



Paul VI: Pope of Evangelization

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The entire Church rejoices! The canonization of Pope Paul VI on October 14, 2018 brings great joy. We recall that on World Mission Sunday in 2014, Paul VI (1963-1978) was beatified in Rome. The choice of that occasion was significant! First, on Mission Sunday, the Church focuses on her missionary vocation and identity. And, when elected, the new pope specifically chose the name “Paul” because he saw himself preaching the Gospel to the whole world, following Saint Paul’s missionary dynamism. Secondly, the 2014 date marked the close of a special Synod of Bishops on the family; his canonization in 2018 coincides with the close of the Synod of Bishops on the youth. Recall that it was Paul VI who established the synod of bishops in 1965 to assist the Church in both reading and interpreting the signs of the times.

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

Paul VI

Missionary Initiatives. Aside from expressing his “core identity” with the chosen name “Paul,” Giovanni Montini accomplished much to bring the Gospel message to contemporary humanity. Sharing John XXIII’s vision of Church renewal, Paul successfully concluded Vatican II and systematically implemented its missionary vision. In addition, Paul VI presented his “dialogical” vision of the Church in his first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964). He established the Vatican office, Secretariat for Non-Christians,





on Pentecost Sunday 1964 [renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1988].

Paul, the missionary pope, initiated papal travels, literally covering the globe. His most extensive missionary journey in November-December 1970 brought him to Asia with visits to eight countries. While in Manila (November 27-29) he met with 180 Asian bishops, a pivotal event in the foundation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). In addition, Paul VI vigorously promoted the worldwide growth of authentic, inculturated, local Churches.

Evangelii Nuntiandi. Pope Paul will always be remembered for his 1975 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), *Evangelization in the Modern World*. This was the first papal document to flow from a synod (the 1974 world synod focused on the theme of evangelization). This beautiful document, as fresh today as when it was written, asserts that: (1) evangelization is the vocation proper to the Church; (2) the Church's mission continues the mission of Jesus in the power of the Spirit; (3) evangelization is a multi-faceted reality; and, (4) evangelization includes a commitment to full human development and social justice.

Paul VI asserted: "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (EN 14). "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity" (EN 18).

Pope Francis' Affirmation. Our present pope draws extensively upon the missionary vision of Paul VI; he quotes EN thirteen times in his *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG]. From his earliest days as pope, Francis regularly speaks of EN, noting that Paul's words "are as timely as if they had been written yesterday." He described EN as "the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day."



Reflection. Popes Paul VI and Francis share several common perspectives: **(A)** “Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing” (EN 80); “let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization” (EG 83); **(B)** All Christians are challenged to be “evangelized evangelizers” (cf. EN 15) who are truly “missionary disciples” (EG 120); **(C)** Christian spirituality must reflect “the fervor of the saints” (EN 80) and emerge from “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ” (EG 3). Popes Paul and Francis are truly “kindred spirits”—afire with the fire of evangelization. Try to catch the same “Gospel Fire”!

*“Evangelization will never be possible
without the action of the Holy Spirit....
The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church....
Techniques of evangelization are good,
but even the most advanced ones could not
replace the gentle action of the Spirit....
It must be said that the Holy Spirit is
the principal agent of evangelization....
Through the Holy Spirit the Gospel
penetrates to the heart of the world.”*

Paul VI

