious “competition” in Brazil – online and offline – has cultivated energy for evangelization and an opportunity to learn from the success of others. Mr. and Mrs. Lobos saw that nothing was stopping them from using social media to share the Gospel. Just as this young couple can digitally evangelize, surely others – including lay Catholics – can do so as well.

---

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 127.

## CONCLUSION: Signs of Hope?

*“Change isn’t going to happen because Pope Francis rides in on a white steed and cures all that ails us. It’s going to happen because people in this room stand up and respond.”<sup>273</sup>*

While most lay people have easy access to digital tools, few are using them for evangelization. Online, the gatekeepers are gone and the barriers to entry are low, but most Catholics are not storming through the unlocked gates and being the missionary disciples that Pope Francis calls them to be. Karl Vaters writes that with all of the evangelizing possibilities that digital tools create, “The only person who can stop you is you.”<sup>274</sup> And we seem to be stopping ourselves.

Additionally, lay Catholics in the U.S. were not exactly maximizing the opportunities for evangelization they had before the internet. Despite volumes written about the laity’s call to evangelize, many Catholics still do not see evangelization as a “Catholic thing.” Most U.S. Catholics do not feel responsible for sharing their faith. Simply giving them more opportunities to do so does not cultivate the sense of responsibility – let alone an unquenchable fire to share Jesus Christ with others. One has many reasons to doubt whether Catholic laity in the U.S. will ever use digital tools to evangelize in a significant way.

Still, if a few lay Catholics develop a significant following by evangelizing online, they could help many others internalize the call to proclaim the Gospel. People could see that they, too, have a contribution to make. Realizing that they can connect with people better than their boring, out-of-touch bishop could light a fire for some people to become more active in

---

<sup>273</sup> John Allen in Michael Freedman, “‘Vaticanologist’ John Allen Addresses Popularity And Philosophy Of Pope Francis During NU Talk.”

<sup>274</sup> Vaters, “The Gatekeepers Are Gone: What’s Holding Your Ministry Back?”

evangelization. Digital evangelization by the laity can very well become a “Catholic thing.”

Some parallel examples are helpful. No one with a decent knowledge of the U.S. Catholic Church in the twentieth century would question whether a Catholic could have an impact as a writer. With figures such as Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, and Thomas Merton – in addition to authors like Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and J.R.R. Tolkien elsewhere in the English-speaking world – Catholics had a monumental impact in literature in the twentieth century. If some Catholics want to write about religious themes, they have many examples to look to for inspiration. Something similar has happened in American comedy in recent years. With Catholics such as Stephen Colbert, Jim Gaffigan, Jimmy Fallon, and Jimmy Kimmel, no one today could question whether a Catholic could be a comedian. Today, it seems less common to find a prominent American comedian who *isn’t* Catholic.

While “making it” as a writer, comedian, or musician is extremely difficult, new media have enabled and encouraged many more to share their work publicly. Writers can self-publish, and comedians can share their work on Twitter. Musicians do not have to first land a deal with a record company in order to distribute their music. They can start by publishing their own work on YouTube – and do it with a phone and an internet connection that they already have. Justin Bieber and Carly Rae Jepsen are two of the most prominent examples of stars who got their start on YouTube.

Of course, this does not mean it is likely that one recording covers of pop hits in his bedroom and posting them on YouTube is going to become famous. Few will make it, and millions are trying. But that is exactly what is so significant. Because the barriers to entry are so low, millions are trying. For many of these musicians, few beyond their friends and family may

actually watch them, but by simply using tools that they already have, digital video gives them a new forum to share their talents. And for some, thousands may stumble upon their work. These musicians may never make any money from this – let alone become stars – but now people from around the world can see what they produce. Even if they only reach a few hundred or a few thousand, that’s far more people than they were previously able to reach from the comfort of their bedrooms.

Something similar can happen with digital evangelization. According to the Barna study, only 34% of adult Catholics in the U.S. feel responsible for sharing their faith. But that’s still 34% of the largest Christian church in the country. There are millions of lay Catholics who already feel some responsibility for sharing their faith and who already have a smartphone in their pockets. What’s only missing is a few prominent examples of lay Catholics sharing their faith in an interesting way online. Just as Stephen Colbert and Jim Gaffigan show that one can be open about his Catholicism and accepted as a comedian, and just as Justin Bieber and Carly Rae Jepsen show that a musician can use YouTube as a career launching pad, it would not take a significant number of evangelizing Catholics to show that digital evangelization is a “Catholic thing.” If a few step up and find success, they could push others to see how this is their responsibility and opportunity. Even those who do not have Mother Angelica-level determination could follow the lead of such “early adopters” and share their experience of Jesus Christ and his Church.

There are some positive signs. Two young women at the University of Notre Dame started an Instagram account, @dailycatholicgospel,<sup>275</sup> that offers short reflections on the Gospel reading of the day. Through their consistent output, thoughtful reflections, and palpable joy, they have amassed 25,000 followers on Instagram since they started in April 2016. They film their videos with their smartphones and use no special effects. The videos seem amateur, but also authentic. Their videos are no more than one minute, as that is the maximum length of a video on Instagram. The brevity goes a long way towards producing new “wine” for the digital “wineskins,” as users of social media have notoriously limited attention spans.

A group of college students at Franciscan University at Steubenville offers another example of lay Catholics using online video to evangelize. While still a teenager, Renée Shumay started *New Catholic Generation*, a website featuring Catholic teen and young adult vloggers. At Franciscan, she joined with other vloggers in expanding the quality and reach of *New Catholic Generation* as a YouTube channel.<sup>276</sup> They use humor, comment on the Church and pop culture, and show their love for being Catholic. Much of their content is unlikely to connect with young people who do not already strongly identify as Catholics. Still, the effort of these young people to try to evangelize is admirable. While there are not many examples of lay Catholics in the U.S. effectively using digital video as a tool of evangelization, *Daily Catholic Gospel* and *New Catholic Generation* show how it is possible.

Additionally, even if something like *New Catholic Generation* is the exception, rather than the norm, a group like Hillsong could help stir the Catholic imagination to see what is

---

<sup>275</sup> Interestingly, DailyCatholicGospel.com is the *Word on Fire* website that offers daily Gospel reflections from Bishop Barron. As successfully as Barron has used social media, these young women snagged that Instagram handle before he did.

<sup>276</sup> "New Catholic Generation - About." YouTube, 5 Nov. 2015.

possible. Online video can reach a massive audience – including people who would not normally step foot in a church. And emotionally charged worship song are not the only type of video content that works successfully online, as vlogs from people like Shay Carl Butler and Thiago and Ihasmyn Lobos indicate.

In many Catholic circles, one is more likely to hear an ecclesial authority warning against the dangers of internet pornography or complaining about how people spend too much time on their phones. Of course, these are legitimate concerns, but a negative or cautionary outlook tends to dominate our discussion around digital technology. We can often fail to see their positive potential. Modern popes have repeatedly expressed the need to use emerging media to spread the Good News. Groups like Hillsong practice what the popes preach. Catholics in the U.S. have a lot to learn.

Proclamation, of course, is but one element of evangelization, and using digital tools to proclaim the Gospel is a complement to in-person proclamation. Still, there are significant opportunities in this domain, particularly for lay people. Additionally, the work is more important than ever when so many of the people the Church wants to reach rarely, if ever, step foot in church. Not only can using digital tools help others encounter “the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ,”<sup>277</sup> but the laity’s leadership in digital evangelization can also help to fight the phenomenon of clericalism.

While some from the Church in the U.S. may already be speaking online, most people are not hearing them. Thus far, many attempts at digital evangelization have been out of touch with digital culture. Online, the gatekeepers are gone, but there is much unrealized potential

---

<sup>277</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49.

for lay people to share a joyful, accessible message about what the encounter with Jesus Christ has meant to them. Innovative digital evangelization is unlikely to come from the clergy. Lay people, it's time for You(Tube).

## Works Cited

- Allen, John L. *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 2009.
- . "The Triumph of Evangelical Catholicism." *National Catholic Reporter*, vol. 43, no. 35, 31 Aug. 2007.
- . "We Shall Not Look upon the Likes of Mother Angelica Again." *Crux*, 28 Mar. 2016.
- Bendyna, Mary E, and Mary L Gautier. "Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference." *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*, Aug. 2009.
- Bevans, Stephen B., and Roger Schroeder. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004.
- "Bishop Robert Barron - About." YouTube, 10 Feb. 2007.
- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991.
- Burke, Daniel. "Millennials Leaving Church in Droves, Study Says." CNN, 14 May 2015.
- Burrows, William R. "Catholics, Carey's 'Means,' and Twenty-First Century Mission." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 343, July 2010.
- Campbell, Heidi, and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Group, 2016.
- CARA. "Frequently Requested Church Statistics." Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Web.
- "Catholic Women Preach - About." YouTube, 22 July, 2016.
- Christerson, Brad and Richard Flory. *The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders Are Changing the Religious Landscape*. New York: Oxford UP, 2017.
- Center for Church Communication. "About Us." *Church Marketing Sucks*, Web.
- Cleary, Edward L. *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America*. Gainesville: U of Florida, 2011.

- Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament. "Redemptionis Sacramentum: On Certain Matters to Be Observed or to Be Avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist." The Vatican, 25 Mar. 2004.
- Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. "Plenary Assembly Final Message." The Vatican, 18 Nov. 2009.
- Cooper, Betsy, et al. "Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion-and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back." *PRRI*, 22 Sept. 2016.
- Davie, Grace. "Believing Without Belonging: Just How Secular Is Europe?" Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 04 Dec. 2005.
- DeSiano, Frank P. *The Evangelizing Catholic: a Practical Handbook for Reaching Out*. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.
- Detweiler, Craig. *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2014.
- Donchev, Danny. "YouTube Statistics - 2017." *Fortune Lords*, 23 Mar. 2017.
- Donovan, Vincent J. *Christianity Rediscovered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Fournier, Keith A. *Evangelical Catholics*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1990.
- Freedman, Michael. "'Vaticanologist' John Allen Addresses Popularity And Philosophy Of Pope Francis During NU Talk." *Niagara University*, 11 Nov. 2016.
- General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. *Concluding Document*. Aparecida: 13-31 May 2007.
- Gould, Meredith. *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015.
- Hahn, Scott. *Evangelizing Catholics: A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization*. Our Sunday Visitor, 2014.
- Hayes, Mike. *Googling God: the Religious Landscape of People in Their 20s and 30s*. Paulist Press, 2007.
- Heimans, Jeremy, and Henry Timms. "Understanding 'New Power.'" *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 2014.
- Hillsong: Let Hope Rise*. Dir. Michael John Warren. Prod. Jonathon Bock.

- Houston, Brian. "Vision." Hillsong Church, 2014. Web.
- Howard, Jacqueline. "Americans at More than 10 Hours a Day on Screens." *CNN*, 29 July 2016.
- "Is Evangelism Going Out of Style?" *Barna Group*, 17 Dec. 2013. Web.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Kantrowitz, Alex. "Zuckerberg Says Video Will Soon Be The Heart Of Facebook." *BuzzFeed*, 27 July 2016.
- Koetsier, John. "Facebook: Native Video Gets 10X More Shares Than YouTube." *Forbes*, 13 Mar. 2017.
- Lipka, Michael. "U.S. Nuns Face Shrinking Numbers and Tensions with the Vatican." *Pew Research Center*, 8 Aug. 2014.
- Logan, Robert K. *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan*, New York: Peter Lang, 2016.
- Laytham, D. Brent. *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment*. Eugene, Or.: Cascade, 2012.
- Lederman, Jason. "Mark Zuckerberg: Within Five Years, Facebook Will Be Mostly Video." *Popular Science*, 6 Apr. 2016.
- Martin, James. "Status Update: How Well Is the Church Reaching out to People in the Digital Age?" *America Magazine*, 04 July 2011.
- Massa, Mark S. *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team*. Crossroad Pub. Co., 1999.
- McBrien, Richard P. *Catholicism*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980.
- McGavran, Donald A. *Understanding Church Growth*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
- "New Catholic Generation - About." YouTube, 5 Nov. 2015.
- Pable, Martin. "Why Don't Catholics Share Their Faith?" *America Magazine*, 11 June 2015.
- "Planet of the Phones." *The Economist*, 26 Feb. 2015.
- Pontifical Council for Social Communications. "The Church and Internet." The Vatican, 22 Feb.

2002.

"Pope: Clericalism Distances the People from the Church." *Vatican Radio*, 13 Dec. 2016.

Pope Benedict. "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word." The Vatican, 16 May 2010.

Pope Francis. "Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter." The Vatican, 24 Jan. 2016.

———. "Communications at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter." The Vatican, 24 Jan. 2014.

———. *Evangelii Gaudium*. The Vatican, 24 Nov. 2013.

———. "Message for World Mission Day 2015." The Vatican, 24 May 2015.

———. "To Participants at the International Pastoral Congress on the World's Big Cities." The Vatican, 27 Nov. 2014.

———. "To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization." The Vatican, 29 May 2015.

———. "To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity." The Vatican, 17 June 2016.

Pope John Paul II. *Ecclesia in America*. The Vatican, 22 Jan. 1999.

———. "Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel." The Vatican, 12 May 2002.

———. "'Preach from the Housetops': The Gospel in the Age of Global Communication." The Vatican, 27 May 2001.

———. *Redemptoris Missio*. The Vatican, 7 Dec. 1990.

Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The Vatican, 8 Dec. 1975.

Portier, William L. "Here Come the Evangelical Catholics." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (2004): 35-66.

———, "Here Come the Nones! Pluralism and Evangelization after Denominationalism and Americanism." *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. 2013.

———. "More Mission, Less Maintenance." *Commonweal*. 12 Apr. 2013.

Pullella, Philip, and Daniela Desantis. "Pope Closes South America Trip Urging Youths to 'Make a

- Mess'." *Reuters*, 13 July 2015.
- Putnam, Robert D. and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.
- "Sacraments Today Updated." 1964 blog edited by Mark Gray, *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*. 16 Aug. 2016.
- Saric, Marko. "The State of Facebook Video In The Year 2017: Video Length Up, Time Watched Down." *Business 2 Community*, 2 May 2017.
- Schreiter, Robert. "Redemptoris Missio in the Development of Missiological Thought." *Simposio "A Dieci Anni Dalla Redemptoris Missio,"* 19 Jan. 2001.
- Schroeder, Roger P. "Catholic Teaching on Mission after Vatican II: 1975-2007." *A Century of Catholic Mission Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Wipf & Stock Pub, 2015.
- Secretariat for Non-Christians. "The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission." *The Vatican*, 10 May 1984.
- Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Smith, Gregory A., and Alan Cooperman. "The Factors Driving the Growth of Religious 'Nones' in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, 14 Sept. 2016.
- Spadaro, Antonio. *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*. New York: Fordham UP, 2014.
- "Sr e Sra Lobos – About." YouTube, 13 Apr. 2014.
- Stark, Rodney. *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World Is More Religious than Ever*. Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2015.
- Stetzer, Ed. "The State of the Church In America: Hint: It's Not Dying." *Christianity Today*, 1 Oct. 2013.
- Taylor, John V. *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*. Oxford UP, 1972.
- Tighe, Paul. "Digital Media: A Version of the Pulpit." *Priesthood Today: Ministry in a Changing Church*, edited by Eamonn Conway, Veritas, 2014.

"United States Conference of Catholic Bishops - About." YouTube, 11 Jan. 2008.

Van Gelder, Craig, and Dwight Zscheile. *Participating in God's Mission: A Missiology for the U.S.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017.

Vaters, Karl. "The Gatekeepers Are Gone: What's Holding Your Ministry Back?" *Christianity Today*, 19 Oct. 2015. Web. 27 Mar. 2017.

Vatican II. "Ad Gentes: On the Mission Activity of the Church." 7 Dec. 1965.

Tad Walch. "Alcoholism Prompts YouTube Star Shay Carl to Halt Production of 'Shaytards,' Enter Rehab." *Deseret News*, 22 Feb. 2017.

Weigel, George. *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*. New York: Basic, 2013.

Wormald, Benjamin. "Religious Landscape Study." *Pew Research Center*, 11 May 2015.

Zscheile, Dwight J. *The Agile Church: Spirit-led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. New York: Morehouse, 2014.