

How the New Evangelization Fits with Catholic Higher Education

By Scott W. Hahn

The call of the last several decades for a new evangelization finds a particularly natural setting for dialogue within the Catholic university. Evangelization—sharing the gospel message with all people—is the Church’s mission, and should be a part of everything she does, including the education of young people. The nature of higher education provides a unique opportunity to integrate faith and reason, to see the witness of an authentic Catholic life lived out by the faculty and staff, to engage in conversations and friendships that inspire ongoing conversion, and to participate in the evangelization of culture. Certainly these are not easy assignments. However, a proper conception of both the new evangelization and Catholic institutions for higher learning demonstrates that the new evangelization can and should be an integral activity of a Catholic university.¹

Many in the academy and elsewhere assert that an institution for higher learning, even a Catholic one, is not a proper location for evangelization. After all, a Catholic university is neither a parish nor an evangelistic association. A university exists for the purpose of higher education. It is supposed to be academically rigorous, forming the intellect more than the will or the emotions. It is a community of students and teachers in diverse academic disciplines coming together to grow intellectually.

¹ I would like to thank Alicia Boyle for her assistance on this paper, and my graduate research assistants, Alex Parra and Laura Gallant, for their helpful input in preparing the original lecture.

While a Catholic school can certainly require students to learn about the Catholic faith, it would be a violation of freedom of conscience to require belief or conversion as part of an education.² Most avow that the learning at a university ought to be concentrated in a classroom, not gleaned from the pulpit or a bible study. As such, it would seem like the new evangelization does not logically fit into the mission and purpose of an institution of Catholic higher learning.

I propose that the reason so many do not see the new evangelization as a responsibility of the Catholic university can be traced to an inadequate understanding of what the new evangelization means. Evangelization is not the same as proselytization. Proper evangelization should deliver the gospel message in a way that is respectful of other cultures and religious traditions.³ Indeed, there are many possible methods for evangelization, but all these methods lead to the center of the gospel, which is Christ. Once we grasp the inner logic of the new evangelization and see how expansive it is, and how boldly the Church proclaims this mission in response to the great challenges we face, once we reconsider what is meant by new evangelization, we will be able to see that there is no more fitting place for the new evangelization than at a Catholic institution of higher learning.

Overview of the New Evangelization

In order to build a proper understanding of the new evangelization, it may be helpful to trace the history of the term. The word *evangelium* (“gospel”) was not prominent in magisterial or conciliar writings before the Second Vatican Council. For instance, documents of Vatican I

² Glenn B. Siniscalchi, “No Excuses: Catholic Schools Must Evangelize,” *Crisis Magazine*, March 12, 2015, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2015/evangelization-catholic-schools>, [accessed February 9, 2016].

³ Siniscalchi, “No Excuses”.

mention “gospel” one time, and evangelization not at all. The documents of Vatican II refer to “gospel” 157 times. “Evangelization” is used 31 times, and “evangelize” is used 18 times. This increased use in the sixteen documents of the Council reflects an evangelistic emphasis, which many highlight as a central theme of the Council.⁴

Pope Paul VI taught extensively on the topic of evangelization during his papacy. He changed the name of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; and he made many apostolic journeys throughout Europe, as well as to the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia, taking the message of the gospel to the world. His 1974 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* declared that evangelization is the deepest identity of the Church; her purpose is to share the good news of the Paschal Mystery with the world.⁵

A focus on evangelization has thus been a prominent part of the Church’s dialogue in the decades following Vatican II. Pope John Paul II intensified the Church’s discussion, calling for the 1990s to be an extended advent season for the new evangelization.⁶ In 1990, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad gentes* (Vatican II’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church), he promulgated *Redemptoris missio* (which is viewed by many as the Magna Carta of the new evangelization), in which he says, “the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies

⁴ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 88.

⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), par. 14.

⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris missio* (7 December 1990), par. 86.

to the new evangelization.... No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”⁷

What is Meant by New Evangelization?

Talking about a “new evangelization” implies that there is an “old evangelization.” It is in fact ancient—the proclamation of the good news to those who have never heard about Jesus has been the Church’s mission from the beginning. This “old” evangelization is still crucially important and should not be forgotten.

The new evangelization is a reevangelization of the dechristianized.⁸ The Church is not only seeking to baptize those who have been newly evangelized, which she has been doing for two thousand years; she is also evangelizing those who have been baptized but have been progressively dechristianized by a secular culture. The culture of death, the new atheism, the dictatorship of relativism—these societal trends affect even Catholics.

As John Paul said, evangelization is not just for the clergy or for missionaries. Evangelization needs to be directed toward cultures that have become increasingly secularized. As such, evangelization is for every Christian.⁹ In numerous countries where the Catholic faithful had been flourishing, the indifference to religion has grown under the influence of secularism and atheism.¹⁰ In these places, reevangelization is necessary to “remake the Christian

⁷ *Redemptoris missio*, par. 3.

⁸ *Redemptoris missio*, par. 33.

⁹ *Redemptoris missio*, par. 71. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), par. 33.

¹⁰ *Christifideles laici*, par. 34.

fabric” so the faith can grow again where it is facing serious opposition.¹¹ With missionary zeal, the Church must continue to preach the gospel to those who have never encountered Jesus, but she must also reevangelize “entire portions of populations.”¹²

This is not just John Paul's message. It was reinforced repeatedly by Pope Benedict, who in *Verbum domini* says, “Many of our brothers and sisters are ‘baptized, but insufficiently evangelized’ ... nations once rich in faith ... are losing their identity under the influence of a secularized culture. The need for a new evangelization, so deeply felt by my venerable Predecessor, must be valiantly reaffirmed, in the certainty that God’s word is effective.”¹³

Pope Benedict established the Congregation for the Promotion of the New Evangelization in the Roman Curia because he believed “the mission of evangelization ... is necessary for the Church: it cannot be overlooked; it is an expression of her very nature.”¹⁴ Many in the world have abandoned the faith; Benedict understands the need for a new evangelization, a “constant interior renewal” of the Church.¹⁵ The new evangelization cannot be limited to a single method; rather, “careful discernment” should be exercised to determine the best method in any situation.¹⁶

In 2012, Benedict called a Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. The synod identified the need for a new evangelization of those who have grown distant from the Church, that through it the Church would be a witness to

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum domini* (30 September 2010), par. 96.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter in the Form of *Motu Proprio* establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization *Ubicumque et semper* (21 September 2010).

¹⁵ *Ubicumque et semper*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

God in the secularized world.¹⁷ It reiterated that although initial evangelization and the new evangelization remain mutually supportive ideas, they should not be confused; they each remain distinct and vitally important to the Church's overall mission.¹⁸ With his encyclical *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis shows he is following his predecessors in a continuing focus on the new evangelization.

However, evangelization cannot focus solely on the initial conversion of individuals. Evangelization must also include ongoing personal conversion and a broader evangelization of culture. The new evangelization is a comprehensive program to reach those who have lost their faith and adopted secular worldviews. What I propose, and what John Paul regularly repeated, is that our understanding of evangelization embrace a deeper understanding of what conversion entails. This understanding of the new evangelization as conversion demands a reconsideration of what Christian formation requires. This formation is certainly an important part of the mission of the Catholic university.

Theology of Conversion

At its heart, evangelization is not just a personal relationship with Jesus, accepting him as Savior and Lord; evangelization calls for something much longer and much deeper. A distinction must be drawn between evangelization in the Catholic tradition and evangelization as practiced by many non-Catholic Protestants and fundamentalists. As beautiful and as important as a

¹⁷ *Final Propositions of the Synod on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, no. 7, 8.

¹⁸ *Propositions*, 9.

personal relationship with Jesus is, this personal relationship is just the beginning of the Catholic understanding of evangelization.

Notably, the earliest accounts of the ancient Church show us how initial evangelization led to initial conversion; and the grace of this conversion made one a “convert.” Following this conversion, which was the development of a personal relationship with Jesus, a convert enrolled in the catechumenate to learn the four spiritual laws and the *kerygma*, the Creed and the petitions of the Our Father, how to pray and how to fast. Catechumens underwent scrutinies and many months of catechesis, all in preparation for something even greater: entering God's covenant family through baptism, confirmation, and the reception of Holy Communion. Thus in the ancient process of conversion, a person was evangelized, and then catechized, and finally sacramentalized. This three-stage process begins with a personal relationship but it culminates with a covenantal relationship.

Evangelization is like falling in love with someone; followed by engagement, when one realizes the future spouse's family will be one's own, and discovers all the commitments that marriage entails. Finally, the relationship culminates in the covenant bond of marriage. In this model, evangelization moves into catechesis, the next level; but the proclamation of the good news does not cease. Similarly, when catechesis moves into sacramentalization, evangelization continues; it is as though the gospel is shared and understood even more deeply. Throughout the levels of evangelization, the good news never ceases to be internalized. Even after baptism, confirmation, and the reception of Holy Communion there is an ongoing process of conversion. In the Catholic understanding of evangelization, conversion is a lifelong journey.

Here, the Catholic tradition offers one of the most distinctive, and largely overlooked, contributions to the theological discussion. The idea that the theology of conversion must match

the depth of the theology of evangelization is deeply Catholic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes how from the time of the early Church, the initiation of a Christian involves a journey through several stages in which “certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion.”¹⁹ The initial conversion of accepting the gospel is indeed only the first step, to be followed by catechesis, with conversion reaching a pinnacle in the sacramental stage. However, the *Catechism* also recognizes that with the prominence of infant baptism, a “post-baptismal catechumenate” is required since infants do not experience initial evangelization or initial conversion before their baptism.²⁰ The great need for the new evangelization is a call for this post-baptismal catechumenate, especially in the face of the many forms of radical secularization – the new *deevangelization* – which has been taking place for decades.

The *Catechism* is also clear that even following baptism one struggles to overcome the weakness of human nature; the struggle of the Christian life is the struggle of conversion.²¹ The *Catechism* echoes the great and deep tradition that the second conversion is an uninterrupted, lifelong task for the whole Church and for each individual Christian.²² Conversion is not a singular and static past event. Conversion is an ongoing and ever-deepening process, one that never becomes easy. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said, “If any man would come after me, let

¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 1229.

²⁰ CCC, 1231.

²¹ CCC, 1426.

²² CCC, 1427-1428.

him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”²³ The way of the cross always requires a grace of ongoing, ever-deepening, and lifelong conversion.

This taps into the tradition of the three stages of the spiritual life: the purgative stage, the illuminative stage, and the unitive stage. These stages have been part of the formation of religious communities for centuries. Vatican II, however, clearly affirmed the universal call to holiness—that holiness is not just for clergy and religious, but for all baptized Christians—so this journey of ongoing conversion is also something for the daily life of the laity. The call to holiness and the call to conversion is the call to struggle together as a community of believers; and this is a struggle that rightly penetrates every aspect of our lives. Conversion must be both interior and exterior, private and public, spiritual and social. The university is positioned at a crucial point in this dynamic process. Therefore, conversion should be found in all the departments and disciplines of a truly Catholic university.

When the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was promulgated in 1992, the program of the new evangelization was still developing. The treatment of the new evangelization in the 2005 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is much more extensive. By that time, the need for ongoing conversion had become far more apparent than it had been in 1992. Another closely related feature in the *Compendium* is its emphasis on the new evangelization as integral to human society and interpersonal relations. In other words, the *Compendium*'s concept of evangelization goes beyond initial conversion, and beyond post-baptismal catechesis, to show that the gospel should have a significant impact on every area of human life and culture.

²³ Luke 9:23

To bridge the growing gap between the gospel and culture, the Church must enter a new phase in which she views social doctrine as an “instrument of evangelization,” highlighting the importance of emphasizing human dignity in an effort to share the good news with others.²⁴ While historically an emphasis on social doctrine has focused on those who are materially poor, the growing need for reevangelization demonstrates that in parts of the West, those who have material comfort are spiritually in need.

A mature understanding of the Church’s social doctrine should be grounded in the overarching vision of human dignity, and should concentrate on the Church’s mission of evangelization.²⁵ The “witness of a Christian life ... the life of holiness” proclaims social doctrine in a positive light.²⁶ In this way, the Church, in the lives of her members, is showcasing the beauty of the truth she advocates. The work of the Church is a perpetual effort of formation, such that Christians feel empowered to embody their faith in all aspects of their lives.²⁷ Therefore, “Catholic educational institutions can and indeed *must* carry out a precious formative service, dedicating themselves in a particular way to the inculturation of the Christian message ... the productive encounter between the Gospel and the various branches of knowledge (emphasis added).”²⁸ This expresses the Church’s firm belief that Catholic educational institutions provide a unique and fitting environment to advance the Church’s mission of evangelization through their witness of an integrated life. At a Catholic university, students can truly experience what it means to live in the culture while not being of the culture.

²⁴ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 523, 67.

²⁵ *Compendium*, 530.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Compendium*, 531.

²⁸ *Compendium*, 532.

Evangelization of Culture

Another aspect of evangelization growing in emphasis during the last several decades is the dialogue of the gospel message with the culture, often referred to as the evangelization of culture. Particularly for John Paul, the evangelization of culture is essential for the success of the new evangelization. The *National Directory for Catechesis* indicates that “the dynamism inherent in the new evangelization demands both the inculturation of the Gospel and the transformation of the culture by the Gospel.”²⁹ “Only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history.”³⁰ The inculturation of the gospel is not meant to degrade the good news to a simplistic or secular level simply to persuade more people to listen to the message; instead, the principle of inculturation identifies and uses the elements of culture that help people to better hear and assent to the gospel. Inculturation involves several key levels on which a person may interact with the gospel in order to choose to live in union with God: personally, culturally, economically, and politically.³¹ We can easily see how a university is an ideal setting for precisely this type of inculturation because all aspects of the human experience come together in the little society that is a college campus.

“Education is a constitutive dimension of evangelization”; and so Catholic institutions have a responsibility to participate in evangelization.³² Catholic schools not only provide excellent academic programs but also are “effective vehicle[s] of total Christian formation.”³³

²⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 1st ed., (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 47.

³⁰ *Christifideles laici*, par. 44.

³¹ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 64-65.

³² *Propositions*, 27.

³³ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 230.

All students are entitled to an education and to evangelization; as such, Catholic institutions should seek to ensure the preservation of their Catholic identity and should encourage teachers to witness to Christ through their teaching.³⁴ As part of this witness, Catholic universities, are especially privileged places for the lay faithful to both purify and elevate the culture by boldly proclaiming the gospel.³⁵

Witness in the Catholic University

The promulgation of *Redemptoris missio* in 1990 coincided with the promulgation earlier that same year of *Ex corde ecclesiae*. It is significant (and not coincidental) that both evangelization and higher education were on the mind of John Paul II. That year marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council, which was an appropriate moment to reflect on the urgent need for a continuing renewal of the Church's evangelization efforts. In *Ex corde ecclesiae*, John Paul outlined four essential marks that every Catholic university should strive to establish in order to be faithful to its Catholic identity: a Christian inspiration as a university community; an ongoing dedication to the Catholic faith in all it does, including research; a commitment to the Church's Christian message; and a disposition of service to all in the human family.³⁶

In *Ex corde ecclesiae*, John Paul does not call for Catholic universities to shy away from the traditional responsibilities of a university—study and research; rather, he calls the Catholic university to pursue all its endeavors in the light of the Catholic faith—to integrate faith and

³⁴ *Propositions*, 27.

³⁵ *Christifideles laici*, par. 44.

³⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities *Ex corde ecclesiae*, (15 August 1990), par. 13.

reason. In his mind faith and reason are not competing paths to truth, but two sides of a single discussion, each providing a deeper understanding of the other. An educator himself, John Paul viewed the Catholic university as a “living *institutional* witness to Christ and his message,” a particularly fitting place for the advancement of the new evangelization.³⁷ The Church’s mission is to preach the gospel so that for individuals and their sociocultural context there is an obvious relationship between faith and life.³⁸ The Catholic university is to participate in the life of the local Church and enable the Church to engage in dialogue “with people of every culture.”³⁹ A Catholic university is uniquely equipped to help its students to live integrated lives, so that what they learn in the classroom and what they experience in the world are informed and mutually deepened by the Catholic faith with which the university imbues all its activities.

In his 1821 University Sermon Number Five, *Personal Influence: The Means of Propagating the Truth*, John Henry Newman reflects on the fact that throughout the centuries the Church has confronted so many opponents, so many obstacles; and yet, faithful to its own principles, the Church has grown and prospered, often in spite of the weaknesses of her members.⁴⁰ He says this miraculous growth can be attributed to “the influence of truth in the world at large which [arises] from the personal . . . influence of those who are commissioned to teach it.”⁴¹ He concludes by saying, “[the truth] has been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of men . . . who are at once the teachers and the patterns of [the truth]” they teach.⁴² These teachers are not

³⁷ *Ex corde ecclesiae*, par. 49.

³⁸ *Ex corde ecclesiae*, par. 48.

³⁹ *Ex corde ecclesiae*, par. 27, 6.

⁴⁰ John Henry Newman, *Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1966), V.4.

⁴¹ Newman, *Sermons*, V.8.

⁴² Newman, *Sermons*, V.26.

simply sharing abstract truth; they are teaching through their own personal development and imparting to their students the illumination this truth has brought them. For their part, the professors are affected by conversations with students who continually challenge them to remember that an intellectual life should not stagnate. Like conversion, the pursuit of knowledge is a lifelong journey. As Newman believed, the university is not only a place of study, but a place where one cultivates an interior life, where students and teachers together grow in knowledge and virtue.

This same insight is evident in what Paul VI, the grandfather of the new evangelization, expresses in *Evangelii nuntiandi* when he writes, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”⁴³ While it is certain that students are influenced by what they are taught in the classroom, they are perhaps more impacted by those who teach them. A teacher who teaches a subject with the conviction of having lived out the principles he teaches carries powerful weight in a student’s consideration of the topic. Thus one sees the importance of a Catholic university’s Catholic identity, wherein professors in every discipline can demonstrate their own integration of faith and reason, both in their scholarship and in daily life. At such a university, the faith is not separated from reason, is not relegated to theology class, is not the sole responsibility of the campus minister; rather, the faith is present in biology, psychology, literature, and even business and mathematics courses.⁴⁴ Catholic universities that clearly understand this responsibility show the evangelistic possibilities that exist in the classroom. While the exclusive goal of discussions

⁴³ *Evangelii nuntiandi*, par. 41.

⁴⁴ Monsignor Stuart Swetland, “Catholic Colleges Are Essential Agents of Evangelization,” *National Catholic Register*, September 7, 2013, <http://www.ncregister.com/site/article/catholic-colleges-are-essential-agents-of-evangelization> [accessed February 9, 2016].

in these academic settings may not be evangelistic, a Catholic university should not shy away from seeking every opportunity to open a student's eyes to the beauty of the gospel message, demonstrating that an integrated and holistic education involves the whole person – spirit and body, intellect and will. This is why it is crucial to understand how the new evangelization is actually reinforced by a Catholic university aware of its true Catholic identity.

Reception of the New Evangelization among Catholic Academics

In certain quarters of Catholic academia, the call for the new evangelization met with silence or ambivalence. Others gave it serious consideration, both in general and to its place in Catholic higher education in particular.⁴⁵ Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, the most influential Catholic theologian in America at the time, to the surprise of many of his colleagues, devoted considerable attention in the last fifteen years of his life to the call for a new evangelization. Dulles recognizes (not uncritically) its importance to the mission of the Church and the university and writes extensively about its application to the American situation. I am able to touch on only a few of his points in this small essay.

According to Dulles, many Catholics in the United States are hesitant to embrace evangelization, in part due to distaste for the aggressiveness they encounter in evangelical Protestants, in part with a post-Vatican II wariness of triumphalism.⁴⁶ American Catholics “often fail to proclaim their faith with confidence,” acceding to the national tradition of religion as

⁴⁵ For more on this, see my article in America Magazine entitled “Mass Evangelization” from the April 22, 2013, issue (<http://americamagazine.org/issue/mass-evangelization>).

⁴⁶ Dulles, *Church and Society*, 98.

something practiced privately.⁴⁷ But, as Dulles asserts, the new evangelization is the overriding vision to interpret the documents of Vatican II, and it is “the most effective remedy for the church’s present ills” because it calls the faithful to share the faith and discover the beauty that comes from seeing the fruit of conversion in the lives of others.⁴⁸ This echoes John Paul II’s position that the “faith is strengthened when it is given to others.”⁴⁹ “Evangelization, by concentrating on the basic Christian message, helps us to see what is supremely worthwhile about our religion.”⁵⁰

Drawing extensively from the writings of Pope John Paul II, Dulles points out that conversion builds on evangelization through catechesis and religious education at all levels. One cannot pass on to others what one does not first possess; thus catechesis is vital to helping the faithful understand the beliefs they profess. But in order to truly share the gospel, it must permeate one’s whole life through ongoing interior change and conversion.⁵¹ Evangelization draws people into an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and is ordered to social and cultural transformation, or what John Paul frequently refers to as the evangelization of culture.⁵² Indeed, all of life is deliberately included under this umbrella of the new evangelization, Dulles states, because all of life is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.⁵³

This idea that Christ is the means to draw all people together recaptures the Christocentric vision of a gospel for all nations prominent in the writings of Vatican II, and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Dulles, *Church and Society*, 98.

⁴⁹ *Redemptoris missio*, par. 2.

⁵⁰ Dulles, *Church and Society*, 98.

⁵¹ Dulles, *Church and Society*, 93.

⁵² Dulles, *Church and Society*, 95.

⁵³ Patrick Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ: A Model Theologian, 1918-2008*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 447.

resonates with the work of John Paul in the nineties.⁵⁴ The new evangelization is not a passing moment. It is a long-term strategy for the revitalization of the Church.

Dulles acknowledges several general impediments for theologians to consider when adopting the new evangelization, including religious pragmatism, cultural relativism, and a false concept of freedom.⁵⁵ In speaking to bishops of the United States, Dulles highlights within American culture four key obstacles to the Church's program of the new evangelization: American receptivity to "vague transcendence without content," the lack of appeal of many evangelical preachers, a strict understanding of the "separation of church and state, and internal Catholic divisions."⁵⁶ However, demonstrating his dedication to the cause of the new evangelization, Dulles also believes that though real, these impediments should not be exploited as a means to avoid the "inclusive concept" of evangelization in America.⁵⁷ Cardinal Dulles calls educators to allow Catholic theology to be renewed in the spirit of evangelization. Dulles describes the new evangelization as the realization of the *aggiornamento*, which was a key and oft-used term at the time of the Second Vatican Council, representing a renewal and updating, an opening of the Church to the world. This opening was not sought to allow the floods of secularization to come into the Church, but so that the 'living water' of the gospel might go out and bring grace to all people. In this way also, the Catholic university is a fitting place for the evangelization of culture to take place.

⁵⁴ Parenthetically, many thought that the decade of the nineties was the decade of the new evangelization, and John Paul II used the term well over a hundred times throughout that decade, but in the next five years, from 2000 to 2005, he frequently spoke of the new evangelization. John Paul never referred to the nineties as the decade of the new evangelization; instead, he referred to it as the "advent season" of the new evangelization. Just as advent is a preparatory season for ordinary time, so too when the decade of the nineties was over the new evangelization was not done; truly, it had barely begun.

⁵⁵ Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles*, 449.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

American Catholic Universities and the New Evangelization

Several years ago Pope Benedict came to America and addressed Catholic educators at the Catholic University of America. He states that “education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News.”⁵⁸ That is why Catholic colleges and universities are a prime place for the new evangelization. Only in embracing the gospel message with conviction will Catholic universities train truly Christian leaders for all the spheres of human activity, not just for theology and philosophy, but also for politics, economics, science, art, journalism, and mass media.⁵⁹ At a vibrant Catholic university that embodies Christ and his teaching, where every aspect of the community “reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith,” students are drawn by the power of the gospel and inspired to live a life of Christian witness.⁶⁰ While there is a tendency to divide truth and faith, Benedict declares that truth is more than knowledge: “knowing the truth leads us to discover the good.”⁶¹ Thus a university striving to impart the truth to students is leading them to a deeper faith and conversion.

During his time with American Catholic educators, Benedict challenged them to make their universities about more than just the transmittal of knowledge in a classroom, and to focus on the integration of faith and reason, committing the intellect, will, mind, and heart to God.⁶²

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, Meeting with Catholic Educators, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI (17 April 2008), at Catholic University of America, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_cath-univ-washington.html, [accessed February 9, 2016].

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Timothy T. O'Donnell, “Catholic Higher Education: Heart of the Church’s Evangelization,” *National Catholic Register*, April 25, 2010, http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/catholic_higher_education_heart_of_the_churchs_evangelization, [accessed February 9, 2016].

Benedict, himself a former university professor, shares that, in a spirit of “intellectual charity,” an educator’s leading of students to the truth is a profound act of love.⁶³ He calls all educators to be witnesses to Christ, to account for their hope and joy, to live integrated lives of prayer and study, demonstrating that it is possible to have harmony between faith, life, and culture.⁶⁴ Benedict wants universities to be tangible expressions of the beauty of Catholicism liturgically, sacramentally, and academically.⁶⁵

Pope Benedict identified that the current time is marked by a deep hunger, which many do not realize is a desire for God. There are many who seek to live an authentic life, but who need direction in order to turn to God as the fulfillment of the true desire of their hearts.⁶⁶ St. Augustine understood this desire centuries ago when he wrote “our hearts are restless until they find rest in You”; but for a growing number of people turning to God is often the last solution they try in their attempt to fill the void they feel inside.⁶⁷ This continues to highlight the role of the Catholic university as a prime place for the new evangelization. At a university this feeling of void is often filled with superficial solutions; but when the gospel is shared with joy, many students will find rest in the Lord rather than in the empty cures suggested by the culture.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Papal Mass on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (28 June 2010), at The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100628_vespri-pietro-paolo.html [accessed February 9, 2016].

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.

In his *ad limina* visit with United States bishops in Rome in 2012, Benedict called Catholic schools “an essential resource for the new evangelization.”⁶⁸ It is vital, he says, for American colleges and universities to “reaffirm their distinctive identity in fidelity to ... the Church’s mission in service of the Gospel.”⁶⁹ Benedict reinforces this by saying, “it is no exaggeration to say that providing young people with a sound education in the faith represents the most urgent internal challenge facing the Catholic community” in the United States.⁷⁰ As such, it is incumbent upon Catholic institutions for higher education in America to valiantly embrace their participation in the Church’s mission of evangelization, “to challenge students to reappropriate their faith as part of ... exciting intellectual discoveries,” and to afford them networks of support in a time where broken families and communities dominate the current milieu.⁷¹

Vision of the Catholic University as Locus for Evangelization

The basic starting point for institutions of higher learning in the Catholic Church, to fulfill the new evangelization, is to embrace their own distinctive calling; to abide in what Vatican II has imparted; to follow what John Paul, Benedict, and now Francis have recommended; and to be Christocentric, where Christ is the center of student life, of faculty life,

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the United States of America (Regions X-XIII) on their “Ad Limina” Visit (5 May 2012) at the Holy See, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120505_us-bishops.html [accessed February 9, 2016].

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

and of the whole community of learning. In this way they can integrate faith and reason in all areas of research, of study, and of teaching.

Some might object, saying evangelization is pastoral work, the responsibility of missionaries, not faculty members.⁷² This is a false dichotomy for a variety of reasons. First of all, most American Catholic colleges and universities are residential, which necessarily involves a living faith community that requires vibrant pastoral ministry.⁷³ Second, the nature of research, study, and teaching, so essential to the university, arises from a shared hunger for the truth, and it must accord with what is true.⁷⁴ Third, every university recognizes its responsibility to form leaders who are going to go out and transform the culture.⁷⁵ But this commitment to others, this commitment to the culture, requires more than instruction, it requires more than a diploma. It ultimately makes sense only if people understand the meaning and purpose of life under the truth of God, grasping that they must live out their own vocation in a community.

Finally, the university is the ideal place for forming not just students and scholars, but also disciples. For *mathetes*, the Greek term for a disciple, literally bespeaks a disciplined learner who has discovered the need for disciplined study balanced with disciplined prayer and a social concord with others who are following the truth and discovering the light of the world. What else can take the place of faith in the application of reason? Where can research and intellectual growth coincide with the spiritual and moral values that make us whole, if not at a Catholic university? For this reason, not only does the new evangelization fit into Catholic higher

⁷² Swetland, "Catholic Colleges."

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

education, it fits best in a Catholic university where students will discover that they are not just called to good grades but to the greatness of holiness, as well as to ministry, sharing the good news with others.⁷⁶ The university provides instruction to help students form a Catholic worldview. This Catholic worldview is built not only in the classroom; it is solidified through involvement with the local community, mission opportunities, and musical collaborations. Opportunities for spiritual growth abound outside the classroom through the arts, campus ministry, Mass, and confession. The many extracurricular activities that make up the spiritual life of a Catholic university campus show that academics are only one (albeit large) facet of the university experience. A Catholic university, with a clear Catholic identity and purpose, ought to be the setting for a student's grace-filled and holistic conversion, a conversion that will continue after they leave campus and throughout their lives.

Mentorship in a University

The new evangelization is about reevangelizing the dechristianized, which leads to a richer understanding of conversion as a process that is ongoing, ever-deepening, lifelong, and holistic, for both individuals and institutions. Such a holistic view thus leads me to propose: *there may be no institution within the Church better suited to advance the new evangelization more effectively than faithful Catholic universities.* A Catholic university is much more than its classrooms. Of course at a Catholic university professors lecture and give tests and grade papers, but they also develop mentoring relationships with the students whom they encounter on campus, at Mass, and within the larger community. Speaking personally, I look back on my studies as an

⁷⁶ Swetland, "Catholic Colleges."

undergraduate and as a graduate student and realize certain professors exercised significant formative influences on my life's direction and my outlook on the world, even more than my own parents and pastors. In mentoring relationships, these influential professors extended my own experience of conversion beyond repentance and faith to a true and lasting *metanoia*, a complete and total change of mind. At a university, mentoring and formation lead to transformation. This is exactly what the new evangelization calls for and why it fits so well in a Catholic university. It is difficult to identify a better-suited institution to accomplish the life-changing long-term goals of the new evangelization than a Catholic university.

Recent anecdotal evidence indicates that a Catholic university can have this kind of lasting impact on its students. *Our Sunday Visitor Newsweekly* reports how a legion of students who attended Franciscan University of Steubenville in the 1990s went on to work in – or found – a multitude of prominent Catholic apostolates. Those students describe their experience at Franciscan and how the faith was not merely a topic for rigorous study and classroom discussion, but something lived and shared by professors and students alike.⁷⁷ Within a community of faith, they discovered a “fertile environment for spiritual growth, study and Christian friendship,” which inspired them to find ways to evangelize the culture and minister with the mind of the Church.⁷⁸ Additional examples from other Catholic colleges and universities could be cited, but

⁷⁷ Susan Klemond, “Apostolate of friendship,” *Our Sunday Visitor Newsweekly*, September 16, 2015, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Article/TabId/535/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/18221/%E2%80%98Apostolate-of-friendship%E2%80%99.aspx>, [accessed February 9, 2016].

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Klemond observes how students “who attended Franciscan University of Steubenville in the 1990s have gone on to become some of the Church’s leading evangelizers...Called by the Holy Spirit to immerse themselves in the Catholic Faith, a diverse group arrived at Franciscan University of Steubenville in the 1990s and soon forged an ‘apostolate of friendship’ as they studied the Faith together and prepared for God’s next big assignments. The small campus set in the hills of northeastern Ohio served as the launching pad for these friends to start national and international ministries. Two decades later, they continue to help each other promote the Faith to millions. The roughly two dozen ministry leaders – including Jeff Cavins, Patrick Coffin, Tim Gray, Marcus Grodi, Sister John Dominic, Curtis Martin, Curtis Mitch, Tom Nash, Leon Suprenant and Edward Sri, among others – were drawn to

this may suffice to show the effect that a Catholic university can have not only on its students, but on the entire Church and the broader culture. Through the various ministries these students touch, the new evangelization is happening boldly throughout the Catholic Church in the United States.

All of the Church's institutions are called to participate in the mission of evangelization. However, the reach of a parish or retreat center is often limited to the lives of its parishioners and retreatants, since many come to these places to be individually nourished, but may not feel particularly called to participate in the evangelization of others. Yet at a vibrant Catholic university, students see the powerful integration of faith and life, and often feel drawn to share their experience of the gospel. As the *Our Sunday Visitor Newsweekly* article shows, when the Catholic university embodies the new evangelization, seeking to preach the gospel to all, the university's participation in the Church's mission can bear unending fruit as its alumni hunger to transform those around them. When a university is passionately Catholic in a true and honest way, it requires not only academic excellence but rigorous scholarship, because to study properly enhances prayer, but to pray properly is not an exemption from hard study. In fact, proper prayer should motivate us to go back and study harder and learn truth more deeply and then share it more generously, allowing the virtue and the holiness of God's spirit to grow in our lives and to reach others as well. After reflecting on all these reasons, it should be clear that the new evangelization has no more appropriate place to flourish than in a vibrant institution of Catholic higher education committed to the Church's mission.

Franciscan by the university's intellectual fervor, by the teachings of Pope St. John Paul II and [professors] who shared with them [a] deep understanding and zeal for ... the Faith."

The Catholic University and the Church's Mission

In order for the Church's mission to evangelize all people to truly succeed, Catholic institutions of higher learning must understand and embrace their role in sharing the good news with the world. The time has come for all professors, administrators, and trustees of Catholic universities to seek a Christocentric vision for their institutions; to integrate faith and reason; to see that a student's experience in the classroom, the chapel, and the dormitory should be an ongoing assimilation; and to desire to send forth disciples who will transform the world and the culture. If Catholic universities embrace John Paul's vision in *Ex corde ecclesiae*, seeking to be all that "they are called to be," seeking to embody a vibrant Catholic identity, seeking to mentor students in an authentic Christian life, then these universities will answer the Church's urgent call to evangelize the culture.⁷⁹ This task cannot be overlooked; the need to reevangelize the dechristianized grows daily. Catholic institutions of higher learning are uniquely poised to provide the means to live out the call for the new evangelization. Through a deeper understanding of the ongoing conversion that empowers evangelization, and a deeper understanding of the Catholic university's opportunity and responsibility to be an instrument for this conversion, one can clearly see that the success of the new evangelization necessitates the participation of the Catholic university in this preeminent mission of the Church.

⁷⁹ Swetland, "Catholic Colleges."