



PERSPECTIVES FOR THE SYNOD ON THE NEW EVANGELIZATION: A VIEW FROM THE UNITED STATES

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The upcoming synod on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith (October 2012) has received widespread recognition as a response to the obvious need for the Church to concentrate even more clearly on its essential mission. The pre-synodal working paper (*Lineamenta*) notes some of the characteristics of our current times that make evangelization at the same time both imperative and more difficult. The Synod's working paper points out how fundamentally different the world is today, compared to any other time in the history of the Church (*Lineamenta*, 6 and 9), and the need for renewed Christian living and witness in the modern world (*Lineamenta*, 17).

While the term *new evangelization* arises from certain root understandings of the word *evangelize*, the direction of its particular meaning was caught well by Bishop Edward Clark of Los Angeles in 2006, when, in a talk published in *Origins*, he elaborated on the key points of the new evangelization as Pope John Paul II had sketched them. Chief among those points were: the new evangelization is aimed at Catholics and rooted in a personal relationship with Christ; it is directed at believers, thereby deepening religious experience, so as to permit the Gospel to penetrate in a way that allows them to share faith; it calls non-practicing believers to active participation; it seeks to re-evangelize traditionally Christian countries weakened by secularization; it looks for new methods, especially with technology and communication; and, finally, the new evangelization involves all members of the Church, especially the laity (*Origins*, 36, #1, May 18, 2006, p. 5).

In this way, we can understand the new evangelization as the fundamental thrust of evangelization, now directed in a particular way toward societies at least nominally Catholic or Christian. While it contains all the elements of evangelization, the new evangelization's driving force is directed specifically toward already-Christian societies, as opposed to those societies not yet Christian (those efforts are properly called "mission *ad gentes*").



Nevertheless, the new evangelization, shaped as it is to reach societies at least nominally Catholic and Christian, cannot take only one form, given the wide variety of those already-existing Christian societies. Catholicism in Latin America differs significantly from that in English-speaking North America. Similarly, Catholicism and Christianity in Europe differ from their expressions in the United States, Canada, and Africa. These differences arise from (a) the distinct historical roots of Christianity/Catholicism, and (b) the distinct societies and cultures in which faith lives.

THE AMERICAN SITUATION

However, if we reflect on the new evangelization from the vantage point of the United States, this may benefit the synod by opening up directions that can provide insight into possibilities for the rest of the world. There is a compelling reason for presenting this American perspective: the Church in the U.S. deals with modern life in a unique way. Models of faith in America may very well be models for the broader preservation and growth of faith in the future, as more cultures absorb the impact of modernity.

The United States offers a decisive setting for the new evangelization because of the way our nation is built upon the modern structures of life, which have come to fruition on our soil in particular ways. Among the challenges posed by modern life, in the American model, two stand out: (1) what does it mean to belong to a believing community where church and state are, by constitution, separate, and have always been so; and (2) how does one have faith living in a world driven by novelty, manifested in the need for new products and ideas in order to feel alive or successful.

1. Church and State

When church and state are separated, then it is imperative to develop strategies of choice and identity. When church and state are not separated, then belonging to a church in reality means claiming the identity of a national or geographical group. In this latter situation, church and faith do not have to be chosen. They come with the territory; thus faith can often become largely a function of a particular society. Unfortunately, when the society becomes unhinged in its identity, so also does faith. The mostly-nominal practice of faith in Europe today clearly reflects this.

In the United States, by contrast, we have the first society to consciously separate faith and national identity. After decades of experimenting with how faith might work in the American colonies, framers of the U.S. Constitution deliberately excluded any established church from its organization. As a result, people did not automatically belong to a particular church. In some way, faith had always to be chosen. This has meant, in American life, successive waves of revivals and renewals that have kept religion animated and strong.

To be sure, there are dangers with this separation, not the least of which is a vapid secularism. Another danger is the state implicitly impeding the beliefs of certain groups. These dangers recede in the face of a far more positive experience: the ability of any faith and all faiths—including the Catholic faith—to thrive in this environment, depending on the force of its call to conversion and participation. As the American Father Isaac Hecker put it in 1886, “American institutions tend to develop independence personal independence and love of liberty. Christianity rightly understood is seen to foster these



qualities” (*The Church and the Age*, p. 107). Freedom provides the environment not only for religion, but also for religious growth.

The American experience means faith has to be primarily about choice and participation, in all the varied ways these are embodied in personal life or in different cultural forms.

2. New Ideas

Novelty continues to characterize the American experience. Initially it was the novelty of founding new communities, cities, states, territories, and domains as America moved west. Expansion seems part of the American imagination. More recently, novelty comes in the form of new ideas, new inventions, new models of living, and new products. Certainly, much of this can degenerate into sheer commercialism—new ideas having to be hawked all the time because we cannot stand still, we must expand. Even religion in America might, at times, look like a cross between commercialism and faith, as new churches arise to attract new members, as is evidenced by the non-stop formation of non-denominational churches and megachurches. Even so, this novelty contains the essential potential for congregations to use new ideas to meet a changing culture on its own terms.

This underlying framework of new ideas presents unique opportunities for churches and believers. We have been able to put our faith into forms that make it accessible to subsequent generations, and to people who have no faith, or have no active practice of their faith. If America seems like a religious marketplace, it also calls for Catholics to survey their substantial deposit of faith to present to seekers today, in terms of modern life, the spiritual wealth which we have to offer them as a Church.

In a particular way, the American experiment has felt the distinct marks of immigration, making the issues of choice and novelty play out in unique ways. As ever-new immigrant groups have entered the country, they have shaped its culture, such that America represents a collection of many cultures, often living well together, though sometimes uneasily. As immigrants have brought their faith to American life, they have offered wider American culture an opportunity to experience yet another instance of how faith lives in people today. This presents our culture with yet another view of how choice mixes with faith and novelty today.

The presence, and impact, of Latino culture on the United States, throughout its history, indeed presents an alternative vision of the American story. The huge influence of recently-arrived Latinos, with their own sense of culture, family, and faith, tease American experience in important ways. To what extent will the faith of Latinos be absorbed into a wider, less-distinct, American expression? To what extent will the culture of Latinos prove to be a counter-cultural witness to America? These same questions also arise from the experience of Asian Catholics, who have brought yet another experience of novelty to America.

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THE TENSION TODAY

These factors from American experience (and surely there are more) play out in our current Catholic experience which, over a fifty-year period, has moved from one pattern of passing on faith to our contemporary attempt to find new patterns. Indeed, no more pressing issue faces the Church in America today than discovering new ways of passing on faith.

Before 1960, Catholics in America still maintained some of their European patterns by developing ethnic communities in dense urban neighborhoods or monocultural small towns. They passed on faith by centering on the local parish, Catholic schools, ethnic patterns and identity, all of this buttressed by systems of authority. In the past fifty years, beginning with the building of suburbs—once Catholics could afford to move there—these established patterns began to change. Coinciding with this (and not causal) were the election of a Catholic as president of the United States, the Second Vatican Council, and the huge cultural transformation of the nineteen-sixties in the United States and Europe. We were now moving beyond the society of the Second World War, with its terrible toll and its semi-depressed existentialism, into a new world. Suburbia, which expressed these new dreams, also deflated the ethnic havens in which Catholics had lived and formed their identities for so many decades.

At this point, we see the system of Catholic schools becoming substantially smaller and significantly transformed from what it was, due in part to the absence of religious women and men to run them under the parameters of vows of poverty. Increased costs of running those schools also converged with the often higher quality of education in well-financed public schools. Today we also see our schools, when they can survive, more autonomous from parish life, at least in terms of funding, if not also in terms of their self-definition.

Likewise, our primary catechetical model for children—based on them “going to class” so they can “receive the sacraments”—has shown its limitations. Widespread observation indicates that only small percentages of children remain active in their faith after completing such classes. As the saying goes, “Confirmation is graduation.” The *Lineamenta* explicitly mentions the changes that have affected the passing on of faith (#12, 13).

We also see how modern patterns of life, whether urban or suburban, have largely ruptured the connection between faith and identity. Religious identity cannot come ready-made, but has to be constructed in each generation, and in each individual.

All of this lays open the pastoral issues that lie before the Church today. How do we develop ways of living that facilitate people’s choice of faith and help them construct a religious identity in congruence with the Catholic faith? How do we develop and nurture strategies in which we make it more likely that Catholics today (and tomorrow) will want to choose Catholicism as their religious identity? In more theological terms, the question might be put this way: *how do we help Catholics participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ in explicit and personal terms, so they choose to become and live as disciples in the Catholic tradition?*

Whether Catholics can more openly appropriate the principal elements of discipleship, elaborated near the end of this paper, remains the crucial issue, especially in Europe and America. Catholics must move from an idea of *membership* to commitment as *disciples*.



SKETCHING A RESPONSE

Initial directions in sketching this urgently-needed movement from membership to discipleship should explore (1) modes of contemporary life, (2) what those modes say about the appropriation of the content of the Catholic faith, and (3) how this leads to a Catholic vision of discipleship.

1. Modes of Communication in Contemporary Life

The Good News is primarily about communication—effectively proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the community of his followers, in the world today. Before any content of the Good News can be proclaimed, evangelizers have to look at the modes (ways) in which communication happens today. Our traditional modes of communication, springing from times before near-universal literacy, were basically public proclamation to people gathered in groups; definitive announcements decreed and published via messenger or, later, print; and various print modes for established teachings (catechisms, encyclicals, etc.).

Public proclamation and print are now superseded by newer modes of communication, which are quite different from these traditional modes. They entail particular methods of communication as well.

(1) Global proclamation now seems more possible than ever before due to global media. At the same time, this form of communication can easily be distorted. If spokespersons for the Church always are on a stage or altar, always talking to or at their audience, the Good News can seem remote and abstract. Styles of proclamation need to be carefully examined, particularly in view of other evangelizers who command these media with more energy, spontaneity, and passion than Catholics often show. Representatives of our Church often speak from carefully prepared scripts; they do not appear to speak so powerfully from the heart. (Even on local levels, when we are not speaking of authorized statements, clergy appear to be speaking more from texts than from their own commitment.) The new evangelization has to re-conceive *urbi et orbi* in today's global reality.

A limit to global communication arises from the ways in which media can instantly put a message into other contexts—replayed in other settings, such as news or comedy. Likewise, global communication can generate much commentary—some of it unwanted—from Internet sources that can take the most perfectly framed messages out of context.

(2) Internet communications now dominate the ways younger people relate to the world. Religious groups are responding to this in multiple ways through an enormous number of offerings, from apologetics (with various approaches), to online theology courses, to sites devoted to prayer, to material offered through episcopal conferences and parishes, to the Vatican's own website.

The crucial factor in the development of the Internet is this: it creates a multiplicity of niches in which smaller communities form around particular interests and interact in a relatively abstract way (through messages and comments). As a result, it is almost impossible through this medium to have one central message going forth from which a large group of people receives one distinct impression. Rather, many smaller communities, composed of individual users, break up larger messages into smaller doses, which are then passed on the initiative of the individual user. Even when things go “viral,” they do so only for a brief period.



The new evangelization has to encourage use of the Internet, and perhaps the Church needs to provide more direction for the sites that carry its message. How does one differentiate one “Catholic” site from another “Catholic” site? In this plethora of voices, the Church might need to claim more clearly its own sites—with a broad enough diversity to express the breadth of Catholic experience. These sites need to provide more than information. They also need to include opportunities for prayer, retreat resources, music, and ways for people to communicate and blog about particular spiritualities. All these kinds of online resources need to supplement sites that dispense information about the Catholic faith.

(3) *A third mode affecting communication that arises from modern experience revolves around the personal, the particular.* As society has grown bigger and more global, people have felt a more pronounced need to find personal space. To be part of a group, important as that is, needs to be complemented by recognizing the individuality and personal reality of each human being. While the Catholic Church stands well above most other groups in upholding the dignity of every person, how is that seen in our styles of worship, in our teaching, in our actual church life? The Church will have to allow the development of a variety of ways in which individual Catholics appropriate the faith and “make it their own.” Coming together as a people to affirm the common faith we have received from Jesus through the Apostles will demand, in the future, an acceptance of the many personal ways in which people actually accept and express that faith.

The message of the Gospel will need personal expression as well as communal expression. The Church will need to talk more in explicitly relational categories, rather than mainly in institutional ones. The perspective of discipleship—personal adherence to Jesus, through his Spirit, in deep openness to the Father—will need to become the major rhetorical field to address people today. None of this means diminishing the importance of community, or the solidarity on which Catholicism rests. But it does mean a change in emphasis.

Modern means of communication, combined with this personal dimension today, make it possible for people to form their own worlds. They shape data to their preferences and retool resources to their desires. Faith has to penetrate these personal worlds as much as it tries to penetrate the world at large.

(4) *And yet another mode for communicating the Good News arises from the need for community.* Even with the modern focus on the individual and the personal, a communal dimension is always part of human experience. For all the modern suspicion of institutions, faith comes through relationships with others, through bonds that create Christian community. The Church’s emphasis on the family moves logically to its emphasis on solidarity, the tenet that human beings can be grasped only in their connection to other humans and, indeed, to God: all forming the personal and communal reality in which we live.

How does one communicate faith in a world filled with suspicion of large institutions and corporations? How does one speak of community in a world that thinks primarily in individual ways? Much contemporary experience points to the importance of small-group sharing of faith. The small group mediates the larger world in ways that allow greater appropriation of belief. Whether the unit be the family, friends, gatherings of peer groups, clusters of people serving the poor, groups under common spiritual direction, or other configurations, the Church will advance the Good News by facilitating many levels of small groups through which today’s believers, and seekers, acknowledge faith. One need only look at the widespread ministry of the Catechumenate (R.C.I.A) to see this dynamic at work.



2. Appropriation of the Kerygma


The synod can help Catholics address twin crises of modern human life. One is the crisis of *meaning*—or the threat of meaninglessness—whereby a truncated and false scientific view gives rise to the impression that existence is nothing more than random combinations. Such a view robs humankind of any sense of purpose other than the alleviation of pain and the augmentation of pleasure. Our modern prejudice is to think that random patterns bring about an accidental humanity which ultimately means nothing to a vast, unimaginable, and cold universe that runs by its own laws. Does it mean anything for human beings to exist?

The second crisis of modern life involves *community*. How are humans connected to each other? How do our relationships bring about community? Just as a false science can make human existence seem a random accident, so a false politics can make human connections seem arbitrary and capricious. In this distorted view, people choose only for their own benefit and all connections are utilitarian. As a result, community appears secondary and artificially constructed.

Addressing these twin crises should not mean whole-scale dismissals of modernity and the structures of modern living. Rather, we have to demonstrate that religious values, and Catholic values in particular, unfold from the deepest modern impulses—and can find fulfillment only by a renewed acceptance of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Otherwise the Church will look like it is asking people not to live the very life they are living; only a radical extreme can accept such a starting point. Catholicism lives within cultures, not on the fringes of culture.

Given the modes and styles of contemporary life, now operating virtually across all the continents of the world, how might these modes be used to further the acceptance of the Gospel, and the fuller living of the implications of the Gospel today?

Here, it is necessary to conceive of alternative sequences and multiple processes, which might lead modern people to the acceptance of faith today. Instead of appealing only to an implied identity with the Church, and calling people to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for example, or appealing only to implied needs in the human person and calling them to accept Jesus as Savior, perhaps another sequence might make use of how modern people deal with personal experience, community, and institution. What follows is a possible sequence, attending to the modes of modern living as they have evolved in the American experience. This sequence, elaborated in eleven steps, primarily addresses a *method* for evangelization, and not its content.


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ELEVEN INTEGRAL STEPS IN THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

(1) The synod might call every committed and semi-committed believer to some practice of *daily prayer*. This prayer, rooted in the experience of Jesus, unfolds in human life the transcendence and immanence of the Triune God. Daily prayer would mean opening our hearts to God, through Jesus and the Spirit, at key moments throughout the day, as individuals, families, or small prayer groups. The conspicuous absence of patterns of daily prayer, and the diminished use of elements of popular religion (which played a large role in Pope Paul VI's thinking), make it imperative to place the importance of



this daily practice before all believers. Needless to say, patterns of daily prayer respond directly to modern emphases on the individual person and on relationships.

Such a practice would help millions of Catholics make openness to the transcendent a consistent part of their lives, leading, in turn, to an openness toward greater dimensions of the Good News. It would allow people to accept more deeply the action of God in their lives. Prayer would, in itself, change things. This also would work as a pastoral strategy. It is one thing to ask Catholics to “come back to the Church,” meaning, very often, to return to the practice of celebrating the Eucharist on Sunday. It is another thing to ask Catholics, many of whom never cultivated a discipline of weekly worship, to begin attending to God, and the call of God, in their own hearts. Daily prayer forms a more ready access to faith.

This need not mean having Catholics recite the Liturgy of the Hours, probably an impossible objective. Rather, simple prayers, based on elements of the Scriptures and laid out for flexible use by individuals and groups, can begin to unveil the presence and power of God more explicitly in the lives of Catholics. This also builds upon the instinctual spirituality that many Catholics have, whether they are active or not in the practice of their faith.

Resources for prayer can also be distributed through Internet, TV, radio, and other media, making it possible for people to bring prayer into various elements of their lives in a personal, adaptable way. Such an approach responds to the “personal niche” element that pervades modern adaptation of mass media. As people choose what pieces of the media they want in their own lives, they can choose resources that support prayer and spiritual growth.

A call to daily prayer reflects the truth that, once people pray consistently, they begin to see changes in their lives—changes in attitudes, their sense of themselves, their vision of the future. They begin to see signs of divine presence where they had not noticed them before. God appears as a reality in their lives.

A further benefit of starting with daily prayer is that Catholics can easily be distributing prayer booklets to their Catholic, and even non-Catholic, friends.

(2) The synod can also affirm the indispensable benefit of *attending to the Scriptures* individually and also in small groups. While practicing Catholics have become more familiar with scriptural texts, Catholics still do not feel comfortable using the Scriptures as a base in their daily spirituality. In multiple ways daily Scriptures (already chosen in the Lectionary) can become available to Catholics for personal reflection and prayer. Church leaders and spiritual directors can offer simple uses of Scripture, emphasizing the application of God’s Word in daily life.

The Church can also build upon the widespread experience of the *comunidades de base* and *small faith-sharing groups* to invite the whole Church into regular a experience of faith sharing. Providing simple texts, and suggested points of departure for discussion, can be done by dioceses and parishes alike. Encouraging these groups on multiple levels of communal experience, from grade school through seniors, can transform the experience of faith for both nominal and active believers.

These groups can also be a basis for invitation and reaching out to those who have even less of an identity with faith: those who have no faith community to which they are committed. Personal prayer, the Scriptures, and small groups can be the initial, accessible steps people might take to come to know Jesus in personal, experiential ways, but in ways shaped by the experience of community.



These groups need not meet all the time; seasonal meetings might best accommodate the needs of modern life. The key value is the experience of bonding with others, and the experience of being involved with Jesus in an active way. Small group experience, an element of many renewal movements in the Catholic Church, has become a permanent feature in growing expressions of faith in America. Acceptance of small group experience has to include a trust in the health of such a process once basic parameters are established.

(3) The synod can clarify the role of *conversion* for contemporary Catholics. On the one hand, some forms of Christianity place enormous emphasis on an adult experience of personal change, making many other Christians, and Catholics, feel as if they have had no experience of conversion. On the other hand, simply talking about “ongoing conversion” might not have the specific content that modern believers need.

Preachers, teachers, and spiritual writers can all begin to emphasize the role of the Paschal Mystery in everyday Christian experience, and how Catholics today are constantly called to allow elements of their lives to die (self-centeredness, vices, and sin) in order to experience greater life in God (self-gift, virtue, and holiness). We need to help modern believers unpack the power of the Paschal Mystery in the daily realities of their lives, where the drama of faith is acted out.

Catholics need to see themselves as converted, perhaps not in the exact same format proposed by some evangelical Christian groups, but in the profound sense of identity with Jesus through the Spirit, leading to a placing of God and the Kingdom at the center of their lives. Such experiences of conversion should not be made to seem rare or exceptional. Rather, they should be related to everyday life, and to the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation, each of which replicates the dynamics of Baptism throughout a Catholic’s spiritual life.

(4) The synod can give direction to Catholic *parishes*, particularly aiming to (a) engage people in their parish as members of a community and (b) infuse a missionary spirit in the parish. Here, the distinct history of parish in America has led to a more dynamic concept of parish community: parish is not just a sacred building, but a community that responds to the multiple needs of people. In American Catholic experience, parish has often been the center of the lives of believers.

Important here will be avoiding the impression that parish, in itself, is the goal of evangelization, rather than the essential instrument for celebrating and passing on faith. The parish must see itself in service to people to help them engage the reality of God through the Good News of Jesus, and empowering them to live as disciples through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the actions engendered *beyond* parish life are a fundamental goal of parish life itself. Parishes, in the missionary vision of the Catholic Church (cf. canon 528), serve by helping their parishioners be missionaries and servants beyond the actual confines of the parish. Another way to put this would be: a parish must serve as a family of families, a community of communities, by encouraging spirituality and mission in, and beyond, all of its families and communities. (Thinking of parish as the center often leads Catholics to see the maintenance of a parish building as central; this only reinforces the institutional language we need to learn to diminish.)

Engaging people in our parishes means far more than engaging those who come to Mass on Sunday or who are registered in a parish. The proper “clients” of Catholic parishes



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are all those who live within parish boundaries or the particular mission of the parish. Parishes have to be as committed to those who are not present as it is to those who are present. Attending to the modes of modern life, parishes can generate many levels of sharing the Good News in its ministries. The more parishes help active Catholics intersect with others, the more parishes can accomplish their purpose.

Pastors, priests, parish ministers, and all parishioners have to live with a passion to share the Good News of Jesus and invite people into relationship with him. This entails realizing how much Catholicism has to offer modern people, as we overcome our inner shyness and act in accord with personal, relational, patterns. All too often pastors claim that they cannot reach out to those not involved in faith because they are too busy taking care of those who come to church. The synod needs to clearly state that when parishes are not reaching out, and not empowering their active parishioners to reach out, they have already ceased to serve their active members. Mission, furthermore, has to be defined as the province of all the baptized, not just the clergy. The synod needs to call parishes to a radical vision of themselves as missionary—caring as much for those “who do not come” as for those who do.

Involvement in parish will come for many today only after involvement in prayer, exposure to the Good News, and engagement with small groups. In other words, involvement in parish often will not be the starting point for modern people, but a point reached further along in their spiritual journeys. Pastors at every level need to trust that the Holy Spirit will begin to lead people to more overt and external forms of religious practice. Desire for the Eucharist, its celebration, its veneration, and its effects in daily life will emerge all the more as people are called to an authentic spirituality.

(5) The Good News (the kerygma), articulated so completely in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, will have *various paths* by which people accept it. For many, the approach will be a clear sense of personal need, whether of sin or of human limitation. For many more, however, the approach will be a desire to serve, to discover a fuller life of beauty, to put our search for truth into a more complete context, to live more clearly in community, or to experience God in mystical patterns.

As a result, the Church will necessarily have to develop *multiple appeals* to modern people to accept and deepen faith. No one approach will serve the broad and evolving needs of people today. Jesus, to be sure, remains “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and so the center of the Good News we proclaim. But the richness of Jesus, expressed in our Catholic life, may be experienced in different, multiple ways as people begin to relate to him; those distinct ways can expand to other ways as people grow in discipleship. The mystics of our Catholic tradition, particularly the great Carmelites, have an enormous amount to teach modern people, many of whom have come to think of faith only as affectivity or consolation, and, therefore, restrict the full experience of the Paschal Mystery.

The person of Jesus gives us more than the *content* of faith: his teachings, his deeds, and the doctrines about them. Jesus also gives us a *method* of Good News, particularly with the parabolic thrust of much of his ministry. In offering parables, Jesus invites his listeners to use vivid images in everyday life to discover how God is at work. Presenting the Good News today can invite people to discover the parables of modern existence, parables that emerge from the drama of human life itself to open access to God. To *affirm* Jesus as the center of Christian life is not as important as leading people to *discover* Jesus as that center through their personal experience of faith.



(6) The Good News that we profess must have clear reference to the *Kingdom of God*. While Pope Benedict has rightly pointed out the limitations of a purely “social” understanding of Christianity, which has emerged as “Regnocentrism,” (cf. *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 53; and *Spe Salvi*, #23), it nonetheless remains true that the Kingdom of God was the dominant goal of the life of Jesus, and central to his teaching and self-understanding.

A fuller appropriation of the Kingdom has to go beyond good deeds for the needy, key as those are to Christian life. Rather, the Kingdom involves a radical way to envision God’s relationship with humankind as Father, and, as a result, involves a transformed set of relationships among human beings. The Kingdom is nothing less than the elaboration of the Sermon on the Mount, with its radical trust in God and its radical call to service. We truncate the Kingdom by making it “other worldly,” and also by making it “this worldly.” The Kingdom encompasses all time because it is the goal of history, of redemption in Jesus Christ, coming about through constant divine action.

Inviting people to the Kingdom in this fuller sense means inviting them to live for what Jesus lived for, and making the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption in Christ the particular goal of every believer. God sweeps in and through history, directing it toward a fullness that can only be realized in God; Jesus, and his Spirit, are essential to what God the Father is doing. Faith means being swept up into this all-encompassing action of God. The Kingdom serves as a goal, pulling reality forward toward completion, no matter the resistance. When we talk about Christian life as conflict, as a struggle—lead us not into temptation—we are actually describing the resistance to the Kingdom of God in human hearts.

Inviting modern people into the Kingdom can help them bring patterns of meaning into what can often seem like a life bereft of foundations. As people adopt half-digested scientific images of atoms floating in random patterns, and come to think of their own humanity that way, they need to come to see that the Kingdom of God precisely brings a divine order out of what seems like formless chaos.

(7) The synod will likewise serve us by helping the Church recognize and accept more profoundly the work of the *Holy Spirit* in all of Catholic life.

The Holy Spirit, after all, is the point of the resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, whose dynamism runs so clearly through the Acts of the Apostles, remains the essential dynamic principle of Catholic life. Pope Paul VI pointedly noted that evangelization is the work of the Holy Spirit (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, #75). Blessed John Paul II likewise gave the Spirit a prominent place in the advancement of mission (*Mission of the Redeemer*, #21). Every sacrament Catholics celebrate involves the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Catholic life can be understood as much as an effect of the Spirit as an effect of Jesus, the Word made incarnate.

The dynamism of the Spirit needs to run through Catholic life today. Catholics, if they practice their faith, are for the most part way too focused on a spirituality of vision, of beholding, of venerating. Without losing any of that, Catholics also need a spirituality



Catholics also need a spirituality of action, of movement, of transformation, of community—all of which emerges more clearly in the mission of the Holy Spirit. Unless they grasp, and respond to, the Holy Spirit who “sends us forth,” Catholics will mostly think of their spirituality as “going to Church.”



of action, of movement, of transformation, of community—all of which emerge more clearly in the mission of the Holy Spirit. Unless they grasp, and respond to, the Holy Spirit who sends us forth, Catholics will mostly think of their spirituality as “going to Church.” The emergence of strong Pentecostal patterns in the twentieth century has much to teach the Catholic Church. Whatever the distinct effects of the Holy Spirit may be, the overriding energy of the Spirit in the experience of believers needs emphasis and underlining. Without powerful engagement with the Holy Spirit, Catholicism is not being lived as it should. Only when Catholics engage the Holy Spirit (or, better, let the Spirit engage them) will the relational, personal, and invitational aspects of Catholic life become clear.

(8) As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes clear, sacraments, moral life, and prayer follow from the core of our beliefs (the kerygma). What we believe about God, and the kind of God Jesus reveals in fullness, shapes the vision we have of ourselves and, consequently, *the kind of lives* we live.

Almost all studies of current Catholic practice in the United States show a bifurcation between its general moral content and that related to sexuality. While Catholics struggle to accept the Church’s social teachings, many of them, particularly in younger generations, put qualifications on teachings about sexuality and gender. These younger folks live in a world with wildly different assumptions about sexuality than those that held force just fifty years ago.

Catholic leaders and believers have every obligation to ask society whether it can really make sense of human love, human life, and human dignity in a world where almost any kind of access to sexual behavior is tolerated, if not accepted. But Catholic leaders also have the responsibility *not* to make teachings on gender and sexuality the seeming crux and sine qua non of moral life. With Blessed John Paul II, we have to put issues of sexuality into the context of human dignity and meaning.

Many people today do not view sexuality primarily as patterns of actions; rather, they view sexuality as an inherent part of the human person. To deny sexual expression seems, to modern people, to deny human nature. It will take a long time for today’s society to nuance its assumptions about sexuality, and for humankind to realize the headlong tragedy arising from its attitudes toward sexual action, expressed in theories and manifest in most public media. After all, issues about abortion are ultimately tied to issues about sexual expression. It took a long conversation for us to get to where we are sexually (at least for the young); we need great patience to reverse the modern narrative about sexuality.

The synod can help by acknowledging that the modern dialogue about sexuality has arrived at a difficult place. It can also place the emphasis on moral renewal primarily on the side of human dignity (i.e., the implications of the Kingdom), and its meaning for human society (Catholic social teaching), and its call for integrity at every level of human life (relations with others, responsibilities to family and world, use of speech in public and private life, and sexual expression). Putting sexual issues into the fundamental vision of the Kingdom and the fulfillment of humankind can help both believers and wider society find broader bases for discussion and renewal. Sexual teaching cannot become the sole litmus test for following Jesus. Doing so distorts both sexuality and our teaching.

Moral perspectives have to be drawn from the heroic call to live for others. Only an emphasis on the selfless qualities of living for others can begin to align modern people with the spiritual vision of Jesus Christ. We can begin by inviting people to live this vision



in the ways in which they actually can live it—and by challenging people to come to live it fully. A quest for integrity through generosity of self in any area becomes a call to live that integrity in all areas of life.

(9) Another note about the kerygma revolves around *ecumenical and interfaith* commitments, which have renewed so much Catholic vision and action in the past fifty years. The divisions of Christians clearly make evangelizing difficult; they scatter the gifts we have received, and make it impossible for us to approach the world with a consistent alternative to a flat, secular narrative. Instead, so much time goes into how our Christian narratives differ from one another that our common voice becomes muted. Likewise, Christians can too readily separate themselves from the universal drives toward fullness represented at the core of other world religions.

Without losing our Catholic integrity, we can articulate our kerygma in ways that show connections with the aspirations in other Christian communions and even in other faiths. Jesus' engagement with pagans can be paradigmatic—the way he elicits faith from them mostly as an act of profound trust in God. In this kind of profound trust, Christians and Catholics may find kindred experience with all believers (cf. Matthew 8:5 ff. and 15:22).

With ecumenical and interfaith sensitivity, the Catholic Church can still be compelling to modern people because of the very breadth of our experience as a world-wide community. It is not necessarily in our narrowed differences, but more likely in our broad affirmations, that we evince the power of the Kingdom, and that others can begin to hear our message and understand why we affirm Jesus as central to the human relationship with God.

Renewed ecumenical efforts will not hurt the new evangelization; indeed, they are a basic condition of its success. As the love of the early Christians drew others to their company (Acts 2:43-47), so a powerfully expressed love among all Christians, moving toward unity through the work of the Spirit, can draw seekers today.

(10) If we envision communicating the kerygma in accord with the modes of modern life, we see an unfolding of a *missionary pattern* that takes this form: involvement with regular, daily prayer and regular reflection on the Scriptures; connection with small groups—augmented by media both small and large; a deeper sense of conversion and re-conversion, leading people to a greater focus of their lives on Jesus Christ, and new appreciations of the Spirit; as Jesus leads people into a realization of the Kingdom (in the various meanings of “realization”) they are drawn to community, to service, to self-gift; all of this draws believers more deeply into moral realizations that correspond to the Kingdom and the dignity of persons; this happens in line with ecumenical and interfaith commitments, showing the broader and more compelling aspects of God's interaction in the world; all of this supported by a renewed image of parish, reaching beyond its somewhat defined membership to touch as many people as it can.

(11) Here, the central place of the *Eucharist* finds new power because all of the new evangelization will be pointing inevitably toward worship. The new evangelization will need patience to engage with people who may well not be ready for the Eucharist—their searching may be more preliminary. But Eucharist will be the goal of all the new evangelization, as it calls people to mission, as it feeds and supports them in mission, as it involves ever new people who have been touched by mission. The Eucharist is the sun whose mass creates a gravity that holds everything else in place, affecting all people even though they may not be aware of it. Prayer, sharing, service, community, Kingdom, Paschal Mystery, unity—all of this is eminently contained in the Eucharist, through



which Christ's presence is concentrated in the worship of the Church. The Eucharist, in the divine presence of Jesus, in the dynamics of the Holy Spirit, and in the broader dynamics it inspires in the Church and the world, serves as the central engine of the new evangelization.

The Eucharist summarizes everything in the Catholic heart; the Eucharist points to so much more that needs to happen in the world through Catholic mission. The stable and enduring elements of Eucharist, especially the Real Presence, unfold into the dynamic and ever-new dimensions of the Church, its mission accomplished in the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge the Eucharist as an act of present worship, participating in the eternal worship of Jesus. At the same time we acknowledge the Eucharist as the foretaste of the eschaton, when redemption in Jesus Christ is complete, when God is, as St. Paul puts it, "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

3. Discipleship

These emphases, arising from the more mobile and sectorized patterns of modern life, all drive toward the goal of the new evangelization: a profound sense of union with Christ. "[The Church] makes the Person of Jesus and a personal encounter with him central to her thinking, knowing that he will give his Spirit and provide the force to announce and proclaim the Gospel in new ways which can speak to today's cultures" (*Lineamenta*, #5). This goal also frames the purpose of catechesis: "Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ making, of oneself a disciple of him" (*General Directory for Catechesis*, #53). Catholicism offers this framework, knowing that Jesus is far more than a mental image one construes. Rather, the fullness of Jesus involves adherence to Jesus personally, as Jesus is revealed in the Word, in community, in prayer, and in service. Far more than some moving of feelings, conversion means an adherence—a total and faithful commitment—to Christ. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* puts it, "The Christian faith is above all conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps" (*Ibid.*). The pedigree of the word adherence goes back to *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (#22).

Consequently, the synod can help Catholics understand the new evangelization by *linking it to discipleship*: a call for all Catholics to intentionally identify themselves as disciples, becoming personally committed followers of Jesus Christ, thereby carrying out more openly the call of the Second Vatican Council for holiness. Discipleship becomes a way to talk about Catholic life in relational terms, one that responds in particular to the energies of modern life. This leads, in turn, to an apostolic expression of discipleship,

the carrying out of the mission of Jesus through his Spirit. Discipleship can respond to the modes of life today, because we invite people to be part of a global community (i.e., a Catholic communion), where each of us is personally involved following Jesus, and serving his Kingdom, in the community of the Church.

Various components of Christian life support and express discipleship. *Community* supports discipleship because one cannot be a disciple in isolation. One lives within a



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community whose values and message shapes the way one lives as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The intensity of involvement in community also reflects the intensity of discipleship.

Likewise, the *Word of God* supports discipleship because it calls one, again and again, to conversion. The Word of God reveals the personal dimension of the divine in such a way that a hearer responds to that Word through committed faithfulness. The enduring love of God, expressed in God's covenant with us, becomes reflected in the faithful commitment of disciples. While discipleship often has strong emotive components, primarily discipleship is about commitments made in God's grace. Love may be a feeling, but it always is a choice to place another at the center of our lives. Discipleship means that a believer places God consistently in the center of life. The Word of God reinforces this consistent choice throughout the spiritual life—a believer's adherence to Christ.

Worship and prayer express discipleship in both personal and collective patterns. Disciples have a relationship with God; as such, they express that relationship through dialogue, profound listening, and greater commitment. When believers open themselves to God through personal prayer, they expose their deepest hearts to the living Word, the shaping grace, of the Holy Spirit. Such openness becomes a dialogue of ever-greater giving of oneself in response to the God who is eternal self-gift. Personal prayer in discipleship becomes the road along which disciples journey in life.

When disciples gather, as they must, they express their relationship with God through the patterns of worship that Jesus bequeathed his followers, primarily in the Eucharist. The Eucharist expresses the deepest elements of discipleship through the various components of Catholic worship—the Word of God, and the Table through which the Church offers itself with Christ in love to the Father, and receives in love, from the Father, the Body and Blood of Christ. All spiritual life fundamentally is an expansion of the spiritual reality of Catholic worship.

Discipleship, finally, shows itself *in service*: the self-less giving of oneself to others in the pattern of Jesus' life, and in the continuance of his mission as apostles. Jesus' words cannot be understood apart from the deeds of service, particularly those given to people outside the established circles of his day. Jesus liberates those who are bound, heals those who are ill, supports those who are weak, consoles those who cry, forgives those caught in sin, and shows the power of God to bring a new vision of hope and life to the world.

Discipleship allows people to see their lives in terms of the journey of faith. Different believers will be in different phases, but each believer sees him- or herself as moving toward a full participation in the Kingdom of God. Discipleship directly relates to the Kingdom: to be a disciple is to live in and for the Kingdom, just as Jesus did. To be a disciple means letting the Spirit of Jesus draw one forward toward the fullness of life.

THE SYNOD

The Synod on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith can bring a transformative vision to Catholic life in the twenty-first century, a life far more threatened now than it appeared to be fifty years ago. While some of those threats come from outside, the greatest threats come from within the community of believers—to be uncommitted, half-hearted, and nominal in the practice of faith. The road to living the faith more fully and openly needs to be mapped out through



patterns of personal prayer, community, and sharing. Only this can help Catholics in the twenty-first century bring about a convergence of identity and personal commitment (conversion) in modern life.

Like the Second Vatican Council, the Synod is an opportunity to speak of faith in the modern world—that is, a world shaped by the assumptions of modernity. While historically the life of the Church arose from pre-modern elements of human consciousness, the Church must still coordinate its basic faith with people today. Even as it struggles to absorb elements of modernity (those elements suitable to its Good News), the Church must also give leadership by witnessing what it means to live profound faith in the midst of the world today.



[The Church] makes the Person of Jesus and a personal encounter with him central to her thinking, knowing that he will give his Spirit and provide the force to announce and proclaim the Gospel in new ways which can speak to today's cultures (Lineamenta, #5).

The Church is ever in tension between those aspects of its life that can often seem counter-cultural, and those elements that powerfully interplay with culture. Pope Paul VI saw the Gospel as both transcending, and penetrating, culture (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, #19-20). While not of this world, the Church is certainly in it (cf. John 17:14-16).

While this may mean some critique of elements of modern life (and certainly critique is needed in some areas), people today will not be able to hear the fundamental message of the Church if it comes as a series of condemnations. Before there is materialism, consumerism, individualism, or any other “ism,” there are *people* who live in a world filled with options and alternatives all around them. The Synod has to appeal to the hearts of people, and give the Church a renewed

and powerful incentive to invite and share, specifically with modern people whose lives will be shaped by cultural forces that neither the Church—or any other agency for that matter—can completely control. Catholic faith and life need not be an alternative to modern life, but rather an alternative within modern life.

Older patterns of identity no longer seem to express the faith today, partly because of social changes and partly because of renewed understandings of Catholic life. Therefore, the imperative that lies before us can be nothing else than sketching, in concrete and viable ways, how Catholics today can be engaged in the modern world as committed disciples of Jesus Christ, and how that discipleship is lived most fully in the Catholic Church because of the compelling ways the Holy Spirit has brought the Catholic Church into the deepest, and most credible, service of the Kingdom of God. Older patterns of conversion and identity have forever shifted during the twentieth century; the twenty-first century points to new patterns in which identity emerges for modern people as personal choice supported by the structures of discipleship and situated within the life-giving riches of the Catholic Church.

