



*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

## REFLECTIONS ON TWO FAITH PILLARS – GIFT AND TRANSFORMATION

### Multiple Church Teachings Explain How Fully Appreciating God’s “GIFTS” Will Lead To “TRANSFORMATIONS”

This document covers the many references to **GIFT** and **TRANSFORMATION** throughout Church teachings as two foundational and interrelated faith pillars, which, unfortunately, seldom receive attention or consideration. The recurring nature of these messages affirms their combined merit as concise, fundamental guidance for our lives.

Multiple Church teachings advocate our need to fully appreciate all the wonderful **GIFTS** God has blessed us with (life itself, all we need to survive, love, joy, family, our faith, our Church, Christ’s real Presence in our lives); and then in humble appreciation of all God’s loving provisions, to allow ourselves to be **TRANSFORMED** to conform to God’s self-less and loving character and to His perfect plan and will for our lives; and then to go forth following His plan for us to **TRANSFORM** the world in Christ-like charity.

The recurring references to **GIFT** and **TRANSFORMATION** would also suggest that more direct conveyance of these two interrelated, foundational and faith-enriching concepts might be beneficial and warranted for each of us -- personally and for the world at large. This could also lead to a movement, encouraging and equipping the faithful to live a more fervent, fruitful faith, consistent with the Parable of the Sower, producing a harvest 30, 60 or 100-fold (MT 13: 3-23).

A conclusion that could also be drawn from this teaching: **What is the Church but a Global Institute For Transformation® (a GIFT).**

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Church Teachings Assert That Appreciating God’s GIFTS Leads To Transformation	2
The GIFT of Faith Leads To Transformation	5
The Encyclical, <i>Light Of Faith</i>	7
The Encyclical, <i>Evangelii-Gaudium</i>	10
The Encyclical, <i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>	14
Apostolic Exhortation, <i>GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE</i> , Of The Holy Father Francis On The Call To Holiness In Today’s World”	19
Excerpts from Cardinal Mahony’s Book, “To Reconcile Our People: Our Ministry And Mission”	23
Excerpts from Carl Anderson’s Book, “A Civilization of Love... What Every Catholic Can Do To Transform Our World”	26
Reinforcing Artwork	29
Contact Information	31

Note: insights and excerpts highlight key findings from thousands of pages of materials in a comparatively brief compendium.



392 Crystal Lake Road, Tolland, CT 06084 402-212-7973 [www.institutefortransformation.org](http://www.institutefortransformation.org)



*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

## **CHURCH TEACHINGS ASSERT THAT APPRECIATING GOD'S "GIFTS" LEADS TO "TRANSFORMATION"**

Multiple Church teachings advocate our need to fully appreciate all the wonderful **GIFTS** God has blessed us with; and then in humble appreciation, to allow ourselves to be **TRANSFORMED**; and then to go forth to **TRANSFORM** the world in Christ-like charity. **GIFT** and **TRANSFORMATION** are two foundational and interrelated faith pillars expressed in Church teaching:

### 1) Lumen Fidei:

***"Faith is God's free gift... Faith consists in the willingness to let ourselves be constantly transformed and renewed by God's call. Christian faith is thus faith in a perfect love, in its decisive power, in its ability to transform the world... Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts."***

### 2) The Synod on the New Evangelization notes Christians must be witnesses to the transforming power of the Gospel message:

***"A new evangelization means that the Church must convincingly sustain her efforts at uniting all Christians in a common witness to the world of the prophetic and 'transforming power' of the Gospel message." ...the Gospel, a gift of salvation meant for every person, initiates us into a process of transformation and participation in the life of God, who renews us in the present moment. Every person has the right to hear the Gospel of God to humanity, which is Jesus Christ. Like the Samaritan woman at the well, humanity today needs to hear the words of Jesus: "If you knew the gift of God." They must allow themselves to be guided by his Spirit so that they can newly experience the gift of communion with the Father which is theirs in Jesus Christ, and, in turn, offer to others this same experience as the most precious gift that can be possessed. Through the new evangelization, the Church seeks to insert the very original and specific character of her teachings into today's world and everyday discussion. She wants to be the place where God can be experienced even now, and where, under the guidance of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, we allow ourselves to be transformed by the gift of faith.***

### 3) The Encyclical, Gaudete Et Exultate:

***"We need to acknowledge jubilantly that our life is essentially a gift... Only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed... charity alone makes growth in the life of grace possible, for 'if I do not have love, I am nothing'.... share in the life of those most in need... configure ourselves to Jesus... remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens... holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full. If we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged: 'I was hungry and you gave me food...'"***

### 4) The Encyclical, Evangelii-Gaudium:

**The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him. He sends his Spirit into our hearts to make us his children, transforming us and enabling us to respond to his love by our lives.** The Church is sent by Jesus Christ as the sacrament of the salvation offered by God. Through her evangelizing activity, she cooperates as an instrument of that divine grace which works unceasingly and inscrutably...

Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God... **Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society.**

*The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity.. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony. Evangelization joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church.*

*...The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church... Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord's gift, it also bears fruit... Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it... Each portion of the people of God, by translating the gift of God into its own life and in accordance with its own genius, bears witness to the faith it has received and enriches it with new and eloquent expressions..."*

Whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel...

Spiritual reading: There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call lectio divina. It consists of reading God's word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us.

On the other hand this process of response and growth is always preceded by God's gift, since the Lord first says: "Baptize them in the name..." ( Mt 28:19). The Father's free gift which makes us his sons and daughters, and the priority of the gift of his grace (cf. Eph 2:8-9; 1 Cor 4:7), enable that constant sanctification which pleases God and gives him glory. In this way, we allow ourselves to be transformed in Christ through a life lived "according to the Spirit" ( Rom 8:5).

"Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" ( Rom 10:17...The memory of the faithful... should overflow with the wondrous things done by God. Their hearts, growing in hope from the joyful and practical exercise of the love which they have received, will sense that each word of Scripture is a gift before it is a demand.

Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.

#### 5) The Encyclical, Evangelii Nuntiandi:

Evangelization will also always contain - as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism - a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.

As the kernel and center of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and of being given over to Him.

Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new." But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change...

Strata of humanity which are transformed: 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.

Christ also carries out this proclamation by innumerable signs, which amaze the crowds and at the same time draw them to Him in order to see Him, listen to Him and allow themselves to be transformed by Him.

...An adherence to the truths which the Lord in His mercy has revealed; still more, an adherence to a program of life - a life henceforth transformed - which He proposes. In a word, adherence to the kingdom, that is to say, to the "new world," to the new state of things, to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the Gospel inaugurates... Thus those whose life has been transformed enter a community which is itself a sign of transformation, a sign of newness of life: it is the Church, the visible sacrament of salvation.

6) Pope Benedict XVI at World Youth Day expressed:

*"In the end, life is not about accumulation. It is much more than success. To be truly alive is to be transformed from within, open to the energy of God's love. In accepting the power of the Holy Spirit you too can transform your families, communities and nations."*

7) The Encyclical Caritas In Veritate asserts that we need a shift in mentality toward gratuitousness and the logic of GIFT:

*"It is the primordial truth of God's love, grace bestowed upon us, that opens our lives to gift and makes it possible to hope for a 'development of the whole man and of all men', to hope for progress 'from less human conditions to those which are more human'. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles... Economic activity... needs to be directed towards the pursuit of the common good... in commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of GIFT as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity. Economic life... needs works redolent of the spirit of gift... without gratuitousness, there can be no justice... to defeat underdevelopment, action is required... on forms of economic activity marked by quotas of gratuitousness and communion... market and politics need individuals who are open to reciprocal gift."*

8) Populorum Progressio:

*"Finally and above all, there is faith—God's gift to men of good will—and our loving unity in Christ, who calls all men to share God's life as sons of the living God, the Father of all men... Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: "You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich... In the developing nations and in other countries lay people must consider it their task to improve the temporal order. ...the laity have the duty of using their own initiative and taking action in this area—without waiting passively for directives and precepts from others. They must try to infuse a Christian spirit into people's mental outlook and daily behavior, into the laws and structures of the civil community. Changes must be made; present conditions must be improved. And the transformations must be permeated with the spirit of the Gospel. We especially urge Catholic men (people) living in developed nations to offer their skills and earnest assistance to public and private organizations, both civil and religious, working to solve the problems of developing nations."*

9) Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation – Christus Vivit – of the Holy Father Francis

*"What does it mean to live the years of our youth in the transforming light of the Gospel? We need to raise this question, because youth, more than a source of pride, is a gift of God: 'to be young is a grace, a blessing'.*

*It is a gift that we can squander meaninglessly, or receive with gratitude and live to the full... Our world is filled with beauty! How can we look down upon God's many gifts?...*

*Far from obsessively seeking new pleasures, which would keep us from making the most of the present moment, we are asked to open our eyes and take a moment to experience fully and with gratitude every one of life's little gifts. ... living the present to the full, spending our energies on good things, cultivating fraternity, following Jesus and making the most of life's little joys as gifts of God's love... rejoicing in the gifts the Creator gives us each day... life is a gift... Christian service represents a unique opportunity for growth and openness to God's gifts of faith and charity. The Lord calls us to share in his work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the gifts we have received... Of course, you are for God. But he has decided that you should also be for others, and he has given you many qualities, inclinations, gifts and charisms that are not for you, but to share with those around you... let ourselves be transformed by Christ... The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive. He is the Christ, risen from the dead, filled with supernatural life and energy, and robed in boundless light.*

*The young want to be protagonists of change. Please, do not leave it to others to be protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future! Through you, the future enters into the world. I ask you also to be protagonists of this transformation. You are the ones who hold the key to the future!*

Continue to fight apathy and to offer a Christian response to the social and political troubles emerging in different parts of the world. I ask you to build the future, to work for a better world.

**All of this has its living source in the Eucharist, in which our bread and our wine are transformed to grant us eternal life... being an apostle does not mean wearing a lapel pin; it is not about speaking about the truth but living it, embodying it, being transformed in Christ.** Young people face immense and difficult challenges. With faith in the risen Lord, they can confront them with creativity and hope, ever ready to be of service, like the servants at the wedding feast, who unknowingly cooperated in Jesus' first miracle. They did nothing more than follow the order of his Mother: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). Mercy, creativity and hope make life grow.

#### 10) Pope Francis Asserts That GIFT Is Followed By Obedience, And That Christ's GIFT of Communion Will TRANSFORM Us.:

God is not extraneous: he is *your* God. This illuminates the entire Decalogue and also reveals the secret of Christian action, because it is the very same attitude of Jesus, who says: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (Jn 15:9). Christ is loved by the Father, and he loves us with that love ***"God never asks without giving first. Never. First He saves, first He gives, then He asks. This is our Father, our good God."***

Christ is the beloved of the Father and loves us with that love. He does not start from Himself, but from the Father. Often our works fail because we start out from ourselves and not from gratitude.

***Christian life is first and foremost a freely given response to a generous Father.*** Christians who follow only their "duties" complain of not having a personal experience with that God Who is "ours". I must do this, this and this... Only duties. But something is missing! What is the foundation of this duty? ***The foundation of this duty is the love of God the Father, Who first gives, then commands.*** To place the law before the relationship does not help the path of faith. How can a young person to wish to be Christian, if we start out from obligations, commitments, consistency and not from liberation? But to be Christian is a journey of liberation! The commandments free you from your selfishness, and they free you because there is the love of God that carries you forward.

How many beautiful things has God done for me? And this is God's liberation. God does many beautiful things and frees us. God has not called us to life to remain oppressed, but to be free and to ***live in gratitude, obeying with joy He Who has given us so much, infinitely more than what we can give to Him. This is beautiful. May God always be blessed for all that He has done, that He does and will do in us!***

**"Every time we take (the gift of) Communion, we resemble Jesus more, increasingly being transformed in Jesus and stripping away one's selfishness by uniting oneself closer with Christ... Just as the bread and wine are turned into the real body and blood of Christ, so too are those who receive the gifts, transformed into 'a living Eucharist,' becoming 'body of Christ.' We become what we receive."**

**"The Eucharist is Jesus who gives himself entirely to us. To nourish ourselves with him and abide in him through Holy Communion, if we do it with faith, transforms our life into a gift to God and to our brothers."**

#### 11. Year of Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, and Indigenous Peoples, 2020 Philippines:

***"Everyone has needs but everyone also has a gift. Your gift is the response to the needs of the others. We don't only ask who is my neighbor, we also ask can I be a neighbor to others,"*** said Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle.

***"We all have to admit before God that we are still divided in many ways. Division is not a gift from God."*** Rufino Regie A. Pamposa said.





## Transforming *hearts, lives & communities*

*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

### The GIFT of Faith Leads To TRANSFORMATION

Holy Scripture encourages appreciation for the gifts we receive from God our creator:

- Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. (James 1:17)
- "If you knew the Gift of God... he would have given you living water... welling up to eternal life." (John 4:10)
- For it is by grace you have been saved...it is the gift of God. Ephesians (2:8-10)
- But eagerly desire the greater gifts... the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:13)
- Fan into flame the Gift of God. (2 Timothy 1:6)
- Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. (1 Peter 4:10)
- I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. (Ephesians 3:7)

Holy Scripture encourages our transformation:

- All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18)
- Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. (Rom 12: 2)

Pope Francis has repeatedly encouraged Catholics to pursue opportunities to transform our world:

- "With Christ we can transform ourselves and the world."
- "God is even now making all things new; the Holy Spirit is truly transforming us, and through us, he also wants to transform the world in which we live."
- The fullness of grace can transform the human heart and enable it to do something so great as to change the course of human history... Jesus gives us this courage! With him we can do great things... Commit yourselves to great ideals, to the most important things. We Christians were not chosen by the Lord for little things; push onwards toward the highest principles. Stake your lives on noble ideals...Let us ask the Lord to make us ever more aware of his mercy at work in our lives and ever more effective in testifying to its transforming power in our world...Each of us, by practicing charity, mercy and forgiveness, can be a sign of the power of God's love to transform hearts and to bring reconciliation and peace."

Pope Benedict advocated collaborating with God to transform the world at the Seventh World Meeting of Families:

- "In the Book of Genesis, God entrusts his creation to the human couple for them to guard it, cultivate it, and direct it according to his plan (cf. 1:27-28; 2:15). In this indication of Sacred Scripture we may recognize the task of man and woman to collaborate with God in the process of transforming the world through work, science and technology."

USCCB repeatedly asserts that we're called to transform the world:

- The USCCB "Document on the Laity; Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord" asserts:
  - "All of the baptized are called to work toward the transformation of the world."
  - "All of the faithful are called in various ways to share in the Church's mission of announcing the reign of God and transforming the world through the light of Christ."
- CSJ teaching in the USCCB document Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus calls us to:
  - "Act" (on an issue or need)
  - "Reflect"(on the root cause)
  - "Transform" (the root cause via pursuing innovative solutions)

In his book "Rediscover Catholicism," lay leader Matthew Kelly emphasizes the need to live transformative lives:

- "The essence of Catholicism is dynamic transformation. You cannot become more like Jesus Christ and at the same time, stay the way you are. To be Catholic means to striving to live the Gospel, to be striving to be more like Jesus Christ. It is this dynamic approach to transformation that animates the human person – physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually – and allows us to experience life to the fullest..."
- We have become too comfortably a part of the modern secular culture, and this comfort has resulted in a dangerous complacency toward the life-giving words of the Gospel. Too often, we listen to these words but do not allow them to penetrate our hearts and transform our lives."



# Transforming *hearts, lives & communities*

*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

## **The Encyclical, Light Of Faith, Highlights Two Foundational And Interrelated Tenets Of Our Faith --“Gift” And “Transformation” -- And Encourages Us To Let Our Light Shine**

The light of Faith: this is how the Church’s tradition speaks of the great gift brought by Jesus. In John’s Gospel, Christ says of himself: “*I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness*” (Jn 12:46). Saint Paul uses the same image: “*God who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts*” (2 Cor 4:6).

**Faith is God’s free gift**, which calls for humility and the courage to trust and to entrust; it enables us to see the luminous path leading to the encounter of God and humanity: the history of salvation.

**Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift**, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time.

**Faith consists in the willingness to let ourselves be constantly transformed and renewed by God’s call.**

Christian faith is thus faith in a perfect love, in its decisive power, in its ability to transform the world...

God’s light comes to us through the account of his self-revelation, and thus becomes capable of illuminating our passage through time by recalling his gifts and demonstrating how he fulfils his promises.

In God’s gift of faith, a supernatural infused virtue, we realize that a great love has been offered us, a good word has been spoken to us, and that when we welcome that word, Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, the Holy Spirit transforms us, lights up our way to the future and enables us joyfully to advance along that way on wings of hope.

Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfillment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us.

The light of faith: this is how the Church’s Tradition speaks of the great gift brought by Jesus.

Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts...

**The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift** that affirms life and sustains it ... Only by being open to and acknowledging this gift can we be transformed, experience salvation and bear good fruit. Salvation by faith means recognizing the primacy of God’s gift. As Saint Paul puts it: “*By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*” (Eph 2:8)...

Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us...

Christ came down to earth and rose from the dead; by his incarnation and resurrection, the Son of God embraced the whole of human life and history, and now dwells in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Faith knows that God has drawn close to us, that Christ has been given to us as a great gift which inwardly transforms us, dwells within us and thus bestows on us the light that illumines the origin and the end of life.

Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts to faith...

"One believes with the heart" (Rom 10:10). In the Bible, the heart is the core of the human person, where all his or her different dimensions intersect: body and spirit, interiority and openness to the world and to others, intellect, will and affectivity. If the heart is capable of holding all these dimensions together, it is because it is where we become open to truth and love, where we let them touch us and deeply transform us. Faith transforms the whole person precisely to the extent that he or she becomes open to love.

Through this blending of faith and love we come to see the kind of knowledge which faith entails, its power to convince and its ability to illumine our steps. Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment. Faith's understanding is born when we receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enables us to see reality with new eyes.

Faith becomes operative in the Christian on the basis of the gift received, the love which attracts our hearts to Christ (Gal 5:6)... For those who have been transformed in this way, a new way of seeing opens up, faith becomes light for their eyes...

At the centre of our faith is the confession of Jesus, the Son of God, born of a woman, who brings us, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to adoption as sons and daughters (Gal 4:4).

By his taking flesh and coming among us, Jesus has touched us, and through the sacraments he continues to touch us even today; transforming our hearts, he unceasingly enables us to acknowledge and acclaim him as the Son of God.

On the basis of this sharing in Jesus' way of seeing things, Saint Paul has left us a description of the life of faith. In accepting the gift of faith, believers become a new creation; they receive a new being; as God's children, they are now "sons in the Son". The phrase "Abba, Father", so characteristic of Jesus' own experience, now becomes the core of the Christian experience (cf. Rom 8:15). The life of faith, as a filial existence, is the acknowledgment of a primordial and radical gift which upholds our lives. We see this clearly in Saint Paul's question to the Corinthians: "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7).

Yet it is precisely in contemplating Jesus' death that faith grows stronger and receives a dazzling light; then it is revealed as faith in Christ's steadfast love for us, a love capable of embracing death to bring us salvation. This love, which did not recoil before death in order to show its depth, is something I can believe in; Christ's total self-gift overcomes every suspicion and enables me to entrust myself to him completely.

Those who have opened their hearts to God's love, heard his voice and received his light, cannot keep this gift to themselves.

Since faith is hearing and seeing, it is also handed on as word and light. Addressing the Corinthians, Saint Paul used these two very images. On the one hand he says: "But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture – 'I believed, and so I spoke' – we also believe, and so we speak" (2 Cor 4:13). The word, once accepted, becomes a response, a confession of faith, which spreads to others and invites them to believe. Paul also uses the image of light: "All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image." (2 Cor 3:18).

Once we discover the full light of Christ's love, we realize that each of the loves in our own lives had always contained a ray of that light, and we understand its ultimate destination. That fact that our human loves contain that ray of light also helps us to see how all love is meant to share in the complete self-gift of the Son of God for our sake.

The Church never takes faith for granted but knows that this gift of God needs to be nourished and reinforced so that it can continue to guide her pilgrim way.

Those who are baptized are set in a new context, entrusted to a new environment, a new and shared way of acting, in the Church. Baptism makes us see, then, that faith is not the achievement of isolated individuals; it is not an act which someone can perform on his own, but rather something which must be received by entering into the ecclesial communion which transmits God's gift. No one baptizes himself, just as no one comes into the world by himself. Baptism is something we receive.



The structure of baptism, then, demonstrates the critical importance of cooperation between Church and family in passing on the faith. Parents are called, as Saint Augustine once said, not only to bring children into the world but also to bring them to God, so that **through baptism they can be reborn as children of God and receive the gift of faith.** Thus, along with life, children are given a fundamental orientation and assured of a good future; this orientation will be further strengthened in the sacrament of Confirmation with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

**God who, in giving us his Son, revealed fully the mystery of his Name, now bestows upon the baptized a new filial identity.** This is clearly seen in the act of baptism itself: immersion in water. Water is at once a symbol of death, **inviting us to pass through self-conversion to a new and greater identity,** and a symbol of life, of a womb in which we are reborn by following Christ in his new life... **Christ's work penetrates the depths of our being and transforms us radically,** making us adopted children of God and sharers in the divine nature. It thus modifies all our relationships, our place in this world and in the universe, and opens them to God's own life of communion.

This change which takes place in baptism helps us to appreciate the singular importance of the catechumenate — whereby growing numbers of adults, even in societies with ancient Christian roots, now approach the sacrament of baptism — for the new evangelization. It is the road of preparation for baptism, **for the transformation of our whole life in Christ.**

The sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the Eucharist. **The Eucharist is a precious nourishment for faith: an encounter with Christ truly present in the supreme act of his love, the life-giving gift of himself...**

**We can say that in the creed believers are invited to enter into the mystery which they profess and to be transformed by it... He or she cannot truthfully recite the words of the creed without being changed...**

The Decalogue (**10 Commandments**) appears as the path of gratitude, the response of love, made possible because **in faith we are receptive to the experience of God's transforming love for us.**

Finally, faith is one because it is shared by the whole Church, which is one body and one Spirit. In the communion of the one subject which is the Church, we receive a common gaze. By professing the same faith, we stand firm on the same rock, **we are transformed by the same Spirit of love,** we radiate one light and we have a single insight into reality.

As a service to the unity of faith and its integral transmission, **the Lord gave his Church the gift of apostolic succession.** Through this means, the continuity of the Church's memory is ensured and certain access can be had to the wellspring from which faith flows.

"The obedience of faith (Rom 16:26; compare Rom 1:5, 2 Cor 10:5-6) must be our response to the God who reveals. By faith one freely submits oneself entirely to God making the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and willingly assenting to the revelation given by God. **For this faith to be accorded, we need the grace of God, anticipating it and assisting it, as well as the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, and opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth. The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that revelation may be more and more deeply understood.**" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 5).

In the fullness of time, God's word was spoken to Mary and she received that word into her heart, her entire being, so that in her womb it could take flesh and be born as light for humanity... In the Mother of Jesus, faith demonstrated its fruitfulness; when our own spiritual lives bear fruit, we become filled with joy, which is the clearest sign of faith's grandeur. In her own life Mary completed the pilgrimage of faith, following in the footsteps of her Son. **In her the faith journey of the Old Testament was thus taken up into the following of Christ, transformed by him and entering into the gaze of the incarnate Son of God.**

**Faith also helps us to devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted;** it teaches us to create just forms of government, in the realization that authority comes from God and is meant for the service of the common good.



*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

## **The Encyclical, Evangelii-Gaudium**

**The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift.** God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him. **He sends his Spirit into our hearts to make us his children, transforming us and enabling us to respond to his love by our lives.** The Church is sent by Jesus Christ as the sacrament of the salvation offered by God. Through her evangelizing activity, she cooperates as an instrument of that divine grace which works unceasingly and inscrutably...

Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. ***Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society.*** The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge.

***When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony. Evangelization joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church.***

***...The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church... Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord's gift, it also bears fruit... Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it... Each portion of the people of God, by translating the gift of God into its own life and in accordance with its own genius, bears witness to the faith it has received and enriches it with new and eloquent expressions..."***

Whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel...

Spiritual reading: There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call lectio divina . It consists of reading God's word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us.

The Lord's missionary mandate includes a call to growth in faith: "Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you" ( Mt 28:20). Hence it is clear that that the first proclamation also calls for ongoing formation and maturation. Evangelization aims at a process of growth which entails taking seriously each person and God's plan for his or her life. All of us need to grow in Christ. Evangelization should stimulate a desire for this growth, so that each of us can say wholeheartedly: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" ( Gal 2:20).

It would not be right to see this call to growth exclusively or primarily in terms of doctrinal formation. It has to do with “observing” all that the Lord has shown us as the way of responding to his love. Along with the virtues, this means above all the new commandment, the first and the greatest of the commandments, and the one that best identifies us as Christ’s disciples: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” ( Jn 15:12).

Clearly, whenever the New Testament authors want to present the heart of the Christian moral message, they present the essential requirement of love for one’s neighbour: “The one who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the whole law... therefore love of neighbour is the fulfilling of the law” ( Rom 13:8, 10).

These are the words of Saint Paul, for whom the commandment of love not only sums up the law but constitutes its very heart and purpose: “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself’” ( Gal 5:14).

To his communities Paul presents the Christian life as a journey of growth in love: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all” ( 1 Th 3:12). Saint James likewise exhorts Christians to fulfil “the royal law according to the Scripture: You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (2:8), in order not to fall short of any commandment.

**On the other hand this process of response and growth is always preceded by God’s gift, since the Lord first says: “Baptize them in the name...” ( Mt 28:19). The Father’s free gift which makes us his sons and daughters, and the priority of the gift of his grace (cf. Eph 2:8-9; 1 Cor 4:7), enable that constant sanctification which pleases God and gives him glory. In this way, we allow ourselves to be transformed in Christ through a life lived “according to the Spirit” ( Rom 8:5).**

**“Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” ( Rom 10:17...The memory of the faithful... should overflow with the wondrous things done by God. Their hearts, growing in hope from the joyful and practical exercise of the love which they have received, will sense that each word of Scripture is a gift before it is a demand.**

From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. **Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God’s love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.**

This inseparable bond between our acceptance of the message of salvation and genuine fraternal love appears in several scriptural texts which we would do well to meditate upon, in order to appreciate all their consequences. The message is one which we often take for granted, and can repeat almost mechanically, without necessarily ensuring that it has a real effect on our lives and in our communities.

How dangerous and harmful this is, for it makes us lose our amazement, our excitement and our zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice! God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: “As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me” ( Mt 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: “The measure you give will be the measure you get” ( Mt 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” ( Lk 6:36-38).

**What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of “going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters” as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift.** For this reason, “the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being”. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes.

**“The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might”. [153] In this context we can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” ( Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.**

**The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.**

Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property. **The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good;** for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them.

**These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual.**

Some people do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. They think: "Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won't see any significant result?" This attitude makes it impossible to be a missionary. It is only a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness. It is a self-destructive attitude, for "man cannot live without hope: life would become meaningless and unbearable".[211] If we think that things are not going to change, we need to recall that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ truly lives. Put another way, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). The Gospel tells us that when the first disciples went forth to preach, "the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message" (Mk 16:20). The same thing happens today. We are invited to discover this, to experience it. Christ, risen and glorified, is the wellspring of our hope, and he will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us.

Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. **Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history.**

Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.

Faith also means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity.

Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper, which escapes all measurement. **It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit.**

The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. **Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time.**

Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: **"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). This was Jesus' heartfelt prayer to the Father: "That they may all be one... in us... so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).** Beware of the temptation of jealousy! We are all in the same boat and headed to the same port! **Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all.**

When Saint Paul approached the apostles in Jerusalem to discern whether he was "running or had run in vain" (Gal 2:2), the key criterion of authenticity which they presented was that he should not forget the poor (cf. Gal 2:10). This important principle, namely that the Pauline communities should not succumb to the self-centered lifestyle of the pagans, remains timely today, when a new self-centered paganism is growing. We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards.

Sometimes we prove hard of heart and mind; we are forgetful, distracted and carried away by the limitless possibilities for consumption and distraction offered by contemporary society. This leads to a kind of alienation at every level, for **"a society becomes alienated when its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer the gift of self and to establish solidarity between people".**

**Given the seriousness of the counter-witness of division among Christians, particularly in Asia and Africa, the search for paths to unity becomes all the more urgent. Missionaries on those continents often mention the criticisms, complaints and ridicule to which the scandal of divided Christians gives rise.**

If we concentrate on the convictions we share, and if we keep in mind the principle of the hierarchy of truths, we will be able to progress decidedly towards common expressions of proclamation, service and witness.

**The immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot leave us indifferent. Consequently, commitment to a unity which helps them to accept Jesus Christ can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelization.**

Signs of division between Christians in countries ravaged by violence add further causes of conflict on the part of those who should instead be a leaven of peace.

**How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.**

Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God; indeed, one who does not love others “walks in the darkness” ( 1 Jn 2:11), “remains in death” ( 1 Jn 3:14) and “does not know God” ( 1 Jn 4:8). Benedict XVI has said that “closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God”, [209] and that **love is, in the end, the only light which “can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working”.**

**When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s greatest and most beautiful gifts.** Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries.

The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual constructs. A committed missionary knows the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others.

**Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary. This openness of the heart is a source of joy, since “it is more blessed to give than to receive” ( Acts 20:35).** We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide.

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self.

**If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving.**

Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God’s handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God’s glory.

Every human being is the object of God’s infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God’s faithful people. We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!

**“We do not worship God with sacrifices and exterior gifts for him, but rather for us and for our neighbour.** He has no need of our sacrifices, but he does ask that these be offered by us as devotion and for the benefit of our neighbour. For him, mercy, which overcomes the defects of our devotion and sacrifice, is the sacrifice which is most pleasing, because it is mercy which above all seeks the good of one’s neighbour”





# Transforming *hearts, lives & communities*

*sforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

## **The Encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi***

We have stressed the importance of this theme of evangelization on many occasions... On June 22, 1973, we said to the Sacred College of Cardinals: "The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity." ...it is absolutely necessary for us to take into account a heritage of faith that the Church has the duty of preserving in its untouchable purity, and of presenting it to the people of our time, in a way that is as understandable and persuasive as possible.

This fidelity both to a message whose servants we are and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact is the central axis of evangelization. It poses three burning questions:

- 1. In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on man's conscience?**
- 2. To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of this century?**
- 3. What methods should be followed in order that the power of the Gospel may have its effect?**

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new." But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.

Strata of humanity which are transformed: 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.

Christ also carries out this proclamation by innumerable signs, which amaze the crowds and at the same time draw them to Him in order to see Him, listen to Him and allow themselves to be transformed by Him

All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in Gaudium et spes, always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

**The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.**

Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization.

The above questions will ask, whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptized people who do not practice, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking, and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name. Other questions will arise, deeper and more demanding ones, questions evoked by this witness which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization."

All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers.

Nevertheless this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified - what Peter called always having "your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" - and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus.

The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.

The history of the Church, from the discourse of Peter on the morning of Pentecost onwards, has been intermingled and identified with the history of this proclamation. At every new phase of human history, the Church, constantly gripped by the desire to evangelize, has but one preoccupation: whom to send to proclaim the mystery of Jesus? In what way is this mystery to be proclaimed? How can one ensure that it will resound and reach all those who should hear it? This proclamation - kerygma, preaching or catechesis - occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization.

**In fact the proclamation only reaches full development when it is listened to, accepted and assimilated, and when it arouses a genuine adherence in the one who has thus received it. An adherence to the truths which the Lord in His mercy has revealed; still more, an adherence to a program of life - a life henceforth transformed - which He proposes. In a word, adherence to the kingdom, that is to say, to the "new world," to the new state of things, to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the Gospel inaugurates.** Such an adherence, which cannot remain abstract and unincarnated, reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers. **Thus those whose life has been transformed enter a community which is itself a sign of transformation, a sign of newness of life: it is the Church, the visible sacrament of salvation.** Our entry into the ecclesial community will in its turn be expressed through many other signs which prolong and unfold the sign of the Church. In the dynamism of evangelization, a person who accepts the Church as the Word which saves normally translates it into the following sacramental acts: adherence to the Church, and acceptance of the sacraments, which manifest and support this adherence through the grace which they confer.

**Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.**

To complete these considerations on the meaning of evangelization, a final observation must be made, one which we consider will help to clarify the reflections that follow.

**Evangelization, as we have said, is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity,** witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others. The value of the last Synod was to have constantly invited us to relate these elements rather than to place them in opposition one to the other, in order to reach a full understanding of the Church's evangelizing activity.

It is this global vision which we now wish to outline, by examining the content of evangelization and the methods of evangelizing and by clarifying to whom the Gospel message is addressed and who today is responsible for it.

In the message which the Church proclaims there are certainly many secondary elements. Their presentation depends greatly on changing circumstances. They themselves also change. But there is the essential content, the living substance, which cannot be modified or ignored, without seriously diluting the nature of evangelization itself.

It is not superfluous to recall the following points: **to evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to bear witness that in His Son God has loved the world - that in His Incarnate Word He has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life.** Perhaps this attestation of God will be for many people the unknown God whom they adore without giving Him a name, or whom they seek by a secret call of the heart when they experience the emptiness of all idols. But it is fully evangelizing in manifesting the fact that for man the Creator is not an anonymous and remote power; He is the Father: "...that we should be called children of God; and so we are." And thus we are one another's brothers and sisters in God.

**Evangelization will also always contain - as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism - a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.**

**As the kernel and center of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and of being given over to Him.** All of this is begun during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by His death and resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of history, in order to be realized fully on the day of the final coming of Christ, whose date is known to no one except the Father.

"We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church." It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. **Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.**

Consequently evangelization cannot but include the prophetic proclamation of a hereafter, man's profound and definitive calling, in both continuity and discontinuity with the present situation: beyond time and history, beyond the transient reality of this world, and beyond the things of this world, of which a hidden dimension will one day be revealed - beyond man himself, whose true destiny is not restricted to his temporal aspect but will be revealed in the future life.

**Evangelization therefore also includes the preaching of hope in the promises made by God in the new Covenant in Jesus Christ; the preaching of God's love for us and of our love for God; the preaching of brotherly love for all men - the capacity of giving and forgiving, of self-denial, of helping one's brother and sister - which, springing from the love of God, is the kernel of the Gospel; the preaching of the mystery of evil and of the active search for good.**

The preaching likewise - and this is always urgent - of the search for God Himself through prayer which is principally that of adoration and thanksgiving, but also through communion with the visible sign of the encounter with God which is the Church of

Jesus Christ; and this communion in its turn is expressed by the application of those other signs of Christ living and acting in the Church which are the sacraments. To live the sacraments in this way, bringing their celebration to a true fullness, is not, as some would claim, to impede or to accept a distortion of evangelization: it is rather to complete it.

**For in its totality, evangelization - over and above the preaching of a message consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist.**

***But evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development - a message especially energetic today about liberation.***

It is well known in what terms numerous bishops from all the continents spoke of this at the last Synod, especially the bishops from the Third World, with a pastoral accent resonant with the voice of the millions of sons and daughters of the Church who make up those peoples. Peoples, as we know, engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism.

**The Church, as the bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children - the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization.**

Between evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption.

**The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man?**

We ourselves have taken care to point this out, by recalling that it is impossible to accept "that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbor who is suffering and in need."

The same voices which during the Synod touched on this burning theme with zeal, intelligence and courage have, to our great joy, furnished the enlightening principles for a proper understanding of the importance and profound meaning of liberation, such as it was proclaimed and achieved by Jesus of Nazareth and such as it is preached by the Church.

**We must not ignore the fact that many, even generous Christians who are sensitive to the dramatic questions involved in the problem of liberation, in their wish to commit the Church to the liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a man-centered goal; the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being. Her activity, forgetful of all spiritual and religious preoccupation, would become initiatives of the political or social order. But if this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties. She would have no more authority to proclaim freedom as in the name of God.**

This is why we have wished to emphasize, in the same address at the opening of the Synod, "the need to restate clearly the specifically religious finality of evangelization. This latter would lose its reason for existence if it were to diverge from the religious axis that guides it: the kingdom of God, before anything else, in its fully theological meaning..."

With regard to the liberation which evangelization proclaims and strives to put into practice one should rather say this:

- it cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the divine Absolute;
- it is therefore attached to a view of man which it can never sacrifice to the needs of any strategy, practice or short-term efficiency.

Hence, when preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it, the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems. Nevertheless she reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the kingdom by the proclamation of forms of human liberation - she even states that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ.





# Transforming *hearts, lives & communities*

*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

## APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*, OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

Key messages include: we should accept and receive God's free gifts; then allow them:

- 1) to transform us to conform to Christlike Holiness, so we live and love more like Jesus
- 2) to enable us to transform the world.

Consider these two Pillars of the faith: GIFT & TRANSFORMATION.

What is the Church but a Global Institute For Transformation (GIFT).

"REJOICE AND BE GLAD" (Mt. 5:12), Jesus tells those persecuted or humiliated for his sake. The Lord asks everything of us, and in return **he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence...** **"Walk before me, and be blameless"** (Gen 17:1).

...I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you: **"Be holy, for I am holy"** (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16)... "Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect." ...The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, **that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts.** (cf. 1 Cor 12:7).

### **MORE ALIVE, MORE HUMAN**

Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, **you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you,** and you will be faithful to your deepest self.

**Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality. His friendship infinitely transcends us; we cannot buy it with our works, it can only be a gift born of his loving initiative. This invites us to live in joyful gratitude for this completely unmerited gift...**

Like the supreme commandment of love, this truth should affect the way we live, for it flows from the heart of the Gospel and demands that we not only accept it intellectually but also make it a source of contagious joy. **Yet we cannot celebrate this free gift of the Lord's friendship unless we realize that our earthly life and our natural abilities are his gift. We need to acknowledge jubilantly that our life is essentially a gift...**

**Only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation.**

May you come to realize... the message of Jesus that **God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed.**

**Grace acts in history; ordinarily it takes hold of us and transforms us progressively.**

**We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him** who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, **so that his free gift may grow and develop within us: "I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."**

**To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world.**

## The logic of gift and of the cross:

Generosity too is demanded, for “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. This entails a readiness to make sacrifices, even to sacrificing everything.

For happiness is a paradox. We experience it most when we accept the mysterious logic that is not of this world: **“This is our logic”, says Saint Bonaventure, pointing to the cross.**

When, in God’s presence, we examine our life’s journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life, we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult...

**God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us.**

It is my hope that these pages will prove helpful by enabling the whole Church to devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness.

**Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God’s greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us.**

An often-overlooked Church teaching...

**The Second Synod of Orange taught with firm authority that nothing human can demand, merit or buy the gift of divine grace, and that all cooperation with it is a prior gift of that same grace:** The Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative... the Council of Trent, while emphasizing the importance of our cooperation for spiritual growth, reaffirmed that dogmatic teaching: **“We are said to be justified gratuitously because nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification; for ‘if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise, grace would no longer be grace’ (Rom 11:6)”.**

For that matter, the Church has always taught that **charity alone makes growth in the life of grace possible, for “if I do not have love, I am nothing.”** (1 Cor 13:2). Luke... calls us to **share in the life of those most in need**, the life lived by the Apostles, and ultimately to **configure ourselves to Jesus** who, though rich, “made himself poor” (2 Cor 8:9). (Thus, be TRANSFORMED to live and love like Jesus.)

To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. **We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves...**

**Let yourself be renewed (transformed) by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission.** The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but **remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens...(A GIFT that TRANSFORMS us.)**

**The Father’s plan is Christ, and ourselves in him** (We’re TRANSFORMED to live and love like Christ). **In the end, it is Christ who loves in us, for “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.”**

As a result, “the measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his.” Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and GIVES to his people. (So we’re TRANSFORMED to live and love like him – so we can be givers of the riches of Christ.)

...as Saint Ignatius of Loyola pointed out, “Christ’s whole life is a revelation of the Father”... “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of redemption”... “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.” (Thus, we’re TRANSFORMED).

This is a powerful summons to all of us. **You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission.** Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you.

Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. **Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world. (A gift in your life of being TRANSFORMED to live and love like Christ.)**

**A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness,** for "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess 4:3). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.

**That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him (being repeatedly TRANSFORMED to be a self-less GIFT to humanity).**

Christ himself wants to experience this with you, in all the efforts and sacrifices that it entails, but also in all the joy and enrichment it brings. **You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavour.**

...We are challenged to show our commitment in such a way that **everything we do has evangelical meaning and identifies us all the more with Jesus Christ.** The bishops of West Africa have observed that "we are being called in the spirit of the New Evangelization to be evangelized and to evangelize through the empowering of all you, the baptized, to **take up your roles as salt of the earth and light of the world wherever you find yourselves**".

We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that **every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes.** In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.

Saint Bonaventure... pointed out that true **Christian wisdom can never be separated from mercy towards our neighbour: "The greatest possible wisdom is to share fruitfully what we have to give"...**

## THE GREAT CRITERION

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel (31-46), Jesus expands on the Beatitude that calls the merciful blessed. **If we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (35-36).**

### In fidelity to the Master...

Holiness, then, is not about swooning in mystic rapture. As Saint John Paul II said: **"If we truly start out anew (TRANSFORMED) from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified."**

The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is "not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ". **In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to (be transformed to) imitate.**

If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. **Or I can respond with faith and charity,** and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being?

For Christians, this involves a constant and healthy unease. Even if helping one person alone could justify all our efforts, it would not be enough. The bishops of Canada made this clear when they noted, for example, that the biblical understanding of the jubilee year was about more than simply performing certain good works. It also meant seeking social change (Societal TRANSFORMATION).

“For later generations to also be released, clearly the goal had to be the restoration of just social and economic systems, so there could no longer be exclusion.” (Societal TRANSFORMATION).

#### JOY AND A SENSE OF HUMOUR

Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humour. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit.

The Christian life is “joy in the Holy Spirit” ( Rom 14:17), for “the necessary result of the love of charity is joy; since every lover rejoices at being united to the beloved... the effect of charity is joy”.

If we allow the Lord to draw us out of our shell and change our lives (e.g. TRANSFORM US), then we can do as Saint Paul tells us: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, rejoice!”

Saint Francis of Assisi lived by this; he could be overwhelmed with gratitude before a piece of hard bread, or joyfully praise God simply for the breeze that caressed his face. This is not the joy held out by today’s individualistic and consumerist culture. Consumerism only bloats the heart. It can offer occasional and passing pleasures, but not joy.

Here I am speaking of a joy lived in communion, which shares and is shared, since “there is more happiness in giving than in receiving” ( Acts 20:35) and “God loves a cheerful giver” ( 2 Cor 9:7). Fraternal love increases our capacity for joy, since it makes us capable of rejoicing in the good of other...

Having received the beautiful gift of God’s word, we embrace it “in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” ( 1 Thess 1:6).

Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change (transform) things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil. We “let things be”, or as others have decided they ought to be.

Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord. (Compelled by the Word of God, by the example of Christ and His presence in our lives, and by the Holy Spirit, to live TRANSFORMED.)

We are inspired to act by the example of all those priests, religious, and laity who devote themselves to proclamation and to serving others with great fidelity, often at the risk of their lives and certainly at the cost of their comfort. Their testimony reminds us that, more than bureaucrats and functionaries, the Church needs passionate missionaries, enthusiastic about sharing true life. (TRANSFORMING the world with God’s love.)

Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to (be TRANSFORMED to) become a saint”.



*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

Excerpts From Cardinal Roger Mahony's Book,  
"To Reconcile Our People: Our Ministry And Mission,"  
Emphasize The Dual Pillars Of Our Faith – GIFT and TRANSFORMATION

Pope John Paul II often reminded us that **the great gift we have to share with the world is not a set of doctrines or rules but the living person of Jesus Christ. He is the source of all love, forgiveness and transformation. Nothing else that we do is more important than sharing this gift with the world.**

Every baptized Catholic is called to participate in the mission of Christ and the Spirit, proclaiming in word and deed the message at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry: the Reign of God among us here and now at this time and in this place. **The whole life of the church, in all its dimensions is to serve this mission: announcing in what we say and do the good news, the year of God's favor, the transformation of the world and the coming of the Reign of God, the Reign of Truth, holiness, justice, love and peace.**

Central to this mission is evangelization. There are three levels of evangelization.

First, evangelization entails allowing one's own heart to be seized and saturated by the Gospel, **responding to the call to life-long conversion to Christ (transformation) by the gift of the Spirit.**

Second, evangelization requires reaching out to others to proclaim in word and deed the Reign of God.

**Third, evangelization demands that the values of the Reign of God – the Reign of truth, holiness, justice, love and peace – permeate each and every culture, transforming every sphere of life.**

It's common place to hear that people today have lost a sense of sin... they need our help in coming to terms with these "negative factors," naming their sinfulness in light of the promise and hope that are God's gift in Christ... Our proclamation of the Gospel should help our people live the joys and delights of human life in the presence of the Divine, to see and celebrate all they have as gift through and through. We need to find more effective ways to help our people be and to build the Body of Christ in and for the world. We cannot assume any longer that because they are catechized and sacramentalized they are evangelized.

**... we need to recognize that the Church must itself be evangelized. What is more, the Church does not celebrate the liturgy for itself but for the world. God is not best glorified by good liturgy but by a world redeemed and transformed by the grandeur of self-giving love.**

The Cathedral is not simply the locus for the local Church to be and become the Body of Christ, though it may be that first and foremost. **The Cathedral is itself transformative of the whole city. True, a Cathedral may transform by bringing new life and energy to the inner city as we have seen in Baltimore and Detroit.**



But far more importantly, the Cathedral is transformative of the city and its people by reminding them, inspiring them, evoking from them a deep awareness of what the city is to be and become. The Cathedral is an eschatological symbol, calling all who see it and dwell therein to the realization of all that is good and noble in the humanum, inviting all to be the fulfillment of the human capacity for the true, the good and the beautiful...

It is in the Cathedral that the people hear the call to repentance and forgiveness, and the challenge to lifelong conversion in Christ (transformation). It is from this place that lay missionaries are sent to different parts of the world to spread the Gospel, expressive of the catholicity of the faith and life that is celebrated in the Cathedral church – a faith so full and whole that it stretches out and pours itself forth in lives of service to other peoples in other lands. The Church catholic opens a vision beyond the diocese and shakes us from self-sufficiency and self.

The future of our local Church rests on an appreciation of the gifts of us all, rooted in our baptismal vocation, and a deepening appreciation of the dignity and responsibilities of the laity in the local Church.

- While professional ministry is exercised by a small percentage of our laity, all are called to develop a sense of Christian service to the world around us.... If all of us truly acted from our Christian vocation in our daily lives, think what changes this would produce, and how it would develop in us those Christian attitudes that would enrich our Church and the wider world
- The closer we come to Christ, the more we realize communion with God's people, the more concerned we are about brothers and sisters in most need, the more enlivened by the Spirit we are to carry out Christ's transforming mission in the world
- Parish is based on principle of inclusion of many forms of Spirituality; of the call to both personal conversion and social transformation; of the communion of the Church and solidarity; offering others hope, engaging and invigorating the youth
- While we can align with those who further work of justice, solidarity has greater demands on our personal transformation. Personal transformation must always find expression in transforming structures of society for the dignity and community of all
- ... the Individual Parish alone is an inadequate expression of Church. The individual parish must be seen as part of the universal Church through the particular Church of the local diocese. This must find expression in the concrete ways that parishes collaborate with one another within a diocese, and, reaching beyond diocesan lines, with other parishes in the hemisphere and throughout the world
- **Conversion, Communion and Solidarity**
- Conversion and transformation: multidimensional formation in faith for the transformation of the world... putting on the Lord Jesus; care for the Body of Christ and carrying on mission of Christ
- Communion is collaboration among priests, religious, lay person, parishioner
- Solidarity is the fruit of communion expressed in a Christian life, which seeks the good of others, especially those most in need
- God's grace enables Christians to work for the transformation of the world – solidarity moves us beyond individual works of charity to the larger effort to transform societal structures
- This requires that laity take leadership in the forums of business and politics. It calls for collaboration at every level of the church – twinning parishes, dioceses and conferences of Bishops in shared mission
- We need to lift up examples and celebrate occasions of solidarity so what is practiced by some can be seen as possible for all
- Most laypersons are called to transform the world by living out baptismal vocation in the world, advancing the reign of God amidst pressing demands of marriage, family, school and work
- Whatever we do, do it for the building of the body, advancing the Reign of God and the transformation of the world that God loves
- Sow the seed of God's Word continually to create, nurture and sustain hope in context of relationships, creating new opportunities through announcing the Reign of God and his want for transformation of the world through living His Word and the Holy Spirit.

*What is it that the lay leader brings to the role of leadership of a parish community?*

*The parish is a place very much a part of this world. Like the Areopagus of old, it is a center of encounter and exchange. But here, the encounter is with God in Christ through the gift of the Spirit given to us in Word and Sacrament. And the exchange is based on an economy of gift, in which all the parish community know themselves to be given the gift of God's love in the sending of the Son and in the pouring out the Spirit in our hearts... It is from a position of being in the world, in these worldly 'places,' attentive to the 'joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age' (Gaudium et Spes, no.1), that the lay leader must give shape to a vision of the Reign of God, inviting others in the parish to live from and for this vision of a world transformed by holiness, truth, justice, love.*



*Transforming hearts, lives and communities by helping people receive, fully appreciate and share the gift(s) of God.*

Excerpts From Knights of Columbus Supreme Knight Carl Anderson's Book,  
**"A Civilization of Love... What Every Catholic Can Do To Transform The World"**

Assert The Proposition Of GIFT Leading To TRANSFORMATION.

(In fact, the insights specifically highlight a Catholic responsibility  
 to use our GIFTS to engage in the TRANSFORMATION of our world.)

**All life is a gift -- a gift that is a result of an expressive love that flows from the God who is love. Therefore, we are called to live in a manner that reflects both the nature of the giver and gift. This way of life is dedicated to self-sacrifice in service to others.**

**Gift of self means everything we are given -- every talent -- is given as a gift. Every moment is a chance and opportunity for conveying love.**

**In the Christian understanding of a loving communion there is always present the idea of gift of self. Indeed, all Christian charity... takes as its source the gift that Christ makes of himself in the Eucharist.**

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict reminds us that, "My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them. **I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self. I must be personally present in my gift.**"

One of (Pope) Paul IV's greatest legacies in the area of social and economic development is his insistence that **"it is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole."**

The Pope was convinced that the church of the Good Samaritan was calling each of her members to take up this great responsibility, one we should not view in a narrow fashion. One of the aspects of globalization that has created great concern is the degree to which governments have relinquished to corporations unprecedented levels of economic power and decision making...

**Yet this could provide an avenue for great influence among Catholics in the corporate world to affect the course of globalization. Corporations possess resources, flexibility and adeptness far exceeding those of many governmental agencies. They can be used to steer economic development consistent with certain moral values.**

David Bornstein, author of *How to Change the World*, suggests **there's an emergence of a new global citizen sector that is leading patterns of social and economic change throughout the developing world. He describes the leaders of this citizen sector as "social entrepreneurs" -- men and women who in addition to applying management skills to solve social problems do so with a new idea that has transformative power to create significant change throughout society.** These people also possess a steel-like determination that enables them to overcome obstacles and see their projects through to successful conclusions even when it may take years or decades.

...Today, we see ourselves in a similar position to the classical world of (the Apostle) Paul's day. We, too, live in a civilization that can boast unprecedented triumphs in every realm of human endeavor and that seems to be at the

height of its glory but that is also suffering from many injustices. We, too, live in a culture that often seems to spend its time "in nothing except telling or hearing something new."

Yet, **the unprecedented electronic flow of information on a global basis has blurred the continuing "newness" of Paul's message to "seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him, and find him." Even so, the responsibility of Christians in our own time remains as it was in Paul's -- to radically transform culture, not by imposing values from above, but through a subtler yet more powerful process -- living a vocation of love in the day-to-day reality of our lives.**

...Those listening to Paul proclaim a new Gospel on the site of the Areopagus... would have seen him as proclaiming a new era in which **the darkness of a society that worships before "the alter of the unknown god" gives way to a new order. The Christ whom God has raised from the dead is the one who will transform their culture and their history.**

He was not preaching a message that would easily coexist with pagan gods. Instead, **his message proposed a fundamental transformation of that culture. An important part of that transformation had to do with a new vision regarding human dignity and equality.**

**If a modern Paul were to choose a contemporary Areopagus, he might settle upon Davos, Switzerland, a city where over a thousand international leaders of politics, business and intellectual live gather once a year for the World Economic Forum (WEF\*).**

What would a contemporary Paul say to a gathering of the World Economic Forum? ... If he spoke of a God "in whom we live and move and have our being" or the death and resurrection of a man whose very existence marks the pivot point of human destiny, they might grow just as uncomfortable as Paul's original listeners.

**Some might question what Christianity brings to the discussion of the universal values of equality and human dignity. But for the Christian, this is precisely the point: the understanding that these values are ultimately grounded in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ profoundly elevates them and at the same time calls out for a truly radical personal response.**

**... The Catholic tradition as a whole regards Christ as above culture -- as one who is always present to transform culture.**

**For the Christian, the values of equality and human dignity cannot be separated from the commandment to "love one another as Christ loved us" -- the source from which equality and dignity derive their ultimate support.**

John Paul II said, "The eyes of the believer **contemplate the image of the Crucified One**... Gazing upon the Crucified One, we are filled with confidence that forgiveness and reconciliation can become the normal practice of everyday life and of every culture, and thus a real opportunity for building humanity's peace and future."

Pope Benedict writes: " Progress is beginning to put Creation -- the basis of our existence -- at risk; it creates inequality among human beings, and it generates ever new threats to the world and humanity."

...Modern advancements have strings attached. For example, while many of the old "frightful diseases" have been wiped out by science, our modern way of living has exposed us to other, perhaps even more frightful, diseases, some of them the result of the "comforts and luxuries... available to practically everyone. Thus progress generates "ever new threats" to humanity.

**John Paul II insisted that a person's life is meaningless without love. Only when this great need, which is at the same time a great calling, is affirmed can the great dignity of each person be clearly seen and respected. It is the vocation to love that not only makes each person, but makes each person human.**

We know that the vocation to love is written in the heart of each person. What we don't know is why so often it is so difficult to see this reality. **The vocation to love is the only value strong enough to overcome contemporary culture's often consumerist and manipulative view of human relationships.** Too often, people are treated as nothing more than objects -- of value only because they are seen as being useful to achieve some purpose, whether it is personal, social or economic. But the person who is the object of our love is of value because he or she is loved, not because he or she is productive.

**God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love. He called him at the same time for love. God is love.... "Love is the only rational act."**

**But the Christian is under a new and unique obligation..."In everyone, we can see and must recognize the countenance of Christ the Son of Man, especially when tears and sorrows make it plain to see."**

**....at the close of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI was calling the laity especially to a higher involvement in their work to renew (author's note: transform) society. If we see Christ in the suffering of all those around us, then our only response is a response of love. This response has communion between the two -- a communion that forms a living stone in the building up of the civilization of love.**

(\*AUTHOR'S NOTE: the WEF is where the Business & Sustainable Development Commission -- under the leadership of a strong Catholic, Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever -- introduced a strategy for fulfilling the UN Sustainable Development Goals -- "17 Goals To Transform Our World." The SDGs include: eradicating hunger and poverty; enabling wellbeing [which should include physical and spiritual wellbeing]; asserting dignity, equality and inclusion for all; affecting responsible production and consumption; enabling climate impacts; and more, by 2030. The Vatican endorsed the UN SDGs, and they're what we're all called to do in Sacred Scriptures, including in Matthew 25 and elsewhere across Church teaching. **In a sense, the SDGs are all about transforming our world into a civilization of love through selfless, Christ-like love.** But, sadly, regarding the SDGs: there's too little awareness of them; too few actions are being taken to affect the core goals; and too little progress is being made. In this is despite BSCD projections that the SDGs could generate \$12 - \$36 trillion in global growth [or more] for all participants to share in, and create 380 million jobs which will build purchasing capacity for those working. So, perhaps the Apostle Paul's message has started to reach the WEF, and WEF now Christian leadership and commitment help to see it through.)  
[http://report.businesscommission.org/uploads/BetterBiz-BetterWorld\\_170215\\_012417.pdf](http://report.businesscommission.org/uploads/BetterBiz-BetterWorld_170215_012417.pdf))



**True Joy Comes From Living A Life Of Continual GIFT Exchanges...**



**Reciprocating Back To God, Our Father, For His Wonderful GIFTS To Us  
And Exchanging Heartfelt GIFTS With All Our Brothers And Sisters**



© Global Institute For Transformation® (GIFT) 877-WE-GIFT2 [www.institutefortransformation.org](http://www.institutefortransformation.org)



*"Let us not reject this gift of God which is the one family of his children. Encountering and welcoming everyone, solidarity... these are what make our society truly human... Be servers of communion and of the culture of encounter! What must guide us is the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed,"* exclaimed Pope Francis, World Youth Day, 2013.

**Life...  
And Everything And Everyone In It...  
Are Incredible Gifts From Our loving God!  
Life Will Be Most Joyful When We Engage In  
Continual, Faithful & Caring Gift Exchanges.**



We've all been given so very much -- oh, so many gifts: life itself; all the food, water, oxygen, sunlight and resources we need for survival; family and friends; our brothers and sisters around the world; work; play; love; happiness; God's real presence in our lives to love, comfort and guide us; and the hope of life eternal with God, too.

To be truly joyful, we should reflect on all our gifts and seek a continually transforming heart. A heart that reflects appreciatively on God our Father, our gifts, and our brothers and sisters next door and across the globe -- and a heart that reciprocates with meaningful gift exchanges.

Life will be happier if we spend our lives engaged in continual gift exchanges -- receiving the beauty and gifts of God and others, and sharing ourselves and our resources with one another.

And if there are members of God's family who are in need of anything, may they receive all they need through God's loving hands -- His loving Church in action -- us.

Let us be selfless like Jesus and bear much fruit -- engaging in heartfelt gift exchanges.

Let us also let our light shine in the darkness to bring all God's children compassionate, life-transforming love, including a genuine witness of our loving God -- our Father, Creator, Provider, Counselor, Friend and Savior.

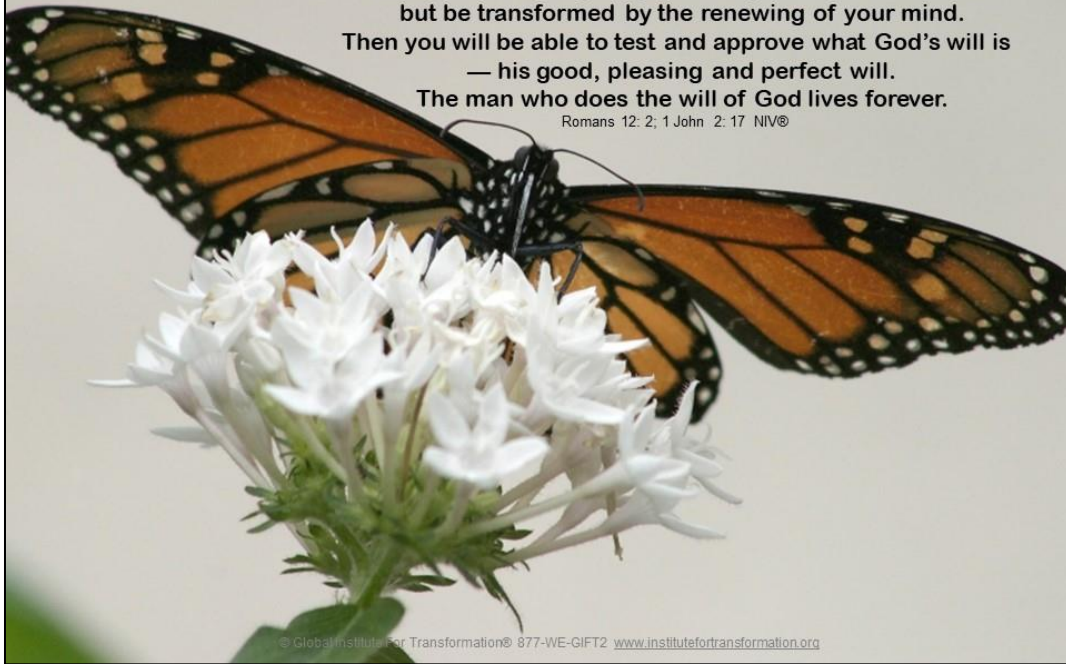
© Global Institute For Transformation® (GIFT) 877-WE-GIFT2 [www.institutefortransformation.org](http://www.institutefortransformation.org)



# Be Transformed

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is  
— his good, pleasing and perfect will.  
The man who does the will of God lives forever.

Romans 12: 2; 1 John 2: 17 NIV®



© Global Institute For Transformation® 877-WE-GIFT2 [www.institutefortransformation.org](http://www.institutefortransformation.org)

Transforming hearts, lives, and communities  
by appreciating and sharing the *GIFTS* of God

"If you knew the Gift of God...  
he would have given you living  
water...well up to eternal life."  
John 4:10

Every good and perfect gift is  
from above, coming down from  
the Father of the heavenly lights.  
James 1:17

For it is by grace you have  
been saved...It is the gift of God.  
Ephesians 2:8-10

The wages of Sin is death, but  
the gift of God is eternal life  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23

Repent and be baptized... In the  
name of Jesus Christ... and you will  
receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit.  
Acts 2:38

In him you have been enriched  
in every way...Therefore you  
do not lack any spiritual gift...  
1 Corinthians 1:5-7

Fan into flame  
the Gift of God.  
2 Timothy 1:6

We have different gifts...  
Let us use them in  
proportion to our faith.  
Romans 12:6

Each one should use  
whatever gift he has received  
to serve others.  
1 Peter 4:10

Do not neglect your gift...  
Be diligent in these matters;  
give yourself wholly to them.  
1 Timothy 4:14-15

Try to excel in gifts  
that build up the church.  
1 Corinthians 14:12

I became a servant of this gospel  
by the gift of God's grace given me  
through the working of his power.  
Ephesians 3:7

But eagerly desire the greater gifts...  
the greatest of these is love.  
1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:13

How much more will those who receive  
God's grace and gift of righteousness  
reign in life through Jesus Christ.  
Romans 5:17

Thanks be to God for  
His indescribable Gift.  
2 Corinthians 9:15

## THE REFORMATION EVEN CITED OUR NEED FOR A **TRANSFORMATION**

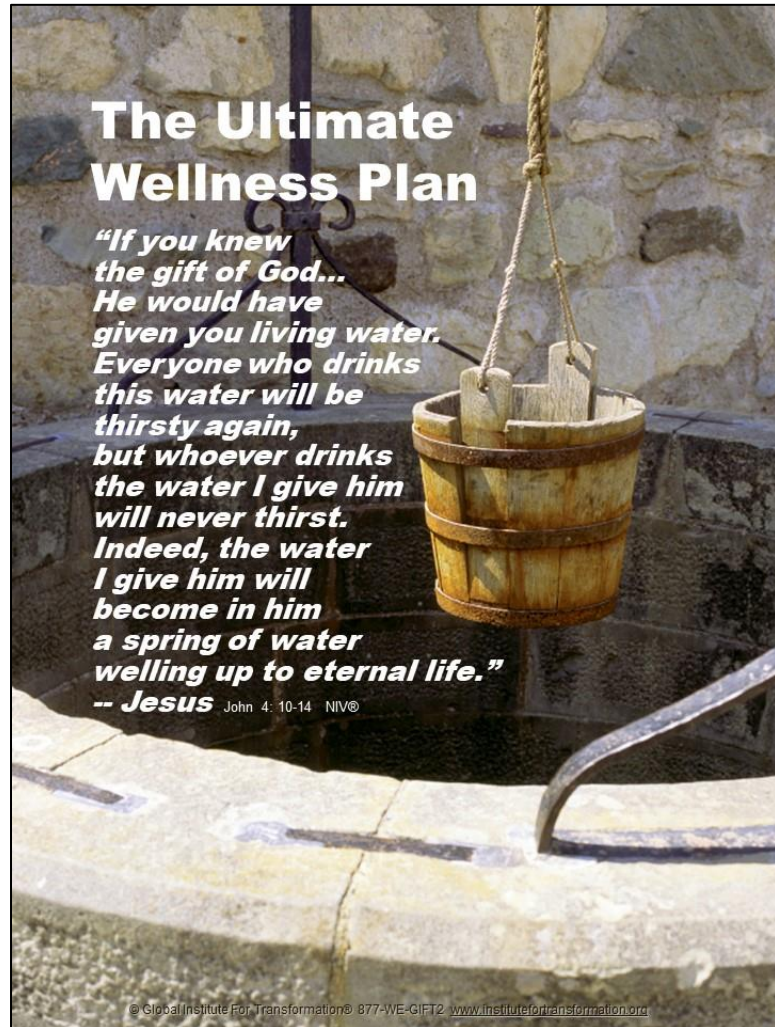
Excerpts From Martin Luther's 95 Theses  
Emphasize Our Need For A Transformation  
-- Via True Repentance And Works Of Love!

"Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ willed  
that the whole life of believers should be repentance...  
Yet its meaning is not restricted to repentance in one's heart;  
for such repentance is holl unless it produces outward signs...  
The imperfect health of the soul, that is to say,  
the imperfect love of the dying  
brings with it, of necessity, great fear;  
and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear...  
No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere;  
much less that he has attained full remission...  
Rare is the man that is truly penitent...  
Every truly repentant Christian  
has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt...  
Every true Christian, whether living or dead,  
has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church...  
Love grows by works of love...  
Christians should be taught that he who sees a needy person  
but passes him by incurs the wrath of God...  
Christians are to be exhorted  
that they be diligent in following Christ,  
their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hells...  
And thus be confident of entering into heaven  
rather through many tribulations,  
than through a false assurance of peace."  
Martin Luther's 95 Theses.

Let us ask God to continually transform  
our hearts so we can live more like Christ.  
Let us live out our faith manifesting  
true repentance and works of love!

© Global Institute For Transformation, [www.institutefortransformation.org](http://www.institutefortransformation.org)  
Luther references: [www.idnet.org/publicresources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/ninetive.html](http://www.idnet.org/publicresources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/ninetive.html)  
[www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/95theses.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/95theses.htm)





For further information, reflection or collaboration, please contact:

Tim Maurer  
President  
Global Institute For Transformation® (GIFT)  
392 Crystal Lake Road  
Tolland, CT 06084  
[www.institutefortransformation.org](http://www.institutefortransformation.org)  
[timothy.maurer@institutefortransformation.org](mailto:timothy.maurer@institutefortransformation.org)  
402-212-7973

