New Evangelization and Ideology: Toward a Subversive Insurgence of Catholic Evangelism in Western Secularity

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in the Divinity School of Duke University

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The following doctoral thesis explores the Catholic Church’s New Evangelization movement relating to the rise of the western-secular (American) paradigm. In an attempt to infuse this evangelistic movement with an undercurrent of rupture, it pulls from modern continental philosophy to faithfully engage the secular age with innovation and holiness. The thesis counters various perspectives on what constitutes the New Evangelization today, arguing instead that a new evangelization cannot occur without elements of rupture and subversion toward specific ideologies of secularism.
Dedicated to:

My wife Irene Bristow, for her patience, love, and dedication during this period of writing

&

My father Steve Bristow, for his oversight, encouragement, and willingness to read my work before anyone else
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**Introduction:**

*Must Jesus Save the New Evangelization Before It Begins?*

The terminology of New Evangelization has become a ubiquitous catchphrase when it comes to the ministerial and educational outposts of the Catholic Church in the Western hemisphere. This should come as no real surprise for those familiar with the concept. At its basic level, the New Evangelization is a modern-day missional agenda for the re-evangelization of peoples and cultures whose adherence to the (Catholic) Christian narrative has become impeded by secularity's ideological formulations. Initially popularized under the pontificate of John Paul II, this growing evangelistic movement has developed itself into a charismatic renewal of Matthew's Great Commission (Matt 28:9) for the contemporary setting. Whereas the Church's previous missional activity sought to bring the Gospel to those who had never encountered it before (such as indigenous people in non-Christian lands), this new evangelization focuses instead on those baptized members of the Church (or Christian culture) that no longer identify with the Gospel's proclamation.

In many ways, the movement serves as the Church's recommitment to making disciples of "all the nations" in those spaces where faith has become disenchanted and trivialized—i.e., in those nations specifically classified as de-Christianized under secular pressure.¹ For this reason, the Church's evangelistic

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¹ The terminology of disenchantment is taken largely from Philosopher Charles Taylor. Theologian James Smith notes how Taylor sees the world as becoming “progressively disenchanted” due to the rationalist explanations associated with the rise of secularity. See Smith’s *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2014) p. 24.
undertaking has occasionally been cast as a countermeasure to what some say is
the very collapse of traditional Christian society. The New Evangelization’s role,
then, is to curtail the widespread cultural loss of any integral relationship to the
Church, to Christ as Lord, or to the Biblical metanarrative within the modern-
secular ethos.

Subsequently, this calling forth for new evangelization has become the
main priority to a variety of Catholic intellectuals, lay ministers, popes, and clergy
since the closing of Vatican II. The Church’s post-conciliar framing of
evangelization concerning the secularization process is arguably the most lasting
achievement of the Second Vatican Council. And this is not without significant
warrant. To put things in perspective, Vatican I (1869-70) used the word
"evangelium" only once within its documents whereas Vatican II (1962-65) used
it in over 200 instances—a word implying both the Gospel and its sharing
thereof. The discrepancy in usage between these monumental Councils points to
what the Church has come to understand about its status in broader secularized
culture; namely, the cultural capital that the ecclesia once possessed has now
become displaced, decentered. The Church no longer controls the social

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1 See for example Paul Grogan and Kristeen Kim’s (ed.) The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context, and Practice (Bloomsbury T&T Clark: London, 2015) and the present / historical developments in the area of mission and evangelization post-Vatican II. This is not to say, however, that substantial disagreement continues in ways of interpreting the idea of mission, faith, and culture when referencing modern forms of evangelization, many of which stem from an interpretation of key Vatican II documents. Paul D. Murray’s contribution in the book’s essay Ecumenism, Evangelization and Conflicting Narratives of Vatican II provide one example of the dichotomy existing between then Pope Benedict and Giuseppe Albergio concerning continuous/progressive interpretations of the Council (pp.101-111).

imaginary of the public. Meaning is constructed, if not thoroughly controlled, by secular pressures, and the rise of exclusive humanism is becoming ever more normalized in Western culture.\(^4\)

The social impact of this excessive faith loss in Western society has already been well-documented. In the United States alone, for example, it is estimated that ten percent of all adults are now ex-Catholics—a remarkable statistic considering the sheer size of this demographic. Speaking generationally, attendance in weekly Mass has plummeted in all age demographics since Vatican II with Gen X and Millennials hovering at only 13% and 10% respectively.\(^5\) And the sharp decline in priestly ordinations and Catholic marriages in the United States has shown, at least in part, a lack of institutional or ideological allegiance to the Catholic Church.\(^6\)

Disconcerting statistics like these only reinforce what many New Evangelization proponents see as the need for a wakeup call in the Catholic Church—hence the proliferation of the New Evangelization phraseology. Due to these unfavorable circumstances, the Church has emphasized how its evangelism can no longer be passive in the wake of Christianity's apparent downfall in western culture. On the contrary, it is essential to the Church's very own survival

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\(^4\) See James Smith, *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Secular age terminology is from Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007) pg. 21-25. Exclusive humanism is the belief that the immanent has totally "eclipsed" the transcendent.

\(^5\) Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

in western societies. Everyone is called to evangelize—lay people and religious alike—a slogan which has become the battle cry *par excellence* in significant quarters of the Catholic Church.

Understandably, this is what has made the New Evangelization “new” for many professed Catholic Christians. The entire body of Christ is mandated to share the faith as a witness, to spread the good news as modern missionaries. The egalitarian rationale centers on the premise that as Jesus calls all people to himself, so too is every member of the Church called to share Christ with his or her wider culture (see St. Paul’s words in Romans, “Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomes you”).7 Indeed, one accomplishes this in a myriad of ways, each different in flavor, tone, and scope. But the critical point mandated in the Scriptures—and further testified recently by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—is that everyone in the Church must possess a "willingness to share the Gospel."8

All this is well enough. It is undoubtedly true that the nature of the Church is inherently missionary—it is itself an act of evangelization.9 To welcome those fallen away from the Lord back into the fold, or to share in the Eucharistic feast while professing Father, Son, Holy Spirit, is essential and an inherently beautiful undertaking for the New Evangelization. However, a critical issue arises when it comes to characterizing what this newness entails for the people of God. It is here

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7 Romans 15:7.
9 See *Ad Gentes* no. 2.
where the movement remains fuzzy, if not entirely unclear. In many religious circles, for example, the New Evangelization is pitched only generally, as spreading the faith with "new ardor, methods, and mission" (a famous summation from Pope John Paul II) while at the same time dismissing the idea that the Church needs a "new gospel."

Statements like this clarify how the New Evangelization is called to engraft itself to the same Holy Spirit found at Pentecost even though it is specially formatted anew to reach those in the modern secular age. It is, in effect, to safeguard the wine of Christian identity while repackaging its message in new wineskins (ref. Lk 5:37-38). However, the Church must here ask itself whether this basic summation of the movement (i.e., new evangelization, not a new Gospel) holds enough transformative sway to cultures already implicated in the throes of secularity. For many living within the secularization process, there is a good reason to believe that a simple repacking of the same Gospel will carry the same antagonism or indifference to religiosity as a whole.

The above idea that those 'outside the Church' could dismiss the New Evangelization as essentially irrelevant continues to be overlooked by many who research the movement. Just because the Church maintains it has a "New Evangelization" does not substantially ensure or validate that those outside its walls will view it the same way. The above sentiment becomes a critical point when considering where many proponents of the New Evangelization have placed...
their focus when implementing the idea of modern Catholic mission. For example, newness of *new* evangelization becomes linked to impassioned talk about joyful Gospel proclamation; building non-judgmental relationships with doubters and coworkers; papal statements on Jesus's mercy and forgiveness; faithful witness amongst (secular-neoliberal) persecution; sustained sacramental encounter; Catholic social media and video/web series; college and young adult missionary activity; renewed discussion on moral decay; and the free gift of salvation to name a select few.¹¹

That said, there is a hesitancy in outright labeling these as ‘new evangelization’ since it remains unclear whether these can constitute the new which inaugurates a paradigmatic rift in the secularized transitioning of Western culture. At least on the surface, these efforts do not appear to be that different than what has occurred before, nor are they necessarily more appealing than the countless secular-liberal ideologies to which an ever-growing portion of the western demographic now abide [E.g., secular pleasantries such as mutual respect, community organizing, civic discourse, human solidarity, self-help, political empowerment, inclusion and tolerance, social and environmental change, etc.]. Like the New Evangelization, then, each of these secular counterparts "evangelizes" in its own right, methodically perpetuating a narrative without direct recourse to the Judeo-Christian God.

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¹¹ Certainly, each theme is vital, and, in certain circumstances, could direct the Church's evangelization efforts towards more robust discipleship.
While it is true the current examples of New Evangelization provided above hold a certain degree of value for the Church, it is still very far from clear if these efforts can transcend the obstructive opinions and accommodations of the prevailing secular order. The overarching fear here is that the New Evangelization movement becomes typecast in the modern day as nothing more than the same mundane Gospel, only in a new pleasant wrapping: e.g., its formulations and practices, although fervent, become ever more accommodated and therefore eclipsed by the prevailing winds of secularity. Nothing about them necessarily disrupts the secular social order which has, increasingly, already rejected or dismissed the Church's advances in the contemporary venue. If this is indeed the case, such an outlook on New Evangelization will not bode well in western culture where growing numbers of the public have already disavowed Catholicism and Christianity.

Due to this loss of faith, it may be time to fathom the New Evangelization on a different trajectory than those recently presented within the movement. The following work calls for such theological dissonance, arguing that the Church’s New Evangelization subscribe to a ‘faithful subversiveness’ to the secular imaginary. Far from disavowing the Church’s orthodoxy, this formulation calls for a subversive orthopraxis (faithful practice) whose witness takes into account the philosophical conceptions of “rupture” and “event” as an inherent part of its evangelical mission. Such terminology evokes a degree of fracturing the perceptions of both ecclesial and secular-liberal normalcy (rupture)—and, in
doing so, forms a new collectivity of faithful practices (events) not encountered yet by secularity.

Ironically, the terms “rupture” and “Event” come from renowned atheist philosophers Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou respectively—critical thinkers that will be engaged, incorporated, and challenged within this work. The reason behind this theological engagement is, in part, because both figures have used theology and scripture symbiotically to further their philosophical agendas to overcoming ideological establishments (such as the “logic of capitalism” subsuming “human subjects into consumers”). Instead of dismissing the role of theology as others have done, these continental philosophers view the discourse as helping people transgress the ordinary social consciousness that keeps them locked into a standard way of thinking. Individuals are then able to encounter another conceptualization of “Truth” that cannot be otherwise claimed or fully explained by their current secular (western) establishment. As such, both Zizek and Badiou invoke notable Christian figures as providing a template for rupturing what they perceive as dangerous social-political ideologies, albeit by forgoing adherence to the traditional-orthodox Christian narrative.

However, the New Evangelization can reverse this atheistic trend, using these thinker's ideas as providing something of a theoretical basis for the New Evangelization when witnessing to the orthodox Christ-figure. Up until this point,

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* In particular, see Alain Badiou’s, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)
little theological/ministerial attention is given to the New Evangelization as those evangelistic encounters inaugurating charged practices—or faithful "truth Events"—which contain a destabilizing gesture toward the liberal-individualistic-consumeristic-secular distortions of modernity. These are not simply new evangelistic practices held within secularity's paradigm; rather, they are Christ-infused, creative acts partaken by the Church whose ruptures enact a distinctive form of existing in the world. It begs the question, "How might the Lord be asking today's Church to rupture secularism's encroachment with a witness to its truth events, with its sacred practices whereby a new depiction of the Truth (Christ) is birthed vis-à-vis the ideologies of the world?"

For Christians, this is as much a challenge today as it was in displacing the Greco-Roman world. Allegiance to the ultimate truth-event, the Christ-event, to the in-breaking and rupturing of the God-man in time, is to deploy ruptures of intense love in strange, unexpected, and sometimes very provocative ways. And at these points the evangelization process will inevitably possess critical elements of risk and challenge due to their allegiance; i.e., it forgoes blindly accepting a basic integration into, say, the consumeristic-secular-political imaginary that so many (lapsed) Christians have found themselves captured within the western paradigm. In its place comes the hope of imaginative evangelism, a superabundance of innovative, faithful-poetic encounters, and one that seeks to form something so new in the Lord as to outright transgress social and even ecclesial conventionality.
Without this consideration, movements like the New Evangelization run a higher risk of falling back into relegated safety, regurgitating standard practices of evangelism that are assimilated into today's secularized spaces. The reality is that a good portion of these "new" evangelistic practices of the Church already fit into the established cultural framework that too often determines the boundaries of its enactment and articulation. In the case of the Church's evangelism, Western liberalized society has often become the unrecognized construct which allows specific evangelistic measures to occur, yet in a way that wholly negates the possibility of real societal displacement.

The Church's evangelization must advance without becoming encapsulated by western ideological structures that attempt to dictate the rules of when, where, and how it happens. To do otherwise is, in a sense, to perform evangelization without the miracle of Christ's truth-event, without the ongoing disruption of the Holy Spirit. And when this occurs, the potential of another ‘truth-event’ based in the Lord's love becomes subverted, policed by outside ideological factors, often without the direct knowledge of those doing the evangelization.

Thus, a critical part of the New Evangelization's mission becomes the uncovering of these latent ideologies that thwart its ability to flourish to the point of social-cultural-political rupture. Here "newness" designates not only the Church's evangelization in (post)modern culture but also the outright subversion of certain ideological measures the Church(s) has taken as commonplace in western culture. These can range from the individualistic pursuit of "making a name for oneself" (as opposed to Yahweh) to "performing charity" without
mutual friendship amongst the body-of-Christ. The challenge and risk of this venture for the New Evangelization become all the more apparent: that is, to abandon a false-faith in certain societal constructs/political conventions through imaginative gestures of faithful embodiment.

This abandonment brings the reader to the central (and perhaps provocative) claim in this work. The New Evangelization cannot be made out to be just the mere increase of faithfulness and holiness by the Church's faithful to passionately evangelize secular culture—or, in more dubious fashion, to instill a romanticized return to Christendom. Nor is it for the entire faithful to partake of evangelization in new ways yet to be tried by the Catholic Church for abstract salvation—say, like door-to-door missionary activity, befriending the neighbor, or commercially advertising the Church's views of mercy. No, this work proposes that the New / Evangelization occurs when a sacred rupture of the western social consciousness takes place. It is when secular-liberal-consumeristic ideologies are uncovered and destabilized by the loving act(s) of a faithful people, and when the Gospel is made so imaginatively new in practice that it reorients the landscape of those inside the Church as much as those residing outside it—an apt description of a truth-Event.

It is this type of ecclesial reflection that most probes Catholic Christian identity today as an enactment of New / Evangelization. The body-of-Christ is pushed to pray, innovate, and reformulate an alternative polity of truth, an alternative kingdom, to the social-ontological arrangements given by secularity. The evangelistic boundaries of the Church are to become pressed up against,
perhaps even broken from before. Subsequently, these ruptures move beyond articulating a mere presentation of truth to the general public and instead disclose sacred breaches which allow the Church to irrupt the ideological perceptions and sentimentalities of secular-liberal culture to confer an imaginative faithfulness. All this becomes the work of New / Evangelization.

The following treatise has three main parts: The Christ Figure of the New Evangelization, The Cross of the New Evangelization, and the Resurrection of the New Evangelization. Part one of the work explores the question of which Christ the Church is to follow in the New Evangelization movement. It highlights the necessity of seeing the New Evangelization as an enactment of the Christ-figure’s kingdom, as an intrinsically subversive endeavor, one that unveils secularity’s paradigm because of the Messiah’s cross and the ruptures associated with it. By doing so, this section will counter many formulations of the New Evangelization provided by today’s notable scholars of the movement.

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Both the cross and the resurrection have become prominent themes within recent debates of continental philosophy, each used imaginatively to further particular social-political agendas (typically Leftist leaning). More often than not, these discourses have absolutely nothing to do with Christian adherence in a transcendent deity; instead, the concepts of cross and resurrection are themselves repackaged philosophically and psychanalytically to expose some ideological shortcoming left unrecognized by the surrounding world order. This work seeks to inverse this reality. It pulls from specific points pertaining to continental philosophy's dabble in the religious sphere (specifically cross and resurrection), yet it does so symbiotically, theologically, to press and enact the Church's New / Evangelization in imaginative fashion. Engaging in any continental-philosophic reflection will therefore be explored, developed, or possibly even negated in the theological context and prerogatives of the New / Evangelization. Ideally, such atypical thought becomes a hopeful means to "reconcile all things" in the Lord (Col. 1:20), lending itself to the ongoing advancement of the Church's mission in the Western secular context.
Section two will examine the Cross of the New Evangelization by asking how Christ’s crucifixion can be a subversive force to secular-liberal ideologies. It will engage continental philosopher Slavoj Zizek and his formatting of the cross in a rebellious manner (albeit atheistic), particularly his exploration of anti-atonement theology concerning a revolutionary change in the material, social-political order. It hopes to shed light on some of Zizek’s substantial claims pertaining to the cross as a means of social-ideological alteration for the New Evangelization—and, at the same time, negating and inverting his philosophical/psychoanalytical analysis pertaining to Christ’s cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, Why Have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

The third part of the work, “The Resurrection of the New Evangelization” investigates the idea of holy irruption within secularity and how this pertains to the Catholic Church’s implementation of a new evangelization. Building off of the work of Alain Badiou, it reconfigures his budding terminology of “Event,” giving theological weight to the rupturing of both the social and ecclesial consciousness through acts of kingdom participation (defined here as New / Evangelization). These acts can appropriately be called truth-Events, an ushering in of the Holy Spirit to form a resurrected perspective exemplified by the God-man, solidified by his resurrection. As a way of illustration, St. Oscar Romero's work in El Salvador in the late 1970's will be cast as an act of New / Evangelization, a holy Event as such. The section will close by countering Badiou's atheistic untying of Christian spiritual belief from Jesus's resurrection discourse. Whereas the atheist Badiou argues for the mere reality of Christianity's truth-event (via St. Paul) without
recourse to a Divine metaphysic, this work argues otherwise. It claims no real Event (social-ecclesial resurrection) is disruptive without the metaphysical/incarnational truth of the God-man.

The overall intention of the work is to illuminate, reconfigure, and metastasize the connections between modern philosophical theory and the overarching theological methodology of the New Evangelization. In doing so, the hope would be for the Catholic Church to expand its new evangelization to include disruptive elements of the Holy Spirit in ways yet to be encountered by those implicated in the secular world. By evaluating and critiquing these possible connections comes the desire to, on the one hand, reveal the philosophical significance of modern continental thought for the application of New Evangelization. On the other, it is to create an introductory gesture of what it might entail for the Catholic Church to stir constant attention towards the philosophic world (specifically those to whom Christianity’s metaphysical structure appears all too untenable, unrealistic). May the journey continue to unite these discourses in imaginative fashion—all the while upholding human dignity and holiness—and bringing forth a new synthesis, perchance a new theo-political formation, leading to a positive, unimagined space of faithfulness in the contemporary context.
Part 1: The Christ-Figure of the New Evangelization

What of the Christ Figure?

Whatever one wants to make of the New Evangelization, and regardless of how one views it as being implemented in the Western hemisphere, the movement’s central motif appears to be its grounding and entrancement on the Christ figure.¹⁵ Few would deny it is this Christocentric accent that now shapes and molds the evangelism of the Church’s mission for the modern world. Following Vatican II’s return to a Christocentric emphasis, the emergence of Christ-centered ideology has drifted into nearly every facet of the Church’s current practice and identity. Such nuanced Christology is a vital ingredient to unearthing who the Lord’s people are called to be over-and-against the accommodation of faith to the surrounding cultural ethos.

Some scholars suggest it was this latter type of desire—of watering down the Christ figure to attain greater relevancy and recognition—that became a primary detriment to the ecclesia’s current mission of evangelization (particularly in those areas dominated by modern forms of secular humanism).¹⁶ When the Church’s theology and practice become too interwoven with cultural agendas it risks offering itself as a distinctive gift in service to the world: e.g., sacraments, biblical narrative, and the self-sacrificial embodiment of the Gospel become

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relegated to a non-particular, universal essence, one found in any given number of philosophic, religious, political, or ideological agendas. There is a shortchanging of evangelization here since the Church cannot provide anything of real theological worth. The compromise of Christ-identity for cultural relevancy thus leads to a dissolution of the Church's message of the Lord crucified and risen, a message frequently replaced in liberal-modernity with nontheistic values, each jockeying for consumption in Christianity's wake.

However, this fear of accommodation has been thoroughly addressed in recent times by the Church, particularly since the pontificate of Pope John Paul II (1978-2005). As the main protagonist and instigator of the New Evangelization, Pope John Paul II and his fellow counterparts have continuously warned against the inherent danger of correlating the faith into modernity's embrace. In its place has come a renewed focus on the preeminence of Christ articulated by a good portion of the ecclesial hierarchy, a theological gesture meant to have longstanding implications for the future direction of the New Evangelization. The thought process assumes fallen-away Catholics do not need more assimilation into secular modernity where faithfulness becomes "relatable," especially since this trend has been unable to stop Catholics from exiting the Church (if not a contributing factor).

Instead, a theological re-centering on Christ has become one of the hallmarks of John Paul II's papacy (and subsequently Pope Benedict XVI), both in its articulation of modern mission as well as how certain Vatican II documents
were viewed. To re-evangelize Western culture, then, is to emphasize the preeminence of the Christ figure by forging new encounters with him through the Church’s guidance and direction. This renewal of relationship has extended into the Catholic understanding of modern mission and which has now come to solidify the Christ-centered focus of the New Evangelization.

Understandably, various proponents of the New Evangelization now view the Christocentric idea of relationality as the movement’s main prerogative. These proponents worry about the implications of muting, subverting, or disavowing the Christ-figure in modern evangelism, especially when a personal encounter is lost. Here Christ’s distinctiveness becomes elevated to the relationship extraordinaire because it is the gift offering that the secularized west remains in dire need. Relationship with Jesus is imperative for the world, the church, and the individual’s soul because the mediating grace of the God-man is necessary for any sustained transformation. The Messiah serves as the living heart and roadmap to support Western culture as much as directing the Church itself. Viewed in this light, a new evangelization without Christ is likened to an evangelistic cause without any blood; i.e., it becomes liable to weakness and disarray in the secular wilderness, unable to guide people into new life—an

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* There is a particular note here given to *Guadium et Spes* in paragraph 22 by many following in this vein of Christocentric interpretation of the council: "The Truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man was a figure of Him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father, and His Love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear." Referenced in The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context, Practice, Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2015, pg. 46. See Tracey Rowland's essay, “Christ, Culture, and the New Evangelization.”

* An example of this Christ-building relationship is found in the program *Alpha for Catholics*, endorsed by a wide variety of Catholic Cardinals and Bishops.
unfortunate consequence of overlooking the Nazarene's words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Recently, a growing number of Catholic pastoral theologians, bishops, and cardinals have placed themselves within this mold, very much concerned over a lack of Christ-centered zeal in relation to discipleship and mission. These figures are intent on bringing this Christocentrism to the forefront, encouraging readers to share Jesus to the world to offset a general passivity undergirding Catholic evangelization. Animated by the words and motifs of recent pontiffs, they are communicating the theological profundity associated with encountering Christ in the Church's evangelistic (and sacramental) offer.

The direction of these pastoral theologians and leaders is congruent with the 2012 Synod of Bishops General Assembly on the New Evangelization, whose very first chapter is devoted to naming Christ as the "heart of evangelization." In the document's introduction, it reads,

“...the encounter with Jesus Christ, God the Father's Gospel to humanity, which transforms us, gathers us together and introduces us, through the gift of the Spirit, to a new life, already experienced by us in the present, precisely in our feeling gathered as the Church. At the same time, this new life is the cause of our joy which compels us, as witnesses and joyful heralds of the gift received, to travel the streets of the world, awaiting the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.”

What is made clear from the bishop's synod is how it articulates the Catholic faith as being more than mere teaching, preaching, or morality codes—a simplistic reduction of the Gospel. The main thrust of Catholicism, as noted by the bishops, is instead to provide a "true encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ" whereby any transmitting of the faith (i.e., evangelization) is to lead one into such a joyful, intimate encounter.\(^{20}\) Upon later reflecting on the synod, leading proponents of the New Evangelization stated how the central kerygma of the movement was that Jesus offers a "new way of being" and not just a "new way of living."\(^{21}\) This mindset translates into the idea that the entire Church body is now commissioned to make known the Gospel since the Church’s primary mission is itself evangelization.\(^{22}\)

In the United States at least, these viewpoints are common. In his book *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*, theologian and priest Robert Imbelli urges for a renewal of a “Christic center” to "animate, impel, and sustain" evangelical commitments within the New Evangelization.\(^{23}\) Drawing on the imagery from Pope Francis’ homiletic words, Imbelli shares how the Church cannot separate ‘Christ the head’ from ‘Church the body’ without having an adverse displacement

\(^{20}\) Ibid., section 18.
\(^{21}\) Cardinal Donald Wuerl, *New Evangelization: Passing on the Faith Today* (Our Sunday Visitor: Huntington, IN 2013) Pg. 35 (Kindle Cloud reader)
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 15 (kindle cloud reader)
in its culture. Only with this Christic-center firmly anchored can the Church then proceed to “venture forth to the peripheries without fear of losing the way,” allowing for the joyful and glorious articulation of the Gospel to be unimpeded in the secular abode. The implications for Christo-centrism are clear for Imbelli who shares the Pope’s evangelical conviction, writing how the “evangelical task is to lead ourselves and others toward a new or renewed encounter with the Mystery of God in Christ.” Evangelization is framed as an ongoing conversion in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ to gain renewed enthusiasm and imagination for the Gospel.

The late Cardinal Avery Dulles, himself a preeminent theologian of the Church, also shared this Christ-centered focus when giving his Laurence J McGinley lectures. Echoing the Christocentric themes of Pope John Paul II, Dulles states how the New Evangelization rests on Jesus Christ as its “chief agent,” the fulcrum from which the Church is to frame its post-Vatican II “evangelical turn.” For Dulles, this turn marks one of the “most important and surprising developments in the Catholic Church,” the kerygmatic emphasis on “God’s saving love as shown forth in Jesus Christ.” He notes how the name of

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* Ibid., 95 (Rekindle Christian imagination)
* Ibid. 99
Christ must be spoken for any evangelization to take root in a culture since it carries a "universal validity" applicable to all.

Dulles, therefore, finds those in the Church who view evangelization as either non-critical or secondary miss a critical point—namely, when the Church keeps the ‘truth of faith' privatized it monopolizes Jesus's gift of encounter inside its very own walls. As such, Dulles reminds those in the Church to enact the evangelistic words of Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* 2 which states, “Faith is strengthened when it is given to others.” Without such vibrant sharing of the Gospel message, the Church only becomes “self-enclosed,” unable to bring the world into “union with God through Jesus Christ.”

Dr. Gavin D’Costa, professor of Catholic theology at the University of Bristol, follows in Dulles’ rationale when replying to western objections against modern evangelization.  Arguing against the presumption that Vatican II shifted focus from evangelization to “listening, learning, and cooperation” with other religious-secular traditions, D’Costa suggests otherwise, explaining how evangelization has always had “bringing friendship with Christ” as its goal by uniting a person with “the universal community of Catholic Christians.” Vatican II simply highlighted, with newfound clarity, how preaching the truth of

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*Ironically, the real disservice to transforming culture occurs when the Christ-figure remains inward, privatized from the world. When the Church forgoes sharing the revealed Word of God, people are less likely to encounter a saving relationship with the risen Lord and the transformative source of culture is thereby weakened.


* Ibid., 185.
encountering Christ does not discount the importance of listening and learning from non-Christians. In this way, the Church must refrain from seeing the two motifs of dialogue and proclamation as inherently incompatible or mutually exclusive.

D’Costa notes, for example, how Vatican II’s document *Lumen Gentium* does not deny the possibility of supernatural truths in other religions. Instead, it sees them more like a "stepping stone" to the fullness of truth found in Christ, alluding to the document's opening paragraph that "insists on the universal mission of the Church for the gospel is good news for everyone." Rather than subverting the message of Christ-figure, then, D’Costa urges the modern Church to do otherwise, to avoid what Pope Francis has called a “facile syncretism” whereby (western) Christians forgo their deepest convictions to “avoid problems” in interreligious dialogue.

It is precisely this kind of approach to (non)evangelization that does the opposite of its intended purpose of bringing Christ’s salvific message to the world. Instead of enriching and nourishing a theological understanding of each side’s position, it unfortunately ‘deceives’ and ‘denies’ the good offered for false unity. As these above examples make clear, the focus remains on the gift of salvation and redemption offered by the Christ-figure by making accessible, in new ways, a greater sense of relationality with the Triune God. It is to welcome

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* Ibid., 185
these people back freely into the Church's sacramental fold through the evangelistic outpourings of the Christ figure.

But here an important question arises—and an issue that has been mostly absent from the theological musings undergirding the New Evangelization. Put succinctly, it asks which Christ figure is the Catholic Church called to emphasize when birthing the New Evangelization? While it is correct to say that agreement abounds in proclaiming Jesus as the foundational impetus for the New Evangelization, there is less consensus surrounding what this Christ-figure entails for discipleship today. The very mention of Jesus Christ, for example, can conjure a range of reactions, emotions, and proclivities in the modern world, both positive and negative.

The Church's missionary field cannot overlook this critical fact. How Christ is named, professed, and enacted within the Church's offer impacts or impedes the New Evangelization's growth, direction, and lasting stature. The proclaiming of the Christ-figure must be nuanced and specific in its theological approach, and yet, at the same time, move beyond the mere articulation of preaching Jesus as true God / true Man, or that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection offer salvation—a conceptual framework already encountered by many in the Western Hemisphere. The Church must reflect anew on how the Christocentric structure of the New Evangelization can be a life-giving source
seeing that many in modern liberal culture have already disavowed or discounted the Christ figure in Christianity (and hence the need for a New Evangelization).33

In the sections ahead, two different Christo-centric directions are presented to make these evangelistic distinctions more apparent. These approaches both utilize Christ as a means for salvation, although each will articulate salvation on two different paradigms as it relates to the proclaiming of the Christ-figure.34 The first approach stresses the need for new evangelization as it mostly relates to those implicated in western culture and their need for eternal salvation through Christ, a missional gesture reminiscent of many evangelical churches already involved in the western modernity. The second approach will evangelize the Christ figure as something of a 'revolutionary instigator,' as one who implements salvation through a "reign of God" construct over-and-against traditional soteriological approaches relating to the first model.35 The two Christological directions, although not entirely incongruent with one another,

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* It could very well be the case that these people never had an intimate relationship with Christ in the context of the Church before departing/rejecting, but such a characterization still has to account for how these people would ever encounter Christ anew in this present social predicament. Failure to rectify this issue—that is, the sometimes negative perceptions of the Church's depiction of Christ in the modern social consciousness—is to potentially create a more dispassionate environment for the Gospel message to take root (i.e., is it a Christ who admonishes LBGTQ? Is it a Christ only concerned with the soul's after-life and not social transformation? Is it a Christ who works through pedophilia priests to administer sacraments, etc.?).

* Understandably, there will be more than two paradigms as it relates to unpacking the Christ figure for the New Evangelization. Be it as it may, these two approaches carry with it various theological, social, and ecclesiastical ramifications that, although not wholly distinct, can direct the Church's evangelization mission in two different ways.

* Most people can likely see the interplay between these two formulations as well as their interdependence; however, both entail a specific focus on the Christ figure that can lead to different ends when evangelizing.
provide vastly different roads with the profession of the New Evangelization even though each upholds the Christ figure as central to its cause.

**Evangelizing Jesus of the “Narrow Gate”**

Cardinal Avery Dulles once wrote, "Christians, who profess Christ to be the Savior of the world, should have no difficulty in finding motives for evangelization...," be it the initial proclamation of God's Word to those unaware of the message or furthering the Gospel message's influence in a given societal structure. This sentiment may very well be true, but Dulles' message fails to address what Christ as Savior means when furthering the Gospel message through evangelization. Such a profession is today cast in a myriad of directions, each proclaiming a distinctive way to evangelize through the name of Jesus Christ. If one were to press Dulles' rationale, these many "motives" could vary considerably, even to the point of enacting divergent paths.

Furthermore, in extreme cases, these different evangelization tactics can become so diverse that each side views the other as having either misread sacred documents (e.g., Scripture, Vatican II) or utilized a wayward theological or hermeneutical starting point. While it is true that the Catholic Church allows a plethora of missional paradigms for spreading the Gospel, it seems ever more pertinent to get these paradigms guided appropriately with the New Evangelization. As many proponents of the movement have remarked, something

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* See The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles, ed. Steven Boguslawski and Ralph Martin (Paulist Press: New York, 2008) Pg. 4
must be done with a new evangelization to offset the rampant exodus of Catholics drifting away from the Church—an exodus, which in some measure, is due to the secularization of modern culture in the West.

However, as to whether these approaches are constructive is another matter of debate altogether. Take the example of Catholic Dr. Ralph Martin, professor of theology at Sacred Heart Seminary and President of Renewal Ministries, who offers a particular approach to the New Evangelization founded mainly on the concept of eternal salvation. In this model, the Christ figure's saving act is that which takes away condemnation in a world rampant with sin, a world where many people are now in jeopardy of perishing without recourse to God. Dr. Martin takes this perspective based on an explanation of the narrow gate parable (ref. Matthew 7:13-14, Luke 13: 22-30) and supplements it with an interpretation of Vatican II's Lumen Gentium (notably paragraph 16).37

He notes how many Western Catholics today have the parable of the narrow gate backward, mistakenly believing that "broad and wide is the way that leads salvation/heaven..." while furthering the idea that "narrow and difficult is the path that leads to condemnation/hell..."38 As Martin points out, this is not the case with Jesus's words, who preached how the broad path leads to destruction and that many of his fellow Jewish counterparts were on it. Martin then

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38 Martin, The New Evangelization: What it is and How it Affects the Life of Every Catholic, loc. 186 Kindle Cloud reader.
extrapolates this idea by pulling the parable into the 21st century—into an era where Christianity is subsumed by a hostile secularization—and asks if today's times for Christians are much different than their 1st-century Jewish equivalents. In Martin's estimation, it seems remarkably similar in the negative sense. The path to destruction is once again present in Western culture. Christ is the means to escape it. Evangelization has become urgent because so many (Catholics) are on the broad path while thinking that their eternal salvation is secure.

Of course, Dr. Martin has to navigate many of the ecumenically driven pronouncements of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, specifically regarding the teaching that salvation is possible for those without explicit knowledge of the Christian faith. He concedes to the theoretical position that one could be saved without knowledge of Jesus Christ, but then proceeds to unpack the conclusion of *Lumen Gentium’s* paragraph 16 (c) as a theological supplement to Matthew’s narrow gate imagery. The document reads,

“But very often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the world rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Wherefore, to promote the glory of God, and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, “Preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:16), the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.”

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39 Ibid., loc. 242.
40 Lumen Gentium 16
With this passage, Martin is attempting to offset an apparent (Catholic) overconfidence that those unfamiliar with the Gospel will find eternal salvation, particularly in a time when, according to Martin, all indicators point to an "environment and culture that lead to sin."  

Notice what Martin is saying here. If broad is the way that leads to destruction in a hostile culture, then the actualization of those being saved without adherence to the Gospel seems less likely, especially in light of paragraph 16 of *Lumen Gentium*. Evangelization is all the more necessary in the West because eternal destinies are at stake in a society that no longer favors or adheres to a Christian metanarrative. And this includes the multitude of fallen away Catholics and self-identified Catholics that fail to live intentionally as Christ’s disciples in the present time. It is at this venture that Martin concocts his interpretation of the New Evangelization within the framework of a ‘saving soul’s paradigm’ saying, “Why bother to evangelize? Because the eternal destinies...of many of our fellow Catholics...are hanging in the balance.” Evangelization is critical because of the malignant *telos* of so many people. The Church must change the fundamental ordering of these souls in a western environment bent on disavowing the truth of the Catholic faith.

That said, Martin's saving-of-soul's plea has significant drawbacks when made the driving locus for a New Evangelization. For starters, the negative
soteriological dimension of his narrow gate interpretation is a stretch. If one examines the Lucan pericope of the narrow gate parable (Luke 13:22-30), Jesus' response to the question "how many will be saved?" first appears to be cast in the negative when directed to his fellow Jews—i.e., the people of the covenant ("I do not know where you are from" v.25). Upon further reading, however, Jesus states in verse 29 that "people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God" referring to the influx of Gentiles now included in the Lord's table with the work of the Christ-figure. The negative connotation, then, is less about the small remnants of those "saved" and more about the disavowal of many Jewish contemporaries who have failed to recognize the Lord's workings through Jesus in first century Palestine (as is the case with Matthew's telling as well).43

To use Martin’s narrow gate imagery as a rallying cry for soul-saving evangelization appears shortsighted. The parable’s purpose is not to speculate on how many are saved and how many are not within any generation. Rather, it is challenging Jesus’s (Jewish) hearers of the Messiah’s radically life-giving demands within the Gospel, specifically those practices appearing foreign to their conventional thinking. With this in mind the parable of the narrow gate might be better understood today as, “Don’t miss out on your own salvation Christians, your own road I have gifted you with, and allow me to work in those outside the Church’s walls, sometimes mysteriously, inconspicuously, without assuming to know the direction of another’s eternal destiny.” The warning, ironically enough,

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* For a summary of this perspective, see Dr. Andrew Wilson’s blog post on thinktheology.co.uk “Will More People Be Saved Than Not” (June 11th, 2016). Accessed 4/29/2018.
could here be directed to those ‘faithfully loyal Catholics’ that view western outsiders / lapsed Catholics as inherently profane, as secular ideologues whose non-religious orderings are always and everywhere corrupted.

Martin would undoubtedly be right in saying the narrow gate imagery calls for evangelization when it concerns the Messiah's demands relating to the Christian life. Nevertheless, he overlooks the parable's underlying theme of abstaining from generalized constructions over "who is in" or "how many are saved" within any populace—be it in the positive or negative sense. If the above parable reminds the Church of how the Lord works graciously, mercifully, and justly in ways even the appropriated faithful cannot fathom, then speculation over ‘who is on the broad path’ becomes precarious at best, judgmental at worst. And it appears Martin approaches this line when presenting normalizing claims regarding salvation for those implicated in his virulent secular abode. If such is the case, then the direction of the new evangelization he calls for is founded on a misguided theological assumption that the narrow gate parable argues against in the scriptures!

Regarding Martin's analysis of Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, there is indeed truth concerning the end of paragraph 16 and its warning about an

* Martin has elsewhere stated how he has never claimed to know "how many are saved or not" and thus keeps himself within the Church's bounds. His call for an "urgency of evangelization" is simply a reminder to Catholics that eternal destinies are at stake "drifting towards destruction" in this Western-secular culture. That said, I believe Martin uses the narrow gate to justify evangelization in a way that seems to counteract what the parable is alluding to theologically. See "Comments by Dr. Ralph Martin on Fr. Robert Barron's Review of Will Many Be Saved?" on the Renewal Ministries Blog (Dec. 7th, 2012) [https://www.renewalministries.net/wordpress/comments-by-dr-ralph-martin-on-fr-robert-barrons-review-of-will-many-be-saved/](https://www.renewalministries.net/wordpress/comments-by-dr-ralph-martin-on-fr-robert-barrons-review-of-will-many-be-saved/). Accessed May 18th, 2018.
overoptimistic spirit of universal salvation. This analysis is especially true if the document is cited as downplaying the need for evangelization in the Church or casually overlooking the evils in modernity. A large part of Martin’s plea for a New Evangelization concerns these two aspects. He tends to counter an optimistic soteriology with salvation pessimism because, according to his interpretation of paragraph 16 (c), the cultural conditions by which eternal salvation can be offered to non-Christians is rarely actualized in the secularized world. So, while *Lumen Gentium* extends the theoretical possibility for non-Christians to be saved, Martin sees the post-Christian world around them as no longer being able to fill this requirement (e.g., things are overtly evil/disordered). This mentality leads him to presume the massive difficulty for an unbelievers' ability to be saved in the current predicament. The Christ-figure's message is denied in secular culture, and the consequences correspond to one's increasing probability of eternal punishment.

Whether or not Martin’s depiction of salvation’s relation to the world carries the same tone as *Lumen Gentium* is highly contestable here.45 Even if, as Martin suggests, select theologians and popes have slighted the ending of paragraph 16, this does not necessarily warrant the bleak cultural viewpoint he endorses. An important question Martin must address concerns his comparative analysis between the woes of contemporary secularization in relation to all other periods in Western Christianity. Clearly Martin is right to draw attention to great evils existing today which bear direct or indirect connection to modern

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secularization; however, as way of example, it can be seen as a gross overstatement to say these evils are somehow worse than the dismissal or exploitation of African Americans, Jews, or Native Americans under the confines of (western) Christian culture. If the conditions were somehow "more favorable" for the salvation of non-Christians during these periods, then what does it say about the Church's view of salvation (rescue) or understanding of culture?

To suggest, as Martin does, that the numbers of those saved correlate to "whether a Christian culture forms the context of peoples' lives or not" misses the mark on many levels, most notably when past social-historical factors are considered underlying Christian culture.\(^{46}\) Those in the missional field should not overlook this suggestion. Martin assumes how "...in our time it is clear the main river of culture is flowing ever more swiftly toward destruction" without appropriately providing context on why this is so much more apparent than in other times of Christendom's existence.\(^{47}\) A better way forward would be to solely address present evils limiting people's approach to Jesus—a theme present within \textit{Lumen Gentium}—but the exaggerated emphasis on cultural destruction is the bulwark of Martin's thesis concerning the conditions for salvation and the number saved within it. In Martin's estimation, evangelization becomes practically useless without the threat of many being eternally lost.

There is nothing new here regarding Martin's paradigm to spur forth the New Evangelization. Not only has this missional paradigm relating to Christ's

\(^{46}\) \url{https://www.renewalministries.net/wordpress/comments-by-dr-ralph-martin-on-fr-robert-barrons-review-of-will-many-be-saved/}
\(^{47}\) Martin, loc 219 Kindle Cloud Reader, \textit{How Many Will Be Saved?}
eternal salvation been propagated before, but its cultural influence seems to be waning steadily, if not outright disregarded, by significant numbers in the post-Christian world.48 This predicament leads one to question whether the Holy Spirit is urging the Church to find another way forward as a means of encountering the Christ-figure in holiness, especially when growing segments of non-Christian people feel animosity or anxiety towards this soteriological construct (i.e., "soul's eternal saving"). If the above variables are correct, then the pessimistic strand associated with Martin's salvation runs the risk of eliciting fear, belittlement, or even disgust from western non-Christians—the very opposite effect Martin wants in solidifying Catholic conversions.

All this is in addition to the fact that *Lumen Gentium* paragraph 16 (c) can remind both the Church and the world of evil (Satan) and its effects of rejecting God (i.e., despair) without necessarily undoing a salvific optimism won through Christ. Bishop Robert Barron, for example, pulls from Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi* as a way to press Martin on this point, stating how Benedict himself concludes, “that “the great majority of people” who, though sinners, still retain a fundamental ordering to God, can and will be brought to heaven after the necessary purification of Purgatory.”49 Thus, whereas Martin believes there is a

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* Although not specifically about soteriology, Keith Giles writes in "Welcome to Post-Christian America" about an evangelical "reverse evangelism" that is occurring over things like the Christin right's political ideology. The questions with Martin's soteriological construct is whether the same thing is happening, specifically among Catholics and how moral/systematic theology is being presented in one manner or another. See [http://www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2018/06/welcome-to-post-christian-america/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2018/06/welcome-to-post-christian-america/) accessed June 12, 2018.
zero-sum arrangement between salvation optimism and the need for evangelization, many other theological scholars like Barron, Balthasar, Rahner, and Benedict do not. Reminding the world of its fallen nature or humanity's ability to be deceived can still be imperative to the Church's mission without entailing a total extinguishment of God's flame in most people—even in times when culture appears adrift.50

**Evangelizing the Christ of “Kingdom Participation”**

Of course, if one holds to a soteriological optimism, then the question becomes, ‘Why evangelize?’ The crux of Martin's 'narrow gate' analysis is how he interprets Christ's salvation in the context of evangelization. One of the significant issues overlooked, however, is the profuse academic development given to Christ's offer of salvation in recent years—which then directly influences how one views the Christ figure. The term salvation, like many in the theological world, is rife with multiple elucidations and includes much biblical and theological scholarship since Vatican II. One of these key developments escaping Martin's work is the heightening of salvation to the ongoing participating in God's reign on earth as a salvific offer. As noted above, Martin's account of why the Church needs a New Evangelization boils down to where one ends up for all eternity—i.e., something likened to receiving a ticket to go to another place. In this scenario, the default position of the world is pointed to eternal separation.

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50 That is, "truly wicked people" consciously rejecting any offer of the Lord. Ibid, "How Many Are Saved." Pope Benedict remarked as much saying that there are few truly wicked people or holy individuals, but most have a fundamental ordering to God whether or not they recognize it in their lives.
from God, for apart from Christ, humanity deserves God’s wrath and condemnation.\(^5^1\) Relationship to Christ is to take seriously one’s eternal wellbeing.

However, this approach to salvation is contestable and promoting a different relationship to Christ can vary in theological implication. For example, prominent biblical scholar NT Wright has argued that the New Testament’s depiction of salvation, when read as a whole, differs considerably from this idea of external soul-saving. Instead, he claims it emphasizes faithful participation in the new covenant of God’s kingdom, brought forth on earth, by the victorious resurrection of the Christ-figure.\(^5^2\) Wright (and others like him) is attempting to diffuse the Western preoccupation of salvation as mostly an extrinsic, individualist affair, one whereby personal relationship with Jesus is made right to go home with God for all eternity.\(^5^3\)

NT Wright’s New Testament exegesis attempts to de-center this otherworldly salvation that grips a significant portion of the Western consciousness, viewing it as more a latent and unbiblical soteriology distorting the church’s mission. He writes in his book *Surprised by Hope*,

“As long as we see salvation in terms of going to heaven when we die, the main work of the church is bound to be seen in terms of saving souls for that future. But when we see salvation, as the New

\(^5^1\) See Martin’s talk “Salvation in a Dying World” for Renewal Ministries [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkHgR1gUzNs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkHgR1gUzNs) (accessed 6/10/18).

\(^5^2\) Wright also believes that this has a better “hermeneutics of continuity” with the Old Testament, specifically with the Abrahamic Covenant.

\(^5^3\) Ibid., 196
Testament sees it, in terms of God’s promised new heavens and new earth and of our promised resurrection to share in that new and gloriously embodied reality—what I have called life after life after earth—then the main work of the church here and now demands to be rethought in consequence.”\(^5^4\)

Wright argues that salvation in the New Testament is foremost the Christian’s engagement in the reign of God brought forth and revealed by Jesus the Messiah; i.e., a “reshaped family” of Jews and Gentiles whose distinctive participation serves as the foretaste of the eschatological kingdom to come.\(^5^5\) In various ways, then, salvation becomes a faithful embodiment in the creation of a new heaven and new earth, initiated in the here-and-now by Christ’s work, and furthered by the ongoing power of the Holy Spirit. It is the reconstituting of new life together within God’s kingdom, fostering a family dynamic patterned off of the love of the Christ-figure.

This view of ‘salvation in Christ' extends beyond a soul-saving ideology to the point of providing a very different locus for evangelization. To evangelize is to invite the ‘watching world’ into a life of divine participation which then extends into the eschaton as a foretaste of the final (new) creation being fulfilled in the Lord’s coming. This includes, as Dr. Bryan Stone has argued in *Evangelization After Christendom*, the ongoing invitation into the Church’s practices as a sign of “ordinary nonconformity,” and which, for Catholics specifically, embraces the

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practices of table fellowship (Eucharist), forgiveness (Reconciliation), liturgy (worship / scripture), and faithful immersion (Baptism).56

Each of these peaceful acts is given as a generous gift by Christ, representing hallmarks and sacramental signposts of the Lord’s reign taking place now. It entails these embodied practices are salvific and life-giving in their own right since they usher in realities of a "kingdom not of this world." When done faithfully in Christ's name, they are counteroffers of grace to the deviant ideologies of any particular culture or time—modern, Western, or otherwise. The Church's mission of furthering the Lord's salvation is therefore interwoven with the evangelistic sharing of these earthly practices, revealed and made possible only through Jesus's life, passion, and resurrection.

To focus mainly on one’s final resting place for evangelization is to undercut Jesus’s salvific rescue mission taking place in the Holy Spirit. Theologian William Abraham, for example, goes so far as to say, “Any vision of evangelism that ignores the kingdom of God, or relegates it to a position of secondary importance, or fails to wrestle thoroughly with its content is destined at the outset to fail.”57 This understanding of Christ centers on the gathering of a covenantal family more than preaching of eternal destinies—and, although it does

* Bryan Stone, *Evangelization after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007) Kindle loc. 6553 (conclusion). Stone is not a Catholic, but his take on evangelization emphasizes the distinctive practices of the Christian church. In many ways, the Catholic Church's methods not only fit this bill but fit it to the utmost extreme when considering their view of sacraments.

not deny a transcendent abode (heaven, hell), it has as its main prerogative the in-breaking of the kingdom set loose by the Messiah. Evangelization is not lessened, therefore, with a view that many will be in heaven because the point is to bring people into the full awareness of what Christ has fashioned here—that is, to be made part of what the Lord is doing in a renewed, embodied creation.

What follows, then, is an invitation to allow oneself into the Spirit’s presence of goodness, truth, and beauty as a member of a distinctive people of faith; e.g., it is to gather together into the Lord’s holiness to find new life in ways unimaginable to the world’s power structures (ref. Jn 10:10). Thus, evangelization matters most because, without it, populations fail to partake fully of what the Lord is doing in this ulterior kingdom. The Church’s evangelization safeguards the validity of the Gospel message for the world by ushering in the Messiah’s hope, truth, and freedom during times of despair, negligence, and sin. Jesus’s proclamation to spread the Gospel to the “ends of the earth” is always needed so that humanity will not ‘miss out’ on the inherent beauty associated with being taken into the Lord’s redeeming work.58

However, missing out on the Lord’s beauty is only part of the missional equation. To have a new-found relationship with Christ is also to be confronted by the Spirit in ways that make kingdom participation inherently risky. This risk is because evangelization carries with it a subversive strand of grace, an ongoing

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58 Understandably, missing out is a possibility, and someone like Dr. Ralph Martin would be correct in saying hell is a reality for those completely denying the Father’s love. But this hell is better appropriated as an absence of joyful participation, as the voiding of goodness into nothingness, and as favoring the darkness of the street to the light of the Father’s house.
confrontation between Jesus's kingdom and Pilate's world (John 18:28-40). To proclaim faithfulness to 'God's reign' now entails a forming of a people whose sacramental practices run counter to any underlying ideology of worldly power. It appears these evangelistic gestures of subversion have gone largely unarticulated in the Catholic Church's call for a New Evangelization. In an attempt to bring people into the Church, there is little mention given to how devotion to the Christ-figure disrupts the political, economic, national, religious, and cultural realms as acts of kingdom participation. Evangelization must be more than inviting people to have "relationships with Jesus" to include a faith that reconfigures, disrupts, and possibly threatens specific world orders.

Such participation reinforces how there is nothing abstract or ethereal about salvation given through Christ. In talking about how the Gospel is not "itself 'how to be saved' or 'how to be justified,'" NT Wright states how St. Paul, emboldened by the Spirit, "...is more eager to preach the same message anywhere and everywhere, not least right under Caesar's nose in Rome." In doing so, St. Paul is announcing Jesus as Lord to the pagan Greco-Roman world, exclaiming how "God's spirit is at work," an inherently subversive gesture to the power structures of the day. This act of evangelization was, at its root, to become part of a complete reconfiguration of the surrounding ethos of the Mediterranean world brought forth by the Holy Spirit. The resurrection of Jesus thus reimagined

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* Stone, Evangelization after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness, 79. This countering mentality is also an important reason why the Kingdom of God motif does not by its nature fully align with liberal or political theology.
* Ibid., 80.
* NT Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 917.
everything: e.g., national alliances to Rome, city worship of pagan gods, exclusion in table fellowship (citizenry), the role of status and power in everyday relationships, etc. al.,—each was to be transformed by the performance of the early Church. The Holy Spirit reframed an old-world order with a new one.

Likewise, to evangelize the in-breaking of the kingdom today will challenge and disrupt the conventional ideologies that have taken hold of the Western imagination. Encountering Jesus may begin with an act of reconciliation, of giving his or her life (back) to God; however, if the main focus of evangelization is mere acceptance of belief, then subversive acts become liable to futility, likened to awkward street corner preaching or abstract professions amongst secular coworkers. These actions fail to capture the dissidence of a new kingdom which, inevitably, looks and feels different when confronting the world.

The Church's New Evangelization in the Western world should take heed. In order for newness to take hold with an in-breaking of the Holy Spirit, the focus of evangelization must adhere to Christ as a beautifully disruptive force, one which unmask world (western) ideologies in ways that discount their locus of meaning (particularly when they have become distorted by sin and violence). The fear is that the New Evangelization continues to push its newness on principles like "all Catholics now evangelize," or "evangelizing with social media" without uncovering many of these western ideologies that keep Catholicism on life support—that is, allowing the Catholic faith to remain in Western consciousness but without any radicalizing gesture in the created order. Ethereal soul saving holds it at bay. And as long as Catholic evangelization characterizes itself in this
manner, as being placed in relationship with Christ for eternal wellbeing, it will distance itself further from uncovering the worldly distortions keeping Catholicism (Christianity) from renewing its kingdom potential.

If the above is accurate, and the New Evangelization is trending without subversive bite, then the movement could find impetus from a most unlikely ally. For the last few decades, continental atheist philosopher Slavoj Zizek has been at the forefront of uncovering ideologies in provocatively new ways, most notably those thwarting revolutionary action within the Western imagination. In particular, Zizek turns to Christ's cross as a way of administering this radical agenda. As will be shown, his psychoanalytical reading of the Christ-figure's passion serves to uncover the reality of radical openness to change unencumbered by an outside force. Although far from orthodox, Zizek's paradoxical structure based on the Christ-figure may come to help the Catholic Church’s New Evangelization efforts, saving it from becoming evangelistic conventionality.

However, in keeping with the theme of Christ’s cross, Zizek’s reading of the passion will then be turned in on itself, showing how Christ’s cross negates the radicalizing nature Zizek professes when the divine connection to the God-head is lost. It is only when this graced relationship occurs that the ‘kingdom of God,' configured on Jesus the Messiah, carries the remarkable potential for a truly subversive act of the social-political order. It is this Christ figure, a creator of social rupture, that the Church is called to evangelize in the secular ethos as a means of new evangelization.
Part 2: The Cross of the New Evangelization

Zizek and Christ’s Cross: A Challenge to the New Evangelization

It is not every day an elite continental philosopher becomes the focal point of evangelistic practice—most especially when defined as a closet Stalinist, avowed (Christian) atheist, and radical-left public interlocutor. Then again, many in the Catholic mission field have yet to encounter Slavoj Zizek. Provocative and revolutionary, this Slovenian born intellectual has made a habit of reconstructing Christian theology in a way that undermines contemporary ideologies based on distinctively Western ideals (e.g., Neo-Liberalism, tolerance, political correctness, capitalism, etc.).

The inherent irony of these maneuvers is apparent: Zizek, himself a Leftist atheist, posits Christianity to be the most suitable thought-system to instill revolutionary change in the social-political realm. He does it so ingeniously (using Lacanian psychoanalysis) that various Christian scholars have questioned whether this non-Christian understands aspects of the faith better than those professing it.62 Zizek is a secular-like prophet who reimagines Christian faith to enact new possibilities for the social-political change. He has, as Creston Davis remarks, placed himself within St. Paul’s stance of "now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:13) — i.e., the future is not predetermined, but concealed, obscured with various ideologies that keep us from really changing anything.63

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It is essential to define what Zizek’s agenda encompasses from the onset. It is hard to articulate briefly due to his breadth and complexity, but it is perhaps best epitomized with the notion that what (western-modern) people have come to think as commonplace is nothing more than ideological misdirection. That is, individuals have come to believe in things without really understanding why they do so (i.e., a simple definition of "ideology"). Here Zizek situates himself mainly within political and social discourse; he seeks to uncover the power relations that control society so as to keep people embedded in a certain way of living. There is always more to the reasons why people hold to the things they do, and this is where Zizek’s mind roams indefinitely.

Take the ill-effects of capitalism as one example. Zizek believes many companies have learned to fool consumers into “feeling good” when purchasing products where proceeds go to charitable causes (i.e., think buying Starbucks coffee where portions go to underprivileged coffee workers). This seemingly charitable action diverts the consumer’s attention to buy more stuff in a euphoric state instead of overthrowing—or better yet revolutionizing—what Zizek believes is the hegemonic establishment of unbridled capitalism. And by doing so, the American consumer forgets just how well off they are when compared to third-world foreigners who have become exploited by a capitalist economy. The consumer’s mind is misdirected with a submissive act of kindness (i.e., buying

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* See Zizek’s talk, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce at RSA ANIMATE (online). See also Richard Stupart’s “Zizek says your donations to charity are hypocritical” on the Matador Network (August 19th, 2011) found at https://matadornetwork.com/change/zizek-says-your-donations-to-charity-are-hypocritical/. (accessed June 23rd, 2018)
something as a noble act) that essentially keeps the system from being overthrown (unbridled capitalism).

In Zizek’s estimation, this is ideology at its finest—and, according to this philosopher, ideology permeates everything in the cultural landscape. It is what keeps peoples' minds from changing anything by becoming subconsciously locked into conventional modes of thinking. Revolution, or real change, is here displaced by keeping people's minds occupied on the wrong things. Whether it is in the political sphere or simple social etiquette, there is always an ideological strand needing unveiling that bounds people to conventionality, non-revolution.

Zizek’s talent is his ability to unmask these ideologies in (post)modern society without entrenching himself in abstract discourse far removed from people’s livelihoods. It is one reason why he touches upon so many relevant topics with his unbridled popularity. His thought process bleeds into any given number of trending subjects for their radical potentiality. This intellectual vastness includes Christianity—a topic Zizek has dabbled on occasion, albeit atypically. Thus, the Judeo-Christian narrative has been atheistically interwoven in many of Zizek’s writings as a reoccurring subject within segments of his work.

* As with many European intellectuals of the Left, he has made a distinctive “theological turn” to address various issues relating to the current social-political field. See Jack Caputo’s review of Zizek and Milbank’s *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic* in Notre Dame’s Philosophical Reviews (Sept. 2009) at https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-monstrosity-of-christ-paradox-or-dialectic/ (Accessed June 22, 2018). This turn to theology is right in year’s past, but Zizek seems to have moved on from this theological phase.
Headlining Zizek’s (anti)theological motif is “Christ’s cry of dereliction or abandonment on the cross...” (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mk 15:35, Matt 27:46). To push his revolutionist-based agenda, Zizek reads the cross event within the Lacanian notion of the Real—i.e., a trauma where the "...coherency of a moment is pierced and the symbolic support of one's identity begins to give way." What this entails for Zizek’s reading is something of an anti-atonement theory where the fantastical idea of something (or someone) exerting saving influence becomes crucified altogether. Christ’s abandonment by the transcendent God on the cross (“Father, why have you forsaken me?”) is not real in the (onto)theological sense; rather, it ushers in the ultimate realization that the material (physical) world is all there is. Here the Gospel becomes “inspired” for Zizek because the plot-line allows the reader to face the reality of a world without a “big Other” (i.e., God) pulling strings behind the scenes.

In Zizek’s psychoanalytic reading, then, the God of the Bible (Christ) is declaring himself dead because no one rescues him during his cry of abandonment. Zizek’s Christ is something of a divine symbol that gets ‘crucified’ to prove how there is no deity, politic, program, commercial market, idea, etc., that makes everything come out okay in the end. Even though this nihilistic reading is pessimistic, Zizek asserts it with great hope, positing himself as the

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* Pound, *Zizek: A (Very) Critical Introduction, loc. 189 Kindle Cloud reader*
ultimate realist (theologian). He does so because Christ is revealing to the world its radical openness—i.e., now it is devoid of someone or something coming to humanity’s rescue. Even if evil supersedes good in a particular case, it still necessitates ones' engagement in the material struggle without dismissing it to a heavenly abode or awaiting the Messiah's return.

Zizek posits the Christ-figure as the first to overcome the metaphysical, to acknowledge the absence of (transcendent) reality beyond the material realm. The Christ of the cross is exclaiming how the material world is all there is. Help is not coming from any source (hence the "cry from the cross"), so radical revolution becomes a possibility because it is without any constraints holding it back. Adhering to this 'Truth' is to confront the profound revelation that the world is capable of alteration since "finite existence" is the only location where the Spirit "achieves its actuality." In Zizek’s opinion, this becomes the political gesture *par excellence*—that is, acting in the world free of any big Other, be it God, social or political convention, or anything else looming behind the scenes.

In turning the cross upside down, Zizek wants to negate what he believes is the passive ideological strand of Western Christian belief. This passivity is when faith presumes it already knows the outcome of life "before it actually takes place..." which "radically neutralizes a materialist struggle in the present" (i.e., God will come again and make everything okay, etc.). Zizek is under the impression that Christianity orthodoxy can disarm one's "ability to struggle for

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liberation and truth” in the current world order. These strands fail to uncover the material ramifications of projecting belief onto an otherworldly narrative because such a move tames the social-political revolution without knowing it. The actual impetus for Zizek’s political revolution, as revealed in Christ acknowledgment of no big-Other, is negated for another (fantasy) realm altogether.

Before challenging Zizek’s psychoanalytical reading of the cross, it is essential to note where his insights can transverse into the Catholic Church’s New Evangelization. For starters, Zizek’s cross focuses on administering subversive gestures in the social-political order to bring radical change from a system. Within his psychoanalytical-atheistic interpretation, Jesus's words from the cross reveal a boundlessness for social-political altercation as a means of liberating people from any form of oppressive ideology. Through this reading, Zizek offers the Church a paradoxical reminder as to how a new social-political space is not secondary to the cross event but rather intrinsic to following it.

Viewed from the perspective of Christian orthodoxy, for example, the Son of Man subverted cultural and social conventions of the world with the in-breaking of God’s ‘alternative kingdom.’ The cross of Christ only further unsettled these worldly powers by becoming the vessel which inaugurated spaces

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* It is doubtful Zizek has adequately researched the positive contributions Christianity has given to materiality, especially considering the depth of the faith tradition. To bypass major concepts like the plight for human dignity, personhood, social justice, or the mere creation of hospitals is a glaring testament to his blind spots.
free from the distorted (sinful) ideologies of first century Palestine. At this point the Christian concept of conversion is subversive; that is, a new life in the Messiah cannot be made possible without some element of undermining the ‘Other’ (older) establishment for a new creation. Professing Christ crucified is disruptive in both the individual's inner self (being made free from sin) and the kingdom practices which flow from this conversion (viewed as subversive by the world).

Here Zizek’s zeal for subversive acts is theologically lucrative for the New Evangelization—most notably when engaging secularist ideology. When the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization met in 2012 to discuss the movement, it called upon Christians to counter the "tsunami of secular influence" confronting the Church. In the minds of many Catholic leaders present, it was the very nature of this "aggressive secularism" that had given rise to the necessity of a renewed evangelism. Pope Benedict XVI even warned of how the crisis of secularism had created societies where there was the exclusion of God from people's lives, a general indifference towards the Christian faith, an attempt to marginalize it from public life. Although not every element associated with secularism was perceived as unfavorable by the Synod, it framed the cultural process as a substantial ideological hurdle driving people away from the Church. Of course, if this secularization process is as secure as the Synod believed, then it

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*See Alessandro Speciale’s “Pope Benedict XVI Confronts Secularism with Synod of Bishops on ‘New Evangelization’” in The Huffington Post (10/09/2012) [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/09/pope-benedict-xvi-secularism_n_1949751.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/09/pope-benedict-xvi-secularism_n_1949751.html)*

would appear to necessitate, at the very least, a deployment of evangelical subversion unlike anything done before in the Church's history.

The New Evangelization must here consider where the Church's alternative kingdom provides for a rebellious feel when evangelizing today's secular order. It is to preach "Christ crucified" in ways that bring forth a disruptive element in-the-world through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. As was the case with first century Christians, partaking of this new mission entails holy acts of subversion whenever social-political distortions occur—which, coincidentally, become exemplified in Jesus of Nazareth's road to Golgotha's cross (ref. Matt. 27:33). To follow this Christ, the God-man as instigator, is to be anything but safe or conventional in the mission field.

The above point is articulated well by theologian Bryan Stone who, in talking about evangelism specifically, notes how Jesus was tried and crucified on charges of sedition in all four Gospel accounts (i.e., "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."). Stone writes that "However much Jesus' execution may be interpreted later by the church as redemption or as an atonement for sin, it was, in the first place the price of subversive evangelism." For Stone, this biblical account testifies to the fact that Jesus’s ‘otherworldly Kingdom’ was as much a political, public, and disruptive force in this world as it was in the heavenly one—i.e., the very reason why “...Jesus is standing before Pilate.” Stone, being faithful to the Gospel account, here resonates with elements of Zizek’s interpretation:

closeness to Christ sometimes entails a subversive strand in this material order. Although each scholar comes from two different vantage points (orthodox belief / psychanalytical atheism), there is significant overlap in how the cross disrupts the powers of the world before it ever became a soul-saving technicality.

The New Evangelization cannot ignore this critical element of holy subversion. Doing so would substantially undercut the social-political power inherent in Christ's cross—a point Zizek understands well. To ask, "Which Christ the New Evangelization is to follow?" must incorporate a Messiah whose salvific acts remain subversively charged as a means of witnessing to an alternative kingdom vis-à-vis those structures distorted by secularity. Such an effort makes visible a Church that, in the words of theologian William Cavanaugh, “is itself meant to be the first fruits of the appearance of salvation in human history,” a radical participation in the “...whole Christ, who has come into history make us whole.”\footnote{William Cavanaugh, \textit{Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church} (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 2011), loc. 1805 Kindle Cloud reader} To frame the subversive implications of kingdom participation only in ethereal discourse—or, worse still, to negate it all together—is to lose a medium for what constitutes the Lord's salvation. And to lose this element could only be seen as a mistake on the part of the New Evangelization since it is to ignore the movement's most central figurehead—the \textit{whole} Christ.

Of course, when dealing with the element of subversion, it is important to clarify what this entails in the modern world. Zizek again provides a degree of clarity at this juncture. He positions the cross as revealing what a “true act” of
subversion encapsulates— i.e., as a “fundamentally critical gesture, an event that establishes something new rather than something subsumed back up into the existing paradigm.” Put another way, Zizek believes a subversive measure is to break free of the constraints imposed by some overarching ideology or symbolic order that limits radical gestures to form. Such an ideology disguises any real act of subversion in the world by placating its revolutionary implications. Thus, an action is not really subversive for Zizek if it already fits into the established order it is trying to rupture. The overarching paradigm tries to do just this by keeping radical acts hidden by posing them off as feeling revolutionary.

In summarizing this angle of Zizek’s work, Theologian Marcus Pound uses the London peace march of 2003, a national protest against the war in Iraq, as means of an analogy. Pound notes how Prime Minister Tony Blair “invited the country to rebel, only to quickly add the rejoinder that rebellion must be responsible.” In saying this, however, Blair was merely allowing space for an "act of rebellion" to occur so long as "nothing changes"—that is, the London people could show their disapproval even though nothing done altered the outcome. The protest is therefore made inconsequential from the onset, giving protestors the impression a radical act occurred when nothing actually changed. They are blinded by the overarching ideology that limits the scope of their revolutionary gesture.


Zizek provides the Church’s evangelism with an important question when confronting secularist thinking: i.e., are the New Evangelization’s practices truly rupturing from longstanding ideologies to not be swallowed back into secularity’s undercurrent? Are acts of faith ‘seeing’ secularity’s influence that tame new and holy movement? Are they, in some respects, not “perverse” enough in the eyes of secularity? Zizek’s point draws attention to the fact that any degree of so-called rupture by the New Evangelization will be thwarted without first unveiling the symbolic structures keeping faithful subversion at bay. In Zizek’s estimation, it is only after becoming aware of these hidden ideological constructs that a truly subversive gesture can irrupt a paradigm.

What this adds for the New Evangelization is a process of faithful unveiling—a theme rarely mentioned within the Church’s discourse on modern mission. This unveiling occurs when the Church reassesses which secular ideologies are limiting faithful witness beyond those themes historically viewed as ‘amoral’ or ‘sinful.’ Specifically, it focuses on those ideological constructs in which ‘life together’ is decentered off a Eucharistic people; e.g., ideologies such as becoming too busy with sports or academic schedules, acquisition of monetary goods or income past a specific limit, mandatory service requirements apart from liturgical community, higher GPAs or occupational advancement at the expense

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* See for example Yang Huilin’s “To Reverse our Premiss with the Perverse Core — A Response to Žižek's “Theology” in Chinese Context” in Revue International De Philosophie (March, 2012) pp. 381-397 [https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2012-3-page-381.htm](https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2012-3-page-381.htm) accessed Nov. 24th, 2018. Although it is in the understanding of Chinese philosophy, Huilin’s is one of the numerous articles depicting how Zizek sees theology, of any kind, as a perverse enterprise.
of sacrificial hospitality, etc.\textsuperscript{82} Unveiling, then, is the first part of forming renewed kingdom participation to know where any subversive measure should occur. Only then can the New Evangelization innovate practices capable of \textit{rupturing} these hidden secular ideologies as a distinctive people (ref. Heb. 10:25).\textsuperscript{83}

As a way of a faith-based example, take the predicament of religious expression found in many venues of the public educational system in the United States. Religious affiliation of young people is permitted bearing it refrains from interfering with the overarching ideology of the educational system. One can debate abortion, sexuality, and politics in a classroom setting as long as the discourse is devoid of the theological and metaphysical—an action that voids critical engagement in the guise of mutual tolerance. Not only does this type of secularist ideology negate itself in ironic fashion (a lack of patience for faith-based arguments and evangelization), but it also guarantees the prevalence of liberal secularism over religious commitment by forcing the dialogical encounter off-limits.\textsuperscript{84}

Notice the domestication of an evangelistic act by the very (educational) system it seeks to confront, critique, or even possibly escape. The system gives off an accommodating perception to individual religiousness when in fact any radicalizing (theological) message becomes subverted before it begins. Of course,

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\item Each of these will be unpacked in the final section of the work. The terminology of “life together” is taken from theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
\item “We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.”
\end{itemize}
the point is that many professed Christians also adhere to the above ideological construct under the assumption that religious freedom limits church-state discord—albeit now as a Christian conception without secular qualification. In doing so, however, Christianity is unknowingly placed within a framework driven by a modern liberal-secular ideology of religious toleration and public order. Such thinking remains unrevealed as ‘secular' in the guise that it applies to all people, religious or otherwise. Even if there is a societal benefit to the above church-state construct, the Christian remains unaware as to whether the ideological position ever warrants a degree of faithful rupture.

Ironically, when this lack of unveiling occurs, the secularization ethos becomes something of a “big-Other” (symbolic support) to modern Christian belief (a reversal of Zizek); i.e., secular-liberal ideologies control faithful expression often without the Church’s explicit knowledge, sometimes directing what an act of faith can and cannot do by diverting practices like evangelization into a pre-established framework. Consequently, these ‘hidden ideologies’ proliferate unsuspecting modern-liberal forms of life that tame the intrinsic radicalness of the Lord’s kingdom. The Church body becomes subconsciously directed in modern-secular formulations which pacify ‘life together' apart from the Eucharistic Christ. The church may concern itself with, say, moral, charitable, or social issues (ex. abortion, racism, tithing, etc.) as acts of evangelism, but in a way where the secular motif retains control (ex. marching for rights, voting for a pro-life candidate, partaking of door-to-door ministry, civil religion, or aiding a charitable cause).
In various cases, then, the body-of-Christ is ultimately relegated by a secular consciousness whereby "following Jesus" fuses with the acceptability of the secularized-political forum. It fails to uncover the ideologies holding increased faithfulness at bay. Thus, the Church becomes like any other modern institution that meets once a week, only now with lesser cultural influence than their secular counterparts (an apt diagnosis whenever parishioners know more about their coworkers, classmates, or fellow soccer moms than those receiving the ‘sign of peace’ during liturgy). The Church’s evangelistic framework can become preoccupied on abstractions like “renewed zeal for Christ” at the expense of breaking from secularist ideologies that decrease kingdom participation in its political-material embodiment.

When this happens, preaching "Christ crucified" becomes likened to a national protest without a subversive bite. Fervent and heartfelt evangelization is permitted because it remains inundated in an overarching secular paradigm where faithfulness boils down to holding different beliefs (and almost nothing to do with distinct, disruptive practices of kingdom participation). This evangelistic rupture is equated to the courage to stand for one’s faith against opposing moral-political-atheistic viewpoints in the public forum even when secularist ideology controls the general publics’ boundaries on what is and is not allowed.

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James Davidson Hunter discusses the power associated with the secular process, even if the majority of Western people still adhere to some faith traditions. Hunter writes, “And yet out culture – business culture, law and government, the academic world, popular entertainment – is intensely materialistic and secular. See To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World (pg. 19)
Zizek shows little interest for this type of conscientious dissent to a prevailing ideological order (religious or otherwise). He goes to painstaking ends to invalidate a 'soft' revolutionary commitment. For this reason, Zizek deplores various social-political revolutions for "failing to go far enough" in their affront against an overriding establishment (notably those associated with the ‘cultural Left’). These social/political revolutions lack the nature of a real emancipatory act because they are unable to "create any new kind of collective life."\(^86\) They only uphold the symbolic order that structures their revolution, albeit now in an attempt to make the system more just, ethical, or pleasant. As mentioned, what Zizek desires most is a revolutionary gesture that inaugurates a new operating system, a rapturous and inherently risky tearing from the old collectivity (symbolic-political order). His understanding of revolutionary action shatters the perceived limitations of the rebelled system by pushing the revolution to the system's brink.

Presumably, this ‘pushing to the brink’ is the most thought-provoking component of Zizek’s thought when applied to the New Evangelization. It provides the New Evangelization with its own form of critical self-evaluation regarding its degree of faithful radicalness. Without the Church tapping into Christ's kingdom participation as a means of subversive rupture, evangelization can fail in being “radical enough” to disrupt the secular-western paradigm that

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holds many lapsed Christians at bay.\textsuperscript{87} It parades as a form of soft evangelization, a clown of sorts for the Gospel that, in the words of theologian Marcus Pound, fails to "disturb the order of being."\textsuperscript{88} This means of evangelization preaches a domesticated Jesus, one devoid of the cross's subversion, thereby turning the Christ-figure into either a harbinger of ethereal soul saving or an affable social worker. In both cases, the risk of witnessing to the Christ-figure as a Eucharistic body becomes mollified. It fails to form a new collectivity of 'life together' in the Church that sustains itself outside the symbolic guarantees of secularist ideology or modern-political control.

The New Evangelization must come to understand how overcoming the secular fabric goes well-beyond rehashing orthodoxy with new ardor. For a "New Pentecost" to form as the Church desires, its evangelism must reevaluate how its holy practices subvert secularist ideology to ignite Church membership renewal.\textsuperscript{89} These subversive acts of faith become particularly imperative to the evangelistic cause when the New Evangelization's primary revolutionary gesture is shifting once Christianized countries to reconsider the Gospel. From the

\textsuperscript{87}Slavoj Zizek pulls from C.K. Chesterton who states how "Christianity is terribly revolutionary…". Of course, Zizek approaches this through militant atheism, but I would argue that the overarching ideology of secularization has completely tamed any revolutionary character of Christianity in the West. See The Monstrosity of Christ, pp. 48-49.

\textsuperscript{88}Phraseology borrowed from Marcus Pound, Zizek: A Very Critical Introduction, loc. 426 kindle cloud reader

Catholic perspective of evangelization (and in conjunction with Zizek), this is to break with the perversions of secularity to show what secularist ideology cannot provide in relation to the Gospel. Without disrupting this secular symbolic order in some measure, the transformative power of the Gospel risks becoming further absorbed into the boundaries of secularist ideology without direct recognition—a point even Zizek might find disconcerting.

**Christ’s Cross as True Act: The New Evangelization’s Rupturing from Zizek**

As noted above, many of Zizek’s depth charges can strike an accord with New Evangelistic practice by opening spaces of discernment regarding the Church’s subversive stance vis-à-vis modern secularist ideology. In particular, Slavoj Zizek’s psychoanalytic reading of the cross can direct the Church to see its essential duty to rupture worldly orders from any symbolic-ideological support relegating life apart from the Lord. In terms of Catholic evangelization, such destabilization happens whenever the ‘kingdom of God’ breaks from the ideological supports of secularism—a conception based on Zizek’s methodology whenever social-political revolutionary measures do the same in the modern world.

That said, Zizek’s psychoanalytic reading of the cross fails on many theopolitical accounts concerning Christian orthodoxy and modern evangelization. The most obvious failure is seeing Christ as purely immanent (non-divine), a gesture that, for Zizek, fosters a deeply nihilistic and violent
ontology in which to engage the world—and one he seemingly glorifies without reservation. His vision is therefore highly militant when it comes to breaking an existing paradigm (recall that Zizek’s ‘god’ is one of many symbolic supports meant to be "crucified" for a true revolution to arise in the social-political order). While Zizek may be correct in suggesting the world needs subversive acts to rupture hegemonic ideologies, Christian orthodoxy views any revolutionary gesture as peacefully oriented, flowing directly from the Holy Spirit’s grace and peace (Acts 1:4-5). Read through the narrative of orthodoxy, then, the Messiah’s cross reveals the very opposite of Zizek’s nihilistic ontology—the divine Christ-figure exposes materialistic militancy and violent control as an endless cycle of depravity, one without “life in the Spirit” (ref. Rom. 8:9-10).

The fundamental problem is that Zizek’s assumes his reading of the cross opens real revolutionary activity free of a "big Other" lurking behind the scenes. However, this assessment is without specific qualification as to whether anyone can truly rid themselves of a "big Other" (a)metaphysic upholding reality. Zizek’s position is merely another ideological perspective in the secular playing fields. Overthrowing the symbolic support of orthodox Christianity as Zizek does—precisely the divine nature of Christ—only replaces the Christian narrative with

something else as a new harmony, even if it is, in this case, Zizek’s negative disharmony of difference.

In other words, this new ideological structure happens to be Zizek’s disguised nihilistic framework of psychoanalytical ideology. His materialist reading can just as readily pose as a "big Other” construct, albeit one of endless violent revolution for a non-enchanted, materialistic world. But what if, as the Christian tradition proclaims, it is the nihilistic-violent non-harmony of Zizek’s revolutions needing uncovering in progressive forms of secularism? What if the Christ-figure's revolutionary activity of kingdom participation is not a "big Other,” but rather the very means of overcoming any secular symbolic support marred through sin and violence?

Notice the theological implications for the New Evangelization when viewed in this light. Most fundamentally, any sense of evangelistic revolution done by the Church is now underlined by Christ's peaceful activity whose rupturing of the world order reveals only the Lord's salvific offer—namely, to be free of sin and death (Rom. 6:22). Following Vatican II, for instance, the Church made certain adjustments regarding the mission of evangelization, focusing more on the assimilation of the Gospel to social-cultural situations while disregarding an imperial-violent expansion of the physical Church.91 Such an understanding undercuts any coercive measures to win adherents back to the Catholic faith, be it

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91 This mindset was articulated by Dr. John F. Gorski who said: “When the Council centered mission on the evangelization of peoples rather than the geographical expansion of the Church, it brought about a transition from territorial to a situational idea of mission.” See The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context, Faith, pg.32.
through violent revolution, colonial expansion, or psychological-political manipulation to justify its religious foundation.

Subsequently, the Church today becomes “militant” only in the sense that it suspends the secular symbolic order onto Christ’s terms, thereby initiating another form of (holy) existence “not of this world” (Jn. 18:36). It shows that, contrary to Zizek’s lone materialism, the enchantment of the entire world order with the outpouring of Christ's love for humanity, most encountered in the Church's sacramental offerings. Peaceful rapture of grace, not revolutionary violence, is what leads to any lasting alterity in the world. The Christ-figure continuously reveals this altered reality through his ongoing presence in the Church body, a testament to the words, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:30).

This outpouring of Christ's love is why the New Evangelization must pull from the Church's traditional practices, dogmas, scriptures, and sacraments for any sustained, revolutionary rupture—for the secular world is without their power. These deposits of faith provide the subversive core for today's evangelization as they have done for all of Christian history, epitomized in peaceful, Eucharistic encounter. Such ‘life together’ blatantly counters Zizek’s ideology—whose belief is to follow a “new master” of ongoing revolutionary

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* Granted, this needs to take into account deformities associated with these concepts that have sometimes plagued Christendom, particularly when human dignity has been lessened or exterminated (racism, violence to ethnic groups, etc.)
transgression—with a New Evangelization that frames ongoing, revolutionary insurrection in the Eucharistic Christ-figure. The “body and blood of Christ” sustains any sacred rupture within Western culture since Eucharistic participation is, by its nature, against the (secular) idea that finite existence (violent materiality) is all that exists. In a secular age of religious disenchantment, this insurrectionary-sacramental participation becomes a conduit from which all New Evangelization measures flow and return.

The reality is Zizek’s reading of the cross negates itself without recourse to a metaphysical-sacramental truth upholding existence (generally a hallmark of any form of nihilism, no matter how innovative). His reading allows for any “big Other” to resurface (be it a false god or atheistic psychoanalysis) since his perspective cannot delineate what ultimately constitutes ideological thinking or noteworthy transgression—each worldview is nothing more than a mundane symbol meant to be uncovered and suspended. By this logic, Zizek’s psychoanalytical framework can just as easily be inverted into itself, exposed and crucified by an outside act of brutal violence that dominates Zizek’s symbolic support in favor for a new way of (non)being.

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95 Robert Imbelli, for example, speaks about the element of Eucharistic participation as a component of the New Evangelization, placing new creation in the context of the liturgy. See Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization. p. 52-57.
96 Zizek believes he has overcome this, with a non-disclosed metaphysical viewpoint (Theopolitical vision)
97 Marcus Pound states, “By maintaining recourse to the transcendent, one can paradoxically affirm the goodness of the material world, an affirmation without which materiality risks evaporating back into the nothing” Loc. 872 Kindle Cloud Reader, Zizek: A (very) Critical Introduction
Ironically, it seems the only way to escape Zizek’s void of endless violence is to negate it by re-subscribing to the orthodox Christ-figure—an inroad for the New Evangelization. Here the New Evangelization can turn Zizek’s reading of the cross insight-out, taking its inverse to expose the perversity of his violent ideology. Instead of viewing Christ’s death as the crucifixion of any big Other a la Zizek, the New Evangelization can read the cross as the Messiah’s continued allowance for subversive love to remain in existence even when bearing and confronting sin’s totality. Faced with most horrific sin imaginable—the literal killing of the Messiah—Christ doesn’t destroy or overthrow sin and evil from existing in the material world. Instead, Jesus’ act on the cross unveils nihilism’s absurdity with a subversive gesture of forgiveness and holiness, a new (material) kingdom leading to everlasting life, one which results in the ongoing resurrection and new (salvific) life together (see Eph. 4:20-24).

This cross the Church must also witness to with its current evangelization efforts, most notably when read against Zizek’s interpretation. The Christ-figure’s dereliction on the cross allows divine love to flourish all the more where it ultimately becomes impossible for creation to fall into a nihilistic death-drive. Any act of evangelistic love is already subversively charged because it, like Christ on the cross, refuses to be voided by sin or a violent-political ideology. Zizek’s rendering of the cross is hopelessly backward: Christ’s cry exposes the ‘harmony of violence’ running throughout any revolutionary gesture devoid of grace. The

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Both John Milbank and Marcus Pound make a similar assessment within their theological musings.

* This reversal is not to suggest that the world is inherently violent. Rather, it is to turn the table as to what constitutes harmony in the theological perspective of subversion. The argument is that
‘disharmony’ to which Zizek gloriﬁes is only present in the incarnate Lord whose cross ruptures the harmony of violence in all its ongoing social-political-ideological manifestations. 

Consequently, the cross inverses what constitutes a revolutionary action in the world order. Whereas the cross once carried the stigma of personal humiliation or violent subjugation, it now ﬁnds revolutionary signiﬁcance in the Christ-ﬁgure as a subversive enactment of God’s reign. Jesus’s revolutionary act was, in part, his peaceful irruption from the cross, an incursion that overcame all laws forged in violent-nihilistic-political hegemony, one summarized in "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). The Savior negates any revolutionary measure that seeks to transform society by severing itself from this divine-incarnate Logos—be it Rome’s political executions, Zizek’s atheistic militancy, or a disenchanted secularist ideology.

Zizek misses the importance of this beautiful, ontological inversion. He fails to take orthodoxy’s cross "far enough" to see its continuous voiding of the violent fantasy infiltrieating all symbolic constructs devoid of the God-man. As such, Zizek is only partially correct in his atheistic reading of the cross: i.e., there is a revolutionary freedom that lies beyond a “big Other” symbolic support—but, 

the Holy Spirit brings disharmony to any ideological worldview outside of a Christian ontological state of peace, including Zizek’s radical materialism.

*Geoffery Holsclaw states how Zizek is always hesitant to move into a resurrection of a new political order because it is nothing but the insurrection of a new master, a new beginning, a unique harmony that will soon return to dominate us." Zizek wants a pure suspension between the law without creating anything of a lasting harmony, only permanent revolution, but never seems to articulate that the world has always had a balance of violence running through it (a statement that resonates with the Christian understanding of original sin. See Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical vision, pg.164
from the Church’s standpoint, it is the cross negating the neuroticism of humanity trying to control and/or displace history through self-made revolutionary measures.¹⁰¹

And this is a vital point to understand for the New Evangelization. To evangelize the Christ-figure in the western-secular world is to remain fixated on the subversive idea of transformation in Christ, not an outright conversion of culture with mere violent-revolutionary / (a)religious aspirations as does Zizek.¹⁰² In fact, the former is radically subversive by rejecting the latter's lure—that is, the New Evangelization disdains any conventional materialist-secularist ideology that frames ‘world-altering' as foremost a human (and often individual) endeavor.¹⁰³ Evangelization, too, can be self-deceived and distorted whenever its telos wanders from the Eucharistic Christ, the Logos of God. Its revolutionary capabilities become preoccupied on "changing the world" without comprehending how evangelization is already radical participation in the Lord's ulterior kingdom in the world. The ultimate end of the New Evangelization must

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¹⁰¹ Paul Dafydd Jones makes the argument in “On the Monstrosity of Christ”: Karl Barth in Conversation with Slavoj Zizek and John Milbank” (The Other Journal, July 8th, 2013) that Karl Barth would not, in fact, argue this point, but instead turn Zizek into a false religiousness of nullity. This may be true, but for the purposes of a New Evangelization, it seems that calling this outputs more of a priority on Eucharistic devotion and over what constitutes real, historical change. At some point, it would look as if Barth would likewise broach this subject, as Jones hints at within his essay. Accessed Dec. 26th, 2018.

¹⁰² Robert Imbelli points out how a transformation must center in Christ, something both Charles Taylor and Pope Benedict XVI make clear. See Rekindling the Christic Imagination (introduction, XXIV-XXV).

¹⁰³ Likewise, James Davidson Hunter makes a similar assessment from the sociological point of view. His research in To Change the World argues against the simple declaration that changing hearts and minds will inevitably lead to a change in culture. Davidson remarks how culture is much more complicated and intricate a system than such an evangelical viewpoint suggests. If this is true, it only adds another layer onto the complexity of shifting Western culture into something resembling Charles Taylor’s immanent frame.
be to "sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth" (Eph. 1:10) before it is radical world-changing. Revolutionary acts are implicit to this evangelistic mission whenever the kingdom of God reigns vis-à-vis those ideologies that sum up all things in humanity.

It is at this juncture that the New Evangelization and Zizek will part ways—both with who Christ is as well as the impetus for any revolutionary act. In Zizek’s closing to “A Meditation on Michelangelo’s Christ on the Cross,” he summarizes his revolutionary take on Christianity (cross) in the following manner,

“I think this is the legacy of Christianity—this legacy of God not as a big Other or guarantee but God as the ultimate ethical agency who puts the burden on us to organize ourselves.”

Zizek believes this legacy is not a “simple humanism” but at the same time asserts that the message of the cross is “not to trust God” but “God trusts us.” His atheistic evangelization witnesses to no guaranteed meaning in life; the (non-divine) holy spirit becomes nothing more than a "community of outcasts" subverting those who believe there is an ultimate guarantee, be it God, or modern-liberal political ideology.

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104 Paul’s New Movement, p. 180
105 Ibid., 179-180.
The New Evangelization must call Zizek’s perspective precisely what it is—a philosophically astute humanism, but nihilistic nonetheless. Zizek focuses on a revolutionary fervor that is strictly materialist in having no connection to the (divine) transcendental and draws from a self-reliant hubris of rupture. In this sense, it is as secular as the leftist liberalism Zizek disdains in the West—only now in militant form as a “politics of transgression.” These secularized, humanistic revolutions are exactly what the New Evangelization subverts in secular modernity because of the cross’s inversion towards peace. The Church’s evangelism points not to worldly revolution, but witnesses to an alternative kingdom that disrupts the novel philosophical nihilism of Zizek and company—i.e., a disenchanted materialism fraught with humanistic-secular revolutions without recourse to the Christ-figure’s kingdom.

Thus, the differences in world-altering between Zizek’s revolutions and the New Evangelization’s subversion stand in stark contrast. Both might begin with unveiling the distorted ideologies of western existence, calling out false paradigms masquerading as an overarching system of wholeness, as a “big Other.” But whereas Zizek desires a revolutionary severing from any ideological model (be it global capitalism, religious beliefs, liberal-democratic socialism, environmentalism, etc.), the New Evangelization witnesses to a life patterned on the Christ-figure, one that ruptures secular ideologies of humanistic glorification, no matter how philosophically innovative.

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*Pound, Zizek, loc. 1006*
Ultimately, then, these revolutionary paths diverge because they witness to two different kingdoms. Zizek seeks to disrupt the worldly order through negating any sense of wholeness while the New Evangelization inverts the secular, revolutionary fervor with subversive participation in the Lord’s kingdom. In order to see the material ramifications of each methodology, take the following two examples—Jesus’s act of foot washing and the pursuit of educational accomplishment in modern (Catholic) educational systems.

Concerning foot washing, the atheist Zizek would presumably see its revolutionary potential by reading John’s Gospel (see Jn. 13: 1-20). Jesus takes a menial act with little revolutionary or subversive weight in 1st century Palestine (and which, in Roman households, was often done by slaves) and inverts the practice, making it the symbolic basis for divine-human friendship. With proper knowledge, Zizek might gather how Jesus radically disarms any perceived form of hierarchical domination over his disciples or existing world order—be it social prestige, worldly kingship, or superiority as a rabbi, etc. In this way, the act of foot washing would constitute a social-political disruption to the Greco-Roman world, a cultural jettisoning of its longstanding presumptions and ideologies associated with honor, status, and power.

However, Zizek would end the revolutionary act there. The foot washing merely transgresses the social-political ideology of the Roman-Greco world without absorbing back into its dominate symbolic order. And since no

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*See Schneiders,” The Foot Washing (John 13:1-20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics,” 87. She writes, “By the foot washing Jesus has transcended and transformed the only ontologically based inequality among human beings, that between himself and us.”*
overarching metaphysic exists, the symbolic order of foot washing—the
subverting of power to humility, domination to servanthood—cannot become a
new harmony either. To do so is to posit a new ideological system with a "Master-
Signifier" (in this case, humility) that attempts to be the basis for all reality.\textsuperscript{108}
Once accomplished, Zizek believes one fails to live in a state of negative
transgression.

On the other hand, the Church calls its New Evangelization to embody the
Christ-figure’s humility, using the foot washing as a hermeneutical lens for its
kingdom participation—even in the modern secular age. Here servanthood and
humility remain subversive by the fact that they point to the Christ-figure as their
originating and sustaining source. From the Church’s perspective, there is no
pure secular formulation of these concepts that can create some natural ‘state of
harmony’ within secularity (to use Zizek’s terminology).\textsuperscript{109} Without the witness of
the Church directing to the Logos, humility and servanthood become displaced
on a fundamentally anthropocentric ideology, a secular "humanizing trend"
whereby the Divine loses its essential nature.\textsuperscript{110}

In these instances, faith is vestigial to the current order of creation,
nothing more than a supportive after-thought. It severs Christ from the act of foot
washing—and, in the context of today, mostly neuters the radical implications of
the gesture. It is ideological by the fact that it diverts secularist attention away

\textsuperscript{108} Pound, Zizek: A (Very) Critical Introduction, loc.999 Kindle Cloud Reader
\textsuperscript{109} Certainly, other non-Christian people can radiate humility; yet the argument is that the further
away from the source of all humility – the Eucharistic Christ – the less it can be said to be such.
\textsuperscript{110} See James Smith, How Not to Be Secular, pg. 49
from the distinctive kingdom of the Christ-figure. As a way of example, take how the Catholic-parochial educational system in the United States sometimes frames humility and servanthood. Servanthood becomes the accumulation of service hours as a mandatory student requirement, a paradigm quite similar to those instilled in public education. A student partakes of service hours to be awarded a diploma, or to show the accolades of the school or accomplished individual, but rarely with theological or prayerful contextualization in the Lord.

Furthermore, humility on the student's part is the partaking of the service requirement itself. Time must be "taken out of their busy schedules" for the students to serve a neighbor or organization in need, typically as an addendum to round out their college application process. Upon graduating with these service hours (if not before), Catholic students are as prone to shout out phrases that resonate with secularism’s humanizing trend; e.g., “We are the future” or “It is our time to change the world,” spoken with little-to-no mention of Christ’s ulterior kingdom of humility, or gained knowledge for assisting the ecclesial body. It is as if the qualifier "Christian" in front of the word humility or servanthood is no longer needed.

While Zizek would likely find this trend in Catholic schools amusing, the New Evangelization should see it as disheartening. In these instances, a dominating secular-liberalism is the norm for even the Catholic educational system, a "big Other" that subsumes Christian practices back into its ideology of universality without the need of faithful distinctiveness. Of course, Zizek would argue the Catholic Church never really existed as anything other than an
ideological force; it has only now been overtaken by modern secularism and capitalism in its current educational sphere. Any revolutionary activity done by Zizek on this front is merely to subvert liberalism’s ideological agenda as somehow more freeing, permissive, or unitarily whole than the Christian tradition.

The Church agrees with Zizek on the latter, but the entire point of following the Christ-figure is to reveal the inverse of Zizek’s non-divine ideology. The New Evangelization witnesses to actions like foot washing so that the Kingdom of God can reorient what theologian Boris Gunjevic refers to as “...the multitude’s already entrenched assumptions.” In the case of Catholic parochial education, for example, these assumptions of “changing the world” can be undermined with a “rhetoric of humility,” one whereby students abandon their world-altering ambitions as means of modern revolution. In its place comes the inverse understanding that, in the words of theologian William Cavanaugh, “God changes the world, not us.” Far from doing nothing, this epiphany inverses the revolutionary gaze of students—Christ has already changed the world. The students’ mission, then, is to humbly participate in this change as the “body of Christ” in a patient and prayerful manner. This Christian sense of humility is patterned on Jesus’s foot-washing which negates the zeal for human revolutionary fervor to overthrow a paradigm immediately, violently, or on

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* Zizek: A Graphic Guide, loc. 687 Kindle Cloud Reader
* See Zizek and Gunjevic’s *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*, pp. 268-269. Gunjevic uses this phraseology to highlight more of a disenfranchised multitude in reference to Mark’s Gospel.
* See William Cavanaugh’s “Don’t Change the World CCT Table Conference Lecture” at Biola University
human terms. The revolutionary impetus is thereby centered on the God-man, not on the act of revolution itself.

The New Evangelization is called to witness to any revolutionary and subversive measure in the same fashion. Regarding Catholic institutions, for instance, a new evangelistic act would direct its schools to forgo the language and practices associated with world-altering, reconfiguring them onto faithfulness in the Lord. These acts will be in the vein of foot washing (humility, servanthood) and table fellowship (Eucharist, sacraments), practices that seem absent of revolutionary potential from the world’s perspective, but are inherently teeming with subversive bite. When incorporated into these sacred practices, possible material ramifications ensue: e.g., Catholic education disavowals service hours as a requirement because of the inherent servanthood of their student and faculty body; GPAs are secondary to family and Church participation—and, may even be lower because of involvement in them; local parishes provide scholarships based on the Eucharistic presence of its young people; commencement speeches celebrate the “body of believers” rather than individual aspirations, etc.

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* Ibid., “Don’t Change the World” According to Cavanaugh, these human revolutions feel “short on time” because they are limited to temporal human activity instead of the timeless God. Because of this, they often feel the need to utilize coercion, ideology, or violence to make said change.
These examples may seem idealistic, even naïve to many educational systems today. But this is precisely what makes them subversive to the current world order as an enactment of the New Evangelization. If actualized through faithful witness, these sacred ideals rupture with the consciousness of a prevailing educational ideology while possibly forming a "new collectivity," an altered reality severed from conventional secular normalcy—the very thing Zizek salutes. However, in drastic separation from Zizek, this transgression of normality is both positive and sacred. That is, it is founded on the Christ-figure's cross as the continued allowance of life and grace to flourish over the ideology of sin, human and meaningless death. Holding to such a 'cross of faith' avoids having the Church fall into Zizek’s nihilistic revolution of (negative) transgressions, an endless material voiding of anything Divine.

And here is where the New Evangelization ruptures Zizek’s philosophy. The movement posits the ‘kingdom of God’ as the only means for a truly subversive act in the current social-political order since it negates the desire for a worldly revolution/ transgression of humanity. The Church instead witnesses to the sacred practices of the Christ-figure in this age of secularity, reminding the world of how the Lord's kingdom cannot be voided or disregarded because of the cross’s reality. Grace is, therefore, a requirement for any act of disruption. And since these practices stem from the eternal Christ-figure, they will forever be innovative and subversive to infuse "new life" to any period, never allowing the world to fall entirely into the ideological abyss of revolutionary nihilism that Zizek proclaims.
In the next part of the work, the Church’s New Evangelization will be challenged to rethink how and when these subversive measures occur by looking at the work of French philosopher Alain Badiou. In particular, Badiou’s thought will be utilized to frame the New Evangelization as a series of orthodox “events” or “sparks” that usher in real change, altering the “intensity of existence” by breaking the social consciousness. More than simply rehashing Catholic orthodoxy with new ardor, Badiou’s “Event” framework provides a structure of “breaking free” from any repetitiveness of existence, secular or otherwise—a measure that may, in time, provoke new and rewarding responses by those fallen away from faith within western secularity. It is here where we now turn.

Part 3: The Resurrection of New Evangelization

Alain Badiou and Breaking New Evangelization Consciousness

In one of the essential documents regarding Catholic evangelization in the modern world, Pope Paul VI wrote the following in 1975 as part of his exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi,

“...for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.”¹¹⁷

(emphasis mine)

It is not uncommon for the subversive nature of these words to go unnoticed by those proclaiming a New Evangelization.¹¹⁸ In an attempt to win over those who have fallen away from the Catholic faith in a post-Christian, pluralistic society, many forays of New Evangelization have emphasized things like the intellectual

¹¹⁷ See Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi paragraph 19 http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html
¹¹⁸ Although the Pope makes clear that the Gospel and evangelization are not always "incompatible" with the wider culture, a split between the two is emphasized in the modern age, described in the document as the "drama of our time."
or cultural respectability of faithfulness\textsuperscript{119} or market “following Christ” in terms of value for the individuals’ or nations’ wellbeing, eternal or otherwise.\textsuperscript{120} The reason for these measures is sincere, although questionably dubious; e.g., to make the Church the "center of culture" again with a new influx of adherents, it is assumed one forgoes faithful disruption, substituting a more socially reputable form of witness as the way forward.\textsuperscript{121}

While it is true the Church’s evangelization is not necessarily disruptive on every front,\textsuperscript{122} its witness to the Christ-figure must include a degree of worldly unsettlement. Pope Paul VI understood this well. The Gospel is to be proclaimed by all baptized as being part of a “new state of things” in Christ, a message that permeates all cultures without “being subject to any one of them.”\textsuperscript{123} The Gospel evades being encapsulated or wholly defined by any given culture or historical period including western secularity—a construct that often 'universalizes' modern-liberal ideologies over and against religious-faith commitments. New Evangelization must, therefore, find ways to usher in a renewed in-breaking of the Gospel, to form new (truth) events in secularity whereby those fallen from faith can respond to the Christ-figure in a way not previously encountered.

\textsuperscript{*} A prime example is having high-end bishops meet with late night talk show hosts. Although this isn't out-of-question for Catholic bishops, it tends to lack any subversive or disruptive force in the world. To qualify this as New Evangelization seems misplaced.
\textsuperscript{*} See Stone, Evangelism after Christendom, pg. 10. Dr. Stone makes the same assessment for various churches in the Protestant world. The point, of course, is that evangelization is to “win back” a nation to what it once was, to bring Christianity back to the center.
\textsuperscript{*} Ibid., pg. 9.
\textsuperscript{*} See for example the words of Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi paragraph 20
\textsuperscript{*} Ibid, Evangelii Nuntiandi paragraph 20
Whenever the discussion of truth-events arises, living French philosopher Alain Badiou is not far behind. In fact, there seems an unlikely connection between Pope Paul VI and the atheist Badiou in this regard: Pope Paul VI's "upsetting" of conventional worldly criteria as a form of evangelization is close to Badiou's emancipatory politics centered on the terminology of "Event." Badiou defines an Event as any occurrence that cannot be fully claimed by its particular social-cultural setting—that is, it escapes being part of the status quo (as in the Gospel escaping full assimilation into any culture's grasp). And since an Event cannot be fully claimed by a situation's present consciousness, it confronts the status quo by bringing forth "truths that are prior existent, or inexistent" into a setting that would otherwise not arise.\(^{124}\) Atheist or not, such language provides fecund grounding for present-day evangelization in the Church. The New Evangelization should take note.

Badiou is famous as a leftist-political thinker. Like Zizek, his work is emancipatory, subversive, militant—yet Badiou emphasizes his radical change through a (resurrected) commitment to communist, collective life.\(^{125}\) His atheistic viewpoint stems from a philosophical conception of mathematics—specifically set-theory—as an ontology affirming the idea of universal truth without need of God (i.e., set theory "rules out an ultimate infinity").\(^{126}\) His mathematical claims

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\(^{125}\) See Michael Kelly’s *Alain Badiou: A Graphic Guide* (Icon Books: London, 2012), loc. 60. Kindle Cloud Reader. Badiou seems open to an ongoing communist paradigm, a hope in the social-political resurrection which counters Zizek’s endless transgressions.

over God’s non-existence are heavily contested,\(^\text{127}\) but it paves the way for Badiou to conceive of his theoretical *Event* paradigm—an all-encompassing truth formula where only an “inconsistent multiplicity” exists *ad infinitum.*\(^\text{128}\) What this entails is that there will always be something that does not fit into any designated unity or social whole—be it artistic, cultural, economic, scientific, political, or otherwise—and it is through an "Event" that a new universal is born within these areas.

For Badiou, Events signal a radical break from accepted reality. They universalize (make true) something lying dormant in a particular situation, something not yet actualized in the world. Events, therefore, unexpectedly rupture the social scene.\(^\text{129}\) Since these ruptures are outside the ideological norm of social consciousness (think living outside the bounds of capitalism or the French Revolution), their excesses inevitably force some critical engagement by the public, be it through allegiance, ridicule, or ignoring the Event altogether.\(^\text{130}\) Regarding one’s fidelity to the Event, allegiance entails holding to a critical gesture of faith (*pistis, conviction*) because submission to an Event will, over

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\(^{127}\) See Frederiek Depoortere’s *Badiou and Theology* (T&T Clark: London, 2009). Depoortere believes Badiou is simply biased from the start and that his ontology for set theory rests on pre-conceived, axiomatic-foundational claims. In this sense, it is not more or less axiomatic than belief in God. Ironically, the founder of set-theory Georg Cantor believed such mathematics pointed to the opposite of Badiou’s analysis, showing that God’s existence was possible since infinities do exist.


\(^{129}\) Robinson, “Alain Badiou: The Event,” *Ceasefire Magazine*

time, jeopardize the current social order for belief in something other. It is to place one’s faith in what is not yet at the expense of what is accepted now.

Consequently, these Events inherently destabilize. They irrupt established norms by potentially birthing a new real, a new universal, an unimagined social-political space within the world order. And because of this progressive disruption there tends to be a fair amount of risk associated with one's fidelity to them. This risk is because the Event goes on to define one's identity against the older prevailing order deemed universal, ordinary, or whole. When the subject (person, cause) becomes in service to this new "truth-Event," the subject stands in contradistinction to the familiar, showing the inconsistency or unsaid excess of its ideological position. From the outsider's perspective, the Event is often "unpermitted" because of "prevailing prejudices."  

Here is where a figure like St. Paul looms large for Badiou. Ironically, it is this atheist philosopher who invokes the Christian evangelizer as a template for fidelity to an Event. According to Badiou, St. Paul's homage to the evangelistic proclamation of “Christ crucified and risen” became the impetus behind the message’s rupturing of the underlying ideologies of Greco-Roman culture and Jewish religiousness (law). Badiou writes,

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See Slavoj Zizek’s essay on “Paul and the Truth Event” in Paul’s New Movement: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology, pp. 74-81. On page 76, Zizek articulates this excess/inconsistency that takes place whenever an Event is brought forth from the current social-political situation.

Robinson, "Alain Badiou: The Event," Ceasefire

In particular, see Alain Badiou’s Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003). Like many living continental philosophers, Badiou takes a Pauline turn, using the Christian phenomena of 1st century as a revolutionary measure meant to emulate.
“Paul’s unprecedented gesture consists in subtracting truth (taking away) from the communitarian grasp, be it that of a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a social class.”
(parenthesis mine)\(^{134}\)

In doing so, the message formed a new universal focus, a new Event for the world to engage. In particular, St. Paul’s faith in Christ’s resurrection ushered in a singular universal, a truth where everyone was admitted into the (ecclesial) community regardless of who they were in the 1\(^{st}\) century—i.e., “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Thus, St. Paul baptized an “ulterior universal” to the surrounding order—a new (true) universality—something unfamiliar to the “universal projects” of either Jew or Greek.\(^{135}\) For Badiou, then, St. Paul’s fidelity to the Christ-event, to the Messiah’s resurrection, became an act of “ontological subversion” towards the other social-political discourses of the time.\(^{136}\) At some point, everyone in the Roman-Greco world had to deal with this new-found reality of Christianity. There


was simply no way to escape its ideological reach from the nature of the movement.

Of course, as an atheist, Badiou only cares for Christ’s resurrection as a formal affair. As theologian Paul Griffiths puts it, Badiou’s belief in the resurrection “...is limited to the effects its proclamation may have on those who hear about it.” As such, Badiou cares little over the veracity of the Christ-Event, of whether or not Jesus of Nazareth rose from the grave. Instead, his point is to show how St. Paul witnessed to the Christ-Event in such a way as to it ignite a transformative movement (of truth) for those subscribing to the Gospel message. Truth is merely the unfolding of a new universal order; that is, it is the “miracle” that always and everywhere breaks the normalcy of a given situation and for what the situation cannot keep down.

A question can be posted here whether the New Evangelization can approach Badiou's Event status (or if it is possible of ever becoming an Event). On some level, it appears the New Evangelization resonates with Badiou's characterization of an Event. For example, Pope Benedict XVI's establishment of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization after decades of

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*This miracle is where Badiou separates himself from the postmodernist/deconstruction camp. Whereas the postmodernist is always circumspect over any new revolutionary movement – "be careful for what you wish for" – Badiou sees an Event through the perspective of hope and resurrection – it is a new operating system, even if just for a moment. Truth is the reality of the infinite multiplicity; it is not negative as in the deconstructive sense. Badiou is therefore like the deconstructionist on no underlying-ontological truth (beyond mathematics), only a lot happier about the reality – this is the world, this is its ontology, embrace it. See Slavoj Žižek’s characterization of Badiou in Paul’s New Movement: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology, pp. 80-81.*
sustained calls for “renewed missionary impulse” in the Catholic Church gives
testament to this fact. From a Catholic perspective, this constitutes a genuine
movement of the Holy Spirit, a ‘miraculous Event’ to confront the ideological
drawbacks associated with secularity. However, while this building up for what
has become known as "New Evangelization" is warranted, it often lacks any sense
of social unsettlement to the surrounding order (a la St. Paul). As such, there is
little in the form of a new universalizing perspective to those directed and pulled
by the secular order.

This striving for social unsettlement highlights an essential qualification of
Badiou's Event. For having taken place, an Event must "shake up the identities
and discourses of the situation." In other words, not every political protest, or
cultural revolution constitutes an Event—in fact, most do not. Typically, these
protests or revolutions merely depict a confrontation between two or more forces
that already exist in the public’s wider consciousness (i.e., republican-democrat,
pro-life-pro-choice, etc.). Nothing appears in their situational awareness that was
not already present beforehand, and the different sides continue to exist without
any new emergence or novel disruption.

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* See Vatican Information Service, "Pope Creates a Dicastery for New Evangelization" June 28, 2010, at [www.vis.va](http://www.vis.va) as quoted in *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context, and Practice*, pp.1-2. Vatican II the Church has realized how the “process of secularization” has often led to the “eclipse of the meaning of God” and desires to break this trend in its formulation of new evangelistic ardor

* These words come from Political Theorist Andrew Robinson's interpretation in "Alain Badiou: The Event," *Ceasefire Magazine*. Robinson believes that Badiou is too narrow in this approach. I would agree but on different terms. It's not merely a matter of colonial exclusion or capitalist exploitation, but religious-theological exclusion as well. See below.

* Ibid.

* Ibid., Again, Robinson will disagree with this assessment.
The above qualification of an Event is noteworthy for the New Evangelization. In particular, it questions whether New Evangelization occurs without the evangelization disturbing and then redefining the spaces involved. After talk is complete regarding the New Evangelization's methodology—how it is generally 'lay-person' centered in Christ\textsuperscript{143}; or how the Church is perpetually in a “state of mission” for salvation\textsuperscript{144}; or how it forms “new enthusiasm” and “new language” for a “different cultural situation”\textsuperscript{145}—it must determine if a new situational awareness has transpired onto both the Church and secular scene.\textsuperscript{146} As with Badiou’s Event, any new evangelistic act would thereby escape assimilation into either the Church's current framework (hence new) or the secular world’s existing order (hence evangelization).\textsuperscript{147}

Here is where the New Evangelization can mimic St. Paul's playbook a la Badiou. As the Apostle Paul's evangelistic zeal evades the societal conventions of either Greek or Jew, so too must the New Evangelization forgo being claimed by the surrounding social consciousness of those acclimated to western culture—a miraculous feat to be sure. These holy evangelistic movements are unpredictable

\textsuperscript{143} Pope John Paul II writes in \textit{Redemptoris Missio} paragraph 2, “The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life, while particular churches are more willing to meet with the members of other Christian churches and other religions, and to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. Above all, there is a new awareness that \textit{missionary activity is a matter for all Christians}, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.”


\textsuperscript{146} This formulation is similar to Zizek's rupturing of ideologies but in a different way.

\textsuperscript{147} Of course, any New Evangelization will be described as a Christ-Event, as a recent enactment of kingdom participation. More on this below.
by the surrounding western ethos from which they will play out. They are to be entirely new in practice and hold to an element of Spirit-led improvisation (i.e., stem from the Divine source).

But how would this evangelistic Event be defined today? In the context of New Evangelization, it entails two critical aspects of the Church’s mission. On the one hand, the New Evangelization must confront the secular universal with a new fidelity to the Lord's kingdom in the modern world—a new set of faithful practices drawn from the Eucharistic source. This holy confrontation occurs because the secular paradigm cannot account for the new fidelity within its midst—that is, an evangelistic undertaking not yet encountered or assimilated before by those within secularity itself. By its nature, then, this evangelism’s newness must upset secular conventions because of the Church’s innovative fidelity to the Christ-figure in the form of a radical display of kingdom participation.

On the other hand, the New Evangelization disrupts the Church’s missional conventionality. Part of this has already been articulated well by the Church when defining the New Evangelization’s movement—for example, all "baptized members" are called to evangelize Jesus Christ, not just "specialists" or "priests," etc.\textsuperscript{148} But using Badiou's Event as a guide, the New Evangelization

\textsuperscript{148} See Ralph Martin’s \textit{The New Evangelization: What it is and How it Affects the Life of Every Catholic} (Our Sunday Visitor: Huntington 2012) loc. 221-370. I agree with Martin's take here, summarized nicely within Church documents, but I am apprehensive on the individual perspective he often gives. The emphasis seems to be less on Church participation of kingdom and more an individual requirement. Although not mutually exclusive, I feel the communal practices take precedence.
must move beyond these characterizations to include the evangelistic appearance of something unexpected in the Holy Spirit, almost as if it does not belong to the Church's prior practices or ecclesial habits. There is a sacred interruption from the repetitiveness of existence when these disruptive measures occur—a refreshing wind of novelty, but without loss of the Church's original teachings or sacraments as source. In time, these measures can spark renewed fidelity, a resurrection of the Catholic universal (i.e., Christ-Event), particularly by alienated Catholics or those that uncritically embrace the secularization ethos of the western world.

When taking these two aspects together—unsettling the consciousness of the secular and the Church's conventionality—the evangelistic measure can adequately be deemed as a birthing of New / Evangelization, an Event as such. And herein lies the critical distinction regarding the New Evangelization with the help of Badiou's characterization of Event: e.g., the evangelistic act must include the "breaking-in" of alternative practices that could not be witnessed to or seen as truth before their arrival—an apt resemblance to the Christian apocalyptic.149 It is to make incarnate the Christ-figure's words, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5) by affecting the appearance of a specific locale. The radical novelty of evangelization here interrupts the world and the Church; it is both traumatic to the world and exhilarating to those being transformed by the evangelization through the Spirit.150

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150 The same characterization is made with Political Theorist Andrew Robinson's interpretation in "Alain Badiou: The Event," *Ceasefire Magazine*
Contrast this outlook to the numerous examples of New Evangelization within the Church's broader western consciousness. Primarily, any activity or program with the "intent of bringing people back into the Church" can now be designated as "New Evangelization," regardless of what it is, or its particular methodology.\(^{151}\) For example, door-to-door evangelization on college campuses or suburban neighborhoods might be "new" to the Catholic Church, but such evangelization tactics have already been encountered and processed by the western-secular paradigm through Evangelical Protestantism and others.

Similarly, while ardent evangelistic calls for a more joyful Catholicism, praying a family rosary, or attending Mass more frequently are spiritually beneficial, they too fall short in being characterized as inherently new practices in the current ecclesial or cultural establishments.\(^{152}\)

Granted, this is not to suggest these common evangelistic practices are somehow worthless or even secondary in importance for Catholic Christians—they are not.\(^{153}\) However, the shift in focus to a New / Evangelization highlights the radical novelty of the Holy Spirit that “rips into the fabric of being” in a secular age.\(^{154}\) With Badiou in mind, it asks ‘Where is the new situational

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\(^{152}\) The Diocese of Salina has a list of 90+ evangelization ideas like the ones provided. As mentioned below, these are genuinely noteworthy and needed. However, the question is whether they qualify as new evangelization. Do they disrupt the social order to provide a perspective not yet seen? See [https://salinadiocese.org/new-evangelization/1955-99-effective-ways-to-evangelize-as-a-catholic], Accessed Feb. 8th, 2019.

\(^{153}\) Apocalyptic evangelization should never be the default mode of the Church.

\(^{154}\) Phraseology was taken from Andrew Robinson's interpretation in "Alain Badiou: The Event," Ceasefire Magazine
awareness surrounding the Christ-Event for the modern day? Where is a resurrection of Truth unknown to the world in the form of radical, risky, and subversive evangelistic practices?' These aspects must also be reclaimed by the Church to avoid the trappings of mundane, ecclesial deism. Catholics cannot, in the words of theologian Frederiek Depoortere, "...give up on the passion for the new which drove Jesus and Saint Paul," of living in between the ‘already' and the ‘not-yet' of the Christ-figure's kingdom.\textsuperscript{155} To do so is to lose both St. Paul and the Christ-figure to a domesticated faith without radical novelty. It is to lose any sense of the beautiful apocalyptic that paves a new road by the Church's new evangelization.

\section*{St. Oscar Romero as Witness to Badiou’s Event and New / Evangelization}

What would an ‘Event' of New / Evangelization look like if the Church took an apocalyptic element seriously within its evangelization? One notable example in modernity arises from the depths of El Salvador, with the witness of the saint, priest, and martyr Oscar Romero. With Badiou's structure in mind, Romero's witness to the political and ecclesial events surrounding the poor of El Salvador in the late 1970s ushered in a new consciousness for the local (universal) Church and the established political order. This example could rightly be considered an Event of New / Evangelization because Romero's words and actions enacted kingdom practices that rightly shook up the dominant discourses.

\begin{quote} \footnotesize See Frederiek Depoortere’s \textit{Badiou and Theology} (T&T Clark: London 2009), p 4. \end{quote}
of the country’s situation. Something new was birthed and resurrected through the Holy Spirit.

St. Oscar Romero was the archbishop whose faithful witness triggered a profoundly new outlook in El Salvador—a boldly disruptive faith centered on the Christ-figure. His religious conservatism and political moderation got him elected to his ecclesial appointment, but he died as a subversive martyr and outspoken proponent of the poor after denouncing the military-backed government's violence on its people. Romero was shot in the heart by a military sniper's bullet while celebrating Mass in 1980. His death may have been easy, but the archbishop's influence never waned.

As is customary with Events, quite the opposite occurred—new paths were discovered and formulated by Romero's witness. Theologian Jon Sobrino, for example, states how Romero is "the most universal Christian at the end of the twentieth century" because his iconic persona and radiating influence have transcended his own country's borders. The archbishop's legacy has become influential in a wide variety of disciplines and academic fields, particularly as it pertains to countering violent forms of oppression or the endemic roots of poverty. In fact, nearly forty years after his death, Pope Francis declared Romero a saint— “a voice for the voiceless,” a figure who took Pope Paul VI’s ‘upsetting’

-- It is true that the terminology of New Evangelization has yet to be used by Pope John Paul II at this point. Nevertheless, I believe that much of New Evangelization will be retrospective in characterization. That is, one comes to an awareness that an Event of New Evangelization has happened only after taken place.
-- See Dennis, Golden, and Wright, Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings, p. 115
literally when it came to holiness and evangelization. This canonization is noteworthy considering the Vatican at first stayed away from Romero’s canonization due to the (political) polarization he was said to have represented.

As such, the narrative of Romero forces the Church to take Badiou’s Event seriously. The story interrupts the normalcy of a situation as an enactment of evangelization. To begin, Badiou believes any Event has its “roots in a particular excluded part,” be it a social group, national custom, cultural or scientific ideology—or, in the case of El Salvador, the poor and oppressed of the country. 

It is important to note that, according to Badiou’s framework, Romero is not the Event itself, but its servant, its spokesperson (as St. Paul was to Christ’s resurrection). Romero’s faithful witness organized others to participate in what had already been taking place as the Event—a confrontation with political-government officials demanding the Church’s neutrality in the rich-versus-poor conflict facing the country. Romero's fidelity to this Event provided the fire that ruptured El Salvador's social-political convention as well as disrupting the Church's response. It forced a new singular awareness (truth) onto the scene which failed any assimilation back into the preexisting social order.

One notable break came with Romero taking a prophetic stance alongside the poor and outcast. This incarnational position arose after his priest friend

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See Alain Badiou: The Event, https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/alain-badiou-event/

See Marie Dennis, Renny Golden, and Scott Wright’s Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings (Maryknoll: New York, 2000)
Rutilo Grande was murdered denouncing the abuses of wealthy landowners in El Salvador. With the loss of his friend, Romero's work with the destitute turned 'subversive' towards the power elites. As archbishop, he would directly confront the Salvadorian Oligarchy whose political ideology repressed those trapped inside its unjust political, social, and economic system—often blaming the poor “...for their own persecution.”

His courageous stance was steeped in holiness and faithfulness, vigorously upholding Vatican II’s pronouncements on social justice as well as the Gospel’s ‘Good Samaritan’ and ‘Beatitudes of Jesus’. While giving his address at the University of Louvain, the Archbishop went so far as to say, “Our encounter with the poor has regained for us the central truth of the Gospel, through which the Word of God urges us to conversion.”

Consequently, Romero provided a theological and spiritual insult to the economic self-interest of those controlling Salvadorian land. It was a calling out by a Church archbishop with little to no ecclesial precedent (some of Romero's fellow clergymen thought he went too far). Undoubtedly, Romero's actions would enact opposing hostilities in El Salvador's political-governmental sector. Those opposed to Romero viewed his activities as a blatant trotting on their political terrain—e.g., the Church was, in their estimation, to remain on the spiritual-personal plane far removed from political dealings. Romero’s faithfulness

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* Dennis, Golden, and Wright, *Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings*, p. 116
* Dennis, Golden, and Wright, *Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings*, p. 45. It is important to note that although Romero could be read as a “liberation theologian” his work often cannot be contained as such. The quote, however, does make the case that a failure to confront and stand with the poor is something contrary to the Gospel message.
* Christine Allen wrote in The Guardian how, "Most of the senior clergy had remained tight-lipped out of fear or out of complicity," suggesting that Romero was a "bishop for the people." The point is that the Church would eventually transverse into the political realm via Romero and
thought otherwise. Witnessing to the Holy Spirit could only rupture their existing
governing paradigm.

Badiou suggests pushback is deeply characteristic of Events whenever a
new truth arrives onto a scene. According to Badiou, there will always be an
"obscure subject(s)" who "rejects change" by attempting to keep an old truth alive
in contradiction to the Event. In the case of El Salvador, for example, it was the
military-backed government as well as certain clergymen who believed faith
should remain centered on personal and spiritual matters. In the face of this
opposition, Romero continued to inspire the Salvadorian people towards the
Gospel as both a spiritual and social-political reality. The movement became a
peaceful, albeit risky, witness to God’s kingdom in response to the hegemonic-
violent control of El Salvador’s corrupted elite. It was not afraid of worldly
disruption because of an allegiance to the Christ-figure.

The evangelical novelty of Romero’s witness was unprecedented. Far from
staying within the parameters of the situation, Romero pushed the faithful
beyond the existing political constellation to resurrect kingdom practices left
undiscovered by the situation. He does not abandon the orthodox discourse of
Catholicism, but instead “reconstitutes” what it means to be part of the Catholic
discourse in a very new way. He challenged the prevailing paradigm of El

others. See "Romero, a Beacon of Hope for the Poor" (March 19-, 2010) in The Guardian.

"Alain Badiou: A Graphic Guide", loc. 198 kindle cloud reader. Often it comes through staunch
enforcement of dogma or political law, anything to keep the old truth in order.

"In his essay "A Very Particular Universalism: Badiou and Paul," Dr. Stephen Fowl makes the
same appropriation to St. Paul. As with Badiou, it is essential to note that the subject of an Event
Salvador’s conservative fractions as a holy bishop devoted to the Christ-figure, as one saturated in the prayers and sacraments of the Catholic Church. He disdained violence on all accounts, regardless of the side it came.\textsuperscript{166} He walked with the poor as an archbishop. Movements toward the ‘marginalized peripheries' became prioritized by many in the Salvadorian Church (and abroad) due to his example.\textsuperscript{167} He spoke out against violent military oppression from the pulpit as an "alternative to state-controlled media."\textsuperscript{168} These evangelistic measures were simply unrealized or incalculable before the Event brought on by the Holy Spirit. As the movement’s spearhead, Romero would make them an incarnational reality.

This bringing forth of undisclosed kingdom practices is precisely what New / Evangelization entails. Of course, as with Romero’s witness, courage and risk will be necessary on the part of today’s pastoral leaders (a point emphasized by Badiou whenever fidelity to an Event is needed). Without these components, the New / Evangelization will have a hard time disclosing “alternative realities” to secularity since an act of faith lays the groundwork for any new Event.\textsuperscript{169} For

\textsuperscript{169} Alain Badiou: A Graphic Guide, loc. 461 Kindle Cloud Reader
example, Romero’s fidelity was an inherently risky ordeal that exposed a radical alternative to the respective parties involved in El Salvador’s political predicament. It helped resurrect a new truth (truth-
Event) in the form of subversive Catholic orthodoxy within El Salvador. Likewise, today’s enactment of New / Evangelization must uphold risky endeavors in the faith, albeit towards the ideological distortions of secularism. If the Church’s evangelization is without this element of courage and risk, one can question whether the evangelistic act constitutes an Event of New / Evangelization.¹⁷⁰

Notice here how fidelity to an act of New / Evangelization can become a dividing process. Badiou describes an Event as enacting a critical decision for or against its determination of Truth, as a polarizing line of the social world in which the Event takes place.¹⁷¹ It forces a response by all involved due to its pervasive reach (as was Romero’s witness in El Salvador). Consequently, New / Evangelization would entail not so much a passive ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ stance as it would a birthing of a new critical decision on the part of the Western onlooker. Romero’s witness, for example, had to be addressed by the surrounding order of El Salvador as well as the universal Church—that is, there was no way to bypass or ignore them due to the ‘newness’ of the faithful message.¹⁷² Perhaps this

¹⁷⁰ Again, this is not to suggest that all evangelization must be inherently risky as an act of disruption. However, regarding shifting secular paradigms, it is difficult to see how riskiness fails to be involved.
¹⁷¹ Alain Badiou: The Event, https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/alain-badiou-event/
¹⁷² This polarization of Romero was exemplified with his assassination while celebrating Mass as well as a lengthy deliberation over his canonization process by certain notables in the Church’s hierarchy In particular, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Part of this stems from the radical nature of Romero’s work and the worry that it might baptize any and all forms of liberation theology and ties with Marxist ideology and a progressive, Leftist Church. It is debated whether Romero could be properly defined as a "liberation theologian" of this nature. Even if it is
example provides a timely message for the Church's New Evangelization of today: i.e., the greater the need for the Holy Spirit to irrupt a respective ideological paradigm (secular or otherwise), the greater the risk and polarization on behalf of the leaders witnessing to it.

That said, it is important to note that the conditions of Western cultural secularism in the United States and Europe are not the same as El Salvador's conflict in the 1970s. The Church's forays into evangelistic risk will undoubtedly be constructed differently between the two periods. For example, today's enactment of *New / Evangelization* might suggest more of a consumeristic or social-status martyrdom than a physical one as in El Salvador. Or, it might be deemed 'less public' or 'newsworthy' by the world even if it is disruptive to a particular locale's consciousness (e.g., think how Larche communities disrupt current opinions over who is considered mentally handicapped).

That aside, the theoretical grounding for an evangelistic Event is very much similar between these two periods. Both desire a renewed calling for following the Gospel message—El Salvador with a "sharpened commitment" by the Church to social justice, and today's Western Church and its calling for a (re)evangelization of secular cultures previously defined as Christian. Each is called to birth a new truth into the modern context without disregarding the

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the case that he could fit into an established paradigm of liberation theology, it is doubtful that Romero would ever characterize himself as such. The other reason for the lengthy deliberation may have involved the political upheaval in the country of El Salvador after Romero's death. There may have been a sense of tact in being patient with a canonization process. See Joshua J. McElwee's "Francis Clears Way for Romero to be Canonized Next Year" in the *National Catholic Reporter* (March 7, 2018) at [https://www.nronline.org/news/vatican/francis-clears-way-romero-be-canonized-later-year-or-early-next](https://www.nronline.org/news/vatican/francis-clears-way-romero-be-canonized-later-year-or-early-next)
narrative of Catholic orthodoxy. Both call new saints devoted to holiness, prayer, sacraments, and sacred scripture. Thus, any display of New / Evangelization should recall how Romero never aimed at being an activist revolutionary—the secularist temptation of making ‘evangelization’ about the people instead of the Lord (“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slave for Jesus’ sake” - 2 Cor. 4:5).\textsuperscript{173} The radical kingdom practices flowing from Romero were therefore due to this personal encounter with the incarnate, Eucharistic God. The New / Evangelization must do the same. Its focus must be centered on the Christ-figure found in the Eucharist, conveyed in the Scriptures. Revolution by itself is never the telos, only the marker of the Holy Spirit’s work when enacted faithfully, peacefully.

Lastly, like the Event of the Holy Spirit in El Salvador, any New / Evangelization within (post)modernity must involve a degree of secular-ecclesial unsettlement. Romero’s subversive evangelization provided impetus to the El Salvadorian peasant’s cause; it galvanized diocesan churches (and the Church universal) to continue in the new crusade of social justice even after Romero’s assassination. Likewise, the New / Evangelization is called to be an evangelization unlike those assimilated into secular-ecclesial consciousness, thereby eliciting new responses by the surrounding public. Doing so provides the apocalyptic dimension of the Christ-figure: i.e., it inaugurates kingdom practices

\footnote{Paul Elie remarks that how Romero was initially chosen Arch-Bishop because of his moderate stance on the Bishop's Conference at Medellin Colombia in 1968. This changed after his good friend and fellow priest Rutilio Grande was shot and killed. See “What Oscar Romero's Canonization Says About Pope Francis” in The Atlantic (November 2018 issue) and at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/11/the-martyr-and-the-pope/570835/}
unseen and unprocessed by those who have already departed the Church’s doors due to the rise of contemporary secular-liberalism.

Oscar Romero's brazenness is a daunting endeavor even by today's standards. He reminds the Church's New Evangelization to trust the unbridled Holy Spirit—a Divine Being that irrupts Church complacency, oppressive political systems, and unchecked secularism—all as an *Event* of new evangelization. Such characterization epitomizes Romero's life. He stood against any passive evangelization or retreatant theology when the living Gospel was made to be "received and enfleshed." Participation in the Eucharistic Christ was, for him, a saving spiritual practice and an active (theo)political act of incarnation that refused to succumb to any wayward ideology seeking universalistic control.

This faithfulness is a beautiful directive—to become actively enfleshed by the Gospel. Without it, any evangelistic Event of the Church (*New / Evangelization*) will risk being thwarted within the modern-secular landscape, relegated to abstract dogmatic beliefs professed under the facade of new ardor. The New Evangelization should thus look to the figure of Romero: his fidelity to El Salvador and the Church serves as inspiration for modern evangelization in the western world. In fact, from a theological perspective, Romero's life and work—centered on the Christ-figure—transcends (disrupts) even that of Alain Badiou's Event. In various ways, it ruptures with Badiou's framework exactly where Badiou does not want to go—into the reality that any Event, any new birthing of

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*See for example Dennis, Golden, and Wright, *Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings*, p. 47.*
Truth, is always and everywhere an enactment of the Holy Spirit. It is here that we now turn.

**New / Evangelization as “Breaking” Badiou’s Event Consciousness**

In his book *Metapolitics*, Alain Badiou makes the following statement,

> “Since Plato, philosophy has stood for a rupture of opinion, and is meant to examine everything that is spontaneously considered as normal...Everything consensual is suspicious as far as the philosopher is concerned.”

It would be interesting to see how Badiou would respond if this statement were turned in on itself. How would Badiou's philosophy of Event, of this inherent need to rupture, not itself undergo the same predicament? Is it not setting up a new ‘universalism of rupture’ meant to be resurrected by something that exists beyond all rupture? And if the atheist Badiou ousts religion, theology, and the belief in God from the onset as a "determination of truth," then what would be more of a break than their return onto the modern-secular-philosophical sphere?

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*See Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (Versa Press: London, 2011) p. 78-79. See also Dr. Justin Clemens “Key Thinkers” presentation on Alain Badiou at the University of Melbourne (2009) found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RikLzWRsWk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RikLzWRsWk). Badiou is making this quote in reference to “democracy” in particular, but the point stands for all norms and conventions – a trademark of Badiou.
* See *Alain Badiou: A Graphic Guide*, loc. 251 Kindle Cloud Reader. Badiou believes that only art, love, math-science, and politics serve as truth determinants. It seems anything having to do with, say, God, can be thrown into the category of love, but it still seems as if “religion” is too notable of a truth not to be included.
Enter the *New* / Evangelization of the Catholic Church. As mentioned, the *New* / Evangelization can mimic much of what Badiou highlights with his understanding of Event—i.e., rupturing the consciousness of a locale, birthing a hidden truth (new kingdom practices), militant figures faithful to an Event, etc.—but without disregarding the meta-truth of Christian orthodoxy. Fidelity to Jesus Christ, true God and true man, becomes the grounding and source of any real Event in the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Church's New Evangelization breaks with Badiou's atheistic consciousness; it witnesses (evangelizes) to a different source underlying the world's 'resurrection' of new truths. The reality of God becomes the 'excess' left unsaid in Badiou's work.

Similarly, the New Evangelization should be suspicious of Badiou's ability to always provide a positive Event. Herein lies a significant criticism of Badiou's work by some of his opponents. Badiou's thought seems ill-equipped to decipher what constitutes a positive truth-Event as opposed to a deranged, false one. In other words, can Badiou navigate the many Event-like occurrences in history that have either "de-recognized" an entire people (i.e., Native American Peoples, African Genocide) or baptized a violent-political ideology (as in the Nazi German state)? These, too, can be potentially cast as 'new truths' that break social-political conventions—yet are somehow defined as "false Events" by Badiou. And there are seemingly multiple examples of "false Events" that, like Badiou's truth-Events, resist being "captured by the state of a situation."  

> See Andrew Robinson’s “Alain Badiou: After the Event” in *Ceasefire* (March 9, 2015) https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/alain-badiou-event-2/. Badiou doesn’t seem to have a solid answer. As Robinson says, “He (Badiou) also consistently assumes that Events are good.”
grounding in an absolute universal, however, Badiou seems lost to characterize precisely how Events are all positive truths within a particular situation.

In the context of the New Evangelization, the Lord’s grace necessitates any resurrection of ‘new truths’ onto a social-political scene. The further an Event (of New/ Evangelization) is decentered from the Eucharistic Christ the more it leads to the possibility of an anti-Event. Unlike Badiou who disregards any “overarching substantive horizon” for an Event, the Church maintains an “underlying process” within its Gospel narrative “which determines what is, or is not, an Event.” Thus, it does not shy away from evangelizing the universal God who allows any new universal perspectives (Events) to break through in a particular space. In fact, this evangelism is what constitutes salvation history as revealed in the Gospel—the very message the New /Evangelization attempts to witness to through fidelity to the Lord’s kingdom practices within secularity.

Here Badiou worries that Christianity (or any other ‘universal’) turns the Christ-event into a totalizing construct, especially when it becomes a codified whole without critique. In his thinking, Christian fidelity defends an (old) truth that remains in the status quo; it seeks to "totalize the actions of all bodies and

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* Indeed, the same kind of "distortion" can take place within the Church – sexual abuse of minors, torture of those whose beliefs are different, etc. However, the point is that the Church has a holy grounding, a faithful ideal brought forward through the revelation of the Christ-figure (and these abuses obviously can be called out as antithetical to the Gospel message). The question isn't so much whether or not the Church has any more or fewer deformations than the non-Church. Rather, the question is can an Event take place without some form of grounding in which to guide it?
* See John Milbank’s “The Return of Mediation” in Paul’s new Movement: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology, p. 215. Milbank writes Badiou “realizes, of course, that Christianity provides just such a possibility but seeks, perhaps incoherently, to confine its truth-Event to the full emergence of the very idea of a truth-event as such…”
* See Robinson’s “Alain Badiou: After the Event” in Ceasefire
merge truths into one truth.”  

But Christian movements such as the New Evangelization are a direct response to this type of unreflective, totalizing thinking. The entire purpose of the Catholic Church’s promotion of New Evangelization, for example, is to critique and expand past formulations of mission, faith, and witness in the spaces of western secularity. It is to bring Christ’s radiating newness, even rupture, into the world order. Quoting Archbishop Francis George, “Circumstances create challenges to principles; in different circumstances, one sees something in the principle of doctrine that was not seen before.”  

Christianity, then, was never supposed to be a totalizing, uncritical life of faith—quite the opposite. It is about seeing and responding to the Lord’s love in unexpected places and ways that have failed to be recognized before. It is a faithful and exhilarating story that, in the words of St. Augustine, is always ‘ever-ancient, ever-new.’  

Likewise, Badiou is not without his own degree of amorphous religiosity. According to Andrew Robinson, “Badiou elevates the experience of an Event into an almost religious experience.”  

One could, theoretically, put Badiou’s experience of an Event on par with unreflective Christian adherence, especially if it disregards theological critique. Of course, a meta-truth discourse does not by its nature reinforce the status quo—a point Badiou has a hard time fathoming. For example, the New / Evangelization is described here as a faithful rupture to

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See Alain Badiou: A Graphic Guide, loc. 591 Kindle Cloud reader
See Francis George’s “The Ecclesiology of Communion: From Jurisdiction to Relationship” in The New Evangelization: Faith, people, Context, and Practice, p. 84
See St. Augustine’s Confessions 10:27.
See Robinson’s “Alain Badiou: After the Event” in Ceasefire
specific ideological structures associated with unreflective secularity or ecclesial conventionality. The issue, then, is less about totalizing a universalizing whole than it is resurrecting something unpredictably new arising from the (Christian) universal itself. Such fidelity towards a new truth (Event) is what ultimately drives Badiou's thought. It is also what drives the Catholic Church's New Evangelization. The difference between the two is only where the newness originates.

And yet the differences in an Event's origination is critical. The New Evangelization holds to the Holy Spirit as the catalyst and source for any true Event in the modern world; i.e., it is the meta-Being that can never be fully captured or justified, always alluding universalisms apart from the Lord's grace. In this way, the Holy Spirit is the Divine gift to creation that is both infinitely subversive and infinitely creative (restorative). The Church's calling for a New Evangelization illustrates this very fact. Far from "totalizing the actions of all" a la Badiou, it seeks to unleash the "strong driving wind" of the Holy Spirit that escapes secularity's religious disenchantment in freedom (Acts 2:2). By its nature, the evangelistic movement holds to a Spirit that interrupts the secular and ecclesial spaces of the western outposts. This Holy Spirit always remains unconventional, yet at the same time, it maintains a universal presence in which to distinguish truth-Events (grace) from false-Events (sin).

If Badiou believes everything "consensual is suspicious," then the Church's New Evangelization might suggest everything "atheistic and secular" be considered in the same light. Such includes Badiou's atheistic-continental
philosophy (even if he proscribes St. Paul as the premier militant figure). While it is true Badiou can enlighten the world about the possibility of radicalizing Events, he appears to fall into the same unreflective secularity when negating anything tainted in a ‘universal’ Divine Being. The New Evangelization would question Badiou here by asking what imposes more of a universal, imperialistic demand on the popular consciousness of the western world—the narrative of orthodox Christianity or the discourses of contemporary secular-liberalism? Certainly, Badiou will argue against both with his formulation of an Event; however, as a purely atheistic and impersonal philosophy, it still carries the residue of underlying nihilistic secularism, one that views any Christian metaphysic as "strangely abstract and inconsequential" to the modern world's affairs.185

The New Evangelization wants to sway the secular world away from such impersonal metaphysics regardless of their ingenuity (even though, in the case of Badiou, retain some of his worthy insights). It questions whether such an overarching impersonality can ever form Events capable of rupturing the false ideologies and universals of today without attaching itself to the proper (Christian) metaphysics.186 Would it not merely instill a quasi-subjective election

186 For example, Badiou argues against identification politics (women, homosexuals, transgender, ecologists, etc.) as they are subsumed into the capitalistic market for commercial investment. Thus, the market capitalizes on their ventures so as to merely authorize new products or selling points. Identification is intimately connected with capital gain; the system perpetuates itself without any displacement in sight. “Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for it principle of movement to homogenize its space of action;
of impersonal truths, some more Event-like than others? And how much hope can be placed in an Event if it based in such an impersonal metaphysic?

Conversely, the evangelistic movement of the Church desires a renewed participation in the personal, concrete, incarnate Christ-figure and his ongoing kingdom of faithful rupture. Far from a justification for new Christian orthodoxy, it witnesses to the wild orthodoxy that continuously resurrects kingdom practices unknown to the world before an act of New / Evangelization occurs. Such evangelistic fervor is of the theological opinion that a meta-truth of the Godhead does not necessarily need to reinforce the status quo—on the contrary, it can be the very means of breaking it. And it is only through breaking that a new resurrection of faithfulness arises (truth), a point both Badiou and the New Evangelization have in common.

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identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market.” (Badiou, Saint Paul, p. 10-11). Theoretically, the New Evangelization can agree with this assessment. But overcoming it is another matter of debate. Is an overthrow of, say, capitalistic markets but another foray into violent discourse?
Conclusion:

The New / Evangelization as ‘Subversive’ Kingdom Practice

The premise of this work can be summarized in the following statement—the Catholic Church’s New Evangelization must necessitate a radically subversive novelty in which to “gift” the secular realm. This summation takes into account prior statements regarding what the New Evangelization encompasses, but pushes the Christological mission to include a possible apocalyptic dimension. Thus, it seeks to faithfully incorporate the themes of risk, rupture, and disruption towards the distorted ideologies of secularization that hold sway over western culture. Witnessing to the Christ-figure is to take part in these kingdom practices that, in the face of modern-liberal secularity, sometimes break with the consciousness of social-political normalcy.

To suggest these evangelistic subversions are a "gift" can appear backward—indeed, a strange gifting to rupture a consciousness to ignite another. However, in following the Christ-figure, such incarnational disruption becomes the birthing of joyful possibilities of grace not yet seen by those suffering from a loss of Christian identity. The New Evangelization serves to interrupt their secular discourse to (re)invite all into the body-of-Christ [for the Lord never gives up on calling all peoples, all nations, at all times]. The New Evangelization is therefore subversive only for the sake of extending the Lord's friendship. It is
never a ploy to get the Church undue fame, institutional accolades, or worse still, to be made into an ‘identity fad’ for social-capital consummation.\textsuperscript{187}

The above summation of subversive evangelism also challenges the Catholic Church. There should be great hesitancy in labeling all practices of evangelization "new," especially when they reinforce what has already assimilated into the secular mainstream's consciousness. These practices may be necessary for the Church, but this work argues that a holy breaking with evangelistic conventionality must, on some level, ensue in today's secular age because of faithfulness to the Christ-figure. Subsequently, to emulate Church missional practices that have gone on before (only with renewed lay person ardor), or to follow the faithful evangelism of other non-Catholic churches, is, by definition, to fall short of New Evangelization. Instead, this work proposes that an act of New / Evangelization occurs when adherence to the Christ-figure tears the fabric of both the church and secular order. In doing so, the formation of an entirely new encounter of the Lord is birthed through the Holy Spirit's tearing—a new vision of a "kingdom not of this world" is revealed in the modern context.

The phrasing “adherence to the Christ-figure” and “through the Holy Spirit” are imperative here. Partaking of this New / Evangelization must be

\textsuperscript{*} Interestingly, Alain Badiou argues against identification politics (women, homosexuals, transgender, ecologists, etc.) as they have been subsumed into the capitalistic market for commercial investment. Thus, the market capitalizes on their ventures so as to merely authorize new products or selling points. Identification is intimately connected with capital gain; the system perpetuates itself without any displacement in sight. “Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for it principle of movement to homogenize its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market.” (Badiou, \textit{Saint Paul}, p. 10-11). Theoretically, the New Evangelization could be in agreement with this assessment.
centered on a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. Such is a foundational component of the Church's New Evangelization; a safeguarding of orthodox belief and the direction of any evangelistic gaze (telos). However, the question arises as to what the Church's witness to the Christ-figure should look like within the secular paradigm. This work argues that, far from a soul-saving technicality or an end goal of numbers, the New Evangelization is the creation of distinctive kingdom practices done in faithfulness, soaked in Word and Eucharist. It may not be a new Gospel, but it is a new public manifestation of God's kingdom against secular captivity, a new relationship of peoples (life-together) basking in the Lord's love.

Similarly, any evangelistic rupture is merely the overflowing of the Holy Spirit—it is never “revolutionary” in the sense of it being a human social construction. The Church's evangelistic ruptures are more about 'seeing' and 'responding' to what the Holy Spirit is doing already and less about 'changing the world.' Granted, the question the Catholic Church must address in the western context is whether it has been open to the fullness of the Holy Spirit when evangelizing in the social-political sphere. Has it opened itself to the possibility of evangelistic risk by subverting harmful components of secularization with innovative kingdom practices? If, as Frederiek Depoortere remarks, "Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God and was looking forward to a decisive intervention of God which would bring about a new social-political order," then the New Evangelization must reflect on what this "intervention" entails for today.188

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To better frame the subversive intervention of New Evangelization, this work utilized the philosophical insights of Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou—radical continental thinkers that deploy Christianity symbiotically for means of social-political subversion, rupture, and newness. As Leftist atheists, a good portion of their discourse will be rejected from a Catholic theological perspective; however, in the context of capturing Christianity's significance of rupture, their insights carry great potential for the New Evangelization. In particular, both Zizek and Badiou highlight the disruptive components of cross and resurrection in a manner left unconsidered by the New Evangelization movement. To bypass these philosopher’s paradoxical intuitions would be a mistake for evangelism. Enacted faithfully, these intuitions could produce much harvest for the Church.

For example, Slavoj Zizek’s reading of “Christ’s cry of dereliction on the cross” can direct the Church to confront wayward secular-liberal ideologies, specifically those neutering Christian practices by policing their revolutionary implications in unreflective fashion. This is the very definition of a secularized "big Other"; i.e., a specific ideology that ‘permits' Christianity to remain within the western consciousness, albeit under a non-radicalizing rubric, one curtailed of revolutionary fervor by the secular paradigm itself. The ‘cross of Christ’ exposes these thwarting ideologies as the Christ-figure's crucifixion did against Rome—that is, it "crucifies" any overarching social-political construct negating the Gospel message or holding it at bay. Part of the role of the New Evangelization is to discover these neutralizing patterns through sustained prayer and sacramental participation. Only then can a real disruption of new
evangelization take place where it is not subsumed back into the secular system at hand.

Similarly, Alain Badiou’s characterization of an Event pushes the Church to consider breaking social and ecclesial consciousness through acts of New / Evangelization. These radical acts witness to a profound newness of the Holy Spirit at a particular juncture, which then provokes a response because of their fidelity to the Lord's kingdom. As epitomized by the fidelity of St. Oscar Romero, it reconstitutes the practice of the Gospel message without changing the message itself. Badiou further reminds those faithful to an Event (New / Evangelization) as undertaking an inherently risky enterprise: the resurrection of a new (Christian) truth onto the (secular) social-political scene is bound to cause pushback from many sides because of its novelty. In this way, the New Evangelization will need as much courage as it does zeal to spark new possibilities in today's missional field.

Granted, most in the New Evangelization field would agree that the "spark of new possibilities" are of central importance for the movement. Evangelization must provide some degree of novelty in secularity and faithful presence will undoubtedly be called for anew in an age of religious disenchantment. The issue, however, is what the spark entails. For many proponents of the New Evangelization, this means increased lay evangelization in ‘professing Jesus’, or a return to Biblical sources for the salvation of souls, or a joyfully open Church that

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Depootere states in *Badiou and Theology*, “If we raise the question of how the (Christian) passion for the new can be ‘saved’ in our post-revolutionary age, the work of Badiou is very promising.” P. 9
embraces the discarded other with genuine hospitality. These are noteworthy components on many levels—but in respect to sparking something resembling Badiou's *Event* or Zizek's *rupture*, they appear questionable at best. One wonders whether these serve as the basis of the New Evangelization movement.

This thesis argues differently. It calls for an enactment of radical kingdom practices, based on the Christ-figure, whose subversive implications rupture secular conventionality, disclosing communal possibilities not yet encountered by the western world. Its purpose is a holy inauguration of the Holy Spirit's excesses that cannot be contained by the secular world (regardless if there is a change or conversion in the individual/culture). While it is true the Church desires increased membership, working faithfully in prayer to pull those into the Eucharistic Christ, its *telos*, its ultimate end goal, is an embodied faithfulness to the Lord's kingdom forever breaking through in creation.

The formulation of new kingdom practices should be an outgrowth of this subversive faithfulness to share the "good news" when confronting the shortcomings of the secularization process. These practices will resist violent revolutionary fervor devoid of the Christ-figure. They will resist being domesticated of disruption and risk—either by a universal secularist paradigm or social-political commodification. And through the Holy Spirit, they can birth new potential for encountering the Divine—a sacred transgression of worldly ideology.

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* Badiou makes a similar point with the idea of the political and Event. See Alain Badiou: A Graphic Guide, loc. 506.
so that those in once Christianized countries can, once again, be confronted with salvation history anew.

As a way of a final push, this work will close by articulating possible seedbeds for New / Evangelization in the following five secular arenas (provided by the Diocese of Salina, Kansas): busyness, consumerism, violence-revenge, individualism, and entitlement. By no means exhaustive, these small groupings of questions can provide sparks that break with what the secular-ecclesial order has traditionally upheld regarding evangelical consciousness. The goal is not to give a set of conclusive acts of New / Evangelization (which, on some level, can only be assessed retrospectively). Rather, it is to show the “evangelical nonconformity” of kingdom practices vis-à-vis common ideologies associated with living in a secular age. That said, any movement of New Evangelization undertaken by the Church ultimately hopes for a new social possibility to arise without triumph, coercion, force, or manipulation—themes antithetical to Eucharistic participation and the Gospel message. The Church movement is therefore hopeful of a greater reconciliation over time, of its disciples "bearing fruit that will last" (John 15:16), because fidelity to the Christ-figure is an infinite wellspring of love irrupting onto all of creation.

See the Diocese of Salina’s “Examination of Conscience: The Five Wounds of Secularization” at [https://salinadiocese.org/new-evangelization/documents/1053-five-wounds-examination-of-conscience-simple-text/file](https://salinadiocese.org/new-evangelization/documents/1053-five-wounds-examination-of-conscience-simple-text/file). Although the "five wounds" are used here, the implementation of what the New Evangelization is different from what has been provided by the Diocese. Again, their insights are valuable and worthy of consideration. However, they will be pushed further to consider what an actual break with these five wounds might look like in the material order.

Words are taken from Bryan Stone's *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, Loc. 6619 Kindle Cloud Reader
The following is an “examination of rupture conscience” that may potentially lead to the enactment of innovative kingdom practices within secularity.

Understandably, this probing is, in many ways, culturally and socially limited. What may be an appropriate question for a certain social-economic, geographic, or racial-ethnic background may not be for another. However, an act of *New / Evangelization* is supposed to be limited, set to a specific locale and time. Each parish and/or Diocese can think through what subversive kingdom practices mean for their specific area based on example questions below. The beauty of the Lord’s work is that it breaks into any location and space—all are called to participate in the same beauty and truth, albeit in distinctive ways.

1. **Busyness:** “*Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted and wait for the Lord.*” (Ps 27:14) Is it time for the Church to articulate practices for families in which to "push back" the persistent ideologies leading to over busyness? What kingdom practices of the Lord disrupt busyness, but with a joyful invitation and not tribal judgment? What would it entail for Catholic parents to be okay with their children having lower GPAs if homework overtakes their familial livelihoods in the Church? What practices of the Church would compensate to relieve adolescent anxiety? Are Catholic parochial institutions formulating new educational practices that do not “busy” students in the same manner as non-Catholic education might? How should the Church “crucify” the idea of having its

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youth participants excel in sports, academics, or clubs if it separates families by the constant travel, unnecessary expenses, or pulled from Eucharistic participation? How should the Church prepare income earners (parents or otherwise) to forgo promotions when an increase in pay is offset by lack of time with family and Church community? How should the Church body ease people into Sabbath where ‘time off’ before, during, and after liturgy is contagious, refreshing, a holy holiday? What Christian practices would need to occur so that Church members/families form "non-busy communities" in which to share genuine ‘life together’ (outside of just Eucharist)?

2. Consumerism: “You cannot serve both God and mammon.” (Mt 6:24) What kingdom practices should be formed and sustained to renounce excessive consumption? Should parish families purchase new household items, infant equipment, or child clothing if other parish families have them in good condition? Should adolescent Church members refrain from accepting money for babysitting parish families in need (especially if it is only spending cash)? How might family "pot luck" meals within the parish offset the costs of eating out in order to share with the Church community? What subversive practices are called for to transcend rampant purchasing of gifts? How would these proliferate new positive gifts within the Church body, especially during times as “Black Friday” or the “Holiday season?” Are Catholic families dictated more by a holiday calendar of consumption or a liturgical calendar of grace—and how might the ladder lifestyle reconstitute "de-consumption"? How can the Church form a genuine encounter with Christ's love that negates the temptations associated with
consumeristic practices? What does the graffiti artist tell us about freedom from corporate advertising as well as what we look at (one is subversive to corporate messaging, the other, generally, has more capital in which to spread a consumeristic message)? Can sustained practices of charity and sacramental worship (self-gifts) void a consumeristic urge (me-gifts)? How can minimalizing our "things" make us vulnerable and poorer (in spirit and possessions)?

3. Violence / Revenge: “Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as the Lord has forgiven you.” (Mt 4:32) What formative practices are given by the Church that guides life-giving speech against those we fundamentally disagree with (politically or otherwise), be it behind closed doors, in the public sphere, or online? How does the Church navigate the void of a "hermeneutics of suspicion" toward all other discourses, peoples, and viewpoints? How does the Church make habitual a non-dominatable, non-triumphalist evangelism while standing firm to her cherished beliefs? Are there peaceful practices of the Church, centered on the Christ-figure, that are capable of transcending a polarized ‘Just War / Pacifistic' stance, but need discovering? How might these practices rupture common perceptions of war and military enforcement held by the nation-state? What are the concrete practices of forgiveness when unjust words or a slight of human dignity imposes itself on the Church? Can the Church rupture any generalized perception of an ontology of violence, be it in film, art, poem, music, etc. with counter (artistic) practices saturated in a peaceful ontology of the Lord?
4. Individualism: “The Lord made us; we belong to Him.” (Ps 100:3) What constitutes a "healthy ambition" within the Church's parameters? Do our individualistic pursuits (academic, professional, etc.) blend with bettering the Church's community, with our families, and with the Lord? Can certain forms of excellence be in direct contradiction to the Gospel message? Should the Church indirectly negate the role of social media by continued presence amongst its bodily-incarnate fellowship? Does a Church's communal wellbeing depend on how long a ‘sign-of-peace' occurs within its liturgy? Should the idea of ministries in the Church be reexamined—perhaps even dismissed—when it becomes isolationist, sectored off from other members of the Church or other ministries? Does our Christian charity reinforce a one-way relationship, devoid of ongoing, sustained friendship with the other? Has Christian charity been neutered of sacrificial 'life together' and replaced with mandatory service hours, positive public imaging, distant /general service, or individual-parish recognition? What are the channels for asking for physical, spiritual, emotional assistance within a Church community? What does it say about the state of a parish if a person never partakes of assistance in the Church by relying on a faith community centered on the Eucharist? Are our national political outcomes more important than the day-to-day outcomes and support of our local parish congregations (both spiritually and materially)?

5. Entitlement: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23) Are we capable of staying in the Church family even when we don't get our way? What forms of ecclesial or
political protest border on unhealthy narcissism as opposed to life-giving, albeit bold, speech? Should the Church cultivate a new understanding of 'profane' words by those in the Catholic faith, now epitomized in "best, greatest, legend, g.o.a.t, etc."? What would it take for the Church's young people to be presented with a (selfless) message that it is "okay to be forgotten by the world" since they were never called to be the future apart from Christ—and, more importantly, that the Lord and one's family are the main motivators of healthy and holy recognition? Does the Church rigorously pursue change (of cultures, individuals, ideological structures, hearts, etc.) without patience, prayer, and a sacramental centering in the Lord?
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