

# THE GREAT COMMISSION

Models of Evangelization  
in American Catholicism

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## THE PROCLAMATION MODEL

### Preaching

*The Proclamation model of evangelization is the verbal announcement of the gospel. This proclamation of Christ's message also includes education in the faith that leads to Christian maturity. This is the mode of promoting the gospel that is most often viewed as evangelization. St. Peter's discourse after Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41) is the first recorded account of this method of evangelization in Church history.*

### The Proclamation Model Defined

The Proclamation model of evangelization calls to mind images of St. Martin of Tours traveling through the countryside preaching to the pagans of Gaul, or John Paul II explaining the meaning of Jesus Christ to a stadium full of young Muslims in Morocco, or Billy Graham making an altar call at a revival service. Proclamation is the most fundamental means of communicating the message of the gospel. It seeks to convert people to Christ through verbal persuasion so that they may receive him in faith and attain eternal salvation. All other forms of evangelization ultimately turn toward proclamation at some juncture.

Jesus of course is the greatest of preachers, and the spoken word was his primary means of announcing the kingdom during his public ministry. At his ascension he commanded his disciples to do likewise.

This command was heeded at Pentecost. The Spirit of God inflamed the hearts of Christ's disciples and drove them into the streets of Jerusalem,

empowering them to proclaim Jesus Christ to citizens *from every nation under heaven* (Acts 2:5). “It was Peter, the one who had been living with the shame of having denied his Lord, who now emerged in his role as the rock on whom Christ would build his Church.”<sup>1</sup> Assuming the primacy in this kerygmatic outbreak, he addressed the people of the city, delivering the first recorded sermon of the Christian Church<sup>2</sup> as he spoke for the community who stood by his side.<sup>3</sup> Raising his voice, St. Peter proclaimed,

*“You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it...*

*Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?” Peter (said) to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit...”*

*He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.*

(Acts 2:22–24, 36–38, 40–41)

In this first declaration of the gospel, St. Peter summarized the apostolic proclamation that Jesus is Lord and Messiah.<sup>4</sup> He announced with Pentecostal fervor the good news of God’s plan accomplished in his Son Jesus Christ: the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, with all of its salvific implications. This message of hope was based on the Hebrew Scriptures and the revelation of Jesus. It proclaimed the great deeds of God in salvation history that culminated in Christ. St. Peter’s speech exhorted

those who listened to respond by living a new life in Christ, a life of holiness, contrition, and detachment.

St. Peter’s discourse on the day of Pentecost was the prototype of the first sermons of the early Church and a paradigm of kerygmatic preaching. It announced the essential message of Christianity to those who had never heard it before. The kerygma possessed a new and startling authority that powerfully penetrated the hearts and minds of those who heard it. The inspiration that flowed from St. Peter’s words, and the words of Christian preachers who would imitate this prototype, also supplied believers with the strength to endure the challenges that inevitably followed their conversion.<sup>5</sup>

From Pentecost on, the goal of all kerygmatic preaching has been the same: to introduce people into the mystery of God, who invites them to enter into a personal relationship with Christ.<sup>6</sup> As the proclamation paradigm shows, the specific content or vital core of this announcement is always “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.”<sup>7</sup> This core includes the entire corpus of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition that the Lord entrusted to his apostles so that everything he revealed could be transmitted to all generations.

This apostolic patrimony is handed down to the human race in every age through the Church. According to Catholic faith, the teaching office of the Church is authorized to interpret authentically this sacred deposit of God’s Word.<sup>8</sup> Genuine preaching, therefore, always conforms to the magisterium of the Church. This message, announced clearly and unequivocally, reaches people in the most fundamental ways, and awakens and transforms them into believing, practicing Christians.

This apostolic preaching is at the heart of all evangelization. By its very nature it possesses several distinctive attributes.<sup>9</sup> First, it is motivated by the Great Commission Christ gave to his followers to *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. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age* (Mt 28:19–20). Obedience to the Lord is the impulse behind Christian preaching. A key aspect of this mandate is Christ’s promise to be with the evangelist and also to impart his own authority to the duly commissioned preacher.

Second, Jesus gives his Spirit to empower the preacher sent forth by the Church. Preaching is a supernatural activity and the one who announces the Word of God cannot rely on his own abilities for success but only on the workings of God's grace. In this sense the proclamation of the gospel is not an event of the past. It is a living, ever-present communication of God's Spirit through the ministry of preaching.

Third, one comes to faith in Christ, and consequently to the threshold of salvation, through the preached and received Word of God. *And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?* (Rom 10:14–15). This proclamation of the gospel always has "Christian conversion as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and His Gospel through faith,"<sup>10</sup> which leads to repentance and eternal life.

Fourth, an important aspect of proclamation involves the implantation of the particular church, the gathering of a community in Christ's name.<sup>11</sup> One effect of St. Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost was the formation of the new converts into the first Christian communities.

In the task of proclamation, the preacher, infused by faith and aided by grace, communicates divine truth with boldness, fervor, and fidelity. Inspired preaching exceeds whatever public speaking skills the preacher may possess naturally. Without the infusion of supernatural assistance by God into the action of proclaiming the gospel, the preacher would merely be *a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal* (1 Cor 13:1). Similarly, the grace of the Holy Spirit assists those who hear the preaching of the gospel so that they may assent with the obedience of faith. The Spirit "moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth."<sup>12</sup> The supernatural nature of Christian proclamation must always be appreciated by those engaged in the ministry of the Word.

Kerygmatic preaching was not the only aspect of proclaiming the gospel in the early Church. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that St. Peter and the apostles linked this first announcement with the more in-depth, systematic teaching called catechesis (Acts 2:42). The first evangelists were as much teachers as preachers, and the first converts were devoted to their teaching. This ongoing catechetical formation mentioned in Acts and developed over the centuries differs from kerygmatic preaching. It is intended

to be a systematic, thorough, and complete elucidation of divine revelation. The initial embrace of the faith does not yield complete conversion and instantaneous knowledge of the mysteries of Christ and his commands.<sup>13</sup> A fuller understanding comes with ongoing catechetical instruction.

This broad and explicit proposal of the faith is indispensable if believers are to reach full stature in Christ. Without it, Christian belief and practice will remain superficial. Catechesis, therefore, must aim to form properly and completely those who already believe. It must lead them to an ever-deeper and more mature conversion of heart and mind, which culminates in a full embrace of Jesus and his way of life.<sup>14</sup> Catechesis also continually nourishes Christians as they strive to be faithful. The characteristics of this kind of education in the faith are:

1. It must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal.
2. It must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis.
3. It must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma.
4. It must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.<sup>15</sup>

These features will ensure that catechesis achieves its aim of affecting a thoroughgoing conversion.

The ministry of preaching combined with catechesis is the most basic and perennial form of Christian evangelization. It constitutes the essential element of Jesus' missionary mandate: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature* (Mk 16:15). The image of St. Peter preaching in the streets of Jerusalem is the New Testament paradigm of this form of evangelization, which we call the Proclamation model. Essentially it is a straightforward method of evangelization that has enjoyed success and widespread use since the day the risen Lord commissioned his apostles on the Mount of Olives.

### Example: Parish Missions in the United States

The Proclamation model of evangelization is epitomized in American Catholic history in the parish mission crusade, which reached its peak between 1830 and 1900. During this period, bands of Catholic priests from a variety of religious orders toured the country conducting missions at the parish level to enliven the faith of the people.<sup>16</sup> The preachers were primarily Jesuits, Redemptorists, and Paulists, although the Passionists, Vincentians, and Dominicans made their contribution to the mission movement as well. Most of the missionary priests from these religious orders working in the United States at the time were originally from Austria, Germany, and France.

In the nineteenth century, the period during which these missions flourished, the Catholic immigrant population of the United States grew rapidly. At the same time, Catholic life in most parts of the country was primitive; priests were scarce and funds were short. Many Catholics became inactive or joined Protestant denominations, which were more established, well staffed, and readily accessible. This was true not only of the frontier and the deep South, but also of the urban areas in the Northeast and Midwest, where tens of thousands of Catholics collected in ghettos and attempted to survive. In the cities, Catholics were deprived of religious support for the same reasons: too few parishes and too few priests.<sup>17</sup> The performance of religious duties consequently fell into decline, and apathy fatigued the immigrant Church.

As the Catholic population in America continued to swell, the bishops of the United States were aware that the problem was becoming desperate. They instituted a number of ecclesiastical measures to address the problem, but what was needed most was some kind of Catholic revival on the popular level.<sup>18</sup> The Church in America struck upon a solution and in the 1830s initiated the parish mission. This movement swept across the country, revitalizing the spiritual lives of millions of Catholics.

The parish mission was a phenomenon first developed in Europe during the Catholic Reformation by religious founders like St. Vincent de Paul (1580–1660) and St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787). In 1625, St. Vincent established the Congregation of the Mission, known today as the Vincentian Fathers. This congregation conducted a perpetual mission in

the parishes of the French countryside, working to increase conversions and religious fervor among the common people, parish by parish. From 1726 to 1752, St. Alphonsus preached and heard confessions in the peasant villages up and down the kingdom of Naples. Liguori's community, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, continued this work in his spirit and does so to this day.

This method of converting the masses was imported to America in the nineteenth century and was ideally suited to the conditions of Catholics at the time. The parish mission was a brief but intense dose of evangelization directed at the parochial level and designed to rekindle the faith of priestless, churchless Catholics.

In the first years of the mission movement in America, the preachers traveled alone or in pairs, crisscrossing the country by railroad, by steamboat, or on horseback. Life on the mission circuit was harsh. The fatigue induced by these excursions can hardly be appreciated today in view of the convenience and comfort of modern travel. Often the missionary had to reach his destination on foot through rugged forests and wilderness in every type of inclement weather.<sup>19</sup> The accommodations were no less spartan.

By the end of the century two to six priests constituted the mission band. These mission masters were on the road for at least six or seven months a year. When the mission priests arrived in a given place, people came great distances to attend the revival. They would spend the entire day in church, waiting to listen to the priests and go to confession.<sup>20</sup> If a church was not available, a barn or large house would suffice. Sometimes the priests had to preach in the open air and use a tree trunk or small embankment for a pulpit.<sup>21</sup> As Catholicism became the single largest denomination in the country, these missions gathered huge crowds together in both rural and urban settings. Even the turmoil of the Civil War did not deter the expansion of the parish mission movement in America.

A period of publicity always preceded a parish mission. The area was saturated with posters and handbills advertising the upcoming event. Local newspapers even posted the mission times, dates, and locations. The local parish priests visited the parishioners and encouraged them to attend. Prayers were offered for its success, the choir honed its repertoire, local

men built a fifteen-foot wooden cross, and a supply of religious articles and books was made ready.

The mission was calculated to awaken people's consciences and jar them out of their religious complacency. Mission priests used stern, strong words and aroused great excitement and enthusiasm. They targeted their sermons to the emotions, and the effectiveness of the mission was measured by the number and intensity of the confessions.

The piety promoted in these missions was characteristic of the post-Reformation Catholicism that became normative in the nineteenth century. It was eminently personal, liturgical, and hierarchical. It centered around popular "devotions, the use of sacramentals, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, novenas, and litanies concentrated on petitionary prayer and good works."<sup>22</sup> This spirituality emphasized "Marian devotion, the cult of the saints, veneration of relics, processions, pilgrimages, and other public manifestations of the faith."<sup>23</sup>

The mission itself was usually one to two weeks long, although sometimes it could go longer. During the mission, subgroups within the parish were invited for addresses intended specifically for them. Separate sessions were held for married women, single women, married men, and single men; sometimes children were addressed separately as well. Each day began at 5:00 a.m. with the celebration of Mass followed by a half hour of catechesis; later in the morning this cycle was repeated. The evening service began with a brief instruction followed by the Rosary. Then came the focal point of the day: the mission sermon, lasting a full hour. The evening service closed with benediction.

The instructions outside of the evening sermon were didactic. Usual topics included the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, the Apostles' Creed, the Commandments and precepts of the Church, and the devotional life. Marriage and the other states of life were clarified. The intention of these catechetical sessions was to form and shape the religious awareness of the Catholics. The evening sermon, on the other hand, was a classic example of impassioned preaching. In the early part of the mission, it emphasized the horror of sin, the particular judgment of the soul, and the fear of hell. Toward the end of the revival it shifted to the topics of God's tender mercy and the virtue of hope.

The overall format of this series of sermons was common to all missions. It generally followed the themes of the four weeks laid out in St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*: examination of conscience, the repugnance of sin, hell, the two standards, reforming one's life, the passion of Jesus, and the attainment of divine love. The preachers hammered away on topics such as intemperance, attendance at Sunday Mass, the duties of parents, and the importance of Catholic schools. The entire purpose of the sermon cycle was to arouse sorrow for sin, induce repentance, facilitate conversion, and rekindle fervent Catholic faith.

The last night was the climax and the cumulative effort of the mission usually produced the desired effect. One Massachusetts newspaper gave the following report of a parish mission in Newburyport in 1861:

We are not unacquainted with revival meetings, and we have before seen people at camp meetings and other excited gatherings, stand up and vow; but we never before saw such a scene. The multitude looked as though they would have sunk into the earth or been burned together at the stake, before one of them would in the slightest manner have denied the faith. We saw before us both the material of which martyrs are made and the fiery zeal that would make them.

During some parts of the service, especially at the farewell, the people were greatly moved. The speaker held them as by a sort of electrical influence, and the whole audience quivered like the leaves of a tree in the breeze. Now they sunk; and now the rising tide found vent in sobs and moans.<sup>24</sup>

Even if a particular mission did not have such dramatic results, it consistently reaped spiritual goods that perdured.<sup>25</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, as the Church became solidly founded in America, the centrality of the parish mission subsided, although it continues to be a standard feature of Catholic life. Today, pastors regularly invite preachers to conduct missions at their parishes, and the fruits of renewal still flourish through these visitations. This effort to convert others to Christ through preaching and teaching exemplifies the Proclamation model of evangelization.

## The Parish Mission Movement Evaluated

The first point that must be acknowledged in assessing the nineteenth-century parish mission movement is that it achieved the goals set for it by the American bishops. The parish mission inevitably left a wave of Catholic revival in its wake. There were innumerable sincere confessions, countless conversions, healing of parish schisms, great increases in parish confraternity memberships, and the widespread distribution of Catholic literature, especially James Cardinal Gibbons's *Faith of Our Fathers*.

The missions inspired a general invigoration of parish life, and even the conversion of some non-Catholics who were invited to attend the mission on the final day. "The revival did indeed foster a new religious experience for Catholic Americans."<sup>26</sup> It invigorated their spiritual life and instilled in them a strong identification with Catholicism. The parish mission provided a successful means of keeping Catholics in the fold despite the scarcity of priests and parishes. In all of its main features the parish mission proved to be the brief but intense dose of evangelization the bishops hoped would save the immigrant Church of the nineteenth century from dissipation.

In hindsight, there are certain aspects of the mission movement that are criticized today. For example, the preaching and general focus of the missions are faulted for being overly individualistic.<sup>27</sup> It is said that the emphasis was weighted too heavily in favor of personal salvation to the exclusion of social concerns. Connected to the theme of individual salvation was a tone of moral rigor and fear of damnation as the primary motivation for repentance. These features were present in parish missions, but it must be remembered that this mentality was characteristic of nineteenth-century Catholicism in general. The dominant orientation of immigrant Catholics of that period emphasized these qualities:

moral rectitude, asceticism, opposition to the spirit of the world, and meditation on the great truths of death and hell to evoke a change of life. The religious experience that supported such an interpretation was typical of nineteenth-century piety... a strong sense of personal sin joined with a desire for perfection and a sense of God's presence; an exacting program

of self-discipline; a close dependence on Jesus, Mary, and the saints; and a reliance on the sacramental ministrations of the church.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, rugged individualism was a universally recognized trait of an American citizen, Protestant or Catholic.<sup>29</sup> Even though the parish mission spirituality was individualistic, it was not devoid of a social dimension. The parish revival "was more than just a religious phenomenon. It was a social movement which strived for the collective conversion of American Catholics."<sup>30</sup> The missions succeeded in this objective. On the local level, pastors commented that after a mission the diverse members of their parishes became a united people. There was also a significant upswing in memberships in parish organizations of every kind.

Today, of course, the importance of the gospel mandate for social reform is appreciated, and preachers tend to avoid fire and brimstone sermons to evoke conversions. Yet, it is unreasonable to expect current theological concerns and developments to be the primary focal points of every age of Christian history.

Another aspect of nineteenth-century parish missions that is disparaged is emotionalism. It is true that emotional expressions were characteristic of many parish missions, but they were, in fact, joined to moments of real interior conversion. For ordinary Catholics of the time, the parish revival constituted "a special moment when God was present in their midst in an extraordinary manner."<sup>31</sup> The "people believed that the power of the divine was working in mysterious and surprising ways."<sup>32</sup> For the majority of Catholics, these emotional displays were signs of a great parish mission.

Related to the emotional aspects of the parish mission is the criticism that the preacher's approach was anti-intellectual. This was not necessarily true; the great missionaries of the revival movement were the best educated men in the Catholic community. The mission itself included sound, systematic doctrinal instruction. We must recall that the venue of the parish mission was not Notre Dame Cathedral, where the renowned Jean Lacordaire preached to the cultured nineteenth-century Parisians. Parish missionaries preached in the farms, fields, barns, and log chapels of the American frontier, as well as the ghettos of industrialized American cities. The situation called for straightforward candor, simplicity, and

concrete expressions aimed at reaching immigrant Catholics on the affective level.

Finally, some critics today denounce the parish mission as fostering an ecclesial structure that was institutional, authoritarian, and clerical.<sup>33</sup> The parish missions revolved around the preacher-priests and were animated by the sacramental system of Catholicism. In the face of this criticism we must recall the essential nature of Catholicism, which is sacramental. It is self-evident from the success of the mission movement that the faithful rejoiced to see the black-robed missionaries trudge into their outlying district or urban quarter after a grueling missionary excursion. They were Catholics who for months, years, or even decades had been deprived of the consolations of the Church's sacraments.

Today we certainly appreciate the importance of the laity and their indispensable role in the mission of the Church, and we are the beneficiaries of the ecclesiological insights and developments of Vatican II. At the same time, we profess a sacramental faith based upon Holy Orders, which is the essence of the apostolic faith. Catholics will always need their priests, and this need is more acutely felt where priests are in short supply.

If we consider the parish mission in its historical context, it is without doubt one of the great moments of the Proclamation model of evangelization in American Catholicism. As missionary St. John Neumann says: "He that has not given missions nor heard confessions during missions cannot know how useful these exercises are. Owing to the manner in which the Bread of the Divine Word is broken, when eternal truths are methodically exposed to the hearers who have assembled in great numbers, it is nearly impossible for them not to be converted."<sup>34</sup>

### The Proclamation Model Today

The demand for an effective Proclamation model in the life of the Church today is as pressing as it was in the nineteenth century. As the fathers of Vatican II said in the opening paragraph of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, "Christ is the light of humanity; and it is, accordingly, the heart-felt desire of this sacred council... that, by proclaiming His Gospel to every creature, it may bring to all men the light of Christ."<sup>35</sup>

The centrality of the Christian proclamation has always been stressed by Church leaders. They remind us that despite the variety of means currently available to promote the gospel, at some point the witness of Christians must become verbal because the message of the gospel is not self-evident. Sooner or later there needs to be a clear and unequivocal announcement of divine revelation combined with sound, thorough catechesis.<sup>36</sup>

An American prelate recently highlighted the importance of the Proclamation model at the chrism Mass in his Boston cathedral. Addressing his priests in particular, Sean Cardinal O'Malley said that "today, with religious illiteracy at an all-time high, we must toil to preach and to teach... We must be convinced that the kingdom of God is spread by word of mouth."<sup>37</sup>

As Cardinal O'Malley explained to his priests, "the problem is that we are not convinced that preaching must be our priority," despite the fact that the pope, the council and our people tell us that this is the most important task of the priest.<sup>38</sup> Continuing in this vein, he cited a survey showing the direct relationship between the quality of preaching and attendance at Catholic churches:

A national opinion research center conducted extensive surveys with the Catholic laity and was forced to conclude that the strongest correlation of church attendance and Catholic identification for both the young people and the general Catholic population were not issues of sex, birth control, abortion and the ordination of women; rather the strongest predictor of Catholic behavior and identification was the quality of the Sunday sermon preached in the respondent's parish church. In another survey of 30-year-olds returning to the church, the two most important factors were a personal relationship with the priest and the quality of preaching.<sup>39</sup>

This survey indicates that in America today, any program of evangelization has to include a plan to promote and upgrade the ministry of preaching if it is going to make a difference.

If only 22 percent of Catholics in America attend Mass on Sundays, the question arises, how does all of this emphasis on preaching help those most

in need of evangelization, that is, the unchurched? As Cardinal O'Malley asks, "Are we preaching to the choir?" He answers, "Yes, definitely, but if we touch their hearts then the choir will become the messengers and the inviters... They will become evangelizers because we have given them the tools and the motivation."<sup>40</sup> Anointed preaching inflames the faith of believers and inspires them to become apostles in their own right.

At the same time, good preaching has an inherent power to convert the unchurched as well. The truth of this statement has been affirmed in a revealing study entitled *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, by Protestant author Thom S. Rainer, dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth.<sup>41</sup> Rainer and his team polled a group of 353 unchurched people who are now attending Christian services. All of these persons were at one time inactive in church life and now have become practicing evangelicals. To supplement this data, Rainer also interviewed 101 pastors of churches who have proven success with the unchurched. These samples came from referrals from two thousand active evangelical churches across the nation. Every major geographic region, as well as a cross section of all socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial groups are represented in this study.

The cumulative results of the poll showed that 90 percent of the unchurched were led to become active in a particular church *because of the quality of the pastor's preaching*.<sup>42</sup> The data overwhelmingly substantiated the fact that preaching was the most decisive factor in evangelizing the unchurched.

Rainer's interviews with the pastors of churches that have an effective ministry to the unchurched further demonstrated the importance of good preaching. The pastors were a diverse group: Anglos, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, young and old, from the suburbs, cities, countryside, and small towns. These successful pastors were enthusiastic about the gospel and passionately desired to spread the Word of God. They rated integrity, personal example, vibrant prayer life, and intense Bible study as their leading characteristics.

The main point is that for these pastors who related well to the unchurched, good preaching was the priority of their pastoral ministry.<sup>43</sup> Rainer's findings suggest that preaching may be the most decisive factor in any curriculum of evangelization. Unfortunately, many programs

designed to reach the unchurched do not even remotely take this factor into consideration.

An important corollary to the value of good preaching is the integrity of doctrine. Cardinal O'Malley explained that people are looking for certainty amid the cacophony of voices claiming to speak the truth today. He said that sound doctrine is an actual grace that the people of God need today. It enables them "to resist the temptation to conform to the culture of death, to consumerism, hedonism, individualism. The good news needs to be preached with clarity. No one will follow an uncertain trumpet blast."<sup>44</sup> Cardinal Dulles also asserts this point: "To evangelize, we must allow the testimony of God, of the apostles, and of the Church to speak through us. This we cannot do with confidence and success unless we have assured ourselves that the testimony is credible and unless we are able to convince others that this is the case."<sup>45</sup>

A recent study by Colleen Carroll, a twenty-seven-year-old journalist from St. Louis, also discovered the appeal of Christian authenticity. In her book *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, Carroll reports on a trend currently emerging among people in their twenties and thirties. Her research reveals that there is a movement within this age group to live an orthodox Christian life in an authentic, compelling way.<sup>46</sup>

Conducting interviews from coast to coast, among all denominations, Carroll documents a "small but growing core" of dedicated and committed young adults latent within many Christian communities who are educated, competent, healthy, and capable of religious leadership.<sup>47</sup> Their spiritual journey to orthodox Christianity began with "a desire too deep to be explained by sociology, too timeless to be particular to Generation X and its famous 'spiritual hunger.'"<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, the appeal of orthodoxy for these young people is the same as that observed by O'Malley. As Carroll testifies, "I have heard them speak of their weariness with secularism, their thirst for meaning, and their conviction that they will not repeat the mistakes of the generation that preceded them."<sup>49</sup>

Carroll's argument converges with the mind of Vatican II, which maintains that a successful curriculum of evangelization must be faithful to the apostolic tradition in both content and expression.<sup>50</sup> As St. Paul said in one of his pastoral instructions, people do not need interminable myths,

idle speculation, or meaningless talk; rather, preachers should strive for *the plan of God that is to be received by faith. The aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith* (1 Tim 1:4–5).

With these various reflections on the Proclamation model in mind, I would like to recommend once again the parish mission. It continues to retain all of its efficacy as an excellent starting point for the re-evangelization of parochial life even today. As the number of priests in the United States declines, many regions of the country find themselves in a situation not unlike that of the nineteenth century. Priests are scarce, Catholic immigrants lack proper sacramental care, and parishes yearn for spiritual refreshment. Once again the parish mission can offer that injection of life and devotion that revivifies flagging or priestless parishes and reaches out to the unchurched.

Some of the same techniques should be recovered that made the earlier missions so successful. When a parish is hosting a mission, the locality should be saturated with fliers and posters announcing the event. Press releases to local newspapers and radio stations with the times, dates, and locations of the mission are an advantageous means of publicity. The parish choirs and organizations should also be drawn into the preparation and execution of the mission. The practice of targeting specific segments within the community such as single men or young mothers is also a feature that always attracts additional participants. Church members should be encouraged to invite their neighbors and friends, especially those who do not attend church, just as parishioners hosting a mission did 150 years ago.

It would also be good if the mission preachers themselves could arrive early and visit the taverns and markets beforehand. Mingling with the people on the streets and extending personal invitations to attend the mission was always an effective way of filling the house. Perhaps more important, these techniques can establish contacts with today's alienated and fallen-away members. In general, the creation of a sense of drama, excitement, and expectation prior to the mission is what drives its success.

It is still possible to find great preachers who are dedicated to this work. When administered properly, the parish mission provides a practical, straightforward, and readily available means of energizing the parish community. Fortunately, missions can be arranged with relative ease and at minimal cost virtually anywhere in the nation.

## Considerations for Christian Education

Our analysis of the Proclamation model of evangelization highlights several issues for religious educators. First, the Catholic faith obliges the person who has been given the responsibility to preach or teach in the name of the Church to represent the truths of Christianity according to the received tradition of the Catholic Church. By preaching and teaching we mean the announcement of the gospel and the catechetical instruction given in the essential formation of Christians.

The ministry of preaching and teaching may be distinguished from theological research, which can entail speculative and experimental investigations. Even here there are limits to what may be taught, if it has the effect of undermining those doctrines that have been solemnly defined by the Church's magisterium, or have been taught by her ordinary universal teaching authority as binding on the consciences of all the faithful.<sup>51</sup>

Although there are different responses warranted by different levels of magisterial teaching, those who seek the message of Christ and his Church have a right to hear it without mutation or adulteration.<sup>52</sup> People cannot arrive at personal conversion without the light of God's truth.<sup>53</sup>

Second, the Proclamation model underlines the importance of homiletic training for priests and deacons. Because preaching is the primary way in which people are exposed to the gospel, this means that those who preach should be well formed and prepared for the task. Sound biblical and theological education has always been underscored in the formation of future priests and deacons. Today it is essential to give greater attention to the ministry of preaching, and to develop programs that enhance the methodology, preparation, and delivery of sermons. Also, there may be room for improvement in the preaching and communications skills of many rank-and-file parish priests.

Preachers may need to invest more time and effort in homily preparation. Rainer's study showed that more than 90 percent of Protestant pastors in America spend only two hours per week preparing Sunday sermons, yet those pastors who excel at reaching out to the unchurched spend twenty-two hours per week in homily preparation.<sup>54</sup> For obvious reasons, Catholic preachers also need to consider spending more time on this task and delegating other duties.

Third, religious educators today must appreciate the fact that “evangelization is an indispensable point of reference for catechesis.”<sup>55</sup> Those who participate in the work of catechesis need to see themselves as evangelists, disciples of Christ who are called to invite those in their pastoral care to total conversion in Christ. “In a nutshell, we cannot presume as a given in our catechetical efforts even a foundational level of understanding and adhesion to the faith. Rather we must approach the task as if we were introducing our students and hearers to Christ for the first time.”<sup>56</sup>

Even after the first conversion, evangelical catechesis is integral to each Christian’s lifelong spiritual passage. Education in the faith is required at every level to accompany believers along the “ascent of Mount Carmel,” St. John of the Cross’s allegory for complete union with Christ. The demanding nature of the work is why Christian educators are among the most dedicated and self-sacrificing ministers in the Church.

Fourth, while preachers or teachers have to work as if everything depended on their efforts, they must recall that the ultimate efficacy of their ministry is essentially dependent upon supernatural factors. The art or science of communicating the Word of God has more to do with one’s relationship with Christ and quest for virtue than it does with methodology and technique. In other words, the most effective pedagogy for any proclaimer of the gospel is the “pedagogy of holiness.”<sup>57</sup> The great masters of communicating the Word of God tell us that the catechist and preacher will be able to touch souls with the good news of Jesus Christ to the degree that they are in union with him.<sup>58</sup>

Fifth, religious educators should encourage those in their charge to look for opportunities to propagate the gospel in the ordinary settings of life. Every Christian can offer others a personal word of kindness, consolation, or direction in a religious context at moments of trial and sickness as well as occasions of joy and thanksgiving. In the car, on the street, in offices, schools, and homes, easy, genial exchanges that draw near to the most important issues of life, death, God, and the soul provide the forums for gently communicating the gospel. This is never a question of winning a debate or engaging in polemics. Neither should there be a false shame or harsh self-assertiveness in one’s tone. Rather, the believing Catholic attempts to share supernatural hope and joy with anyone who needs it or is looking for it.<sup>59</sup> Simply said, there are times when it is a sin to be silent.

Finally, ministers of the Word today must fully utilize the new means of preaching and teaching that modern technology supplies. Radio, television, film, music, the Internet, the print media, and other means of social communication have tremendous appeal and influence in the modern world. In fact, the media may be the most dominant influence upon our culture today. Vatican II urged all of the members of the Church to make use of these forms of communication to promote the gospel and its values.<sup>60</sup> In this area, Catholics also have much to learn from our evangelical brothers and sisters.