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## **CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE INTO THE MEDIA CULTURE**

Within the culture of communication there exists a media culture, i.e., the nature and influence of the human and technological mediation of ideas, ideals, values, information, storytelling, and rituals. The media have self-propagated in a plethora of communication tools that are constantly evolving. On the one hand, they reinforce the relational dynamic at the heart of culture especially in their social networking form, generating or supporting other cultures in unprecedented ways. On the other hand, they are devastating culture through their symbiotic relationship with consumerism and the will to power, which constitute some of the principal dynamics at the root of modern unbelief.

The main purpose of my considerations hereafter is to indicate how the task of the new evangelization with respect to this phenomenon can build a culture of communication, enlightened by faith.

### **Atheism According to JPII**

How does John Paul II regard “modern unbelief”? While *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*<sup>1</sup> is not a comprehensive treatment of his thought, it does offer insights into how an informed faith can change the course of a history that, in many respects and over a long period of time, has followed a trajectory without God. After situating atheism and faith within a historical context, examining them both in relation to the development of philosophy and theology, John Paul reflects on his contemporaries’ struggle for faith. He describes the characteristics of their inner struggle—in the face of evil and nihilism—to confer meaning on life consonant with the *totality* of

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

revealed truth about God and the human person and to make their individual and societal existence consistent with that meaning. He comments,

One sees clearly that *the response to the question "An Deus sit?"* [Does God exist?] *is not only an issue that touches the intellect . . .* Questioning God's existence is intimately united with *the purpose of human existence*. Not only is it a question of the intellect; it is also a question of the will, even a question of the human heart . . .<sup>2</sup>

It could be argued that Wojtyla's understanding of atheism was forged during the immediate aftermath of World War II in the crucible of Marxist dialectical materialism and has been supplanted by the challenge of a new reality, a new atheism, the bitter fruit, in part, of 9/11. This new reality is characterized by the insecurity of a multipolar geopolitical economy, disgust and disillusionment at the "wars of religion," and the deference afforded to the magisterium of science, in a search for the origins, meaning, and purpose of human existence apart from God.

### Faces of Contemporary Atheism

Let us look at three real atheists of our times, people whose paths I have crossed, to discover any relevance to his perspective.

#### *Atheist #1*

On a flight from Toronto to Calgary in 1997, I sat next to an engineer from Poland, living at that time in Ontario. He, his wife, who was also an engineer, and their seventeen-year-old son were atheists. For three hours and some, at his initiative, we sparred about the merits and risks of belief and unbelief, about Poland, and culture. Eventually he admitted that, although "the Church never betrayed us," as he put it, it kept people from advancing economically and politically (no doubt to keep them away from the Communist party). I urged him, "To be Polish is to be a person of faith; it's who you are, historically and culturally. You want to advance? Go ahead! But not at the cost of who you are." We actually ended up praying together as we taxied into Calgary. Only God knows where that journey will *really* end up.

#### *Atheist #2*

The following year I was on a flight from Montreal to Toronto, and a young Chinese woman next to me confided that she had been raised an

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<sup>2</sup> Id., 30–31.

atheist in mainland China, then immigrated to Canada and got her degree in mathematics five years previously. On campus she was browbeaten as a sinner by proselytizers. Even so, the “God question” never left her, so she pressed me about God’s existence. After I affirmed her intrinsic worth as a human being, I appealed to the Thomistic “proof” from causality. She countered, “But that doesn’t *prove* God’s existence.” I agreed, explaining that “the proofs demonstrate that faith is not contrary to reason.” What she said next pierced my heart like a knife: “If only someone had talked to me like this five years ago, I would be a Christian today.”

### *Atheist #3*

Theresa was raised in a very devout Catholic family. Her father was a professor who led an evangelism program at a Catholic university. Her first doubts about God’s existence came when she was five. Later, Church politics pressured her father to leave the Church’s employ. The resulting scandalous behavior of some people of the cloth brought intense suffering to her family and soured Theresa to religion and faith itself. She describes her definitive break with God one day when she was 14:

I could not understand how a loving, all-powerful God could allow my family to suffer like this . . . I reasoned that if God . . . did exist, he might as well not exist to me.

The moment that thought crossed my mind, I claimed it as my own, and in that instant I became an atheist . . . I disowned God.<sup>3</sup>

Through a long, circuitous journey she found her way back to the Church, and in 2010, into the Daughters of St. Paul. We just published a book by Sr. Theresa Aletheia (“truth” in Greek), *The Prodigal You Love: Inviting Loved Ones Back to the Church*.<sup>4</sup>

### **A New Atheism?**

As is widely known, some secular humanists contend that there really is no “new” atheism, only new packaging and new marketing through media.<sup>5</sup> Other atheists disagree. Appealing to science, the new atheists condemn not just belief in God but respect for such belief. In this crusade

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<sup>3</sup> Theresa Aletheia Noble, F.S.P., *The Prodigal You Love* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2015), 135–136.

<sup>4</sup> Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Flynn, “Why I Don’t Believe in the New Atheism,” *Free Inquiry* 30:3 (2010): 7–43.

against faith, Victor J. Stenger writes, “the real war is between rationalism and superstition,” imperative because of religion’s public nature and “adverse effect on society.”<sup>6</sup> The organization, American Atheists, posts an anti-Christmas billboard every year now in Times Square and displays its messages even on buses. Without discounting the influence of science on atheism, in many ways it is the same; it’s just gotten mean.

Mean and popular. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, Americans who are religiously unaffiliated—describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” (“nones”), accounted for 22.8% of the population, up from 16.1% seven years earlier. It marks the highest growth rate of any group in the study. Not surprisingly, a full 34% to 36% of Millennials (ages 18–33) were thus unaffiliated.<sup>7</sup>

More problematic, perhaps, are the roots of atheism, some of which we saw in the faces we just examined. There, people eschewed faith and religion because of their experiences or desires. Sr. Theresa Aletheia explains it this way: “The roots of my atheism did not lie in a logical refutation of the existence of God—that would come later. Rather than reasoning God’s existence away, I simply denied it.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, an attempt to “stifle the voice of God,” says John Paul II, “has nothing to offer except the things of this world. And sometimes such an offer brings with it destruction of cosmic proportions.”<sup>9</sup>

If that description fit the ideologies of his day, it most certainly reflects the corrosive influences within culture in ours, especially the deforming power of consumerism on technology and on all the ways that technology affects life. In one of its earlier stages, the cancer of consumerism, to use Pope Francis’s metaphor,<sup>10</sup> manifested itself sixty years ago in this excerpt from a proposal for prosperity by retail analyst Victor Lebow in the *Journal of Retailing*. Annie Leonard made it famous in *The Story of Stuff*:

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<sup>6</sup> Victor J. Stenger, “Why I Believe in the New Atheism (and it’s not just a matter of faith),” <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/vstenger/MagArticles/IBelieve.pdf>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> “U. S. Religious Landscape Study,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Noble, *The Prodigal You Love*, 136.

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> “Pope discusses Medjugorje, coming encyclical on flight from Bosnia,” *Catholic World Report* (June 6, 2015), [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3931/Pope\\_discusses\\_Medjugorje\\_coming\\_encyclical\\_on\\_flight\\_from\\_Bosnia.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3931/Pope_discusses_Medjugorje_coming_encyclical_on_flight_from_Bosnia.aspx), accessed on June 14, 2015.

Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms . . .

[C]ommodities and services must be offered to the consumer with a special urgency . . . We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace. We need to have people eat, drink, dress, ride, live, with ever more complicated and, therefore, constantly more expensive consumption.<sup>11</sup>

This cancer has metastasized over the years and is now taking its toll on science, arts and the media, political structures, and even faith communities. It inverts priorities of individuals and families, substituting choice for truth, desires for needs, the immediate and ephemeral for the eternal, the commodity for the person, and what columnist David Brooks calls “resumé virtues” in place of true character.<sup>12</sup>

### John Paul’s Response of Faith

1. It is in this context that we listen to John Paul’s response of faith, which involves the whole person. He writes:

I think that it is wrong to maintain that Saint Thomas’s position stands up only in the realm of the rational. One must, it is true, applaud Étienne Gilson when he agrees with Saint Thomas that the intellect is the most marvelous of God’s creations, but that does not mean that we must give in to a unilateral rationalism. Saint Thomas

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<sup>11</sup> Victor Lebow, “Price Competition in 1955,” *Journal of Retailing*, <https://hundredgoals.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/journal-of-retailing.pdf>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> This public paucity of “character formation” is the subject of *The Road to Character*, by *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, a secular Jew. In an interview he states: “We as a modern society are cultivating outwardly impressive but ultimately superficial ‘resume virtues’—not *character*. And it’s costing us dearly, both personally and communally” (“A priest’s powerful impact on New York Times’ David Brooks,” *CNA Daily News*, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/catholicnews/2015/05/a-priests-powerful-impact-on-the-new-york-times-david-brooks/>, accessed on June 13, 2015).

celebrates all the richness and complexity of each created being, and especially of the human being.<sup>13</sup>

John Paul roots human knowledge in sensory knowledge, then moves quickly to the transempirical, affirming the validity of extrasensory truths shared in common. In addition, far from relegating these to the realm of theology, he recognizes in them a philosophical basis. This is a key element in how John Paul envisioned the new evangelization.

*We are witnesses of a symptomatic return to metaphysics . . . through an integral anthropology . . . one that passes not so much through being and existence as through people and their meeting each other, through the "I" and the "Thou" . . . a coexistence.*<sup>14</sup>

2. Commenting on agnostic demands that God reveal himself on our terms, he observes that "The history of salvation is also the history of man's continual judgment of God."<sup>15</sup> John Paul lays the blame for agnosticism at the feet of René Descartes, "who split thought from existence and identified existence with reason itself."<sup>16</sup> I-Am-Who-Am cannot be reduced to "I think, therefore I am." Absolute Mystery is not subject to dissection and analysis (no matter what Victor Stenger thinks<sup>17</sup>). Moreover, John Paul says that what God reveals is not for our control, but for communion, and through it, for adoration and our salvation. In the words of English mystic, Evelyn Underhill, "If God were small enough to be understood, He would not be big enough to be worshipped."<sup>18</sup>

3. In his response to the question, "What is the use of believing?" John Paul adds a pragmatic consideration to his metaphysical/anthropological synthesis. He draws from the words of Vatican II to state that "the essential usefulness of faith consists in the fact that, through faith, man achieves the good of his rational nature."<sup>19</sup> In this way communion is based on the whole truth about the human person, rather than on a subjective determination of what is right and good.

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<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*, 34–35.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Stenger, "Why I Believe in the New Atheism."

<sup>18</sup> Quoted after Elisabeth Elliot, *Secure in the Everlasting Arms* (Revell, 2002), 91.

<sup>19</sup> *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, quoted in John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 192.

## The New Evangelization

The intended demographic of the Church's commitment to a new evangelization is whole peoples who were once evangelized, but who have either rejected Christianity's Greco-Roman patrimony as outmoded and restrictive, or have traded Christian culture for superficial consumerism. I believe that to be effective, the Church's dialogue with these peoples must address the "question" of God with John Paul's threefold response.<sup>20</sup> Practically speaking, how does this response translate today? What makes this evangelization new? I mention six elements here, derived largely from the very detailed *Lineamenta*, or working document, published in preparation for the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in 2012:

1. From the outset, Christian mission, like its theology, has been *incarnational*, earthy, communicated in contemporary terms and formative of culture—the Word with skin on. If we look at a small portion of history, the past hundred years or so, we see numerous icons of "new" evangelization—people who have "incarnated" the Word in their own lives and ministries in a remarkable way. Here are a few:

- the thousands of U.S. women religious who devised new ministries to meet new needs of the pioneer, the immigrant, and the child laborer, profoundly shaping the entire nation;
- Don Bosco and his Salesians, who dared to cross into Turin's "dark side" entering taverns and workplaces to entice young ruffians to join other boys at the Oratory;
- European missionaries to Asia who, at the turn of the last century, propagated the Gospel by new means and fostered native vocations, even when this alienated Europe's bishops;

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<sup>20</sup> "A 'new evangelization' also means to have the boldness to raise the question of God in the context of these problems, thereby fulfilling the specific character of the Church's mission and showing how the Christian prospective enlightens, in an unprecedented way, the great problems of history. The new evangelization calls us to engage in dialogue with these sectors, not remaining confined to our communities and our institutions, but accepting the challenge to take part in these phenomena so as to speak and bear witness in these sectors, from the inside. This is the form of Christian *martyria* in today's world, engaging in dialogue even with the recent forms of a militant atheism or an extreme secularism, whose purpose is to eliminate the subject of God from human life" (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. Lineamenta*, 7).

- Alcoholics Anonymous: In 1990 *Life* magazine listed co-founder Bill Wilson as one of the most influential people of the twentieth century;<sup>21</sup>
- Jacques and Raissa Maritain, Mother Teresa, Brother Roger of Taizé, Oscar Romero . . .

The list goes on. To be new, this incarnational aspect will have to address new situations in radically new ways.<sup>22</sup>

2. It is increasingly *lay inspired, involved, and led*.<sup>23</sup> Preceded by the rise of anticlerical Enlightenment thinkers and statesmen, the French Revolution and its aftermath meant death or expulsion for clergy and religious and, all across Europe, the elimination of legal recognition for hundreds of religious communities together with the confiscation of their goods. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, an unintended side effect of this systemic greed was an unprecedented groundswell of the laity in support of the very Church whose influence the secular agenda had tried to ban from the public sphere. Individuals, organizations, and movements on both sides of the Atlantic made notable contributions to a burgeoning lay Catholic sense of Church, history, and social activism.

To garner support for their position, these laity did not hesitate to use the press, the same means used by their opponents. Consider, for example, the project of Blessed James Alberione, founder of the Pauline

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<sup>21</sup> "Life Lists 20th Century's Most Influential Americans," *Deseret News* (Sept 1, 1990), <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/119956/LIFE-LISTS-20TH-CENTURYS-MOST-INFLUENTIAL-AMERICANS.html?pg=all>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II "said to the bishops in Latin America: 'The commemoration of this half millennium of evangelization will have full significance if, as bishops, with your priests and faithful, you accept it as your commitment; a commitment not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression'" (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. Lineamenta*, 5).

The new evangelization requires "courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today . . . 'Today all Christians, the particular Churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit'" (id.).

<sup>23</sup> "Nor is transmitting the faith a specialized work assigned to a group of people or specifically designated individuals, but an experience of every Christian and the entire Church . . . This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel" (id., 12).



Family with its ten branches of laity, clergy, and religious, all dedicated in some way to proclaiming Christ, Way, Truth, and Life in a world of communication. It was a project that he boldly regarded as key to “a new evangelization,” which he saw as essential to the Church’s survival.

From Opus Dei to Communion and Liberation, modern lay movements point to a theological shift, part of Vatican II’s legacy, namely, an evangelization derived from Baptism,<sup>24</sup> rather than from the ministerial priesthood, as the basis for the Christian’s right and responsibility to share the Gospel of Christ. Much needed is the integration of Christian values in the social, academic, political, and economic sectors that these spiritualities foster.

3. As was stated above, John Paul proposed an anthropology that “passes . . . through people and their meeting each other.” The new evangelization is, therefore, *relational*, first with God in Christ, then with each other.

In his first encyclical, Benedict XVI underscored this relational aspect of faith:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction . . . Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn. 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.<sup>25</sup>

To be authentic this love for God must be “incarnated” in love for neighbor—concretely, in *empathy*: “[W]hoever does not love a brother [or sister] whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn. 4:20). Concretely, for example, people claim that the purpose of economics is to increase wealth. How often do they ask: For whom? According to what criteria? And at whose expense?<sup>26</sup> John Paul connects a warning against triumphalism vis-à-vis Communism with a warning to the West regarding this very prevailing notion about economics, exacerbated by the media:

How else can we explain the increasing gap between the rich North and the ever poorer South? Who is responsible for this? Man is re-

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<sup>24</sup> To explore the implications of Baptism for the new evangelization, especially in the integration of catechesis and sacramental practice, see id., Chapter III.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> As did the participants of the International Congress “Renewing the West by Renewing Common Sense,” held on July 17–20, 2014, in Huntington, Long Island, NY.

sponsible . . . [R]esponsibility lies with the struggle against God, the systematic elimination of all that is Christian.<sup>27</sup>

Is it really necessary to add here that little hinders the Church's evangelizing effort more than Christians exploiting other human beings?

In his latest encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes:

The principle of the maximization of profits, frequently isolated from other considerations, reflects a misunderstanding of the very concept of the economy . . . only when "the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne" . . . can those actions be considered ethical.<sup>28</sup>

In this, the popes are calling us to *communion*. In response to the new atheism, God is giving us the new evangelization, an act of charity, that in order to be an antidote to the individualism and isolation of our culture, can only be carried out in communion. The days of the Lone Ranger are over. No authoritarianism, no rivalries, no cultural imperialism, but reverence for the story of God's call to others, collaboration, obedience to the Spirit of God acting through the Church, the body of Christ, and a selfless sharing of the faith values that undergird all the great civilizations.<sup>29</sup>

4. We usually think of enculturation in terms of ethnicity. The media generated culture in which we globally live crossed ethnic borders long ago. Its languages are being interpreted everywhere in the ethnic symbols in which they are expressed. How can evangelization be *enculturated* there? How can it build a culture of communication in the secular sphere? Through a theology and spirituality of communication. The post-conciliar document, *Communio et progressio*, models such an approach in its review of salvation history and life in the Church through the lens of communication: the faith response to God's self-revelation, lived in communion (nn. 8–12).

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 132–133.

<sup>28</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si*, 195.

<sup>29</sup> In the nascent Church "[t]he process of evangelization became a process of discernment. Proclamation first requires moments of listening, understanding and interpretation. "In many ways, our times are similar to those in which St. Paul lived. As Christians, we too find ourselves immersed in a period of significant historical and cultural change which we will have greater opportunity to treat later in these pages. Evangelical activity demands that we undertake a similar, corresponding and timely activity of discernment" (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 3).

To enculturate and so, share, the principles and values that comprise the “operating system” of Western civilization, we will have to reboot. The process for this action is a communication paradigm. The Church will always derive her theology and spirituality from revelation. However, in order to speak the truth in a comprehensible and life-giving way to people of this age, she needs to recover her early methodology: seeing revelation primarily as communication and not just content. In this paradigm for evangelization, the medium becomes the message.<sup>30</sup> If the Church neglects to do this, she will continue to see media as extraneous to her mission, and so, will fail to both share the patrimony of the West and integrate with it the riches of the East and the South.

In his evangelization encyclical, *Mission of the Redeemer*, John Paul II observes:

After preaching in a number of places, St. Paul arrived in Athens, where he went to the Areopagus . . . (cf. Acts 17:22–31) the cultural center of the learned.

The first Areopagus of the modern age is the *world of communications* . . . Involvement in the mass media . . . is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel . . . [I]t is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications . . . [T]he “new culture” originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology (RM 37.c).

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<sup>30</sup> “This extensive mixing of cultures is the backdrop to our third great sector which has an increasingly determined effect on the lives of individuals and the collective conscience, namely, the means of social communications, which, while today providing great possibilities for the Church, also represents one of her greatest challenges. Although these means of social communications, in their initial stages, were limited to the industrialized world, they are now able to influence vast portions of developing countries. Today, no place in the world is beyond reach and, consequently, unaffected by the media and digital culture, which is fast becoming the ‘forum’ of public life and social interaction . . . In this sector, the new evangelization means that Christians need to show boldness in these ‘new *aeropaghi*’, where they live everyday, and find the means and approaches to ensure that the Church’s patrimony in education and knowledge, safeguarded by the Christian tradition, has a part to play in these ultra-modern places” (id., 6).

5. The new evangelization is *joyful*, because it trusts in God.<sup>31</sup> We all face obstacles in living and sharing our faith. Joy does not turn a blind eye to what afflicts society and the Church or fail to recognize our own insufficiency, but neither does it dwell on dour predictions about the future. Crossing the threshold of hope with the Apostle Paul, we see beneath every evil: “[W]here sin increased, grace has abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). Pessimism repels! Joy attracts! To quote Joan Rivers: “The first time I see a jogger smiling, I’ll consider it.”<sup>32</sup> In his first letter, John models the purpose and style of our own witness: “We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy” (1 Jn. 1:4).

6. Finally, the new evangelization is *prayerful*. “If the Lord does not build a house, in vain do its builders labor” (Ps. 127:1). As the story goes, when Fr. Alberione was approached by a journalist who wanted a photo of this entrepreneur of the Gospel—behind his desk, directing his empire—Fr. Alberione went over to his prie-dieu and knelt before the crucifix. “Here,” he directed, “this is where you can take my picture.” John Paul affirms that prayer “constitutes the easiest way of making God and His redeeming love present in the world.” As we discuss how to renew the West, how convincingly, how faithfully is prayer a factor?

One day as he concluded a parable on prayer, Christ asked a chilling question: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk. 18:8) John Paul describes this question as “the source of the missionary dimension of the prayer of the Church and of the Pope”<sup>33</sup>: a longing that Christ at his coming might find faith in the hearts, lives, and societies of the earth. Despite our insufficiency, we answer a resounding “yes!” to that desire of Christ and of every believing Christian.

Who compensates for our lack? Pope Francis answers: “[N]o words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in

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<sup>31</sup> “The new evangelization is an invitation to Christian communities to place greater trust in the Spirit who guides them in the course of history. In this way, they can overcome the temptation to fear and more clearly see the places and programmes where the question of God can be raised amidst people’s lives today” (id., 19).

“[T]he obstacles to the new evangelization are precisely a lack of joy and hope among people . . . We therefore approach the new evangelization with a sense of enthusiasm. We will learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing, even at times when proclamation might seem like a seed sown among tears (cf. Ps 126:6)” (id., 25).

<sup>32</sup> *Thinkexist.com*, [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the\\_first\\_time\\_i\\_see\\_a\\_jogger\\_smiling-i-ll/155433.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the_first_time_i_see_a_jogger_smiling-i-ll/155433.html), accessed on June 13, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 24.

our hearts.”<sup>34</sup> May the Spirit spark a new Pentecost within and among us and in so doing, grant to the world a new season of faith.

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## CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE INTO THE MEDIA CULTURE

### SUMMARY

The “new atheism” and the “new evangelization” have become the buzzwords of the age. Atheism is now the fastest growing “religious” group in the United States; the new evangelization decisively shaped the conclave that elected Jorge Bergoglio to the papacy. Twenty years ago, in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II reflected pastorally on some of the philosophical, spiritual, and cultural roots of both. His insights, embodied in Christians who live them, offer the Church a key to our times. If evangelization today is to announce the Gospel in the languages of today, what script might it use? What images might it evoke? What might its cadence be like?

**KEYWORDS:** anthropology, atheism, consumerism, Crossing the Threshold of Hope, faith, John Paul II, media culture, metaphysics, new evangelization, paradigm shift, Western civilization.

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<sup>34</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 261.