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## The New Evangelization of the Catholic Church in the Context of Modern Socio-Cultural Changes

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ewangelia; Kościół katolicki; papież Kościoła katolickiego; nowa ewangelizacja; media cyfrowe; sekularyzacja.

**Keywords:** Gospel; Catholic Church; Catholic Pontiffs; new evangelization; digital media; secularization.

### Introduction

Communication is integral to the mission of the Church. Even the apostles and other first century Christians used the tools of communication available in their time: orality (or word of mouth) and writing. The medium of communication changed over the Christian history. When society's communication style seemed to have settled for the electronic, analog gave way to digital and another technological shift occurred. In the 1970s and 1980s, personal computers emerged and a new environment developed. Soon after, the 1990s brought an invention the Internet that brought higher speed, quantity of information, and a means of connecting people globally that the world had never seen before.

New media incorporates all technological devices and software programs associated with the process of creating and promoting digital information. It also involves different ways and habits of delivering and receiving information – whether searching on Google for interests, watching ad free TV, home delivery of goods, buying e-books on Amazon – everything

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mostly directs to a smartphone, laptop or personal computer, and Internet access.

People are living online and offline and they are integrated with one another, and media giving a richer experience of the world around us.

Given the change in modern social and religious life of many Christians and the emergence of differences between religion as an institution and personal spiritual experience, the Catholic Church put on agenda necessity to disseminate the Holy Scripture to everyone on the planet, taking into account their interests and habits in everyday life. In order to implement that, catholic clergy have introduced the concept of new evangelization. They argued that for centuries European civilization was formed on the basis of Christianity, but since the second half of the XX century it was under the influence of mass secularization, which affected the loss of religious affiliation among many representatives of religious confederations and communities of that time. Based on that, new evangelization would become a power that will unite the people and Church.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to identify the concept of new evangelization as a missionary activity of the Roman Catholic Church given the modern socio-cultural changes, Catholic Pontiffs attitude toward implementation of new evangelization as well using of social media platforms within the church due to corresponding increase in the number of Internet and social network users around the world.

Methodology of research includes theoretical and empirical methods, where analysis, logical, historical and comparison methods were most commonly used. Thus, when preparing a paper we were able to achieve the goals according to our purpose.

Among the researches and publications related to the concept of new evangelization, position of the official Vatican regarding implementation of the relevant strategy, peculiarities and main provisions as well as challenges of Catholic Church to reach her goals it is worth to highlight the studies T. Kondrusevych (Кондрусевич Т., 2013), M. Кууак (Кияк М., 2014), M. Hull (Hull M., 2013), J. Allen (Allen J., 2013) and P. Willey (Willey P., 2015). At the same time, an official Vatican documents and Popes official letters and speeches were used in order to fulfill the purpose of the article.

## Definition, Main Areas and Characteristics of New Evangelization

The idea of evangelization revival or new evangelization was first announced during the Second Vatican Council of 1962, which, among other things, sought to answer the threats to the spiritual world of the time that Christians felt through powerful changes, divisions and creation of a new world order. The official Vatican has identified new evangelization as a synonym for missionary effort, aimed at transformation the consciousness of people, attracting them to the Church and their greater participation in religious life.

For the first time new evangelization concept was officially presented by Pope Paul VI in the *Evangelii Nuntiandi Apostolic Adjunction* (Evangelization in the Modern World) on December 8, 1975. The Pope, in particular, noted that modern people should reconsider their beliefs and strive to convey a Christian message to everyone, where society may find an answer to current issues and strength to fulfill a duty of human solidarity (Папа Павло VI, 2009, p. 4).

In its turn, Nikola Eterovich, Croatian Archbishop has determined evangelization on the basis of three different types of missionary efforts:

- 1) evangelization as a regular activity, a life-long process aimed at ordinary believers of the Catholic Church;
- 2) Ad Gentes missions – the proclamation of salvation message to those people who do not profess individual religious views, covering not only new territories of Africa, Asia, or Oceania, but also countries that already under the wing of Catholic Church;
- 3) new evangelization as an efforts, aimed at believers of the Catholic Church, who eventually succumbed to secularism and rejected religion from their everyday life (Що таке нова євангелізація, 2013).

In other words, new evangelization calls to Catholic believers who most probably have become secularized and withdrew from the religion (Allen J., 2013).

Given the significant stratification of society, Catholic Church has identified five areas for spreading a new evangelization in the world, including culture, social sphere, economy, civil society, science and technology.

Evangelization through culture has become one of the key instruments on which clergy drew particular attention. This is due to secularization that predominates particularly on the West that has a profound impact on its history and identity. Secularization is mistakenly perceived in our cultures as a sign of liberation and the ability to predict the future, human life in general, without any reference to transcendence (from Latin

*transcendo* – something inaccessible to cognition, “beyond the world”). Mass secularization became rooted in the daily life of an ordinary citizens and thereby new generations of people live in anti-religious life, where there are no God (in whole or in part), and His existence depends entirely on human consciousness.

The spread of new evangelization through social sphere became important as a result of increasing migration, which causes cultures mixing and destruction of basic social orientations, values and interpersonal connections where people build their identity and recognize the meaning of life. According to the advocates of concept, human interpersonal relations may become a solid foundation for actualization and dissemination of Catholic doctrine.

The economic relations in view of the Catholic Church became more and more interconnected every year and respectively require special attention. To a large extent, this is due to migration, as the economy, along with its positive effects, generates inequality among people, as well as violence and ethnic hostility. With this in mind, new evangelization should serve as a benchmark for all countries without exception – they should unite their efforts around this idea and strive to maintain balance, live in harmony for the sake of a common future (The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith *Instrumentum Laboris*, 2013).

Civil society has become the fourth direction that the Catholic Church identified as determining for new evangelization. Trying to become closer to the modern world and spread the Gospel among people, Catholic Church entered into a dialogue with civil society, and, along with her missionary activity, committed itself to professing the key values of civilized world, mainly commitment to peace; development and liberation of people; improvement of international regulation and interaction between national governments; search for possible spheres of coexistence, dialogue and cooperation between different cultures and religions; protection of people and human rights; tackling environmental disasters etc.

The last, but not least way for dissemination of new evangelization concerns the field of scientific research and technology. Representatives of various religious denominations point out that modern development of science and technology may create new idols for humanity. Moreover, in the digital and globalized world, even science may easily become a new religion. New forms of gnosis (from Greek γνῶσις – knowledge) consider technology as a form of wisdom, as evidenced by the rise of new cults that are structured as religions and using religious healing practices, promising prosperity and instant pleasure for everyone who will use their magical power (Allen J., 2013).

Therefore, technological changes and acceptance of new world order predetermine development of new, contemporary mechanisms for spreading the ideas of Christianity in different parts of the world. Based on that, Church has identified new evangelization as ideology which aims to unite the values of the nation around the activity that is actively supported by the Catholic Church (Кияк М., 2014, р. 261–263).

Based on that, we may conclude that new evangelization has become an important part of Catholic missionary efforts, aimed at spreading the Gospel in modern digitized world, which involves main spheres of human activity and seek for reconsidering and revival of ordinary Christians as well as non-believers, their religious views for religious renewal in Catholic Church.

### **New evangelization as viewed by Supreme Pontiffs**

First of all, it is important to mention that Catholic Pontiffs have repeatedly pointed to necessity of using emerging media for evangelization. Within its dynamics, evangelization has become energy that gives ability to the Church realize her purpose and respond to the general call for holiness. For example, Pope Paul VI said that the evangelizing activity of the Church “must constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting, or representing God’s revelation and faith in Jesus Christ”.

In turn, Pope John Paul II has identified evangelization as one of the main postulates of his great teaching. The concept of new evangelization has become confirmation of the Pope’s ideas that he systematically developed in many discourses. According to him, evangelization is a task facing the Church mainly in countries with Christian tradition. This directly influences an attitude of the Church towards outside world and involves constant internal renewal, continuous passage from evangelization to evangelization (Leo Burke R., 2011).

Pope John Paul II convinced that only new evangelization could ensure solid and deep faith among Christians. But in order to achieve these goals it is important to “remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself present in these countries and nations” (Willey P., 2015).

Later, Pope Benedict XVI similarly to John Paul II supported idea of developing new approaches to Church’s missionary activity. He appealed for preaching of the Gospel both in those regions that are waiting for the first evangelization as well as in areas where roots of Christianity are profound, however, suffered a serious crisis of faith. He considers new evangelization not new in its meaning, but in its methods, which must keep pace with time.

In order to properly share the ideas of new evangelization, Pope Benedict XVI has established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization in 2010 (У Ватикані презентовано Папську Радуну сприяння новій евангелізації, 2010). He also noted that the Church faced a “rejection of faith” – a phenomenon that increasingly manifested in societies and cultures that seemed to have penetrated the Gospel for centuries, but now has led to the decline of Christian identity in the world (Amato A. and Cardinal Levada W., [b. r.]).

In some areas, he said, in addition to progressive secularization, the practice of faith continues to be alive and deeply rooted in the soul of entire nations. There are almost completely secularized regions where the light of faith stays in hands of very small communities (Hull M., 2013).

According to the Vatican, apology of faith requires the mastery of new global thinking, which covers thoughts and activities, personal cases, the inner life of society and their missionary fervor as a whole (Доповідь після дискусій Синоду про Нову Євангелізацію, 2012).

Nowadays the spirit of new evangelization is also filled with the teachings of Pope Francis. Like predecessors, the Pope’s message to mankind focuses on a relentless appeal to dialogue, creation of an open, dynamic Church, one that goes to the people who are lost and unprivileged. He emphasizes that Church cannot just wait for people to come, but need to actively look for them (Кондрусевич Т., 2013)

The mission of new evangelization according to Pope Francis is formed as follows: “Do not diminish, reject or ease one or another thing, but go along the road in search of people, to know them by name. The Church, which is limited to the administrative work in the parishes closing in its community, expects same fate as a lonely person: she atrophied physically and intellectually. Or it will look like a mortal apartment with moisture and mold” (Папа Римский Франциск, 2014).

In 2016 message for World Communications Day Pope Francis alluded to this: “Emails, text messages, social networks and chats can also be fully human forms of communication. Not a technology that determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal” (Grosso J., 2018).

Holy Father Pope Francis notes that today’s humanity is facing a deep crisis. Thus, new evangelization must necessarily use the language of mercy, which is more about gestures and attitudes than words.

The pope is convinced that we are living in time of epochal change and reflecting on what will follow the crisis, the economic and social consequences of the ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 and, above all, how the church can offer itself as a safe point of reference to the

world lost in face of unexpected event (Pope Francis on New Evangelization, [b. r.]).

## **Expansion of Catholic Church in Modern Social Media Platforms**

It is also important to observe main achievements within implementation of new evangelization of the Catholic Church. We can see that Church started using social media outlets to invite people to Mass, adoration, confession and other catholic events. Therefore, social media have become a way to minister to and feed these communities by offering them content that will help them encounter Jesus.

With this in mind, the Vatican introduced the official pontifical website *www.vatican.va*. The very first post was Pope John Paul II's Christmas message: greetings in different languages and his traditional papal blessing *Urbi et Orbi* ("to the city [of Rome] and the world").

In two days, the page was visited by 307,786 users from 70 countries. In 1995, this meant reaching close to 2% of the total population on the internet. That percentage today would refer to 75 million users in 48 hours (Botha R., 2017, p. 17).

Benedict XVI continued efforts aimed at to promoting new evangelization through new media technologies, taking considerable steps forward. Thus, the Holy See's official YouTube channel *www.youtube.com/vatican* was launched on January 2009.

Further, the staff of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication proposed using a Twitter account to Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. He readily agreed to use any available means to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and so the Twitter handle *@Pontifex* was launched.

Within 24 hours of the Twitter account release, 350,000 people became followers, and by February 28, 2013, Pope Benedict's last day in office, the account had increased 10 times the number of followers (Botha R., 2017, p. 17–18).

*@Pontifex* has been also remained with the papal office when Pope Francis was installed in March 2013. Since then, the pope's Twitter account has been called the most influential in the world with tweets receiving an average of 10,000 retweets in Spanish and 6,400 retweets in English (Hicks M., [b. r.]).

Through social media, the Catholic Church has the potential to promote the Gospel by promoting Catholic books, the rosary, medals, clerical wears, sacramental, and more. Social media catches the eyes of the world

if used correctly and many Catholic groups are presently doing just that. It is easy to look at the Internet and social media while only seeing the faults and misuses of its faculties.

However, among the challenges that faced primarily bishops, priests within implementation of new evangelization we may point necessity for their visible presence both online and offline that takes more time for communication, particular digital knowledge for proclaiming the Gospel via social media as well as having digital devices that would help people to connect with their church.

## Conclusions

Consequently, new evangelization has become one of the main priorities of the Catholic Church for about last 50 years. This is mainly because of rapid development of Internet, digital devices and social media and rising necessity for the adoption of technological implementations to aid communication between Bishop and priests, as well as priests and parishioners. By implementing new evangelization Catholics Pontiffs primarily seek for attempting to draw people back from the path of secularism, which causes them to treat religion as a private matter, a materialism in which people seek meaning through their possessions, and an individualism in which people's self-reliance causes them not to recognize the need to rely on God and to reach out to others.

We consider that new evangelization became important as in modern digitized world its main tools can be used by priests and parishioners to find meaningful information regarding their parish activities (liturgy times, events calendar, homilies, prayers, daily readings, online giving etc) and keep the parishioners updated on latest news and last minute messages.

Thus, we can point out that social media are helpful and useful for Church purposes and according to Pope Francis it can be treated as "gift from God". At the same time, we need to recognize how social networks, on the one hand, help us to better connect, rediscover, and assist one another, but on the other, lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, different kinds of fraud or virtual violence.

Moreover, among the challenges facing Church and mankind in general we can point out technology that has become the new "golden calf", the alternative religion that provides new forms of divination and the illusion of control. Many people would sacrifice time, talent and resources just to adhere to the newer and better versions of technology, software, etc., as we



live in time where faith in progress is manifested in faster, smarter and more efficient world.

Within modern socio-cultural changes and especially due to COVID-19 pandemic new evangelization looks very appropriate and extremely necessary given the social distancing of people and lack of religion in everyday life. Therefore, new evangelization may foster growing religious belief and further rapprochement between church and people. But from our point of view, main challenge here lies in remote transmitting of the Gospel, without face-to-face communication between parishioner and priest or physical presence in church. When watching over the screen, it's much difficult to convey the spirit of religion or the importance of Scripture especially to those people who far from the church. Thus, we may conclude that new evangelization is a good approach within its missionary efforts aimed at proclaiming the Gospel especially given the current world trends, however in order to achieve main goals as predetermined by Supreme Pontiffs much more efforts are needed than the usual church activities. Accordingly, further implementation of new evangelization of the church would be aimed at improving its efficiency, quality of presenting main values as well as ease of perception by target audience.

## PROWADZENIE NOWEJ EWANGELIZACJI KOŚCIOŁA KATOLICKIEGO W KONTEKŚCIE WSPÓŁCZESNYCH PRZEMIAN SPOŁECZNO-KULTUROWYCH

(STRESZCZENIE)

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie nowej ewangelizacji jako działalności misyjnej Kościoła katolickiego w obliczu szybkiego rozwoju Internetu, urządzeń cyfrowych i mediów społecznościowych na całym świecie. Głównym celem nowej ewangelizacji jest nawrócenie na chrześcijaństwo ludzi, którzy obecnie ulegają sekularyzacji. W artykule wyróżniono pięć kierunków nowej ewangelizacji we współczesnym świecie, a mianowicie: kulturę, sferę społeczną, gospodarkę, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, naukę i technologię. Analizie poddano rozumienie, postrzeganie i główne propozycje papieża Kościoła katolickiego odnośnie do nowej ewangelizacji. Autorzy analizują treści dostępne na portalach społecznościowych oraz na platformach internetowych, na których daje się wyraźnie zauważyć wpływ nowej ewangelizacji prowadzonej przez Kościół katolicki. Zdaniem autorów nowa ewangelizacja powinna być prowadzona nie tylko w świecie rzeczywistym, ale również w przestrzeni wirtualnej (online), co domaga się skutecznego wykorzystywania mediów oraz narzędzi cyfrowych, a także stałego podnoszenia przez ewangelizatorów kompetencji komunikacyjnych związanych z funkcjonowaniem Internetu. Autorzy dochodzą także do wniosku, że efektywność nowej ewangelizacji w przestrzeni wirtualnej zależy bezpośrednio od technicznej jakości prezentacji oraz dostosowania komplikacji sposobu prezentacji danych treści do możliwości percepcyjnych odbiorców docelowych.

## THE NEW EVANGELIZATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES

### (SUMMARY)

The article is dedicated to the analysis of new evangelization as a missionary activity of the Roman Catholic Church because of rapid development of Internet, digital devices and social media around the world. It has been determined that the main goal of new evangelization is drawing people back from the path of secularism to the Christianity. The author outlines five areas for spreading a new evangelization in the world, which are culture, social sphere, economy, civil society, science and technology. It has been analyzed an understanding, perception and main approaches of Catholic Pontiffs to the implementation of new evangelization in the world. The author analyzes social networks and Internet highlighting most popular platforms where Catholic Church has many followers, which became an evidence of successful implementation of new evangelization. Among the challenges it pointed out is the necessity for Catholic Church remain both online and offline that requires more time for communication, particular digital knowledge for proclaiming the Gospel via social media as well as having digital devices that would help people connect with their church. The author draws conclusions, noting that further implementation of new evangelization of the church would be aimed at improving its efficiency, quality of presenting main values as well as ease of perception by target audience.

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