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Catherine of Siena and the New Evangelization[1]

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Abstract

This article shows the relevance of past ages to the current project of the new evangelization. In particular, it presents St. Catherine of Siena as an example of the intuition that saints throughout the history of the Church have had regarding how to undertake the process of evangelization. The concept of the "new evangelization" is outlined by referring to the writings and speeches of Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. While covering the basic features of the new evangelization, Saint Catherine's life and insights are presented as an example of how to accomplish the project of the new evangelization.

Keywords

Catherine of Siena, New Evangelization, Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis

Introduction

The title of this article may promote a bit of cognitive dissonance. After all, what can a fourteenth century woman who died at the age of 33 teach us about the contemporary project of the "new evangelization"? I wish to present St. Catherine as an example of the intuition that saints throughout the history of the Church have had regarding how to undertake the process of evangelization. I will progress by outlining the concept of the "new evangelization" about which our three most recent popes have spoken so much.[2] In

[1] A version of this paper was delivered as the Catherine of Siena Lecture at Ohio Dominican University on April 30, 2015.

[2] Much of the material on the new evangelization has appeared in Perry Cahall, "The Nucleus of the New Evangelization," *Nova et Vetera* 11.1 (2013): 39–56. However, in addition to integrating aspects of St. Catherine's life and insights, I include here contributions from Pope Francis relating to the new evangelization.

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addition, while outlining the basic features of the new evangelization, I will turn to Saint Catherine's life and insights, showing how she provides us an example of how to accomplish the project of the new evangelization, a project which although new is as old as Christianity itself.

Origin of the New Evangelization

The term "new evangelization" was first used by Pope Saint John Paul II when he called for such an effort during his now historic pastoral visit to Poland in 1979.[3] Yet, even though he coined the term "new evangelization,"[4] John Paul II pointed to the ultimate origin of this movement in the Second Vatican Council,[5] stating in one of his addresses that Vatican II "called for a new evangelization."[6] The basic foundations of the new evangelization can be seen in the Second Vatican Council's reminder to the faithful that, "The Church . . . is by its very nature missionary,"[7] having "an obligation to proclaim the faith and salvation that comes from Christ" (*AG* 5).

In addition to Vatican II, John Paul II noted that the foundations of the new evangelization "were laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Blessed Pope Paul VI."[8] In this document, Paul VI echoed the Second Vatican Council when he wrote, "the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of

[3] Noted by Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the Polish Episcopal Conference on their 'Ad Limina' Visit, 3 Dec. 2005. *The Holy See*. accessed 12 Nov. 2010 <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051203_adlimina-polonia-ii_en.html>.

[4] Avery Cardinal Dulles notes that the term "new evangelization" seems to have been used first by the Latin American bishops at their general conference at Medellin, Colombia in 1968 [see "Evangelization, New," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, 2d ed. (Detroit, Gale, 2003, 477–480)]. However, there is no evidence that John Paul II new of this usage by the Latin American Bishops. If he did know of it, and consciously borrowed the term, he ended up expanding and elaborating on it thus truly making it his own.

[5] See Avery Dulles, "Vatican II and Evangelization," in *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, ed. Steven Boguslawski, O.P., and Ralph Martin (New York: Paulist Press, 2008).

[6] John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization: The Complete Texts of the Holy Father's 1998 ad Limina Addresses to the Bishops of the United States* (San Diego: Basilica Press and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), Address, June 27, no. 1.

[7] Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1992), no. 2; hereafter *AG*.

[8] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter. *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994), no. 21; hereafter *TMA*.

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the Church," and evangelization is the Church's "deepest identity" because she "exists in order to evangelize;"[9]

Content of the New Evangelization

Yet, if the new evangelization has its remote origins in the Second Vatican Council, and has been commented on by succeeding popes, what is *new* about the new evangelization? First of all, we should make clear what is *not* new about the new evangelization. The new evangelization is *not* new in its content. John Paul II said very clearly, "the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery."[10] Elsewhere, John Paul II made it clear that when we evangelize we are not preaching a theory but a person.[11] Thus the gospel, like the person of Jesus Christ, remains unchanged. Most recently, Pope Francis has emphasized that the heart of the message of evangelization will always be the same: the God who revealed His immense love in the crucified and risen Christ.[12] Francis has insisted that we must focus on this message of "the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ" as the basic core of evangelization (*EG* 36), instead of preaching secondary aspects that do not convey the heart of Christ's message (*EG* 34). Francis has explained that *all* Christian formation is entering deeper into the initial preaching (kerygma) of the Gospel, which Francis says can be summed up in these words, "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you" (*EG* 164–165). Thus, the content of the new evangelization is the love of God made manifest in the Person of Jesus Christ – a love that is extended to all! This is the same wonderful good news that has been the central proclamation of Christianity since the beginning.

Like the most recent pontiffs, Saint Catherine of Siena shows us that the love of Jesus must always be the core message of any

[9] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1992), no. 14; hereafter *EN*.

[10] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1999), no. 66; hereafter *EIA*.

[11] John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, March 17, no. 6.

[12] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 Nov. 2013. *The Holy See*. accessed 30 Mar. 2015 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; hereafter *EG*.

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authentic evangelizing effort. As Mary O'Driscoll, O.P. has observed of Catherine, "The central theme in all her writings is the love of God for humankind manifested in Christ crucified."[13] Catherine poured herself out in love for Jesus, and for others to invite them into the crucified love of the bridegroom. Her emphasis on Jesus' love is evident in how she closes many of her letters with the encouragement to "Remain in the holy, gentle love of God. Gentle Jesus, Jesus love." One of Catherine's clear statements of Jesus' love as the core of evangelization is in a letter she writes to three widows in Naples when she states, "the love you have discovered at the breast of Christ crucified you must show to your neighbors, carrying them into God's presence with tears, loving affection, and great compassion, in watchfulness and in continual humble prayer."[14] As Catherine insinuates, making evident to others and inviting them into the love of God made manifest in the crucified Jesus must always be the heart of evangelization.

A New Societal Situation and Audience

If the content is not new, then what *is* new about the new evangelization? First of all, what is new is the societal situation in which the unchanging truth of the gospel must be preached at this point in history. John Paul II said, "the new and unique situation in which the world and the Church find themselves . . . and the urgent needs which result, mean that the mission of evangelization today calls for a new program which can be defined overall as 'new evangelization'" (*EIA* 66). As part of the new evangelization, John Paul called for a renewed effort to make Jesus known to those who have not heard his name.[15] However, he emphasized that one predominant aspect of the new situation prompting a new evangelization is that "some Christian cities and countries" are again "mission territory" and are in need of "re-evangelization" (*RM* 32). These are "countries with ancient Christian roots . . . where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (*RM* 33). Thus, John Paul II called for a

[13] Mary O'Driscoll, "Introduction," in *Catherine of Siena: Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 13.

[14] Letter T356, in Suzanne Noffke, O.P., *Catherine of Siena: An Anthology*, Vol. 1, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Vol. 406 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 471.

[15] See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter. *Redemptoris Missio* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1990), no. 31; hereafter *RM*.

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"new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed" (*RM* 30). In his document establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Benedict XVI emphasized the need to re-evangelize the baptized when he said that one of the "singular features" of our time "has been to be confronted with the phenomenon of estrangement from the faith."[16] Thus we have a *new situation* for evangelization in which the audience to be evangelized has already heard the Good News but, for whatever reason, lives estranged from it. This means that in accomplishing the new evangelization we should not presume that people have encountered the love of the living Jesus, but instead should seek to re-introduce him to them anew.

Although St. Catherine of Siena lived in a different time and place, and faced a societal situation distinct from our own, we can learn from her efforts to spread the love of Christ as we seek to spread his love in our current context. Although the proportion of Christians needing to be re-evangelized might be higher today than in Catherine's age, certainly Catherine was no stranger to the need to re-ignite the love of Christ in the hearts of the baptized. One could say that at the core of her attempts "to act as peace-maker between feuding families and warring Italian states"[17] was her desire to re-awaken the disputants to the love of Jesus that obligated them to peace. Catherine even exhorted the reform-minded Pope Urban VI to root his actions in the love of Christ, when his heavy-handed, autocratic ways proved to alienate many in the Church.[18] Catherine devoted the latter part of her life to reigniting the love of Christ in the hearts of members of the hierarchy during the time of the Great Western Schism, when political concerns motivated cardinals to elect a rival pope to Pope Urban, a sin against charity that presented a scandal that deeply wounded the unity of the Church. Thus we can see in St. Catherine an example of efforts to re-evangelize those who had already heard and accepted Christ's call to discipleship, exhorting them to understand the implications of the love of Christ for their lives and behavior, and for the Church and society.

[16] Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio* Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, *Ubicumque et Semper*, 21 Sept. 2010. *The Holy See*. Accessed 14 Nov. 2010 <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper_en.html>; hereafter *UES*.

[17] O'Driscoll, "Introduction," 10.

[18] See Letter T291/G15 in Suzanne Noffke, O.P., *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, Vol. 3, Medieval and Renaissance Text Studies 329 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 151–155.

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A New Cultural Context and New Challenges

There is also a particular cultural context within which the new evangelization is to be carried out and to which we must be attentive. First, all of the recent popes have noted a deep spiritual hunger in the culture into which we are to take the gospel. People are hungry for the love of Jesus, even if they do not know it. So much of the misery and desperation in our world is the result of trying to substitute something else for the love of God, who alone can fill us up completely. John Paul II said in an address to the bishops of the United States, "*No demand on our ministry is more urgent than the 'new evangelization' needed to satisfy the spiritual hunger of our times*."[19]

Along with noting this hunger, the recent popes have identified specific challenges that agents of the new evangelization should expect to face in an attempt to satisfy this hunger. John Paul II noted there has been a "closure of reason to . . . objective truth" leading to "skepticism and relativism" and a resulting "pragmatic vision of truth."[20] John Paul II also said that the current "crisis of moral culture" stems from a distorted notion of freedom understood simply as personal autonomy.[21] Additionally, John Paul noted that the shadows of our day include "*religious indifference* which causes many people today to live as if God did not exist" (*TMA* 36). He said there is a "*crisis of civilization*, . . . especially in the West, which is highly developed from the standpoint of technology but is interiorly impoverished" (*TMA* 52). As part of this crisis of civilization John Paul II discussed the emergence of a society dominated by the powerful who eliminate the powerless, forging a culture of death (*EIA* 63). Pope Francis has noted that economic inequality and rampant consumerism, have the potential to set off a "process of dehumanization" (*EG* 51, 52–60). Francis has also observed that in this context pastoral workers themselves can fall into a "practical relativism [that] consists in acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, setting goals as if others did not exist, working as if people who have not received the Gospel do not exist" (*EG* 80). He has said, "It is striking that even some who clearly have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission" (*EG* 80). Thus Francis is noting the need for vigilance as Christians fulfill their baptismal obligation to be missionary disciples in the current cultural context.

[19] John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Oct. 23, no. 3.
[20] Ibid., Address, Oct. 23, no. 5.
[21] Ibid., Address, June 27, no. 2.

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Although Saint Catherine's context for evangelization was certainly different from ours, with its own unique cultural challenges, Catherine poured herself out to awaken people to their spiritual hunger and to show them that Jesus alone is the only one who can satiate that hunger. While the challenges to spreading the gospel might have been different in Catherine's day, she did not shy away from these challenges, and she was an expert at calling others to vigilance, bold in promoting reform of the Church. She exhorted others, including popes, to cast aside temporal concerns and worldly endeavors. Catherine was strident in her exhortations of Pope Gregory XI to tend to needed reform in the Church. She wrote, "You are in charge of the garden of the holy Church. So [first of all] uproot from that garden the stinking weeds full of impurity and avarice, and bloated with pride (I mean evil pastors and administrators who poison and corrupt the garden)."[22] She reminded the pope, "For ever since the Church has paid more attention to the material than to the spiritual, things have gone from bad to worse."[23] After convincing Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome from Avignon, where the papacy had resided for nearly seventy years, Catherine wrote to him stating, "It does not seem God wants us paying so much attention to temporal authority and possessions that we lost sight of the great slaughter of souls and dishonor to God that comes from war!"[24] She wrote further, "it is better to let go of the mud of temporal things than the gold of the spiritual."[25] And she exhorted the pope, "You will conquer more people with the staff of kindness, love, and peace, than with the club of war, and you will besides have back what is yours both spiritually and temporally."[26] A couple of years later, when there were rival claimants to the papacy, Catherine supported the rightful pope, Pope Urban VI, while simultaneously exhorting him to curb his own ambitious and autocratic ways.[27] She wrote to him stating, "It seems, most holy father, that this eternal Truth wants to make of you another himself, both because you are his vicar, Christ on earth, and because he wants you in bitterness and suffering to reform his dear bride and yours, who has been so pale for so long."[28] Thus Catherine did not ignore the need to speak, even to those in positions of authority, challenging them to resist the cultural currents that ran

[22] Letter T206/G5/DT63 in Suzanne Noffke, O.P., *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, Vol. 2, Medieval and Renaissance Text Studies 203 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 61.

[23] Letter T206/G5/DT63 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 62.

[24] Letter T209/G2 in ibid., 298.

[25] Ibid., 299.

[26] Ibid., 300.

[27] Noffke, "Introduction," in *Anthology*, Vol. 1, xxi.

[28] Letter T346, in Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 2, 1084.

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counter to the gospel, and exhorting them to truly live and behave in a manner that bespeaks that the gospel does in fact exist.

Agents of the New Evangelization

So, recognizing the new situation and unique challenges of the new evangelization, who are the *agents* of the new evangelization? Who should be the ones to re-evangelize our culture with the unchanging truth of the love of Jesus? Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have all commented on agents of the new evangelization. First, all of the recent popes have stressed that the *Holy Spirit* "is the principal agent of evangelization" (*EN* 75; *RM* 21; *TMA* 45; *EG* 12). As in the beginning of the Church, it is the Holy Spirit who is the animating principle of the Church, and the driving force behind its growth. Without relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, the new evangelization will bear no fruit. Francis has stressed that evangelizers must be "fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit" (*EG* 259) through prayer and work (*EG* 262). However, as is implied in Pope Francis' statement, the Holy Spirit can only effect the growth of the Church with the cooperation of human agents. The faithful must open themselves up to the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the manner of a new Pentecost, in order to accomplish the new evangelization.

So who are the *human agents* of the new evangelization? In this vein, the Second Vatican Council and all of the succeeding popes have made it clear that "the whole Church is missionary" (*AG* 35). While this is not new, Vatican II and the succeeding popes have tried to recover the understanding that all members of the Church are called to participate in the basic task Jesus sends his disciples to accomplish – evangelizing (*EIA* 66). Imbued by the Holy Spirit, the whole Church, including each individual, is called to evangelize (*EN* 15), to welcome others into the love of Jesus. In fact, John Paul II said of all members of the Church that evangelizing "is a right and a duty based upon their baptismal dignity" (*RM* 71). Francis has emphasized that being God's people "means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world" (*EG* 113), and that "each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are . . . " because in our hearts we " . . . know that it is not the same to live without him" (*EG* 121). So, all baptized Christians are to go forth with clear purpose and resolve to reignite the faith and to invite others to salvation. We need to overcome the dichotomy in the Church of some people being missionaries while others are disciples. Instead, each of us is to be a *missionary disciple*.[29]

[29] This was a point made by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, CT, in his keynote address at the annual meeting of the National Association of Catholic

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Certainly Saint Catherine of Siena understood that spreading the gospel is the work of the entire Church. She clearly saw evangelizing as a responsibility that she personally appropriated, and as a result she communicated Jesus wherever she was and however she could because she knew that life could not be the same without him. She wanted desperately for all to come to know the love of Jesus. She also exhorted others to realize their responsibility to spread the gospel as baptized Christians, and to witness to Christ according to one's own state in life. In a letter to Thomas of Alviano, Captain of the People in Florence, in which she was trying to enlist military support for the papacy, Catherine wrote, "Every faithful Christian is obliged to be faithful and to serve holy Church, each according to his or her station in life."[30] Moreover, Catherine's own witness shows that she firmly believed that every baptized believer has a role in spreading the gospel, as she received no formal education, yet persuasively shared her faith in and love for Jesus amidst the circumstances in which God had placed her. Each baptized Christian can learn something from Catherine's zeal in accomplishing the new evangelization.

Goals of the New Evangelization

Personal Conversion through Encounter with Jesus

As every baptized believer serves as an agent of the new evangelization, what precisely is the goal they seek to accomplish? As discussed by the most recent pontiffs, the new evangelization has a twofold goal. The *first goal* is to share with others the love of Christ and thereby invite them to *personal conversion through a personal encounter* with him. John Paul II said, "Evangelization is the Church's effort to proclaim to everyone that God loves them, that he has given himself for them in Jesus Christ, and that he invites them to an unending life of happiness."[31] At the beginning of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites all Christians everywhere to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ (*EG* 3). In proclaiming the good news of God's love made manifest in Jesus, and facilitating an encounter with him, the aim is to present the opportunity for personal conversion to a life formed and informed by that love. Thus the new evangelization seeks to provide the opportunity for people to encounter, or re-encounter, Christ,

Theological Schools (NACTS) held in Chicago on October 13–14, 2014. The theme of the annual meeting was "*Evangelii Gaudium*: Pope Francis and His Impact on Priestly Formation and Identity."

[30] Letter T191/G221 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 229.

[31] John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, Mar. 17, no. 2; see also *RM* 2.

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allowing Jesus to shape their very lives. In fact, John Paul II said that the work of evangelization must bridge the gap between faith and life (*EIA* 26). This is why Pope Francis has said, "Evangelization aims at a process of growth which entails taking seriously each person and God's plan for his or her life" (*EG* 160). In other words, *we must make Christ's love real* in people's lives so that his love will impact their lives! Thus the whole project of the new evangelization is founded in personal encounter with Christ, and the first goal of the new evangelization is to facilitate personal conversion through personal encounter with Jesus who is the ultimate revelation of God's love.

Certainly this first goal of the new evangelization is a goal that consumed Saint Catherine of Siena. In all of her personal encounters and correspondence she sought to invite people to conversion by inviting them to encounter the love of Jesus. She did so by trying to make Christ's love real for all whom God placed in her path. "For Catherine there was no such thing as a chance encounter. She saw with great clarity that everyone she met was the Trinity's gift to her and as such her role was to present them with the love of the Triune God."[32] Catherine saw this love revealed fully in Jesus on the Cross,[33] which is why she opens many of her letters with the salutation, "In the name of Jesus Christ crucified." One example of Catherine's desire to facilitate personal conversion in others by inviting them to encounter Jesus' love can be seen in a letter she wrote to Monna Colomba, an elderly widow who had taken to living a worldly life of pleasure-seeking and vanity, persuading other women to join her in pursuit of luxury and indulgence. Catherine is not shy about telling Monna that she is, "immersed and drowned in the world through attachment and inordinate desire,"[34] and she exhorts Monna "to be a mirror of virtue for the young women who are still bound in the world by the bonds of their husbands."[35] Catherine wants Monna to know that she has written to her out of the love and concern that she has for her salvation and she reminds Monna that Christ alone has redeemed us "with unspeakable love."[36] In an age of political correctness when we are told subtly and not so subtly that every person has a right to create his or her own moral universe and that it

[32] Perry J. Cahall, "Saint Catherine of Siena's Pedagogy of the Cross," *New Blackfriars* 87:1012 (Nov. 2006): 592.

[33] See Ibid., 580–583.

[34] Letter T166/G349 in Suzanne Noffke, O.P., *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, Vol. 1, Medieval and Renaissance Text Studies 202 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), 178.

[35] Ibid., 176.

[36] Ibid., 177.

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would be impolite and intolerant to suggest that a person's choices and behaviors might be lacking in moral rectitude, Catherine shows us that if we truly love someone this means at times we may have to offer loving fraternal correction to gently remind our loved ones where their true happiness lies – not in doing whatever they want, but in remaining in the love of Jesus. Furthermore, each of us should welcome fraternal correction that seeks to turn us toward the love of Jesus.

Transformation of Culture

In addition to facilitating personal conversion through personal encounter with Jesus, a *second, and related, goal* of the new evangelization is the *transformation of culture*. Pope Paul VI remarked that cultures must be evangelized and "regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel" because the "split between the Gospel and culture is . . . the drama of our time" (*EN* 20). Thus John Paul II said, "[T]he new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture" (*EIA* 70). Pope Francis has also stressed the imperative of evangelizing culture (*EG* 69), and he devoted an entire chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* to "the inescapable social dimension of the Gospel message" (*EG* 258; Ch. 4). According to John Paul II the *second goal* of the new evangelization is that the "crisis of culture must be countered by *the civilization of love*" (*TMA* 52). The goal is that this civilization will become more welcoming of the gospel and will embody gospel values so that the gospel is imbedded in the culture and cultural institutions, along with being passed on person-to-person (*EG* 129). Thus the goal is to affect the air that we breathe so that it bears the scent of the gospel, which should be threatening to no one, since the love of Jesus Christ seeks nothing other than to allow us to breathe in abundant life (Jn 10:10).

Certainly Saint Catherine of Siena tried to spread the sweet scent of Jesus' love in the culture of her day. She understood very clearly the inescapable social dimension of the gospel and the need that her culture had to be renewed and revitalized by the gospel message. She was "deeply enmeshed in the civil and ecclesiastical events of her day,"[37] desiring to shape all of these events according to the love of Christ crucified. In a letter she wrote to civic leaders in Bologna, Catherine exhorted them to cease acting for their own personal

[37] Mary Ann Fatula, O.P., *Catherine of Siena's Way*. revised ed. The Way of the Christian Mystics 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 14.

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advantage out of self-interest, but instead to seek true justice tempered with mercy, showing particular care for the poor, with concern for the common good.[38] Catherine explains how personal virtue and cultural health are related, reminding the leaders of Bologna that "selfish love is the ruination of the city of the soul and the disruption and ruination of earthly cities as well."[39] She states further that "those who do not help themselves by being virtuous [cannot] help their city with familial charity and with just and holy zeal."[40] She then pleads with the city leaders to be clothed in the indescribable love of Jesus to maintain both their personal states of grace and the state of their city,[41] showing clearly the link between personal conversion through encounter with Christ and the preservation and transformation of culture with the gospel.

A New Manner

Seeking to accomplish the two-fold goal of the new evangelization in a new societal situation and new cultural context, another aspect of the new evangelization that is "new" is the *manner* in which the gospel must be spread. In his address to the Central American Bishops in 1983, John Paul II appealed for a commitment "new in its ardor, methods and expression" (*EIA* 66). He insisted that "it is necessary to inculturate preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers" (*EIA* 70). In asking for such a commitment, John Paul II was following the program of the Second Vatican Council which said the Church, being "sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God," must accomplish this task as Christ did – committing "himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived" (*AG* 10). Thus an integral part of the new evangelization is adapting the manner of spreading the unchanging gospel to resonate with the current cultural climate. Affirming an adaptable manner of spreading the gospel, Benedict XVI explained in his *Motu Proprio* establishing the new dicastery for Promoting the New Evangelization that by necessity the new evangelization does not mean elaborating "a single formula . . . the same for all circumstances" (*UES*) in which evangelization takes place. Pope Francis has likewise emphasized the necessity "of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness" (*EG* 41). Thus, in the

[38] Letter T268/G200 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 3, 96–99.
[39] Ibid., 98.
[40] Ibid., 99.
[41] Ibid.

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particular social and cultural circumstances of the twenty-first century, through new ardor, methods, and expression, the "program" of the new evangelization seeks to equip the Church to proclaim the Gospel is a manner adapted to the mentality and character of an age facing unique challenges, particularly the challenge of estrangement from the faith.

Saint Catherine of Siena has something to teach us about speaking the unchanging truths of the faith in the language and culture of our hearers. In her own time and place, with her own idioms, she sought to make evident the abiding newness of the unchanging love of Jesus. As Mary O'Driscoll has noted of Catherine's writings, "Catherine of Siena's style of writing is spontaneous, energetic and passionate. Much of its vitality comes from her superb use of imagery," she "relies on images to stimulate the dormant intuition of her readers, and to open for them the deeper meaning of human and divine truths."[42] The images that Catherine used to facilitate the spread of the gospel were images appropriate to her time, culture, and audience. When writing to prisoners in Siena, some of whom were Knights Hospitalers, Catherine turned to military imagery. She wrote about Christ as a knight who "came onto this battlefield and fought and conquered the devil . . . The crown of thorns was his helmet. His scourged flesh was his breastplate. His nailed hands were his gloves of mail. The lance at his side was the sword that cut off our death. His fastened-down feet were his spurs. Look how wonderfully this knight of ours is armed! Surely we ought to follow him and be encouraged in our every difficulty, in every adversity!"[43] When writing to the Madonna Jacoma, widow of the lord of Fuligno, Catherine employed references to courtly life, referring to divine mercy making us all kings and queens, lords and ladies.[44] When sending a letter to the wife of a Milanese official she said our souls, which were once servants and slaves are now made empresses who are espoused by the eternal emperor.[45] These, and other images that she employed, show Catherine's ingenuity in proclaiming the good news of Jesus' love in a language that would resonate with her audience in her own time and place, thus evidencing the perennial necessity of adapting the language with which one spreads the good news of Jesus to particular social and cultural circumstances.

[42] O'Driscoll, "Introduction," 15–16. Examples of these many images can be found in Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 2, 835–1048.

[43] Letter T260/G309 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 318. For more examples of Catherine's use of military imagery see Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 2, 1004–1011.

[44] Letter T264/G324 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 481.

[45] Letter T29/G319/DT18 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 1, 208. For more examples of Catherine's use of courtly imagery see Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 2, 1032–1036.

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Methods of the New Evangelization

Witness

In the context into which agents of the new evangelization are called to take the gospel, what methods are we to use? In other words, how do the faithful, all of whom are called to engage in the new evangelization, present the Catholic vision of reality in an engaging and imaginative way to promote the healing of mind and heart that our culture needs? Neither the Second Vatican Council nor any of the succeeding popes have laid out a detailed program or methodology for the new evangelization. This is primarily because, as Paul VI said, methods of evangelization differ with "time, place and culture" (*EN* 40). One must remember that the overall thrust of the new evangelization is to speak the unchanging truth of the gospel in a new cultural context in a language that the culture can understand and with which it can resonate, in order to facilitate personal conversion through encounter with Jesus as well as the transformation of culture.

Yet, while being careful not to prescribe a methodology for evangelization that is overly specific, Paul VI did say there are methods of evangelization that have "fundamental importance" (*EN* 40). Thus, it is possible to articulate some basic methods that must be followed if the new evangelization is to be effective. It should be noted that these methods do not necessarily involve dreaming up new and elaborate programs. In fact, Pope Francis has noted that for the new evangelization to be successful, "Mere administration can no longer be enough," instead, we must be "permanently in a state of mission" (*EG* 25). Thus Francis is telling us to prioritize personal ministry over programs. Francis maintains that structures in the Church must be renewed so that instead of focusing on self-preservation they will become "more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth" (*EG* 27). Francis has challenged "everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities" (*EG* 33).

Carrying forth the effort of new evangelization the first and most fundamental method of evangelizing is authentic Christian witness. Paul VI poignantly stated, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers," and, "It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world" (*EN* 41). Echoing Paul VI, John Paul II said "The first requirement of the new evangelization is the *actual witness of Christians who live by the Gospel*."[46] He said being "evangelists of the new millennium"

[46] John Paul II, *Springtime of Evangelization*, Address, June 5, no. 4.

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means "witnessing to the faith by lives of holiness."[47] He also said wordless witness is a silent, powerful, and effective proclamation of the Gospel, stirring up "questions in the hearts of those who see how they live."[48] Pope Francis has been stressing constantly that concern for others, especially the poor, is the most appealing witness to the Gospel. He has said, "all religious teaching ultimately has to be reflected in the teacher's way of life, which awakens the assent of the heart by nearness, love, and witness" (*EG* 42). Francis is calling us to prioritize authentic witness, personal presence, and solidarity with others over programs. He is also exhorting us to concrete expressions of solidarity and presence instead of just to perfunctory glances at those around us.

St. Catherine exemplified a manner of spreading the gospel through authentic Christian witness that prioritized personal presence and solidarity with others. Catherine's letters evidence that she was attentive to the circumstances and needs of the individual, delighting "in the uniqueness of each person," and showing a "compassionate love for each person with whom she corresponds."[49] Suzanne Noffke has noted of Catherine, "Hers is a mysticism not at all dominated by physical and psychological phenomena but centered explicitly in the conviction that the quest for God is inseparable from active love for the world."[50] In one of her letters to her confessor Raymond da Capua, Catherine wrote, "We can't show God affection by the service we might be able to do for him, because he has no need of the good we do; but we can and must show it in the persons of our brothers and sisters by seeking the glory and praise of God's name in them. No more indifference, then! No more sleeping in unawareness! No, with bold and blazing heart stretch your sweet loving desires to go and give honor to God and your best efforts to your neighbors, never losing sight of your goal, Christ crucified."[51] In the same letter Catherine includes an exhortation to spread the gospel through authentic witness stating, "I long to see you true sons and trumpeters of the incarnate Word, God's Son, not only with your voices but in your actions. Learn from the Master of truth, who preached virtue only after he had practiced it."[52] Echoing the First Letter of John, Catherine insisted in a letter to Peter of Milan that we cannot remain distant from our neighbors when she wrote, "How can I say I am loving if I see my neighbors in need and keep my distance from them, if for the sake of my own comfort I pretend not to see

[47] Ibid., Address, Mar. 17, no. 6.
[48] Ibid., Address, June 5, no. 4.
[49] O'Driscoll, "Letters," in *Catherine of Siena*, 19.
[50] Noffke, "Introduction," *Anthology*, Vol. 1, xxvii.
[51] Letter T226/G89, in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 8–9.
[52] Ibid., 5.

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them?"[53] Catherine also exhibited a particular concern for the poor, evidenced in a letter to Lodovica di Granello, presumably a woman of means, when she wrote, "Do your duty well, because in whatever you can do you must be a steward for the poor, you and anyone else who has anything – because the poor, along with the loving charity with which the alms are given, are the hands that lead us to eternal life."[54] Perhaps nowhere is the priority of personal presence and solidarity with others through concrete expressions of love more evidenced in Catherine's life than in her visits to a young man named Niccolò who was imprisoned and condemned to death for treason.[55] Her visits consoled him and she promised Niccolò that she would be present at his execution. The morning of his execution Catherine took him to Mass to receive communion, and she remained with him, as she allowed him to lean his head on her breast to draw courage from her as the time of his execution drew near. Through Catherine's words and her presence, fear was cast from Niccolò's heart and he began to see the place of his execution as a holy place where he would meet Jesus, bathed in Jesus' blood. When Niccolò arrived at the place of his beheading and saw Catherine waiting for him, he smiled. Catherine made the sign of the cross over him, and as Niccolò was murmuring "Jesus" and "Catherine," Catherine lovingly received Niccolò's head in her hands as it was severed from his body. It is hard to imagine a more powerful witness of personal presence and solidarity than this.

Personal Proclamation

Although authentic witness through personal presence and solidarity is the most fundamental method of the new evangelization, witness in itself is not sufficient. Paul VI said that in addition to witness we also need proclamation (*EN* 22). In our proclamation of the gospel, John Paul II noted "that faith cannot be taken for granted, but must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness" (*EIA* 69). Thus, we cannot presume that people, even Catholics, know the content of the faith, nor can we assume that they have attained any particular level of catechesis. Proclaiming the gospel without presumptions, all of the recent popes have asserted that the Church should avail herself of modern methods of social communication (*EN* 45). However, Paul VI said that mass media and social communications should be used to evangelize with the challenge of speaking to the individual (*EN* 45).

[53] Letter T315, in Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 1, 470.

[54] Letter T304/G345, in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 3, 186.

[55] Catherine discusses her visits to Niccolò and his execution in Letter T273/G97/DT31, in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 1, 82–90.

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So, lest one think the focus of the new evangelization is on utilizing new technology to spread the gospel, Paul VI taught that "person-to person" contact will always be indispensable in evangelization (*EN* 46). Pope Francis has exhorted all members of the Church not to be self-enclosed in a false sense of security, but instead to get out in the streets and take the gospel personally to others, especially to the poor and the sick (*EG* 48–49), whom Francis says are at the center of the new evangelization (*EG* 198). Francis has warned against forgoing interpersonal relationships through screens and equipment, and instead he has challenged us "to run the risk of face-to-face encounter" in a "revolution of tenderness" (*EG* 88). Applying Francis' statements to the use of social media in spreading the Gospel, it should be pointed out that virtual communities should direct people to real personal communities. Social media should support personal relationships, not substitute for them. We need "digital missionaries" who seek out and "proclaim" the gospel to people in the digital world and bring them into real human communion.[56]

St. Catherine certainly saw the necessity of personally proclaiming the gospel through all means available to her. She exhorted others to proclamation, as in a letter to an Augustinian monk Felice da Massa, when she wrote: "Let the truth be your delight; let it always be in your mouth, and proclaim it when it is needed. Proclaim it lovingly and to everyone, especially to those you love with a special love – but with a certain congeniality, putting the shortcomings of the other person on your own shoulders."[57] In a letter to Raymond of Capua, Catherine wrote, "We must proclaim the truth openly and generously, never letting fear silence us."[58] In her own way Catherine used the means of social communication available to her, the letter, to "speak" to individuals and bring them into the human community of the Church. In fact, Catherine wrote over four hundred such letters. Suzanne Noffke notes that Catherine used "letter-writing as one of her favored means of reaching out, advising, and influencing others," writing "to anyone she thought she might influence, whether for their personal good or that of the larger Church."[59] However, Catherine was concerned through her letters to draw their recipients into a personal encounter with Jesus through personal relationships in the community of the Church, which is where proclamation should lead.

[56] The need for "digital missionaries," as well as noting the relationship between virtual and personal communities, was made by Bishop Caggiano in his keynote address at the annual meeting of the National Association of Catholic Theological Schools (NACTS) held in Chicago on October 13–14, 2014.

[57] Letter T218, in Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 1, 229.

[58] Letter T330, in Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 1, 231.

[59] Noffke, "Introduction," in *Anthology*, Vol. 1, xxiii–xxiv.

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Joy

In many ways the reflections of our recent pontiffs paint a fairly sobering picture of the context within which the new evangelization must be carried out. However, these pontiffs have tried to identify the barriers that must be cleared away if we are to lead others to encounter the love of the living God. Regardless of the obstacles we may face, Pope Francis has reminded us that "an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always" (*EG* 24). Francis has consistently stressed that we must never cease to rejoice in the Joy of the Gospel (*EG* 83)! He has noted, "We are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink" (*EG* 86), because, as Francis stated in the opening of *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew" (*EG* 1). This is not a false or fabricated joy, tantamount to "put on a happy face." This is a deep and profound joy, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Gal 5:22-23) that exists even amidst turmoil, turbulence, and suffering because in the core of my being I know my fundamental identity – I am the beloved of God! This is a joy that comes from knowing that even with my faults, my flaws, and my sins, I am loveable and I am loved, and that Jesus is the ultimate proof that I am offered a love that never fails.

Most definitely, Saint Catherine exuded the joy which Christians should evidence as they bring the gospel into any cultural context. She never tired of pointing out the ineffable love of the crucified Jesus, who shows everyone that they are lovable and they are loved.[60] Sr. Mary Ann Fatula, O.P., has noted of Catherine, "Love, rather than physical beauty made her radiant – a passionate love for God and for the people treasured by God."[61] The love of God that Catherine pondered in Christ crucified and that she experienced in her mystical union with her divine spouse, bore the fruit of joy that she longed to share with others, an indispensable "method" of evangelization.

The Primacy of Love

Beyond witnessing to the gospel and proclaiming it with joy, the most important "method" of the new evangelization is undertaking the spread of the gospel with love – the love that is the gift of the Holy Spirit which allows us to truly will the good of the other. That

[60] See Cahall, 580–583.
[61] Fatula, 15.

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the gospel should be spread with love should be obvious when we recall that the very content of any effort of evangelization is the love of God made manifest in the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul VI said the evangelizer must love those he evangelizes (*EN* 79). John Paul II said evangelization means sharing, "Christ's burning love for souls" and the Church, a love that takes "the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability, and interest in people's problems" (*RM* 89). This is a point that has become a mantra in Pope Francis' pontificate. Francis has said, "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives," (*EG* 244) to show them how much God loves them. Francis has insisted, "Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others (*EG* 127), because, "The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus, which we have received" (*EG* 264). Thus, among the "methods" of the new evangelization, none is more important than love, without which the evangelizer is simply a "noisy gong or a clashing symbol" (1 Cor 13:1). As Pope Francis keeps saying, we must let others know the joy of being infinitely loved (*EG* 7–8). He has even succinctly defined the new evangelization as "to be aware of the merciful love of the Father so that we also become instruments of salvation for our brothers."[62] Thus we must make love real for others, especially for those who do not believe that they are either lovable or that they are loved.[63]

Nothing could be more true than to say that Saint Catherine of Siena's heart was on fire with love – love for Jesus, love for his Church, and love for all her neighbors whom she knew Jesus loves desperately. When in prayer Catherine experienced her "mystical espousal" to Christ, she took from this experience the realization that she needed to be where Christ was, among the people.[64] Catherine's circle of friends, whom she liked to call her "family", included women and men, clerics, lay and religious, intellectuals, politicians, rich, and poor.[65] She made herself available to others in concrete offerings of love, making the love of Jesus real in their lives, as when she ministered to those ravaged by the plague in Siena. In her *Dialogue* God tells Catherine that the soul in love with God's truth "reaches out in loving charity to the whole world's need for

[62] Pope Francis, "Pope's Address to Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization," May 29, 2015, trans. ZENIT news agency, accessed May 31, 2015, www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-s-address-to-pontifical-council-for-promoting-the-new-evangelization.

[63] That many people in contemporary society doubt that they are lovable and that they are loved was a point made by Bishop Caggiano in his keynote address at the annual meeting of the National Association of Catholic Theological Schools (NACTS) held in Chicago on October 13–14, 2014.

[64] Ibid., xx.

[65] Ibid.

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salvation. But beyond a general love for all people she sets her eye on the specific needs of her neighbors and comes to the aid of those nearest her according to the graces I have given her for ministry."[66] In a letter to the senator of Siena, Catherine writes, "the more you love God, the more your love will reach out to your neighbors, helping them spiritually and materially as you have opportunity and time to serve them."[67] It is this service of love, in word and deed, impelled by the love of Jesus, that is the very heart of any effort of evangelization.

Conclusion

In this article I have briefly outlined the "new evangelization" which our three most recent pontiffs have elaborated. While outlining the basic features of the new evangelization I have made reference to Saint Catherine of Siena's life and insights, showing how we can see in her an example of how to accomplish the project of the new evangelization. This project, although new in some respects, is also as old as Christianity itself. Although new societal situations and cultural contexts present new challenges that require us to proclaim the gospel in a new language with which the culture can resonate, the goal is to present individual persons and the culture with the unchanging truth of God's love made fully manifest in the Person of Jesus Christ. Saint Catherine presents us with the intuition that many saints throughout the history of the Church have had regarding how to undertake the process of evangelizing, through personal witness and personal proclamation with joy and love. Christian faithful can learn much from Saint Catherine in their current efforts to further the new evangelization.

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[66] *Dialogue* 6, in Noffke, *Anthology*, Vol. 1, 226.
[67] Letter T180/G207/DT43 in Noffke, *Letters*, Vol. 1, 193.

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