

Evangelization and Catechesis: “How to Meet Christ”

John M. Crawford, FSC, PhD¹

In an address to the Bishops of South America in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti on March 9, 1983, Pope John Paul II called for “...a new evangelization; new in its ardour [sic], methods and expression.”² Was this the first time the expression “New Evangelization” was ever used? Some argument could be made that as early as 1979, when Pope John Paul II made his historical first pastoral visit back to his native Poland, he had used the same phrase, likely in reference to the efforts that would be required by the Church to revitalize the Catholic faith in his homeland then still dominated by Communist rule.³ Each of Pope Saint John Paul II’s successors in the Papacy, Popes Benedict XVI and Francis, have made the “New Evangelization” a major point in their preaching and direction of the worldwide Church. Yet, this constant refrain about New Evangelization seems to have changed the definition previously connected to the task. Evangelization had traditionally been associated with the missionary efforts of the Church to tell the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to persons who had not yet had a chance to hear it. For the past thirty or more years, the Church has been encouraged to evangelize constantly, even to an audience of hearers who are already baptized members of the faith. Simultaneously, the concept of catechesis has been seemingly redefined to include elements of ongoing evangelization. Does this mean that catechesis is not as important a task now? How are we to understand the meaning and inner connection of evangelization and catechesis today?

The purpose of this short essay is to investigate how the concepts of evangelization and catechesis represent two related and mutually supportive tasks for the Church of the twenty-first century. The topic will be approached through three principal lenses: 1) through Biblical Scriptures and the experiences of the early Christian Church; 2) as the distinction and relationship between evangelization and catechesis may have been understood by John Baptist de La Salle; and, 3) as the interplay between evangelization and catechesis is understood today through Papal teachings. The methodology employed in this study argues that by learning from past historical periods, we might apply the lessons analogously to our own circumstances. The apparent blurring of lines that exists today between evangelization and catechesis seems actually to be rooted in the past experiences of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The tension between the terms actually is both a healthy and life-giving paradox, as evangelization and catechesis are efforts that must be experienced together to do justice to the task of expanding the Gospel in the twenty-first century.

Understanding Evangelization and Catechesis in the Bible and the Early Christian Church

Insight from the Hebrew Scriptures

It would be a futile effort to try to discover explicit references to evangelization and catechesis in the Hebrew Bible. Those words alone, rooted in the Greek language, would be out of place in the undisputed canonical books of the Bible. Nonetheless, Biblical Judaism, as a covenant people,

was strongly concerned with passing on the fundamental beliefs of the faith to each generation. For three millennia-plus now, Jews have searched and memorized sacred texts from the Bible and have reflected upon them, finding in them the core principles of their beliefs. At the heart of the Hebrew Bible is the covenantal relationship which exists between the LORD and the people. This relationship is expressed in the many laws found within the Torah books, but the clearest expression of covenant law is found in the passage known as the “Shema, Israel” in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

This passage represents the Deuteronomist writer’s summary of the core of Jewish belief. It is “these words,” a reference to the restatement of the commandments, the heart of Jewish law and practice, which provide the guidelines for the covenantal relationship which exists between God and the people.

Modern Biblical scholars explain that the Book of *Deuteronomy* is likely to have been the last of the Torah books completed in the Hebrew canon. It derives from a troublesome time in the experience of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, during the reign of King Josiah (approximately 640-609 B.C.E.). Josiah is highly praised in the Bible as a monarch in the best traditions of King David, the great King, because of the serious commitment and zeal that Josiah had for the covenant. Most scholars attribute the discovery of the Book of *Deuteronomy* inside the Temple in Jerusalem in Josiah’s time to the King’s cooperation with the “Deuteronomist” (D) writer(s) in trying to reform and renew the faith commitment of the people of Judah at a time of great stress.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been crushed out of existence by the conquering Assyrians. Josiah’s Kingdom of Judah was disputed land, caught in a tug-of-war within the Fertile Crescent between the powerful nations of Assyria, Egypt and Babylonia. Josiah and the Deuteronomist writer were using the restatement of the Law found in the book of *Deuteronomy* to call the people of Judah to a reinvigorated faith in the Law of the LORD. Josiah is a Biblical hero, because his efforts to renew the covenant, rehabilitate the Temple in Jerusalem, and to govern the people according to traditional Jewish principles were all successful.⁴ Yet, Josiah and his Deuteronomistic reforms are also critiqued severely by an unexpected source, the prophet Jeremiah.

As prophets go, Jeremiah was both among the most reliable and the least liked. What could he possibly find to criticize about a faithful king making a concerted effort with religious authorities, represented by the Deuteronomic author, to renew the true faith and practice of Judah? Jeremiah’s point is that the Deuteronomic reform worked *too well*. The people of Judah had learned to rely on the words of the Law. They memorized it. They drilled it into their children. And they missed the point; at least as Jeremiah saw it. He argues: “Put not your trust in the deceitful words, ‘This is the temple of the LORD! The Temple of the LORD! The Temple of

the LORD!” (Jeremiah 7:4). Jeremiah continues: “How can you say, ‘We are wise, we have the law of the LORD?’” (Jeremiah 8:8). If Jeremiah suggests that it is wrong to rely on the Temple, recently remodeled through King Josiah’s initiative, or even on the law of the LORD, so recently reconfirmed by the discovery of the Book of *Deuteronomy*, then where should the people’s reliance be founded? “They refuse to recognize me, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:5).

By analogy, this quick study of the Josiah-Jeremiah story speaks to the debate today about catechesis and evangelization. Just as Josiah relied upon his reforms to renew the people of Judah into knowledge and practice of their religion, with particular emphasis on knowledge of the Law, good catechesis attempts to get believers to know and practice their religion. However, as Jeremiah pointed out, knowledge and practice is irrelevant apart from the deep personal recognition of the reality of God. The evangelical principle always calls people to a more intimate relationship with the divine. Religion is more than learning, or even of doing. At its heart, religion, as Jeremiah knew, is recognizing that God is with us. The Hebrew Bible example serves to remind us that evangelization is always a deeply personal, intense, and loving encounter with the living God. Without that, catechesis about God and religion makes little sense.

Insight from Christian Scriptures

Evidence of both the concepts of evangelization and catechesis abound in the Christian New Testament. Obviously, the term “Gospel” applied to the four distinctive books is rooted in the Greek “eu angelion” for “Good News” and suggests a positive connotation to these collections of materials for the spiritual benefit of hearers and believers. The writings of Paul predate the written Gospels, yet any quick study of his texts demonstrate his familiarity with the term “gospel” in its earliest sense, not a specific type of biblical document but as good news for the hearer rooted in the saving activity of Jesus the Christ. Consider, for example, Paul’s introductory message in his letter to the *Romans*:

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of his holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:1-4).

This passage identifies the New Testament understanding of evangelization. It is at the heart of Paul’s mission to deliver this good news throughout various locations in the Roman Empire. The good news is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul’s self-understanding of apostleship and mission certainly echo the words found at the end of Matthew’s Gospel which further enrich our understanding of both evangelization and catechesis in early Christianity. According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ final discourse to his followers commissioned them for a task that became the evangelical mission of Christianity ever since: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). The evangelical task is

directed to “all nations.” The catechetical dimension is also set. It is necessary to teach what Jesus has taught. From the fledgling years of the Christian Church, the dual roles of evangelizing and catechizing were being worked together.

The Gospels describe incidents that are reminiscent of the warnings which were contained in the oracles of Jeremiah seven or so centuries earlier. Jesus warns, as Matthew’s Gospel records it, that teachers have a role that must be respected and followed, even if the messengers fall short of living up to the standards they declare. “The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice” (Matthew 23:2-3). Luke retells the same episode with Jesus demonstrating a similar warning about those who are scholars of the Law: “Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter” (Luke 11:52). What might be learned about correct catechesis from these exchanges? Clearly, both Matthew and Luke retain a memory of Jesus’ words that indicate that teachers exercise a vital role in the religious awareness of their communities. These teachers must be taken seriously, indicating that their catechesis has a vital importance. However, just as Jeremiah warned that merely acknowledging Law or Teaching or Temple was not enough, Jesus declares that without the “key of knowledge” there is nothing but empty words and burdensome rules. What is the key? Jesus words point us clearly to Jeremiah’s insight.

Oh you Pharisees! Although you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, inside you are filled with plunder and evil. You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also make the inside? But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you (Luke 12:39-41).

The law (in this case one of the laws pertaining to ritual purity from the Torah) was to be respected, but simply to follow the mandate without an awareness of its ultimate source would lead a person to foolishness. The “maker” of both the outside and the inside is the source of everything. Effective catechesis, therefore, is not only knowledge of what the law requires, but also the integrity to acknowledge the ultimate source and to do good, especially for those in need (“give alms”) in order to meet the requirements of the law.

These few examples are intended to show that evangelization and catechesis are topics that are found within the Christian Testament. The nuances surrounding these concepts indicate that where evangelization can be found, catechesis will soon follow. The terms are inextricably related and yet distinctive. Evangelization shares the good news. Catechesis reinforces it.

Insights from the Early Christian Community

Paul represents the early Church’s best exemplar of evangelization. In his own words, his mandate to preach “came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Paul’s conversion experience redirected him from being a fiery persecutor of Christian to become its most ardent exponent. The many letters of Paul found in Christian Scriptures sketch out his path as a pilgrim, moving throughout various communities in the Roman Empire, staying for prolonged periods to preach about Jesus Christ to all who would listen, and later communicating

by letter with some of these communities to keep them aligned with the dimensions of the gospel he had shared with these local churches.

The preached word that Paul shared initially with these communities is best described by the Greek word “kerygma.” Translated literally, kerygma means “proclamation.”⁵ It indicates a preached word, often intended as the “first word” for new hearers. Paul indicates in several places in his writings some examples of what the kerygmatic word must have been for his audiences. These words suggest how the original kerygma must have sounded:

When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive [words of] wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

The early Church preached a simple gospel. It did not depend upon rhetorical flourishes nor was it grounded in deep philosophical wisdom. Rather, the kerygma was the simple and straightforward preaching of the heart of the Christian message: Jesus, the anointed one, who died for us on the cross, the ultimate and most cruel form of Roman capital punishment, and who is now raised to his glory as God’s Son.

Scholars indicate that many simple kerygmatic statements are easily gleaned in the New Testament, most especially in the letters of Paul. Perhaps the simplest of these examples is echoed throughout Paul, and most exuberantly in the letter to the Philippians: “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:11). This simple statement found at the conclusion of the so-called “Philippians’ Hymn” passage, succinctly states an evangelical theme. Contemporary Christians have heard the statement so often that we may be a little slow to take in the power of its message. Jesus of Nazareth the anointed one is God. Restated that way, perhaps we can understand why such a simple sentence would have attracted an audience. Some people in Paul’s audience would want to know more about this man Jesus. Kerygma is something like baiting a hook: it is meant to attract a catch.

Another of Paul’s kerygmatic texts, albeit a little more expansive than the simple sentence referred to above, is found in the reminder Paul shared with the Corinthians about the resurrection of Jesus. Note well the unadorned simplicity of the proclamation:

Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all of the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be

called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God [that is] with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed (1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

Paul announces, clearly and effectively, the message of Jesus' resurrection as the foundational belief which called the Corinthian Christians to follow the gospel.

Kerygma is analogous with evangelization. The simple, attractive and inviting message calls the listener to attention. Kerygma, like evangelization, intentionally avoids complication or equivocation. It represents a straightforward proclamation of basic truths. But once the hearer was engaged, what happened next? As neophyte Christians sought to know more about "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," there was another form of religious education at work in the early Church. If kerygma has connection to our concept of evangelization, then the next step that parallels catechesis was known as "didache."

The Greek word "didache" means "teaching." If kerygma represented the means to attract and win over the candidate, then didache encompassed the way to inform and deepen the faith of the newly interested hearer. Curiously, the word also was used as the title for "the first great catechetical document outside the canon of the New Testament,"⁶ an ancient Christian tome called *The Didache*. The book contains practical and expansive information about "how-to" live a Christian life. Among its pragmatic material is the earliest set of directions of what is required to properly perform a Christian Baptism. Thus, this book that dates perhaps as early as 100 A.D./C.E., is a treasure trove of insight into the life of early Christianity as it was practiced. It also represents documentation for the "next step" in educating the Christian community. Thomas Groome, contemporary scholar of Christian religious education and pastoral theology, characterizes *The Didache* as making "clear...that Christian faith is 'a way of life' that welcomes all and requires strict moral praxis supported by prayer and worship in a community of service."⁷ Thus, we learn that within the early Christian community, preaching and teaching worked together like hand and glove. *The Didache* is analogous to our contemporary understanding of catechesis, since Christians have always benefitted from instruction and guidance that enhances their knowledge and practice of the faith. Once again, evangelization and catechesis must be understood as a partnership. Through time, the associations connected with these two concepts grew more distinct, yet, even at a time when religious practice was marked with polemics and iron-bound definitiveness, there is evidence that catechesis and evangelization work best together. The next set of insights on this connection is provided in the experiences of John Baptist de La Salle and the early Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Evangelization and Catechesis in the Time of De La Salle

John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719) was born about 134 years after Martin Luther posted his "Ninety-Five Theses" on October 31, 1517, marking the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, 88 years after the close of the Roman Catholic Church Council of Trent that became the official Catholic response to the Reformation, and roughly three years after the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 which ended the Thirty-Years' War that devastated Europe in armed conflict over the Reformation. These historical milestones help to explain major

influences on the mindset and religious environment in which De La Salle ministered. De La Salle's world had been torn apart over religious disputes. Religions had become defensive of their own beliefs or anxious to counter the unacceptable positions of other religions. As a result, De La Salle's age was a catechetical one. People were expected to "know" their respective religions.

Martin Luther initiated this catechetical shift when he published in 1529 his *Kleiner Katechismus* (*The Little Catechism*). His purpose was both didactic and apologetic. By distilling the key elements of his approach to Christian theology into a little book of questions with answers, he was disseminating his viewpoint and providing his earliest followers with a document that could be used to educate new adherents into the Lutheran community. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent understood the significance of Luther's little book. As a result, Trent defended Catholic theology by issuing a catechism of its own, *The Roman Catechism* (also known as *The Catechism of the Council of Trent for Priests*) in 1566. This book, too, represented a compendium of Catholic theology which was intended to be read by priests as a resource to educate the faithful and to counter the teachings of the new Protestant Churches. Thus, the catechetical impulse at this point was clouded in the debates, sometimes polemical, between Catholics and Protestants.

The Council of Trent also created a significantly intellectual slant on the understanding of faith. Consider these lines from the *Roman Catechism*:

Faith is that by which we yield our unhesitating assent to whatever the authority of our Holy Mother the Church teaches us to have been revealed by God; for the faithful cannot doubt these things of which God, who is truth itself, is the author.⁸

The Tridentine Council emphasizes intellectual assent to revealed truth as taught by the magisterium of the Church as the definition of faith. Since knowing the truths of faith was considered to be an intellectual experience, what was required from believers was "unhesitating assent" to a body of knowledge. Thus, if a person was unaware of the particular truths, or was unable to reiterate them in the proper language, that person's immortal soul was in imminent danger of eternal damnation. In the light of this intense attitude, De La Salle's admonitions to the Brothers to teach the catechism each day in school and to be especially vigilant in encouraging the students to know their catechism make sense. It was considered to be a matter of eternal life or death.

John Baptist de La Salle's most extensive written work is a catechism, *The Duties of a Christian before God*, published in 1703. It was composed to be used on two levels. There is an extensive part of the book written in prose that was intended to inform the Brothers (and by extension, the generations of religion teachers who used the book as a resource) about the theological background of the catechism lessons. Given that the Brothers in De La Salle's time seldom had access to University degrees or formal theological training, *The Duties of a Christian* was intended as a kind of insiders' Master Degree program in religious education for the community. The larger part of the book was intended for the students to use as their religious studies book and consists of hundreds of questions and answers providing catechism lessons, at least in schools where in the local diocese had not already mandated the use of another catechism text.

Obviously, John Baptist de La Salle followed the catechetical norms of his day in providing both the teachers and the students with a traditional, orthodox catechetical resource.

However, De La Salle's fidelity to the expectations of Trent to teach religion as an intellectual ascent to the body of truths taught by the magisterium of the Church represents only one dimension of his view about religious education. De La Salle's writings are filled with exhortations and reminders that teaching religion requires much more. Consider some of these sentiments found in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat: Meditations for the Time of Retreat*:

... your zeal for the children who are under your guidance would be quite imperfect if you exercised it only by instructing them; zeal will only become perfect if you practice what you are teaching them. Example leaves a far stronger impression on the mind and heart than words, especially for children, because do not yet have a mind sufficiently able to reflect and ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them, above all when teachers' words are not in harmony with teachers' actions.⁹

The catechist had to be more than the one who monitored the accuracy of repeated questions and answers. The catechist was called upon to model the practices, behaviors and actions that represented a lived faith. Although De La Salle's original audience for these *Meditations* would have mainly been the Brothers and teachers trained in the Brothers' methods, a message drawn from these thoughts indicate how strongly De La Salle believed in the agency of witness. In a sense, the evangelical dimension of the teacher as model necessitated a deep and visible commitment to living the Gospel. This visible witness had to be simple, yet strong enough to be perceived by those young people in the classroom. De La Salle's intensity on this point resounds in an earlier *Meditation*:

The fact that you are ministers not only of God but also of Jesus Christ and the church ought to commit you even further to have great zeal for your state. This is the saying of Saint Paul, who wishes that everyone should consider *those who announce the gospel to be ministers of Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 4:1); they write the letter he has dictated, not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, on the children's hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3).¹⁰

The catechist is the evangelist, since what he or she does is to proclaim Jesus Christ, not to inanimate objects but to living subjects. De La Salle's methodology met the expectations of catechesis, but his vision and mission were evangelical to the core.

Evangelization and Catechesis in Our Times

In this brief reflection the dynamic connection between evangelization and catechesis has been examined in its Biblical and Lasallian historical past. Catechesis by catechism remained the common methodology of Catholics well into the 1960s. Older students were educated in apologetics, with the expectation that the goals of religious education were best suited to training practicing Catholics with the tools they would need to defend their faith. Often, the defense was predicated upon proving "us" right and "them" wrong, which was part of the reactive mentality

of the Council of Trent at the time when the wounds of the Protestant Reformation were still quite raw. For Catholics in the United States, whose experience in this nation had been met with much prejudice and discrimination, the defensive methodology from Trent made sense. For Catholics of a certain age, the defense of the faith was an essential element well into the 20th century, whether the threat to it was perceived to come from other religious groups, “godless Communism,” or a host of other dangerous powers.

Pope Saint John XXIII, a longtime Vatican diplomat and pastoral archbishop who was familiar both with the diversity of peoples and real dangers in this world and with the Church’s God-given mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to this wounded planet, began his Papacy in the late 1950’s with a call for a new Church Council to address the modern world. Now, fifty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, as we live in a Church still struggling to implement its vision, we experience the tension of trying to negotiate the path of religious education that is simultaneously being invited to catechesis and evangelization. There are certainly mixed messages being sent and received. Should we educate new Christians into a world of exclusivism that understand our Church as the privileged actor in God’s world? Do we owe students enough factual knowledge that they could develop convincing and grounded arguments for their religious beliefs? How do we navigate both a sincere and heartfelt adherence to our own faith traditions while being open to the other who may have no faith or a faith quite different from our own?

Pope Saint John Paul II initiated a call for a “New Evangelization” thirty or more years ago. His immediate successor, Benedict XVI, maintained that language as he encouraged the members of the Church to devote themselves to this new evangelization as their mission, created a pontifical council to address it, and turned it over to his successor to guide it. Pope Francis has characterized the challenges of our times as “a happy provocation”¹¹ that serve both as a sign of the times and an invitation “...to bring Jesus Christ to the people of our time.”¹² Francis’s words were seen by some observers as yet another confusing explanation that blurred the lines of catechesis and evangelization. His remarks on May 2015, leading up to the meeting of a global meeting of bishops to address evangelization and catechesis, suggest that the relationship between these concepts must necessarily carry some ambivalence, for the sake of a greater purpose. Francis said, “The catechesis, as a component of the process of evangelization, needs to go beyond simply the scholastic sphere to educate believers, from childhood, to meet Christ, living and working in his church.”¹³ He further explained, “The challenge of the new evangelization and of catechesis ... is at stake truly on this fundamental point: how to meet Christ, what is the most coherent place to find him and follow him.”¹⁴

Additional Insights from Francis

It is clear that Pope Francis understands a relationship between evangelization and catechesis that keeps the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ as the primary and ongoing activity. Catechesis serves to further inform people about their encounter with Jesus Christ. Francis grounds his reasoning in John Paul II’s encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* which declared the necessity of the Church to proclaim a God of Mercy to the world today. For Francis, this connection explains the relationship between announcing the Word of God and teaching it. In Francis’s Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus* issued on

April 11, 2015, proclaiming a Year of Mercy that began on December 8, 2015, the Pope observes:

The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour [sic] after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.
The Church's first truth is the love of Christ.¹⁵

His message is consistent. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in which Pope Francis insisted that the proclamation of good news to our world changes the way we must do things. "If we attempt to put all things in a missionary key, this will also affect the way we communicate the message."¹⁶ What might this new "missionary" approach to evangelization and catechesis require? Francis opines: "...today's vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness."¹⁷ The challenging task for us is to proclaim the Gospel in a way that attracts the new or indifferent hearer while also enlivens and emboldens the one who has embraced it to live it out, in mercy, for the benefit of all of our brothers and sisters. Both Pope Francis and John Baptist de La Salle agree completely, the goal of religious education at all levels is "to touch the hearts of all people" and to lead them to encounter the absolute majesty of our living, loving God.

Perhaps a last example will further inform us about the "both ... and" dynamic that seems to be essential to understanding the interplay between evangelization and catechesis in our day. In a story that was underreported, due, unfortunately to the bombings in Paris, Pope Francis in his general audience on December 2, 2015, directly addressed young people and invited them to become missionaries. Just back from his apostolic visit to three nations in Central Africa, Pope Francis related an encounter he had with an elderly religious sister who had spent fifty-seven years as a nurse and midwife in Africa. Sister was particularly proud that she had assisted in the births of 3200 children. Many of the women and children served by this Sister were Muslims, who had come to trust her. Why? Pope Francis observed:

The missions. They are not for proselytizing because this Sister told me that Muslim women came to them because they know they are good Religious nurses who care for them and do not give catechesis in return. Testimony. Then, for those who want catechesis, they get it. But it's testimony. This is what the heroic missions of the Church consist of, proclaiming Jesus Christ with their lives.¹⁸

Evangelization, as this Pope teaches it, becomes the witness that Christians offer by their very lives about the good news of Jesus Christ. Catechesis follows as deeper instruction by those who want to learn more.

Conclusion

The dynamic tension that exists between evangelization and catechesis is not new. What this paper attempted to do was to see this as a lively distinction that energizes both dimensions of religious education. For Lasallians who understand our commitment to evangelization and catechesis as part of our own identities, we can take courage from this distinction to move forward in our “principal function.”¹⁹ All of us, even the most sincerely devoted Christian believers, always stand in need of the humbling truth that we have been graced by God in Christ. We need to hear this. We need to proclaim it. We must explain it. We must live it.

Endnotes

1. Brother John M. Crawford, FSC, is an Associate Professor of Religion at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA. The dissertation for his PhD in Religion and Education at Boston College is entitled “Extending Lasallian Charism: Its Texts and Lived Contexts for the Spirituality of Teachers.”

2. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/re_synod_doc_20120619_instrumentum-xiii_en.html#_ftn34. Downloaded November 29, 2015.

3. See the website for the Saint John Paul II National Shrine, Washington, DC at www.jp2shrine.org/jp/en/ev/index.html.

4. The material about Josiah and the Deuteronomist writer is supported by Corrine L. Carvalho. *Encountering Ancient Voices: A Guide to Reading the Old Testament*. Second Edition. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2010, pp. 211 – 213.

5. Thomas Groome. *Will There Be Faith?* New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011, p. 166.

6. Thomas Groome. *Sharing Faith*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998, p. 50.

7. Ibid.

8. John McHugh, editor. *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*. New York, Wagner, 1923, p. 11.

9. John Baptist de La Salle. *The Meditations for the Time of Retreat: 202:3*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994: p. 456.

10. Ibid. 201.2, p. 452. Emphasis mine.

11. Pope Francis quoted in: Joshua J. McElwee. “Francis calls for reorientation of catechesis away from ‘simply scholastic sphere.’” *National Catholic Reporter; May 29, 2015: NCR Today*. <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-calls-reorientation-catechesis-away-simply-scholastic-sphere>. Downloaded 11/23/2105.

12. Ibid. McElwee.
13. Ibid. McElwee.
14. Ibid. McElwee.
15. Pope Francis. *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*. April 11, 2015: Article 12.
16. Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel of Joy*. http://www.vatican.va/content/Francesco/en/apost-exhortations/documents/papa-grancesco-exortazione-ap_20131124_evangeill-gaudium.html. Article 34.
17. Ibid. *Evangelii Gaudium*. Article 41.
18. <http://www.romereports.com/2015/12/01/pope-francis-challenges-young-people-think-about-what-to-do-with-your-life> Downloaded 12/05/2015.
19. This phrase is found again in the new *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: 2015*. Article 17.