

Czestochowa, September 12, '2026

Dr hab. Paweł Maciaszek
Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa
Faculty of Social Sciences

Review of Doctoral Dissertation in the Discipline of Theological Sciences
by Fr. mgr lic. Joseph Inarigu Abu *New Evangelization according to the Teaching of*
John Paul II as a basic for the Growth of the Church in Nigeria
produced under the scientific direction of Rev. fr. prof. dr hab. Marek Tatar,
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Faculty of Theology,
Warsaw 2026, pp. 191 (+ pp. 14 bibliography).

This dissertation contains the following parts:

1. Selection of research topic
2. Dissertation objectives
3. Work structure
4. Methodology of work
5. Substantive value of the dissertation
6. Formal aspect of the work
7. Questions for debate
8. Conclusion

1. Selection of research topic

The doctoral thesis written by Fr Joseph Inarigu Abu, MA, Licentiate, comprises 191 pages – it is a meticulous work. In addressing the topic *The New Evangelisation according to the Teaching of John Paul II as a Foundation for the Growth of the Church in Nigeria*, the author discusses not only the binding duty to proclaim the Gospel, but also the fact that this task is becoming increasingly difficult (increasingly complex). This situation raises the question of whether the constantly changing circumstances of life – such as particularly marked linguistic diversity, the evolution of value systems, and the threats arising from technological progress – necessitate a change in the content of Christ's teaching and the way it is conveyed to the modern world.

A thorough study of the teachings of John Paul II enabled the PhD candidate to accurately identify a coherent concept for proclaiming the Gospel, known as the New Evangelisation. In the context of the contemporary challenges facing human life – political and economic, social and cultural – he undertook the task of finding an answer to the fundamental question: can the papal concept be regarded as an effective means of conveying Christ's saving teaching to the modern world? Is it effective from a biblical, theological and pastoral perspective? Are the Polish Pope's guidelines directed solely at those who are unfamiliar with this teaching? Does his concept for developing spiritual life also work for Christians who have strayed from the path of faith?

Fr Abu studied the teachings of John Paul II in great detail. He also discerned from them a warning that evangelisation must not be formulaic. It must take into account the specific religious, cultural and social context of a given country. For there are societies with a deeply rooted faith (where a mature faith must be sustained and deepened), highly secularised societies (countries where social groups have lost the meaning of faith and where it is therefore necessary to build a relationship with God from the ground up), and mission territories – *ad gentes* (where people do not yet know Christ and his saving work). It is therefore not surprising – indeed, it is a cause for joy – that the author undertakes the intellectual endeavour of analysing how the Pope's principles of the New Evangelisation can be applied in Nigeria. The PhD candidate is familiar with this country and recognises the specific challenges present there; these include, amongst others: inter-religious tensions, rapid urbanisation, and the need for the inculturation of religion. He aims to demonstrate that addressing these challenges will be decisive for the effectiveness of proclaiming Christ's teaching.

The choice of the pastoral issue presented in the thesis appears justified – it is both interesting and important. For there is a need to seek opportunities to develop the spiritual life of the Church at all times and in all places. If such opportunities exist, they should be utilised.

2. Dissertation objectives

The author has set out the following objectives (p. 11):

- a/ to present the teachings of John Paul II on the New Evangelisation,
- b/ to demonstrate that the teachings left by the Polish Pope form the basis for the development of the Church in Nigeria, despite the many threats to the integrity of Christian life and the effectiveness of evangelisation that are evident in that country.

It is worth noting that each chapter begins with a brief introduction. These introductions outline the purpose for which the content presented in the chapter in question is intended. This approach ensures that the reader does not get lost in a maze of theory and can more easily follow the development of the topic under discussion.

A thorough understanding of the papal concept of transmitting Christ's teaching can provide a solid foundation for proclaiming the message of salvation. In turn, demonstrating that the New Evangelisation should be implemented in Nigeria can create a paradigm for the renewal of the Church's community and its missionary commitment (pp. 12-13). The author is convinced that this presentation will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the future of the Church in Nigeria. The aims of this dissertation, as set out in the Introduction, encourage the reader to engage with it.

3. Work structure

The doctoral thesis presented by Fr. Joseph Abu comprises 191 pages and consists, amongst other things, of five chapters. The title of the thesis is concise and unambiguous; its structure is logical and convincing – so clear, in fact, that one can easily discern the author's chosen approach to presenting the selected topic. The even distribution of the ideas presented testifies both to the well-thought-out structure of the thesis and to the care taken to ensure that no single thread dominates the entire content. The Introduction and Conclusion serve as a unifying framework for the chapters, bringing them together as a whole. The author has a good grasp of the current state of knowledge regarding the topic under consideration. This is evidenced by the extensive bibliography (spanning 14 pages), which also includes international publications. These constitute a strong point of the thesis. The source research has been carried out thoroughly and all texts have been selected appropriately; they are relevant to the subject matter of the doctoral thesis and enable a multi-faceted academic discourse. The thesis is characterised by meticulous writing; its style is correct and clear, and the sentences are constructed logically.

In the first chapter of his thesis, the PhD candidate explained how the concept of 'evangelisation' should be understood. He did so by drawing on the Holy Scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law, the Second Vatican Council, and the teachings of the popes and bishops of the Catholic Church in Africa. This first part of the thesis already draws on reflections on the New Evangelisation relating to both the African continent and Nigeria; these are drawn, amongst other sources, from the post-synodal

apostolic exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011), as well as the two Synods of African Bishops (1994 and 2009).

In the second chapter of the work, he highlighted John Paul II's commitment to the New Evangelisation. He presented the Pope's vision for this form of pastoral care by referring to the teachings contained in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (1990), the apostolic exhortations *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) and *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), in the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), in his homily in Kraków-Nowa Huta (1979), and during his two pilgrimages to Nigeria (1982 and 1998). In this way, he demonstrated that the key tenets of his vision – namely, a new approach, innovative methods and new ways of transmitting the faith – remain relevant to this day. According to John Paul II, these three elements are essential for the effective proclamation of the Gospel in a changing world. In turn, the essence of teaching the truths of the faith is formed by five fundamental theological principles: Christ-centredness, shared responsibility, universality, dialogue with culture, and missionary spirituality. These principles show that the papal concept of the New Evangelisation continues to be a source of inspiration and guidance for the Church in the 21st century as well.

Particular praise is due to the way in which the author justifies and reinforces John Paul II's concept of the New Evangelisation; he draws on the scholarly insights of esteemed theologians such as Cardinal Avery Dulles, George Weigel, Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder and Michael Gallagher. Citing their views lends the analysis greater academic credibility and demonstrates that the concept under discussion is supported by broader theological reflection. It is also worth noting the author's ability to bring together various research perspectives, thanks to which the concept of the New Evangelisation is presented as well-considered, relevant and of enduring significance for the mission of the contemporary Church. This use of the work of esteemed theologians constitutes a significant strength of the reviewed work and attests to the rigour of the analysis carried out.

The third part of this thesis is a description of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The local community is deeply rooted in the Tradition and universality of the Church of Christ, and carries out its evangelising mission within a specific socio-cultural and religious context. A defining feature of this reality is the coexistence of a genuine desire to live out one's faith on a daily basis alongside serious social, political and moral problems. Consequently, the presence of the Church and its multifaceted mission – encompassing the kerygmatic, liturgical, catechetical, educational, social and integral development dimensions – cannot be analysed in isolation from the specific circumstances of life in Nigerian society.

For the proclamation of the Gospel takes place in a context where faith is confronted with the reality of corruption, violence, social insecurity, poverty and a crisis of moral values.

One of the fundamental conditions for the effective fulfilment of this mission is the deepening of the shared responsibility of all members of the People of God. Of particular importance here is the collaboration between the clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful, based on a proper understanding of their charisms, vocations and roles within the life of the Church. Shared responsibility, understood in this way, finds its particular expression in the ecclesiology of synodality, which emphasises communion, participation and mission as fundamental dimensions of the Church's life. Synodality does not, however, merely denote a specific organisational method, but expresses a way of realising ecclesial communion, in which every baptised person is called to share in the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ.

In the fourth chapter, the author outlined the path of the New Evangelisation in relation to the realities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. He justified the need for a renewed and refreshed proclamation of the Gospel, tailored to the people of that country. In the Nigerian context, this task becomes particularly significant and urgent due to the complexity of the circumstances. Among the most significant factors hindering the effective implementation of the evangelising mission are the inadequate standard of catechesis and Christian formation, infrastructural limitations, and insufficient cooperation between the clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful. Missionary activity is also not made any easier by the influence of contemporary ideological trends and cultural changes, which affect the way traditional Christian values are perceived. These factors pose a challenge not only to the Church's pastoral work, but also to her ability to communicate the faith in a pluralistic society in a clear and credible manner.

Chapter Five sets out recommendations for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The synthesis of conclusions drawn from the description and analysis of John Paul II's teaching on the New Evangelisation has enabled the author to formulate specific pastoral proposals which may contribute to the renewal of ecclesial life at both the diocesan and parish levels. The faithful of this country should recognise the opportunities and the urgent need for the development of spiritual life. The proposed courses of action remain rooted in the teachings and documents of the Church's Magisterium and focus on areas such as: - in-depth catechesis and Christian formation, - building ecclesial communion, - the development of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, - an appropriate renewal of pastoral structures and practices. The work of the New Evangelisation in Nigeria requires a contextual approach:

on the one hand, fidelity to the deposit of faith must be maintained; on the other hand, concrete solutions must be implemented to address the challenges posed by the country's complex socio-political situation, multiculturalism and religious pluralism. Contextualising evangelisation does not mean relativising Christ's teaching, but rather choosing forms of proclaiming it – for example, through the process of inculturation – which will enable the people of this country to embrace the Gospel more fully and to live out the message of salvation in their daily lives.

The pastoral implications outlined by Fr Joseph Abu include, amongst others:

- the need for mystagogical catechesis explaining how the sacraments one receives influence one's daily morality, choices and relationships with others;
- the establishment of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) to deepen faith and foster solidarity amongst people;
- improving working conditions for lay staff in Church institutions;
- providing religious formation for children and young people;
- making the faithful aware that the spiritual renewal of individuals contributes to the holiness of society;
- strengthening cooperation between priests, religious and the laity;
- utilising modern means of communication in the work of evangelisation;
- promoting interreligious and ecumenical dialogue;
- ensuring the participation of Catholics in the management of public life;
- providing pastoral care for victims of armed conflicts;
- strengthening the work of Church commissions and their impact on the lives of the faithful and society as a whole (the Liturgical Commission, the Catechetical Commission, the Pastoral Commission, the Commission for Family Life, the Commission for Youth, the Commission for Communication, and Caritas – Justice, Development and Peace).

The PhD candidate rightly pointed out that the structure of the thesis reflects its methodological orientation (p. 12); the arrangement of the chapters shows not only what the author is investigating, but also the sources of knowledge he has selected and the path he has taken to reach his conclusions.

4. Methodology of work

The author described the method used in this study as follows:

- listing and characterising the individual elements of the New Evangelisation as presented by John Paul II in his teachings;
- analysing the current pastoral and socio-religious reality of the Church in Nigeria.

Through a process of deduction, moving from universal principles (widely known

- and applied) to specific applications (concrete guidelines and solutions), he identified the foundations for the Church's future evangelisation efforts;
- a bibliographical approach was adopted, that is, a study of the texts of the Church's Magisterium was carried out.

It is worth noting at this point that the methodological approach outlined above finds application in pastoral theology. Within the structure of the so-called practical syllogism, the following elements can be distinguished:

- the major premise – comprising the truths of the faith and theological principles – that is, what things ought to be;
- the minor premise – this is the result of the descriptive-analytical method – that is, how reality stands at a given moment;
- the conclusion – this consists of pastoral implications – that is, what needs to be changed and what actions should be taken.

5. Substantive value of the dissertation

With regard to the individual sections of the thesis, it should be noted that the *Introduction* to the doctoral thesis under review has been prepared correctly and contains all the essential elements, including a justification of the need to address the topic. It also sets out the aims of the work, the methodological assumptions, and a general outline of the substantive content of the individual chapters.

It cannot be overlooked that the author has presented the issue of the New Evangelisation in a methodologically structured and theologically profound manner; he has highlighted the biblical foundations of the New Evangelisation and their consistent alignment with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and those of St John Paul II. One can discern an integrated approach to the sources cited and the effort made to highlight their mutual complementarity. The author does not confine himself to a descriptive presentation of these sources, but attempts a synthetic interpretation of their significance for the Church's contemporary evangelising mission. This allows us to discern both the continuity in the development of reflection on evangelisation and the new perspectives arising from the cultural and social changes of the modern world. The PhD candidate has identified in the teachings of John Paul II a coherent and integral foundation for the Church's renewed missionary activity.

A key academic strength of this thesis is its comprehensive analysis of the historical development of the pastoral structures of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, presented in close connection with the socio-cultural changes that have taken place throughout the history of that Church. The author does not confine himself to a chronological account of the formation of ecclesial structures, but presents their development as a dynamic process, closely intertwined with the historical, social, cultural and religious conditions of the country. The analysis clearly reveals the challenges facing contemporary Christians – the processes analysed include, amongst others, secularisation and the relativisation of values, the dynamic growth of Pentecostal communities and movements, the phenomenon of corruption, and the progressive erosion of traditional structures and values. The author convincingly argues that these phenomena do not operate in isolation, but form a complex reality within which the Church is called to carry out its evangelising mission. Secularism and relativism contribute to a drift away from the faith and the abandonment of Christian values. The growing significance of Pentecostal movements raises questions for the Church regarding the effectiveness of its chosen forms of pastoral care and the language of evangelisation. Corruption and the weakening of traditional cultural bonds, in turn, hinder the building of both social and ecclesial communities.

A key achievement of this thesis is to demonstrate that effective evangelisation in the Nigerian context requires the Church's critical yet creative engagement with the local culture. The author convincingly explains that inculturation cannot be understood merely as the adaptation of external forms of pastoral activity to the local context, but as a process of creative dialogue between the Gospel and culture. This dialogue must be characterised by respect for cultural values, whilst at the same time subjecting them to critical evaluation in the light of the Christian message of salvation.

The author aptly points out that the authentic rooting of the Gospel in Nigerian society's culture is one of the conditions for its credible and fruitful proclamation. A critical and creative approach to culture enables the Church, on the one hand, to recognise and make use of the values present within it that foster the acceptance of the Christian message, and, on the other hand, to engage in dialogue with those elements of culture that require evangelical purification and transformation. Thus, the author presents inculturation as a dynamic process in which culture becomes not only a space for evangelisation, but also an essential context for its realisation. The value of this approach lies in its combination of theological reflection with the specific socio-cultural context of Nigeria.

The thesis demonstrates that only evangelisation which takes into account the actual cultural and social experiences of its audience can lead to the faith taking deep root and to the renewal of the Church's life. In this sense, the analysis presented here makes a valuable contribution to the reflection on contemporary models of evangelisation and on the significance of inculturation for the Church's missionary activity.

6. Formal aspect of the work

The Introduction correctly identifies the key issues that will be discussed in the individual chapters of the thesis. However, this description sometimes contains summarising elements; as a result, the reader may feel that they are not required to familiarise themselves with the analysis of the source material that led to the conclusions presented (see e.g. pp. 133, 165).

In the source references (both in the footnotes and the bibliography), there are not only different ways of citing the same works, but also instances where they are omitted. Please compare footnotes no. 144, 146 and 149. John Paul II's publication *Omelia a Mogila (Nowa Huta)*, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, is not included in the bibliography. The author also failed to include the publications cited in footnotes no. 368, 369.

7. Questions for debate

I would like to propose two questions for discussion:

A/ A few days ago, Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu – the Nigerian-born Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelisation – remarked: "A culture evangelised by Christ becomes capable of both giving and receiving. It does not need to put up walls to remain true to itself" (Rome, September 3, '2026). Please answer the following questions: Can a culture that is evangelised by Christ simultaneously preserve its distinctiveness and remain open to the values and experiences of other cultures? What challenges does this mutual capacity for 'giving and receiving' entail?

B/ John Paul II made two pilgrimages to Nigeria, in 1982 and 1998. Were there any changes in the life of society, initiated by the Polish Pope, during the period between these visits (16 years) and in the years following the second pilgrimage? If the Pope's words did bring about changes, then the PhD candidate's work – which recalls this teaching and relates it to the contemporary difficulties faced by Nigerians – may have practical value and offer solutions to their current problems.

8. Conclusion

The doctoral dissertation by Fr. Joseph Inarigu Abu is the fruit of diligent work that demonstrates a high level of scholarship. Given the topicality and importance of the subject matter, the methodological coherence, the thorough presentation of the issue *The New Evangelization according to the teaching of John Paul II as a foundation for the growth of the Church in Nigeria* and the sound use of the collected sources, the dissertation merits a positive assessment. The work offers an interesting and, importantly, comprehensive treatment of the chosen topic. Its publication – which I strongly encourage – would undoubtedly provide a both interesting and valuable read.

There is no doubt that the dissertation by Fr. mgr lic. Joseph Inarigu Abu meets the criteria defined for a doctoral thesis and can serve as the basis of further registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree. I put forward a proposal to admit PhD Student to further stages of the registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree.