THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



Culture & the New Evangelization

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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Culture and the New Evangelization

Bringing Christ to a Post-Christian World

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INTRODUCTION

A Mission Field Called Home

For most of Western history, a Christian did not need to think much about evangelizing his own culture, because his culture was already Christian, soaked in the faith, assuming its truths, structured by its calendar and its morality. A man was born into a Christian world, and the work of mission was carried out far away, in lands that had not yet heard the Gospel. That world is gone. The culture a Christian now inhabits is no longer Christian but post-Christian, a civilization that once knew the faith and has largely left it, and this changes the entire situation of the believer, who now finds himself a missionary not in some distant land but in his own home, among his own people, in a culture that has forgotten the faith it once held.

This book is about that new situation and the response the Church has called for, which goes by the name of the new evangelization. It is new not because the Gospel has changed, for it has not, but because the mission field has: the task now is not to bring the faith to those who have never heard it but to re-propose it to a culture that has heard it and rejected or forgotten it, which is a different and in some ways harder work. The aim is to help the ordinary Christian man understand the post-Christian culture he lives in, grasp what the new evangelization requires, and take up his own part in the great work of bringing Christ back to a civilization that has lost him, which is the defining missionary task of our age.

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. — Mark 16:15

We will begin by understanding the post-Christian culture that is now the believer's mission field, and how it differs from both a Christian and a pre-Christian world. We will see what makes the new evangelization new and why it is needed. We will take up the particular challenge of reaching those who think they already know and have rejected the faith. We will consider how culture itself is to be engaged and shaped, not merely individuals converted. We will face the digital world that now forms the culture more than any other force. And we will see that the renewal of a post-Christian culture begins not with grand strategies but with the witness of transformed lives and vibrant communities, and that every believer has a part to play.

CHAPTER ONE

The World We Now Inhabit

Understanding the Post-Christian Culture

To evangelize the culture, a man must first understand it, and the culture he inhabits is a particular and historically unusual thing: a post-Christian culture, one that was formed by Christianity and has largely abandoned it. This is different from a culture that has never known the faith and different from one that still holds it, and understanding what a post-Christian culture is, how it came to be, and what it is like to evangelize, is the necessary foundation for the new evangelization. A man cannot reach a culture he does not understand, and the post-Christian culture has its own particular character that the evangelist must grasp.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. — John 1:5

Neither Christian Nor Pagan

The post-Christian culture is a peculiar thing, neither Christian nor simply pagan, but a civilization that was once Christian and has left the faith while retaining, in distorted forms, much that it inherited from it. It is not a Christian culture, for it no longer holds or assumes the faith, and its public life, its assumptions, and its morality are increasingly detached from or opposed to Christianity. But neither is it simply a pre-Christian pagan culture that has never heard the faith, for it carries the memory and the inheritance of Christianity, often in secularized and distorted forms, retaining Christian values cut off from their source, Christian expectations without Christian faith. This gives the post-Christian culture its peculiar character, haunted by a faith it has abandoned, living off a Christian inheritance it no longer acknowledges, neither believing nor wholly forgetting. Understanding this peculiar in-between character is important for the evangelist, for the post-Christian is not a blank slate to be written on nor a believer to be deepened, but someone who has a complicated relationship with a faith he thinks he knows and has left, and who must be approached as such. The post-Christian culture is neither Christian nor pagan but a third thing, and the evangelist must understand its peculiar character.

How the Faith Was Lost

The evangelist does well to understand something of how the culture came to abandon the faith, for the loss of faith in the West was not a sudden event but a long process with identifiable causes, and understanding it helps in addressing it. The faith was lost gradually, through a long series of intellectual, social, and spiritual developments, as the culture came to place its confidence in reason and science apart from faith, as it grew prosperous and comfortable and felt less need of God, as it reacted against the failures and scandals of Christians, as it embraced a radical individualism that resented all authority including the Church's, and as the transmission of the faith from generation to

generation broke down. This loss was not the result of the faith being disproven, for it was not, but of a complex cultural process by which the faith was gradually abandoned, forgotten, and rejected, often for reasons that had little to do with its truth. Understanding this helps the evangelist, for it reveals that the culture's rejection of the faith is often not a reasoned conclusion but the result of a long cultural drift, and that addressing it requires understanding and responding to the real causes of the loss. The faith was lost gradually and for complex reasons, and the evangelist who understands how it was lost is better equipped to address the culture that has lost it.

The Hunger Beneath the Surface

Beneath the surface of the post-Christian culture, for all its apparent indifference or hostility to the faith, lies a deep hunger, an unfulfilled longing that the culture's secular substitutes cannot satisfy, and this hunger is the great opportunity of the new evangelization. Having abandoned the faith, the post-Christian culture has not found the happiness it sought, but is marked by a pervasive emptiness, anxiety, loneliness, and loss of meaning, a hunger for the very things the faith provides that its secular replacements have failed to satisfy. This hunger, often unrecognized and unnamed, is real and widespread, a deep dissatisfaction beneath the surface of a culture that has gained the world and lost its soul, and it is precisely the opening for the new evangelization, the point at which the culture's need meets what the faith offers. The evangelist can take heart that beneath the indifference and hostility of the post-Christian culture lies a genuine hunger for meaning, purpose, belonging, and hope, a hunger that the faith uniquely answers, and that his task is in large part to connect this hidden hunger with the faith that satisfies it. The hunger beneath the surface of the post-Christian culture is the great opportunity of the new evangelization, and the evangelist who perceives it sees not only the difficulty of his mission field but its ripeness.

CHAPTER TWO

What Makes It New

Re-Proposing the Faith to the Fallen-Away

The new evangelization is called new not because its message is new but because its situation is new, and understanding what makes it new, how it differs from the original evangelization of pagan lands, is essential to grasping what it requires. The task of re-proposing the faith to those who have already heard and left it is genuinely different from the task of proposing it for the first time to those who have never heard it, and the

difference shapes the whole approach of the new evangelization. A man who understands what makes the new evangelization new is equipped to take up its particular challenge.

Behold, I am making all things new. — Revelation 21:5

The Same Gospel, a New Situation

The new evangelization is new in its situation, not its substance, for the Gospel it proclaims is the same Gospel the Church has always proclaimed, unchanged and unchanging, but the situation in which it proclaims it is new, a post-Christian culture rather than a pre-Christian one. This distinction matters, for the newness of the new evangelization does not lie in any new message, any updating or softening of the Gospel to suit the times, which would be a betrayal rather than an evangelization, but in a new situation requiring new approaches, new ardor, new methods, and new expressions suited to reaching a culture that has already heard and rejected the unchanging Gospel. The message remains the same; what is new is the context, the audience, and therefore the approach, for reaching the fallen-away requires a different strategy than reaching the never-reached. Understanding this keeps the new evangelization from the twin errors of changing the Gospel to suit the culture, which empties it, and of proclaiming it exactly as to a pre-Christian audience, which fails to meet the particular situation of the post-Christian. The new evangelization proclaims the same Gospel in a new situation, and its newness lies in the situation and the approach, not in the message, which remains forever the same.

The Difficulty of the Already-Heard

The particular difficulty of the new evangelization is that it addresses people who think they already know the faith and have rejected it, which is in some ways harder than addressing those who have never heard it, for the fallen-away carry resistances the never-reached do not. The person who has never heard the Gospel may receive it with fresh openness, but the person who has heard it, or thinks he has, and has left it, comes with a settled judgment against it, often based on caricatures, bad experiences, or a superficial acquaintance that he mistakes for full knowledge. This person believes he already knows what the faith is and has reasonably rejected it, and this false sense of already knowing is a formidable barrier, for it closes him to a fresh hearing, making him think there is nothing new to learn about a faith he has already dismissed. The new evangelization must therefore overcome not ignorance but a false and resistant familiarity, must get past the caricatures and the settled judgments to present the faith afresh to those who think they already know it. This is the particular difficulty of the already-heard, and it makes

the new evangelization in some ways harder than the first, requiring the evangelist to overcome a resistant familiarity that the original evangelization did not face.

New Ardor and New Methods

Meeting the new situation requires what has been called new ardor, new methods, and new expressions, a renewed zeal and fresh approaches suited to the post-Christian mission field, even as the message remains unchanged. New ardor means a renewed fervor and conviction in proclaiming the faith, for a lukewarm or apologetic evangelization will not reach a resistant culture; the new evangelization requires evangelists on fire with the faith, convinced and convincing. New methods means approaches suited to the new situation, using the means and the opportunities of the contemporary world, meeting people where they are, finding fresh ways to reach a culture that the old methods no longer reach. New expressions means presenting the unchanging faith in language and forms that can be heard by contemporary people, getting past the barriers of unfamiliar language and off-putting associations to present the faith freshly and attractively. These, new ardor, new methods, and new expressions, are what the new situation requires, the renewal of zeal and approach that allows the unchanging Gospel to reach the changed world. The new evangelization calls for this renewal, not of the message, but of the ardor, methods, and expressions with which it is proclaimed, so that the old Gospel can reach the new mission field with fresh power.

CHAPTER THREE

Reaching the Resistant

Getting Past the Caricatures

The new evangelization must reckon with the resistance of those who think they already know and have rejected the faith, and a central part of its work is getting past the caricatures and false impressions that stand between the post-Christian and a true encounter with the faith. Much of the culture's rejection of Christianity is a rejection not of the real thing but of a caricature, a distorted image of the faith that bears little resemblance to its reality, and the evangelist's task is often to dismantle the caricature and present the faith as it actually is. Understanding how to reach the resistant, how to get past their false impressions to a fresh encounter, is essential to the new evangelization.

Come and see. — John 1:46

They Reject What Is Not There

A crucial insight for reaching the resistant is that most people who reject Christianity are rejecting not the real thing but a caricature of it, a distorted image that bears little resemblance to the actual faith, so that their rejection, however firm, is often based on a misunderstanding. The post-Christian culture carries a host of caricatures of the faith: that it is anti-intellectual and opposed to science, that it is a joyless system of rules and repression, that it is hypocritical and corrupt, that it is naive and outdated, that it is judgmental and cruel. Many who reject the faith are rejecting these caricatures, which are indeed worth rejecting, rather than the real faith, which is nothing like them, so that their rejection, though sincere, is aimed at something that is not actually there. This is a hopeful insight for the evangelist, for it means the resistance he faces is often resistance to a false image rather than the true faith, and that his task is in large part to dismantle the caricature and reveal the reality, to help people see that what they rejected is not what the faith actually is. They reject what is not there, and the evangelist's work is to show them what is actually there, the real faith behind the caricature they have dismissed.

Dismantling the Caricature

The evangelist reaches the resistant in part by dismantling the caricatures, by gently revealing that the faith is not what they think, that their objections, valid against the caricature, do not touch the reality, and so opening them to a fresh look at the real thing. This dismantling is done partly by word, by clarifying what the faith actually teaches and showing that it is not the caricature they imagine, and partly and more powerfully by witness, by being a Christian who is evidently not the caricature, whose intelligence refutes the charge of anti-intellectualism, whose joy refutes the charge of joyless repression, whose love refutes the charge of judgmental cruelty. A single Christian who visibly contradicts the caricature does more to dismantle it than any argument, for he is living proof that the faith is not what they thought, and such a witness can open a resistant person to reconsider a faith they had dismissed. The dismantling of the caricature, by word and especially by witness, is central to reaching the resistant, for it removes the false image that stands between them and the real faith, and opens them to the fresh encounter that the caricature had foreclosed. To reach the resistant, the evangelist must dismantle the caricature they have rejected and reveal the reality they have never truly encountered.

Come and See

The deepest way past the resistance of the already-heard is not argument but encounter, the invitation to come and see, to actually encounter the living reality of the faith rather

than debating the caricature, for the resistant are won less by being argued with than by being drawn to see for themselves. When Nathanael dismissed Jesus with a prejudiced question, Philip did not argue but simply invited him to come and see, and the encounter did what argument could not. So the evangelist, facing the resistance of those who think they know the faith, often does best not to argue them out of their rejection but to invite them to encounter the reality, to come and see for themselves what the faith actually is, in a vibrant community, in the witness of transformed lives, in the beauty of worship, in a genuine encounter with Christ. This invitation to encounter, to come and see rather than to debate, is often more effective than any argument with the resistant, for it bypasses the settled judgments and offers a fresh experience of the reality that the caricature had obscured. Come and see is the invitation of the new evangelization to a resistant culture, an invitation not to win an argument but to encounter a reality, and it is often the encounter, rather than the argument, that finally reaches those who think they already know and have rejected the faith.

CHAPTER FOUR

Converting the Culture

Not Only Souls but Society

The new evangelization aims not only at the conversion of individuals but at the transformation of culture itself, at the re-Christianizing of a civilization, and this cultural dimension is essential to its vision. It is not enough to convert individuals one by one while the surrounding culture continues to form everyone in unbelief; the culture itself, with all its formative power, must be engaged and shaped, so that it supports rather than undermines the faith. Understanding the cultural dimension of the new evangelization, the engagement and transformation of culture and not only the conversion of individuals, completes its vision and reveals the fullness of the task.

You are the salt of the earth… You are the light of the world. — Matthew 5:13-14

Culture Forms People

The reason the new evangelization must engage culture and not only individuals is that culture forms people, shaping their assumptions, values, and vision in ways more powerful than explicit teaching, so that a non-Christian culture continually forms everyone in it, including believers, in a non-Christian direction. The culture, through its stories, images, assumptions, and institutions, is a constant formative force, teaching everyone within it what to value, what to assume, how to see the world, largely below the

level of conscious thought, and a post-Christian culture forms everyone in post-Christian ways. This means that converting individuals while leaving the culture untouched is a losing battle, for the culture continually re-forms people in unbelief faster than individual evangelization can convert them, and even the converted are continually shaped by the non-Christian culture they inhabit. The engagement of culture is therefore not optional but essential, for the culture's formative power must be addressed if the faith is to flourish; a culture that forms people in unbelief must be changed into one that at least does not undermine, and ideally supports, the faith. Culture forms people, and the new evangelization must therefore engage and seek to transform the culture, not only convert individuals, if it is to succeed against the formative power of a post-Christian civilization.

Christians in the Culture-Shaping Places

The transformation of culture requires Christians present and active in the places where culture is shaped, in the arts, the media, education, the professions, and the institutions that form the culture's assumptions and values, witnessing and working for the good there. Culture is shaped in particular places and by particular people, in the universities, the media, the arts, the centers of thought and influence, and the faith can shape culture only if Christians are present and faithful in these culture-shaping places, bringing the influence of the faith to bear where the culture is formed. This calls Christians to be present and excellent in the culture-shaping professions, not retreating from them into a Christian enclave but engaging them, bringing the light of the faith into the places where the culture's assumptions are made, working for a culture more open to the truth. This does not mean imposing the faith but bringing its influence to bear, being salt and light in the culture-shaping places, witnessing to the truth and working for the good, so that the culture is gradually influenced toward openness to the faith. The transformation of culture requires Christians in the culture-shaping places, and the believer called to this work serves the new evangelization by bringing the faith's influence into the very places where the post-Christian culture is formed.

The Long Work of Cultural Renewal

The transformation of a post-Christian culture is a long work, the labor of generations rather than of a single campaign, and the Christian engaged in it must take the long view, sowing seeds whose harvest he may not live to see. Cultures are not changed quickly, and the re-Christianizing of a civilization that took generations to secularize will likewise take generations, requiring patient, persevering labor over a long time, the slow building of a Christian presence and influence that gradually shifts the culture. The Christian engaged in cultural renewal must therefore take the long view, not expecting quick results, content to sow seeds and lay foundations for a harvest that may come only after he is gone,

faithful in his own generation's part of a work that spans many. This long view is essential, for the Christian who expects to see the culture transformed in his lifetime will be discouraged, while the one who understands the generational nature of the work can labor faithfully without discouragement, contributing his part to a transformation that will be completed by others. The long work of cultural renewal requires patience and the long view, the willingness to labor for a harvest one may not see, and the Christian engaged in it serves the new evangelization by faithfully doing his generation's part in the long transformation of a post-Christian culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

The New Public Square

Evangelizing the Digital World

No force shapes the contemporary culture more powerfully than the digital world, the screens, the networks, and the online spaces where people increasingly live, learn, and form their views, and the new evangelization must reckon with this new public square. The digital world is now the primary place where the culture is formed and where people spend much of their lives, and it is a mission field the Church cannot ignore, both a powerful tool for evangelization and a formative force that often works against the faith. Understanding how to engage the digital world, as both opportunity and challenge, is essential to the new evangelization in our time.

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! — Romans 10:15

Where the Culture Now Lives

The digital world has become the new public square, the primary space where the contemporary culture is formed, where people spend much of their time, encounter ideas, and shape their views, so that a mission to the culture that ignores the digital world misses where the culture now actually lives. The screens and networks are not a peripheral part of contemporary life but increasingly its center, the place where people get their news, form their opinions, build their relationships, and spend their hours, and the formative power once held by other institutions has passed largely to the digital world. This means the digital world is now a central mission field, perhaps the central one, for it is where the culture is formed and where people can be reached, and the new evangelization must be present there if it is to reach the contemporary person where he actually lives. To ignore the digital world is to abandon the primary space of contemporary life and culture, to leave the new public square to voices other than the

Gospel's, and the new evangelization must instead engage it, bringing the faith into the digital spaces where the culture now lives. The digital world is where the culture now lives, and the new evangelization must be present there, in the new public square, if it is to reach the contemporary person and influence the culture that forms him.

A Tool and a Danger

The digital world is both a powerful tool for evangelization and a serious danger to the faith and the soul, and the Christian must engage it with both its opportunity and its perils clearly in view. As a tool, the digital world offers unprecedented opportunities for evangelization, the ability to reach vast numbers, to make the faith available to anyone searching, to create and share content that draws people to Christ, to build community and offer formation across any distance; it is a powerful means of spreading the Gospel that the Church is right to use. But as a danger, the digital world also forms people in harmful ways, fostering distraction, superficiality, isolation, anxiety, and immersion in content that coarsens the soul and undermines the faith, so that it is also a formative force often working against the Gospel and a peril to the one who uses it carelessly. The Christian must therefore engage the digital world with discernment, using it as a tool for evangelization while guarding against its dangers, neither rejecting it entirely, which would abandon a vital mission field, nor embracing it uncritically, which would expose him to its perils. The digital world is both a tool and a danger, and the new evangelization must use the tool while reckoning honestly with the danger, engaging the digital world wisely for the sake of the Gospel while guarding against its genuine perils.

Witness in the Digital Space

The Christian's engagement of the digital world is finally a form of witness, a carrying of the faith into the digital spaces through the same means that work everywhere, the attractiveness of a life, the quality of genuine presence, the offering of truth and goodness and beauty amid the digital noise. The principles of evangelization do not change in the digital world; there too the faith is spread by attraction rather than aggression, by the witness of genuine goodness rather than the force of argument, by presence and relationship rather than mere broadcasting. The Christian witnesses in the digital space by being there as a genuine and attractive presence, by offering content and conversation marked by truth, charity, and beauty, by refusing the digital world's characteristic ugliness of contempt and combativeness, and by drawing people through the same attractiveness that draws them anywhere. This digital witness can take many forms, from creating content that offers the faith attractively, to engaging in online conversations with charity and truth, to simply being, in one's digital presence, a Christian whose goodness is evident; but in all its forms it is witness, the carrying of the faith into the new public

square through the same attraction that works everywhere. Witness in the digital space is the Christian's engagement of the digital world, bringing the faith into the new public square through a genuine and attractive presence that draws people to Christ amid the digital noise.

CHAPTER SIX

Communities That Shine

The Witness That Draws a Culture

For all the importance of engaging culture and the digital world, the deepest force in the re-evangelization of a post-Christian culture is not strategy but witness, and above all the witness of vibrant Christian communities whose shared life is so evidently good that it draws the surrounding culture. A post-Christian culture, having rejected the faith's claims, is reached less by arguments than by the sight of Christian communities living a life it has lost and secretly longs for, communities that shine with a quality of life, love, and joy that the culture cannot match. Understanding the power of such communities, and the believer's part in building them, reveals the heart of how a culture is actually re-evangelized.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
— John 13:35

The Argument of a Life Together

The most powerful argument the faith can offer a skeptical culture is not a proposition but a community, the sight of Christians living a life together so marked by love, joy, and goodness that it raises the question the culture's own emptiness has prepared. The early Church converted the ancient world not chiefly by argument but by the witness of its communities, whose love, care for the poor, and quality of life drew the pagans who observed them, provoking the famous observation, see how these Christians love one another. The same holds for the new evangelization: a post-Christian culture, empty and longing, is drawn most powerfully by the sight of Christian communities living the life it lacks, communities marked by a love, joy, belonging, and hope that the culture cannot find in its secular substitutes. Such a community is a living argument for the faith, a demonstration that the faith produces something the culture has lost and wants, and it draws people as no abstract argument can, by showing them a reality they long for. The argument of a life together, of a community whose shared life is evidently good, is the most powerful witness to a post-Christian culture, and the building of such communities

is central to the new evangelization, for it is often the sight of Christians loving one another that reaches a culture arguments cannot.

Counter-Cultural and Attractive

The Christian communities that reach a post-Christian culture are both counter-cultural and attractive, visibly different from the surrounding culture in a way that draws rather than repels, offering an alternative to the culture's emptiness that is evidently better. These communities do not reach the culture by blending into it, becoming indistinguishable from the world around them, for a community that is just like everything else offers nothing and draws no one; they reach it by being genuinely different, living a life the culture does not, embodying an alternative that the culture's own emptiness makes attractive. This counter-cultural difference must be attractive rather than merely strange or off-putting, a difference that draws by its evident goodness, joy, and love rather than repelling by its oddity or harshness; the community must be visibly better, not merely different, offering the culture a glimpse of a life it lacks and wants. The combination of being counter-cultural and attractive, genuinely different from the empty culture and evidently better, is what gives these communities their drawing power, for they offer the longing culture an alternative that is both real and desirable. Counter-cultural and attractive, visibly different and evidently good, such Christian communities draw a post-Christian culture by embodying the life it has lost and secretly longs for, and their building is at the heart of the new evangelization.

Your Part in Building Them

Every believer has a part in building the kind of community that draws a culture, for such communities are not built by leaders alone but by the committed participation of all their members, each contributing to the quality of life, love, and witness that makes the community shine. The believer builds such community by his own contribution to it, by loving his fellow members well, by participating fully in its life, by helping to create the warmth, love, and vibrancy that make it attractive, so that the community's drawing power is the cumulative effect of all its members' contributions. This means that a believer's work in his own Christian community, his parish, his group, his fellowship, is itself a central part of the new evangelization, for in helping to build a community that shines he is creating the very witness that most powerfully reaches a post-Christian culture. The believer need not be a cultural strategist or a digital evangelist to serve the new evangelization; he serves it powerfully simply by helping to build a vibrant, loving Christian community whose life draws the culture around it. Your part in building such communities is thus a central contribution to the new evangelization, for the communities that most powerfully reach a post-Christian culture are built by the

committed participation of ordinary believers, each contributing to the quality of shared life that makes the community a light drawing a culture in darkness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Hope for a Fallen-Away World

Why the New Evangelization Will Bear Fruit

The task of re-evangelizing a post-Christian culture can seem overwhelming, even hopeless, a tiny and shrinking Church facing a vast and powerful secular civilization, and the believer may wonder whether the new evangelization can really succeed. But there are solid grounds for hope, reasons to believe that the new evangelization will bear fruit and that the post-Christian culture is not beyond the reach of the Gospel. Understanding these grounds for hope sustains the believer in the long and difficult work of the new evangelization, and sends him to it not in despair but in confident hope.

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. — Matthew 16:18

The Culture's Own Emptiness Is an Opening

The first ground for hope is that the post-Christian culture's own emptiness and failure are themselves an opening for the Gospel, for a culture that has tried life without God and found it wanting is a culture ripe for the rediscovery of what it abandoned. The secular experiment has not delivered the happiness it promised, and the post-Christian culture is increasingly marked by the emptiness, anxiety, loneliness, and loss of meaning that reveal the failure of life without God, a failure that is itself an argument for the faith and an opening for its return. This growing emptiness and dissatisfaction, far from being only a cause for despair, is a ground for hope, for it is precisely the condition in which people begin to seek again what they abandoned, to wonder whether the faith they rejected might hold the answer their secular life has failed to provide. The culture's own emptiness is thus an opening for the Gospel, a ripening of the mission field through the failure of its secular alternative, and the believer can take hope that the very emptiness of the post-Christian culture is preparing it, beneath the surface, for a rediscovery of the faith. The culture's emptiness is an opening, and the failure of the secular experiment is itself a ground for hope that the new evangelization will find a culture increasingly ready to seek again what it lost.

God Is Still at Work

The deeper ground for hope is that God himself is at work in the post-Christian culture, drawing souls, preparing hearts, and advancing his purposes even where his presence is least apparent, so that the new evangelization is not the Church's work alone but God's, and its success does not depend finally on human strength. However dark the culture appears, God has not abandoned it, but is at work within it, drawing individuals to himself, preparing the ground, keeping the light burning in the darkness, advancing his purposes through means seen and unseen, so that the believer labors not alone but as a co-worker with a God who is already at work. This is the deepest ground for hope, for it means the new evangelization does not depend finally on the Church's strength against the culture's, which would indeed be hopeless, but on God, who is at work in the culture and whose purposes cannot be defeated. The believer can therefore labor in hope, knowing that he is not fighting a losing battle by his own strength but cooperating with a God who is already at work in the culture and who will accomplish his purposes. God is still at work in the post-Christian culture, and this is the deepest ground for the believer's hope, for the new evangelization is finally God's work, and its success rests on his power rather than on the Church's strength against a hostile world.

The Promise That Cannot Fail

Finally, the believer's hope rests on the promise of Christ himself, that he would build his Church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it, a promise that guarantees the ultimate triumph of the Gospel whatever the appearances of any particular age. The Church has faced the apparent triumph of hostile cultures before and has outlasted them all, for the promise of Christ secures her against ultimate defeat, guaranteeing that the Gospel will not finally fail however dark any particular moment appears. The post-Christian culture, for all its power, is not the first civilization to seem to have defeated the faith, and it will not be the last to be surprised by the faith's resilience and renewal, for the promise of Christ stands over all of history, assuring that the gates of hell will not prevail against his Church. This promise is the believer's final ground for hope, lifting his eyes above the discouragements of the present moment to the certainty of Christ's ultimate triumph, and freeing him to labor in the confidence that the cause he serves cannot finally fail. The promise that cannot fail is the believer's ultimate hope in the new evangelization, for whatever the appearances of the post-Christian age, Christ has promised that his Church will not be defeated, and the believer labors in the certainty of a triumph that is finally guaranteed, not by the Church's strength, but by the promise of her Lord.

CONCLUSION

Bring Christ Home

The mission field has come home. The Christian is now a missionary not in some distant land but in his own post-Christian culture, called to bring Christ back to a civilization that once knew him and has largely left him, which is the defining missionary task of our age. This book has been about that task: understanding the post-Christian culture that is now the believer's mission field; grasping what makes the new evangelization new and why it is needed; learning to reach the resistant by getting past their caricatures to a fresh encounter; engaging and seeking to transform the culture itself and not only individuals; evangelizing the digital world that now forms the culture; building the vibrant communities whose witness most powerfully draws a post-Christian culture; and finding solid grounds for hope that the new evangelization will bear fruit.

The task is great, but so are the resources and the grounds for hope: a culture whose own emptiness is opening it to seek again, a God who is at work within it, and the promise of Christ that his Church will not be defeated. And the task reaches every believer, for the re-evangelization of a culture is accomplished not by strategists and specialists alone but by the witness of countless ordinary Christians living transformed lives and building vibrant communities in the midst of a culture that has lost its way.

So take up your part in bringing Christ home to a fallen-away world. Understand the culture you inhabit and the hunger beneath its surface; present the faith afresh to those who think they know and have rejected it, getting past their caricatures to a living encounter; bring the influence of the faith into the culture-shaping places and the digital public square; and above all, help to build the kind of vibrant, loving Christian community whose life shines so brightly that the surrounding culture is drawn to its light. Do this, and you will take your part in the great work of our age, the bringing of Christ back to a civilization that has lost him, laboring in hope for the re-evangelization of a culture that, beneath its indifference, hungers for the very Gospel it has abandoned, and trusting the promise of Christ that the gates of hell will not prevail against his Church.

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