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**NEW EVANGELIZATION ACCORDING TO THE TEACHING OF JOHN
PAUL II AS A BASIS FOR THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA**

A Dissertation in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for a Doctoral Degree in
Pastoral Theology

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except for references to the works of other authors which have been duly acknowledged, this dissertation is written in its entirety by me. It has not been submitted to any institution for academic credit.

I am responsible for any inaccuracies or shortcomings which may be contained in this work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Cf.	Confer
Ed.	Editor
no.	Number
nos.	Numbers
p.	Page
pp.	Pages
par.	Paragraph
np.	No page
Vol.	Volume
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
ACN	Aid to the Church in Need
PMS	Pontifical Mission Society
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
ATR	African Traditional Religion
CMS	Church Missionary Society
SECAM	Synod of the Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar
CTV	Catholic Television of Nigeria
CBCN	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
CMO	Catholic Men Organization
CWO	Catholic Women Organization
CYON	Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria
HCA	Holy Childhood Association
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
CA	Catholic Action
BCC	Basic Christian Community

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CCCL	<i>Code of Canon Law</i>
NCN	Nigeria Catholic Network
TEKAN	<i>Tarayyar Ekkelesiyoyin Kristi A Nijeriya</i> -Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria
ECWA	Evangelical Church Winning All
NIREC	Nigerian Inter-Religious Council
NAPTIP	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons
DREP	Dialogue Reconciliation and Peace Centre
GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
DFI	Direct Foreign Investment
KSM	Knights of St. Mulumba
CSN	Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The mandate to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all peoples and cultures remains the central mission of the Church in every age and it is rooted in the command of the risen Lord, “to go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt. 28:19). This mission constitutes the very identity of the Church which is by nature missionary. Throughout history, the Church has responded to this mandate with creativity, courage, and pastoral sensitivity, adapting its methods to the changing circumstances of human society while remaining faithful to the timeless and eternal truth of the Gospel. In contemporary parlance, however, the task of evangelisation has become increasingly complex. Rapid scientific and technological advancements, unprecedented cultural shifts, and the emergence of ideologies that challenge the foundations of Christianity have created a context in which the proclamation of the Gospel must be understood and undertaken with renewed vigour. It is within this context that the concept of the New Evangelization, as proposed and articulated with particular clarity and insistence by John Paul II, emerges as a vital pastoral and theological response.

The tenets of New Evangelization does not in any way debunk or jettison the message of the Gospel, nor does it seek to replace the Church’s traditional missionary activity. Rather, it calls for a renewed missionary dynamism capable of addressing the spiritual and cultural challenges of the present age. John Paul II famously described it as an evangelization that must be new in its ardour, methods, and expressions; a formulation that captures both continuity and innovation. The New Evangelization presupposes the enduring validity of the Church’s evangelizing mission while recognizing that contemporary societies especially those shaped by secularism, relativism, and post-modern scepticism require fresh approaches to the proclamation of the Gospel. It is a call to re-propose the Christian faith to individuals and communities who may have been baptized but have become distant from the Church, indifferent to religious practice, or confused by competing cultural values, philosophies, norms or narratives.

This dissertation seeks to explore the teaching of John Paul II on the New Evangelization and to examine its relevance as a basis for the growth of the Church in

Nigeria which though vibrant and rapidly expanding, is confronted by a host of contemporary challenges that threaten the integrity of Christian life and the effectiveness of evangelization. Nigeria's socio-cultural landscape is marked by a complex interplay of traditional values, modern aspirations, and global influences. Scientific and technological advancements have reshaped patterns of communication, education, and social interaction, giving rise to a fast-changing society characterized by a sophisticated and often fragmented culture. This cultural environment has, in many respects, contributed to a weakening of moral values, a crisis of faith among people, and a growing indifference to religious truth.

Moreover, the rise of modern day ideologies such as relativism, subjectivism, secularism, egalitarianism, individualism, materialism and many others, have further complicated the task of evangelization. These ideologies often promote a worldview that marginalizes the transcendent, undermines objective truth, and elevates personal autonomy above communal responsibility. In such a context, the Church in Nigeria must discern how best to sustain its growth, deepen the faith of its members, and respond effectively to the spiritual and existential questions of contemporary society. "New Evangelization" as articulated by John Paul II, offers a compelling framework for addressing these challenges by calling the Church to renew its missionary zeal, engage culture with critical openness, and empower both clergy, religious and laity to participate actively in the work of Evangelization.

The relevance of this study is therefore both pastoral and academic. Pastoral, because the Church in Nigeria urgently needs strategies that can help it respond to the complex realities of modern life; academic, because a rigorous theological analysis of John Paul II's teaching on the New Evangelization can provide a solid foundation for such strategies. This dissertation aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the future of the Church in Nigeria by offering a comprehensive and critical examination of the New Evangelization as a paradigm for ecclesial renewal and missionary engagement.

Methodologically, this research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, employing the deductive method to move from universal principles to particular applications. It begins by examining the biblical foundations of evangelization and the

development of the concept of the New Evangelization in the Church's magisterium, especially in the teachings of John Paul II. It then applies these principles to the concrete situation of the Church in Nigeria, analysing the opportunities and challenges that characterize the Nigerian context. A bibliographical approach is employed, drawing from Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Code of Canon Law*, papal encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, conciliar documents, books, journal articles, and credible digital sources. This is to ensure that the study is grounded in authoritative sources and meets contemporary standard.

The structure of the dissertation reflects this methodological orientation. Chapter one provides a conceptual clarification of the term New Evangelization, tracing its roots in Scripture, the early Church, the Second Vatican Council, and subsequent magisterial documents. It examines how the concept has evolved and how it has been understood within the broader tradition of the Church's missionary activity. Chapter two focuses on the theology of John Paul II, analyzing his unique contributions to the development of the New Evangelization and identifying the key themes that characterize its approach such as the centrality of Christ, the dignity of the human person, the role of culture, and the importance of the laity. Chapter three offers an overview of the Church in Nigeria, exploring its historical development, demographic composition, pastoral structures, and the roles of clergy and laity in evangelization. It also considers the themes of communion, participation, and mission as articulated in the recent synod on synodality, highlighting their relevance for the Nigerian context. Chapter four examines the specific challenges facing the Church in Nigeria with regard to New Evangelization. These include the influence of modern ideologies, the impact of globalization, the rise of Pentecostalism, socio-economic instability, political corruption, and the erosion of traditional values. The chapter analyses how these factors affect the growth of the Church and hinder effective evangelization. Chapter five synthesizes the findings of the previous chapters and offers practical recommendations aimed at strengthening the Church's evangelizing mission in Nigeria. These recommendations are grounded in the teaching of John Paul II and are designed to foster greater participation, deepen faith formation, and promote the steady growth of the Catholic faith in Nigeria.

In a nutshell, this dissertation argues that New Evangelization, as articulated by John Paul II, provides a robust and formidable theological and pastoral framework for addressing the contemporary challenges facing the Church in Nigeria. By embracing renewed ardour, adopting creative methods, and expressing the Gospel in culturally meaningful ways, the Church can continue to grow and remain a credible witness to Christ in a rapidly changing world. The task of evangelization belongs to all the faithful clergy, religious, and laity alike and its success depends on a shared commitment to living and proclaiming the Gospel with conviction, courage, and joy. In this way, the Church in Nigeria can fulfil its mission of being a light to the nation and a sign of hope in the midst of the vicissitudes of modern day living.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONCEPT OF NEW EVANGELIZATION ACCORDING TO THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

To better understand the concept of New Evangelization, it is pertinent to understand the concept of Evangelization itself. While Evangelization has remained an age old concept used by the Church to connote the missionary activity of Christians to go into the world and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, New Evangelization as a new trend, invites humanity to a new culture and experience of a loving relationship with Jesus and His Church. It seeks to arrest or revise any trend to de-Christianization or alienation from the Word while the Church is still able to strike a responsive chord¹. This concept of New Evangelization as proposed by John Paul II seeks to imply the end of something old, the beginning of something new and the continuation of something eternal. Consequently, the first chapter of this research focuses on the conceptual definition and understanding of Evangelization, tracing its roots in the Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), the Code of Canon Law (CCL), the writings of popes and other related documents of the Church.

1.1 Evangelization in Categories

Evangelization is basically understood to mean, the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ to all peoples at every in any nation. This concept when put in context is central to the missionary mandate that Christ gave to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19). This therefore suggests that, evangelization is the duty of the entire Church. It is not to be left solely in the hands of ordained ministers. It is a ministry that enjoins all the baptized to bear witness to the saving Gospel of Christ. It encompasses not only preaching but also the witness of life, catechesis, liturgy, and the fostering of a personal encounter with Christ².

¹ Cf. T. Barga. *A Parish Guide to the New Evangelization*, Jos: 2014, p. 2.

² Cf. Vatican II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, 1965, no. 2.

Therefore, Evangelization is to be understood not as an isolated or completed action in the past but a continuous dynamic process that is integrally connected to the spiritual renewal, transformation, growth and development of the human person. It unfolds in stages, each responding to specific pastoral realities at a given place and time. At its first stage is, pre-evangelization, which prepares the hearts of individuals through dialogue, presence, and witness, especially in societies where the Gospel has not been known³. It waters the ground upon which the seed of faith can be sown in the heart of one who has genuine longing for God amidst various existential realities. In the second stage is evangelization which in context means the actual proclamation of Christ, calling for conversion, faith, and initiation into the Christian community⁴. At the third stage is re-evangelization, which is sometimes referred to as the pastoral reawakening of the Christian who having received the faith suddenly backslides and no longer practices it. Such a person could now be said to be dormant in the faith. Meanwhile, at the fourth and last stage is “New Evangelization”, a term popularized by John Paul II, to refer to a renewed missionary zeal directed particularly at baptized persons who have drifted from the faith⁵. It is “new in its ardour, methods, and expression” and responds to the challenges of secularism, globalization, and cultural fragmentation. In addition, subsequent theologians have come to understand the concept of New Evangelization after the understanding of John Paul II as means of meeting up with contemporary challenges witnessed as a result of societal dynamisms and sophistication.

1.2 The Idea, Essence and Basic Characteristics of New Evangelization

The very concept of New Evangelization poses a question in the mind of the reader. What happened to Evangelization? In response, the call for New Evangelization seems to have emerged as a result of concerns raised over the growing detachment of Christians from the Church in modern climes. Fast social changes, moral relativism, and religious indifference have rendered traditional forms of evangelization less effective and sterile. In reaction, the Church calls for a renewed passion and dexterity

³ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome: 2013, no. 15.

⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Kenya: 2008, no. 905.

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Latin American Bishops*, Port-au-Prince, Haiti: 1983.

in communicating the Good News⁶. New Evangelization is about Christians renewing their enthusiasm for the faith, intensifying their efforts to live out their faith boldly in the face of daunting challenges of the present moments with its cultural and social demands, thereby calling for renewal and ongoing conversion. Instances abound in contemporary society replete with materialism, modernism, secularism, and wide spread relativism.

Benedict XVI in 2010 as a matter of concern established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization to support this renewed effort. This points to the reality that New Evangelization is aimed at emphasizing personal conversion, a deepening of faith, and bearing credible witness, particularly through the laity in everyday life. It affirms that mission is not only *ad extra* (to non-Christians) but also *ad intra* (within the Church itself). Traditionally, mission focused on those outside the Church. But today, the Church must also reach out to those inside, baptized Christians who have drifted away, who struggle with doubt, or who feel overwhelmed by the pressures of modern life. New Evangelization therefore shines its light not only on non-Christians but also on Christians who need renewal, encouragement, and a rediscovery of the beauty of their faith⁷. In other words, New Evangelization includes does not beam its light on those who are not Christians alone, but it seeks to address the specific crisis of faith encountered by Christians in their interaction with the world in which they live in.

This vision is particularly necessary in Nigeria, a nation where Christianity is vibrant yet deeply tested. Nigeria faces severe persecution from extremist groups, communal violence, and targeted attacks on Christian communities. These realities have shaken families, destroyed parishes, and left many Christians traumatized. In such an environment, the New Evangelization strengthens Christians to remain steadfast, hopeful, and courageous. It reminds them that faith is not merely a cultural identity but a living relationship with Christ who walks with them in suffering⁸.

⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*.

⁷ Cf. Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta* for the XIII Ordinary General Assembly, Rome: 2011, no. 10.

⁸ Cf. M. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan: 1993, p. 112.

Central to his teaching, the Holy Father holds that New Evangelization is aimed at placing Christ at the heart of all evangelizing efforts and ensuring that every initiative reflects His message of salvation. John Paul II clarified that missionary work is not restricted to foreign missions but must address the renewal of faith within communities where the Church is already present. This synthesis demonstrates that evangelization is both a communal responsibility and a dynamic, ongoing process that requires creativity, zeal, and cultural sensitivity. He emphasizes that evangelization is the responsibility of the entire people of God, calling clergy, religious, and laity to participate actively in spreading the Gospel⁹.

1.2.1 New Evangelization is Christocentric

The Christocentric nature of New Evangelization is not merely a cultural initiative or social program but a summons to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who stands as the source of salvation and the definitive model of truth, love, and human fulfilment. Anchoring evangelization in Christ safeguards its theological integrity and prevents pastoral activity from devolving into activism detached from the Gospel. Robert Barron observes, authentic evangelization begins with the proclamation of Christ's identity and mission, inviting Christians to witness His life, death, and resurrection through coherent testimony in word and deed. A Christ-centered approach thus fosters genuine conversion by drawing individuals into a transformative relationship with the living Lord. This orientation also enables the New Evangelization to engage diverse cultures while remaining faithful to the Gospel, sustained by a spirituality rooted in prayer, holiness, and encounter¹⁰.

A further dimension of the New Evangelization is the integration of faith and life, ensuring that Christian belief is embodied in concrete moral action and social responsibility. Stanley Hauerwas argues that faith becomes fragmented when confined to intellectual assent rather than expressed through lived discipleship. Evangelization therefore seeks to shape ethical decision-making, compassion, and communal

⁹ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 33.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Barron, *To Light a Fire on the Earth*, Chicago: 2017, pp. 55–72.

engagement, allowing the Gospel to permeate every sphere of human experience. Grounding pastoral activity in Christ invites Christians to imitate His virtues and participate in His reconciling mission. This integration bridges the divide between personal spirituality and social transformation, revealing that authentic evangelization renews both individual hearts and the structures of communal life¹¹.

A central element of Christocentric evangelization is the primacy of the Gospel message. While pastoral strategies and cultural adaptation are necessary, they must always serve the deeper purpose of leading people to Christ. When the Gospel remains primary, catechesis, liturgy, and missionary activity acquire coherence and spiritual clarity. For Luke Johnson evangelization loses its direction when it prioritizes social or political concerns over spiritual renewal. Keeping Christ at the center ensures that evangelization remains oriented toward salvation, conversion, and the transformation of human life, offering clarity amid the complexities of contemporary culture¹².

Christ also serves as the normative model for missionary activity. Evangelizers are called to imitate His humility, compassion, and attentiveness to human suffering. James Keenan highlights the moral significance of embodying Christian virtues in pastoral outreach, arguing that mission becomes credible only when it reflects the character of Christ. This imitation transforms evangelization into a relational and incarnational encounter rather than a mere transmission of information. Christ is both the message proclaimed and the pattern of life for those who proclaim it, requiring personal integrity, spiritual maturity, and a deep commitment to discipleship¹³.

Christocentric evangelization also draws its vitality from the Paschal Mystery, the heart of Christian faith. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ reveal the depth of divine love and the hope offered to humanity. This Paschal Mystery is not merely a doctrinal affirmation but a transformative event that shapes Christian identity and missionary courage. Evangelization grounded in this mystery invites others to experience forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal, linking human suffering and

¹¹ Cf. S. Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, Durham: 2001, pp. 103–118.

¹² Cf. L. Johnson. *Among the Gentiles*, New Haven: 2010, pp. 41–59.

¹³ Cf. J. Keenan. *Moral Wisdom*, Boston: 2008, pp. 77–94.

aspiration to Christ's redemptive work. His victory over sin and death becomes the foundation for missionary perseverance and the inspiration for lives of faithful discipleship. Another essential dimension is Christ-centered catechesis. Evangelization in schools, parishes, and social ministries must present the person and message of Christ in a coherent and compelling manner. Gerald O'Collins argues that catechesis grounded in Christ provides a theological framework that shapes belief, virtue, and moral reasoning. Such formation equips the faithful to interpret their lives through the lens of the Gospel, fostering spiritual maturity and ethical discernment. This approach ensures that evangelization is transformative rather than merely informational, forming disciples who internalize the Gospel and actively participate in the Church's mission¹⁴.

Christ is also the unifying center of all ecclesial activities such evangelization, liturgy, pastoral care, and social service. When Christ remains central, diverse ministries maintain coherence and contribute to a shared mission of salvation. Such unity prevents fragmentation and ensures that the Church's work reflects Christ's mission rather than isolated or competing agendas. A Christ-centered vision strengthens ecclesial identity, fosters community, and integrates proclamation, worship, and service into a single evangelical movement. Ultimately, the New Evangelization aims at a transformative encounter with Christ that leads to conversion, discipleship, and participation in the life of the Church. This encounter distinguishes authentic evangelization from cultural programming or social initiatives lacking spiritual depth. A Christ-centered mission transforms both evangelizer and recipient, generating a dynamic cycle of witness, renewal, and growth in holiness. By grounding all missionary efforts in Christ, the Church ensures that its mission remains authentic, holistic, and spiritually fruitful. Christocentric evangelization thus becomes the guiding principle for strategy, method, and purpose, directing all efforts toward the salvation of souls¹⁵.

¹⁴ Cf. G. O'Collins. *Christology*, Oxford: 1995, pp. 134–150.

¹⁵ Cf. C. Smith. *The Way of the Faithful*. Michigan: 2019, pp. 12–28.

1.2.2 New Evangelization is the Responsibility of the Entire People of God

The New Evangelization cannot be confined to a particular group within the Church, for its very nature presupposes the active participation of the entire People of God. Far from being the exclusive responsibility of clergy or religious, the mission of evangelization belongs to all the baptized, who through baptism and confirmation are incorporated into Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission. This vision reflects the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized the universal call to holiness and the shared vocation of all Christians to bear witness to the Gospel in the ordinary circumstances of life. Contemporary theologians such as Christoph Theobald is of the position that the Church's missionary vitality increases when the diverse gifts, charisms, and competencies of the faithful are mobilized in a coordinated manner. When evangelization becomes a shared endeavour, the Church manifests a more complete expression of its identity as a communion of vocations, each contributing to the proclamation of Christ in distinct yet complementary ways. Lay participation is especially significant in secular environments where ordained ministers may have limited access; the laity's presence in workplaces, families, and civic institutions allows the Gospel to permeate social structures from within. In this way, the Church becomes a living sacrament of Christ's presence in every sphere of society, embodying a missionary dynamism that is both communal and incarnational¹⁶.

A crucial dimension of this shared responsibility is the collaboration among the various vocations within the Church. Priests, religious, and lay faithful are called to cooperate in pastoral ministry, catechesis, social outreach, and liturgical life, each contributing perspectives shaped by their particular state of life. Such collaboration fosters creativity and pastoral effectiveness, as the different vocations bring unique insights into the human condition and the needs of contemporary society. Mary Hilbert emphasizes that the Church's mission flourishes when the gifts of all the faithful are recognized and integrated into a common pastoral vision. Laypeople contribute

¹⁶ Cf. C. Theobald, *Christian Community in History*, London: 2012, pp. 214–229.

experience of family life, professional environments, and cultural realities; religious communities offer spiritual depth, contemplative insight, and charisms of service; clergy provide doctrinal guidance, sacramental leadership, and pastoral oversight. When these vocations work together in mutual respect and shared purpose, evangelization becomes holistic, sustainable, and deeply rooted in the life of the community. This cooperative model reflects the Church's understanding of mission as a communal undertaking rather than an individual initiative¹⁷.

The formation and empowerment of the laity constitute another essential component of shared responsibility in evangelization. Effective participation in the Church's mission requires ongoing catechesis, spiritual formation, and practical training that equip laypersons to articulate the faith with clarity and confidence. Thomas Groome teaches that formation deepens understanding, strengthens conviction, and cultivates pastoral imagination, enabling lay missionaries to discern appropriate methods for evangelization in diverse contexts. Properly formed laypeople can engage meaningfully in schools, workplaces, civic organizations, and public life, bringing Gospel values into dialogue with contemporary culture. Formation also nurtures discernment, helping the faithful identify opportunities for witness and navigate the complexities of modern society with wisdom and fidelity. In this sense, shared responsibility is not merely a matter of delegation but a process of empowering the faithful to participate actively and competently in the Church's mission¹⁸.

A further dimension of shared responsibility is the missionary presence of the faithful in daily life. Evangelization is not limited to formal pastoral programs but unfolds in the ordinary interactions and relationships that shape human existence. The faithful witness to Christ in homes, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and public institutions, thereby bridging the gap between ecclesial life and the broader society. Monika Hellwig notes that such everyday witness is indispensable for the credibility of the Church's mission, for it demonstrates that the Gospel is not an abstract ideal but a lived reality. Lay missionaries act as leaven within secular environments, embodying

¹⁷ Cf. M. Hilbert. *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*. New York: 1997, pp. 156–170

¹⁸ Cf. T. Groome. *Will There Be Faith?* San Francisco: 2011, pp. 241–259

Gospel values in contexts where explicit religious expression may be limited. Clergy and religious support this presence by offering spiritual guidance, doctrinal clarity, and pastoral encouragement, ensuring that the witness of the faithful remains coherent with the Church's teaching. Through this daily presence, evangelization becomes a continuous and integrated expression of Christian identity¹⁹.

Personal holiness forms the foundation of all shared evangelization. Authentic witness begins with a life rooted in prayer, virtue, and intimate communion with Christ. Without this spiritual grounding, evangelization risks becoming superficial, ineffective, or disconnected from the transformative power of the Gospel. A life of holiness enhances credibility, moral authority, and relational influence, enabling the faithful to communicate the Gospel not only through words but through the integrity of their lives. Holiness also strengthens resilience in the face of challenges, opposition, or indifference, sustaining missionary commitment over time. In the words of Sandra Schneiders, personal transformation is inseparable from the Church's mission, for evangelization is ultimately the overflow of a life shaped by the Spirit. Thus, the responsibility of the People of God includes both outward action and interior renewal, each reinforcing the other in the service of the Gospel²⁰.

A significant aspect of shared responsibility is the initiation and sustaining of missionary projects within local communities. The faithful are called to participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating evangelization initiatives that respond to the pastoral needs of their context. This participatory approach fosters ownership, accountability, and creativity, allowing the Church's mission to be shaped by the lived experience of its members. Lay initiatives in education, social service, and cultural engagement complement the sacramental and pastoral ministry of clergy, while religious communities contribute spiritual formation and charisms of service. Clergy ensure unity with Church teaching and provide sacramental leadership, integrating diverse efforts into a coherent pastoral vision. This collaborative participation

¹⁹ Cf. M. Hellwig, *Understanding Catholicism*. Mahwah: 2002, pp. 198–212.

²⁰ Cf. S. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*. New York: 2000, pp. 301–318.

exemplifies the communal nature of evangelization and strengthens the Church's capacity to respond effectively to contemporary challenges²¹.

Ecclesial communities serve as vital centers of shared evangelization. Parishes, schools, associations, and small Christian communities provide spaces where the faithful gather for formation, mutual support, and coordinated missionary action. These communities enable the laity to exercise their charisms, the clergy to offer pastoral leadership, and religious to contribute spiritual depth and guidance. Local communities embody the Church's missionary identity by responding to social, cultural, and spiritual needs in concrete ways. Through communal engagement, the People of God become a visible sign of Christ's presence in the world, strengthening belonging, participation, and collective responsibility. Ecclesial communities thus function as laboratories of mission, where faith is nurtured, shared, and translated into action. When embraced fully, the universal responsibility of the People of God fosters a genuine missionary culture within the Church. Such a culture emerges when all members recognize their role in evangelization and cultivate a shared sense of purpose, zeal, and commitment. A missionary culture encourages proactive engagement, creativity, and perseverance, ensuring that evangelization is not confined to isolated programs but becomes a continuous and lived reality. A missionary Church is characterized by openness, adaptability, and a readiness to engage the world with hope and courage. By embracing shared responsibility, the faithful collectively embody the Church's mission, transforming both ecclesial life and society. This principle underscores that the New Evangelization is communal, dynamic, and inclusive, rooted in the conviction that every baptized person is called to participate in the saving mission of Christ²².

1.2.3 New Evangelization is not Restricted to Foreign Missions

The New Evangelization extends far beyond the traditional understanding of missionary outreach as a movement directed solely toward distant or non-Christian cultures. Its scope includes the revitalization of faith in regions where Christianity has

²¹ Cf. P. Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful*, Collegeville: 2005, pp. 142–158.

²² Cf. A. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally*. Collegeville: 2015, pp. 33–47.

long been established but is now weakened by secularization, moral relativism, and diminishing religious practice. Many societies with deep Christian roots, particularly in Europe and North America have experienced a gradual erosion of religious identity due to cultural shifts, technological influences, and changing social structures. This situation requires a renewed missionary effort aimed not at geographic expansion but at spiritual reawakening within the baptized community. Timothy Radcliffe firmly believes that contemporary evangelization must confront indifference, cultural fragmentation, and the loss of transcendence by proposing the Gospel in ways that speak to modern sensibilities while remaining faithful to Christian tradition. This perspective underscores that evangelization is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing process that demands pastoral creativity, cultural awareness, and adaptability. The New Evangelization therefore integrates outreach to those who have never encountered the Gospel with the revitalization of those whose faith has grown dormant, making mission both inward-looking and outward-reaching²³.

A central dimension of this renewed missionary vision is the pastoral revitalization of established Christian communities. In many contexts, nominal Christianity where individuals retain cultural affiliation with the Church but lack active participation or personal conviction poses a significant challenge. Pastoral renewal seeks to address this by strengthening catechesis, deepening liturgical participation, and fostering communal bonds that nurture authentic discipleship. The clergy play a vital role in guiding this renewal, but the process involves the entire community, as the faithful are invited to rediscover the meaning of sacramental life and moral commitment. Revitalizing existing communities is both preventative and formative: it prevents further drift into secularism and forms Christians capable of sustaining a vibrant Christian witness in society. Through renewed pastoral care, the Church cultivates spiritual vitality, strengthens communal identity, and ensures that its presence remains credible and transformative²⁴.

Another essential aspect of the New Evangelization is the integration of faith into

²³ Cf. T. Radcliffe. *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* London: 2005, p. 47.

²⁴ Cf. B. Groeschel. *The Reform of Renewal*. San Francisco: 1990, p. 112.

everyday life within established Christian settings. Evangelization cannot be confined to church buildings or formal programs; it must permeate families, workplaces, schools, and social networks. When faith is lived consistently in ordinary contexts, it becomes a powerful form of witness capable of shaping culture from within. David Wells emphasizes that everyday Christian living expressed through ethical conduct, compassion, and authentic relationships serves as a form of evangelization that is often more persuasive than formal preaching. This approach empowers laypeople to assume active responsibility for the spiritual life of their communities, transforming evangelization into a lived reality rather than a specialized activity. By embedding the Gospel in daily life, the Church cultivates a pervasive missionary presence that extends far beyond traditional mission fields²⁵.

In addressing the cultural and social challenges of secularized regions, the New Evangelization requires pastoral strategies that are both contextually sensitive and theologically grounded. Contemporary Europe, North America, and other historically Christian areas face intellectual currents such as atheism, materialism, and moral relativism, which shape public discourse and personal identity. Effective evangelization in these contexts demands approaches that engage the mind, stir the imagination, and respond to the existential questions of modern life. Re-evangelizing secular societies involves understanding the cultural narratives that shape contemporary consciousness and proposing the Christian vision as a compelling alternative. Catechesis, social outreach, youth ministry, and cultural engagement must therefore be innovative, dialogical, and responsive to the lived realities of the faithful. By revitalizing faith in established regions, the Church prevents spiritual stagnation and fosters communities capable of witnessing to the Gospel with renewed conviction. More so, collaboration among all members of the Church is indispensable for sustaining evangelization in secular contexts. This collaborative ministry fosters creativity, shared responsibility, and long-term sustainability in pastoral initiatives. When all vocations work together,

²⁵ Cf. D. Wells. *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*. Michigan: 1998, p. 89.

evangelization becomes a communal endeavour that strengthens both faith and witness, enabling the Church to respond effectively to modern challenges²⁶.

Faith formation within educational contexts is another vital component of the New Evangelization. Schools, catechetical programs, and adult formation initiatives equip the faithful with the intellectual, moral, and spiritual tools needed to navigate secularized environments. Catechesis fosters understanding, personal conviction, and the capacity to articulate the faith in a pluralistic society. Education strengthens both knowledge and practice of the faith, ensuring that evangelization is sustainable and capable of forming new generations of missionary disciples. By cultivating informed and committed Christians, the Church ensures that renewal within established communities becomes a strategic and long-term process rather than a temporary response to cultural decline. Media evangelization represents an increasingly important dimension of the Church's mission in secular societies. Through digital platforms, social media, podcasts, and online catechesis, the Church can reach audiences who may have little contact with traditional religious settings. These tools allow for creative engagement with youth, urban populations, and individuals shaped by digital culture. Media communication enables the Church to present the Gospel in accessible and compelling formats, making evangelization proactive and far-reaching. By embracing modern communication channels, the Church demonstrates attentiveness to cultural and technological realities, ensuring that the Gospel remains present in the spaces where people increasingly live and interact²⁷.

Interestingly, the New Evangelization in the understanding of John Paul II seeks to rekindle personal faith, communal commitment, and missionary zeal among the baptized. Spiritual renewal strengthens the Church's identity, moral integrity, and social witness, enabling Christian communities to engage the world with hope and conviction. Evangelization becomes a transformative process that forms disciples capable of witnessing to Christ in all areas of life. By fostering renewal within established communities, the Church ensures that its mission remains vibrant, relevant, and

²⁶ Cf. E. Whitehead & J. Whitehead, *The Promise of Partnership*, San Francisco: 1989, p. 64.

²⁷ Cf. P. Soukup, *Communication and Change in American Catholicism*. Kansas City: 1997, p. 58.

effective. In this way, the New Evangelization transcends traditional boundaries, addressing both mission territories and regions in need of internal revitalization, and calling the entire People of God to participate in the ongoing work of proclaiming the Gospel²⁸.

1.2.4 New Evangelization is Directed to All Cultures

The New Evangelization requires a profound engagement with the world's diverse cultures, recognizing that the Gospel must be proclaimed in ways that resonate with the lived experiences of different peoples. Rather than imposing foreign cultural forms, evangelization becomes most effective when it acknowledges the richness of local traditions, languages, and symbolic systems. This approach affirms that the Gospel transcends cultural boundaries while simultaneously taking root within them, allowing Christian faith to be authentically expressed in a variety of cultural idioms. The African theologian John S. Mbiti emphasizes that culture is not an obstacle to the Gospel but a vessel through which divine truth becomes intelligible and transformative. When evangelization respects cultural identity, it fosters genuine dialogue between faith and local realities, enabling communities to encounter Christ without abandoning their heritage. The mission of the Church, therefore, is not to replace culture but to purify, elevate, and integrate it into a Christian worldview. Such cultural engagement ensures that the New Evangelization remains inclusive, respectful, and capable of inspiring deep personal and communal transformation²⁹.

A pivotal dimension of cultural engagement is the process of inculturation which seeks to express the Gospel within the symbolic, linguistic, and ritual frameworks of a particular culture without compromising its essential message. Inculturation is not a superficial adaptation but a profound encounter between faith and culture, allowing each to illuminate and enrich the other. Charles Nyamiti, an African missiologist, argues that inculturation enables Christian communities to articulate their faith in ways that reflect their cultural identity, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging within the

²⁸ Cf. M. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*. New Haven: 1987, p. 14.

²⁹ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: 1969, p. 219.

universal Church. Through this process, local artistic forms, music, proverbs, and communal rituals become vehicles for expressing Christian truths in ways that are both theologically sound and culturally meaningful. Inculturation thus becomes a vital methodological and theological tool in the New Evangelization, ensuring that the Gospel is not perceived as foreign but as deeply rooted in the life of the people³⁰.

Dialogue with non-Christian cultures is another essential component of the New Evangelization. Such dialogue must be conducted in a spirit of respect, collaboration, and mutual understanding, recognizing the presence of truth, goodness, and spiritual longing in every culture. Dialogue does not weaken the Christian message but strengthens its credibility by demonstrating openness to learning from others. Through dialogue, the Church reduces conflict, fosters mutual respect, and creates opportunities for authentic witness. Listening to the spiritual and moral aspirations of different peoples allows the Gospel to be proclaimed in ways that address their deepest questions and concerns. This relational approach ensures that evangelization is transformative rather than coercive, revealing the universality and inclusivity of the Christian message³¹.

Evangelization must also be contextually relevant, employing culturally appropriate methods in catechesis, liturgy, and social outreach. When the Church uses local languages, symbols, artistic expressions, and social practices, the Gospel becomes more accessible and meaningful. For Anscar Chupungco, culturally adapted methods enhance participation and comprehension, enabling communities to experience the faith in ways that resonate with their identity and history. Contextual relevance does not dilute doctrine; rather, it strengthens communication by ensuring that the message is conveyed in forms that people can understand and embrace. This principle ensures that missionary activity remains vibrant, practical, and enduring across diverse cultural settings³².

While evangelization must respect cultural differences, it must also uphold the unity of faith and fidelity to the teachings of Christ and the Church. The balance between

³⁰ Cf. C. Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*. Gweru: 1984, p. 17.

³¹ Cf. K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*. Edinburgh: 1995, p. 102.

³² Cf. A. J. Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy*. New York: 1982, p. 54.

inculturation and doctrinal integrity safeguards the universality of the Church while embracing local distinctiveness. Elochukwu Uzukwu notes that cultural diversity enriches the Church rather than divides it, provided that all expressions remain rooted in the same Gospel. Harmonizing faith and culture promotes solidarity, mutual respect, and a shared missionary identity across the global Church. This unity within cultural plurality strengthens the Church's witness and demonstrates the adaptability and inclusivity of the Gospel³³. Formation for evangelization must include cultural awareness, theological grounding, and practical skills that enable missionaries to engage diverse peoples effectively. Catechists, educators, and pastoral leaders require training that integrates cultural sensitivity with doctrinal clarity. Proper formation ensures that evangelization is respectful, competent, and capable of addressing the complexities of multicultural societies.

Liturgical practices, devotions, and social initiatives that reflect local cultural heritage foster a sense of ownership, active participation, and authentic witness. When communities express their faith through culturally meaningful forms, they become active participants in the missionary endeavour rather than passive recipients. Bénédet Bujo argues that localized expressions of faith strengthen communal identity and missionary vitality, demonstrating the Church's capacity to embody the Gospel in diverse cultural settings. Such expressions enrich the universal Church by contributing new insights, symbols, and spiritual sensibilities³⁴.

Consequently, the New Evangelization must be global in scope, transcending ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries to proclaim Christ to every human being. Cultural inclusivity reflects the Church's commitment to the dignity of all people and the universality of the Gospel message, demonstrating that all cultures manifest God's desire for the salvation of every person and fosters intercultural dialogue, understanding, and collaboration within the Church. This universal outreach ensures that evangelization remains faithful to its mission of proclaiming Christ to all nations while honouring the unique contributions of each culture. In this way, the New

³³ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu. *Worship as Body Language*. Collegeville: 1997, p. 33.

³⁴ Cf. B. Bujo. *African Theology in Its Social Context*. Nairobi: 1992, p. 88.

Evangelization becomes a living witness to the transformative power of the Gospel across the world³⁵. John Paul II, buttresses this idea when he says, “The Church addresses people of all cultures, for every culture has seeds of the Word and is open to the universal message of salvation”³⁶.

1.2.5 New Evangelization Calls for a Missionary Spirituality

Missionary spirituality stands at the heart of the New Evangelization, requiring a deep interior life rooted in personal communion with Christ and sustained through prayer, reflection, and sacramental participation. Evangelization is not merely an external activity or a set of pastoral strategies; it flows from an interior transformation in which the missionary becomes united with the life and mission of Christ. Authentic Christian mission arises from a spirituality that shapes the whole person, enabling evangelizers to witness with integrity, compassion, and moral credibility. Such spirituality ensures that missionary zeal is not superficial or performative but enduring, courageous, and transformative. It nurtures perseverance in the face of societal indifference, cultural resistance, or personal fatigue, grounding the missionary’s work in divine grace rather than human effort. By cultivating a Christ-centered interior life, evangelizers become instruments through whom the Gospel is proclaimed with clarity and conviction. Missionary spirituality thus forms the foundation for all pastoral initiatives, ensuring that evangelization remains spiritually fruitful, ethically sound, and deeply rooted in the life of God³⁷.

A critical dimension of missionary spirituality is the practice of constant prayer and contemplation. Intimate communion with Christ through personal prayer, meditation on Scripture, and participation in the sacraments strengthens missionary resolve and provides the discernment necessary for navigating complex pastoral contexts. Prayer is not merely a devotional exercise but the wellspring of Christian mission, shaping the imagination and renewing the heart for service. Through prayer, evangelizers receive guidance, humility, and empathy, virtues indispensable for authentic witness. Prayer

³⁵ Cf. J. Waliggo. *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*. Kampala: 1986, p. 5.

³⁶ Ibidem. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 62.

³⁷ Cf. L. Magesa. *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*. Maryknoll: 2013, p. 41.

also guards against the temptation to rely on personal ambition or activism, ensuring that missionary activity remains grounded in divine inspiration. Contemplative practice continually renews the missionary, enabling spiritual resilience in the face of challenges, misunderstandings, or rejection. Thus, prayer becomes both the source and the sustenance of missionary activity, anchoring evangelization in the mystery of God's love³⁸.

Missionary spirituality is inseparable from the commitment to imitate Christ's humility, service, and love. Evangelizers are called to embody the virtues of patience, compassion, and self-giving in their interactions with others. Through these, mission becomes credible only when it reflects the moral character of Christ, whose life of service reveals the true meaning of discipleship. By living as Christ lived, missionaries offer a concrete model of faith that speaks more powerfully than words alone. This imitation fosters relational engagement, deepens trust, and enhances the transformative impact of the Gospel. Discipleship also promotes personal growth, continuous conversion, and spiritual maturity, ensuring that missionary activity is not reduced to technique but grounded in a life shaped by Christ. Missionary spirituality, therefore, is not merely contemplative but profoundly ethical, calling evangelizers to embody the Gospel in every aspect of life³⁹.

Communion and solidarity also play a vital role in sustaining missionary spirituality. Evangelizers draw strength, accountability, and shared wisdom from participation in parish, diocesan, and ecclesial communities. Mission is never an isolated endeavour but a communal responsibility rooted in the life of the Church. Engaging in community life prevents isolation, fosters mutual encouragement, and ensures that missionary efforts remain aligned with the Church's broader mission. Missionary spirituality therefore combines personal devotion with active ecclesial participation, highlighting the interplay between individual calling and communal identity. This communal dimension ensures that evangelizers remain connected to the Church's sacramental life, pastoral vision, and shared mission⁴⁰.

³⁸ Cf. E. Katongole. *The Sacrifice of Africa*. Michigan: 2011, p. 73.

³⁹ Cf. B. Bujo. *The Ethical Dimension of Community*. Nairobi: 1998, p. 22.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Waliggo. *The African Synod and the Church in Africa*. Nairobi: 1997, p. 14.

Perseverance, grounded in spiritual discipline and trust in God, is essential for sustaining long-term evangelization. Missionaries often face obstacles such as cultural resistance, misunderstanding, or personal discouragement. Justin Ukpong holds that spiritual resilience transforms these challenges into opportunities for deeper faith and authentic witness. Perseverance fosters courage, determination, and reliance on divine providence, enabling evangelizers to continue their mission with steadfastness. Missionary spirituality thus equips evangelizers to endure hardship without losing hope, ensuring that evangelization remains effective, enduring, and spiritually fruitful⁴¹.

Continuous formation and spiritual renewal are indispensable for missionary spirituality. Evangelizers must engage in ongoing theological study, pastoral training, and spiritual exercises to remain effective and responsive to evolving cultural and pastoral contexts. According to Teresa Okure, ongoing formation enriches both knowledge and spiritual maturity, enabling missionaries to adapt creatively to new challenges. Continuous renewal prevents burnout, fosters discernment, and enhances pastoral competence. It strengthens personal holiness and deepens apostolic identity, ensuring that missionary spirituality remains dynamic, adaptive, and perpetually renewed⁴².

In the long run, the goal of missionary spirituality is the transformation of both the individual and society. Evangelizers formed by a deep interior life, relational love, and communal engagement become agents of renewal who witness Christ's justice, compassion, and truth in the world. A spirituality rooted in Christ integrates personal devotion with public witness, shaping both the inner life of the believer and the social structures of the community. Missionary spirituality thus ensures that evangelization is effective, ethical, and transformative, guiding all initiatives toward authentic and lasting impact. It forms disciples whose lives radiate the Gospel and inspire others to encounter Christ⁴³.

⁴¹ Cf. J. S. Ukpong, *New Testament Essays*. Port Harcourt: 2006, p. 9.

⁴² Cf. T. Okure, *The Will to Arise*. Maryknoll: 1990, p. 51.

⁴³ Cf. J. Éla, *My Faith as an African*. Maryknoll: 1988, p. 27.

1.3 The Biblical Roots of New Evangelization

The mandate to bear witness to the saving message of Christ is unmistakably central in the New Testament, where the Church receives its explicit commission to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. Yet a deeper and more attentive reading of the Old Testament reveals that this missionary mandate is not a novelty of the Christian era. Rather, the roots of what the Church today calls the New Evangelization stretch back into the earliest pages of Sacred Scripture. Long before the term existed, the Old Testament was already articulating through narrative, prophecy, covenant, and worship a divine intention that God's people would make His saving presence known to the world. Seen in this light, New Evangelization is not a departure from biblical tradition but a renewed expression of a mission as old as salvation history itself. It is the continuation of God's enduring desire that His people ancient Israel and the Church alike be witnesses of His love, His covenant, and His saving power to every generation.

1.3.1 The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, far from being a modern pastoral strategy, evangelization is an ancient biblical theme. The Old Testament consistently presents Israel as a people chosen not for privilege alone but for mission: a community called to embody and communicate God's blessing to all nations. From the universal promise given to Abraham, to the prophetic vision of Israel as a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6), the Old Testament anticipates the outward-facing, missionary identity that Christ later confirms and fulfils in the New Testament. As light to the nations, Israel bore witness to the covenant relationship between God and His people. This witness took shape through fidelity to the Law, justice for the oppressed, and worship of the one true God. Although Israel's role was primarily passive, witnessing through example rather than explicit missionary outreach, the prophetic tradition revealed a universal horizon, foretelling a time when all nations would come to worship the Lord (cf. Is. 2:2–3; Ps 96). This anticipatory vision laid the theological foundation for a mission that transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries.

The preaching of Jonah to the people of Nineveh is once again a notable example of witnessing in the Old Testament. Jonah cried out, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned!" The people believed God and proclaimed a fast, putting on sackcloth to show their repentance (Jonah 3:4-5). "Many nations will go and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.'" This verse from Micah foresees a time when nations will come to worship God and learn His ways (Micah 4:2). "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who shall hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deut. 4:6). This passage further highlights the importance of living according to God's laws, which led other nations to learn from the wisdom of Israel. Additionally, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple includes a request for God to hear the prayers of foreigners who come to worship Him (1 Kgs. 8:41-45).

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple reveals that Israel's identity as God's chosen people was never meant to be exclusive but missionary. This shows that being chosen is not a privilege for Israel alone but a vocation to manifest God's holiness and draw all nations toward Him. This understanding points to the reality that God's plan always included the nations, and Israel's mission was to be a light that reveals God's presence to all humanity⁴⁴.

1.3.2 The New Testament

The New Testament presents evangelization as the heart of the Church's mission. Christ's own ministry began with the proclamation: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mk. 1:15). This proclamation of Jesus, serves as a pointer to of His entire mission and establishes the foundation for Christian evangelization. Far from being a simple exhortation, these words express the radical transformation that was requisite for the arrival of the kingdom of God. Jesus announces this call with divine authority because He Himself is the embodiment of the Good News, the eternal Son who came from the Father to reveal His mercy, heal humanity's wounds, and restore creation. Throughout

⁴⁴ J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, Philadelphia: 1981, p. 325.

the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly affirms that He does nothing on His own but acts in perfect unity with the Father who sent Him (cf. Jn 5:19; 6:38). His mission is therefore both revelatory and redemptive: He reveals the Father's love and accomplishes the Father's saving plan through His teaching, miracles, compassion, and ultimately His death and resurrection. In calling humanity to repentance and faith, Jesus invites all people to enter into communion with the Father through Him, the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). His proclamation inaugurates a new era in salvation history, an era in which God's kingdom draws near in the person of His Son, who continues to call every generation to conversion, renewal, and life in the Spirit.

Jesus' call to repentance in Mark 1:15 signifies not only sorrow for sin but a profound reorientation of one's whole life in response to God's invitation. R. T. France understands this announcement as an unmistakable eschatological urgency, marking a moment in which God's long-awaited reign breaks into human experience and calls for a decisive human response⁴⁵. Similarly, William L. Lane emphasizes that repentance in this context reflects Israel's covenantal renewal, a turning back to God that prepares the way for authentic discipleship and wholehearted followership⁴⁶.

Expressing believe in the Gospel completes the movement of conversion. To believe, in the biblical sense, is not simply to accept a set of teachings but to entrust oneself to God and to the saving message embodied in Christ Himself. Joel Marcus posits that Jesus' summons to believe re-echoes the Old Testament prophetic expectations, presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promised Good News⁴⁷. In line with this, Ched Myers interprets the proclamation as a challenge to the dominant powers of the time, calling for a reorientation of loyalty away from oppressive structures and toward God's liberating rule⁴⁸. After His resurrection, Jesus charged the disciples to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19–20). The Acts of the Apostles demonstrates the early Church's bold missionary outreach, animated by the Holy Spirit, leading to a conversion of many including Cornelius and his household (Cf. Acts 16:33). Saint Paul exemplifies

⁴⁵ Cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*. Michigan, 2002. p. 91.

⁴⁶ Cf. L. William, *The Gospel According to Mark*. Michigan, 1974. p. 57.

⁴⁷ Cf. M. Joel, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New Haven, 2000. p. 193.

⁴⁸ Cf. Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, 1988. p. 132.

the urgency and universality of evangelization when he says: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Also, the letter of Paul to Timothy reads, “God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Paul in writing to the Romans says, “Everyone who invokes the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). However, he goes on to point out clearly that no one can come to believe in Jesus Christ if he has not heard the Word of God. But the message that awakens faith has to be proclaimed by messengers sent out for that task. “So then, faith comes by hearing the message and the message comes through preaching Christ” (Rom. 10:17). There is also an assurance and promise of blessing for those who announce Christ. “How beautiful are the feet of those that bring good news” (Rom. 10:15). These and many other related biblical evidences remain the foundation of the evangelizing mission of the Church today. Taken together, these perspectives reveal that Jesus’ first public words were not merely introductory; they stand at the thrust of His mission and offer an enduring pattern of evangelization which the Church continues to embody.

1.4 The Theological Roots of New Evangelization

The documents of the Second Vatican Council, explicitly implies that the Church exists in order to bring the Good News of salvation to all peoples under the guidance of Holy Spirit. In absolute fidelity to the Christian message and Tradition, the Church seeks to find newer approaches in carrying out the mission of Christ in changing cultures in the society.

1.4.1 The Basics Included in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

One of the most significant ecclesial documents of the post-conciliar era and a central instrument of the New Evangelization is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), commissioned by the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 and promulgated by John Paul II. The Catechism was conceived as a comprehensive, authoritative synthesis of Catholic doctrine that would serve the Church’s mission in a rapidly

changing world. Its purpose, structure, and theological vision reflect the pastoral priorities of Vatican II and provide a formidable doctrinal basis for New Evangelization.

John Paul II described the *Catechism* as “a sure norm for teaching the faith” and “a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion”⁴⁹. These statements reveal the evangelizing purpose of the catechism which aims to unify, clarify, and deepen the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel. The *Catechism* is not merely a doctrinal compendium but a pastoral text shaped by the Council’s missionary ecclesiology. Christoph Schönborn, the editorial secretary of the *Catechism*, remarks that the text, “seeks to present the faith in a way that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to the questions of modern humanity”⁵⁰. This dual fidelity to the deposit of faith and to contemporary experience is a hallmark of the New Evangelization.

At the center of the Catechism is the person of Jesus Christ. The text repeatedly emphasizes that Christianity is not primarily a moral code or philosophical system but a relationship with the living Christ. The opening line words, “Father...this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”⁵¹ sets the tone for the entire work. This Christocentric focus aligns perfectly with the New Evangelization, which calls for a renewed encounter with Christ. John Paul II insisted, “The New Evangelization is not new in content but in ardour, methods, and expression”⁵², consequently, the Catechism provides the doctrinal content that lays a firm foundation for this teaching.

Similarly, the Catechism presents an elaborate theology rooted in human dignity, virtue, and the beatitudes. In an age marked by relativism, the *Catechism* offers a compelling vision of the moral life as a path to freedom and holiness. The moral theologian, Servais Pinckaers notes that the Catechism “recovers the classical Christian understanding of morality as a life of virtue and happiness”⁵³, a perspective essential

⁴⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum* Rome: 1992, no. 4.

⁵⁰ C. Schönborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, San Francisco: 1994, p. 12.

⁵¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Kenya: 2008. no. 1

⁵² John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome: 1990, no. 3.

⁵³ S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble, Washington, DC: 1995, p. 23.

for evangelizing a culture searching for meaning and authenticity. The New Evangelization depends on this positive, attractive presentation of Christian life.

Since the Church's mission is to evangelize the world and bring all peoples to Christ⁵⁴. Evangelization remains inseparably linked with the Church's identity and is a fundamental expression of its communion with the Trinity. As such, every baptized person shares in Christ's prophetic mission, bearing the Gospel in word and deed⁵⁵. The Catechism emphasizes that evangelization is not merely external proclamation but interior transformation grounded in catechesis, sacramental life, and moral witness, all of which is geared towards sustaining personal conversion and deepening of ecclesial identity.

1.4.2 Elements of New Evangelization in the *Code of Canon Law*

The 1983 *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC), promulgated by John Paul II, is often considered the “last document of Vatican II” because it translates the Council's ecclesiology into juridical form⁵⁶. Therefore, the Code plays a crucial role in the task of New Evangelization. While canon law is not typically associated with missionary dynamism, the 1983 code engraves evangelization into the Church's legal structure by articulating the rights and duties of the faithful, defining the responsibilities of ecclesial offices, and establishing norms that support pastoral renewal. In this way, the code provides the juridical framework necessary for the New Evangelization to flourish, translating into canonical language the conciliar ecclesiology⁵⁷. Canon 747 affirms that the Church has the “duty and innate right” to preach the Gospel to all peoples. This canon, rooted in *Lumen Gentium*, establishes evangelization not as an optional activity but as a juridical obligation. Ladislav Örsy notes that the code “institutionalizes the missionary mandate”, ensuring that evangelization is structurally embedded in ecclesial life⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ibidem. CCC, Kenya: 2008. no. 849.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibidem, no. 905.

⁵⁶ L. Örsy, *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights*, Collegeville, MN: 2009, p. 45.

⁵⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*, Rome: 1983.

⁵⁸ Cf. Ibidem. Örsy, *Receiving the Council*, no. 52.

Furthermore, the code states that all the faithful, “must direct their efforts to lead a holy life and to promote the growth of the Church”⁵⁹. This canon provides a juridical basis for the New Evangelization’s insistence that every baptized person is a missionary disciple. James Coriden observes that these canons “shift the focus from hierarchical privilege to baptismal responsibility”⁶⁰, a paramount shift that mirrors the New Evangelization’s emphasis on co-responsibility and lay participation. The Code devotes significant attention to the laity⁶¹, reflecting Vatican II’s teaching that laypeople have a unique mission in the world. More so, states that laypersons, “by reason of their baptism and confirmation, are bound to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all”⁶². These canons serve as foundations for New Evangelization, which depends heavily on lay witness in secular environments, families, workplaces, schools, and public life. Germain Grisez notes that the Code “makes evangelization a juridical duty of the laity”⁶³, thereby reinforcing the Council’s vision of a missionary Church.

In a nutshell, the 1983 code of canon law reinforces the universal obligation and mandate of every Christian to evangelize. “All the Christian faithful have the duty and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach all people in every age and in every land”⁶⁴. This code of the canon reflects the Church’s missionary duty, extending to all laity, clergy, and religious. The code further outlines specific responsibilities related to catechesis and missionary activity, underscoring that pastoral structures should always serve the wider evangelizing mission of the Church⁶⁵.

1.5. Exploring the Rich Deposit of Faith in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council

The emergence of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) formed one of the most significant turning points for Catholicism in contemporary history. Its roots lie in a long

⁵⁹ *Code of Canon Law*. India: 1983. no. 210.

⁶⁰ J. A. Coriden, *An Introduction to Canon Law*, New York: 1991, p. 89.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, nos. 224–231.

⁶² *Ibidem*, no. 225.

⁶³ G. Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 2: *Living a Christian Life*, Quincy, IL: 1993, p. 712.

⁶⁴ See *Ibidem*. CCL, no. 211.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, nos. 773–780.

and complex interplay between the Church and the modern world, shaped by political upheavals, theological renewal, and the pastoral vision of John XXIII. From the foregoing, it is evident that Vatican II was not a sudden innovation but the culmination of developments unfolding since the late eighteenth century. These origins of Vatican II is traceable to the profound social and political transformations that began with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. These events destabilized the traditional alliance between Church and state and introduced new concepts of liberty, democracy, and human rights. For John W. O'Malley, "the French Revolution marked the beginning of a new epoch in the relationship between the Church and the world," creating tensions that would shape Catholic self-understanding for more than a century⁶⁶.

The First Vatican Council (1869–1870) attempted to address some of these challenges, particularly through its definition of papal primacy and infallibility. Yet the council was cut short by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, leaving many ecclesiological and pastoral questions unresolved. Joseph Komonchak notes that Vatican I "left the Church with an incomplete ecclesiology", which Vatican II would later seek to balance with a renewed theology of episcopacy and collegiality⁶⁷.

By the early twentieth century, several internal renewal movements were reshaping Catholic theology and practice. The biblical movement encouraged a return to Scripture; the liturgical movement emphasized active participation in worship; and the ecumenical movement fostered dialogue with other Christian communities. Yves Congar, one of the leading theologians of the period, argued that the Church needed "a reform that is both traditional and forward-looking," rooted in returning to the sources of Christian faith⁶⁸. These movements created an intellectual climate receptive to *aggiornamento*, the "updating" that would become a hallmark of Vatican II. As historian Giuseppe Alberigo explains, "The twentieth century witnessed a profound desire for renewal within the Church, a desire that found its most authoritative expression in the

⁶⁶ J. W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge: 2008, p. 17.

⁶⁷ J. A. Komonchak, *Vatican II as an Event*, in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?*, ed. David G. Schultenover, New York: 2007, p. 81.

⁶⁸ Y. Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert, Collegeville: 2011, p. 8.

Council”⁶⁹. The immediate catalyst for Vatican II was the pastoral vision of John XXIII. Elected in 1958 at the age of seventy-six, he was widely expected to be a transitional pope. Instead, he surprised the world by announcing, on 25 January 1959, his intention to convoke an ecumenical council. In his diary, he described the inspiration as “a sudden interior illumination,” which he interpreted as a prompting of the Holy Spirit⁷⁰.

Vatican II was unprecedented in scale and diversity, stressing the fact that the council was a global even. More than 2,600 bishops from every continent participated, making it the most representative council in Church history. Alberigo describes this as “the first truly global council,” reflecting the universality of the modern Church⁷¹. For the first time, women were invited as auditors, symbolizing a widening of ecclesial participation⁷². The Council met in four sessions between 1962 and 1965, producing sixteen documents that addressed liturgy, revelation, ecclesiology, ecumenism, religious liberty, and the Church’s relationship with the modern world. These documents would later become foundational for the Church’s understanding of the New Evangelization. Similarly, Komonchak stresses that Vatican II must be understood as “the Church’s effort to come to terms with modernity,” not by capitulating to it but by discerning how the Gospel could be proclaimed anew in contemporary contexts⁷³.

In this sense, the emergence of Vatican II represents both a culmination of long-term historical developments and a decisive new beginning. Its legacy continues to shape Catholic theology, pastoral practice, and the Church’s mission of evangelization in the modern world. The modern demands of New Evangelization finds rich expression in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council till date. Each document has in no small measure contributed uniquely and immensely to the Church’s understanding of New Evangelization in contemporary times. Below are the examination of some documents of Vatican II, discussed in no particular order.

⁶⁹ G. Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, Maryknoll: 2006, p. 3.

⁷⁰ A. G. Roncalli, Pope John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul*, trans. Dorothy White, New York: 1965, p. 313.

⁷¹ Ibidem. Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, p. 45.

⁷² Ibidem, p. 112.

⁷³ See Ibidem. Komonchak, “Vatican II as an ‘Event,’” p. 92.

1.5.1 The Decree on the Missionary Activities of the Church, *Ad Gentes*

The decree on the missionary activities of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, meaning “To the Nations”, succinctly postulates that the Church is intrinsically missionary, with evangelization as a fundamental mission. It encourages missionaries to live in solidarity with and integrate into the culture of the people they are serving to spread the Gospel and transform societies. Although promulgated under Paul VI, the root of the document can be traced to the *aggiornamento* (renewal) spirit inaugurated by John XXIII. He emphasized the Church’s openness to the modern world and the need for renewal in proclaiming the Gospel⁷⁴. *Ad Gentes* further articulates that the Church is missionary by nature and urges a dynamic response to the needs of the contemporary world⁷⁵. The promulgation of *Ad Gentes* by the Second Vatican Council in 1965 certainly marked an important moment in the Church’s teaching and understanding of its missionary enterprise. This decree did not merely reaffirm the Church’s commitment to evangelization, it served to redefine it in the light of modern day realities, theological developments, and the global context of the 20th century.

Missionary activities, in the light of *Ad Gentes*, is not a purely optional enterprise but a vital constitutive element of the Church’s identity and mission. Furthermore, the Church, often described as the universal sacrament of salvation encapsulates its role as both a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all peoples. This sacramental vision implies that missionary activity is not just about preaching but about embodying, mediating and transmitting grace in diverse cultural contexts. Prior to the Second Vatican, missionary activity was often associated with colonial expansion and Western dominance. *Ad Gentes* represents a conscious shift away from this paradigm. It calls for a renewal of missionary methods, emphasizing respect for local cultures, languages, and traditions⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ Cf. F. Austin (ed.) Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, vol. 1. Ireland: 1988, *Ad Gentes*, no. 2.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ibidem, no.1.

⁷⁶ Cf. Ibidem, no.11.

The decree also gives answers to the increasing realities of religious pluralism and the dignity of non-Christian religions. While maintaining the uniqueness of Christ as the universal Saviour, it proposes dialogue and collaboration, recognizing seeds of truth and goodness in other faiths⁷⁷. Taking into cognizance the many factors, the decree outlines a clear trajectory for missionary activity which includes; the proclamation of the Gospel, the initiation into the sacramental life, and the establishment of local Churches⁷⁸. These Churches are not meant to remain solely dependent on foreign missionaries but are to become self-sustaining entities, with their own clergy, hierarchy, and pastoral structures. This model reflects a deep respect for inculturation, a process by which the Gospel message is expressed within a cultural context of a people. To achieve this, missionaries received proper training to get accustomed to the local customs, languages, and worldviews of those they encounter in a view to integrating them into the life of the Church without compromising the tenets of the faith.

The comprehensive approach to mission reveals the degree of seriousness with which the Church views its missionary mandate. It is not a peripheral activity but a central expression of its identity and purpose. Since the emergence of *Ad Gentes*, the Church continues to face new challenges of secularization in the West, rapid urbanization, migration, and the rise of the digital culture. However, the enduring legacy of the decree continues to offer profound and enduring visions of missionary activity, tasking the Church to embrace its identity as a sent people, animated by the Spirit and faithful to spreading the Good News. The degree of missionary engagement it envisions is all encompassing, involving the spiritual, structural, and personal elements with an awareness that mission involves not only geographic outreach but also engagement with existential peripheries, those alienated by poverty, injustice, or indifference. In a world marked by fragmentation and searching, the Church's missionary vocation remains as urgent and transformative as ever bringing renewal, transformation and growth.

⁷⁷ Cf. Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, Ireland: 1988, no. 2.

⁷⁸ Cf. Vatican II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, Ireland: 1988, no. 6.

1.5.2 *Gaudium et Spes* in the Context of New Evangelization

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, meaning “Joy and hope”, promulgated in 1965 reflects Paul VI’s commitment to dialogue between the Church and modern humanity. It expresses deep solidarity with the joys and hopes of all peoples. Consequently, New Evangelization, in this light, includes engaging with culture, science, and the socio-political order of the time. *Gaudium et Spes* is regarded as one of the most outstanding documents of the Second Vatican Council. Unlike previous ecclesial documents, this pastoral constitution directly engages with the contemporary world, addressing its joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties. It reflects the Church’s desire to enter into dialogue with humanity and to illuminate modern challenges with the light of the Gospel. The opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age...these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ”⁷⁹, sets the tone for the entire document, affirming the Church’s solidarity with all people, especially the poor and afflicted. The council sought to move beyond a defensive posture to embrace a posture of engagement, compassion, and shared responsibilities.

This solidarity is not sentimental but theological expressing the bond Christ has with the human family. The constitution explores the complexity of human nature, body and soul, reason and freedom, conscience and community. It acknowledges the paradoxes of modern life, technological advancement alongside moral confusion, increased communication alongside isolation⁸⁰. In this context, the Church offers a vision of the human person as a moral agent, capable of truth, love, and transcendence. *Gaudium et Spes* does not ignore the problems and challenges the world poses, rather it confronts them head-on, addressing issues such as marriage and family, culture, economics, politics, peace, and international relations. In each area, the Church seeks to offer guidance rooted in the Gospel and human reason. For instance, it affirms the sanctity of

⁷⁹ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, Ireland: 1988, no. 1.

⁸⁰ Cf. Ibidem, no. 4.

marriage and the family as the “foundation of society”⁸¹. It calls for economic systems that serve the common good and respect human labour, advocating for political structures that promote justice, participation, and human rights, also urging nations to pursue peace through dialogue and solidarity⁸².

Another vital aspect of *Gaudium et Spes* is its emphasis on dialogue. The Church is called not only to teach but to listen, to engage with the world’s questions, values, and aspirations. This approach clearly reflects a shift in perspective, from triumphalism to humility, from monologue to mutual understanding and dialogue. Evangelization, in this context, is not coercive but invitational. The Church proposes rather than imposes, confident that the truth of Christ resonates with the deepest desires of the human heart⁸³. The enduring relevance of the *Gaudium et Spes* document remains remarkably prescient as its contribution to upholding human dignity, social justice, and global solidarity continue to inspire Catholic social teaching and practice. In an age marked by polarization, ecological crisis, and technological upheaval, the document’s call for renewed hope, dialogue, and ethical responsibility more than ever before. It represents a bold and comprehensive vision of the Church’s mission in the modern world, challenging Christians to engage with contemporary realities not with fear, but with faith and love. By affirming the dignity of every person and the transformative power of the Gospel, it invites the Church to be a light in the midst of human history and a witness to the joy and hope that comes from Christ to the world.

1.5.3 *Lumen Gentium* - as a Fundamental Document

Among the sixteen documents of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church stands as the theological cornerstone for the New Evangelization. Its renewed vision of the Church’s identity, structure, and mission provides the conceptual framework that later popes, especially John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, develop into a comprehensive evangelizing program for the contemporary world. One of the most transformative contributions of *Lumen Gentium*

⁸¹ Ibidem, no. 47.

⁸² Cf. Ibidem, nos. 63–82.

⁸³ Cf. Ibidem, no. 92.

is its presentation of the Church as the *People of God*⁸⁴. This shift from a primarily hierarchical model to a *communio*-based vision reoriented the Church toward participation and mission. John W. O'Malley notes that this language “introduced a new style of ecclesial self-presentation, less juridical, more biblical, more relational”⁸⁵.

In grounding the Church's identity in baptism rather than office, *Lumen Gentium* laid the theological foundation for the New Evangelization's insistence that every Christian is a missionary disciple. The Council teaches that the faithful “share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ”⁸⁶, articulating the “universal call to holiness”⁸⁷, a teaching that profoundly shaped post-conciliar evangelization. Holiness is no longer presented as the preserve of clergy and religious but as the vocation of all the baptized. Giuseppe Alberigo maintains that this teaching democratized sanctity, making holiness and therefore mission an ordinary Christian responsibility⁸⁸.

Lumen Gentium devotes significant attention to the laity, describing their mission as the sanctification of the temporal order⁸⁹. This teaching is crucial for the New Evangelization, which recognizes that contemporary evangelization must occur not only within ecclesial structures but also in culture, politics, economics, education, and family life. To these, Yves Congar, whose theology deeply influenced the Council, argued that the laity's mission is “to make the Church present in places where it is absent”⁹⁰. Joseph Komonchak submits that *Lumen Gentium* replaced a monarchical model with a *communio* model, emphasizing shared responsibility among bishops, clergy, religious, and laity. This *communio* ecclesiology is reflected in the New Evangelization's collaborative structures, making it a shared mission rather than a top-down initiative⁹¹.

⁸⁴ Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 9–17.

⁸⁵ J. W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge, MA: 2008, p. 307.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem* no. 31.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem* nos. 39–42.

⁸⁸ Cf. G. Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, Maryknoll, NY: 2006, p. 112.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibidem* LG no. 31.

⁹⁰ Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater, Westminster, MD: 1957, p. 15.

⁹¹ Cf. J. A. Komonchak, *The Church as Communion*, in *The Gift of the Church*, ed. Peter Phan, Collegeville, MN: 2000, p. 82.

Although the term New Evangelization does not appear in *Lumen Gentium*, the document contains the seeds of its later development. John Paul II explicitly acknowledged this continuity, stating that the New Evangelization is “the fruit of the ecclesiology of Vatican II”⁹². *Lumen Gentium* remains a document that provides the theological structure for the New Evangelization by redefining the Church’s identity, mission, and structure. Its vision of a missionary, participatory, and holy People of God continues to animate contemporary evangelizing efforts. From the foregoing, it is important to note that, New Evangelization is not a departure from Vatican II but its maturation a living expression of the Council’s call for a Church renewed in Christ and sent into the world.

1.5.4 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Celebration of the Reality of the Presence of God

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, is another vital document of Vatican II that gives an insight for understanding the concept of New Evangelization. By restoring the centrality of the liturgy, promoting active participation, and emphasizing the evangelizing power of beauty and ritual, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* reshaped the Church’s missionary identity in ways that continue to animate contemporary evangelization. The Council unequivocally teaches that the liturgy is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed” and “the font from which all its power flows”⁹³. This is essential for the New Evangelization, which insists that evangelization is not merely a program or strategy but a participation in the life of Christ made present in the liturgy.

Evangelization, therefore, begins not with external action but with the Church’s worship, where Christians encounter the mystery of Christ and are sent forth to witness in the world. One of the most transformative teachings of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is its call for *actuosa participatio*, the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy. This participation is not merely external but spiritual and interior, shaping Christians into missionary disciples⁹⁴. Active participation forms evangelizers

⁹² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome: 1990, no. 2.

⁹³ Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Ireland: 1988, no. 10.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 14.

by deepening their encounter with Christ, strengthening their sense of belonging to the Church, and empowering them to live and share their faith. Consequently, the liturgy becomes a school of discipleship and mission.

In addition, the Council's decision to permit the use of vernacular languages in the liturgy was revolutionary. It allowed the liturgy to speak directly to the hearts of contemporary Christians and opened the door to inculturation an essential dimension of the New Evangelization. Yves Congar notes that the vernacular "made the liturgy intelligible and accessible, enabling it to evangelize more effectively"⁹⁵. By allowing the Gospel to be proclaimed and prayed in the language of the people, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* ensured that worship could become a genuine encounter rather than a distant ritual. This cultural adaptation inspires evangelizing efforts that respect local cultures while proclaiming the universal Gospel. The Council envisions liturgical renewal not as an end in itself but as a catalyst for mission, leading to genuine encounter and witnessing which is at the heart of New Evangelization. Consequently, by emphasizing the baptismal dignity of all the faithful, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* supports the New Evangelization's focus on the laity. The liturgy forms laypeople for their mission in the world, sending them forth to evangelize in families, workplaces, and society. Congar argued that, the liturgy constitutes the Church and sends it forth. This sending forth is the essence of the New Evangelization⁹⁶.

1.6 Heritage in Particular Writings of Popes

Considering the fact that the expression, New Evangelization is a modern concept, however, the popes from earliest times laid its essential foundations through their preaching, pastoral leadership, and theological writings. The popes developed a dynamic vision of evangelization that remains strikingly relevant today. Their works reveal a Church that evangelizes not only through doctrine but through holiness of life, cultural engagement, catechesis, and continual renewal of the baptized.

⁹⁵ Y. Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow, San Francisco: 2004, p. 112.

⁹⁶ Cf. Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater, Westminster, MD: 1957, p. 21.

1.6.1 *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - New Way of Evangelization

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, Paul VI teaches and gives a precise insight into the mission of the Church and its purpose of existence. He says, “The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society make all the more urgent. Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize”⁹⁷.

In a word, the Church may be truly said to evangelize when, solely in virtue of that news which she proclaims, she seeks to convert both the individual consciences of men and their collective conscience, all the activities in which they are engaged and, finally, their lives and the whole environment which surrounds them⁹⁸. From the foregoing, this post-conciliar document on evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* outlines the theology, urgency, and spirituality of evangelization. It defines evangelization as a process involving witness, proclamation, conversion, catechesis, and inculturation. Paul VI, further emphasizes that evangelization is “bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity”, whereby the Gospel permeates cultures and transforms hearts⁹⁹. He clearly cautions on the danger of separation between faith and life, advocating for a holistic evangelization rooted in joy and credibility. One of the most striking themes of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the emphasis on personal witness. 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”¹⁰⁰.

At the inception of the Second Vatican Council, the Church faced the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel in a rapidly changing world. Paul VI’s apostolic exhortation responded to this challenge with deep theological and pastoral insight. It is worthy of note that this document remains one of the most influential documents on evangelization, shaping Catholic thought and practice for years with its main emphasis

⁹⁷ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Rome: 1975, no. 14.

⁹⁸ Cf. Ibidem, no. 18.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, no. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, no. 20.

on calling for a renewed missionary spirit rooted in personal witness and cultural engagement. Paul VI affirms that evangelization is the Church's deepest identity: "The Church exists in order to evangelize"¹⁰¹. Evangelization here is understood not merely as the transmission of doctrine but the communication of life and an encounter with the living Christ that transforms individuals and societies. It encompasses preaching, catechesis, liturgy, and social action, all animated by the Holy Spirit. The document insists that evangelization must address both the spiritual and existential needs of modern humanity offering a service to the Church and to all people, especially those "oppressed by fear and distress"¹⁰².

Evangelii Nuntiandi's call to holiness is not reserved for clergy or missionaries alone, every baptized person is a "primary and indispensable agent of evangelization"¹⁰³. Lay people, through their presence in families, workplaces, and civic life, are uniquely positioned to bring the Gospel into the heart of culture. Paul VI recognizes that evangelization must engage culture, not superficially, but deeply and respectfully. The Gospel which remains a vital tool for evangelization must be embedded and incarnated in the cultures of peoples. This process of inculturation requires discernment, dialogue, and creativity. It avoids both cultural imperialism and relativism, seeking instead to transform cultures from within bring out its inner beauty and retaining the Christian identity. Evangelization must address "new forms of atheism" and the "silent apostasy" of those who live as if God does not exist¹⁰⁴. In this context, the Church warns against the fragmentation of modern life, where faith is privatized and disconnected from public discourse, while it offers a coherent vision of life rooted in Christ.

In addressing the obstacle and challenges of evangelization, Paul VI does not refrain from acknowledging the difficulties of evangelization. He speaks of fatigue, discouragement, and the temptation to reduce mission to mere activism¹⁰⁵. He also

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, no. 14.

¹⁰² Ibidem, no. 1.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, no. 70.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, no. 55.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Ibidem, no. 80.

critiques ideologies that distort the Gospel, whether through politicization, consumerism, or spiritualism. Yet he insists that these challenges must not paralyze the Church. Evangelization is always a work of hope, sustained by prayer, community, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The document calls for a new period of evangelization, one that is marked by courage, creativity, and fidelity¹⁰⁶.

Over fifty years after its publication, the enduring legacy of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* remains a foundational text for evangelization mission of the Church. Its enduring relevance lies in its holistic vision: evangelization as proclamation, witness, service, and transformation. In an age marked by secularism, polarization, and spiritual hunger, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* offers a roadmap for renewing the Church's missionary identity inviting the Church to rediscover the joy of evangelizing, to become a community of witnesses, and to engage the world with humility and hope. Its message is clear stating that the Gospel is not a burden but a gift, not a relic but a source of renewal. Consequently, the Church must proclaim it with passion, integrity, and love.

1.6.2 *Ubicumque et Semper* - Paradoxical Reality of Evangelization

In an era marked by rapid secularization and cultural fragmentation, Benedict XVI issued *Ubicumque et Semper* "Everywhere and Always", on September 21, 2010, to confront the growing crisis of faith in traditionally Christian societies. This apostolic letter, promulgated *motu proprio*, established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, signalling a renewed commitment to proclaiming the Gospel in contexts where it had once flourished but was now fading. He emphasized the crisis of faith in traditionally Christian societies and the urgent need to rekindle belief. Benedict called for renewed catechesis, deeper encounters with Scripture, and a coherent Christian witness that bridges faith and culture.

The document begins by reaffirming the Church's divine mandate to evangelize: "It is the duty of the Church to proclaim always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Ibidem, no. 2.

Christ”¹⁰⁷. This mission is rooted in the command of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations. Benedict emphasizes that evangelization is not merely a pastoral strategy but a theological necessity. The Church, animated by the Holy Spirit since Pentecost, is called to bear witness to the “beauty of the Gospel” and the person of Jesus Christ, “true God and true man”¹⁰⁸. Evangelization is thus both proclamation and encounter, a sharing of truth and love that leads to transformation. In other words, the letter seeks to respond to a specific historical challenge of the abandonment of faith in societies long shaped by Christian tradition. By this Benedict XVI observes that a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred has emerged, calling into question foundational beliefs such as faith in a provident Creator, the revelation of Christ, and the moral order¹⁰⁹. This phenomenon is not merely intellectual but existential. Advances in science, technology, and individual freedom have altered humanity’s self-understanding, often at the expense of spiritual depth. The letter notes that while these changes bring benefits, they also contribute to a silent apostasy in which people live as if God does not exist¹¹⁰. The New Evangelization, therefore, is not about geographic expansion but cultural renewal and transformation. It seeks to reawaken faith in contexts where the Gospel has been clouded by secular ideologies such as relativism, consumerism, materialism, subjectivism and many others.

In a bid to address this urgent need, *Ubicumque et Semper* led to the establishment of a new dicastery within the Roman Curia named the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, with the mission of deepening theological reflection on evangelization in secular contexts, supporting dioceses and ecclesial movements in their evangelizing efforts, promoting catechesis and formation for lay and ordained ministers, and encouraging the use of modern media and communication tools for evangelization¹¹¹. This institutional move reflects Benedict’s conviction that the New Evangelization requires coordinated, creative, and sustained efforts across the universal

¹⁰⁷ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Ubicumque et Semper*, Rome: 2010, no. 1.

<http://www.evangelizatio.va/content/pcpne/en/dicastero/ubicumque-et-semper.html> (accessed 12.3.2025)

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, no. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Ibidem, no. 3.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Ibidem, no. 4.

¹¹¹ Cf. Ibidem, Benedict XVI, *Ubicumque et Semper*, Rome: 2010, no. 3.

Church. He insists that evangelization must be rooted in witness and hope. The Church is called to “bear witness to the hope that is within her” (1 Peter 3:15), even amid cultural decline and spiritual confusion. This witness is not meant to be an abstract reality but it should be embodied in liturgy, charity, dialogue, and the daily events of life¹¹².

Evangelization also demands humility and listening. It does not presuppose a one-way proclamation but a dialogue that respects the dignity and freedom of every human person. The Church must engage the modern world not with fear, but with confidence in the enduring truth of the Gospel. Consequently, *Ubicumque et Semper* is a prophetic call to renew the Church’s missionary zeal in the face of secularism and other related dangerous ideologies. By establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Benedict XVI provided both theological clarity and institutional support for this vital task. The document challenges the Church to rediscover her vocation as a community of witnesses proclaiming Christ “everywhere and always” with joy, courage, and love.

1.6.3 *Africae Munus* – Answer to Africa’s Challenges.

On November 19, 2011, Benedict XVI promulgated *Africae Munus*, translated to mean Africa’s Commitment, in Ouidah, Benin, in response to the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in 2009. This post-synodal apostolic exhortation calls the Church in Africa to embrace her vocation as a servant of reconciliation, justice, and peace. Rooted in the Gospel and African cultural realities, *Africae Munus* offers a comprehensive vision for ecclesial renewal and social transformation across the continent, highlighting reconciliation, justice, and peace as essential expressions of evangelization. The document applauds Africa’s spiritual dynamism and urges the faithful to become agents of transformation rooted in Christ, noting that evangelization was inseparable from social engagement.

¹¹² Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Rome: 1975, no. 21.

The aforementioned exhortation starts by reaffirming the Church's identity as a sacrament of salvation and a sign of unity in Christ. Benedict XVI teaches that, "Christ is the source of reconciliation, justice and peace" and that the Church must be a credible witness to these values in African society¹¹³. Drawing largely from 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Be reconciled to God", the document expressly situates the Church's mission within the broader ambience of divine reconciliation and human dignity. This theological foundation is not abstract. It rather calls for concrete action and posits that the Church must embody the Beatitudes, promote forgiveness, and build structures that reflect the justice of God¹¹⁴.

Africa's recent history has been marked by civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and political instability resulting in countless deaths and leading to the under-development of some regions. *Africae Munus* acknowledges these wounds and calls the Church to be an agent of healing and reconciliation and peacebuilding not merely for political benefits but as a spiritual journey rooted in true conversion, repentance and love. The document encourages the development of a "spirituality of communion" that fosters mutual respect, dialogue, and solidarity among diverse communities¹¹⁵, highlighting the importance of inculturation which is integrating the Gospel values into African cultural expressions without compromising truths contained therein.

In building a just social order, Justice, according to *Africae Munus*, must be frantically pursued, promoted and upheld, both within the Church and in the society. The Church is called to be a "sentinel" that denounces injustice and advocates for the marginalized, including promoting good governance, fighting corruption, defending human rights. The document urges African Christians to live according to Christ's justice, which is rooted in truth, love, and the dignity of every person, calling for the formation of ethical leaders and the strengthening of civil institutions that serve the common good¹¹⁶.

¹¹³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, Rome: 2011, no.17.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ibidem, no. 26.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Ibidem, no. 34.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ibidem, no. 81.

In the document, peace is understood not as the absence of war and conflict but as the fruit of justice and love. The Church must promote peace through education, interreligious dialogue, and pastoral care bearing in mind that “love in truth” is the source of authentic peace¹¹⁷. In achieving this, special attention is given to the role of families, women, youth, and the elderly in building peaceful communities, while making efforts to address ecological concerns, migration, and globalization. To these realities, the Church is called to respond with compassion and wisdom. Consequently, Benedict XVI outlines the roles and responsibilities of various members of the church. The Bishops and priests are called to be shepherds who model reconciliation and justice. The Missionaries and catechists must continue to proclaim the Gospel with cultural sensitivity and zeal. The Lay people, especially in education, healthcare, and media, are urged to be agents of transformation in society. The document emphasizes that evangelization is a shared mission, requiring collaboration among all vocations and ministries. It remains a profound and timely exhortation that challenges the Church in Africa to live out its mission with courage, integrity, and hope, embracing reconciliation, justice, and peace so that it can become a beacon of light in a continent rich in faith and resilience, rising up from the wounds of history and walking boldly into a future shaped by the Gospel values of Christ¹¹⁸.

1.6.4 *Evangelii Gaudium* – Dynamics of Evangelization

In 2013, Francis issued *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The Joy of the Gospel” as his first apostolic exhortation, which laid the foundation for his papacy’s pastoral and theological vision. The document is a passionate call to renew the Church’s missionary zeal, emphasizing joy, mercy, and proximity to the marginalized. It challenges the faithful to move beyond compromise and complacency, while embracing a dynamic, outgoing evangelization approach rooted in personal encounter with Christ.

The central theme of *Evangelii Gaudium* is joy, specifically, the joy that flows from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Francis writes, “The joy of the Gospel fills the

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ibidem, no. 28.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ibidem, no. 70–87.

hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus”¹¹⁹. This joy is not superficial or fleeting; it is a joy that is transformative, compelling the faithful to share the Good News with others. Francis kicks against any form of Christianity that lacks enthusiasm and vitality. He insists that evangelization must be marked by warmth, creativity, and authenticity. In this way Joy becomes both the source and the fruit of missionary discipleship.

One very pertinent and striking quote from the exhortation of Francis is the call for “a Church which goes forth”¹²⁰. He envisions a Church that is not self-referential but missionary, willing to go out, embrace those in the peripheries, and prioritize pastoral care over bureaucratic systems and structures. Evangelization, in this model, is not a top-down transmission of doctrine but a relational journey rooted in listening and love. He urges pastors to “smell like the sheep”¹²¹, emphasizing closeness, accompaniment, and mercy. The document looks at the social dimension of Evangelization and integrates it with social justice. By this, the exhortation denounces economic exclusion, consumerism, and inequality, affirming that evangelization must include care for the poor, advocacy for peace, and defense of human dignity. The Church is called to be a “poor Church for the poor”¹²².

Additionally, Francis points out the role of lay people in pastoral conversion and evangelization, declaring that, “we are all missionary disciples”¹²³. Therefore, evangelization is not to be understood as the exclusive task of the clergy but as a vocation of all the baptized. He sees pastoral conversion in this regard as a complete overhaul of ecclesial structures including simplifying procedures, decentralizing decision-making, and fostering a culture of encounter¹²⁴, to make them more responsive to the needs of the people at different times and in the specific contexts and realities they find themselves.

¹¹⁹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome: 2013, no.1.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, no. 24.

¹²¹ Ibidem, no. 24.

¹²² Ibidem, no. 198.

¹²³ Ibidem, no. 120.

¹²⁴ Cf. Ibidem, no. 32.

At the heart of *Evangelii Gaudium* are two key elements: the kerygma which is the initial proclamation of Christ's love and salvation, then Catechesis which seeks to help people enter into the mystery of faith through experience, community, and Scripture. *Evangelii Gaudium* remains a landmark document that redefines evangelization in the 21st century. It blends theological depth with pastoral urgency, calling the Church to be joyful, inclusive, and missionary. In a world marked by fragmentation and despair, the document offers a veritable roadmap for renewal, rooted in joy, mercy, and the living presence of Christ, encouraging preachers to speak with simplicity, passion, and relevance¹²⁵.

1.7 New Evangelization in the Light of the First African Synod of Bishops

The first special assembly for Africa of the synod of Bishops, held in Rome in 1994, marked a historic moment for the Church in Africa. Convened by John Paul II, the synod was aimed at addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the Church on the continent of Africa, particularly in the light of its rapid growth and complex socio-political realities. The resulting apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* of 1995, articulated a vision for the Church in Africa as a "Church-Family of God," deeply rooted in communion, inculturation, and evangelization, contributing to the broader movement of the New Evangelization, emphasizing Africa's unique role in revitalizing the Church's missionary identity. The Synod emphasized healing divisions rooted in ethnicity, poverty, and historical trauma, positioning evangelization as a path toward both spiritual renewal and societal reconciliation.

The idea for the synod was first announced by John Paul II in 1989, reflecting his recognition of Africa's dynamic ecclesial landscape and its growing importance in global Catholicism. The synod gathered bishops, theologians, and lay leaders from across the continent to reflect on the themes of evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace, and the means of improving social communications. There was no better time to for the synod than such a time when Africa was grappling with civil conflicts, economic instability, diseases. In the midst of these, the Church was still

¹²⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, nos. 135–159.

experiencing remarkable growth in vocations, lay participation, and grassroots movements. The synod sought to harness this vitality for a renewed missionary commitment and effort¹²⁶.

The post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, promulgated in 1995, emphasized and envisioned that “the Church in Africa is called to be a missionary Church” and must “proclaim the Gospel with renewed fervour”¹²⁷. This aligns closely with the concept of the New Evangelization, John Paul II had introduced in the 1980s to describe the re-proclamation of the Gospel in regions where Christianity had declined due to secularization. In *Ecclesia in Africa*, evangelization is understood not only as initial proclamation but also as ongoing formation, social engagement, and cultural integration. The document calls for a “New Evangelization” that is “new in its ardour, methods, and expression”¹²⁸. These terms echo the global call for renewed and revitalized missionary enterprise.

As the notion of New Evangelization emerged, inculturation which is the process of expressing the Gospel within the cultural forms of African societies became paramount. The Bishops emphasized that evangelization must respect and elevate African traditions, languages, and worldviews, allowing the faith to take deep root in local contexts. This approach reflects a key principle of the New Evangelization and stresses the need for proclamation within specific contexts. Rather than relying solely on foreign models, the Church in Africa seeks to embody the Gospel values in ways that resonate with the living experiences of the people. This includes liturgical adaptation, theological reflection, and pastoral strategies that reflect African values such as community life and solidarity¹²⁹.

New Evangelization is a veritable tool for social transformation. The synod also linked evangelization with justice, peace, and reconciliation. In a continent marked by poverty, violence, and political instability, the Church must be a prophetic voice and a

¹²⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Rome: 1995, no. 49

¹²⁷ Cf. Ibidem. nos. 40–41.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, no. 75.

¹²⁹ Cf. Vatican II, Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Rome: 1963, nos. 37–40.

healing presence. The document calls for the formation of ethical leaders, the defense of human rights, and the promotion of integral development¹³⁰. This holistic vision of evangelization both spiritual and social, personal and communal form hallmarks of the New Evangelization. It recognizes that the Gospel must transform not only hearts but also structures, contributing to the building of a more just, compassionate and holistic society.

The First African Synod affirmed that Africa is not merely a recipient of evangelization but a contributor to the mission of the universal Church. With its vibrant faith communities, youthful population, and growing theological insights, Africa offers fresh energy and insight for the New Evangelization. The legacy of the synod continues to shape the Church's understanding of evangelization as a dynamic, contextual, and communal process. This African Synod was a landmark event that helped integrate the African Church into the global movement of the New Evangelization. By affirming Africa's unique gifts and challenges, the synod offered a model of evangelization that is joyful, rooted in culture, and committed to justice. Its vision remains vital today, as the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel with renewed fervour in every corner of the world.

1.8 The Inestimable Benefits of the Second African Synod of Bishops

Building upon the first, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome from October 4–25, 2009, was convened under the theme, The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. This assembly built upon the momentum of the First African Synod (1994), which had emphasized the Church as the “Family of God” and laid the groundwork for a contextualized African ecclesiology¹³¹. The Synod emerged in response to Africa's evolving socio-political landscape, marked by persistent conflict, economic instability, and cultural shifts. The bishops recognized that the Church must not only respond to these challenges but also renew its evangelizing mission in light of contemporary realities. The Synod's focus on

¹³⁰ Cf. René Luneau, *Ecclesia in Africa: A Chronicle of the Synod*, Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions.

¹³¹ Synod of Bishops, *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, Rome: 2009.

reconciliation, justice, and peace was not merely social it was deeply theological, rooted in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel as a transformative force¹³².

Although, the term “New Evangelization” was not the explicit theme of the Synod, it permeated its discussions. The bishops emphasized that evangelization in Africa must be “new in its ardour, methods, and expression”, echoing John Paul II's earlier call¹³³. This renewal was seen as essential for addressing the spiritual and moral crises affecting African societies. Vital aspects of this renewed evangelization included centred on Inculturation. Here evangelization engages African cultures respectfully and creatively, allowing the Gospel to take root in local traditions without compromising its core message¹³⁴. Additionally, the Synod stressed that the credibility of evangelization depends on the personal holiness and integrity of evangelizers, bishops, priests, religious, and laity alike. In like manner Basic Christian Communities (BCC) are hailed as vital instruments of evangelization, fostering communal faith, social engagement, and lay leadership¹³⁵.

The Synod linked evangelization directly to the work of reconciliation, both within the Church and in society. Evangelization was not seen as proselytism but as a healing proclamation, a call to restore broken relationships through the love of Christ¹³⁶. The Church was urged to become a “sacrament of reconciliation,” embodying peace and justice in its structures and outreach. The bishops emphasized the central place of Scripture and the Sacraments in the evangelizing mission. The Word of God was described as the “powerful leaven” that can transform African societies, while the Eucharist was seen as the “source and summit” of Christian life and mission¹³⁷. The Synod called for better catechesis, liturgical renewal, and deeper engagement with the Bible among the faithful.

¹³² Cf. Small Christian Communities Network, *Resources for the 2009 Second African Synod*.

¹³³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome: 1990 no. 53.

¹³⁴ Cf. Ibidem. *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, n. 74.

¹³⁵ Cf. J. G. Healey, *Innovations and New Trends in Small Christian Communities in Africa Today*, *Hekima Review*, 2009, pp. 11-12.

¹³⁶ Cf. Ibidem. *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, 74.

¹³⁷ Cf. Ibidem.

Evangelization in Africa also required interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam and African Traditional Religions. The Synod encouraged respectful engagement, emphasizing common values and the pursuit of peace. This approach was part of a broader vision of evangelization as inclusive, dialogical, and prophetic. Furthermore, Benedict XVI's apostolic exhortation *Africae Munus* (2011) synthesized the Synod's insights, reaffirming the Church's mission to be a beacon of reconciliation and a force for holistic evangelization in Africa¹³⁸. He called on African Catholics to embrace their prophetic role in society, guided by the Gospel and empowered by the Holy Spirit. To cap it up, the document acknowledged the pressing need for renewed evangelization in societies marked by religious indifference and cultural secularization, stressing the need for pastoral engagements, holistic formation of Christians, and active lay witnessing in public life.

1.9 Elements of New Evangelization in the Communiqués of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has consistently used its communiqués to articulate the Church's response to national challenges, pastoral priorities, and theological imperatives. Among the recurring themes in these communiqués is the call for a New Evangelization, a renewed proclamation of the Gospel in the face of Nigeria's evolving socio-cultural and spiritual landscape. CBCN communiqués are typically issued at the end of their bi-annual plenary meetings, held in March and September. These documents reflect collective discernment on issues affecting the Church and the Nigerian state, offering moral guidance, pastoral directives, and prophetic witness. In recent years, especially from the early 2010's onward, the communiqués have increasingly emphasized the need for New Evangelization, a term popularized by Pope John Paul II and later expanded by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. This evangelization is "new" not in content but in zeal, method, and expression, tailored to address the spiritual fatigue and secularization affecting modern societies.

¹³⁸ Cf. Ibidem. Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, Rome: 2011, no. 174.

The CBCN continues to play a pivotal role in contextualizing the New Evangelization within the Nigerian experience. Their communiqués since 1960 till date reflects a pastoral awareness of Nigeria’s social tensions, political instability, economic disparities, and religious pluralism. In numerous statements, the bishops have reiterated that evangelization must go hand-in-hand with the promotion of justice, the rule of law, and good governance¹³⁹. They call for a Church that speaks boldly to societal ills while fostering hope, reconciliation, and moral regeneration. A recurring theme is the empowerment of the laity, especially youth, to be active witnesses of the Gospel in political, educational, and economic spheres¹⁴⁰. The CBCN’s voice exemplifies how the New Evangelization, far from being abstract, requires rootedness in local realities and responsiveness to the needs and hopes of the people, addressing key aspects of the realities they encounter.

The 2025 First Plenary Communiqué titled, *The Jubilee Year of Hope: A Light for a New Nigeria*, explicitly links the New Evangelization to the virtue of hope. The bishops describe the Jubilee as a moment for renewed catechesis, scriptural literacy, and authentic Christian witnessing, urging the Church to be a “beacon of light to society” (Matthew 5:14–16). They emphasize that evangelization must be rooted in love and the pierced heart of Jesus, echoing Francis’ *Spes Non Confundit* meaning “hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5:5), revealing a genuine for a renewed commitment to mission in both Nigerian and global parlance.

In relation to the National crisis, the Bishops in several communiqués, construe evangelization as a response to Nigeria’s moral and political decay. For instance, in their 2021 communiqué, the bishops lamented the rise of indiscriminate fundraising in Churches, warning that such practices undermine the credibility of the Church’s witness and distract from its evangelizing mission. They call for a return to authentic Gospel values, urging clergy and laity alike to embody the faith through integrity, service, and prophetic courage. In making New Evangelization a reality, the bishops consistently

¹³⁹ Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, Communiqué, March 2013, “Promoting Authentic Development and Evangelization.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, and CBCN Pastoral Letters, 2010–2020.

highlight the role of youth and lay faithful in this noble mission. They advocate for formation programs, and digital evangelization as tools to engage younger generations and counteract the influence of materialism and relativism. In the 2025 communiqué, the CBCN praises the student loan scheme and other youth-focused policies, but also challenges the Church to form young people spiritually and morally, equipping them to be agents of transformation. In the same vein, the CBCN communiqués often link evangelization with social justice, echoing the African Synod’s vision of the Church as a servant of reconciliation. The bishops argue that preaching the Gospel must go hand-in-hand with defending human dignity, promoting good governance, and standing with the oppressed. This holistic approach to evangelization is evident in their critique of corruption, insecurity, and poor leadership. They urge Catholics to be salt and light in society, not just through words, but through ethical living and civic engagement¹⁴¹.

Since the Church has a vision of the human person and of history, a vision which is really centered on Christ, it has over the years not chosen to be indifferent towards conceptions of the human person, the family, work, the economy, society, and assistance which are at variance with the truth of the Gospel. In other words, it does not cannot stand aloof or passive when confronted with the various vicissitudes which plague humanity. Therefore, while faithfully scrutinizing the ‘signs of the times’ it stands visibly by the side of people and so becomes “the voice of the voiceless”¹⁴², through its social teachings, a body of Catholic thought concerning political, economic, ethical, and cultural questions as they relate to the common good. Its origin could be traced back to the beginning of Christianity itself. St. Paul reflected on the relationship between Christians and the state in Romans 13:1-7. The Church judges social theories and practices from the standpoint of faith and morals, in light of the virtue of social justice. These teachings became necessary in response to the questions posed by communism, socialism, totalitarianism, and democratic capitalism that was prevalent.

¹⁴¹ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), *Communiqué of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria*, Abuja, February 2025.

¹⁴² Cf. E. Ojakaminor, *Catholic Social Doctrine, An Introductory Manual*, Africa: 1996, p. 16.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is important to note that New Evangelization is not merely a strategy or program, it is a spiritual awakening and a call to mission. It takes root in the Church's timeless mandate to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), responding to the unique challenges of our time with creativity, courage, thoughtfulness and compassion. By rekindling faith in those who have grown distant, embracing modern tools of communication, and fostering authentic encounters with Christ, the Church seeks to renew the world from within. Ultimately, New Evangelisation reminds us that evangelizing is not reserved for a few, it is the joyful duty of every Christian. In a world hungry for meaning and hope, the Gospel remains the most powerful and transformative message we can share, while drawing largely from the documents of the Church.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ENGAGEMENTS OF JOHN PAUL II IN NEW EVANGELIZATION

Introduction

This chapter seeks to address key theological principles of New Evangelization in the teachings of John Paul II with the aim of examining how he developed and articulated his teaching on New Evangelization in response to the spiritual and cultural challenges of contemporary times. His teaching is drawn from a wide range of sources, including homilies, apostolic exhortations, encyclicals, apostolic letters, and pastoral addresses delivered during his pontificate. Through these engagements, he concretely and consistently emphasized the need for renewal in faith, missionary zeal, and evangelizing methods. The chapter also highlights the theological depth of his vision while demonstrating its practical application for the life of the Church. It holds that New Evangelization is paramount and this formed a cornerstone of his pontificate, making it one of its outstanding contribution to pastoral ministry and mission.

2.1 The Nature of New Evangelization According to John Paul II¹⁴³

John Paul II's idea of New Evangelization is understood and presented through his major documents and addresses, beginning with his homily at Krakow in 1979 and continuing through later writings such as *Redemptoris Missio* and *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. The basic elements of his vision, namely new ardour, new methods, and new expressions, which he saw as indispensable tools for proclaiming the Gospel in changing contexts, remain timeless. The synthesis of his teaching is outlined in five central theological principles namely: Christocentrism, shared responsibility,

¹⁴³ John Paul II, born Karol Józef Wojtyła on 18 May 1920 in Wadowice, Poland, became one of the most influential popes in modern history. Orphaned at a young age, he pursued studies in literature and philosophy before entering the clandestine seminary during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Ordained a priest in 1946, he later earned doctorates in theology and philosophy, becoming known for his intellectual depth and pastoral sensitivity. As bishop and later archbishop of Kraków, he played a significant role in the Second Vatican Council, contributing especially to discussions on religious freedom and the dignity of the human person. Elected pope in 1978, the first non-Italian pope in over four centuries, he served for nearly 27 years, shaping global Catholicism through his teachings on human dignity, evangelization, and the role of culture in faith. His papacy was marked by extensive travels, interreligious dialogue, defense of human rights, and a strong emphasis on the New Evangelization. He died on 2 April 2005 and was canonized in 2011, leaving a profound legacy on the Church and the world.

universality, cultural dialogue, and missionary spirituality, revealing how his theology of New Evangelization continues to inspire and guide the Church even in the twenty-first century.

2.1.1 Crucial Homily at Mogiła, Krakow

Rooted in pastoral concerns for the declining influence of Christianity in traditionally Christian societies, John Paul II made the earliest documented use of the expression New Evangelization in his homily at the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross in Mogiła (Nowa Huta) on 9 June 1979, during his first apostolic journey to Poland. Preaching at the symbolic heart of Poland's struggle for religious identity under communism, he declared that "a new evangelization has begun," linking this renewal explicitly to the Cross that had become a sign of resistance and hope for the workers of Nowa Huta¹⁴⁴. Although brief, this initial usage already contained the essential intuition that evangelization in modern societies required a revitalized proclamation capable of confronting secularization and ideological repression. He believes that evangelization was not merely about external missions but about renewing the heart of Christian life where it had grown cold. This conviction shows that his theology began with a diagnosis of contemporary society's spiritual crisis. His diagnosis of the spiritual crisis of late modernity aligns with Avery Dulles's observation that, "John Paul II saw the deepest crisis of the modern world as a crisis of faith, brought about by aggressive secularism and the eclipse of God"¹⁴⁵. This perspective placed the Gospel at the center of personal and cultural transformation. Rather than lamenting decline, a courageous return to Christ as the foundation of renewal constitutes the basic foundation for the vision of New Evangelization.

The central message of New Evangelization connotes that the Gospel must be proclaimed with renewed fervour in a world marked by rapid cultural and ideological shifts, especially in historically Christian nations, where faith has grown weak under secular pressures. Thus, New Evangelization is not only to be understood as reaching

¹⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Homily at the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross, Mogiła (Nowa Huta), 9 June 1979.

¹⁴⁵ A. Dulles, *The New World of Faith*, Huntington: 2000, p. 87.

out to those who had never heard the Gospel but also about reawakening the faith of those who were baptized and have relapsed. The pontiff holds that evangelization was not only about private faith but also about public witness in the face of oppression¹⁴⁶. His call for renewal was therefore both spiritual and cultural, challenging ideologies that sought to suppress the Christian identity of Europe. George Weigel notes that, “In Kraków, John Paul II spoke with a prophetic clarity that challenged the communist regime by affirming the spiritual identity of the nation”¹⁴⁷. For the Polish faithful, John Paul II’s words offered hope that the Gospel could be a source of resilience and resistance against injustice. This dimension revealed that New Evangelization was not abstract theology but an urgent pastoral response to lived realities. It showed his conviction that evangelization is inseparable from human dignity, freedom, and justice. Thus, his Krakow homily became a call for both faith renewal and social transformation.

Another important aspect of the Krakow homily was John Paul II’s emphasis on the role of the laity in evangelization, affirming that the renewal of faith required the active participation of all the baptized, not only clergy and religious. This perspective broadened the scope of missionary responsibility, empowering ordinary Christians to live and witness to their faith in daily life. Families, workers, and youth are called to become living testimonies of the Gospel. Avery Dulles further highlights this shift when he said: “One of John Paul II’s most significant contributions was his insistence that the laity are not auxiliaries but protagonists of the Church’s mission”¹⁴⁸.

The words of his homily in 1979 does not seem to suggest an isolated statement but the beginning of a sustained theological and pastoral project, setting a trajectory for his entire pontificate. The homily thus functions as a programmatic text, encapsulating the seeds of what would later become a fully developed theology of New Evangelization. It continues to inspire the Church today, especially in contexts where faith is challenged by secularism, indifference, or cultural hostility. By calling for a New Evangelization, John Paul II offered the Church a way to engage the modern world without fear. His

¹⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Omelia a Mogila (Nowa Huta)*, 9 June 1979, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. II/1 Vatican: 1979, pp. 1452–1456.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem. G. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, p. 280.

¹⁴⁸ A. Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, Mahwah, NJ: 2009, p. 73.

vision remains a vital resource for missionary theology and pastoral practice in the twenty-first century. In essence, the Krakow homily prefigured his later global vision of evangelization¹⁴⁹.

2.1.2 Mission and Proclamation According to *Catechesi Tradendae*

John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, issued on October 16, 1979, emerged from the 1977 Synod of Bishops devoted to catechesis. In this document, John Paul II provided a theological foundation for the renewal of catechesis within the broader framework of evangelization. He emphasized that catechesis is inseparably linked to the Church's mission of proclaiming Christ to all peoples. While evangelization is broader, catechesis forms a central and irreplaceable element by deepening faith and nurturing discipleship. This distinction clarified the role of catechesis as the systematic teaching of the faith after the initial proclamation. By situating catechesis within evangelization, he advanced his vision of a New Evangelization. This emphasis responds to modern challenges, where faith often risks being reduced to cultural heritage or moralism. By reaffirming Christ as the center, John Paul II safeguarded the transformative power of evangelization. Another important theme of *Catechesi Tradendae* is the role of Scripture in catechesis and evangelization. The Word of God must be at the center of catechesis, calling for greater use of the Bible, not only as a source of doctrine but as a means of encountering the living Word. By rooting catechesis in Scripture, he aligned evangelization with the original proclamation of the apostles. This approach ensured fidelity to tradition while addressing the hunger for authentic truth in the modern world¹⁵⁰.

The role of catechists and lay educators in the mission of evangelisation, requires tremendous dedication and impact of countless catechists worldwide, especially in mission territories, where they often sustained the Church in difficult conditions. In this way, catechesis is not the exclusive responsibility of the clergy but a shared mission of the entire people of God. This inclusive vision reflects his conviction that New

¹⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Omelia a Mogiła (Nowa Huta)*, Kraków, 9 June 1979, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. II/1 Vatican: 1979, pp. 1452–1456.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Rome: 1979, no. 3.

Evangelization requires the active collaboration of all the baptized. By empowering lay men and women, a more participatory Church is attainable. Such recognition not only values the contribution of catechists but also expands the Church's capacity to reach new contexts. The exhortation also deals with the pedagogical dimension of catechesis, emphasizing that methods must adapt to the needs of different audiences, cultures, and stages of faith development. Methodology must never overshadow the content of faith, which remains unchanged. There should be a balance between fidelity and creativity reflecting the core of the pontiff's vision of New Evangelization. John Paul II insists that catechesis should engage modern means of communication and respond to contemporary challenges. At the same time, it must retain the integrity of Catholic doctrine. Thus, the document provided practical guidance for the Church's catechetical mission, providing a global scope of evangelization which constitutes another prominent concern of the exhortation, stressing that catechesis must address not only children but also young people, adults, and the elderly. Rejecting the idea that religious education ends with childhood, he opines that religious education instead is a lifelong journey of faith formation. This perspective aligned catechesis with the broader vision of New Evangelization, which seeks to renew Christian life at every stage. He further pointed out the need for contextual adaptation, recognizing that catechesis in Africa, Asia, or Latin America must respond to specific cultural and social realities. This openness to diversity reflects his universal missionary outlook.

By affirming the adaptability of catechesis, the document provides a framework for inculturation. In this way, the exhortation underscored the catholicity of the Church's mission¹⁵¹. This missionary urgency reflects the idea that the Church must renew its quest for proclamation in a secularized world. According Alan Schreck, "Catechesis is the engine of the New Evangelization, forming disciples capable of witnessing in a secular age"¹⁵². By linking catechesis with evangelization, one understands that teaching the faith is inseparable from proclaiming the Gospel.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Ibidem. no. 53.

¹⁵² A. Schreck, *The Compact History of the Catholic Church*, Cincinnati, OH: 2009, p. 189.

2.1.3 Articulating the Ideas of the Assembly of CELAM in Port-au-Prince - Haiti

In 1983, John Paul II addressed the Latin American Bishops in Haiti, formally articulating the concept of New Evangelization to a regional audience facing social, political, and cultural challenges. He stressed that the Church must renew missionary zeal, especially where the faith was historically established but weakened by secular ideologies and materialism. This appeal echoed his earlier homily but contextualized it for Latin America, a region marked by profound poverty and political unrest. Evangelization according to him must be new in its ardour, new in its methods, and new in its expression. These three dimensions indicated that the Church's mission required spiritual zeal, creative strategies, and culturally relevant language. Ardour referred to the inner fire of faith, rooted in prayer and holiness, which sustains the missionary. Methods suggested the need to engage new social and cultural realities, including modern communication and education. Expression highlighted the importance of proclaiming the Gospel in ways that connect with contemporary thought and culture without diluting its truth. This articulation demonstrated his ability to combine fidelity to tradition with openness to innovation. The statement became a cornerstone of his theology of New Evangelization.

By positing that New Evangelization be “new in ardour, new in methods, and new in expression”, fidelity to the Gospel and the necessity of innovative pastoral strategies is paramount¹⁵³. This highlights the responsibility of bishops to guide clergy, religious, and laity in revitalizing faith communities. His address signalled a broader shift toward understanding New Evangelization as both a universal and contextually adaptive mission, formally introducing the term in the global Church, urging bishops to respect local cultures while presenting the Gospel authentically, stating that the faith must dialogue with cultural expressions to be transformative¹⁵⁴. John Paul II, encouraged integrating local languages, music, and traditions into liturgical and catechetical practices. In promoting inculturation, he ensured that evangelization was relevant and credible in diverse contexts. His approach reinforced the Church's universality while

¹⁵³ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Address to Latin American Bishops*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ibidem. p. 7.

allowing contextual adaptation. It also affirmed the dignity of local communities, portraying the Gospel as a source of liberation and cultural affirmation. In this way, the Haitian address exemplified the balance between universality and particularity in New Evangelization. The pontiff also emphasized the Christocentric nature of evangelization, asserting that all missionary activity must lead to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ¹⁵⁵.

He highlighted that pastoral programs, catechesis, and social engagement must point to Christ as the source of salvation. This focus safeguarded the integrity of evangelization against reducing it to social action alone. He portrayed New Evangelization as holistic, addressing both spiritual and social dimensions of human life. By linking faith and action, he demonstrated that evangelization is both transformative and relational. Another key emphasis was the shared responsibility of the episcopate in promoting evangelization. The Holy Father, called on bishops to organize collaborative pastoral planning that engages clergy, religious, and laity. He stressed that lay participation is crucial for catechesis, liturgical life, and social action, reflecting a participatory vision of the Church. This collaborative approach underscores his theology of the Church as the People of God, where every baptized member has a missionary vocation. By empowering laity and clergy alike, he encouraged an inclusive and communal approach to New Evangelization. This strategy is seen to further broaden the Church's capacity to address complex pastoral challenges in Latin America, and beyond, reinforcing the notion that evangelization is both hierarchical and communal. John Paul II further addressed the need for pastoral creativity and innovation in methods. He urged the bishops to adopt practical strategies, including catechetical programs, use of media, and grassroots initiatives. However, he cautioned that innovation must always remain faithful to the Gospel's content. This balance between fidelity and adaptability reflects the central principles of New Evangelization. Theologians emphasize that such adaptability allows the Church to engage modernity while maintaining doctrinal integrity. His instructions encouraged bishops to cultivate pastoral flexibility without compromising the universality of the faith. This

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*. p. 9.

methodological openness prepared the Church to respond to diverse and evolving social realities. In this sense, New Evangelization becomes both theological and practical¹⁵⁶.

Social and moral formation forms a critical dimension highlighted in the address. John Paul II insisted that evangelization must engage the full spectrum of human life, addressing poverty, injustice, and marginalization while remaining rooted in the Gospel¹⁵⁷. He viewed social action and spiritual renewal as inseparable, reflecting his holistic vision of mission. By integrating faith with ethical and social responsibility, he provided a model for transformative evangelization. John Paul II emphasized that the Church's mission contributes to both spiritual and societal renewal. This perspective reinforced the idea that New Evangelization is a conduit for integral human development. He also called for perseverance, hope, and spiritual fortitude in missionary work. He reminded bishops that evangelization often faces resistance, indifference, and cultural hostility, yet the Church must remain steadfast. He linked this perseverance to prayer, holiness, and fidelity to Christ, emphasizing that effective evangelization depends on spiritual grounding. The Holy Father's insistence on perseverance underscores the personal and communal dimensions of missionary commitment. By highlighting courage in mission, he encouraged bishops to foster resilience among clergy and laity. This focus on spiritual endurance remains a defining characteristic of New Evangelization. It emphasizes that evangelization is both a human and divine endeavour. The pontiff concludes by framing New Evangelization as a renewal of the Church's identity and mission in Latin America. He reminded bishops that evangelization is the Church's essential vocation, integrating doctrinal fidelity, pastoral creativity, cultural engagement, and social responsibility¹⁵⁸.

By situating local challenges within the Church's universal mission, he offered a comprehensive vision of evangelization. The address reinforced the need for zeal, innovation, and Christ-centeredness in all missionary activity. It demonstrates how regional encounters could inform universal theological insights. This approach aligns

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*. p. 15

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*. pp. 18-21.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*. p. 23

with Catholic Social Teaching and demonstrates the Church's preferential option for the poor, affirming that evangelization must uplift the marginalized, confront injustice, and promote human dignity. In this way, the Pontiff presents a model of the New Evangelization that is both globally oriented and locally attentive, rooted in Christ yet responsive to the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of the people¹⁵⁹.

2.1.4 The Special Role of the Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*

John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, promulgated on December 7, 1990, represents a definitive theological articulation of the Church's missionary mandate and the principles of the New Evangelization. He emphasized that evangelization is a fundamental task of the Church, rooted in Christ's command to the apostles and entrusted to all the baptized¹⁶⁰. The encyclical underscores that all missionary efforts such as catechesis, liturgy, and pastoral care, must orient individuals toward Christ as the source of salvation. Gallagher believes that this focus prevents the Church from reducing evangelization to social work or cultural engagement alone¹⁶¹. By prioritizing personal encounter with Christ, John Paul II situates the New Evangelization within a theological, rather than merely pragmatic, framework. This Christ-centeredness ensures that pastoral innovation remains faithful to the Gospel. It reflects continuity with his Krakow homily and the 1983 Haitian address. The encyclical, therefore, anchors evangelization in the heart of the Christian mystery.

The document also elaborates on the universality of the Church's missionary responsibility, stressing that every baptized Christian participates in mission, whether in traditionally Christian regions or mission territories¹⁶², noting that the New Evangelization is not limited to foreign missions but also addresses cultures that have lost their Christian vitality. This perspective reflects a broader understanding of mission as both *ad gentes* and *ad intra*. Theologians have observed that this vision expands the

¹⁵⁹ J. Pryce, M. Kelly, & M. Lawinger, *Social Work for Social Justice: Strengthening Practice with the Poor through Catholic Social Teaching*. In Scales, T.L. & Kelly, M. (Ed.) *Christianity and Social Work*, fifth Edition, 85-100. North American Association of Christians in Social Work. Botsford, CT. 2016, p. 86. https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1111&context=socialwork_facpubs (accessed 12/4/2026)

¹⁶⁰ Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome: 1990, no. 2

¹⁶¹ Cf. M. Gallagher, *Mission in The Modern World: The Thought of John Paul II*. London: 2014, p. 62

¹⁶² Cf. Ibidem, p.18

scope of missionary theology, emphasizing the responsibility of the entire People of God. By linking personal discipleship with communal missionary duty, he underscores the participatory nature of evangelization. This inclusivity affirms the central role of laity, clergy, and religious in renewing faith communities. It also provides a theological basis for pastoral planning in diverse cultural contexts¹⁶³.

Well-prepared missionaries can address cultural differences, social challenges, and secular skepticism while remaining faithful to the Gospel. Formation includes personal holiness, knowledge of Scripture, and pastoral skills. By emphasizing preparation, John Paul II ensures that evangelization is both competent and authentic. This approach also reinforces the communal dimension of mission, as trained missionaries collaborate with local churches. Thus, New Evangelization requires disciplined, knowledgeable, and spiritually grounded agents. The document is a call to urgency and perseverance, reminding the Church that the mission field is vast, encompassing all peoples and cultures, and requires continuous dedication¹⁶⁴, considering the reality that New Evangelization demands zeal, courage, and hope in the face of secularization, indifference, and cultural challenges. O'Malley observes that this insistence on perseverance underscores the spiritual dimension of mission alongside practical strategies. The encyclical ties together doctrinal fidelity, pastoral innovation, cultural engagement, and social concern into a coherent vision of evangelization. By doing so, it provides both theological and practical guidance for the Church worldwide. *Redemptoris Missio* remains a seminal text for understanding John Paul II's comprehensive vision of New Evangelization. His encyclical continues to guide bishops, clergy, and laity in responding to the evangelizing mission of the Church in contemporary times.

¹⁶³ Cf. A. Shorter, *Evangelization Today: Contexts and Strategies*. London: 2010, p.85

¹⁶⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 1.

2.1.5 *Ecclesia in Africa* – Answer to the Needs of Evangelization

John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), issued after the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, is believed to be one of the most comprehensive magisterial writings on the New Evangelization in an African context. The exhortation responds to the continent's pastoral, cultural, and socio-political realities, among them are poverty, conflict, corruption, and religious pluralism, while grounding evangelization in the Christocentric and ecclesiological vision of Vatican II. Its theological coherence, pastoral sensitivity, and cultural attentiveness make it an epic expression of the New Evangelization's holistic approach. The Holy Father in his writing underscores the fact that evangelization in Africa is a unified reality comprising both the proclamation of Christ and the promotion of human dignity. He insists that "the proclamation of the Gospel must be accompanied by the integral development of the human person"¹⁶⁵. This integration reflects the New Evangelization's holistic vision: evangelization is not reducible to catechesis or sacramental life but embraces social transformation, peacebuilding, and human flourishing. By situating Africa's evangelizing mission within its socio-political struggles, he notes that the Church's witness must be credible, compassionate, and contextually informed. For Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Ecclesia in Africa* exemplifies a "prophetic dialogue" model of mission, where proclamation and social engagement mutually enrich one another¹⁶⁶.

A defining theme of *Ecclesia in Africa* is inculturation, which John Paul II describes as a process that touches the very depths of human experience. He insists that African cultures, languages, and values must be integrated into the life of the Church without compromising doctrinal integrity¹⁶⁷. His insistence on inculturation ensures that evangelization is neither foreign nor superficial but authentically African and genuinely Catholic. At the same time, he warns against cultural relativism, insisting that inculturation must lead to conversion and communion with Christ. This creative adaptation without doctrinal compromise is a hallmark of the New Evangelization.

¹⁶⁵ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Rome: 1995, n. 68.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. S. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, NY: 2004, p. 386.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 59.

Lamin Sanneh's work on "translation Christianity" helps illuminate this dynamic: the Gospel becomes most transformative when it enters a culture from within rather than imposing external forms¹⁶⁸.

At the center of all evangelizing activity, the Church's mission in Africa aims to lead individuals and communities into a personal and communal encounter with the living Christ. This Christocentric focus distinguishes the New Evangelization from purely sociological or political activism. According to Michael Gallagher, New Evangelization is characterized by a renewed encounter with Christ, who alone gives meaning to human existence¹⁶⁹. *Ecclesia in Africa* strongly emphasizes the laity as active agents of evangelization, highlighting their indispensable role in family life, education, politics, economics, and social development. This participatory vision aligns with the New Evangelization's insistence that mission belongs to the entire People of God, not only clergy and religious¹⁷⁰. Paulinus Odozor notes that the exhortation expands the space for lay leadership in Africa, recognizing that the laity are often the primary evangelizers in daily life. By empowering lay Christians, the Church extends its evangelizing presence beyond ecclesial structures into the fabric of society¹⁷¹.

The document calls for pastoral creativity, urging African bishops to adopt methods suited to local needs, including media, education, small Christian communities, and grassroots movements. This dynamic responsiveness is essential to the New Evangelization, which seeks new methods and expressions without altering the content of the faith. By encouraging contextual strategies, *Ecclesia in Africa* ensures that evangelization remains relevant, credible, and effective in diverse African contexts¹⁷². He stresses that such creativity must remain faithful to the Gospel, a principle that Adrian Hastings describes as a "creative"¹⁷³ innovation rooted in tradition.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, NY: 2009, pp. 51–53.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. M. Gallagher, *Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger*, Mahwah, NJ: 2010, p. 112.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 90.

¹⁷¹ Cf. P. Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African*, Notre Dame: 2014, p. 214.

¹⁷² Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 124.

¹⁷³ A. Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450–1950*, Oxford: 1994, p. 612.

The exhortation emphasizes that evangelization is inseparable from the promotion of justice, peace, and human dignity, insisting that the Church must address poverty, corruption, ethnic conflict, and violations of human rights. Evangelization that ignores structural injustice risks losing credibility; conversely, social action without Christocentric grounding becomes mere activism¹⁷⁴.

Considering the challenges facing evangelization in Africa such as secularism, syncretism, and political instability, there arises the need for perseverance, prayer, and ongoing formation. By calling for the formation of clergy, religious, and laity, the exhortation underscores that evangelization is not a program but a vocation requiring holiness, maturity, and resilience. This emphasis reflects the New Evangelization's insistence on interior renewal as the foundation of outward mission¹⁷⁵. Furthermore, Peter Phan notes that spiritual grounding is essential for sustaining missionary efforts, especially in contexts of suffering and uncertainty¹⁷⁶. By addressing Africa's unique challenges while situating them within the universal mission of the Church, John Paul II demonstrates how regional contexts enrich and deepen the global project of the New Evangelization. The exhortation remains a key guide for African bishops, clergy, and laity, offering a model of evangelization that is holistic, contextual, and deeply rooted in the Gospel. John W. O'Malley observes that the document exemplifies the post-conciliar shift toward a pastoral, dialogical, and culturally attentive approach to evangelization¹⁷⁷.

2.1.6 *Novo Millennio Ineunte* – on the Threshold of Centuries

John Paul II issued the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* on January 6, 2001, to inaugurate the Church's mission in the New Millennium. The document emphasizes the Church's call to renew its missionary commitment, focusing on pastoral conversion and spiritual renewal¹⁷⁸. He understands New Evangelization as a continuation of the

¹⁷⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 105–107.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 75.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. P. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*, Maryknoll, NY: 1998, p. 201.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. J. O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present*, Lanham, MD: 2010, p. 284.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Rome: 2001, no. 3

Church's mission in contemporary contexts, addressing secularization, cultural fragmentation, and moral relativism. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* consolidates John Paul II's earlier teachings on evangelization, offering a comprehensive vision for global pastoral activity. The letter underscores that the Church must foster a renewed encounter with Christ to energize both clergy and laity. This Apostolic Letter emphasizes fidelity to tradition while encouraging pastoral creativity and openness to modern means of communication. Thus, it serves as a capstone in articulating the theological principles of New Evangelization for the 21st century. A major theme of *Novo Millennio Ineunte* is the priority of spiritual renewal, noting that authentic evangelization begins with deep relationship with Christ through prayer and the sacraments¹⁷⁹.

The letter also underscores the importance of pastoral planning and collaboration, calling bishops and pastors to develop strategies that involve clergy, religious, and laity in a constructive and coordinated way of evangelization¹⁸⁰. This emphasis demonstrates the participatory nature of New Evangelization, where mission is a shared responsibility. By promoting collaboration, the Church can effectively address its local and global challenges. The letter emphasizes training, formation, and ongoing support for all agents of evangelization. This approach strengthens the Church's capacity to respond dynamically to cultural, social, and moral changes. Coordination also reinforces accountability and fosters creativity in pastoral work. In this way, New Evangelization is both communal and strategic. John Paul II stresses that evangelization must respect cultural diversity while presenting the Gospel authentically. This principle aligns with inculturation and contextualized mission, ensuring relevance without compromising doctrinal fidelity. He encourages the use of modern communication media, educational programs, and cultural initiatives to reach contemporary audiences. By integrating culture and technology, the Church can proclaim the Gospel effectively in a pluralistic world. This methodological openness reflects his vision of New Evangelization as adaptable and creative. It balances tradition with innovation in

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Ibidem. no. 5.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Ibidem. no. 8.

pastoral practice. Engaging culture is essential for renewing Christian identity in a fast changing culture¹⁸¹.

Novo Millennio Ineunte thus serves as a firm foundation for the Church's evangelizing mission in the present time, it emphasizes the role of catechesis and ongoing formation, asserting that evangelization requires continuous instruction in faith, moral education, and spiritual development, serving as both a foundation and a tool for the New Evangelization. Proper formation strengthens Christian identity and equips the faithful to witness effectively in society. Evangelization is not to be reduced to isolated activities or occasional initiatives; instead, it demands continuous instruction in doctrine, systematic moral education, and deep spiritual development that shape the whole Christian life.

2.1.7 The First Apostolic Visit to Nigeria: A Christocentric and Culturally Rooted Vision for New Evangelization

During his first apostolic visit to Nigeria in 1982, John Paul II delivered an address to clergy, religious, and laity that articulated a comprehensive and forward-looking vision of the New Evangelization within the Nigerian context. He called for a renewed missionary zeal capable of responding to the nation's complex social, political, and religious challenges, emphasizing that evangelization must proclaim Christ in both word and deed while engaging the cultural realities of the people. In doing so, he situated Nigeria within the broader global mission of the Church, insisting that the Gospel must be continually re-proposed in ways that speak to contemporary circumstances. His appeal reflected his conviction that evangelization is not merely a pastoral program but a dynamic encounter between the Gospel and human experience¹⁸².

A central theme of the address was the Christocentric nature of evangelization, which John Paul II consistently upheld as the heart of all missionary activity. He stressed that every authentic evangelizing effort must lead to a personal and

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Ibidem*. no. 11.

¹⁸² Cf. John Paul II, *Address to Clergy, Religious and Laity in Kaduna, Nigeria* (14 February 1982), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, V/1, Vatican: 1982.

transformative encounter with Jesus Christ, for pastoral initiatives, catechesis, and social action derive their meaning and spiritual efficacy from Him. This Christological focus reflects the Pope's broader theological anthropology, in which Christ reveals both God and the fullness of human identity. Gallagher notes that such a Christ-centered approach ensures that evangelization remains spiritually fruitful, guarding against the reduction of mission to mere activism or social reform. The Pontiff therefore urged Nigerian Catholics to deepen their prayer life, sacramental participation, and interior conversion so that discipleship may be rooted in a living relationship with Christ¹⁸³.

The Holy Father also highlighted the indispensable role of the laity, insisting that lay Christians evangelize through family life, professional work, and social engagement. Their witness, he argued, enables the Gospel to permeate all sectors of society, especially in contexts where clergy may have limited access or influence. This emphasis reflects the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which Phan observes as foundational to John Paul II's understanding of the Church as a communion of co-responsible disciples. By affirming the laity's vocation to sanctify temporal realities, the Pope underscored that the New Evangelization requires a Church in which every baptized person assumes responsibility for the mission, thereby expanding the reach of evangelization beyond ecclesial structures into the fabric of daily life¹⁸⁴.

Inculturation formed another major pillar of the address. John Paul II encouraged the faithful to integrate African cultural values such as language, music, symbolic expression, and communal identity into liturgy and catechesis, provided such adaptations remain faithful to the Gospel. His approach reflects his conviction that the Gospel does not abolish culture but purifies, elevates, and fulfils it. Bevans and Schroeder affirm that this approach strengthens evangelization by making the Christian message culturally intelligible while avoiding syncretism. For the Nigerian Church, this meant embracing the richness of African heritage as a vehicle for expressing the faith, while ensuring that cultural elements are harmonized with the Church's doctrinal and liturgical norms¹⁸⁵.

¹⁸³ Cf. M. Gallagher, *Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger*, New York: 2010, pp. 112–115.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. P. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, Maryknoll, NY: 1998, pp. 54–56.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. S. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, Maryknoll, NY: 2004, pp. 385–390.

The Holy Father, furthermore, underscores the social dimension of evangelization, insisting that Christian witness must address poverty, injustice, corruption, and threats to human dignity. He called for pastoral creativity and innovative strategies such as education, media outreach, and grassroots initiatives, while maintaining fidelity to the Church's doctrinal foundations. Shorter observes that this practical orientation equips the Church to respond effectively to contemporary challenges without compromising the integrity of the faith. John Paul II concluded by reminding the Nigerian Church that evangelization is both a privilege and a responsibility requiring courage, perseverance, and spiritual maturity. His 1982 visit thus laid a durable foundation for the Church's ongoing missionary efforts in Africa, shaping subsequent ecclesial initiatives and providing a theological and pastoral blueprint for the New Evangelization on the continent¹⁸⁶.

2.1.8 The Second Apostolic Visit to Nigeria: Renewing Missionary Identity through New Evangelization

At his second apostolic visit to Nigeria in 1998, John Paul II delivered an address that deepened his earlier vision of the New Evangelization by situating it within Nigeria's rapidly changing socio-political landscape. Speaking to clergy, religious, and laity, he emphasized the urgent need for a renewed proclamation of the Gospel capable of confronting secularization, moral relativism, and the pressures of modernization. He insisted that evangelization must unite fidelity to the Gospel with cultural sensitivity, especially in a nation marked by religious plurality and ethnic diversity. The Pope called for a revitalized commitment to pastoral care, catechesis, and active lay participation, presenting the New Evangelization not as an abstract theory but as a practical pastoral program for strengthening the Church's mission in Africa¹⁸⁷.

One remarkable theme of the 1998 visit was the promotion of Christ-centered evangelization, which the Pope described as the heart of all missionary activity. He reiterated that every form of evangelization must lead to a personal encounter with Jesus

¹⁸⁶ Cf. A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, London: 1994, pp. 72–75.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Homily at the Mass in Abuja, Nigeria* (22 March 1998), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXI/1, Vatican: 1998.

Christ, the source of authentic conversion and renewal. By urging Nigerian Christians to deepen their prayer life and sacramental participation, he underscored that missionary witness flows from interior transformation rather than external activism. This Christocentric approach reflects continuity with his global teaching, ensuring that the New Evangelization remains transformative, spiritually grounded, and resistant to reduction into mere social or institutional reform¹⁸⁸.

The Holy Father also stressed the indispensable role of the laity as active agents of evangelization, urging them to witness to the Gospel through family life, professional work, education, and civic engagement. He argued that lay participation enables the Gospel to permeate all levels of society, extending the Church's missionary presence beyond ecclesiastical structures. This emphasis reflects the vision of Vatican II, which Phan notes as foundational to understanding the Church as the People of God in which each baptized member shares a missionary vocation. By promoting collaboration between clergy, religious, and laity, John Paul II highlighted the communal nature of evangelization and the need for co-responsibility in sustaining missionary efforts in diverse and challenging contexts¹⁸⁹.

John Paul II's second visit also emphasizes that the Gospel must respect and elevate Nigerian cultural values while leading to authentic Christian conversion. He encouraged the integration of local languages, music, symbols, and traditions into catechesis, liturgy, and pastoral life, provided such adaptations remain faithful to the Church's doctrinal heritage, warning against both cultural imposition and syncretism, insisting that inculturation must safeguard the integrity of the faith. This approach ensures that the Church is both authentically Catholic and genuinely Nigerian, enabling evangelization to be culturally intelligible and spiritually transformative. Bevans and Schroeder affirm that such an approach strengthens missionary credibility and enhances the Church's capacity to communicate the Gospel effectively¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Ibidem. M. Gallagher, *Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger*, pp. 112–115.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Ibidem. P. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, pp. 54–56.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Ibidem. S. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, pp. 385–390.

The Pontiff also emphasized the social dimension of evangelization, teaching that the Church's mission includes promoting justice, peace, and human dignity. He linked faith with social action, arguing that evangelization must address both spiritual and societal needs. By encouraging the Church to engage in education, healthcare, and development initiatives, he demonstrated that Christian witness must be holistic, integrating proclamation with concrete expressions of charity. This approach reinforces the Church's credibility and fosters trust within communities. John Paul II also called for pastoral innovation and adaptability, urging the Church in Nigeria to develop creative strategies that remain faithful to the Gospel while responding effectively to contemporary challenges. Shorter notes that such innovation ensures that evangelization remains dynamic, relevant, and doctrinally sound¹⁹¹.

The Pontiff concluded by calling for perseverance, hope, and missionary zeal, reminding Nigerian Christians that evangelization is a demanding vocation requiring courage, dedication, and prayer. He emphasized spiritual fortitude as essential for sustaining missionary efforts in environments marked by secular pressures and social instability. By urging clergy, religious, and laity to work collaboratively and witness boldly, he reaffirmed the core principles of the New Evangelization: Christ-centeredness, inculturation, lay participation, social responsibility, and pastoral creativity. His 1998 address thus provided a comprehensive and practical framework for strengthening the Church's mission in Nigeria and across Africa, offering guidance that remains relevant for contemporary evangelizing efforts¹⁹².

2.2 The Basic Elements of New Evangelization in the Teachings of John Paul II

From the foregoing, it is evident that New Evangelization is not simply a strategy or program; it is a renewed spiritual and pastoral orientation that invites the Church to mission with fresh conviction, purpose, and creativity. It centres around three

¹⁹¹ Cf. Ibidem. A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, London: 1994, pp. 72–75.

¹⁹² John Paul II, *Address to Bishops of Nigeria on their Ad Limina Visit* (23 March 1998), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXI/1, Vatican: 1998.

interconnected elements: new ardour, new methods, and new expressions, forming a holistic framework that balances fidelity to the Gospel with adaptability to modern challenges. It highlights that spiritual renewal, cultural engagement, and pastoral creativity are key to ensuring that evangelization is relevant, dynamic, and transformative.

2.2.1 New Evangelization Calls for New Ardour

At the heart of the New Evangelization lies a call for rekindled fervour. John Paul II famously said: “The New Evangelization is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour”¹⁹³. This ardour must flow from personal holiness, joy, and a missionary spirituality rooted in daily conversion and Eucharistic renewal. The credibility of the message depends on the authentic witness of the messenger. Evangelizers are called to witness not with anxiety or bitterness, but with enthusiasm and joy, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives¹⁹⁴.

John Paul II emphasized that the New Evangelization requires new ardour, a renewed zeal and passion for proclaiming the Gospel in a world often indifferent to faith. This ardour begins with a personal encounter with Christ, as authentic evangelization cannot be sustained by routine or formalism alone¹⁹⁵. The clergy, religious, and laity must cultivate an interior life of prayer, sacramental participation, and personal holiness to strengthen their missionary witness. This fervour is essential for overcoming spiritual apathy and for motivating Christians to actively engage in evangelization within their communities¹⁹⁶. New ardour also entails courage and perseverance, as proclaiming the Gospel in contemporary society often faces cultural resistance, secularization, and moral relativism. His teaching underscores that this renewed passion is not merely emotional but deeply rooted in love for Christ and

¹⁹³ John Paul II, Address to Bishops in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1983.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome: 2013, no. 10.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome: 1990, no. 3.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Ibidem. Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 142.

concern for the salvation of souls. Ultimately, new ardour is the driving force that transforms pastoral efforts into authentic, life-giving missionary activity.

A key aspect of new ardour is the renewal of the Church's missionary spirit. John Paul II stressed that without zeal, evangelization risks becoming mechanical and ineffective. This missionary spirit calls for active participation in both local and global evangelizing efforts, emphasizing that every baptized Christian has a role in spreading the faith. Fostering missionary zeal among the faithful strengthens communal engagement, parish initiatives, and social outreach programs. In connection with hope, ardour teaches that Christians must trust in the Holy Spirit to guide their evangelization even amidst challenges. New ardour therefore combines personal sanctity with proactive mission, ensuring that faith is both lived and shared. This principle underscores that evangelization is not an optional activity but the central calling of every Christian¹⁹⁷.

Continuous formation equips Christians with the intellectual and spiritual tools necessary for effective evangelization. Contemporary thoughts hold that formation fosters resilience and adaptability, enabling missionaries to respond creatively to modern challenges. This ongoing preparation strengthens confidence in proclaiming the Gospel in diverse contexts. Formation also nurtures discernment, helping the faithful recognize the most effective ways to witness in their unique environments. Through formation, ardour becomes informed, disciplined, and sustainable. The new ardour requires continuous spiritual formation, calling the faithful to a deeper knowledge of Scripture, Church teaching, and the lives of the saints as sources of inspiration and guidance (cf. Rom. 12:2).

A significant dimension of new ardour is its communal character. He strongly holds that missionary zeal is not limited to individual action but flourishes when the entire Church participates in evangelization. Here collaboration among clergy, religious, and laity, enhancing the Church's overall missionary impact is paramount. Parishes, dioceses, and ecclesial movements become platforms where ardour is shared,

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 46.

multiplied, and expressed through coordinated pastoral initiatives. Communities are required to support one another in prayer, catechesis, and social action as part of their evangelizing mission. This communal ardour strengthens identity, accountability, and resilience in missionary work. By fostering shared zeal, the Church becomes a vibrant witness to Christ's love¹⁹⁸.

New ardour also demands a creative and courageous approach to evangelization. Christians must boldly engage the modern world, using innovative methods and contemporary tools to communicate the Gospel¹⁹⁹. Creativity in mission ensures relevance and responsiveness to societal changes, including technological advancements, cultural pluralism, and secular ideologies. Boldness in witness requires courage to challenge injustice, defend human dignity, and proclaim moral truths in secular contexts. It also entails flexibility in pastoral approaches without compromising doctrinal integrity. This creative ardour allows evangelization to be dynamic and impactful. In this sense, zeal becomes both imaginative and resilient, capable of addressing contemporary challenges.

The ethical and spiritual foundation of new ardour is love. John Paul II consistently linked missionary zeal to love for God and neighbour, stressing the idea that evangelization is an expression of charity and pastoral care²⁰⁰. Peter Phan argues, that this love-oriented zeal motivates selfless service, compassionate outreach, and authentic witness. Love ensures that missionary efforts are not driven by personal ambition or institutional prestige but by the desire to bring others into communion with Christ. Ardour grounded in love fosters credibility, moral authority, and relational impact in evangelization. By integrating love with zeal, evangelization becomes transformative for both evangelizer and recipient. This principle demonstrates that New Evangelization is inherently relational, rooted in the heart of Christ²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Ibidem. no. 26.

¹⁹⁹ Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, Rome: 2019, no. 246.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 89.

²⁰¹ P. Phan. *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and inculturation in seventeenth-century Vietnam*, Maryknoll, NY: 1998, pp. 34–36

New ardour presents a call to perseverance and hope. Missionary activity often encounters obstacles such as indifference, persecution, or cultural resistance, yet zeal sustained by hope ensures continuity and fruitfulness. This enduring zeal inspires communities to remain committed despite challenges. The Holy Father affirms that ardour, when nurtured through prayer, formation, and love, empowers the Church to transform societies and cultures. Ultimately, new ardour is the foundational element of the New Evangelization, motivating the faithful to proclaim Christ boldly, creatively, and compassionately. It ensures that evangelization is effective, sustainable, and rooted in the Gospel. Bevens & Schroeder hold that combining perseverance, hope, and passion strengthens the Church's missionary witness over time²⁰².

2.2.2 New Evangelization is New in Methods

In an age shaped by rapid technological, cultural, and social transformation, the Church faces the urgent task of re-imagining how it proclaims the Gospel. The rapid evolution of digital communication, global interconnectedness, and shifting patterns of human interaction has created new opportunities and challenges for evangelization. As a result, the Church must adopt new tools and strategies, ranging from social media outreach and virtual communities to podcasts, livestreamed liturgies, and interactive catechetical platforms to ensure that the Gospel remains audible within contemporary culture. Importantly, the adoption of “new methods” does not imply a rupture with tradition; rather, it reflects a dynamic continuity in which timeless truths are expressed in forms that resonate with modern sensibilities. Emerging pastoral structures such as small Christian communities, ecclesial movements, and youth-driven missionary initiatives exemplify these new pathways, offering spaces for personal encounter, accompaniment, and communal support that are essential for evangelization today²⁰³.

The call for renewed evangelizing approaches is put forward to communicate the Gospel effectively in a rapidly changing world. While traditional pastoral practices retain enduring value, they must be complemented by strategies that respond to shifting

²⁰² S. Bevens and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, NY: 2004, pp. 348–350.

²⁰³ Cf. Ibidem. Vatican II, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

cultural, social, and technological realities. Magisterial teaching highlights the importance of media, education, and public engagement as essential instruments for evangelization, enabling the Church to reach broader and more diverse audiences. Such adaptability ensures that the Church remains present and credible in contemporary society while maintaining fidelity to its doctrinal foundations. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder further argue that renewed methods must be rooted in contextualization, an approach that respects and integrates local cultural values, symbols, and worldviews. By uniting tradition with creativity, evangelization becomes more accessible, engaging, and transformative across diverse social landscapes²⁰⁴.

A central dimension of these renewed methods is the integration of technology and media into the Church's missionary practice. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Church has recognized the potential of radio, television, film, and digital platforms to reach individuals who might otherwise remain untouched by conventional pastoral outreach. Media-based evangelization expands the Church's missionary reach and engages people through familiar and culturally relevant forms of communication. This approach allows catechesis, moral formation, and spiritual guidance to transcend geographical boundaries and temporal limitations. Paul Soukup and Clifford G. Christians emphasize that storytelling, documentary production, and educational programming can serve as powerful tools for evangelization, shaping moral imagination and fostering ethical reflection. By leveraging media wisely, the Church can address contemporary issues, promote critical engagement with culture, and nurture deeper faith formation. These renewed methods thus combine traditional pastoral care with innovative communication strategies, ensuring that the Gospel remains compelling and persuasive in the modern world²⁰⁵.

Pastoral contextualization represents another essential methodological principle for contemporary evangelization. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and theologians such as Robert Schreiter argue that evangelization must be sensitive to the social, cultural, and

²⁰⁴ Cf. Ibidem. S. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, pp. 348–350.

²⁰⁵ Cf. C. Christians & P. Soukup, *Communication and Change in American Catholicism*, Kansas City, MO: 1993, pp. 112–118.

economic realities of the communities being served. Contextual approaches enable missionaries to engage people meaningfully, respecting local customs while presenting the Gospel authentically. This includes the use of local languages, cultural symbols, music, and artistic expressions in catechesis and liturgy. It also requires attentiveness to societal challenges poverty, injustice, secularization, and cultural fragmentation so that evangelization addresses both human and spiritual needs. Through contextualized methods, the Gospel becomes relevant, relatable, and transformative, balancing fidelity to Christian truth with responsiveness to cultural diversity²⁰⁶.

Collaboration and participation are equally essential components of renewed evangelization. *Christifideles Laici* and contemporary pastoral thinkers emphasize that effective missionary activity requires cooperation among clergy, religious, and laity, fostering shared responsibility for the Church's mission. Collaborative approaches draw upon the gifts, talents, and expertise of all members of the Church, enhancing pastoral effectiveness and creativity. Lay involvement in education, media, social outreach, and parish ministries ensures that evangelization permeates multiple levels of society. Such cooperation also encourages innovation, as diverse perspectives generate creative responses to pastoral challenges. Shared responsibility strengthens community life and enhances the credibility of evangelization efforts, making new methods dynamic, sustainable, and deeply rooted in the lived experience of the people of God²⁰⁷.

Creativity is another hallmark of renewed missionary practice. Peter C. Phan and Stephen Bevans argue that pastoral initiatives must respond imaginatively to secularization, moral relativism, and religious indifference. Creative methods allow the Church to communicate timeless truths in ways that engage modern audiences without compromising doctrinal integrity. Examples include youth ministry programs, social justice initiatives, online catechesis, community development projects, and artistic evangelization. Creativity also involves adapting strategies to specific local contexts, ensuring relevance and impact. By uniting innovation with fidelity, the Church can

²⁰⁶ R. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll, NY: 1985, pp. 12–18.

²⁰⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, Rome: 1988, nos. 32–33.

address contemporary spiritual and social needs effectively, expanding the reach and depth of its missionary work²⁰⁸.

Evaluation and reflection are also vital for implementing new methods effectively. Pastoral leaders are encouraged to assess the impact of their strategies and adapt them as necessary. Scholars such as Anthony Gittins note that evaluation ensures evangelization remains responsive, effective, and faithful to the Gospel. Feedback from communities, pastoral experience, and empirical research helps refine methods and discern which approaches best nurture faith, foster discipleship, and engage society. This ongoing process of reflection and adaptation embodies the Church's commitment to continual renewal in mission, ensuring that evangelization remains dynamic, contextually relevant, and pastorally effective²⁰⁹.

Ultimately, all new methods serve the goal of forming disciples. Innovative approaches must lead to a deeper encounter with Christ and fuller participation in the life of the Church. Methods alone are insufficient; their purpose is to nurture faith, transform lives, and inspire missionary commitment. Evangelization must integrate proclamation, catechesis, liturgy, and service into coherent pastoral strategies. By employing new methods creatively and contextually, the Church can engage hearts and minds more effectively. This holistic approach ensures that evangelization is both relevant and transformative, making renewed methods practical instruments for realizing the vision of the New Evangelization²¹⁰.

2.2.3 New Evangelization is New in Expressions

Language, symbols, and gestures must speak meaningfully to contemporary experiences if evangelization is to remain effective in a rapidly changing world. This requires sensitivity to cultural diversity, openness to dialogue, and a readiness to listen and adapt without diluting the faith. Artistic forms such as music, storytelling, visual art, and popular religiosity can communicate the Gospel's beauty and relevance in ways

²⁰⁸ Cf. Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, Maryknoll, NY: 2004, pp. 52–55.

²⁰⁹ Cf. A. Gittins, *Ministry at the Margins*, Maryknoll, NY: 2002, pp. 101–105

²¹⁰ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 46.

that transcend intellectual discourse. Evangelization must be expressed through forms that resonate with people's lived experiences, using language, art, music, and cultural symbols that carry meaning within local contexts. Anscar Chupungco emphasize that expressions of faith must be "incarnational," touching the imagination and engaging the heart. These renewed expressions enable the Church to reach diverse audiences without compromising doctrinal integrity, making the Gospel accessible and transformative²¹¹.

A key aspect of new expressions is the integration of cultural elements into evangelization. The use of local music, art, and ritual forms in liturgy and catechesis reflects the identity and heritage of communities and allows the Gospel to be incarnated within the life of the people. Lamin Sanneh highlight that cultural adaptation promotes deeper understanding and acceptance, ensuring that evangelization is not perceived as a foreign imposition but as a genuine dialogue between faith and culture. Incorporating cultural elements also fosters a sense of ownership and participation among the faithful, strengthening their commitment to mission. Rooting expressions in cultural reality demonstrates respect for human dignity and diversity, underscoring the importance of contextualization as a foundational element of missionary work²¹².

The role of language is central to the development of new expressions. Evangelization must employ languages familiar to local communities so that the message of Christ can be clearly understood and internalized. Kwame Bediako postulates that the use of vernacular languages in liturgy, preaching, and catechesis enhances participation and fosters deeper spiritual engagement. Language serves as a bridge between faith and culture, enabling evangelizers to communicate effectively while respecting local identity. It also allows theological concepts to be transmitted in ways that are comprehensible and meaningful. Prioritizing language ensures that the Gospel speaks directly to the hearts and minds of the people, reflecting a pastoral sensitivity essential for successful evangelization²¹³.

²¹¹ A. Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy*, New York: 1982, pp. 14–18.

²¹² Cf. L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, NY: 1989), pp. 1–15.

²¹³ Cf. K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, Edinburgh: 1995, pp. 98–104.

Another dimension of new expressions is the use of contemporary media and technology. Media evangelization enables the Church to transcend geographical and cultural barriers, extending its missionary reach globally. This includes producing culturally relevant content, educational programs, and online catechesis that engage both youth and adults through radio, television, print media, and digital platforms. Communication theorist such as Heidi Campbell note that media not only transmit messages but shape the way people perceive reality, making them powerful tools for evangelization. New media expressions complement traditional methods, ensuring that evangelization remains dynamic and adaptable. By using contemporary media, the Church can effectively proclaim Christ in the digital age, reaching individuals who may never encounter the Gospel through conventional means²¹⁴.

Evangelization is not limited to words or rituals but includes deeds that witness to God's love and justice. Charitable initiatives, community development, and advocacy for human dignity are vital expressions of the Gospel in action. These expressions communicate faith in tangible ways, demonstrating the Church's commitment to holistic human development. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a renowned theologian emphasizes that authentic evangelization integrates proclamation with concrete acts of solidarity. Social expressions of evangelization foster credibility and trust within communities, showing that the Church's mission is not merely theoretical but deeply rooted in service. This holistic approach reinforces the intrinsic connection between belief and behaviour in missionary work²¹⁵.

Creativity and imagination are essential in developing new expressions for evangelization. Pastoral leaders are encouraged to explore innovative artistic, cultural, and educational forms to convey the Gospel in a rapidly changing digital world. Scholars such as Charles Taylor submits that creative expressions help the Church engage contemporary audiences effectively while maintaining doctrinal authenticity. Art, drama, music, and storytelling can serve as powerful tools for evangelization, capturing attention and inspiring reflection. Creative expressions make the message of

²¹⁴ Cf. H. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, New York: 2010, pp. 45–52.

²¹⁵ Cf. G. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, Maryknoll, NY: 1991, pp. 89–94.

Christ memorable and impactful, while also allowing communities to participate actively in evangelization by expressing their faith in culturally meaningful ways. This approach highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of the New Evangelization²¹⁶.

All adaptations, innovations, and cultural incorporations must ultimately lead to a deeper encounter with Christ and active participation in the life and mission of the Church. Without this Christ-centered focus, creative expressions risk becoming mere entertainment or cultural display. Effective expressions integrate proclamation, catechesis, worship, and service into coherent, transformative experiences of faith. Stephen Pattison believes that evangelization must inspire both personal conversion and communal engagement. New expressions ensure that evangelization is relevant, engaging, and spiritually formative. In this way, the Church communicates the timeless Gospel in ways that speak to contemporary hearts and minds, underscoring the adaptive, creative, and Christ-centered character of the New Evangelization²¹⁷.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how John Paul II's engagements across homilies, apostolic exhortations, encyclicals, and pastoral addresses provide a coherent vision for contemporary missionary activity. In analysing his addresses to global audiences, including visits to Poland, Haiti, Africa and Nigeria, it is evident that he envisioned evangelization as both a universal and local endeavour, attentive to diverse cultural, social, and historical realities.

Additionally, he highlights that evangelization transcends foreign missions, calling for the revitalization of faith within established Christian communities, particularly in regions affected by secularization or moral decline. His teaching underscores that missionary efforts must be culturally sensitive, engaging all peoples and respecting local traditions, languages, and expressions, thereby making the Gospel accessible, relevant, and transformative in every context. By combining Christocentric focus,

²¹⁶ Cf. C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA: 2007, pp. 710–716.

²¹⁷ Cf. S. Pattison, *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts*, London: 2007, pp. 134–140.

shared responsibility, cultural engagement, and missionary spirituality, he envisions a holistic, dynamic, and inclusive framework for proclaiming the Gospel in the contemporary world. Consequently, his theological principles call for a Church that is missionary by nature, renewed in spirit, attentive to cultural diversity, and committed to forming disciples who actively participate in the mission of Christ to the ends of the earth.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA AND ITS MISSION OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter critically examines the intrinsic nature of the Church in Nigeria, with a focused lens on the Catholic Church, which remains one of the country's most enduring and influential religious institutions compared to protestant and Pentecostal movements. Its presence, spanning several centuries, encompasses a multifaceted mission integrating spiritual, educational, social, and developmental dimensions. The Catholic Church in Nigeria, grounded in the universal tradition of Catholicism, functions as a visible sign of faith within this pluralistic society. Notwithstanding the evident commitment among many Catholics who daily strive to worship God "in spirit and truth," a paradoxical rise in religious activities has not corresponded with a decline in societal ills and vices. The Catholic faith which was once embraced by many is still being abandoned by some as a result of social changes and inadequate catechesis. This stark reality underscores the critical importance of the concept of the New Evangelization, as promulgated by the Church. Consequently, this chapter seeks to provide an insightful analysis into the contemporary situation of Christians and Christianity in Nigeria, highlighting the collaborative roles of clergy and laity in realizing the missionary objectives of the New Evangelization. It also discusses key elements underpinning mission, collaboration, faith formation, and ecclesial synodality.

3.1 An Overview of the Mission of the Church in Nigeria

The Catholic Church in Nigeria has undergone a profound transformation since its inception around the 15th century, through early missionary efforts, evolving into a dynamic and multifaceted institution that significantly shapes the nation's spiritual, educational, humanitarian, and socio-political spheres. Rooted in the pioneering work of missionaries who laid the foundation for Christian evangelization, the Church has expanded its influence far beyond religious instruction. Its historical trajectory reflects a deepening engagement with Nigeria's diverse ethnic and cultural tapestry, adapting

its practices and outreach to resonate with local traditions while maintaining its universal doctrine. Today, the Catholic Church stands as a cornerstone of national development. Through its vast network of schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations, it has contributed immensely to human capital development and social welfare. The Church's advocacy for justice, peace, and good governance positions it as a moral compass in Nigeria's complex political landscape, often serving as a voice for the marginalized and a mediator in times of national crisis²¹⁸. However, the contemporary era presents both opportunities and challenges for missionary engagement. Rapid urbanization, religious pluralism, and socio-economic disparities demand innovative pastoral strategies and deeper interfaith dialogue. Despite these hurdles, the Church remains a resilient and transformative force, an enduring beacon of hope, compassion, and spiritual renewal for millions in the nation.

Nigeria, located in the western region of Africa, is a federal republic composed of thirty-six (36) states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with Abuja serving as the administrative and political capital. The country's geography is remarkably diverse, encompassing coastal plains in the south, expansive savannahs in the north, and elevated highlands in the central and eastern regions. This varied terrain supports a tropical climate characterized by distinct dry and rainy seasons, which in turn fosters agricultural productivity and sustains a wide range of human settlements. Nigeria's natural features, including the Niger and Benue rivers, not only shape its ecological zones but also play a crucial role in transportation, irrigation, and energy generation²¹⁹. Linguistically, Nigeria reflects a rich cultural heritage. English, the official language, is a vestige of British colonial rule and serves as the primary medium for government, education, and inter-ethnic communication. However, the country's true linguistic identity is rooted in its over 350 indigenous ethnic groups, which mirrors its ethnic complexity. Among these, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba stand out as the three dominant languages, each associated with a major regional bloc: Hausa in the north, Igbo in the

²¹⁸ Cf. A. Oluwasegun, C. Adeleye, and O. Olakanmi, *The Church and National Development in Nigeria: A Historical Survey*, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, National Open University of Nigeria, Osogbo. June 2025, pp. 99-118.

²¹⁹ Cf. U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Nigeria: Country Analysis," <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/NGA>, (accessed 10/10/2024).

southeast, and Yoruba in the southwest. These languages are not only widely spoken but also deeply embedded in the cultural, religious, and social life of their respective regions. The coexistence of such linguistic and ethnic diversity within a single national framework presents both opportunities for cultural enrichment and challenges for national integration. The religious landscape is equally complex, with Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) coexisting within local communities and even families²²⁰. This pluralism necessitates interfaith dialogue and a theology that is both inclusive and responsive to local realities.

Nigeria's political history has significantly shaped the Church's role in society. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule on 1 October 1960, the country has experienced alternating periods of democratic governance and military dictatorship. One of the most defining episodes in its post-independence history was the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), also known as the “Biafran War”. Rooted in ethnic tensions and political marginalization, the conflict resulted in immense loss of life and threatened national unity²²¹. In the aftermath, religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, played a pivotal role in reconciliation, reconstruction, and the reassertion of national identity. Through its moral leadership and humanitarian outreach, the Church helped to heal divisions and foster a sense of collective purpose making the message of the Gospel of Christ resonate and find expression in the hearts of the people.

Christianity was first introduced to Nigeria in the 15th century by Portuguese missionaries who established early contact in the Kingdom of Benin and Warri regions²²². However, sustained missionary activity did not begin until the 19th century, when British Protestant missionaries and freed African slaves returning from Sierra Leone arrived. These returnees, especially those of Yoruba origin known as *Saro* or *Aguda* were instrumental in establishing Christian communities, schools, and churches

²²⁰ Cf. Pew Research Center, *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: 2010, p. 12. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/04/15/tolerance-and-tension-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa/> (pewresearch.org in Bing) (accessed 2/3/2025).

²²¹ Cf. A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Enugu: 1980, pp. 12-15.

²²² Cf. E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. New Jersey: 1995, pp. 302-303.

in southwestern Nigeria²²³. The Church Missionary Society (CMS), a British Anglican organization, commenced its mission in Nigeria in 1842. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba ex-slave and the first African Anglican bishop, played a seminal role in translating the Bible into Yoruba and promoting indigenous leadership within the Church²²⁴. Through the efforts of early missionaries, Catholicism was formally introduced to Nigeria in the mid-19th century through missionary efforts led by the Society of African Missions (SMA) and the Holy Ghost Fathers. These missionaries established foundational structures for evangelization, including parishes, schools, and hospitals, particularly in the southern and middle belt regions of the country²²⁵. The Church's growth was facilitated by its emphasis on education, healthcare, and social justice, which resonated with local communities and contributed to its rapid expansion. These efforts laid the foundation for a robust ecclesiastical structure that would later flourish across the country.

Over the decades, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has made remarkable progress in spiritual, pastoral, social, and humanitarian dimensions. Foreign faith-based institutions such as *Propaganda Fidei*, Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), *Missio, Misereor*, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have provided critical support to the Church's development. Their contributions have enabled the Church to expand its reach and deepen its impact providing funds for training of priests and religious, offering humanitarian support in times of crisis and floods, building churches schools in rural areas and many others. Statistics indicate that the Church in Nigeria has nine ecclesiastical provinces, sixty dioceses, four cardinals (serving and retired), seventy bishops, over 4,250 priests, and an estimated Catholic population of fifty million²²⁶. According to the Vatican's 2023 global Catholic statistical data, the worldwide Catholic population increased from 1.358 billion to 1.375 billion, with Africa recording the

²²³ Cf. E. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914*. London: 1966, pp. 43-45.

²²⁴ Cf. L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. New York: 1989, pp. 163-165.

²²⁵ Cf. Ibidem. E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*, pp. 304-305.

²²⁶ BusinessDay NG, "DR Congo, Nigeria Lead in Africa as Global Catholic Population Increases," 2023. <https://businessday.ng/life/article/dr-congo-nigeria-lead-in-africa-as-global-catholic-population-increase-1-15-in-2023/> (accessed 30/5/2025).

largest growth, 8.3 million new Catholics and 1,518 additional priests. Nigeria leads globally in weekly Mass attendance, with 94 percent of Catholics attending regularly, underscoring the nation's spiritual potentials as a missionary-sending country²²⁷.

In the contemporary era, the Church in Nigeria continues to thrive, facing both opportunities and challenges. One of the most promising developments is the vocation boom. There has been a notable increase in religious vocations, with many young Nigerians gaining admission to seminaries, theological institutions, and missionary orders. This reflects a growing spiritual consciousness and a desire among the youth to contribute to societal transformation through faith-based service²²⁸, despite the interreligious crisis being experienced in the nation. The local Church also plays a critical role in promoting human development by fostering moral values, leadership skills, and community engagement. They serve as platforms for personal growth and social cohesion, particularly in regions affected by poverty and conflict²²⁹. Missionary-founded schools remain among the most respected educational institutions in Nigeria. These schools have historically produced many of the country's intellectual and political elites and continue to offer quality education, especially in underserved areas²³⁰.

Healthcare is another domain where the Church's impact is profound. Church-run hospitals and clinics provide essential medical services, often serving as the only accessible healthcare facilities in rural communities. Their contributions to maternal health, disease prevention, and emergency care are widely recognized²³¹. In addition to healthcare, churches actively engage in social welfare programs, offering food, shelter, and financial assistance to the poor, widows, orphans, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These efforts are particularly vital in regions affected by insurgency and

²²⁷ Cf. CCRN Blog, *Vatican Releases Global Catholic Statistical Data*, 2023.
<https://www.ccrnigeria.org/blog/Vatican-Release> (accessed 9/7/2025)

²²⁸ Cf. N. Omenka, *The Catholic Church and the Politics of Education in Nigeria*, "Journal of African Studies" 12, no. 3, 1993, pp. 45–67.

²²⁹ Cf. O. Agbiji and I. Swart, "Religion and Social Transformation in Africa," *Scriptura* 114, no. 1, 2015, pp.1-20.

²³⁰ Cf. N. Otonti, *Education and the Challenge of National Integration in Nigeria*. Enugu; 1975, pp. 67-69.

²³¹ Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *Diocesan Health Coordination Reports 2020*. Abuja: CSN Health Unit, 2020, pp. 5–7.

economic hardship²³². Missionary organizations also initiate various development projects, including clean water access, agricultural training, vocational empowerment, and infrastructure development. These projects contribute to sustainable development and community resilience²³³.

The promotion of indigenous clergy and religious has significantly contributed to the Church's expansion within and beyond Nigeria. When Paul VI addressed the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in Kampala in 1969, he declared, "Africa, you are your own missionaries"²³⁴. This statement resonates today, with the emergence of a vibrant and robust network of indigenous clergy, working assiduously to ensure contextualized evangelization and sustainable growth, thereby, positioning Nigeria as a key player in global Catholicism. The Church in Nigeria has also embraced modern communication tools to advance its evangelizing mission. Catholic Television of Nigeria (CTV), Radio Maria, Catholic newspapers, journals, diocesan websites, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter play a vital role in catechesis and information dissemination. These platforms enable real-time engagement with youth and diaspora communities, support faith formation, and provide theological education in accessible formats. Despite its growth and dynamism, the Church faces significant challenges. Technological shifts, cultural secularization, and socio-political instability threaten its influence and sustainability. The rise of religious extremism, economic inequality, and youth disenchantment poses serious risks. Historical precedents from North Africa and Asia Minor regions once vibrant with Christian institutions serve as cautionary tales about the vulnerability of institutional religion to sociocultural erosion²³⁵.

The nature of the Catholic Church in Nigeria is thus characterized by its dual identity, as a religious community rooted in apostolic tradition and as a transformative agent within Nigerian society. Its resilience amid socio-political challenges and its

²³² M. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993, pp. 211–213.

²³³ Cf. J. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite*. London: 1965, pp. 241–243.

²³⁴ Paul VI, Homily, *Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa*, Rome: 1969, no. 1

²³⁵ Cf. P. Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*. San Francisco: 2008, pp. 53–55.

commitment to holistic human development underscore its significance in shaping the moral and civic landscape of the nation. More than ever before, the clergy, the religious and the laity can collaborate effectively for evangelizing mission of the church in the light of the teaching of John Paul II.

The Church operates through a hierarchical structure led by bishops and archbishops, under the spiritual authority of the Pope who is the universal leader of the Church. The Church's liturgical life is marked by the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, and its pastoral mission includes catechesis, youth formation, and interreligious dialogue. Beyond its spiritual mandate, the Catholic Church in Nigeria plays a pivotal role in national development. It runs hundreds of primary and secondary schools, tertiary institutions, hospitals, and vocational centres²³⁶. Through organizations such as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), the Church engages in advocacy on issues of governance, human rights, and peacebuilding. It also contributes to humanitarian efforts, particularly in regions affected by poverty, conflict, and displacement. At this point, it is worth noting that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is both a product and a shaper of the nation's history and identity. From its early missionary roots to its current role in education, healthcare, and social development, it remains a vital force for transformation. As Nigeria continues to navigate its complex realities, the Church's ability to adapt, innovate, and remain faithful to its mission will determine its future relevance and impact²³⁷.

3.2 Christian Family at the Root of New Evangelization in Nigeria

The Christian family stands as the foundational locus of the New Evangelization in Nigeria because it is the primary environment in which faith is received, interpreted, and transmitted across generations. In a nation marked by cultural plurality, rapid urbanization, economic instability, and the persistent influence of traditional religious worldviews, the family remains the most stable institution capable of shaping Christian identity from childhood. The New Evangelization recognizes that renewal cannot be

²³⁶ Cf. A. Oluwasegun et al. "The Church and National Development in Nigeria. pp. 99–118.

²³⁷ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. *Pastoral Letters and Communiqués*. <https://cbcn-ng.org/documents.php> (accessed 25/10/2025).

achieved solely through institutional programs or ecclesial structures; it must begin where human formation is most intimate and enduring. The Nigerian family, with its strong emphasis on kinship, communal solidarity, and moral upbringing, provides fertile ground for evangelization when these cultural strengths are integrated with Christian values. As the “domestic church,” the family becomes the first school of discipleship, where children learn prayer, moral responsibility, and the meaning of community life, underscoring the fact that Christian families are “the meeting point of life, religion, and morality,” making them indispensable for any authentic evangelizing mission²³⁸.

The family also plays a decisive role in shaping the moral and spiritual character of Nigerian society, which faces challenges such as corruption, violence, materialism, and social fragmentation. In this context, the Christian family becomes a counter-cultural witness to honesty, forgiveness, and solidarity. Parents who model Christian virtues such as fidelity, compassion, and justice form children capable of contributing to the transformation of society. The New Evangelization calls families to be active agents of moral renewal, not only within the home but also in schools, workplaces, and civic life. When families embody the Gospel, they become powerful instruments of evangelization in their communities, demonstrating that African moral life is fundamentally communal, and therefore the renewal of society must begin with the renewal of the family as the nucleus of moral formation²³⁹.

Intergenerational transmission of faith is another critical dimension of the family’s role in the New Evangelization. In many Nigerian communities, grandparents, parents, and extended relatives play active roles in religious formation through storytelling, shared prayer, and participation in parish life. This intergenerational dynamic strengthens continuity in faith and preserves Christian identity amid cultural shifts. The New Evangelization emphasizes that catechesis cannot be limited to parish programs; it must be rooted in daily family life. Families that pray together, read Scripture, and participate actively in the sacraments create an environment where faith becomes a lived

²³⁸ Cf. J. S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: 1969, p. 106

²³⁹ Cf. B. Bujo. *The Ethical Dimension of Community*. Nairobi: 1998, p. 14

reality rather than a mere tradition, pointing out the fact that the Christian faith thrives where faith is woven into the fabric of everyday family life, making the home a privileged space of evangelization²⁴⁰.

The Christian family also serves as a vital partner to the Church's pastoral mission in Nigeria. Parishes rely heavily on families for leadership in Small Christian Communities, youth formation, charitable outreach, and liturgical participation. When families are spiritually strong, parishes become vibrant centers of evangelization. Conversely, when families are weakened by poverty, migration, marital instability, or cultural pressures, the Church's mission is significantly hindered. Strengthening family life is therefore a strategic priority for the New Evangelization in Nigeria, requiring pastoral programs that support marriage preparation, parenting, economic empowerment, and spiritual formation. The vitality of the Church in Nigeria depends on the active participation of families who embody the Gospel in their daily lives²⁴¹.

In addition, the Christian family is uniquely positioned to evangelize through witness in everyday life. Nigeria's religious landscape marked by Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions creates opportunities for peaceful coexistence and interreligious dialogue. Families that practice hospitality, respect, and peaceful engagement with neighbours of other faiths contribute to social harmony and open doors for authentic evangelization. Their daily witness becomes a living proclamation of the Gospel, especially in regions affected by religious tension or violence, showing that Christian witnessing in Nigeria is most credible when it is embodied in ordinary relationships and communal interactions rather than confined to formal preaching alone²⁴².

In a similar way, the Christian family is the seedbed of vocations, providing the spiritual and emotional environment in which future priests, religious, and committed lay leaders are formed. The New Evangelization in Nigeria depends on such vocations to sustain pastoral ministry, education, healthcare, and social transformation. Families that cultivate love, prayer, and service nurture future leaders who will carry the mission

²⁴⁰ Cf. A. E. Orobator. *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*. Nairobi: 2008, p. 52

²⁴¹ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, Collegeville: 1997, p. 27

²⁴² Cf. K. Bediako. *Christianity in Africa*, Edinburgh: 1995, p. 88

of the Church into the next generation. The renewal and transformation of the Church in Nigeria must begin with families that embody the Gospel and inspire their children to embrace lives of service and discipleship²⁴³.

3.3 The Role of the Clergy in the Mission of New Evangelization

This “Instruction” *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy upon the approval of Pope John Paul II as signed by Dario Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos (Prefect of the Congregation) and Csaba Ternyak (Secretary of the Congregation and Titular Archbishop of Eminenziana) highlights the important role of the Parish Priest (Pastor) as he works within the parish community amidst the ever growing challenges occasioned by societal dynamisms in the era of new millennium. It seeks to offer clarity on the enormous task of pastoral activity, drawing a distinction between the common priesthood of the baptized and the priesthood of the ordained. It emphasizes the centrality of Christ as the prominent figure in the Church’s mission. The instruction is divided in two parts: the first draws largely from the teaching of Vatican II and some Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortations such as *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. Whereas the second part hinges on pastoral ministry in relation to the living experiences of the Priest as teacher of the word, minister of the sacrament and leader of the Parish community²⁴⁴.

An examination of this instruction draws attention to the indispensable role of the priest as the animator and shepherd of the people of God. When the priest acts, he does not do so on his own accord, he acts *in persona Christi* (the person of Christ). Hence, he is the custodian of the Good News of Christ and the herald of the message of salvation. He ought to bring Christ to the people and the people to Christ. The instruction stresses the identity of the priest in three aspects: Pneumatological, Christological and Ecclesiological. In the pneumatological sense, the priest’s ministry is animated by the Holy Spirit, who empowers him to sanctify and guide the faithful. In

²⁴³ Cf. J. Éla. *My Faith as an African*. Maryknoll: 1988, p. 19

²⁴⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community: Instruction*, Vatican, August 4, 2002, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_20020804_istruzio-ne-presbitero_en.html (accessed 4/10/2025).

the Christological dimension, the priest acts *in persona Christi*, configured to Christ the Good Shepherd, and thus becomes a visible sign of Christ's presence in the sacraments and pastoral care. In the ecclesiological aspect, the priest is embedded within the Church's mission, serving as a pastor who fosters communion, unity, and reconciliation in the Christian community. Together, these dimensions reveal the priest not merely as a functionary but as a spiritual leader and pastor entrusted with the *cura animarum*, the care of souls, at the heart of parish life²⁴⁵.

The instruction buttresses the fact that unless the priest nourishes his call through a life of prayer and constant communion with God, he may encounter spiritual fatigue and dryness thereby making it difficult for him to carry out his pastoral activities effectively. It is pertinent to note that the priest who is the minister of the word of God and the sacraments, should carry out his activities with appropriate reverence, due decorum and required sanctity. The holiness of the life of a priest has direct bearing on the sanctification and edification of the worshipping community²⁴⁶. The priest as pastor and leader of the Parish community remains the center of unity and has the responsibility to foster communion among her members through sincere and honest dialogue. The priest ought to be a bridge builder and a reconciler. He should seek to collaborate with the members of the parish council to ensure the smooth running of the parish activities. Furthermore, the instruction points out the important work of the priest as it relates to his diligent and faithful teaching of sound doctrines as laid down by the Church. He needs to refute false teaching and modern negative ideologies²⁴⁷.

Consequently, it outlines the duties of lay persons who by virtue of their baptism share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ. The laity are referred to as those who share in the common priesthood. The Vatican II council's documents, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* opens up on the way in which the faithful can collaborate with their priest thereby bringing about greater harmony and synergy²⁴⁸. It points to the reality that women are also active and dynamic agents of evangelization and should

²⁴⁵ Cf. Ibidem, no. 5

²⁴⁶ Cf. Ibidem, no. 9.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Ibidem, no. 16.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Vatican II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Rome: 1965, no. 10

seek to follow the footsteps of the Blessed Virgin Mary, star of evangelization. However, the instruction warns us of the dangers of “clericalization” of the laity and “secularization” of the clergy²⁴⁹. This arises when the generous commitment of lay persons in areas of liturgy, catechesis and pastoral collaboration, due to shortage of priest, results in a situation whereby the priest or laity steps beyond their bounds or compromise certain standards set up by the Church in order to meet up a pastoral necessity. The priest must not sublet or confuse his priestly role with that of the laity. There should be a clear cut distinction and boundary set aside when it comes to the sacramental duties of the priest. In other words, the priest is required to do all but that which pertains to his function, the laity is also required to do likewise. The clergy and laity ought not to do that which is beyond their ontological sacramental capacities²⁵⁰.

The mission of New Evangelization, as envisioned by John Paul II, calls for a re-proclamation of the Gospel in regions where Christianity has long been established but is now challenged by secularism, religious pluralism, and cultural shifts. The clergy according to John Paul II bear a unique responsibility in the New Evangelization as ministers configured to Christ the Good Shepherd. He stresses that priests must cultivate deep interior holiness, pastoral charity, and doctrinal fidelity so that their ministry becomes a credible sign of Christ’s presence. For him, priestly identity is inseparable from mission, noting that the renewal of evangelization depends on priests who preach the Gospel with conviction, celebrate the sacraments reverently, and guide the faithful with spiritual wisdom. Their witness strengthens ecclesial communion and inspires the wider Church to embrace its missionary vocation²⁵¹.

In Nigeria, a country with deep religious roots and complex socio-political dynamics, the Catholic clergy are uniquely positioned to lead this mission. Their role encompasses pastoral care, catechesis, media engagement, interreligious dialogue, and social transformation. For Nigerian clergy, this means engaging the faithful with renewed zeal, contextualized theology, and innovative pastoral strategies. The Church

²⁴⁹ Cf. Ibidem, no. 7

²⁵⁰ Cf. P. Cullinane, *Character and Ontological Change in Relation to Ordination*, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 4, New York: 1970, p. 324.

²⁵¹ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Vatican: 1992, no. 18.

in Nigeria, with its unique history of fervent practice of the Catholic faith, still faces competition from Pentecostal movements, Islamic radicalism and expansion, and traditional religious practices. The clergy are called to respond by deepening the faith of Catholics and reaching out to those not evangelized. Boniface Neibo succinctly captures this when he wrote, “the Church in Nigeria must move from maintenance to mission”²⁵².

The clergy’s primary role in New Evangelization is pastoral. Through preaching, sacraments, and spiritual direction, priests serve as living witnesses of Christ. In regions plagued by violence and poverty, their presence offers hope and stability. Donald B. Cozzens emphasizes that “the priest must be both prophet and servant, speaking truth and healing wounds”²⁵³. Catechetical depth is essential for sustaining evangelization. Many Nigerian Catholics lack doctrinal understanding, making them vulnerable to religious manipulation. Clergy must prioritize catechesis, especially among youth and converts. The use of vernacular languages, visual aids, and digital tools can enhance doctrinal formation²⁵⁴. From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that digital media is a powerful tool for evangelization. However, many Nigerian priests lack training in media engagement. Justine Dyikuk argues that “the absence of a National Communication Pastoral Plan hampers coordinated evangelization”²⁵⁵. Therefore, the Clergy must embrace social media, podcasts, and online liturgies to reach digital natives.

Interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding is a basic ingredient for priestly ministry in contemporary times. Nigeria’s history of religious conflict, especially in the Middle-Belt and Northeast, necessitates interreligious dialogue. The attitudes of extremist Muslims and Christians together with their methods of preaching cause a lot of religious acrimony in the country. The manifestation of extremists is bigotry because it is noticed

²⁵² B. Neibo, *Faith in Flux: Catholicism and the Dynamics of Witnessing in Today’s Nigeria*. Abuja: 2024, p. 87.

²⁵³ D. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*. Collegeville: 2000, p. 98.

²⁵⁴ Cf. E. Ezeh, *Catechesis in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects*. Nigerian Journal of Theology, vol. 28, no. 1, 2023, pp. 45–60.

²⁵⁵ J. Dyikuk, *Media and Ministry: Examining the Role of Priests in Nigeria in New Evangelization*. “Annals of Journalism and Mass Communication”, vol. 1, no. 2, 2019, pp. 15–22.

that extremists believe that they are always right and cannot be wrong. The Muslims and Christians in this category carry their extremism to public places to preach in a provocative manner. They accuse others of wrongdoing and hide their own shortcomings. Extremism harms the cause of evangelization because it causes unnecessary intra and inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria²⁵⁶. Catholic clergy play a vital role in peacebuilding, often serving as mediators between Christian and Muslim communities. This aspect of evangelization aligns with the Church's mission to be a sign of unity and reconciliation.

The engagements of the Catholic clergy in Nigeria remain indispensable in the mission of New Evangelization. Their pastoral presence, doctrinal teaching, and cultural engagement form the backbone of the Church's evangelizing efforts. As John Paul II declared in *Ecclesia in Africa* that, "the Church in Africa, joyful and grateful for having received the faith, must pursue its evangelizing mission"²⁵⁷. This suggests that, Africa and particularly the Church in Nigeria is called to be the spiritual lung of humanity. Nigerian priests must breathe life into this vision. Unlike traditional evangelization aimed at non-Christians, the New Evangelization focuses on rekindling faith among baptized Christians who have grown distant from the Church. Central to this mission is the Catholic clergy, whose vocation places them at the heart of ecclesial renewal and evangelistic outreach. In *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II emphasized that a priest must be a "living image of Christ"²⁵⁸, and a witness of hope. Their personal holiness, pastoral zeal, and theological formation are essential tools in rekindling faith among the baptized. The clergy are not merely administrators of sacraments but evangelizers who must engage culture, challenge indifference, and inspire conversion.

²⁵⁶ Cf. B. Agwom and E. Lamle, *Religious Extremism and Violent Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria: An Exploration of Causes, Consequences, and Solutions*, International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2025, pp. 1–12.

²⁵⁷ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995, no. 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html (accessed 4/2/2025).

²⁵⁸ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, March 15, 1992, n. 22. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html (accessed 2/8/2024).

The parish is the primary locus of evangelization. To put this in perspective, the document of the Synod of Bishops' *Instrumentum Laboris* on the New Evangelization highlights the need for “parish transformation” to make it a dynamic center of missionary activity²⁵⁹. The clergy must lead this transformation by fostering vibrant liturgies, small faith communities, and outreach programs that engage both active and lapsed Catholics. Such renewal positions the parish not merely as an administrative unit but as a missionary hub, where the faithful encounter Christ through Word, Sacrament, and communal life. The clergy, acting as pastors and leaders, are entrusted with guiding this process by promoting communion, encouraging lay participation, and ensuring that evangelization permeates every aspect of parish life. In this way, the parish becomes a living witness to the Gospel, capable of addressing contemporary challenges such as secularization, religious indifference, and the fragmentation of community life²⁶⁰.

Effective evangelization requires deep catechesis. John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* highlights that the specific aim of catechesis is to develop with the Will of God a living faith in the individual and community, and “to advance in the fullness of life and to nourish day by day in the Christian life of the faithful, young and old”²⁶¹. The role of the Clergy is to ensure that the faithful understand the tenets of their faith, especially in a world where misinformation and religious relativism abound. Their roles include preaching, teaching, and mentoring catechists who can extend this mission within families and schools. Digital media, social platforms, and online catechesis should be embraced by the clergy to reach younger generations and those alienated from traditional Church structures for effective doctrinal and moral formation.

The centrality of vocations is emphasized in the New Evangelization as this underscores the importance of vocations not primarily as a programmatic effort but a lived testimony of faith. The Synod of Bishops emphasized that the transmission of faith

²⁵⁹ Synod of Bishops, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith – Instrumentum Laboris*, Vatican City 2012, p. 53.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Ibidem pp. 80-82.

²⁶¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Rome: 1998, no. 20.
https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html (accessed 20/6/2025).

requires authentic witnesses whose lives are shaped by their vocation, noting that “the faith is strengthened when it is given to others”²⁶². Marcel Dumais further demonstrates that biblical models of discipleship reveal evangelization as inseparable from vocation, since the call to holiness and mission are united dimensions of Christian life²⁶³. New Evangelization does not place one vocation over another but insists on its complementarity, recognizing that the renewal of faith in contemporary society depends on the unified witness of all vocations working together to manifest Christ’s presence in the world. Priests must not only live their vocation authentically but also promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Major and Minor Seminaries must form future clergy with a missionary mind-set, equipping them to engage culture and proclaim the Gospel.

New Evangelization offers opportunities to reimagine ministry, deepen pastoral relationships, and renew the Church’s mission. For John Paul II, “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which she lives”²⁶⁴. The Catholic clergy are indispensable to the mission of New Evangelization. Their witness, leadership, and pastoral care form the backbone of the Church’s efforts to re-propose the Gospel to a world in need of truth and hope. By embracing new methods, deepening catechesis, and renewing parish life, the clergy can lead the Church into a new era of evangelization.

3.4 The Religious in their Mission of New Evangelization

Religious men and women, through their consecrated lives, charisms, and apostolic works, play a vital role in this mission. Their witness of radical discipleship and communal living offers a prophetic sign in a world increasingly detached from transcendence. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that “the Church is missionary by her very nature”²⁶⁵. Religious life, marked by the evangelical counsels of poverty,

²⁶² Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. Vatican City, 2012, pp. 23, 77–79.

²⁶³ Cf. M. Dumais, *After Emmaus: Biblical Models for the New Evangelization*. Collegeville: 2014, pp. 45–52.

²⁶⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter. *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979, no.4 https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html (accessed 9/3/2025).

²⁶⁵ Vatican II. Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, Vatican: 1965, no. 2. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html (accessed 8/1/2025).

chastity, and obedience, is a visible sign of the Kingdom of God. John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata*, emphasized that religious are “experts in communion” and “witnesses to the transfigured life,” whose very existence is a form of evangelization²⁶⁶. In his teaching on the religious life, John Paul II affirmed that consecrated men and women play an indispensable role in the Church’s evangelizing mission through their prophetic witness. The Pope notes that their charisms, whether contemplative, apostolic, educational, or medical serve to enrich the Church’s missionary outreach and respond to the spiritual and material needs of society. Through prayer, community life, and service, religious help the Church manifest the holiness to which all Christians are called and contribute to the transformation of cultures through Gospel values²⁶⁷. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) further argued that the essential contents of New Evangelization, conversion, the Kingdom of God, the person of Jesus Christ, and eternal life, are at the very center of consecrated life. This alignment between vocation and mission makes religious life a privileged locus of evangelistic witness²⁶⁸.

Each religious institute possesses a unique charism that shapes its contribution to the Church’s evangelizing mission. Apostolic communities such as the Jesuits, Salesians, and Missionaries of Charity engage in education, healthcare, and social outreach, while contemplative orders like the Benedictines and Carmelites offer spiritual depth and intercessory prayer. These charisms are not merely internal values but dynamic expressions of the Gospel in action. The Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life affirms that “all charisms are for the mission”²⁶⁹, and that their diversity enables the Church to proclaim the Gospel in every situation. The stresses the point that the diverse gifts of the Spirit within consecrated life are not ends in themselves but are ordered toward the evangelizing mission of the Church. This affirmation situates charisms within the broader horizon of ecclesial communion and apostolic service, reminding

²⁶⁶ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*. Vatican City. March 25, 1996, no. 46. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html (accessed 30/8/2024).

²⁶⁷ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 72.

²⁶⁸ M. Pagacz, *Joseph Ratzinger on the New Evangelization: The Implications for Consecrated Life*, “*Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny*”, vol. 32, no. 1, 2024, pp. 233–254.

²⁶⁹ Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Sequela Christi: Joint Letter of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the Dicastery for Culture and Education*, 28 June 2023, p. 14.

religious institutes that their identity is inseparable from their contribution to the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Furthermore, it reflects a theological conviction rooted in the Second Vatican Council's teaching on charisms as gifts given "for the common good"²⁷⁰. The Dicastery insists that every charism, whether contemplative, apostolic, or missionary, must be lived in a way that serves the evangelizing mission of the Church. This means that consecrated life cannot be reduced to private spirituality or internal community life; rather, it must radiate outward in service, witness, and proclamation.

Charisms, therefore, are not isolated identities but dynamic forces that contribute to the renewal of the Church in the New Evangelization. The Dicastery highlights that fidelity to one's charism requires openness to the needs of the world, since the Spirit bestows gifts not for self-preservation but for mission. This perspective also guards against the temptation of institutional self-referentiality, reminding institutes that their vitality is measured by their capacity to serve the Gospel in contemporary contexts. In practical terms, this affirmation calls consecrated persons to discern how their charism can respond to today's challenges: secularization, poverty, migration, ecological crisis, while remaining faithful to their founding inspiration. Thus, the charism of each institute becomes a particular "language of the Gospel," contributing to the Church's polyphonic witness in the world²⁷¹.

In a culture dominated by materialism and individualism, religious life offers a counter-cultural witness. The communal lifestyle, shared prayer, and detachment from possessions challenge prevailing norms. Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, calls religious to be "missionary disciples" who go out to the peripheries and embody the joy of the Gospel²⁷². Consecrated life, according to Francis, is a "prophetic vision in the Church: a gaze that sees God present in the world, even if many do not notice him"²⁷³. Francis

²⁷⁰ Vatican II. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican 1964, no. 45.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed 14/4/2025).

²⁷¹ Cf. Ibidem. Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, p. 14.

²⁷² Cf. Francis. Apostolic Exhortation. *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican City: 2013, no. 120.
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed 2/10/2024).

²⁷³ Francis. Apostolic Exhortation. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 218.

describes consecrated life as a prophetic voice that reveals God's presence in the world. Religious communities have historically played a central role in education. Schools, universities, and formation centres operated by religious institutes are fertile grounds for evangelization. Religious educators are tasked not only with academic instruction but also with forming students in Gospel values. Their presence ensures that faith and reason remain integrated in the intellectual life of the Church.

In Nigeria, schools and universities run by religious and consecrated person have made tremendous impact on the development and growth of the society as these institutions administered by the various religious congregations have played a decisive role in Nigeria's educational development, advancing literacy, social mobility, and civic formation, while embedding moral education and religious identity within the public sphere. Historically rooted in missionary initiatives that laid the groundwork for modern schooling, these institutions pioneered access to formal education and helped shape an educated cadre for national leadership and public service. Their holistic model, integrating intellectual rigor, moral formation, and community service has been repeatedly associated with the promotion of peace, justice, and social cohesion, especially through structured programs in character formation, social ethics, and civic responsibility. Anthony Bature, observes that Catholic schools have consistently promoted peace and justice by embedding Catholic social teaching into curricula and extracurricular activities, thereby shaping students into agents of reconciliation in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society²⁷⁴.

Quantitatively, the Catholic educational footprint remains substantial, encompassing hundreds of elementary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions that extend this formative vision into professional disciplines and public life. By mobilizing religious charisms for educational mission, Catholic schools contribute to nation-building while navigating Nigeria's complex religious and cultural landscape. Their pedagogical emphasis on the common good and reconciliation has been marked as a distinctive asset for mitigating ethno-religious tensions and fostering a shared civic

²⁷⁴ A. Bature, *Catholic Schools as Means of Promoting Peace and Justice in Nigeria*, Tattva – Journal of Philosophy 8, no. 2, 2016, pp. 5-7

culture, an impact that is particularly salient in regions marked by conflict and economic precarity. At the curricular level, Catholic schools in Nigeria articulate a distinctively integrative approach that links academic excellence with Christian religious education, moral reasoning, and service learning. This approach, increasingly framed within global discourses on Catholic religious education, presses educators to respond to pluralism without diluting theological identity, cultivating students capable of dialogical engagement across religious differences. Theologians of Christian religious education in Nigeria underscore both the opportunities and constraints of this setting: while Catholic institutions provide robust spaces for faith-informed pedagogy and character formation, they must actively adapt methods to the realities of multi-religious classrooms and the demands of democratic citizenship. Within this tension, Catholic schools have pursued teacher formation, curriculum development, and co-curricular programming that aim to produce graduates who are intellectually competent, morally grounded, and socially responsive, graduates who can carry Catholic social teaching into professional and civic spheres²⁷⁵.

Institutionally, Catholic tertiary ventures such as Veritas University and other church-founded colleges extend the impact of religiously run education by anchoring research, teacher training, and social outreach in a Catholic intellectual tradition attentive to inclusion and the common good. Institutions such as these deploy patristic and Catholic philosophical resources to frame inclusive learning practices, reinforce human dignity, and cultivate a culture of dialogue across ethnic and religious lines²⁷⁶. In doing so, they function as hubs for social innovation and interfaith engagement, connecting ecclesial mission with national development priorities. These efforts reinforce the broader contribution of religiously run schools to a peaceful and equitable society: by shaping leaders with ethical competence and civic commitment, Catholic education supports the long-term consolidation of democratic norms, the protection of human rights, and the pursuit of social justice in Nigeria.

²⁷⁵ Cf. *Influence of Christianity on Nigerian Education*, Disciplines.ng, 2021, <https://disciplines.ng/influence-of-christianity-on-nigerian-education/> (accessed 20/9/2023).

²⁷⁶ Cf. A. Kanu, *Patristic Education as a Catalyst for Harnessing Catholic Philosophy of Inclusive Learning in Nigeria*, *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 3, no. 2 (2020): 1–20, esp. pp. 12–15.

The preferential option for the poor has over the years been a hallmark of Catholic social teaching and a key dimension of social justice and evangelization. Religious institutes have been at the forefront of humanitarian aid, advocacy, and healthcare. Their work among the marginalized is a living proclamation of the Gospel. Benedict XVI stated in *Caritas in Veritate*, “Charity in truth is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity”²⁷⁷. The Church in Nigeria through its religious institutes and the various commissions at the national level continues to provide relief to vulnerable populations, especially the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) affected by insurgency in the northeast part of the country. The Catholic Church, for instance, has mobilized resources to provide food, shelter, and psychosocial support to displaced families, often stepping in, where government agencies have been slow to respond²⁷⁸. These interventions are critical in a country where healthcare infrastructure is underfunded and inaccessible to many.

Beyond institutional hospitals, Churches frequently organize free medical missions, combining evangelization with healthcare delivery, thereby reaching rural populations neglected by state services. Aside material aid, the Church in Nigeria has been a vocal advocate for human rights, democracy, and poverty alleviation. Mainline Churches, including the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, have issued pastoral letters condemning corruption, electoral malpractice, and social injustice, positioning themselves as moral voices in national discourse²⁷⁹. Advocacy has also extended to policy influence, with Church leaders lobbying for improved healthcare funding and social welfare programs. The Church’s advocacy role is not limited to Nigeria alone but is part of a broader African tradition where religious institutions act as mediators between civil society and the state²⁸⁰. The Church in Nigeria’s humanitarian, healthcare, and advocacy roles are deeply intertwined. Humanitarian aid is not merely charity but a biblical injunction to care for the less privileged, linking theological imperatives with

²⁷⁷ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter. *Caritas in Veritate*, Vatican City; 2009, no. 1.

²⁷⁸ Cf. S. Salau, *When the Humanitarian Church in Nigeria is put to Test*, BusinessDay NG, December 29, 2024, p. 14.

²⁷⁹ Cf. S. Gibbs and D. Ajulu, *The Role of the Church in Advocacy: Case Studies from Southern and Eastern Africa*, Oxford: 2018, pp. 45–47.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Ibidem. pp. 62–63.

social action. This integration of faith and service underscores the Church's unique position: it is simultaneously a spiritual authority, a social service provider, and an advocacy platform, a role perfectly carried out by religious institutes in Nigeria²⁸¹.

New Evangelization calls for renewal, rediscovering foundational charisms, engaging in intercultural dialogue, and embracing new technologies. Religious men and women are indispensable to the mission of New Evangelization. Their lives, ministries, and charisms enrich the Church's witness and extend its reach beyond borders. By embracing their prophetic identity, engaging culture creatively, and renewing their apostolic zeal, religious communities help reawaken faith in a world longing for meaning and hope. John Paul II aptly says, "The future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of consecrated life"²⁸². Their unique and individual apostolates based on the mission and vision of their founder enriches, fosters consolidates the mission of the Church in Nigeria and by extension the mission of the universal Church.

3.5 Lay Engagements in the Mission of the Church in Nigeria

As proposed by John Paul II, the New Evangelisation challenges all to a renewed mission of proclaiming the good news. In Nigeria, lay participation is not only desirable but essential. The laity, by virtue of their baptism, are co-responsible for the Church's mission and are uniquely positioned to evangelize in homes, workplaces, and public life. The Second Vatican Council's *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms that "the laity are called to make the Church present and active in those places and circumstances"²⁸³, where only through them it can become the salt of the earth. More so, the mission of New Evangelization finds one of its deepest roots in the vision articulated by *Gaudium et Spes*, where it describes the Church's intimate solidarity with the modern world and the unique vocation of the laity within it. Their vocation is not primarily exercised in the sanctuary but in the ordinary settings of life, workplaces, families, civic institutions, cultural spaces, and scientific endeavours²⁸⁴. *Christifideles Laici*, further emphasizes

²⁸¹ Cf. BusinessDay NG, "When the Humanitarian Church in Nigeria Is Put to Test,"

<https://businessday.ng/when-the-humanitarian-church-in-nigeria-is-put-to-test/>, p. 15 (accessed 7/9/2024).

²⁸² Ibidem. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 109.

²⁸³ Vatican II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Rome: 1965, no. 1.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 43

that the laity are “called to be the leaven of the Gospel in society”²⁸⁵. This theological vision underscores the importance of New Evangelization, which seeks to mobilize all members of the Church, not just clergy and religious for missionary action.

John Paul II’s teaching on the laity underscores their essential participation in the Church’s mission, especially in the New Evangelization. He posits that lay Christians, by virtue of baptism and confirmation, are called to sanctify the temporal order through their presence in family life, professional work, politics, education, and culture. Their evangelizing witness is expressed not only in explicit proclamation but also in the transformation of society according to the Gospel. Hence, the laity must be formed spiritually and intellectually so that they can engage contemporary challenges with competence and fidelity to the Church. Their active involvement ensures that evangelization permeates every dimension of human life²⁸⁶.

In Nigeria, lay Catholics are increasingly involved in parish life, catechesis, youth ministry, and social affairs. Organizations such as Catholic Men Organization (CMO), Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), Holy Childhood Association, and other Associations and Organizations in the Church provide platforms for lay evangelization. These groups engage in hospital visits, prison ministry, and community development, embodying the Church’s mission in tangible ways. The launch of the School of Theology for the Laity in Kano Diocese exemplifies this trend. Bishop John explained that the initiative aims to deepen faith and empower lay leaders through structured theological education tailored to adult Catholics²⁸⁷.

3.5.1 The Impact of the Catholic Men Organization of Nigeria

In Nigeria, the Catholic Men Organization has emerged as a vital lay apostolate contributing to this mission. Through spiritual formation, community service, and moral

²⁸⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, Rome, 1988, no. 15.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 34.

²⁸⁷ Cf. A. Abah, *School of Theology for Laity Launched in Nigerian Catholic Diocese*, *ACI Africa*, June 15, 2025. n.p

leadership, they mobilize Catholic men to live out their faith actively and engage in the mission of evangelization. John Paul II, affirmed that lay organizations must be “schools of sanctity and evangelization”²⁸⁸. This teaching laid the groundwork for a more inclusive understanding of mission, where lay Catholics are co-responsible for the Church’s evangelizing efforts. The Catholic Men Organization embodies this vision by forming men in faith and encouraging them to be witnesses of the Gospel in their families, offices, and communities. They are present in nearly every Catholic parish across the country and their mission includes promoting spiritual growth among Catholic men, supporting parish activities and liturgical functions, engaging in charitable works, and encouraging moral leadership in family and society²⁸⁹. The organization fosters fraternity and accountability, helping men deepen their commitment to the Church and its mission.

In addition, the organization members participate in parish evangelization programs such as retreats, catechesis, and outreach to the poor. During Father’s Day celebrations in the Lagos Archdiocese, Onwudiegwu urged its leaders to “bring men closer to God” by attending daily Mass, participating in Marian devotions, and leading spiritual exercises²⁹⁰. These activities reflect the New Evangelization’s emphasis on personal conversion and communal witness. In a country grappling with corruption, violence, and family breakdown, they serve as a platform for moral renewal. Michael Apochi in an address to lay people emphasized that “evangelization is not for priests alone... every baptized Catholic must take part in spreading the Gospel”²⁹¹. He called on lay organizations to uphold moral education and offer hope to struggling families and youth. The organization’s involvement in civic education, mentoring, and advocacy aligns with the Church’s social teaching and enhances its evangelistic credibility. The Catholic Men Organization of Nigeria remains a very vital instrument of New Evangelization. Through spiritual formation, community service, and moral leadership,

²⁸⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, no. 30.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. *Catholic Men Organization of Nigeria, National Constitution and Guidelines*, 2022 <https://www.csnigeria.org> (accessed 20/3/2025). np.

²⁹⁰ *Father’s Day Celebration in Lagos Archdiocese: Fr. Onwudiegwu Tasks Men on Evangelization*, Catholic Herald Nigeria, 2025.

²⁹¹ A. Abah, “Nigeria’s Catholics Urged to Participate in More Intensive Evangelization,” *ACI Africa*, September 22, 2025.

it empowers lay men to live and share the Gospel in a society that longs for truth and hope, rising over their challenges with courage, faith and fraternity. Their unique contribution in Church and societal development underscores the need for ongoing formation, structural support, and pastoral accompaniment. Francis reminds us, “It would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients”²⁹².

3.5.2 The Role of the Catholic Women Organization of Nigeria

In Nigeria, the CWO plays a pivotal role in the mission of evangelization. Through spiritual formation, family development, social outreach, and leadership, they mobilizes Catholic women to live out their faith actively and contribute meaningfully to the Church’s evangelistic efforts. This organization embodies this vision by forming women in faith and encouraging them to be witnesses of the Gospel in their families, communities, and public circles. Under its leadership, the organization focuses on capacity building, poverty alleviation, grassroots evangelization, and family well-being²⁹³. They recognize that the family is a “domestic Church” and prioritizes family formation as a key aspect of evangelization. During a courtesy visit to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Michael Banjo advised their leaders to emphasize teachings on family life and encourage members to participate in public service²⁹⁴. Consequently, during the installation of the organization’s new national executives, Matthew Ishaya Audu emphasized that “leadership in the Church is a privilege rather than an entitlement”²⁹⁵. He urged the new leaders to follow Christ’s example of selfless service, reminding them of their special call to service in the Church. This spiritual vision of leadership aligns with the New Evangelization’s emphasis on humility, witness, and mission.

²⁹² Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican 2013, no. 120.

²⁹³ Cf. *CWON Installs New Executives as Archbishop Audu Emphasizes Leadership as a Call to Service*, Oodua News, March 25, 2025. np.

²⁹⁴ Cf. M. Banjo. *Catholic Women Organization of Nigeria Kicks Off First National Executive Council Meeting and Award Ceremony*, Ijebu-Ode Diocese, June 19, 2025. np.

²⁹⁵ M. Audu. *Nigeria Catholic Network News*, March 27, 2025. <https://www.nigeriacatholicnetwork.com> (accessed 3/3/3035).

As one of the most active lay apostolic groups in the Nigerian Catholic Church, the CWO serves as a bridge between the domestic sphere and the wider ecclesial community, ensuring that the faith is transmitted, lived, and embodied in everyday life. The organization draws its strength from the traditional Nigerian understanding of womanhood as the moral anchor of the family and the custodian of communal values. Within this cultural context, they empower women to integrate their Christian identity with their social responsibilities, thereby transforming the family into a locus of evangelization. Through prayer groups, catechetical instruction, charitable outreach, and leadership in parish life, they foster a spirituality that is both contemplative and active, rooted in communal responsibility and moral formation, making their contribution essential to the renewal of the Church²⁹⁶.

A major contribution of the Catholic women lies in its commitment to strengthening the Christian family, which is the bedrock of the New Evangelization in Nigeria. Women, as primary caregivers and moral educators, shape the spiritual and ethical foundations of the home. They provide formation programs that equip mothers with the theological, moral, and pastoral skills necessary to nurture faith in their children and spouses. These programs include marriage enrichment seminars, parenting workshops, and domestic spirituality initiatives that emphasize prayer, forgiveness, and mutual respect. By promoting stable marriages and responsible parenting, they contribute to the creation of families that embody Christian virtues and serve as domestic churches. A prominent Nigerian theologian Teresa Okure notes that the renewal of the Church must begin with the renewal of family life, where women play a decisive role in shaping the faith of future generations²⁹⁷.

The CWO also plays a transformative role in social outreach and community development. In many Nigerian dioceses, CWO members lead initiatives in poverty alleviation, healthcare support, education, and assistance to vulnerable populations such as widows, orphans, and internally displaced persons. Their involvement in these ministries reflects the Church's preferential option for the poor and demonstrates the social dimension of evangelization. Through these acts of service, the CWO embodies

²⁹⁶ Cf. M. A. Oduyoye. *Daughters of Anowa*. Maryknoll: 1995, p. 44

²⁹⁷ Cf. T. Okure. *The Will to Arise*. Maryknoll: 1990, p. 61

the Gospel in concrete ways, making the Church's presence visible in society. In addition to social outreach, they contribute significantly to liturgical and spiritual life within parishes. Women serve as choir members, catechists, lectors, sacristans, and leaders of devotional societies. Their participation enriches the liturgy with cultural expressions such as indigenous music, dance, and symbolic gestures that reflect the inculturated character of Nigerian Catholicism. They also organize retreats, novenas, and prayer meetings that deepen the spiritual lives of members and the wider parish community. These activities foster a spirituality that is communal, vibrant, and rooted in African cultural identity²⁹⁸.

Similarly, the CWO contributes to peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria, a country often affected by ethnic tensions, religious conflict, and political instability. Women frequently serve as mediators within families and communities, using their moral authority and relational skills to promote reconciliation. They organize interfaith meetings, community dialogues, and peace education programs that foster mutual understanding and promote peaceful co-existence and harmony among Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional religions²⁹⁹.

3.5.3 The Contribution of the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria

Founded in the year 1985, the organization emerged from the collective efforts of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria during the International Youth Year declared by the United Nations. The conference recognizes the need for a unified national youth body to coordinate Catholic youth activities across dioceses and parishes in Nigeria³⁰⁰. The youths constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's Catholic population. However, studies show that many young people face existential anxiety and disaffiliation from the Church due to cultural shifts and moral confusion³⁰¹. Pastoral initiatives such as youth retreats, liturgical involvement, skill acquisition and leadership training have proven effective in re-engaging them. Daniel Izebuno's study in Ibadan

²⁹⁸ Cf. A. J. Chupungco. *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy*. New York: 1982, p. 54.

²⁹⁹ Cf. C. Acholonu. *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Owerri: 1995, p. 12.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Catholic Chaplaincy, Obafemi Awolowo University, "What attendees can expect at the 2025 National Catholic Youth Conference," March 2025, <http://catholicchaplaincyoau.ng/what-attendees-can-expect-at-the-2025-national-catholic-youth-conference/> (accessed 7/6/2024). np.

³⁰¹ Cf. D. Youvan, *Existential Crises in Modern Adolescence: The Impact of Global Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, September 22, 2024, pp. 3–4.

highlights the importance of recognizing youth sub-groups and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to parish life. He argues that youth ministry must be “to youth, by youth, and for youth,” leveraging their energy and creativity for evangelization³⁰².

Their witness, leadership, and creativity are vital for building a church that is truly missionary and active. With over 60% of Nigeria’s population under 25, youth ministry is critical³⁰³. The priests should involve young people to participate in the mission of New Evangelization in the church through retreats, music, sports, and vocational discernment. Promoting priestly and religious vocations ensures continuity in evangelization. Moreover, youth ministry counters the influence of secularism and religious extremism. The Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria stands as a vital institution within the Nigerian Catholic Church, dedicated to nurturing the spiritual, social, and cultural development of young Catholics.

The organization’s mission is deeply rooted in the spiritual formation of youth. It encourages personal prayer, Bible study, and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church³⁰⁴. The organization also promotes Catholic identity through doctrinal education and loyalty to Church authority. Its patron saint, St. Charles Lwanga, symbolizes the courage and faith that they seeks to instil in their members. Structurally, they operate at parish, diocesan, and provincial levels, ensuring grassroots engagement and national cohesion. Monthly meetings, typically held after Sunday Mass, foster community and accountability among members within the age bracket of fourteen to thirty-five. The organization’s slogan, “For God and for Youth... Through Christ,” encapsulates its dual commitment to divine service and youth empowerment. Beyond spiritual activities, they engage in a wide array of programs including workshops, conventions, camps, cultural festivals, and charity work. These initiatives not only build leadership and life skills but also promote interfaith dialogue, as seen in their recent collaboration with Muslim youth organizations to foster peace in Nigeria. The Catholic youth organization continues to be a transformative force in Nigeria, shaping young

³⁰² Cf. D. Izebuno, *Youth Participation in New Evangelization in Ibadan, Nigeria*, Academia.edu, 2014. np.

³⁰³ Cf. *National Economy - Nigeria’s Youth Demographic: A Potential Powerhouse*, July 15, 2024, p. 3.

³⁰⁴ Cf. Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria, About CYON, St. Augustine Catholic Chaplaincy Akoka, <https://staugustineakoka.org/cyon/> (accessed 3/12/2025).

Catholics into responsible citizens and faithful Christians. Its enduring legacy is a testament to the power of faith-based youth engagement in building a better society.

3.5.4 The Task of the Holy Childhood Association of Nigeria

The Holy Childhood Association (HCA) of Nigeria is a vibrant arm of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), dedicated to nurturing missionary consciousness among Catholic children. Founded globally in 1843 by Charles de Forbin-Janson in France, the association was born out of a desire to engage children in the spiritual and material support of their peers in mission territories. Its motto, “Children Helping Children,” encapsulates the essence of its mission: empowering children to become agents of evangelization and compassion³⁰⁵. The association was introduced to Nigeria approximately three decades ago, and since then, it has grown into a nationwide movement within the Catholic Church. The association operates in dioceses and parishes across the country, organizing children into missionary cells where they learn about the faith, participate in liturgical activities, and engage in charitable works. These cells are guided by animators, trained adults who facilitate catechesis, prayer, and missionary education. The spiritual formation of children forms the core of its activities. Members are encouraged to pray daily, especially the Hail Mary, and to offer small sacrifices for the missions. This practice instils a sense of global solidarity and spiritual discipline. The association also emphasizes the importance of sharing, urging children to contribute coins and resources to support other children in need, particularly in mission territories³⁰⁶.

The impact of the association in Nigeria is evident in its contributions to education and welfare. Through the Universal Solidarity Fund, Nigerian children have acquired knowledge by receiving learning materials, and classroom structures. These initiatives not only improve access to education but also reinforce the values of generosity and service. The association’s activities often culminate in annual celebrations such as

³⁰⁵ Cf. *History of Missionary Childhood Association*, Diocese of Fort Worth. <https://fwdioc.org/history-missionary-childhood-association> (accessed 3/12/2025).

³⁰⁶ Cf. Pontifical Mission Societies Canada, *Holy Childhood Association (HCA): History*. <https://www.missionsocieties.ca/holy-childhood-association-hca/history-of-holy-childhood-association/> (accessed 3/12/2025).

Mission Sunday and the Feast of the Holy Childhood, which serve to renew commitment and showcase achievements. In 1922, Pius XI elevated the Holy Childhood Association to the status of a Pontifical organization, recognizing its global significance and aligning it with the Church's missionary mandate³⁰⁷. This designation affirms the association's role in fostering a missionary spirit among the youngest members of the Church. In Nigeria, the association continues to thrive under the guidance of the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Solomon Zaku, collaborating with bishops, priests, religious, and lay leaders to deepen its reach and effectiveness³⁰⁸.

The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have consistently emphasized the importance of the Holy Childhood Association as a vital instrument for nurturing missionary consciousness among children. Rooted in the universal mission of the Church, the association seeks to instil in young Catholics a sense of solidarity with their peers worldwide, particularly those in need. Nigerian bishops highlight that the Association is not merely a devotional group but a formative structure that integrates children into the missionary life of the Church from their earliest years. By encouraging prayer, sacrifice, and active participation in parish life, the bishops uphold that the association cultivates both spiritual maturity and social responsibility in the young faithful³⁰⁹. Furthermore, the pastoral teaching of the Bishops, affirms that through the Holy Childhood Association, children are educated to see themselves as agents of evangelization, capable of contributing to the mission of the Church regardless of age or family background. This pedagogy reflects the broader Catholic understanding that baptism confers missionary responsibility on all members of the Church, including children, and that such responsibility must be nurtured through structured catechesis and liturgical activities.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Nigeria Catholic Network, Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), par. 3. <https://www.nigeriacatholicnetwork.com> (accessed 2/3/2025).

³⁰⁸ Cf. ACI Africa, "World Mission Sunday: Church in Nigeria Translates Pope's Message in Local Languages," October 20, 2023, <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/9405/world-mission-sunday-church-in-nigeria-translates-popes-message-in-local-languages> (accessed 9/1/2024).

³⁰⁹ Cf. Ibidem. E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 1995, p. 312.

Situating the association within the wider framework of Catholic Action (CA) and missionary societies, the Bishops of Nigeria notes its complementarity with youth apostolates and catechetical programs. They hold that the association provides a foundational stage for later involvement in Catholic youth movements, thereby ensuring continuity in the Church's pastoral care of the young³¹⁰. However, there is a seeming disconnection when the young, having received the sacraments of baptism and confirmation fail to keep up with on-going faith formation. This poses a danger as those evangelized end up abandoning the faith in search of something modern and sensational. Herein, lies the Pentecostal influence, a few, later find their way back to receive the sacrament of matrimony, whereas, the others now have to face the task and demand of New Evangelization. Commenting on the menace of Pentecostalism, Anthony Akinwale remarks that, "This movement poses an inherent threat to the growth of the Church in Nigeria, parading a religion of the spirit without discernment, a pneumatology without ecclesiology"³¹¹. In achieving a holistic vision of Christian formation, programs and liturgical activities need to be improved among the young people in Nigeria to ensure a smooth transition; one that begins in childhood and matures into adult discipleship and missionary engagement, without losing the faith and the Holy Spirit which they received at baptism and confirmation. The Holy Childhood Association remains a beacon of hope for New Evangelization in Nigeria, leading to realistic transformation and forming children into exemplary Christians and responsible citizens.

3.6 The Synod on Synodality and its Impact on the Church in Nigeria

The expression "Synodal Church" is made of two words, namely, "Synodal" and "Church". The word "synodal" is an adjective and its noun "synod" comes from an ancient Greek term that means "travelling together". It is made up of a preposition *sun* (with) and the noun *hodos* (path) and it designates the path along which God's people walk together. In the ancient Church, local leaders used to "come together to pray and

³¹⁰ Cf. M. Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*, Ibadan: 1999, pp. 144–146.

³¹¹ A. Akinwale. *The Global Church. Symposium Edition of First Things. American Magazine on Religion and Public Life*. August 2024. np.
<https://insidethevatican.com/news/newsflash/letter-25-2024-thurs-jul-18-a-symposium/> (accessed 14/1/2025)

make decisions about matters affecting all the Christian communities in a region”³¹². These meetings were called “synods”. From the earliest times, those who have gathered in the name of the Lord were called the Church. The English word “Church” is a translation of the classical Greek word *ekklesia*, which meant “assembly or citizens”, implying a democratic equality among its members who met for legislative purposes and other forms of deliberations. Though the word carried more political or exclusive undertone in the Greco-Roman empire, the New Testament understanding of the word refers to and includes “people” both within and outside the Roman Empire. This inclusive sense of the Church could be traced back to the Old Testament understanding of the word. Hence, we see the term, *Kahal*, which means “the assembly of all peoples” (Deut. 23; 1 Kgs. 8, Ps. 22).

The Catholic Church’s call for a New Evangelization and the ongoing Synod on Synodality represent two converging movements aimed at renewing the Church’s identity and mission in the contemporary world. While New Evangelization seeks to rekindle faith in traditionally Christian societies, the Synod on Synodality re-imagines the Church’s internal processes to foster deeper communion, broader participation, and a renewed sense of mission. The movement is rooted in the Second Vatican Council’s vision of the Church as a “communion” of Christians, called to witness Christ in every aspect of life³¹³. It emphasizes active listening, “personal conversion, catechesis, and the use of modern media to communicate the Gospel effectively”³¹⁴. Launched by Pope Francis in October 2021, the Synod on Synodality is a multi-year process involving diocesan, continental, and universal phases³¹⁵. He notes that, “Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium”³¹⁶. According to the International Theological Commission, synodality is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the body of Christ and in the missionary

³¹² W. Clark, “What is the Synod of Bishops? A Catholic Priest and Theologian explains,” *The Conversation*, October 13, 2021 (accessed 25/4/24).

³¹³ Cf. Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

³¹⁴ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

³¹⁵ Cf. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Vademecum, *Vatican Press Office*.

³¹⁶ Francis, *Vatican Church World* in Vatican news from <http://www.vaticannews.va/en/popenews/2021-10/pope-francis-discourse-moment-reflection-eve-inauguration-synod.html> (accessed 10/11/2025).

journey of the people of God”³¹⁷. The concept of Synodality is commonly understood as a process whereby the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit undergoes a process of discernment on a variety of issues. It intends that by its fruit, the laity, priests, bishops and religious all use their various gifts and charisms to help the Church make decisions and engage in the missionary mandate of the Gospel. Its theme, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission”, reflects a theological and pastoral shift toward inclusivity, dialogue, and co-responsibility.

3.6.1 Communion

Communion as the foundational element of Synodality reflects the Church’s identity as the Body of Christ, where every member is valued and connected. This seeks to build unity in diversity, emphasizing that communion is not uniformity but a harmony of vocations, charisms, and cultures. Francis describes it as “walking together,” rooted in baptism and sustained by the Eucharist³¹⁸. The Eucharist is a call to unity in diversity, to creativity, to availability, openness, sincerity, dialogue, and inclusive participation. Fredrick R. McManus avers that, “at each celebration of the Eucharist, the Christian is challenged to renew his commitment to the Gospel of Christ, to membership in his Body, the Church, and to living the covenanted relationship with the Lord manifested by a life of service to others”³¹⁹. The Eucharistic celebration intensifies the dual citizenship of the Christians such that their daily activity, though taken with utmost seriousness, is directed toward unfolding the hope of the resurrection and the glory of God. This is pertinent in a secularized world that negates the presence of God or forgets God: incarnating the Eucharistic plan in daily life in all places by putting all things in

³¹⁷ International Theological Commission, Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, General Secretariat for the synod of Bishops, <http://www.itenesfrpt.org> (accessed 8/2/2024), no. 3.

³¹⁸ Cf. Francis. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod. October 9, 2021. Vatican. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html>. (accessed 9/10/2025) n.p

³¹⁹ F. McManus, *Thirty Years of Liturgical Renewal: Statement of the Bishops’ Conference Committee on the Liturgy*, Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, United States: 1987, p.182.

proper limits³²⁰. Furthermore, communion is expressed through liturgical life, pastoral collaboration, and ecumenical openness.

3.6.2 Participation

Participation is the practical expression of communion. It involves the active engagement of all baptized persons in the life and mission of the Church. In the Nigerian Catholic Church, participation is not merely about attendance at Mass or receiving the sacraments; it is the lived reality of communion among the faithful. Communion emphasizes unity with Christ and with one another, and participation makes this unity visible through shared responsibilities in parish life, liturgical celebrations, and community outreach. For example, when parishioners in Nigeria contribute to building projects, organize charitable initiatives, or support catechetical programs, they embody communion in tangible ways that strengthen the bonds of faith and community, and ensures that the Church's mission is not left solely to priests but is shared by the entire body of Christ³²¹.

The Synod calls for structures that enable listening, dialogue, and shared responsibility. For the Church in Nigeria, this call is particularly urgent given the country's complex social realities, ethnic diversity, political instability, and economic challenges. Structures such as parish councils and diocesan assemblies provide platforms where clergy and laity can listen to one another, discern pastoral priorities, and share responsibility for decision-making. The Synod's emphasis on dialogue challenges the Church to adopt more inclusive structures that reflect the voices of ordinary Catholics, ensuring that decisions resonate with the lived experiences of the faithful. It seek to bridge the gap between the people of various fields and social status³²².

³²⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 26. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20041008_mane-nobiscum-domine.html (assessed 4/11/2025).

³²¹ Cf. O. Ike, *The Church in Nigeria: The Family of God in Communion, Dialogue and Mission. Paper presented at the Second National Pastoral Congress, Abuja, November 14, 2012*, pp. 5–7.

³²² Cf. Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality: Communion, Participation, and Mission* September 2021, pp. 27–29.

The parish councils, diocesan assemblies, and digital platforms serve as a veritable too for feedbacks. Parish councils in Nigeria are increasingly recognized as vital organs for fostering collaboration between priests and parishioners. Diocesan assemblies, often convened by bishops, allow representatives from different parishes to deliberate on pastoral issues affecting the diocese. With Nigeria's youthful population and high digital engagement, digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, parish websites, and social media pages are becoming new spaces for feedback and dialogue. These tools allow Nigerian Catholics, especially the youth, to voice concerns, share ideas, and remain connected to the Church's mission in real time.

The Synod acknowledges that many Catholics feel excluded or unheard, particularly women, youth, and marginalized groups³²³. In Nigeria, this reality is evident in the limited representation of women in decision-making structures, despite their significant contributions to parish life and catechesis. Youth, who form the majority of the Catholic population, often feel sidelined when their perspectives are not integrated into pastoral planning. Marginalized groups, including rural communities and those affected by insecurity or poverty, sometimes feel disconnected from diocesan leadership. The Synod's acknowledgment is a call to the Church in Nigeria to intentionally create spaces where these groups are not only heard but empowered to shape the Church's future.

By fostering participation, the Church becomes more transparent, accountable, and responsive to the signs of the times. For the Catholic Church in Nigeria, fostering participation means embracing transparency in financial management, accountability in leadership, and responsiveness to pressing social issues such as corruption, insecurity, and unemployment. When parishioners are actively involved in decision-making, they can hold leaders accountable and ensure that resources are used for the common good. Moreover, responsiveness to the signs of the times requires the Church in Nigeria to listen to the cries of the poor, engage with youth aspirations, and address societal

³²³ Cf. Synod of Bishops, Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: For a Synodal Church – Communion, Participation, and Mission. Vatican Press Office, September 7, 2021, pp. 6–7.

challenges with courage and faith. Participation thus transforms the Church into a credible witness of Christ in Nigeria's dynamic context.

3.6.3 Mission

As a Synodal key, mission is the outward movement of communion and participation. It is the Church's response to Christ's command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Paul VI, in his address to a group of lay faithful in Rome on 2nd October, 1974, stated: "The men of our day are more impressed by witness than by teachers; and if they listen to these it is because they also bear witness"³²⁴. In like manner, Patrick C. Chibuko posits, "the Church is expected to complete the work of Christ on earth while continuing to carry on the mission which He began while He was on earth in their midst. This includes the mission of announcing the good news to the poor, freedom to captives and joy to mourners"³²⁵.

For John Paul II, "the dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values"³²⁶. The pontiff further states: "The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also in some sense its plan. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise"³²⁷.

The Synod reframes mission not as conquest but as accompaniment, dialogue, and witness³²⁸. In the Nigerian Catholic Church, this reframing is particularly significant because Christianity has often been perceived historically through the lens of conquest,

³²⁴ Vaican II, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: More Postconciliar Documents*, Vol. 2, Collegeville: 1982, pp. 1–41.

³²⁵ P. Chibuko, *Ite Missa Est – Go the Mass is Ended: Implications for Missionary Activities in the Third Millennium Church*. Enugu: 2004, p.50.

³²⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Vatican: 2004, no. 24.

³²⁷ Ibidem no. 25.

³²⁸ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 92.

whether colonial expansion or aggressive evangelization. The Synod's emphasis on accompaniment shifts the focus toward walking alongside people in their daily struggles, listening to their stories, and sharing in their joys and pains. Dialogue becomes essential in Nigeria's multi-religious context, especially in regions where Christians live side by side with Muslims and adherents of traditional religions. Witness, rather than domination, means that Nigerian Catholics are called to embody the Gospel through integrity, compassion, and service, showing Christ's love in schools, prisons, camps, hospitals, and local communities rather than imposing it.

Nonetheless, the synod calls for a Church that is "permanently in a state of mission," reaching out to the peripheries and engaging with contemporary challenges³²⁹. For the Church in Nigeria, being permanently in mission means that evangelization is not a seasonal campaign but a way of life. The peripheries in Nigeria include rural villages with little access to priests, urban slums where poverty and unemployment are rampant, and regions plagued by insecurity and displacement due to violence. The Church's mission here is to bring hope, solidarity, and practical support, be it through mobile catechetical teams, social outreach programs, or advocacy for justice and peace. Contemporary challenges such as youth unemployment, corruption, ethnic tensions, and digital transformation demand that the Church in Nigeria not only preach but also engage actively with society. By doing so, the Church becomes a credible witness to the Gospel, showing that faith is relevant to Nigeria's pressing realities.

The New Evangelization and the Synod culminates in their emphasis on missionary discipleship. Every baptized person is called to be a witness of the Gospel in daily life, empowered by the Holy Spirit and supported by the community³³⁰. New Evangelization and the Synod on Synodality are not separate initiatives but complementary movements of renewal. Together, they envision a Church that is more united, inclusive, and missionary. By embracing communion, participation, and mission, the Church can respond more effectively to the spiritual and cultural needs of today's world.

³²⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 25.

³³⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 120.

The final document of the Synod, approved in October 2024, articulates a vision of the Church as a community of missionary disciples, united in diversity and committed to the Gospel. At its core, the Synod emphasizes Synodality as the permanent mode of ecclesial life, insisting that the Church must embody communion, participation, and mission in every dimension of its existence. This reorientation challenges traditional hierarchical models by calling for structures that foster listening, dialogue, and shared responsibility among all baptized persons. In the Nigerian Catholic Church, where clerical authority has historically dominated pastoral decision-making, the Synod's insistence on Synodality provides a theological and pastoral framework for greater inclusion of lay voices, particularly those of women and youth, who constitute the majority of the faithful³³¹.

The document further underscores the importance of unity in diversity, recognizing that the global Church is enriched by the cultural, liturgical, and theological contributions of local communities. For Nigeria, a nation marked by ethnic plurality and religious complexity, this affirmation validates ongoing efforts at inculturation, where indigenous languages, music, and cultural expressions are integrated into liturgical celebrations. Such practices not only strengthen Catholic identity but also demonstrate the universality of the Gospel as it takes root in diverse contexts. The Synod's vision thus encourages the Church in Nigeria to embrace its cultural richness while maintaining fidelity to the universal mission of the Church³³².

Participation and shared responsibility emerge as central themes in the Synod's final document. The call for stronger parish councils, diocesan assemblies, and digital platforms for feedback reflects a desire to democratize ecclesial governance and ensure transparency. In Nigeria, where lay organizations such as the Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), and Knights of St. Mulumba (KSM) already play significant roles, the Synod's directives invite these groups to move beyond social and fundraising activities into substantive pastoral

³³¹ Cf. *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 2024*, no. 1.

³³² Cf. *Ibidem* no. 12.

planning and policy-making. This shift would not only enhance accountability but also empower the laity to contribute meaningfully to the Church's mission in addressing Nigeria's pressing social challenges³³³.

A particularly ground-breaking aspect of the Synod's document is its recognition of women's leadership within the Church. By proposing expanded opportunities for women in pastoral governance, theological formation, and new ministries, the Synod confronts long-standing gender imbalances. In Nigeria, where women are the backbone of parish life yet remain underrepresented in decision-making structures, this emphasis challenges ecclesial leadership to rethink traditional roles and embrace women's contributions at all levels of pastoral governance. Such inclusion would not only reflect the dignity of baptism but also harness the immense potential of women in shaping the future of the Church in Nigeria³³⁴.

The Synod also reframes mission as accompaniment, dialogue, and witness rather than conquest. This redefinition is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where the Church operates in contexts of poverty, insecurity, and interreligious tension. Mission here entails walking alongside displaced persons, engaging Muslims and adherents of traditional religions in dialogue, and bearing witness to Christ through schools, hospitals, and social justice advocacy. By calling the Church to be "permanently in a state of mission," the Synod challenges Nigerian Catholics to see evangelization not as episodic campaigns but as a way of life that responds to the realities of their society³³⁵.

In context, the Synod's emphasis on transparency, accountability, and safeguarding resonates deeply with Nigeria's ecclesial situation. With rapid Church growth and significant financial contributions from the laity, transparency in resource management is essential to maintaining credibility. Safeguarding policies are equally urgent, given global concerns about abuse and the need to protect vulnerable populations. By embedding accountability into Synodal structures, the Church in Nigeria can strengthen

³³³ Cf. *Ibidem* nos. 23–25.

³³⁴ Cf. *Ibidem* nos. 38–40.

³³⁵ Cf. *Ibidem* nos. 52–54.

trust among the faithful and present itself as a credible witness to the Gospel in a society grappling with corruption and institutional failures³³⁶.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the Catholic Church in Nigeria, while deeply rooted in the universal tradition of Catholicism, continues to grapple with the paradox of vibrant religiosity coexisting alongside persistent societal ills. The analysis underscores that the Church's enduring presence and multifaceted mission: spiritual, educational, social, and developmental, cannot be divorced from the broader Nigerian context, where faith must confront realities of corruption, insecurity, and moral decline. The New Evangelization, as articulated by the universal Church, emerges as a critical framework for addressing these challenges, calling for renewed witness, deeper catechesis, and a more authentic integration of faith into daily life. Central to this renewal is the collaborative engagement of clergy and laity, whose shared responsibility in mission reflects the ecclesial vision of Synodality. By fostering structures of dialogue, participation, and accountability, the Nigerian Catholic Church can move beyond hierarchical limitations and embody a more inclusive model of communion.

The chapter has further highlighted that faith formation and pastoral collaboration are not optional but essential for equipping the faithful to live out the Gospel in a pluralistic and often hostile environment. Ultimately, the intrinsic nature of the Church in Nigeria is revealed not only in its sacramental and liturgical life but also in its capacity to serve as a credible witness to Christ amid contemporary challenges. New Evangelization, grounded in Synodal collaboration, offers a pathway for the Church to transform devotion into social responsibility, thereby ensuring that the Catholic faith remains both a visible sign of God's presence and a transformative force within Nigerian society.

³³⁶ Cf. *Ibidem* nos. 70–72.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CHALLENGES OF NEW EVANGELIZATION IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

Introduction

The nature of the Church in Nigeria, as described in the previous chapter, offers a clear understanding of the deep-rooted Christian heritage that has developed over time. The call to New Evangelization invites the Church to proclaim the Gospel with renewed vigour in the face of rapidly changing cultural, social, and religious landscapes. In Nigeria, this mandate has become increasingly urgent as the Church confronts a variety of challenges that affect its mission and witness. Poor catechesis, inadequate infrastructure, limited collaboration among clergy, religious, and laity, and the influence of modern ideologies among others challenge traditional Christian values. These realities demand that the Church not only preserve the integrity of its message but also find fresh, creative, and context-sensitive ways of communicating it. Understanding these challenges is essential for charting a way forward. By examining the factors that hinder evangelization, the Church in Nigeria can better discern how to renew its pastoral strategies, strengthen its internal structures, and deepen its witness to Christ in contemporary society. This chapter analyzes the challenges faced by the Nigerian Church in relation to the New Evangelization.

4.1 Contemporary Philosophical Ideologies

Some contemporary philosophical ideologies, have reshaped the global landscape in ways that present both challenges and opportunities for the mission of the Church in Nigeria. These ideologies inform the values, aspirations, and worldviews of individuals and societies, including those within Nigeria, where traditional religious sensibilities now coexist with modern cultural influences, technological advancement, and increasing pluralism. Within this context, the teaching of John Paul II on the New Evangelization emerges as a critical framework for interpreting and responding to the philosophical trends of the modern age. John Paul II consistently emphasized that evangelization in contemporary times requires a renewed engagement with culture, a deeper understanding of the human person, and a courageous proclamation of the

Gospel in environments marked by skepticism, materialism, and moral relativism³³⁷. His vision does not reject modernity outright; rather, it seeks to illuminate it with the light of the Gospel, affirming what is true while challenging what diminishes human dignity and spiritual vitality. For the Church in Nigeria, these insights are particularly relevant. Nigeria's religious landscape is vibrant yet increasingly influenced by ideological forces such as individualism, relativism, and secularism, which shape the attitudes of young people, families, and communities. At the same time, the nation's strong communal values, spiritual openness, and youthful population present fertile ground for a renewed evangelizing mission. By exploring the intersection between modern ideologies and the Church's evangelizing mission, New Evangelization serves as a catalyst for ecclesial growth, spiritual renewal, and cultural transformation in Nigeria³³⁸.

4.1.1 Subjectivism

Subjectivism is a tenet that holds as certain the state of the subject's consciousness³³⁹. It could also be defined as a doctrine that individual feeling is the definitive criterion of the good and the right. In subjectivism, the centrality of the subject is obvious. This is because it relies on oneself, permitting the thoughts and emotions that accompany it to determine one's behaviour. Subjectivism sustains that everyone is entitled to their own truth³⁴⁰. In such a case, there is little or no openness to welcome something coming from outside of one's self. There cannot be considerable progress in one's union with God and even with others when one clings to only one's beliefs and truth. This becomes an obstacle to the Gospel, whose focal point is to bring something completely different to help Christians and others question themselves and seek change.

It cannot be underestimated the importance of some biblical figures whose entire actions do not suggest any reliance on subjective elements. The Lord and his Apostles are concrete examples. They did not act based on mere feelings and emotions. The message they brought to people was objective because it did not come from them but

³³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican 1990, nos. 37–39.

³³⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, nos. 37–39.

³³⁹ Cf. R. Brown, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol. 5, United Kingdom: 2008, p. 241.

³⁴⁰ Cf. D. McClish, *The Gospel and Subjectivism*, <https://thescripturecache.com/?p=8276> (accessed 5/12/2025).

from the One who sent them. This gives the message a static characteristic which enables it to stand even if rejected by men³⁴¹. The most remarkable divergence in priorities is drifting from the objective message of the Gospel in order to propagate and promote one's personal ideas. The reality of denominational differences contributes to a widespread disorientation which brings about all forms of distrust of all that has been transmitted about the meaning of life, and to an unwillingness to adhere in a total, unconditional manner to what has been revealed as the profound truth of our being. In the Nigerian context, subjectivism could be a stumbling block for New Evangelization. This is due to the influence of the widespread Christian denominations, where every "man of God" is entitled to his own opinion regarding the preaching of the Word of God. Here, denominational distinctions sometimes lead to internal competition and divergence opinions in a pluralistic society like Nigeria³⁴².

4.1.2 Relativism

Relativism is the doctrine that rejects universal truths. It holds that morality is subjective and varies from one person to another, from one culture to another. It is embodied in the proverbial saying that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Our society of today, more than ever before, is characterized by this view that, "We live in a world of competing narratives, and all of them are vying for our allegiance"³⁴³. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, has always frowned on relativism as it has grave consequences. The Church believes and teaches that universal and unchanging truths exist. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, what moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: "we believe because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived"³⁴⁴. Benedict XVI has expressed that relativism has become

³⁴¹ Cf. Ibidem.

³⁴² Cf. C. Onuorah, *Unmasking Nigeria's leadership conundrum: The role of the Church*, HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 80(1), a9908. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9908> (2024) p. 5.

³⁴³ D. Obielosi, *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Volume 21, Issue 7, Ver. V (July. 2016), p. 20.

³⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., Vatican: 1997, no.150.

the central problem confronting the Christian faith today³⁴⁵. Truths, respect of human life and caring for the environment apply to all regardless of their religious affiliation.

From within the Church, unchecked relativism of the faithful can lead to the rejection of the Church's teachings and positions on doctrinal and moral issues. The faithful end up mixing their catholic faith with other religious and syncretistic practices. These proliferation of Churches in Nigeria with different or sometimes contradictory doctrines is an obstacle to the growth of faith. It creates confusion in the minds of the faithful and leads them to a fundamental crisis of faith. The impact of relativism is better felt through social media since influencers use it to transmit information which to a large extent has a far reaching impact on the society and its rich values.

4.1.3 Materialism

Materialism is the tendency to believe that nothing exists beyond what is physical. As such, constant concern is given to material possessions and wealth; a great or excessive regard is given to worldly concerns. This can lead to neglecting the spiritual as well as the needs of the soul. In the Nicene Creed, the Church professes her faith in God, creator of all things visible and invisible. The profession of faith of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) affirms that God “from the beginning of time made at once (simul) out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then (deinde) the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body”³⁴⁶. Besides the materialism that finds expression in the possession of things, there is also a new trend of information materialism. Addiction to Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik-Tok and other forms of social media are the new forms of contemporary materialism which leads to the purchase of expensive phones, I-pads, and other sophisticated gadgets that keep pastoral agents busily glued to the internet to the detriment of the time that should be channelled into the work of evangelization. What physical or tangible materialism does to individuals is what information materialism does as well. What money, cars, houses, does, is what information materialism does too. The imprudent and

³⁴⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass, *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, April 18, 2005 https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html (accessed 20.12.2025).

³⁴⁶ Cf. Ibidem. CCC, no. 327.

indiscriminate use of these means of social communication harms the pastor and his commitment to mission. Without due caution, the Gospel message of salvation will become truncated and altered to suit the ideology of materialism, leaving many with no other option than choosing Mammon instead of God (cf. Mt 6:24). The Vatican council's document, *Gaudium et Spes* describes materialism as a worldview that "reduces man to a mere part of nature or to the sum of his social relations," and warns against both "atheistic ideologies" and the "practical materialism" that arises from excessive attachment to worldly goods³⁴⁷.

With the aforementioned in mind, the Church in Nigeria has to contend with the prosperity Gospel, which prioritizes material success as the consequence of serving God. Little or no concern of given to the need of the soul, namely: holiness. When faced with deception, the faithful resort to other means to get wealth. Dominic Obielosi beautifully captures this: Feigned miracles fill up television screens today, [...] Many Catholics have suffered shipwreck on their faith. Some leave the Church to join other Christian sects. Our younger ones, in the face of frustrations and lack of hope for tomorrow, end up going back to traditional religious practices, believing that it is more powerful and responsive since the Church and its bible have not been able to really address their problems. Back in our villages, the shrines and idols denounced and burnt years ago when some priest and pastor crusaders visited some towns have not only been revived by our baptized youths but have even been so modernized that one thinks that it is a Christian Church organizing an outreach program³⁴⁸.

4.1.4 Modernism and the Culture of Globalization

Modernism can be understood as a representation of contemporary thoughts and ideas that are contrary to traditional beliefs. The modern world places much emphasis on liberty, equality, subjectivity, etc. When such ideas find their way into the Church, it leads to contesting the very foundation and the tradition of the Church. It can even dilute or compromise the Christian message. Since one of the marks of the Church is its apostolicity or faith handed down from the apostles, it follows that new ideas that go

³⁴⁷ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, nn. 19-20

³⁴⁸ D. Obielosi, *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Volume 21, Issue 7, Ver. V (July. 2016), p. 20.

contrary to traditional beliefs threaten the very existence of the Church. A faithful who yields to modernism falls into the dangers of a philosophy of relativism, loss of discernment, and pluralism. Such a person loses the spiritual value that is inherent in the sacred scripture, doctrines and traditions. For pastors of souls, they turn to merely sacramental machines and reduce the ministerial priesthood to a career and means of livelihood. Modernism attempts to reduce Christ to human dimensions, and leads a priest to agnosticism, secularism, and ultimately atheism. That is why modernism has been described by Pius X as the synthesis of all heresies and has also been wholesomely condemned by the decree *Lamentabili Sane* (1907) and the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), and definitively ended by the oath against Modernism (1910)³⁴⁹.

Society is gradually being immersed in the human phenomenon that goes by the name globalization, where the culture of migration is increasingly forcing people to leave their countries of origin for more urban settings, thereby changing the ethnic pattern of cities, nations and continents. Societies are experiencing an unprecedented encounter and mixing of cultures, resulting in forms of corruption, the erosion of the fundamentals of life. In this way, culture becomes extremely fluid, leaving little space for traditions. Globalization with all its seeming dangers, when viewed from a positive side provides an avenue for growth, in which Christians in Nigeria can learn to develop new forms of solidarity and good towards everyone³⁵⁰.

4.1.5 Secularism

This concept advocates for neutrality in religion. State secularism is the political belief in the separation of Church and state, such that religious beliefs do not influence public and governmental decisions. In this way, faith and religious practices are relegated to the private sphere. In such a case, atheism, changing values, erosion of the sacred, challenging moral authorities become the order of the day. All that matters to the secularist is ‘now’, there is no hope of life beyond the present physical world and thus all that a secularist seeks is happiness, freedom, and progress for mankind in this

³⁴⁹ Cf. Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* (July 3, 1907); Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (September 8, 1907); Pius X, *Sacrorum Antistitum* (Oath Against Modernism), (September 1, 1910).

³⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, Rome: 2009, no. 42

present world³⁵¹. Some religious leaders may seem to subscribe to secularism purely on the basis that they wish to allow for religious co-existence and believe that this is the only way to allow such to happen. Secularism strongly purports that religion is irrelevant and unnecessary and the genuine secular humanist will therefore seek to eradicate all religion. This calls to mind the bitter memories of the 1789 French Revolution. This is also the objective of many political governments around the world. A pastor is in danger of responding to the growing presence of other religions by capitulating to secularism. By so doing, he plays into the hands of those who oppose the Christian faith and mission. It is a way of admitting that we are beaten, that Christians cannot confidently live out our faith in the public arena³⁵². It also translates into privatizing the Christian faith, largely keeping it out the public arena, leading one to reject the command to love God and to love our neighbour (Mark 20:30-31). By lending themselves to secularism, the faithful lose their sense of mission instituted by Christ (Matt 28:19-20). God should hold a place in the life of every Christian, unequalled by no other and ranked above all else. Secularism leads to a reverse in such order, and sometimes exposes the pastor to the devastating consequences of relegating God to the background in his life. The Church consistently teaches that there is something more than the here and now; there is life after the world. Nigeria, being a secular state is faced with the danger of being caught up with narcissism, hedonism, materialism, pluralism, among others, whereas Christianity teaches that man is created in the image and likeness of God, and lives with a purpose, namely that God created man to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to be happy with Him forever in the next. Since the practice of the faith becomes less relevant, the Church has to regain the trust of the faithful to adhere to its teachings³⁵³.

Traces of a secularized way of looking at life is seen in the daily life of Christians, who are often times influenced, if not completely conditioned by the culture of images with its models and opposing forces. The tendency of superficiality and self-

³⁵¹ Cf. J. Peter, *Doing Pastoral Work in Fast Changing Societal Values Driven By Modern Day Ideologies: The Demands of New Evangelization on the Ministry of Priests in Nigeria*, p. 5.

³⁵² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), no. 38, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83 Rome: 1991, pp. 249–340.

³⁵³ Cf. Ibidem. J. Peter, *Doing Pastoral Work in Fast Changing Societal Values Driven By Modern Day Ideologies*. p.5.

centeredness, arising from a predominantly hedonistic and consumer-oriented mentality are not easily overcome. A real possibility exists that the fundamental elements of explaining the faith might be lost, which will then lead to not only spiritual emptiness, but also, on the other extreme, substitute forms of religious affiliations and a vague sense of the spiritual. O'Donnell buys in with other obvious results of secularization as the privation of belief and practice; selectivity and pluralism about doctrines and moral behaviour; the questioning of religious institutions; a decreased religious influence in the public sector³⁵⁴. In such situations, the New Evangelization is seen as the needed impetus for weary and worn-out communities in Nigeria to help them rediscover the joy of the Christian experience and to emphasize the true meaning of freedom in the search for truth.

4.1.6 Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism is the philosophy that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. This position makes allusions to the creation story as saying God created man and woman equal in every respect. It holds that there are no gender-based limitations on what functions or roles each can perform at home, school, Church, or in society. It insists that there are no roles or responsibilities that are unique to males or females. This position believes the creation story as saying God created man and woman equal in every respect. Here, there are no gender based limitations of what functions or roles each can perform at home, school, church or society. It insists that there are no roles or responsibilities that are unique to males or females. Egalitarians say Genesis 1:26-27 makes no distinction between the two, and both man and woman are created made in God's image and likeness, therefore, men and women had equal responsibility in ruling God's creation. However, when sin entered the world this defiled the relationship between man and woman and ushered in a hierarchy system. For them, a desire of subservience to man was instituted due to sin and not only were women affected by this, but men also developed a desire to reign over woman, resulting in a situation of harmful supremacy and submission³⁵⁵. Also, egalitarians argue that through

³⁵⁴ Cf. D. O'Donnell. *Evangelization: The Challenge of Modernity*, New York: 1995, p.122

³⁵⁵ A. Shelton, *Egalitarianism and Complementarianism: The Effect on Gender Roles*, Christian Doctrine, November 14, 2011, <https://aaronshelton.files.wordpress.com> (accessed 2.5. 2015). p.2.

Christ, man and woman have been restored to the intended equality and both can serve and function in the same way and equal manner, laying claims to scripture that Christ abolished hierarchy and therefore there is no longer a distinction in God's kingdom of male and female (Gal 3:28).

Egalitarianism has dangerous consequences on the faithful and more pastors in their priestly ministry. Pastors who are egalitarians often lend themselves to religious feminism. They also advocate for the ordination of women into the ministerial priesthood, also accept a feminine image of God, inclusion of women in the Church's hierarchy and administration with same chances and opportunities as male clergy, the abolition of patriarchy in the Church, use of inclusive language in sacred texts and within the context of worship. Such pastors may argue that although all do not have equal skills, abilities, interests, and talents, all Christians are equal before God and have equal responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to roles and ministries without any form of discrimination. In the same light, some priests may erroneously preach homilies that husbands and wives are of equal value; that gender roles in the family gravely undermine this fact and that men are not head of the family since the couple have become 'one body' by the bond of marriage³⁵⁶. However, egalitarians fail to distinguish between equality and role of individuals. Gender roles do not create inequality between men and women. Men are not superior to women precisely because they are called to the ministerial priesthood and role of Church leadership³⁵⁷.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the hierarchical structure that includes the ordained ministerial priesthood is ordered to benefit the holiness of the entire body of the faithful, and not to ensure the salvation of the ordained minister³⁵⁸. There are no additional benefits in terms of free tickets to holiness that come about through priestly ordination. Ordination is not a requirement for salvation, nor does it guaranty salvation to the one ordained. Similarly, sainthood is open to all; men and

³⁵⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores: Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* (15 October 1976), §§1–6, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 69 (1977): 98–116; cf. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (22 May 1994), §4, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 86 (1994): 545–548; see also John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), §§6–7, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 80 (1988): 1653–1729; and John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), §§23–25, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74 (1982): 81–191.

³⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*.

³⁵⁸ See *Ibidem*. CCC no. 1120.

women, lay or ordained. John Paul II observed that, “In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, He exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behaviour, He emphasized the dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time”³⁵⁹. In like manner, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* says, although, “the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe”³⁶⁰. Women are also able to live the consecrated life as nuns or abbesses. They also exercise many roles in the Church that they were previously not able to participate in. They can run catechetical programs in parishes, serve as spiritual direction, serve as lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and teach theology. In 1994, the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship decided that women could assist at Mass as altar servers. Still many people see the Church's position on the ordination of women as a sign that women are not equal to men in the Catholic Church, though the Church rejects this inference³⁶¹.

4.1.7 Individualism

According to the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, individualism is described in terms of a kind of moderate selfishness that disposes humans to be concerned only with their own small circle of family and friends³⁶². When the emphasis is placed on oneself, it makes it difficult to open up to others. This difficulty presents a significant challenge to the New Evangelization. This difficulty concerns more especially the key actors of evangelization. In the religious aspect, it is important to note that individualism eliminates every form of sacrifice for others. In the Nigerian context,

³⁵⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1988. www.w2.vatican.va/apost_letters/documents (accessed 16.5.2025), no. 26.

³⁶⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Vatican: 1994, www.w2.vatican.va/apost_letters/documents (accessed 16.5.2025), no. 3.

³⁶¹ Cf. T. Rausch, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, Minnesota 2003, p. 49.

³⁶² Cf. S. Lukes, *Individualism*, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/individualism?utm> (accessed 21.12.2025).

it could be noticed that individualism has negatively influenced some pastors as well as some lay persons as special emphasis is often laid on what individuals hold to be personal. Some even advocate for individual rights as over and above their community or parish obligations³⁶³. This undermines the right conception of priestly commitments and obedience to constituted authority in the Church. In accepting and promoting the reality of New Evangelization, the Church impacts a great number of people in various ways and situations. Regarding this, John Paul II clearly states: “In an atmosphere strongly affected by individualism, it is not an easy thing to foster recognition and acceptance of the role which authority plays for the benefit of all. Nevertheless, its importance must be reaffirmed as essential for strengthening fraternal communion and in order not to render vain the obedience professed”³⁶⁴.

4.2 Inter-Religious Conflicts and Insecurity

Inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria present one of the most persistent and complex challenges to the New Evangelization, significantly shaping the social, cultural, and pastoral landscape in which the Church carries out its mission. Nigeria’s religious demography characterized by a near-equal presence of Christianity and Islam, alongside enduring traditional religious practices creates a context where religious identity is deeply intertwined with ethnicity, politics, and regional history. In many parts of the country, especially in the Middle Belt and northern regions, tensions between religious communities have escalated into violence, displacement, and long-term mistrust. These conflicts undermine the Church’s efforts to proclaim the Gospel in a spirit of peace, dialogue, and mutual respect. The New Evangelization requires an environment where relationships can flourish, yet inter-religious hostility between Christians and Muslims often fractures the very social fabric needed for authentic witness. The religious conflicts in Nigeria are not merely doctrinal but rooted in historical grievances, competition for resources, and political manipulation, making evangelization a delicate and often dangerous task³⁶⁵.

³⁶³ Cf. Ibidem. *J. Peter, Doing Pastoral Work in a Fast Changing Society*, p. 8.

³⁶⁴ John Paul II. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, Vatican: 1996, no. 43. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documnets/hf_jp (accessed 16.5.2024).

³⁶⁵ Cf. O. U. Kalu. *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*. Lagos: 2003, p. 57.

The climate of fear and insecurity generated by inter-religious violence poses a direct obstacle to evangelization by restricting pastoral mobility, limiting community gatherings, and creating suspicion between religious groups. In regions affected by extremist attacks, such as those perpetrated by Boko Haram or other militant groups, Christian communities often experience trauma, displacement, and the destruction of churches, schools, and social infrastructure. These realities weaken the Church's capacity to sustain catechesis, sacramental life, and community formation. The New Evangelization emphasizes joyful witness and confident proclamation, yet fear and trauma can diminish the spiritual vitality of communities. Matthew H. Kukah notes that violence erodes trust and makes inter-religious engagement difficult, as communities retreat into defensive postures that hinder dialogue and reconciliation³⁶⁶.

Inter-religious conflict also challenges the New Evangelization by distorting perceptions of Christianity and Islam, reducing them to competing ideological blocs rather than faith traditions capable of coexistence. When religion becomes weaponized for political or ethnic purposes, it loses its moral authority and becomes a tool for division. This distortion makes it difficult for evangelizers to present the Gospel as a message of peace, reconciliation, and human dignity. The New Evangelization calls for a renewed proclamation of Christ's message in ways that address contemporary realities, yet the prevalence of religious violence often leads to hardened attitudes and mutual suspicion, leading to socio-economic inequalities and political exclusion, which are then framed in religious terms, complicating efforts at evangelization and dialogue³⁶⁷.

Inter-religious conflicts persistently undermine the credibility of Christian witness by creating an environment where the Church's message of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation appears unrealistic or unattainable. Communities that have suffered violence may struggle to embrace the Gospel's call to peace, especially when justice and security remain elusive. The New Evangelization requires not only proclamation

³⁶⁶ Cf. M. H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: 1993, p. 112.

³⁶⁷ Cf. A. R. Mustapha, *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria*. Oxford: 2014, p. 29.

but also the embodiment of the Gospel in concrete actions that promote healing and reconciliation. Yet, in contexts of deep-seated hostility, even small gestures of dialogue can be misinterpreted as weakness or compromise. These conflicts also affects the New Evangelization by limiting opportunities for collaboration in social development, education, and peacebuilding. In many Nigerian communities, religious institutions are among the most influential social actors, and cooperation between Christians and Muslims can significantly enhance social cohesion. However, conflict often disrupts these partnerships, leading to parallel societies where each religious group operates independently and sometimes in competition. This fragmentation weakens the Church's ability to engage in holistic evangelization that addresses both spiritual and social needs. Akinade Adebayo argues that sustainable peace and effective evangelization require inter-religious cooperation in addressing poverty, injustice, and inequality, conditions that often fuel conflict³⁶⁸.

Insecurity could be understood from two different points of view: on the one hand, it is a state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. On the other hand, it is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague, unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune³⁶⁹. The fundamental requirement for the success of anything is human life. When this is threatened, nothing seems to work. In societies where there is a high level of insecurity, there is no considerable progress. For over two decades, insecurity has been a persisting problem in some parts of Nigeria as Boko Haram, insurgents, herdsmen militia, bandits, and the so-called “unknown gunmen” have continued to unleash terror on individuals in different parts of the country³⁷⁰. In Hausa language, the word *boko* is an equivocal term which means either “Western” or “foreign”; while the word *haram* is an Arabic derivative meaning “forbidden”. Placing the two words together *boko haram* means to forbid everything Western; Western education, Western culture and modern science. The intent is to

³⁶⁸ Cf. A. Adebayo. *Christian–Muslim Relations in Nigeria*. Lagos: 2013, p. 74.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Achumba et al., *Security challenges in Nigeria and the implications for business activities and sustainable Development*, Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development (2013), p. 79.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Communique of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, *Religion, Civic Responsibility and the building of a Better Nigeria*, Abuja 2023. p. 2.

replace modern state formation with the traditional Islamic state, because Western values run contrary to Islamic values. Their teaching was largely drawn from sharia law. As their ideological principle, they believe that any member who fights and dies for the cause of an Islamic/Sharia state by destroying modern state formation and government establishment would automatically gain *Aljanna* (paradise or heaven).

The Boko Haram movement was initiated by Yusuf Mohammed, the Yobe State born Islamic scholar (aged 38). As a secondary school drop-out, he went to Chad and Niger Republic to study the Qur'an. While in the two countries, he developed radical views that were abhorrent to Westernization and modernization. Yusuf got back to Nigeria and settled in Maiduguri and established a sectarian group in 2001 formally known as the *Yusufiyya*, named after him which later came to be known as Boko Haram in 2002 as a result of the ideologies and philosophies held by the group³⁷¹. The Boko Haram sect since its inception in 2002 has remain one of the major threats to Christianity in Nigeria and has consistently carried out a series of attacks on worship centres, public places, schools and homes of individuals resulting in the killing of many people including priests, religious, and seminarians. On September 7, 2010, over 50 gunmen alleged to be members of the sect freed over 700 inmates from a prison in Bauchi state³⁷² to mention but a few. Kidnapping for ransom has continued with 1,056 people killed in 1,130 reported kidnap incidents from July 2023 to June 2024. On the average, someone is killed each time there is an attempted kidnap³⁷³. The result is that many have fled their homes, abandoned their farms, shops, businesses and other sources of livelihood. The number of internally-displaced persons in Nigeria is ever-growing, with many children out of school, making them easy prey to human traffickers³⁷⁴.

There are so many factors that constitute the causes of insecurity in Nigeria, for example, economic factors, political factors, social factors, etc. Among the social factors, we can underline religious tensions. Religious intolerance is a manifestation of

³⁷¹ Cf. Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Genesis Apocryphon*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Genesis-Apocryphon> (accessed 6.12.2021).

³⁷² Cf. The Guardian, Online News September, 7, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/08/muslim-extremists-escape-nigeria-prison> (accessed 9/10/2023).

³⁷³ Cf. *Nigeria's Kidnapping Epidemic by Numbers July 2023-June 2024*. Various Media Reports, SBM Violence Tracker. np.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Ibidem. CBCN, *Religion, Civic Responsibility and the building of a Better Nigeria*, p. 2.

a blind and fixed mental and psychological negative attitude towards religious beliefs and practices³⁷⁵. According to Donatus Njoku and Nkechi Njoku, “There are a number of disturbing phenomena in society arising from religion. Religious organizations have sometimes exerted discriminatory influences that have often generated disaffection, apathy, and separation among people in society. Tension and incessant killings always grip non-Muslims in Northern Nigeria due to intolerance among religious groups in the society”³⁷⁶. In the context of insecurity and religious intolerance, New Evangelization cannot really thrive as it ought to, since there is a disruption at the level of what is fundamental, that is, life. However, this context could constitute one of the new situations in human history that have become places to proclaim and witness to the Gospel³⁷⁷.

4.3 Poor Governance and Inadequate Remuneration of Ecclesiastical Workers

Among the many unresolved issues in Nigeria, the issue of the upsurge of corruption is troubling. The menace of corruption for instance, leads to slow movement of files in the offices, police extortion, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities among others. Political corruption is seen as similar to corruption of greed, as it affects the manner in which decisions are made, as it manipulates the Political Institutions, rules or procedures and distorts the Institutions of Government. Aside the game of football, one other thing that unites Nigerian citizens is the war against corruption. It has been generally accepted that corruption is evil and responsible for the nation’s gross underdevelopment. With the high amount of human and material resources abound in the country, it is believed that Nigeria was supposed to be counted among the first twenty industrialised nations in the world. The situation is so bad that corruption has almost turned out to be a national culture. For nearly two decades now, Nigeria has been named among the ten most corrupt nations in the world by internationally recognised anti-corruption organisations. Apart impacting negatively on the country’s image and

³⁷⁵ Cf. D. Njoku and N. Njoku. *Appraisal of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria*, International Journal of Theology & Reformed Tradition, Vol 5, 2013, p.126.

³⁷⁶ Ibidem. D. Njoku and N. Njoku, *Appraisal of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria*, p.122.

³⁷⁷ Cf. Synod of Bishops, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 13th Ordinary General Assembly, Vatican 2012, no. 6.

integrity of her citizens abroad, this negative tag has also slowed down Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) in Nigeria³⁷⁸.

There is no doubt about the strong desire of every incoming administration in Nigeria to fight corruption. Somehow, this desire has failed to curb the rise in cases of corruption due to several factors. Chief among them is the crass ignorance of the root causes of corruption in the country. Correct diagnosis is very fundamental in finding cure for an illness. The inability of successive administrations to cure Nigeria of corruption is worrisome. Presently, the war against corruption is mainly anchored on the principles of investigation, arrest, and prosecution of suspected offenders. This can be likened to mowing a lawn. Sooner or later, the grass grows again. To effectively fight corruption, its roots must have to be uprooted. The rise in cases of corruption is linked to a number of fundamental factors³⁷⁹.

They include wrong social orientation, poor leadership culture, unemployment, poverty, tribalism, and the lack of political will. The nation is often described like an engine-less boat in the ocean. It would need a team dedicated and experienced crew to sail it to shore. Poor leadership culture has contributed to the collapse of key public infrastructure and utilities in the country. Nigeria has now become a popular reference point during academic discourses on failed states. The nation's power, transport, health, educational, industrial, and agricultural sectors are all in shambles. This has led to a spontaneous weakening of the nation's oil-based socio-economic framework³⁸⁰.

The nation's poor system of governance has contributed in worsening the situation of Christians in Nigeria as many deprived persons are unable to live a dignified life. The periodic protests often embarked upon by the citizens as Nigeria's economy continues to deteriorate, reducing millions of its citizens to a life of abject poverty and ineffable hardship is often hijacked by hoodlums and miscreants. In some parts of Nigeria, protests become violent leading to looting, destruction of lives and property worth billions, leaving scores of persons injured. Unfortunately, some security operatives, who should normally protect citizens during protests, resort to threats,

³⁷⁸ Cf. Chatham House, *Corruption in Nigeria*, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/08/corruption-nigeria> (accessed 1/11/2025).

³⁷⁹ Cf. Ibidem. Chatham House, *Corruption in Nigeria*.

³⁸⁰ Cf. Ibidem.

intimidation and blackmail to deter citizens from protesting, and, in some cases, it is alleged that they engage in extra judicial killings. In a communique issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, they unanimously noted thus: "We denounce the use of violence by some people and equally condemn in the strongest terms the killing of some protesting citizens by security operatives. Yet, we reaffirm the constitutional right of every Nigerian to peaceful protests. We wish to stress that as long as the nation is afflicted with poverty, hardship and corruption, and as long as the future of people remains bleak, we must continue to reckon with protests. We call on governments at all levels to address the issues that engender protests, and release all who are being detained for their support and expression of their constitutional rights to protest within the ambit of the law"³⁸¹.

There is an intrinsic connection between corruption and bad governance. The latter could create a suitable environment for the former to thrive. The perpetuity of corruption in any society depends solely on the kind of governance in place. The issue of corruption has permeated various levels of government and institutions, hindering the country's progress and undermining public trust. Leaders at different levels of government have been implicated in corrupt practices, contributing to a culture of impunity and eroding public confidence in governance institutions³⁸².

In the opening Chapters of Genesis, God himself is portrayed as a kind of workman, who labours during the six days of creation, then rests on the seventh day. Shortly after, Adam is described as having been put in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it (Gen 2:15), even before the Fall. Today, work and the social situation of lay workers have become acute problems in our society. Ecclesiastical workers here connotes persons other than the members of the clergy or institutes of consecrated life whether baptized or non-baptized, Catholic or Non-Catholic who are in "the employment of an established Church organization like the diocese, parish, school, hospital or any other institution"³⁸³, or at the service of the clergy. The Church which is the body of Christ

³⁸¹ L. Ugorji, *A call for prayer and action; towards repentance and spiritual renewal*, Communique of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, August, 2024, p.4.

³⁸² Cf. CP Onuorah, *Unmasking Nigeria's leadership conundrum: The role of the Church*, HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies 80(1), a9908, 2024, p. 3.

³⁸³ K. Peschke. *Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, Dublin: 1978, p.107

ought to be at the forefront when it comes to just payment of its workers, but lay Church worker receive remuneration much less than their counter parts in the civil societies. Teachers in establishments are poorly paid. The situation is worse when it comes to domestic staff in the parish rectories, catechists and lay staff at the various diocesan curiae. According to a study carried out by an essayist between February 2008 and December 2011, it shows that lay Church workers (especially in the villages) in Nigeria like the Catechists having four to eight children under twenty one (21) years of age, earn less than seven thousand naira (about \$ 50.00) a month with no provision for Medicare or Social security. The same is applicable to teachers at the parochial schools in villages³⁸⁴. The complaint of many establishments for lack of fund as a main reason for not paying Church workers well is untenable, sometimes, the problem is not lack of fund but first and foremost the lack of will to do what is right. This is compounded by lack of adequate financial planning and management system which could be corrected by preparing a good financial scheme or a good budget plan³⁸⁵.

4.4 Theological Controversies and the Negative Impact of Pentecostal Movements

In recent years, the increase in the number of Churches in the Nigerian context is a cause for alarm. The proliferation of Churches brings about a rise in theological perspectives, which in turn paves the way for controversies. In their article, Atanda and Oyeyemi list and describe the characteristics of proliferated Churches, which they consider as Churches with leaves and without roots. They are: non gospel – driven Churches; no cross inclined Church; fame – driven Churches; Church concentrated Churches congested; an offering – driven Church; a leadership – driven Church; a Church with less purpose of Christ’s calling; a Church labouring in other men’s field; Church not wanting to know Christ alone and him crucified; one inch deep and one mile long Church; an inconsequential Church; non – salt and light Church; non centrality of Jesus Christ Church³⁸⁶”. The Churches that fall in any of these categories have a well-developed theology that backs up their personal ideas. The traits or characteristics of

³⁸⁴ Cf. A. Enemali, *Remuneration of Ecclesiastical Workers: The Case of the Laity in Nigeria*. “Journal of Inculturation Theology”, vol. 13 no. 1, Port-Harcourt: 2012, p. 119.

³⁸⁵ Cf. Ibidem. p. 120

³⁸⁶ A. Peter & O. Philip, *Proliferation of Churches and High Insecurity in Nigeria*, GAS Journal of Religious Studies, Vol. 2, Issue 7, 2025, p. 3-4

the above Churches are found today in Churches that make up the Pentecostal movement. The latter is classified as follows: Classical Pentecostals; Neo-Pentecostals; Evangelicals; Zionist/Spiritual; Neo-Pagans; and Secessionists³⁸⁷. The impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is a cause for great worry, especially in the Nigerian context. In this regard, Nicholas says, Pentecostalism in its Nigerian form should be a great concern for many well-meaning Christians in the country today. They present different faces and typologies. A good number of Churches are now Neo-pagans in their approach to many issues. Some are built around Christian Principles. African spirituality and metaphysical experiences. Most of these build their theology around the religious principles of the Bible, African charismatic sciences, and African cultism. It is therefore a combination of Christian spirituality and African cultic and occult worship in the guise of Pentecostal spirituality³⁸⁸.

When the unity of the Church is affected, it makes it difficult for New Evangelization to thrive. Given their origins and constitutive elements, the activities of the Pentecostal movements cannot be undermined. The greatest harm that has been caused over the years is the rise in denominational distinctions, which is a deep wound to Christian unity. The divergence in theological perspectives does not make it easy for the Church to address certain moral decadence in society. This constitutes the Church's greatest challenge. In this regard, Chioma, referring to Guth, says: "The challenge lies in fostering unity among the diverse denominations to collectively address the leadership conundrum, as each denomination may have unique perspectives and priorities. Moreover, the theological perspectives on political engagement vary among different segments of the Church. Some theological doctrines emphasize a separation between the sacred and the secular, leading to varying degrees of reluctance or enthusiasm regarding the Church's involvement in political matters"³⁸⁹.

4.5 Syncretism, Inculturation and Socio-Cultural Variations

One of the key aims of the Western Missionaries was to plant the seed of the Christian message within a given indigenous historical tradition without losing the

³⁸⁷ Cf. I. Nicholas, *Are All These Galileans? Pentecostalism & Speaking in Tongues A Theological Assessment*, 2015, pp. 16-18.

³⁸⁸ Cf. Ibidem. I. Nicholas, *Are All These Galileans?* p. 21.

³⁸⁹ Cf. Ibidem. C. Onuorah, *Unmasking Nigeria's leadership conundrum*, p. 5.

essence of the Gospel traditions. However, Christian Churches initially failed to remove the aspects of the western culture that constitutes stumbling blocks for the desired integration in the indigenous soil or to assimilate the aspect of indigenous properties that are indispensable for its survival. The consequence of this raised some theological problems. In the attempt to ascertain a balance, most times, the Christian missions in Africa for instance, found themselves alternating between protecting the redeeming Gospel of Christ with its superiority tendency and the severe African traditions, often in contrast to the other.

Consequently, African Christianity was characterized by Syncretism whereby African and western theologies mixed to the point that both systems seemed to have lost their basic structures and identities. From an etymological standpoint, syncretism is from a Greek word *synkretismos*. Its origin is the custom of the people who lived in the Island of Crete in ancient days, who always fought themselves, but when enemies from outside attacked, they combined force with each other to combat their foreign enemy. They called this practice *synkretismos*, which comes from the verb meaning “to combine”, “to mix together” or “to unite one thing to another”³⁹⁰. This concept has its root in two potential sources. The first is hermeneutical, arising out of a misapplication of biblical truth due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of its meaning. The other arises out of a contextualization or quest for relevance, a desire to harmonize biblical truth with cultural trends, norms and practices of modern society. So, the history of the ancient Israelites is a history of their defilement with idolatry-corrupting the practice of Yahweh’s worship by building high places to Baal. We see syncretism in the dawn of the Church, when philosophers mixed their lofty philosophy with the claims of the Jesus way. Soon Christianity was tangled in the mire of Gnosticism, Arianism, and various other deviations (Syncretism). However, the contemporary society holds that syncretism is the mixing of different religious beliefs and systems into one form of worship or expressing one’s belief³⁹¹.

³⁹⁰ E. Ezenweke & I. Kanu. *Perspectives of Syncretism & its Modern Trend: Christian & African Traditions* p.73. <https://ikechukwuanthonykanu.com/repo/SYNCRETISM.pdf> (accessed 3/4/2026).

³⁹¹ Cf. T. Barga. *A Pastoral Approach to African Christian Theology*, Nigeria: 2012, pp. 16-17.

Geographical, economic and linguistic factors facilitate syncretism. For instance, cosmopolitan cities or business nerve centers could breed syncretism. A case in point is the city of Alexandria, which favours cultural contacts, language dissemination and the interchange of gods. Another cause of syncretism is the policy of religious tolerance. In this case, syncretism becomes an effort to plug all the gaps in a given religion³⁹². The innovations in Christianity is said not to provide for some of the functions the traditional values perform. The gospel displaces them without replacement. These independent churches provide traditional needs for spontaneous prayer, exorcism and faith healing lacking in established churches³⁹³.

A definition of the theological content of inculturation is contained in the words of the Gospel of St. John, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). It therefore finds its suit in the incarnational parameters already set by Christ, when, although he was God, took human flesh and lived within a human culture. According to Crollius, inculturation means: “The honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people.... It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity ‘truly feel at home’ in the cultures of each people”³⁹⁴. Inculturation is not a negative phenomenon, but when it is not guided by the right principles it could become a crude syncretism. On the other hand, Syncretism which connotes “mixing together” of elements of religious beliefs has over the years met unfriendly and very hostile scenarios leading to utter rejection as a result of accusations that it has led to the distortion of the Gospel values thereby watering the essentials of the Christian faith³⁹⁵.

Rather than creating a dichotomy between God’s special revelation in Scripture and his general revelation in culture, God is at work in both areas, thereby connoting an inextricable link. So the problem of bringing about a romance between syncretistic religions and the Christian faith lies in the fact of their incompatibility and lack of

³⁹² Cf. C. Barth. *Inculturation as a Symbol of Evangelization: Christian Faith Taking Root in African Soil*, Jos: 1997 p. 20.

³⁹³ Cf. Ibidem. E. Ezenweke & I. Kanu. *Perspectives of Syncretism & its Modern Trend*, p. 80.

³⁹⁴ R. A. Crollius. *Making a Church that is truly African in Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, Inculturation: Newness and Ongoing Progress*. In J. Walligo (Ed.). Nairobi: 1986, p. 11.

³⁹⁵ Cf. Ibidem, T. Barga, *A Pastoral Approach to African Christian Theology*, p. 18.

communion with each other as man cannot serve both God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). Holding to the simplicity of Christ and his message are all veritable tools and a positive way forward in synthesizing syncretism and African theology of inculturation.

Nigeria's extraordinary cultural plurality expressed in its languages, traditions, social structures, and worldviews, creates a complex environment for the Church's mission of New Evangelization. The New Evangelization, calls for a renewed proclamation of the Gospel in ways that respond to contemporary cultural realities while remaining faithful to the Church's missionary mandate³⁹⁶. However, the multiplicity of socio-cultural contexts in Nigeria often complicates this task. One major challenge arises from linguistic diversity. Nigeria is home to more than 300 languages, each tied to a distinct cultural identity³⁹⁷. While English functions as the official language, many rural communities rely primarily on indigenous languages for daily communication. The New Evangelization requires not only translation but also cultural interpretation, ensuring that the Gospel message resonates within each linguistic worldview. This linguistic distinction makes it difficult to develop uniform catechetical materials and can hinder the Church's ability to foster a shared Christian identity³⁹⁸.

Another significant challenge is the persistence of traditional religious worldviews. Many Nigerian communities maintain strong ties to ancestral practices, ritual obligations, and cosmological beliefs that shape their understanding of life, suffering, morality, and community³⁹⁹. These worldviews often coexist with Christian faith in a form of religious syncretism or dual allegiance⁴⁰⁰. The New Evangelization must therefore address not only doctrinal ignorance but also deeply rooted cultural patterns that may conflict with Christian teachings. This requires pastoral sensitivity and a nuanced approach to inculturation, a process the Church has long emphasized as essential to authentic evangelization⁴⁰¹.

³⁹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican: 1990, no. 3.

³⁹⁷ Cf. T. Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*, Westport: 2001, p.15.

³⁹⁸ Cf. A. Okere, *Language and Evangelization in Nigeria*, "African Ecclesial Review" 42, no. 2 (2000): pp. 89–92.

³⁹⁹ Cf. J. Olupona, *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: 2014, pp. 27–30.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. O. Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, Pretoria: 2005, p. 112.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Vatican II, Decree, *Ad Gentes*, Vatican: 1965, no. 22.

Socio-cultural differences also manifest in regional differences in social values and political histories. The predominantly Muslim North, the religiously plural Middle Belt, and the largely Christian South each present distinct evangelization contexts⁴⁰². Issues such as interreligious tensions, ethnic rivalries, and historical grievances can influence how communities receive the Church's message. In some regions, evangelization efforts are constrained by security concerns or by legal and social restrictions on Christian activities⁴⁰³. These realities demand that the Church adapt its pastoral strategies to local conditions while maintaining unity in mission.

Furthermore, urbanization and modernization have created new cultural dynamics that challenge traditional evangelization methods. Urban centres like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt are melting pots of cultures, lifestyles, and ideologies. Young people in these cities are increasingly shaped by globalized media, secular values, and individualistic worldviews⁴⁰⁴. The Church must therefore navigate not only traditional cultural barriers but also emerging cultural shifts that reshape identity, morality, and community life. The New Evangelization must speak meaningfully to these rapidly changing contexts in a bid to address the challenges it faces. Also, socio-cultural variations influence family structures and social expectations, which in turn affect the reception of Christian teaching. Practices such as polygamy, extended family obligations, and communal decision-making can complicate the Church's efforts to promote Christian marriage, personal moral responsibility, and sacramental discipline⁴⁰⁵. The New Evangelization must therefore engage these cultural realities with both fidelity to the Gospel and respect for local traditions, seeking ways to purify, elevate, and integrate cultural values in light of the Christian message. Nigeria's socio-cultural diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for the New Evangelization. While this diversity enriches the Church's life, it also demands pastoral creativity, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to inculturation. The Church must

⁴⁰² Cf. M. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan 1993, pp. 44–47.

⁴⁰³ Cf. International Crisis Group, *Violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt*, Africa Report No. 26 (2018), pp. 5–7

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. A. Ukah, *Pentecostalism, Urban Culture, and the New Evangelization in Nigeria*, "Journal of Religion in Africa" 36, no. 3 (2006): pp. 298–301

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. F. Oborji, *Trends in African Theology*, Nairobi 2005, pp. 89–92.

continually discern how to proclaim the Gospel authentically within each cultural context while fostering unity in faith across the nation's many cultural landscapes⁴⁰⁶.

4.6 Poor Catechesis and Inadequate Knowledge of the Catholic Faith

In numerous parishes, catechetical instruction is limited to preparation for sacraments, with little ongoing formation afterward⁴⁰⁷. As a result, many Catholics possess only a rudimentary grasp of the faith, leaving them ill-equipped to articulate or defend Catholic teaching in a religiously plural society like Nigeria. This lack of depth undermines the Church's call for every Christian to be an evangelizer, not merely a passive recipient of the faith⁴⁰⁸. Poor catechesis also contributes to the spread of syncretism and doctrinal confusion. In many communities, Catholics blend Christian beliefs with traditional religious practices or popular spiritual movements, often without understanding the theological contradictions involved⁴⁰⁹. Without strong catechetical grounding, many Christians struggle to distinguish between authentic Catholic teaching and the promises of prosperity preaching, miracle-centered ministries, or cultural practices that conflict with the Gospel⁴¹⁰. This confusion weakens the credibility of the Church's witness and complicates efforts to present the Gospel in a coherent and compelling way.

Another challenge is the shortage of trained catechists and inadequate catechetical resources. Many catechists in Nigeria serve voluntarily and lack formal theological training⁴¹¹. In rural areas especially, catechetical instruction may rely on outdated materials or oral explanations that do not adequately address contemporary questions faced by young people, families, and professionals. The New Evangelization requires catechists who are not only doctrinally sound but also capable of engaging modern cultural issues such as secularism, digital media, and ethical dilemmas. Without such formation, catechesis remains disconnected from the lived realities of the faithful⁴¹².

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Ibidem, pp. 89-92.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. A. Okere, *Catechesis in Contemporary Nigeria*, "African Ecclesial Review" 45, no. 1 (2003): pp. 72-75.

⁴⁰⁸ Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio, Porta Fidei*, Vatican: 2011, no. 10.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. O. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, Oxford: 2008, pp. 56-58.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. A. Ukah, *The Rise of Pentecostalism and the Challenges to Catholic Identity in Nigeria*, "Journal of Religion in Africa" 37, no. 3 (2007): pp. 312-15.

⁴¹¹ Cf. F. Oborji, *Trends in African Theology*, Nairobi 2005, pp.104-107.

⁴¹² Cf. National Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *Directory for Catechesis in Nigeria*, Abuja: 2015, pp. 12-14.

Furthermore, inadequate knowledge of the faith affects liturgical participation and sacramental life, which are central to the Church's evangelizing mission. When Catholics do not understand the meaning of the Mass, the sacraments, or the liturgical year, their participation becomes routine rather than transformative⁴¹³. The New Evangelization depends on vibrant liturgical communities where the faithful encounter Christ and are empowered to share Him with others. Without adequate formation, these leaders may lack the theological competence and pastoral sensitivity needed to guide others in faith. Poor catechesis and inadequate knowledge of the Catholic faith pose a serious challenge to the New Evangelization in Nigeria. Addressing this issue requires renewed investment in catechetical training, updated resources, ongoing adult formation, and a pastoral commitment to deepening the faith of all Catholics. Only a well-formed community can effectively proclaim the Gospel in a society marked by cultural diversity, religious competition, and rapid social change. Poor catechesis weakens this foundation. Poor catechesis limits the Church's ability to form lay leaders, who are essential for evangelization in Nigeria's rapidly growing and diverse society. The Church increasingly relies on laypersons to lead small Christian communities, youth groups, parish councils, and social ministries⁴¹⁴.

4.7 Poor Infrastructural Development and Inadequate use of Modern Means of Communication.

Poor infrastructural development and the limited ability to use modern means of communication constitute major obstacles to the New Evangelization in the Church in Nigeria. The New Evangelization emphasizes the need to proclaim the Gospel with renewed vigour, employing contemporary tools and methods that respond to the cultural and technological realities of the modern world⁴¹⁵. However, Nigeria's infrastructural deficiencies, particularly in electricity, transportation, internet access, and digital literacy significantly hinder the Church's capacity to carry out this mission effectively. The media and digital culture is undoubtedly a powerful global force that changes the way people think, act and respond. It affects every part of society, including the Church.

⁴¹³ Cf. A. Jimoh, *Liturgy and Evangelization in the Nigerian Church*, "Catholic Theological Journal of Nigeria" 6 (2014): pp. 89–92.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. P. Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African*, Notre Dame: 2014, pp. 145–148.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 37.

Benedict XVI significantly counselled that using new media to spread the faith requires a profound knowledge of this if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately⁴¹⁶.

A central challenge is the unreliable power supply, which affects parishes, schools, and pastoral centres across the country. Frequent power outages make it difficult to operate audio-visual equipment, public-address systems, computers, and other tools essential for modern catechesis and evangelization⁴¹⁷. Without stable electricity, many parishes cannot run digital catechetical programs, maintain parish media centres, or livestream liturgical celebrations and practices that have become integral to evangelization in many parts of the world. Another challenge is the limited access to digital communication technologies, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. While urban centres like Lagos and Abuja have relatively better internet penetration, many rural communities lack reliable network coverage or affordable data services⁴¹⁸. This digital divide prevents large segments of the Catholic population from accessing online catechesis, virtual retreats, Catholic media content, and social-media-based evangelization initiatives. The New Evangelization relies heavily on digital platforms to reach young people, yet many Nigerian youths remain excluded due to infrastructural limitations⁴¹⁹.

The Church also faces challenges related to poor transportation infrastructure, which affects pastoral mobility and communication. Bad roads, long travel times, and inadequate public transportation make it difficult for priests, catechists, and pastoral agents to reach remote communities⁴²⁰. This limits the frequency of pastoral visits, sacramental administration, and catechetical instruction. In such contexts, the New Evangelization's call for closer accompaniment and community-building becomes difficult to realize.

Furthermore, the inability to make effective use of modern communication tools is compounded by low levels of digital literacy among many parishioners and even some

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Ibidem, no. 37.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. A. Adenikinju, *Electricity Infrastructure Failures in Nigeria*, "Energy Policy" 29, no. 3 (2001): pp. 195–201.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Nigerian Communications Commission, *2022 Annual Report*, Abuja 2023, pp. 18–22.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Ibidem. P. Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African*, p. 152.

⁴²⁰ Cf. International Crisis Group, "Nigeria's Dangerous Roads," Africa Briefing No. 120 (2016), pp. 3–5.

pastoral workers⁴²¹. While the Church encourages the use of social media, websites, radio, and television for evangelization, many communities lack the skills needed to produce or engage with digital content. This gap reduces the Church's ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences, especially the youth who increasingly inhabit digital spaces⁴²².

Poor infrastructural development also affects Catholic educational institutions, which play a crucial role in forming future leaders and evangelizers. Schools and seminaries without adequate technological resources struggle to integrate digital tools into teaching and formation⁴²³. This results in graduates who may be pastorally committed but technologically unprepared for the demands of modern evangelization. Poor infrastructural development and the limited use of modern communication technologies significantly hinder the New Evangelization in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires investment in digital infrastructure, training in media literacy, and creative pastoral strategies that adapt to local realities. Only by bridging these infrastructural and technological gaps can the Church fully harness the potential of modern communication for evangelization in the Nigerian context⁴²⁴.

4.8 Lack of Collaboration between the Clergy, the Religious and the Laity

The New Evangelization calls for the entire People of God: clergy, religious, and laity to work together in proclaiming the Gospel with renewed zeal and creativity⁴²⁵. In the Nigerian context, however, a persistent lack of collaboration among these groups poses a significant obstacle to the Church's missionary mandate. When the various vocations within the Church fail to operate in harmony, the effectiveness of evangelization efforts is weakened, and the Church's witness becomes fragmented. One major challenge arises from danger of clericalism, a tendency that places excessive emphasis on the authority of the clergy while minimizing the role of the laity⁴²⁶. In some

⁴²¹ Cf. *Directory for Communications and Media Apostolate*, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Abuja: 2018, pp. 9–11.

⁴²² Cf. A. Ukah, *Digitizing Evangelization in Africa*, "Journal of African Media Studies" 12, no. 2 (2020): pp. 245–248.

⁴²³ A. C. Okere, *Education and Evangelization in Nigeria*, "African Ecclesial Review" 46, no. 2 (2004): pp. 101–104.

⁴²⁴ Cf. Ibidem. pp. 101–104.

⁴²⁵ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 2.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican: 2013, pp. 102–104.

Nigerian parishes, pastoral decision-making is dominated by priests, leaving little room for lay participation in planning, leadership, or ministry. This dynamic discourages lay initiative and undermines the vision of the Church as a communion of charisms working together for mission. The New Evangelization requires a participatory Church in which all members contribute according to their gifts, yet clericalism often prevents this from happening⁴²⁷.

Similarly, tensions sometimes emerge between the religious congregations and diocesan structures, particularly in areas of pastoral jurisdiction, education, and social ministries. When religious communities operate independently of diocesan pastoral plans, duplication of efforts or competition for resources can occur. Such disunity weakens the Church's public witness and reduces the coherence of evangelization strategies. The New Evangelization demands coordinated pastoral action, but institutional rivalries can hinder this unity⁴²⁸. The laity, for their part, often face limited opportunities for formation and leadership, which further restricts their ability to collaborate effectively with clergy and religious⁴²⁹. Without adequate theological and pastoral training, many laypersons feel unprepared to take on roles in catechesis, youth ministry, social outreach, or evangelization programs. This lack of empowerment reinforces dependency on the clergy and prevents the emergence of a vibrant lay apostolate, which the New Evangelization urgently requires⁴³⁰.

Another challenge is the breakdown of communication and mutual trust among the three groups. In some contexts, misunderstandings arise due to differences in expectations, pastoral priorities, or cultural backgrounds. When communication is weak, collaboration becomes difficult, and pastoral initiatives suffer. The New Evangelization thrives on teamwork, shared vision, and mutual respect, all of which are undermined when relationships within the Church are strained⁴³¹.

In a similar way, the lack of collaboration affects the Church's ability to respond effectively to contemporary social issues such as youth unemployment, corruption,

⁴²⁷ Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution. *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican: 1964, no. 31.

⁴²⁸ Cf. A. Okere, *Pastoral Collaboration in the Nigerian Church*, "African Ecclesial Review" 47, no. 1 (2005): pp. 55–58.

⁴²⁹ Cf. Ibidem. *Directory for Communications and Media Apostolate*, pp. 14–17.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Ibidem. P. Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African*, pp. 138–140.

⁴³¹ Cf. Ibidem. M. Kukah, *Witness to Justice*, pp. 89–92.

insecurity, and moral relativism. These challenges require coordinated pastoral responses that draw on the strengths of all vocations: the spiritual leadership of the clergy, the educational and social expertise of religious congregations, and the professional skills and societal presence of the laity. When these groups fail to work together, the Church's response becomes fragmented and less impactful. The lack of collaboration between the clergy, the religious, and the laity significantly undermines the New Evangelization in Nigeria. Overcoming this challenge requires renewed commitment to shared mission, improved communication, and intentional formation that empowers all members of the Church to participate fully in evangelization. Only through genuine partnership can the Church in Nigeria effectively proclaim the Gospel in a rapidly changing society⁴³².

4.9 Christian Marriage and the Challenge of Childlessness

The sacrament of Christian marriage and the challenge of childlessness is not only an issue of social concern alone but a pastoral one as well. In different parts of Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, marriage is deeply embedded in communal understanding and has direct bearing on fertility and lineage. The situation of Childlessness, arising from either biological, accidental, or lifestyle-related factors, therefore poses a profound pastoral and social challenge, affecting not only the couple but the entire community. Contemporary research shows that infertility is a significant public health and social issue in Nigeria, affecting between 20–30% of couples, a rate considerably higher than the global average of 8–12%⁴³³. Studies indicate that female-factor infertility accounts for approximately 55% of cases, male-factor infertility for 30%, and combined or unexplained causes for the remainder. The high prevalence is linked to untreated sexually transmitted diseases, complications from unsafe abortions, poor reproductive health services, and cultural stigmatization that discourages early medical intervention⁴³⁴.

⁴³² Cf. Ibidem. F. Oborji, *Trends in African Theology*, pp. 121–124.

⁴³³ A. Adewuyi and A. Akinade. *Infertility in Nigeria: A Social and Psychological Analysis*, “African Journal of Reproductive Health” 9, no. 2, 2005, pp. 13–20.

⁴³⁴ O. Okonofua, *Infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary Issues*, “Women's Health and Action Research Centre”, Benin City: 2003, pp. 22–26.

Consequently, childlessness constitutes not only a private agony for the family, but a social, existential, and pastoral challenge for larger communities. Christian marriage, from a theological standpoint, is a covenantal union between a man and a woman ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children⁴³⁵. This theological vision is rooted in the creation narrative, where God blesses the first human couple with the command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). While openness to life belongs intrinsically to the vocation of marriage, the absence of children does not invalidate the sacrament or diminish the dignity of the couple. Rather, conjugal love itself possesses intrinsic value as a path to holiness and mutual sanctification⁴³⁶. This doctrinal clarification is essential for avoiding a disordered notion that seeks to equate marital bliss and success solely to biological fruitfulness. In line with this, John Paul II, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, insists that spouses are first called to love each other as persons, not merely as biological collaborators in reproduction⁴³⁷. Therefore, a childless marriage is not a defective marriage. It is still a real participation in God’s covenantal love.

However, from a cultural perspective, lack of children in marriage constitutes a great challenge for families as child bearing is understood not only as personal blessings but also as carriers of family continuity, economic security, social status and family recognition. A prominent Nigerian writer Emefie Ikenga-Metuh notes that African marriage “is essentially a social reality in which the individual finds identity and continuity through the family lineage”⁴³⁸. This suggest that marriage is often interpreted primarily as a means of extending the lineage, strengthening kinship bonds, and guarantees care for parents in old age. Within such a framework, childlessness generates intense pressure from extended family networks, leading to blame, stigma, or even insinuations of polygamy or separation. Similarly, another African scholar Cyril Okorochoa observes that, “the pressure to produce children in African marriages is so

⁴³⁵ Cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican: 1965, nos. 48–52.

⁴³⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation. *Familiaris Consortio*, Vatican: 1981, no. 11.

⁴³⁷ Ibidem nos. 14-18.

⁴³⁸ E. I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes*, Enugu: 1985, p. 112.

intense that couples without children often face social stigma, emotional distress, and spiritual crisis”⁴³⁹.

This situation is compounded by communal expectations, transforming what is already a medical or biological challenge into a profound social, spiritual and psychological burden. As a result of childlessness, some Christian couples are driven into non-Christian or syncretistic practices in search of solutions, including traditional rituals or ethically questionable reproductive technologies. To buttress this, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) also expressed concerns about the spiritual consequences of childlessness. In their 2013 pastoral message, the Bishops lamented that “many families, in their desperation, turn to unchristian practices such as divination, sorcery, and syncretism in search of solutions to infertility”⁴⁴⁰. These responses reveal the depth of marital crisis faced by families in Nigeria and underscore the need for continuous ecclesial support.

While medicine legitimately seeks to address infertility, the Church insists that human procreation must respect the dignity of the person and the unity of the marital act. Therefore, techniques that replace rather than assist conjugal love, or that involve the destruction of embryos, raise serious moral concerns.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the New Evangelization in the Church in Nigeria demand a renewed and united response from the entire Christian community. In a society shaped by rapidly changing cultures, emerging ideologies, and complex social realities, the Church must remain steadfast in its mission to transform the world with the Gospel of Christ. This requires not only prayer but a deeper commitment to the study, preaching, and living out of the Word of God. Likewise, the faithful and meaningful celebration of the Sacraments must continue to nourish individuals, families, and parishes, enabling them to become authentic witnesses of Christ. If the Church in Nigeria is to overcome the obstacles to New Evangelization whether cultural, structural, or spiritual it must strengthen its pastoral strategies, renew its catechetical efforts, and foster collaboration among clergy, religious, and laity. Only through such intentional renewal can the

⁴³⁹ C. Okorochoa, *The Church in Africa and the Challenge of Evangelization*, Ibadan: 1992, p. 87.

⁴⁴⁰ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, *Pastoral Message to the Faithful*, Abuja: 2013.

Nigerian Church experience genuine transformation, growth, and the missionary vitality needed to proclaim the Gospel effectively in our time.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

Introduction

The call for New Evangelization compels the Church in Nigeria to rekindle faith amid secular drift, interfaith tensions, and interreligious conflicts. This concluding chapter synthesizes findings from previous analyses, bringing together historical evidences, ecclesial situation, and contemporary challenges into actionable recommendations for renewal both at the diocesan and parish levels. Grounded in relevant Church documents, these recommendations span catechesis, community building, dialogue, and structural reform to foster missionary conversion and enthrone the tenets of New Evangelization. *Redemptoris Missio* underscores that New Evangelization is not merely about re-proclaiming the Gospel but about re-igniting faith in contexts where Christianity has already taken root but faces stagnation or decline⁴⁴¹. The mission of New Evangelization in Nigeria requires a contextualized approach that responds to the nation's socio-political realities, cultural diversity, and religious pluralism. The Catholic Church, as both a spiritual and social institution, must renew its pastoral strategies to address challenges such as declining catechetical engagement, weak lay participation, and the growing influence of secularism and Pentecostal movements. This means strengthening catechesis, revitalizing parish life, deepening Catholic spirituality in schools, and promoting collaboration among clergy, religious, and laity. The recommendations in this chapter are therefore aimed at equipping the Church in Nigeria to fulfil its evangelizing mission in contemporary times.

5.1 Catechesis/Mystagogy to foster Participation of the Faithful in the Sacramental Life of the Church

Over the years, the Catholic Church has made consistent and incredible progress in the area of religious education, which now at the instance of the Second Vatican Council, is called "Catechesis". The publication of the universal Catechism of the Catholic Church has solidified and clarified the position of the Church on our treasured tradition since the time of the early Church and the flowering of the catechetical mission

⁴⁴¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, no. 33

of the Church over the centuries. The catechism has been a unique gift to the Church and will continue to bear abundant fruits for the future. It is a complete and accurate exposition of Catholic doctrine. It presents what Catholics throughout the world uphold, believe, celebrate in sacraments and live in prayerful spirituality. The challenges of poor handling of catechesis by instructors, the absence of a unified curriculum for catechesis and the wrong aims often associated with catechetical ministry, which is predominantly for reception of the ministry, are obstacles to the evangelizing mission.

The seven sacraments of the Catholic Church make up the deepest and most enduring resources for New Evangelization in Nigeria because they embody the Church's conviction that evangelization is not merely the transmission of doctrines but the communication of graces through visible signs. Among the laity in Nigeria, a profound crisis of sacramental nominalism afflicts them, as frequent reception of the Eucharist too often occurs without the requisite depth of genuine encounter which the Church intends, leading to a faith that seems to be mere routine, ritualistic rather than being transformative⁴⁴². In a country marked by intense religious pluralism, rapid urbanization, economic instability, and the proliferation of Pentecostal and neo-traditional religious movements, the sacraments offer a stable, incarnational, and communitarian mode of encountering Christ. The sacraments are "privileged moments of evangelization" because they unite proclamation with experience, doctrine with encounter, and faith with culture⁴⁴³. For Nigeria, where religious expression is vibrant yet often segmented, the sacraments can renew Catholic identity, deepen discipleship, and strengthen missionary communities capable of addressing the pastoral and social challenges of contemporary Christians.

The Sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist are foundational for building a culture of missionary discipleship. Baptism, which incorporates the Christian into the Body of Christ, resonates deeply with African communitarian ideology. For Orobator, the African understanding of personhood is inherently relational, and Baptism sacramentalizes this relational identity by inserting the Christian into the "family of God," a metaphor that carries profound cultural weight

⁴⁴² Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Rome: 1995, no. 76.

⁴⁴³ Ibidem. nos. 79–82.

in Nigeria⁴⁴⁴. In a society where ethnic and religious divisions often threaten national cohesion, Baptism can serve as a counter-narrative, forming Christians who understand their primary identity as rooted in Christ rather than tribe or region.

Confirmation, which is the strengthening of the faith received at Baptism is not only understood as a rite of passage but as a moment of intentional catechesis, which equips the faithful to resist the pressures of syncretism, Pentecostalism, secularism, and prosperity-driven religiosity. Justin Ukpogong argues that the New Evangelization in Africa requires a renewed pneumatology that empowers the laity to witness in public life, especially in politics, education, and the digital sphere⁴⁴⁵. Confirmation, by strengthening the gifts of the Spirit, forms the laity who can articulate their faith in a society where religious discourse is often dominated by sensationalism and spiritual consumeristic tendencies.

The Eucharist, described by the Catechism as the “source and summit of the Christian life”,⁴⁴⁶ is particularly crucial for the New Evangelization in Nigeria. In a religious environment where worship is frequently evaluated by emotional intensity or material benefits, a renewed Eucharistic mystagogy can redirect Catholic spirituality toward the paschal mystery of Christ’s self-giving love. The Eucharist forms a people who understand mission not as self-promotion but as sacrificial service. When parishes in Nigeria cultivate a deep sense of Eucharistic devotion, liturgical decorum, and social outreach flowing from the altar, they become agents of evangelization that attract others and deepen the faith of those who have been baptized.

The sacraments of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick address the wounds of both individuals and society. Nigeria’s social landscape is marked by corruption, violence, ethnic tension, and widespread trauma. The sacrament of Reconciliation, when reclaimed from minimalistic practice, can become a school of conscience formation. John Paul II emphasizes that confession must link personal sin with social structures, inviting Christians to conversion that includes restitution and social responsibility⁴⁴⁷. In

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. O. Agbonkhianmeghe. *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context*. Nairobi: 2000 pp. 45–49.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. J. Ukpogong. *New Evangelization in Africa in the Spirit of Vatican II*, Enugu: 1997, pp. 110–13.

⁴⁴⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. London: 1994, nos. 334–339.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Rome: 1984, pp. 23–26.

Nigeria, where countless challenges presents opportunities for compromises of the faith, confession can form Catholics who see integrity in public life as an expression of discipleship. Parishes that offer regular confession, communal penitential services, retreats, and catechesis on moral responsibility contribute directly to the New Evangelization by shaping morally credible witnesses of the faith.

The Anointing of the Sick, often misunderstood as a sacrament only for the dying, has immense evangelizing potential in a country where inadequate healthcare, poverty, and insecurity leave many vulnerable. Kevin Okafor notes that pastoral care of the sick in Nigeria must counter both fatalism and magical healing practices by presenting Christ as the compassionate healer who accompanies those who suffer⁴⁴⁸. When the Church ministers to the sick through home visits, hospital chaplaincies, and parish-based health initiatives, it embodies the mercy of Christ in a way that evangelizes through presence rather than mere words. The sacrament becomes a sign of God's solidarity with the afflicted and an admonishment to Christian communities to practice charity.

Holy Orders and Matrimony shape the primary agents and primary spaces of evangelization. Holy Orders configures bishops, priests, and deacons as servants of the Word and stewards of the mysteries of Christ. John Paul II insists in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, that the priest must also be an animator of a co-responsible laity, forming them for mission in the world⁴⁴⁹. In Nigeria, where the tendency of clericalism hinders lay participation, ongoing formation in a missionary ecclesiology is a vital element required for New Evangelization. Priests who cultivate collaborative leadership, empower lay catechists, and promote small Christian communities contribute significantly to the evangelizing mission.

Matrimony situates the Christian family as the “domestic Church,” a concept especially relevant in Nigeria, where the family remains the primary locus of moral, cultural, and religious formation. Benedict XVI emphasizes that African families are called to be “schools of evangelization,” witnessing to fidelity, openness to life, and hospitality⁴⁵⁰. In the Nigerian society faced with pressures from migration, economic

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. K. Okafor, *Pastoral Care and Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, Onitsha: 2005, pp. 72–78.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Rome: 1992, pp. 25–27.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, Rome: 2011 pp. 52–55.

hardship, and shifting cultural norms, strong Catholic families become living and lasting icons of the Gospel message. Marriage preparation, family accompaniment, and parish-based support groups can help families embody the virtues that evangelize neighbours, extended kin, and the entire Christian community.

For the sacraments of the Church to promote New Evangelization in Nigeria, they must be celebrated with theological depth, pastoral intent, and cultural sensitivity. This requires robust catechesis, inculturated liturgy, and a pastoral strategy that integrates sacramental life with social engagement. Boniface argues that Nigerian Catholicism must move from “faith as event” to “faith as transformation,” where sacramental participation leads to ethical and social renewal⁴⁵¹. When the sacraments are celebrated as encounters with the living Christ that form missionary disciples, they become the beating heart of a Church capable of offering to Nigeria a credible sign of God’s kingdom of justice, mercy, and peace.

The *Manual of the Laity* issued by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria outlines a well-structured program for ongoing catechesis, prescribing graduated programs that equip catechists, whether in bustling markets, secular schools, or remote healthcare outposts, with doctrinal clarity and apologetic skills to withstand the encroachments of prosperity theology and syncretistic practices⁴⁵². Parishes, as primary units of this renewal, must have a clearly structured module that is tailored to varying stages of maturity in the faith. For instance, beginners can delve into the CCC paragraphs 1322–1419 on the Eucharist’s real presence⁴⁵³; intermediates can weave liturgical mystagogy from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* with practical family catechesis; while those in the advanced groups may get engaged in studying the works of St. Thomas Aquinas especially his teaching on sacramental theology. This sustained catechetical thrust not only deepens sacramental life but fortifies the Church against the tides of indifference and heresy, ensuring that Nigeria’s faithful emerge as convinced witnesses of the mission of new evangelisation.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. B. Achor, *Faith in Flux: Catholicism and the Dynamics of Witnessing in Today’s Nigeria*, Abuja: 2024, pp. 137–142.

⁴⁵² Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, *Manual of the Laity*, Abuja, 2009, nos. 66–70.

⁴⁵³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Kenya: 2008 nos. 1322–1419.

Remarkably, one of the striking characteristics of the Judaeo-Christian traditions is the desire for God, communicated clearly and consistently in Scriptures, to be known by His people and to live in communion with them⁴⁵⁴. Catechesis remains the backbone of New Evangelization. Consequently, The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) insists that catechesis must be “systematic, comprehensive, and adapted to the circumstances of those being catechized”⁴⁵⁵. In Nigeria, catechesis often ends with reception of the sacrament, without ongoing formation and deepening of the knowledge acquired. This truncation weakens lay participation in the sacramental life of the Church, as many Catholics lack theological grounding to appreciate the Eucharist, reconciliation, and other sacraments. In this case, on-going catechesis becomes a thing of necessity and paramount importance.

Another important model for New Evangelization in parishes in Nigeria today is the integral quest for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and child inclusive. This model combines instruction based on the scripture, liturgical participation, prayer and bonding with the ecclesiastical community. The possibilities of evangelization are endless when RCIA is faithfully developed and adhered to, in the parish setting. In a growing Church like Nigeria, if our teaming Catholics are not able to understand, articulate, explain and defend their faith, then evangelization cannot evolve. For the Gospel to truly penetrate cultures, families must allow the Word of God to take root in them such that their actions reflect a life of faith which cannot be reduced to a memory of fact, an empty discipline of habits or a worship that has no significance. To appreciate the tremendous role of the RCIA, Francis Stafford suggests that in a new millennium, the parish’s best catechetical method is the *mystagogia*, the post-baptismal catechesis. This is a profound discovery into the mystery of faith with the purpose of allowing a person to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at baptism⁴⁵⁶.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, Vatican, 1965, no. 2

⁴⁵⁵ *General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for the Clergy, Vatican: 1997, no. 67.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. F. Stafford. *The Parish – A Spirituality of Communion*. Hayas Michael ed. Mission and Evangelization. London: 2004. p.100.

5.2 Formation of Basic Christian Communities and Adequate Remuneration of Church Workers

The parish, as the Church's fundamental cell, cries out for renewal through the widespread formation of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), which mirror the vibrant *Koinonia* of Acts 2:42–47. The setting up of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) has remained a proven and effective way of deepening the faith and fostering solidarity in Africa. In his apostolic exhortation to the African Synod, John Paul II described BCCs as an expression of ecclesial communion and veritable means of evangelization. By this, he expressed his missionary determination and encouragement for the formation of small Christian communities as a way to being a Church in concrete terms. Furthermore, he asserts that the Church cannot fulfil all its possibilities unless it has smaller units enough to foster close human relationships. The characteristics of such communities, he emphasized, ought to be places engaged in evangelizing themselves, so that subsequently, they can proclaim the Good News to others outside the community⁴⁵⁷.

In Nigeria, BCCs serves as platforms for Scripture sharing, mutual support, and pastoral outreach, especially in rural and urban peripheries where priests cannot regularly visit. They pray and listen to God's Word together, they encourage each other to take up responsibilities and to learn to live as a Church; they reflect on various human problems in the light of the Gospel, and they transcend limits of the natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups⁴⁵⁸. According to John Paul II BCCs are a great hope for the universal Church and a sign of vitality within a particular Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society built on a civilization of love⁴⁵⁹. In addition, Paul VI profoundly described evangelization as a spreading of the Gospel, not merely by gaining territorial expansion nor the planting of communities in more areas of the globe; but a reaching out to people in different situations so that the faith and life of the Church is enriched and lived in a new expression⁴⁶⁰.

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Vatican: 1995, no. 89.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. T. Barga, *A Pastoral Approach to African Christian Community*, Jos: 2012, p. 215.

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican: 1990, no. 51

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican: 1975, no. 58.

Without evangelization, the Church ceases to exist among men and women. This description is what small Christian communities aim to achieve. In the Diocese of Enugu, over 200 BCCs have demonstrated remarkable resilience amid economic downturns and kidnapping epidemics, sustaining evangelization through innovative micro-credit cooperatives, anti-violence vigils, and family strengthening ministries that have retained 85 percent of its members in the face of challenges⁴⁶¹. The presence of the communities drives home the purpose of being in Christ as God's family, bringing about renewal in parishes where they exist. Through the formation of BCCs parishes in Nigerian evolve from outposts into dynamic mission hubs, penetrating society's peripheries with the Gospel's liberating power, and fulfilling the Church's mandate to be a sign and instrument of communion amidst diverse cultural entities. Nigerian parishes should therefore invest in training lay leaders in pastoral administration, catechesis, and liturgical coordination. This will reduce clericalism and foster co-responsibility in parish life⁴⁶². Our African culture of family life and the extended family group offer many opportunities to build small BCC than could evangelise themselves and others. To this, Anthony Gbuji observes that the family and evangelization are intimately connected. New Evangelization builds up the family and families promote evangelization⁴⁶³.

Right from time immemorial, people freely engaged in work and every good work ought to be accompanied by a just payment or reward. This is not always the case in our parishes particularly in rural areas, as most times the services of ecclesiastical workers are employed to foster the work of evangelization but these individuals do not adequate remuneration to enable them care for themselves and their family members. Remuneration here means a reward or payment for work done or services rendered. Work and remuneration are intertwined and could be said to be the two sides of the same coin. It is unfair and a grave sign of injustice for men and women to work without the enjoyment of the fruit of their work. Hence, the Church pronounces and affirms that remuneration is an inalienable right of the worker, lay church workers inclusive⁴⁶⁴.

⁴⁶¹ 2023 Annual Pastoral Report on Basic Christian Communities, Enugu, Nigeria, pp. 22–30.

⁴⁶² Cf. Ibidem. T. Barga, *A Pastoral Approach to African Christian Community*, Jos 2012, p. 215.

⁴⁶³ A. Gbuji. *Handbook on the New Evangelization in Nigeria*. Enugu: 2012. p. 57.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Ibidem. A. Enemali. *Remuneration of Ecclesiastical Workers*, p. 113.

The Church teaches that both men and women have the duty and right to work so as to make a living, provide for their families, perform acts of charity and develop the earth. In this regard, the Catechism of the Catholic Church holds that “a just wage is the legitimate fruit of work” and “to refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice”⁴⁶⁵. Leo XIII stresses the fact that remuneration is an inalienable right of the worker and a modest income that allows the worker and his family to live a modest life⁴⁶⁶. Also, John Paul II, holds that remuneration is the most important means for achieving justice in work relationship⁴⁶⁷. The code of canon law opines that, “lay people who work for the Church have the right to a worthy remuneration so as to enable them provide for their needs and their families, they have the right to have their insurance, social security and medical benefits duly safeguarded”⁴⁶⁸.

The Church in Nigeria, ought to draw up something known as “staff condition of service”. In this should contain work description, remuneration to be received for work done, wage increment/ allowances/ gratuity, medical coverage, pension scheme and so on. Also, finance committee can be set up in a parish to make annual budgets which will make provision for remuneration of all the Church workers serving at the Parish. But if after an assessment, it becomes obvious that the strength of the parish cannot meet up with at least a moderate remuneration of its workers, then the works force of the parish can be reduced, request for volunteer workers can be made or appeal can be done to the diocesan bishop for aid. Similarly, ecclesiastical workers can be permitted to make use of their leisure time to engage in other trade or skill that could assist them and their family. This will curtail the situation whereby lay workers steal or siphon Church funds and properties just to cater for their needs. By doing so, corruption and crime rate in the society can be curbed.

5.3. Deepening Catholic Spirituality in its Schools and Institutions

Catholic education have historically been known for inculcating sound doctrines and morals on children. It has been a pillar of evangelization in Nigeria. The schools and institutions have not only provided quality education but has also transmitted Catholic

⁴⁶⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2008, no. 2434.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter, *Rerum Novarum*, Rome: 1892 n. 5

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Laborem Exercens*, Rome: 1981, n. 19

⁴⁶⁸ *The Code of Canon Law*, 1983, no. 231

values and spirituality, resulting in the transformation of society. However, increasing secularization and some unfavourable government policies on education have weakened its evangelizing mission. Consequently, the mission of New Evangelization can only thrive when faith is integrated into learning. Catholic education must integrate faith and learning. The Congregation for Catholic education insists that Catholic schools should be “places of evangelization, of integral formation, of inculturation, and of apprenticeship in lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds”⁴⁶⁹. Nigerian Catholic schools must therefore ensure that curricula reflect Catholic social teaching, moral formation, and spiritual development alongside academic excellence.

In addition, effective chaplaincies can help to foster Catholic identity, provide pastoral care, and foster vocations. Benedict XVI observed, “Schools and universities are privileged places for the formation of authentic disciples of Christ”⁴⁷⁰. Nigerian dioceses should therefore prioritize the training and deployment of chaplains who can accompany students in their spiritual journey. In achieving this noble objective, Catholic schools must collaborate with parents, who are the primary educators of their children. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that “parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children”⁴⁷¹. Nigerian Catholic institutions should therefore establish programs that involve parents in faith formation, ensuring that Catholic spirituality is reinforced at home. Catholic institutions must continue to embody Catholic values such as justice, integrity, and service in their organizational culture as a remedy to moral decline obtainable in the society, serving as a counter-witness by modelling ethical leadership and social responsibility, giving rise to a generation of saintly professionals; doctors who pray with patients, lawyers who defend the unborn, and engineers who build sustainably structures.

⁴⁶⁹ *Congregation for Catholic Education. The Catholic School*. Vatican: 1977, no. 26.
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html (accessed 10.12.2025).

⁴⁷⁰ Benedict XVI. Address to Catholic Educators in the United States. Washington, D.C., 2008, no. 4.
https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_cath-univ-washington.html (accessed 10.12.2025)

⁴⁷¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2008, no. 2223.

Marek Tatar, reflecting on *The Spiritual Aspect of Communication in Faith and Through Faith in the Process of Reaching Sainthood* offers a valuable theological lens for understanding the interior dimension of the New Evangelization in Nigeria. Tatar holds that authentic evangelization begins with an interior transformation in which communication becomes an act of faith rooted in grace, expressed through personal holiness, and oriented toward communion with God and neighbour. This proposition is particularly relevant for the Nigerian context, where evangelization must address not only doctrinal formation but also the spiritual renewal of individuals and communities facing moral, social, and cultural challenges. By emphasizing that communication in faith is both relational and sanctifying, Tatar provides a framework for forming evangelizers whose witness flows from deep spiritual maturity. His perspective reinforces the conviction that the New Evangelization in Nigeria must cultivate interiority, spiritual authenticity, and holiness of life if it is to bear lasting fruit in the society⁴⁷². Through personal holiness, the faithful reclaim its evangelizing mission, standing as bulwarks against moral relativism and beacons drawing Nigeria's youth back to Christ's light amid pervasive darkness⁴⁷³.

5.4 Strengthening Collaboration among Priests, Religious and the Laity

The synergy of priests, religious, and laity forms the heartbeat of mission and is instrumental for New Evangelization. The mission of New Evangelization in Nigeria cannot succeed without genuine collaboration among priests, religious, and lay faithful. This echoes John Paul II's passionate plea during his 1982 pastoral visit to Nigeria. He sued for a united apostolate that harmonizes clerical ordination with the baptismal priesthood of all Christians⁴⁷⁴. The Second Vatican Council's document, *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that, "all members of the Church, whether clergy or laity, share in the mission of Christ"⁴⁷⁵. This shared responsibility requires structures and attitudes that

⁴⁷² Cf. M. Tatar, *The Spiritual Aspect of Communication in Faith and Through Faith in the Process of Reaching Sainthood*, "Studies in Spiritual Theology", Warsaw: 2018, pp. 45–62.

⁴⁷³ Cf. Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria. Communiqué at the End of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Abuja 2025. Nigeria Catholic Network, <https://www.nigeriacatholicnetwork.com/2025-cbcn-communique-abuja/> (accessed 1.12.2025).

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. John Paul II. *Address of John Paul II to the Priests and Seminarians of Nigeria*, "The Holy See", 13 Feb. 1982, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820213_sacerdoti-nigeria.html (accessed 13.12.2025).

⁴⁷⁵ Vatican II. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican: 1965, no. 31.

foster co-responsibility rather than clerical dominance. Quarterly Diocesan pastoral councils or yearly General Assemblies should be convened by the Bishops aimed to redesign evangelization strategies, avoiding the pitfalls of parallel apostolates that constraints ministerial energy and thwarts genuine efforts of witnessing.

When priests provide sacramental insights, religious infuse consecrated zeal, and laity provide professional expertise, the Church in Nigeria will be more graced⁴⁷⁶. Such collaboration is not a mere option but a vital necessity for the New Evangelization, turning possible obstacles into a unified symphony of service that drives the Church onward with compelling strength.

5.5 Proper use of the Modern Means of Communication

Digital revolution has largely transformed communication globally, and Nigeria is not exempt from this. With the approximately 122 million internet users in Nigeria, digital platforms present unprecedented opportunities for new evangelisation⁴⁷⁷. The Church must harness these tools to proclaim the Gospel in the most effective way in contemporary Nigerian society. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) are widely used especially among the teeming youth population in Nigeria. In an era where about 70 percent of Nigerian youth use smartphones as extensions of self, the Church neglects digital apostolate at its own risk. The Nigeria Catholic Network (NCN) app, with its 2.7 million monthly engagements, should be replicated across dioceses and strengthened by annual COMWEEK digital literacy campaigns that reach 4,700 parishes nationwide⁴⁷⁸. Going by benefit of hindsight, rigorous analytics aim for 50 percent youth interactivity by 2028, measuring through engagement metrics and conversion funnels, embodying Francis’s vision of a networked, missionary Church that meets people where they live⁴⁷⁹.

Benedict XVI aptly observed that “the digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but part of the daily experience of many people”⁴⁸⁰. Nigerian dioceses should therefore establish official social media ministries to share catechetical content,

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. *Guidelines on Collaborative Ministry or Charismatic Renewal Workshop Proceedings*. Catholic Conference of Religious, Nigeria 1999, secs. 2–4.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Nigerian Communications Commission, *Annual Report*, Abuja NCC 2023, p. 45.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Nigeria Catholic Network, *Communications Week 2024*, pp. 3–10.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. Francis. Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican 2013, nos. 24–33.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for World Communications Day*, 2013, p. 2.

livestream liturgies, and engage in dialogue with young people. Catholic radio and television stations, such as *Catholic Television of Nigeria (CTV)*, have already made significant contributions to evangelization. Expanding these institutions and ensuring professional standards will enhance their credibility and reach. Paul VI noted, “Modern means of communication are indispensable instruments of evangelization”⁴⁸¹. Investment in Catholic media will allow the Church to counteract misinformation and promote authentic values. Digital platforms can help provide authentic catechesis, online courses, mobile applications, and e-books which serves as a means of quality faith formation for Catholics who cannot attend physical classes. The *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) highlights the importance of digital catechesis, stating that “the digital culture must be considered an environment to be evangelized”⁴⁸². Nigerian dioceses should therefore develop contextualized digital resources in local languages. While embracing modern communication, the Church must also promote ethical use of media emphasizing truth, charity, and responsibility, aligning with the Church’s social teaching on communication. Priests, Religious and the Laity should be trained to make judicious use of the modern means of communication to foster greater participation in the liturgy and the sacramental life of the Church⁴⁸³.

5.6 Promoting Inter-Religious Dialogue and Ecumenism

Inter-religious dialogue is also an element of inestimable value especially in Nigeria, a nation marked by religious plurality, with Christianity and Islam being the two dominant faiths, alongside African Traditional Religions (ATR). This diversity has often been a source of tension, particularly in regions affected by activities of religious extremists. The mission of New Evangelization must therefore include a strong commitment to inter-religious dialogue as a means of fostering peace and mutual understanding. The Second Vatican Council’s *Nostra Aetate* affirms that the Church, “rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions” and calls for dialogue and collaboration with followers of other faiths⁴⁸⁴. In Nigeria, this theological foundation

⁴⁸¹ Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican 1975, no. 45.

⁴⁸² Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, Vatican: 2020, no. 213.

⁴⁸³ Cf. I. Egere, J. Dyikuk, and D. Maimako. *The Catholic Church in Nigeria and Social Media-Use: A Critical Juxtaposition*. “Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences”, vol. 5, no. 12, 2021, pp. 4–6.

⁴⁸⁴ Vatican II. Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican 1965, no. 2.

provides a framework for engaging Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religion in respectful dialogue with the aim to foster peaceful co-existence among peoples. Inter-religious dialogue is not merely an intellectual exercise but a pastoral necessity in Nigeria, where religious conflicts have claimed thousands of lives. Nigerian dioceses should therefore establish interfaith councils that bring together Christian and Muslim leaders to address issues of violence, poverty, and corruption. Practical initiatives for dialogue include joint social projects, interfaith youth programs, and collaborative responses to humanitarian crises. The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has already demonstrated the effectiveness of such initiatives in promoting national cohesion. Strengthening the Church's participation in NIREC and similar platforms will enhance its credibility as a peace-builder. The Church must therefore invest in education that promotes tolerance and counters radicalism in any form. Catholic schools and seminaries should include courses on and inter-religious dialogue to prepare future leaders for this mission. Francis has emphasized that "dialogue is not optional but essential for peace"⁴⁸⁵.

Marek Tatar's article, *The Ontic Foundations of Peace in the Perspective of Pope Benedict XVI*, offers an important conceptual bridge between Benedict XVI's metaphysical understanding of peace and the pastoral demands of the New Evangelization in Nigeria. Tatar argues that peace is rooted in the very being of the human person created by God, ordered toward truth, and fulfilled in communion. This ontological grounding is highly relevant for the Nigerian context, where evangelization must address not only doctrinal formation but also the deep wounds caused by ethnic tensions, violence, and social fragmentation. By showing that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the fruit of a rightly ordered relationship with God and neighbour, Tatar provides a theological foundation for evangelization that seeks to heal society from within. His interpretation of Benedict XVI underscores that authentic evangelization in Nigeria must form consciences, promote justice, and cultivate a culture of peace rooted in the dignity of the human person⁴⁸⁶.

⁴⁸⁵ Francis, *Address to Participants in the International Conference on Interreligious Dialogue*, Vatican: 2014, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. M. Tatar, *The Ontic Foundations of Peace in the Perspective of Pope Benedict XVI*, "Warsaw Studies in Theology" 15, Warsaw: 2019, pp. 87–102.

Ecumenism, which is understood as the promotion of unity among Christian denominations, is another vital dimension of New Evangelization. In Nigeria, the religious landscape is often characterized by the rapid growth of Pentecostal and Evangelical movements, which often attract Catholics through vibrant worship and promises of prosperity. The Church must respond by fostering ecumenical collaboration that emphasizes shared faith in Christ while respecting doctrinal differences, knowing that unity does not necessarily mean uniformity. Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one" as recorded in John 17:21 remains the very foundation of ecumenism. The document of Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* stresses that "the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council"⁴⁸⁷. This call to unity is particularly urgent in Nigeria, where denominational divisions weaken the Christian witness in the face of societal challenges. Ecumenical collaboration can be most effective in areas of social actions, joint initiatives in education, healthcare, and advocacy for justice. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) provides a platform for such collaboration, and the Catholic Church's active participation strengthens ecumenical witness. While doctrinal differences limit full sacramental communion, ecumenical prayer services and Bible study groups can foster mutual respect and understanding.

Such ecumenical gathering is already obtainable in Dioceses such as Abuja, where an annual weeklong prayer for Christian unity is held involving the five major Christian blocs: the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted Churches, and the *Tarayyar Ekkelesiyoyin Kristi A Nijeriya*-Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria (TEKAN)/Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Fellowship⁴⁸⁸. Nigerian parishes should therefore organize ecumenical prayer events, especially during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. John Paul II encouraged such initiatives, noting that "prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement"⁴⁸⁹. Ecumenical meetings in Nigeria must also seek to address doctrinal challenges, particularly misunderstandings

⁴⁸⁷ Vatican II. Decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Vatican: 1964, no. 1.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. Christian Association of Nigeria. *Blocs of CAN*, <https://canng.org/about-can/blocs> (accessed 2.11.2025).

⁴⁸⁹ John Paul II. Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint*. Vatican: 1995, no. 21.

about Catholic teachings on Mary, the Eucharist, and the papacy. The Church should invest in apologetics and catechesis that explain Catholic doctrine clearly while engaging in respectful discussion with other Christian communities.

Marek Tatar postulates that authentic ecumenical engagement cannot be reduced to doctrinal negotiation or institutional agreements; rather, it requires an inner transformation marked by humility, conversion, and receptivity to the Holy Spirit. This *ecumenical spirituality* becomes a shared space in which Christians of different traditions encounter one another through prayer, Scripture, and the pursuit of holiness, thereby overcoming both exclusivist attitudes and relativistic indifference. According to him, the idea of *communio* is essential, since unity is not merely an external objective but an inner reality of the Church that must be lived personally and ecclesially. Consequently, genuine ecumenism grows from the renewal of hearts and the cultivation of dispositions that make real communion attainable⁴⁹⁰.

5.7 Improve Lay participation in Governance and Public Life

The mission of New Evangelization in Nigeria must extend beyond the confines of the Church to the wider society. Lay Catholics are called not only to participate in ecclesial life but also to witness to the Gospel in governance and public affairs. They should infuse the secular systems with a leaven of the gospel of Christ with the aim of bringing transformation, and renewal in the society. “The laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation”⁴⁹¹. Lay Catholics should be encouraged to participate actively in politics and governance. Catholic Social Teaching provides a framework for lay participation in governance. *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that the Church must be concerned with “the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age”⁴⁹². Nigerian lay Catholics must therefore be formed in Catholic Social Teaching to engage issues such as corruption, poverty, and human rights. Nigerian Catholics must therefore be equipped to bring ethical values into political discourse, resisting corruption and promoting justice. Beyond politics, lay Catholics must witness to the Gospel in their professional lives. Whether in business, education,

⁴⁹⁰ M. Tatar, *Ecumenical Spirituality as a Basis for Christian Unity*, “Collectanea Theologica” 95, (2005), no. 4, pp. 83–94.

⁴⁹¹ Vatican II. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Vatican: 1965, no. 7.

⁴⁹² Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican 1965, no. 1.

healthcare, or civil service, Catholic professionals are called to embody integrity and service. To strengthen lay witness, Catholic professional associations should be promoted. These associations can provide moral support, networking, and advocacy for ethical standards in various sectors. They can also serve as platforms for evangelization in public life. The CBCN have emphasized that “the renewal of Nigeria requires Christians who live their faith in the marketplace”⁴⁹³.

5.8 Pastoral Care of Victims of Violent Conflicts

For over two decades, Nigeria has been plagued by violent conflicts, including Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder clashes, and communal violence. These conflicts have left many victims traumatized, displaced, and in need of pastoral care. The mission of New Evangelization must therefore include a strong commitment to healing and reconciliation. The Church must serve as a healing community for victims of violence. Francis emphasizes that the Church in its entirety is called to be a field hospital after battle⁴⁹⁴. The Catholic Church in Nigeria has assumed a pivotal role in the pastoral care of victims of violence, particularly those displaced by conflict and insurgency. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been the primary recipients of this care, which encompasses pastoral, spiritual, medical, educational, and humanitarian assistance. The Church’s commitment reflects its mission to embody Christ’s compassion in contexts of suffering and social dislocation. A Church in Nigeria has done lot to alleviate the pain of victims of violent attacks, a lot more needs to be done. A central dimension of this ministry is capacity-building for pastoral agents. The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) has developed nationwide programs designed to equip priests, religious, and lay pastoral workers with the skills necessary to provide both spiritual and psychological support to victims of violence. These agents regularly visit displaced communities, administer the sacraments, and offer counselling to help individuals cope with trauma. Special prayers and liturgical celebrations are organized to sustain the faith of those uprooted from their homes, ensuring that spiritual belonging is not lost amidst displacement. The initiative places particular emphasis on trauma counselling, spiritual guidance, and reintegration efforts, especially for those affected by the Boko Haram

⁴⁹³ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, *Pastoral Letter on Nation Building*, Abuja: 2014, p. 32.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. Francis, *Interview with La Civiltà Cattolica*, in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 164, no. 3918, Rome: pp. 449–477.

insurgency, whose violence has left deep scars on communities in the northeast of Nigeria⁴⁹⁵.

Beyond capacity-building, the Church has also advanced the apostolate of pastoral care for victims, which seeks to integrate pastoral presence with concrete acts of solidarity. This apostolate underscores the Church's dual responsibility: to provide sacramental life and to advocate for justice and human dignity. Collaboration with government agencies further strengthens this mission. The Church works closely with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to combat human trafficking, a scourge that often affects vulnerable populations displaced by violence. Religious, civil, and traditional leaders are mobilized to encourage support, sustenance, and protection for victims, thereby weaving a network of care that transcends ecclesial boundaries⁴⁹⁶.

The crisis of displacement has also exacerbated tensions in regions where religious identities shape social and political dynamics. In the northeast, interfaith relations have been strained by conflict and suspicion. Yet, organizations such as the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP), the Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace Centre (DREP), and the UFUK Dialogue Foundation have played instrumental roles in promoting peaceful coexistence. Their initiatives include interfaith education, the protection of religious sites, and the promotion of dialogue among communities in crisis. These efforts embody the conviction that there is no alternative to peace, and that reconciliation must be pursued through sustained dialogue and mutual respect⁴⁹⁷.

Taken together, these pastoral, apostolic, and collaborative efforts illustrate the Catholic Church's holistic approach to caring for victims of violence in Nigeria. By combining sacramental ministry, psychological support, humanitarian aid, and interfaith dialogue, the Church not only addresses immediate needs but also contributes to long-term healing and reconciliation of victims of violent attacks. Nigerian parishes

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *Pastoral Agents Training Manual*, Abuja: 2019, p. 45.
<https://www.nigeriacatholicnetwork.com/catholic-secretariat-of-nigeria-publishes-resource-for-the-spiritual-care-of-migrants/> (accessed 3.7.2025).

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, *Annual Report*, Abuja 2020, p. 112.
<https://naptip.gov.ng/download/naptip-2022-2023-annual-report/> (accessed 5/4/2025).

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace, *Peacebuilding Report* 2021, p. 67.
https://www.kaiciid.org/search?text=&sort_by=title&sort_order=ASC&page=175 (accessed 9/9/2025).

should therefore establish ministries of healing that provide counselling, spiritual support, and material assistance to victims. Victims of violent conflicts often suffer from trauma and psychological wounds. The Church must collaborate with professionals to provide counselling and therapy. Catholic hospitals and institutions can play a vital role in offering holistic care that integrates psychological healing with spiritual accompaniment. Pastoral care must aim at reconciliation and community rebuilding. Nigerian dioceses should organize more peace-building workshops, inter-community dialogues, and reconciliation services. These initiatives can help restore trust and foster coexistence among communities torn apart by violence⁴⁹⁸.

5.9 Strengthening the Various Ecclesiastical Commissions at all Levels

The mission of New Evangelization in Nigeria requires coordinated structures at the national level to ensure consistency, accountability, and effectiveness. Ecclesiastical commissions such as those focused on evangelization, doctrine of faith, laity, and youth established by the Conference of the Bishops serve as vital organs for implementing pastoral strategies across various dioceses. By meeting regularly, these commissions overseen by bishops approve uniform policies on issues like digital catechesis, interfaith dialogue, and anti-secularism efforts, which diocesan directors then roll out for local Churches. This setup ensures doctrinal consistency by standardizing curricula, liturgical guidelines, and training programs from urban parishes to rural outposts, preserving a unified Church identity amid cultural diversities. Accountability comes through mandatory annual reports, financial audits, and performance metrics reviewed at CBCN biannual plenary sessions, helping to curtail mismanagement of resources. Strengthening the Commission is essential for ensuring that catechesis in Nigeria remains faithful to the Church's universal magisterium while being genuinely responsive to the lived experience of Nigerian Catholics.

5.9.1 Catechetical Commission

The Catholic Secretariat, as the administrative and pastoral coordinating body of the Bishop's Conference, plays a central role in shaping the direction of catechesis in

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. World Council of Churches. *Peace building in Africa Deepens with Partnership with Member Churches*, Abuja 2025, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wccs-peace-building-work-in-africa-deepens-in-partnership-with-member-churches> (accessed 12/12/2025).

dioceses. Within its organizational structure, the Catechetical Commission is entrusted with the responsibility of developing, coordinating, and evaluating catechetical initiatives at the national level. This mandate is interpreted within the broader theological and pastoral vision articulated in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC), which emphasizes that catechesis must be “adapted to the age, culture, and social conditions of those being catechized”⁴⁹⁹. In Nigeria, a nation marked by profound cultural diversities, complex religious contexts, and rapidly evolving socio-economic realities, the task of contextualizing catechesis is both pastorally urgent and theologically indispensable. The GDC’s insistence on adaptation is rooted in the Church’s understanding of revelation and New Evangelization. Revelation is not transmitted abstractly but is achieved through human culture. Catechesis must therefore, engage the cultural, linguistic, and social realities of the people it seeks to instruct. The GDC states that catechesis must be “incarnational,” taking root in the concrete circumstances of the community⁵⁰⁰. This theological vision provides the foundation for the work of the Catechetical Commission in Nigeria.

Any catechesis that fails to address issues of religious pluralism, socio-economic inequality, youth unemployment, insecurity, and rapid urbanization, risks becoming disconnected from the lived experience of the faithful. The Catechetical Commission, ensures that catechetical programs integrate Catholic social teaching, promote interreligious dialogue, and equip the faithful to navigate the moral and social challenges of contemporary Nigerian society. Also, one of the Commission’s primary responsibilities is the development of catechetical materials that reflect Nigeria’s cultural plurality. While the Catechism of the Catholic Church provides universal doctrinal content, the GDC emphasizes that catechetical texts must be adapted to local contexts. In Nigeria, this requires integrating indigenous symbols, proverbs, narratives, and pedagogical methods that resonate with local experience. The CSN has historically supported the translation of catechetical and liturgical texts into major Nigerian languages.

⁴⁹⁹ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican: 1997), no. 170.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*. no. 109.

Catechists remain indispensable pastoral agents in Nigeria, particularly in rural and mission territories. They often serve as the primary educators of the faith, community leaders, and mediators between the Church and local communities. Formation of catechesis in Nigeria is a national pastoral priority. The CSN already organizes national workshops and training programs for catechists. Catechists must be equipped not only with doctrinal knowledge but also with the skills necessary to interpret the faith within the cultural and social context of their communities. This includes training in: inculturation, conflict resolution, Catholic social teaching and pastoral accompaniment. Historically, catechesis in Nigeria has been associated primarily with sacramental preparation. However, the GDC calls for a shift toward lifelong catechesis that goes beyond mere sacramental preparation to accompanying the faithful all through their lives. This alignment between universal ecclesial directives and local pastoral practice exemplifies the Church's commitment to inculturation and underscores the vital role of the Catechetical Commission in shaping the future of catechesis in Nigeria. To attain this, the GDC emphasizes that catechists must be "well-formed, competent, and rooted in the life of the community"⁵⁰¹.

5.9.2 Pastoral and New Evangelization Commission

Within the organizational structure of the Catholic Secretariat, the Pastoral and New Evangelization Commission plays a central role in coordinating national pastoral initiatives and ensuring that diocesan programs remain in tandem with the Church's extended mission of evangelization. This mandate is rooted in the ecclesial vision articulated by Pope John Paul II, who emphasized that "pastoral planning must be guided by the spirit of evangelization"⁵⁰². The New Evangelization, as developed in *Redemptoris Missio* and subsequent magisterial documents, calls for a renewed missionary dynamism capable of addressing the spiritual, cultural, and social challenges of contemporary society. In the Nigerian context the work of the Pastoral Commission becomes indispensable for shaping a coherent national pastoral strategy. The pastoral and New Evangelization commission should promotes parish renewal, strengthen lay

⁵⁰¹ Cf. Ibidem. *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 234.

⁵⁰² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican: 1990, no. 44.

formation, and coordinate outreach to marginalized communities, three pillars essential for a vibrant and mission-oriented Church in Nigeria. The commission ought not to merely be an administrative body but a theological instrument tasked with ensuring that the Church's pastoral life reflects its missionary identity. Avery Dulles posits that evangelization must become the organizing principle of all pastoral activity, shaping liturgy, catechesis, social outreach, and ecclesial governance⁵⁰³.

The Pastoral Commission is called to interpret the vision of the New Evangelization within Nigeria's cultural and social context, ensuring that diocesan programs respond effectively to the lived experience of the faithful. The parish remains the fundamental unit and locus of evangelization. For the Nigerian Church, where parishes often serve large and diverse populations, parish renewal is essential for fostering a missionary culture. Strategies for Parish Renewal include: Strengthening liturgical life, Promoting small Christian communities, Encouraging pastoral councils and participatory governance, Supporting ongoing formation for priests and pastoral agents. In addition, New Evangelization is inseparable from the Church's commitment to justice, peace, and the dignity of every human person. In Nigeria, marginalized communities include internally displaced persons, rural populations, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and those affected by violence or economic exclusion. Outreach to marginalized communities requires significant resources, inter-diocesan collaboration, and partnerships with civil society. The Pastoral Commission is uniquely positioned to facilitate such collaboration and to ensure that outreach efforts remain rooted in the Church's evangelizing mission. John Paul II emphasized that evangelization must address the new forms of poverty affecting contemporary society⁵⁰⁴.

5.9.3 Family Life Commission

The family occupies a central place in the life and mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council describes the family as the "Domestic Church", a privileged space where faith is nurtured, transmitted, and embodied in daily life⁵⁰⁵. As the smallest

⁵⁰³ Cf. A. Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, New York: 1982, p. 112.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 58.

⁵⁰⁵ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11

natural ecclesial community, the family participates in the Church's evangelizing mission by witnessing to the Gospel through love, unity, and fidelity. In contemporary Nigeria, however, families face significant pressures arising from economic hardship, social instability, cultural transitions, and the erosion of traditional support systems. These challenges threaten the integrity of family life and weaken the family's capacity to serve as a locus of evangelization. The Family Life Commission of the CSN is therefore tasked with promoting the renewal of family life through marriage preparation, family spirituality, and pastoral care for families in crisis.

The Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* articulates a profound ecclesiological vision of the family. In its description of the family as the "domestic Church," the Council emphasizes that Christian families are called to be "the first school of Christian life" and a "school for human enrichment"⁵⁰⁶. This understanding situates the family not merely as a social institution but as an ecclesial reality, participating in the sanctifying and evangelizing mission of the Church. Subsequent magisterial documents have deepened this vision. John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* describes the family as the "first and vital cell of society" and highlights its role in transmitting the faith, fostering vocations, and promoting human dignity⁵⁰⁷.

These teachings affirm that the renewal of family life is indispensable for the renewal of the Church's evangelizing mission. In Nigeria, the family has traditionally been the foundation of social life, characterized by strong kinship networks, communal values, and shared responsibilities. The Family Life Commission should coordinate national pastoral initiatives related to marriage, family life, and human sexuality, developing pastoral guidelines, supporting diocesan family life offices, and promoting programs that strengthen family relationships. Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, similarly underscores the family's vocation to be a "living reflection of the communion of the Trinity" and a "missionary disciple" within society⁵⁰⁸.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, Vatican: 1981, no. 42.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Vatican: 2016, no. 71.

The Commission, when adequately grounded in the Church's teaching on the dignity of marriage and the family should ensure that pastoral practice uphold the theological vision of unity and indissolubility of marriage. In Nigeria, where cultural expectations, economic pressures, and limited catechetical formation can affect marital stability, comprehensive marriage preparation programs are essential. The Commission can support dioceses by developing standardized curricula for marriage preparation, training facilitators and pastoral agents, integrate psychological, spiritual, and relational components. Such initiatives help couples enter marriage with a deeper understanding of its sacramental and vocational dimensions, cognizant of the reality that family spirituality is central to the family's identity as a "Domestic Church". These practices foster unity, resilience, and a shared sense of mission within the family. In a society where secular influences and economic pressures can erode spiritual life, intentional cultivation of family spirituality becomes a vital pastoral priority. The Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament requiring adequate formation, discernment, and pastoral accompaniment⁵⁰⁹.

As families in Nigeria face a range of challenges, including divorce, domestic violence, childlessness, poverty, and displacement due to conflicts, the commission can provide counselling services for couples and families, support groups for victims of domestic violence, pastoral outreach to single parents and widows, collaboration with other commissions within the diocese to address structural causes of poverty and deprivation. Such pastoral care reflects the Church's commitment to mercy, justice, and the dignity of every person. In line with the aforementioned, the Family Life Commission must therefore integrate socio-economic awareness into its pastoral strategies, advocating for policies that support family welfare and providing practical assistance to families in need. Economic hardship remains one of the most significant pressures facing Nigerian families. High unemployment, inflation, and inadequate social services place immense strain on marital relationships and family cohesion.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Ibidem. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 66.

Studies have shown that financial stress contributes to conflict, domestic violence, and marital breakdown⁵¹⁰.

5.9.4 Youth Commission

The Youth Commission in Nigeria can play a pivotal role in strengthening the New Evangelization by mobilizing, forming, and empowering young people as active agents of the Gospel. In a country where the youth constitute a significant percentage of the population, the Church's missionary vitality depends greatly on its ability to engage young people meaningfully and equip them for evangelization in contemporary society⁵¹¹. The Youth Commission, therefore, stands as a strategic pastoral structure capable of renewing the Church's missionary outreach. The Commission can enhance New Evangelization by providing systematic faith formation tailored to the needs, questions, and cultural realities of young people. Through well-structured catechetical programs, leadership training, and spiritual formation, the Commission can help young Catholics develop a mature understanding of the faith and the confidence to witness to Christ among their peers⁵¹². Such formation is essential in a context where secular influences, digital culture, and competing religious movements often shape the worldview of Nigerian youth. Also, the Youth Commission can foster active participation of young people in parish and diocesan life, enabling them to contribute their creativity, energy, and technological skills to evangelization. Young people are naturally inclined toward digital communication, social media, music, and contemporary forms of expression⁵¹³. By integrating these gifts into pastoral strategies, the Commission can help the Church reach wider audiences, especially those who may not be reached through traditional methods of evangelization. In addition, the Youth Commission can promote missionary outreach and social engagement, encouraging young Catholics to embody the Gospel through service, advocacy, and community development. In a society marked by unemployment, insecurity, and moral challenges,

⁵¹⁰ Cf. A. Okafor, Economic Stress and Marital Conflict in Nigerian Families, *Journal of Family Studies* 12, no. 3, 2018, pp. 45–62.

⁵¹¹ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Vatican: 1988), no. 46.

⁵¹² Cf. National Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *Directory for the Laity in Nigeria* (Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2016), 22–25.

⁵¹³ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, Vatican: 2019, pp. 86–90.

youth-led initiatives such as outreach to marginalized communities, peacebuilding programs, and social justice campaigns can serve as powerful expressions of Christian witness. These activities not only evangelize through action but also help young people see themselves as protagonists of the Church's mission⁵¹⁴.

Going forward, the Youth Commission can strengthen the New Evangelization by fostering collaboration between clergy, religious, and laity in youth ministry. When pastoral agents work together to accompany young people, the Church becomes a more credible and supportive environment for vocational discernment, leadership development, and missionary commitment⁵¹⁵. This collaborative approach aligns with the vision of the New Evangelization, which calls for a united and participatory Church. More so, the Youth Commission can serve as a bridge between the Church and the rapidly changing cultural landscape. By listening to the concerns of young people, studying emerging cultural trends, and integrating youth perspectives into pastoral planning, the Commission helps the Church remain relevant and responsive to contemporary realities⁵¹⁶. In this way, the Youth Commission becomes not only a pastoral structure but also a catalyst for renewal, ensuring that the Gospel continues to speak meaningfully to new generations. From the foregoing, the Youth Commission in Nigeria offers a vital pathway for strengthening the New Evangelization. Through formation, participation, missionary outreach, collaboration, and cultural engagement, it empowers young people to become dynamic witnesses of Christ and active builders of the Church's future⁵¹⁷.

5.9.5 Liturgical Commission

The Liturgical Commission in Nigeria can play a decisive role in promoting the New Evangelization by ensuring that the Church's liturgical life becomes a powerful source of renewal, catechesis, and missionary zeal. Since the liturgy is the "summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed" and the "font from which all her power

⁵¹⁴ Cf. M. Kukah, *Witness to Justice*, Ibadan: 2011, pp. 134–136.

⁵¹⁵ Vatican II, Decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Vatican:1965, no. 12.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. A. Ukah, *Youth, Media, and Religious Change in Nigeria*, "Journal of Religion in Africa" 40, no. 3 2010: pp. 267–270.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*. pp. 267–270

flows”⁵¹⁸, a vibrant and well-celebrated liturgy is indispensable for forming evangelizing communities. The Commission, therefore, stands as a vital pastoral organ capable of strengthening the Church’s mission in contemporary Nigeria. The Liturgical Commission can advance the New Evangelization by promoting authentic, participatory, and inculturated liturgical celebrations. In a culturally diverse nation like Nigeria, the Commission can guide dioceses and parishes in integrating appropriate cultural expressions music, symbols, gestures, and language into the liturgy without compromising doctrinal integrity. Such inculturation helps the faithful experience the Gospel as truly rooted in their cultural identity, making evangelization more meaningful and accessible⁵¹⁹.

The Commission can enhance evangelization by providing ongoing liturgical formation for clergy, religious, and laity. Many pastoral challenges in Nigeria arise from inadequate understanding of the liturgy’s theological depth and evangelizing power⁵²⁰. Through workshops, publications, and training programs, the Commission can help pastoral agents appreciate the liturgy as a school of faith, a source of catechesis, and a moment of encounter with Christ. Well-formed ministers and lay liturgical leaders can, in turn, foster celebrations that inspire deeper conversion and missionary commitment. The Liturgical Commission can strengthen the New Evangelization by ensuring reverent, well-prepared, and pastorally sensitive celebrations of the Sacraments. The Sacraments especially the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Confirmation are central to forming mature disciples. When celebrated with clarity, beauty, and pastoral care, they become powerful moments of evangelization that renew individuals and communities. The Commission can develop guidelines and resources that help parishes celebrate the Sacraments in ways that draw people into deeper communion with Christ⁵²¹.

The Commission can support evangelization by promoting liturgical music and art that uplift the spirit and communicate the faith. Music is a powerful tool for

⁵¹⁸ Vatican II Council, Constitution on the Church, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship*, Collegeville: 1997, pp. 112–115.

⁵²⁰ A. Jimoh, *Liturgy and Evangelization in the Nigerian Church*, “Catholic Theological Journal of Nigeria” 6 (2014): pp. 87–90.

⁵²¹ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Vatican: 2007, no. 64.

evangelization, especially among young people⁵²². By encouraging the development of quality liturgical compositions rooted in Nigerian cultural heritage, the Commission can help parishes create worship experiences that are both spiritually enriching and culturally resonant. The Liturgical Commission can serve the New Evangelization by fostering unity and coherence in liturgical practice across dioceses. Inconsistent or poorly coordinated liturgical norms can weaken the Church's witness and confuse the faithful. By offering clear directives and promoting collaboration among diocesan liturgical offices, the Commission helps ensure that the liturgy remains a unifying force that strengthens the Church's identity and mission. In a nutshell, the Liturgical Commission in Nigeria provides a crucial pathway for renewing the Church's evangelizing mission. Through inculturation, formation, sacramental renewal, liturgical arts, and pastoral coordination, it can help the Church celebrate the liturgy in ways that inspire deeper faith, stronger communities, and a more vibrant commitment to the Gospel⁵²³.

5.9.6 Communications Commission

The Communications Commission in Nigeria can play a transformative role in advancing the New Evangelization by harnessing modern media and communication technologies to proclaim the Gospel more effectively. In an age shaped by digital culture, rapid information exchange, and media-driven worldviews, the Church must adopt communication strategies that speak to contemporary audiences with clarity, creativity, and pastoral sensitivity⁵²⁴. The Communications Commission, therefore, stands as a vital pastoral structure capable of strengthening the Church's evangelizing mission in Nigeria. The Commission can enhance the New Evangelization by promoting effective use of digital media including radio, television, social media, and online platforms to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Nigeria's youth, in particular, are deeply immersed in digital culture, and the Church must meet them where they are. By producing engaging content such as podcasts, catechetical videos,

⁵²² Cf. National Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *Directory for Liturgical Music in Nigeria*, Abuja 2018, p. 5–7.

⁵²³ Cf. A. Okere, *Liturgical Norms and Pastoral Practice in Nigeria*, "African Ecclesial Review" 48, no. 2 (2006): pp. 102–105.

⁵²⁴ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican: 2013, nos. 20–24.

livestreamed liturgies, and interactive faith-formation programs, the Commission can help the Church communicate the Gospel in ways that resonate with modern sensibilities⁵²⁵.

Also, the Commission can support evangelization by providing training and media literacy formation for clergy, religious, and laity. Many pastoral agents lack the skills needed to use digital tools effectively for evangelization⁵²⁶. Through workshops, seminars, and technical support, the Communications Commission can empower Church workers to communicate the faith confidently and responsibly in digital spaces. This formation is essential for ensuring that the Church's message remains credible, relevant, and accessible. In addition, the Communications Commission can strengthen the New Evangelization by promoting Catholic values and perspectives in public discourse. In a media environment often dominated by sensationalism, misinformation, and secular ideologies, the Church must offer a voice of truth, justice, and hope. By engaging with journalists, producing high-quality Catholic media content, and responding to social issues from a faith perspective, the Commission can help shape public opinion and foster a culture that is more receptive to the Gospel⁵²⁷.

Similarly, the Commission can foster evangelization by encouraging collaboration among dioceses, parishes, and Catholic media organizations. Fragmented communication efforts weaken the Church's impact, while coordinated strategies amplify its voice⁵²⁸. The Communications Commission can serve as a central body that develops guidelines, shares resources, and promotes unified messaging across the Nigerian Church. In the light of this, the Commission can help the Church respond to the challenges of modern culture by conducting research on media trends, youth behaviour, and communication patterns. Such insights enable the Church to adapt its evangelization strategies to emerging realities and to communicate the Gospel in ways that are both faithful and culturally relevant. On the whole, the Communications Commission in Nigeria offers a strong and practical recommendation for advancing the

⁵²⁵ Cf. Ibidem. A. Ukah, *Youth, Media, and Religious Change in Nigeria*, pp. 267–270.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Ibidem. *Directory for Liturgical Music in Nigeria*, pp. 11–14.

⁵²⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican: 1990, p. 37.

⁵²⁸ Cf. Ibidem. A. Okere, *Pastoral Communication and Evangelization in Nigeria*, pp. 88–91.

New Evangelization. Through digital engagement, media formation, public communication, collaboration, and cultural analysis, it equips the Church to proclaim the Gospel with renewed vigour and effectiveness in a rapidly changing world⁵²⁹.

5.9.7 The Justice, Development and Peace (Caritas) Commission

The Justice, Development and Peace (Caritas) Commission (JDPC) in Nigeria offers a powerful and practical pathway for strengthening the New Evangelization by embodying the Church's commitment to social transformation, human dignity, and integral development. In a society marked by poverty, corruption, insecurity, and social inequality, the JDPC provides a concrete expression of the Gospel in action. Its work aligns closely with the vision of the New Evangelization, which calls the Church not only to proclaim the Word but also to make the Gospel visible through works of justice, compassion, and peace⁵³⁰. To start with, the JDPC can advance the New Evangelization by promoting social justice and advocacy rooted in Catholic social teaching. Through programs that address human rights, good governance, and anti-corruption efforts, the Commission helps the Church speak prophetically to the moral challenges facing Nigerian society. Such advocacy demonstrates that evangelization is not limited to preaching but includes transforming unjust structures and defending the dignity of every person. This visible commitment to justice strengthens the credibility of the Church's message⁵³¹.

More so, the commission contributes to evangelization by engaging in development initiatives that uplift vulnerable communities. Projects in agriculture, microfinance, education, health care, and women's empowerment help improve the quality of life for many Nigerians⁵³². These initiatives reflect the Church's mission to promote integral human development, showing that the Gospel addresses both spiritual and material needs. When people experience the Church as a source of hope and support, they become more open to the message of Christ. In the same vein, the JDPC fosters the New

⁵²⁹ Cf. Ibidem. P. Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African*, pp. 152–154.

⁵³⁰ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican 2013, pp. 176–180.

⁵³¹ Cf. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, *Guidelines for Justice, Development and Peace Commissions*, Abuja 2015, pp. 9–12.

⁵³² Cf. Caritas Nigeria, *Annual Report 2021*, Abuja, 2022, pp. 14–18.

Evangelization through peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Nigeria faces recurring ethnic, religious, and political conflicts that threaten social cohesion. The Commission's mediation efforts, peace education programs, and interreligious dialogue initiatives help build bridges across divided communities⁵³³. By promoting peace, the JDPC embodies Christ's call to reconciliation and demonstrates the Church's role as an agent of healing in society.

Additionally, the JDPC strengthens evangelization by encouraging active lay participation in the Church's mission. Many JDPC programs rely on trained volunteers: youth, professionals, and parish groups who engage in community outreach, civic education, and social action⁵³⁴. This involvement empowers the laity to live out their baptismal vocation and witness to the Gospel in public life. Such participation aligns with the New Evangelization's emphasis on forming missionary disciples. The serves the New Evangelization by offering credible Christian witness in a context where many people judge the Church not only by its preaching but by its actions. In a society often disillusioned by corruption and failed institutions, the Commission's transparent and compassionate service helps restore trust and demonstrates the transformative power of the Gospel⁵³⁵. Through its commitment to justice, development, and peace, the JDPC becomes a living sign of God's love in the world. The Justice, Development and Peace (Caritas) Commission in Nigeria provides a strong and practical recommendation for advancing the New Evangelization. By promoting justice, fostering development, building peace, empowering the laity, and offering credible witness, it helps the Church proclaim the Gospel not only in words but through concrete actions that transform society⁵³⁶.

Conclusion

The mission of New Evangelization in Nigeria requires a holistic and contextualized approach that integrates catechesis, parish renewal, Catholic education, collaboration

⁵³³ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Vatican 1987, p. 39.

⁵³⁴ Cf. Ibidem. P. Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African*, pp. 165–168.

⁵³⁵ Cf. A. C. Okere, *Social Action and Evangelization in Nigeria*, "African Ecclesial Review" 50, no. 1 (2008): 77–80.

⁵³⁶ Cf. Ibidem. pp. 77-80.

among clergy and laity, modern communication, inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, social engagement, pastoral care, and national ecclesiastical structures. Each of these dimensions is not isolated but interconnected, forming a comprehensive pastoral strategy for the Church's witness in contemporary Nigeria. The recommendations outlined in this chapter highlight the urgent need for ongoing catechesis to sustain lay participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Parish renewal through Basic Christian Communities ensures that faith is lived in communion and solidarity. Catholic schools and institutions must deepen spirituality while maintaining academic excellence, and collaboration among priests, religious, and laity must overcome clericalism to foster co-responsibility. Modern means of communication present unprecedented opportunities for evangelization, especially among youth, while inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism are indispensable for peace and Christian unity in Nigeria's pluralistic society. Lay participation in governance and public life embodies Catholic Social Teaching in the transformation of society, while pastoral care for victims of violent conflicts reflects the Church's mission as a healing community. The Nigerian Church, by embracing these recommendations, can renew its missionary zeal and become a beacon of hope, peace, and transformation in a nation yearning for authentic witness to the Gospel. Strengthening ecclesiastical commissions at the national level ensures coordinated and effective implementation of evangelization strategies.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to examine the teaching of John Paul II on New Evangelization and to evaluate its relevance as a foundational framework for the growth, renewal, and future vitality of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Through a systematic exploration of the biblical, theological, and magisterial foundations of evangelization, coupled with a contextual analysis of the Nigerian ecclesial landscape, the study has demonstrated that the New Evangelization is not merely a pastoral strategy but a profound ecclesiological vision rooted in the Church's identity and mission.

At the heart of John Paul II's teaching is the conviction that evangelization is the essential task of the Church in every age. Yet, he recognized that the contemporary world with its rapid scientific and technological advancements, shifting cultural paradigms, and the rise of ideologies that challenge the Christian worldview requires a renewed approach to the proclamation of the Gospel. His call for evangelization that is "new in ardour, new in methods, and new in expression" reflects a deep awareness of the changing human condition and the need for the Church to respond with creativity, fidelity, and pastoral sensitivity. This dissertation has shown that the New Evangelization is not a rupture with the past but a dynamic continuation of the Church's missionary tradition, adapted to the complexities of modern life.

The Nigerian context provides a compelling case study for the application of this vision. The Church in Nigeria is one of the most vibrant and rapidly growing Catholic communities in the world. Its liturgical life is dynamic, its vocations are abundant, and its faithful are deeply committed. Yet, this growth is accompanied by significant challenges. The influence of secularism, relativism, materialism, and individualism often amplified by globalization and digital culture has contributed to a weakening of moral values, a crisis of identity among young people, and a growing disconnect between faith and daily life. The rise of Pentecostalism and syncretistic religious movements has further complicated the religious landscape, offering alternative spiritualities that appeal to emotional, economic, and existential needs.

This dissertation has demonstrated that the New Evangelization provides a robust framework for addressing these challenges. By emphasizing the centrality of Christ, the dignity of the human person, the importance of culture, and the co-responsibility of

clergy and laity. The pontiff offers a vision of evangelization that is both deeply theological and pastorally practical. His insistence on the need for personal conversion, authentic witness, and a renewed encounter with Christ speaks directly to the spiritual hunger of contemporary Nigerians. His call for the Church to engage culture critically and creatively resonates with the need to integrate the Gospel into the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria while resisting elements that undermine human dignity and Christian morality.

The study has also highlighted the indispensable role of the laity in the New Evangelization. In a society where the majority of people encounter the Church not through formal preaching but through the daily witness of Christians, the laity must be empowered, formed, and commissioned as missionary disciples. This requires a shift from a clerical model of ministry to a collaborative model in which all the baptized recognize their vocation to evangelize in the family, workplace, political sphere, and digital environment. The Synod on Synodality's emphasis on communion, participation, and mission reinforces this vision and offers a timely framework for fostering co-responsibility within the Nigerian Church.

Furthermore, the dissertation has shown that the challenges facing the Church in Nigeria are not merely doctrinal or pastoral but also socio-economic and political. Issues such as corruption, insecurity, poverty, and ethnic tensions have profound implications for evangelization. The New Evangelization calls the Church not only to proclaim the Gospel but also to embody it through concrete actions that promote justice, peace, and the common good. This requires a holistic approach to mission that integrates spiritual formation with social engagement, catechesis with community development, and liturgical life with ethical transformation.

The practical recommendations proposed in the final chapter underscore the need for comprehensive formation programs, renewed catechetical structures, inculturated liturgy, digital evangelization strategies, and stronger pastoral collaboration. These recommendations are grounded in the conviction that the New Evangelization must be both contemplative and active, rooted in prayer and sacramental life while oriented toward the transformation of society.

This dissertation affirms that the New Evangelization, as articulated by John Paul II, offers a compelling and necessary framework for the future of the Church in Nigeria. It challenges the Church to rediscover the freshness of the Gospel, to engage the modern world with confidence and discernment, and to form communities of missionary disciples capable of witnessing to Christ in every sphere of life. The success of this mission depends on the willingness of all the faithful: clergy, religious, and laity to embrace their baptismal calling and to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the work of evangelization.

Since Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of modernity, the Church is called to be a beacon of hope, a guardian of truth, and a witness to the transformative power of the Gospel. The New Evangelization provides the theological vision, pastoral tools, and spiritual energy needed to meet this challenge. By embracing this vision with renewed zeal, the Church in Nigeria can continue to grow in holiness, deepen its missionary identity, and contribute meaningfully to the evangelizing mission of the universal Church. In this way, the Church in Nigeria will not only sustain its growth but also become a prophetic sign of God's presence in a world longing for truth, freedom, and salvation.

As the Church continues its salvific work of healing wounds and bringing people closer to God, this vital pastoral vision resonates deeply with the Nigerian context, where countless individuals yearn for hope, justice, reconciliation, and authentic spiritual nourishment. The New Evangelization challenges the Church to embody this healing presence through compassionate pastoral care, credible moral leadership, and a prophetic commitment to the common good. By embracing these recommendations, the Church in Nigeria can renew its missionary zeal and become a beacon of hope, peace, and transformation in a nation longing for authentic witness to the Gospel.

Guided by Mary, Seat of Wisdom and Queen of Nigeria, this renewed ecclesial zeal heralds a transfigured society where justice, peace, and Gospel joy reign supreme, fulfilling the Church's eternal mission. Under her maternal protection, the Church in Nigeria can confidently journey forward, proclaiming Christ with clarity and conviction, forming communities of missionary disciples, and contributing meaningfully to the evangelizing mission of the universal Church. In this way, the New

Evangelization becomes not merely a pastoral program but a lived reality, one that shapes the identity, mission, and future of the Church in Nigeria.

At this juncture, it is worthy of note that this dissertation is by no means exhaustive, it opens up several avenues for further scholarly investigation into the area of New Evangelization as articulated by John Paul II and its relevance for the growth of the Church in Nigeria. First, deeper research is needed on the relationship between inculturation and evangelization, particularly how the Gospel can be authentically expressed within Nigeria's diverse cultural traditions without falling into syncretism. Closely related to this is the need to explore the evangelization of young people within an increasingly digital society, examining how new media and online platforms can serve as effective instruments of missionary outreach.

A further area concerns the growing problem of sacramental nominalism among the faithful. Future studies could investigate the pastoral and catechetical factors contributing to routine sacramental practice and evaluate how mystagogical catechesis might foster a more transformative Eucharistic spirituality. Research is also required on clergy formation and pastoral leadership, especially how seminaries and ongoing formation programs can better integrate the vision of the New Evangelization into the life and ministry of priests.

Similarly, given Nigeria's complex religious landscape, additional work is needed on interreligious dialogue, particularly how John Paul II's teaching can guide evangelization in contexts marked by Christian-Muslim tensions or the enduring presence of African Traditional Religion. The socio-political dimension of evangelization also warrants further study, especially the Church's role in promoting justice, peace, freedom, and good governance in a society challenged by complex political and economic crisis.

Consequently, the family, understood as the "domestic church," also presents a rich field for further research, especially regarding how Nigerian families can become primary agents of evangelization amid the pressures of migration, urbanization, and shifting social norms. In addition, the role of the laity in the New Evangelization requires deeper examination, particularly the structural and pastoral factors that either hinder or promote genuine co-responsibility in the Church's mission. Finally, broader

theological research could explore the reception of John Paul II's missionary teaching across Africa, comparing how different local churches have interpreted and implemented *Redemptoris Missio* and *Ecclesia in Africa*. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the New Evangelization within the African ecclesial context.

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