



**SAINT PAUL**  
Evangelization Institute

## **Basic Evangelization Training**

Course 1: The Basics

### **1.3 What is Evangelization?**

#### **What does the word “evangelization” mean?**

For many, the word “evangelization” carries negative connotations. It brings to mind images of people standing on street corners with Bibles and large signs yelling at people walking by, telling them that they “are going to hell” if they don’t repent of their sins. It recalls thoughts of Christians cornering others, even complete strangers, with five-minute sermons; of talking but not listening; of smug superiority; of constantly giving people answers to questions they haven’t asked. In the extreme, “evangelization” makes some people think of Conquistadores, by force or manipulation, imposing Christianity upon the native peoples of the Americas as a means of power over them.

None of these things sound appealing or worthwhile at all. But for whatever reasons, many people, as a kind-of knee-jerk reaction, associate any idea of direct, intentional evangelization with one or more of these counterfeits. These types of behavior are not authentic forms of evangelization.<sup>1</sup> They are different kinds of activity, false forms of evangelizing, sometimes referred to today as “proselytizing.” In some way, shape, or form, they objectify the one you’re reaching out to. They *impose*, rather than *propose*, the gospel. We don’t want you to proselytize. We want you to evangelize.

So if these kinds of behavior are not true evangelization, what kinds of behavior are? First we need to consider what the word “evangelization” means. Then we will briefly consider the content of the gospel message - the truth that evangelization is meant to proclaim. Lastly, we will consider, in basic terms, the true task of the evangelist.

The word “evangelization” is connected to the word “gospel.” When a priest or deacon reads the Gospel at Mass we know that means he is reading from one of the four books of the New Testament designated as “Gospels.” The word “gospel,” as we said above, means “good news.” But we often refer to the writers of the four Gospels as “the four evangelists”: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why do we call these authors of the Gospels “evangelists”?

The word “evangelist” is derived from a Greek word, the noun *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον in Greek letters), which means “good news.” “To evangelize” (*euangelizo*, εὐαγγελίζω) is “to tell the good news.” This Greek is of a specific form; a form known as “Koine Greek,” in which the New Testament was originally written. Even though the New Testament was written in Greek, the Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew. The related Hebrew word is the verb *basar* (בָּשַׂר in Hebrew letters).

In the ancient world an evangelist was someone who brought a gospel, who brought good news to announce, usually to a city or village. It could refer to the good news of the birth of a child. It could be about a military victory. It could promulgate a new law. In the Old Testament, bringing good news often had to do with proclaiming the saving works of God for His people Israel. This certainly is significant for the meaning of evangelization in the New Testament. But there is more to consider. In Jesus’ time, if the Roman Emperor was victorious in battle he would send an evangelist with the good news that victory belonged to Rome. Such military victories were presented as events that brought salvation to the Roman people, and the emperor was considered a savior, even a god.

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<sup>1</sup> John the Baptist and other saints certainly warned people who walked by of impending judgment for those who do not repent. They certainly preached a harsh message with voices raised. In contrasting these forms of preaching with “authentic evangelization,” we do not mean to exclude them completely. John the Baptist and the other saints who preached in this way were sent to cultures that already believed in divine judgment, and had received clear calls from God to preach in this way.

## What is the basic message of the gospel?

After Jesus rose from the dead He sent the apostles to proclaim the Good News that He died and rose from the dead to save mankind from sin. *He called them to evangelize.* The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is an infinitely greater victory than any earthly accomplishment; unlike Caesar, Jesus is true God and Savior. The apostles and other disciples of the Lord were given a mission by Jesus to go and spread the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth. This is called the “Great Commission.” In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, it reads, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

*By this commission, Christ made all His disciples into “evangelists.” He sent them out to tell all other people the Good News that He is the Messiah who has freed us from all bondage, especially the bondage of sin and the dominion of the devil, and that this freedom must be embraced by faith and repentance. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). The gospel is a message of salvation in Jesus.* Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the four evangelists recorded in manuscript the story of the life of Jesus and His saving mission, and they continue to evangelize us today when we read their Gospel accounts.

*To evangelize, then, is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ’s victory over sin and death and His offer of eternal salvation through a new life of faith.* Closely connected to this proclamation, and indeed part of it, is a warning: by rejecting this message and the new life of faith it calls for, one can reject the salvation offered by God. Salvation is not guaranteed, but can be refused! As recorded in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus included this also in His commission to His disciples: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15-16). Those who receive the gospel with faith and live by it, will have eternal life. Those who reject it to the end of their lives, choosing sin over God, will lose the eternal life Jesus won for them.

Through their Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John certainly proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus, promising life through faith in Jesus Christ, and warning of the death that comes from sin. We want you to do that too. We don’t want you to try to force someone to become Catholic, but to speak the truth to them, addressing it to their conscience. We want you to tell others about the Catholic Faith, and like the four evangelists, invite them to encounter Jesus Christ through acts of faith and prayer. Evangelization is not complete if Jesus has not been proclaimed and invitation to the faith has not been made. *Evangelization includes proclamation: “The kingdom of God is at hand!” - and invitation: “Repent, and believe in the gospel!”*