



EVANGELIZATION AND HUMAN PROMOTION: INSIGHTS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Abstract

This paper contends that, in the New Testament, particularly within the ministry and message of Jesus, evangelisation is intrinsically linked to the promotion of the human person. The central claim advanced here is that authentic evangelisation, as reflected in the teachings and actions of Christ and his disciples, consistently aims at the integral development and dignity of every human being. Consequently, human promotion is not simply a byproduct of Gospel proclamation, but constitutes its essential content and outcome. Christ intends for the Church to expand both quantitatively and qualitatively through the efforts of his disciples, with evangelisation serving as the primary means by which the Church perpetuates itself. The effectiveness of evangelistic activity is measured by the elevation and flourishing of the human person. This study explores the relationship between evangelisation and human promotion from a New Testament perspective, with particular emphasis on the Gospels, and considers the implications of this relationship for evangelistic work in contemporary Nigeria. It maintains that, for the Church to fulfil this mission effectively, continual focus on the human person, who stands at the centre of all evangelisation, is imperative.

Keywords:

Evangelisation, Human, Person, Promotion.

Introduction

Evangelisation, as a direct consequence of obedience to the Great Commission, has been a principal preoccupation of the Church since its inception. It has been commanded as an abiding obligation of the church to the end of the age, and successive generations of the Church have taken this mandate seriously over the centuries. The Acts of the Apostles reveals the apostles' zeal in this direction, and the early church is also not left out of the venture, as through it the gospel spread to the nooks and crannies of the Roman Empire. In the same vein, the church of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a tremendous quest for and emphasis on world evangelisation. This is apparent in the myriad independent missionary bodies that emerged during that time. Similarly, the 21st-century Church is not relenting in its effort in this direction. Many conferences on world evangelisation have been held in recent years, and many declarations have been issued. These have been backed by concrete actions that have promoted the gospel message

in many countries worldwide. Many Church denominations have, over the years, developed their own Mission Boards and Evangelistic groups, which have performed tremendously in this regard.

The Bible Societies around the world are continually making the Bible available in the indigenous language of the people so as to expose them to the word of God. Millions unreached by resident missionaries have access to the gospel through missionary radio, and virtually every province and village is being penetrated with the gospel in one way or another.¹ Also, Muslim lands are known to be listening to Christian messages through broadcasts in their own language or in a language they can understand in part.² These attainments notwithstanding, there is still a lot of ground to be covered. The new century presents some great and exciting challenges to the Christian Church as a series of changes – political, social, demographic, economic, philosophical, and religious - are daily evolving in the world. The world population is increasing, and new communities are developing by the day. The world is becoming increasingly integrated, and we are becoming more aware and knowledgeable of various illnesses, injustices, problems and suffering around the world.

This study investigates the relationship between evangelisation and human promotion from a New Testament perspective, with particular reference to the Gospels. It further considers the implications of this relationship for evangelistic efforts in Nigeria today. The argument advanced is that, for the Church to fulfil this mission effectively, sustained attention to the human person—who remains central to all forms of evangelisation—is essential.

1. The Church on Evangelisation and Human Promotion

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, evangelisation and human promotion, understood mainly in socio-economic terms, were seen largely as two separate and contrasting realities. The one was assigned to the Church. The other to the State and to voluntary agencies devoted to funding developmental projects in the Third World.³ Evangelisation emphasised an eschatological or after-death type of salvation. Christians were taught to live in this life so that they may inherit heaven in the life to come. To this end, they were to mortify their bodies, despise earthly things and embrace a life of asceticism.

However, this dichotomous view was not without critics, both then and now. Some theologians argue that a sharp separation between spiritual and temporal concerns overlooks scriptural instances in which Jesus and the apostles addressed material needs alongside spiritual ones. Others point out that, even historically, the Church engaged in charity and social outreach, suggesting the boundaries were not always as rigid as proposed. Additionally, some say the dualism between body and soul was not solely a Christian creation but an inherited lens. They

¹ EVANGELISTIC RADIO. “OneWay Africa.” <https://www.onewayafrica.org/evangelistic-radio> Accessed March 21, 2026.

² “Call of Hope’s Radio Ministry.” Call of Hope. <https://www.callofhopeus.org/radio> Accessed March 21, 2026

³ Encyclical Letter of Leo XIII, *Sapientiae Christianae* (New York: Paulist, 1941), no. 30. 18-19.

argue that Christian doctrine sought to transcend this division, as seen in the holistic vision of Christian salvation in some early Christian writings. Modern theological scholarship often questions the effectiveness or soundness of rigid dualism, proposing a more integrated approach to faith and social responsibility. By acknowledging these alternative views and critiques, the complexity of the historical relationship between evangelisation and human promotion becomes clearer.

When the Church became involved in human development in Africa, building schools and hospitals, it mainly aimed to use these as tools for proselytising and evangelising. That is why, for instance, many still lament the Government's takeover of schools in Nigeria. The move left the Church nearly bankrupt in its evangelisation work, as it had no viable alternative channel.⁴ This split between evangelisation and human development had roots in the anthropological dualism of Hellenistic Greek culture, where Christianity grew. According to Karl Rahner, this dualism influenced Church life until the Second Vatican Council. This anthropology, seeing humans as both body and soul, was expressed as a separation of church and state, spiritual and temporal planes, and, ultimately, religion and life.⁵

This dualistic approach claimed to find its theological basis in New Testament texts such as “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36) and “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth” (Col 3:2). These texts were, for the most part, read out of context. The approach ignored the implications of the Lord's prayer: “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:11). Its spirituality emphasized a vertical relationship between the soul and God, neglecting the Gospel's social dimension—“I was hungry and you gave me to eat” (Matt 25:31–46, see v. 35).⁶

In Africa, the procedure destabilised and alienated Africans from themselves, their neighbours, and their environment. It did not challenge African Christians to integrate faith fully into life, as was customary in traditional cultures. This has led to what is known as “the Sunday-Sunday Christian.”⁷ The Second Vatican Council, however, brought about a new understanding of the relationship between evangelisation and human promotion. Since the Council, human development has been progressively seen as an integral aspect of evangelisation, even as a constitutive element in the preaching of the Gospel.⁸

⁴ E. Ahanotu, “Political Bargaining, Religion, and Educational Development: The Nigerian Experience from the Takeover of Schools from Christian missions.” *International Journal of Educational Development* 106 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2024.103000> Accessed March 21, 2026.

⁵ Karl Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” *Theological Investigations 20* (New York: Crossroad 1981), 77-89.

⁶ “Dualism in Johannine Gospel.” Matlana's Blog. 2017. <https://matlana.wordpress.com/2017/05/26/dualism-in-johannine-gospel/> Accessed March 21, 2026.

⁷ Robert Barron, Joshua. “African Christian Theology.” *African Christian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2021): 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10672613.2021.1870190> Accessed March 21, 2026.

⁸ The Pastoral Constitution of the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*), nos. 60-90.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), for instance, declares “the split between the faith” which people profess and “their daily lives” to be “*among the more serious errors of our age*” (emphasis mine). It also considers neglecting “temporal duties” as something that jeopardises (one’s) eternal salvation.⁹ Accordingly, it exhorts all Christians to imitate Christ the carpenter by properly exercising their earthly activities, humane, domestic, professional, social, and technical, gathering them into a vital synthesis with religious values.

More significantly, the document acknowledges that the Church itself has profited “richly by the development of human social life,” for whoever promotes the human community at the family level, culturally, in its economic, social, and political dimensions, both nationally and internationally, is contributing greatly to the Church as well. So not only does the document advocate a synthesis of “one’s faith and one’s daily life”, it sees all activities that aim at integral human development as enriching the Church itself. This surely is a significant departure from the Church’s position prior to the Council on the relationship between evangelisation and human advancement.

This new development in the Church’s thinking reaches its climax in the encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis* by John Paul II. Though the document is named “The Redeemer of the Human Being,” its actual focus is the human person whose dignity and Status it declares to be no less than that of Christ himself, since Christ has united himself with each person.¹⁰ Accordingly, this document sees the human person and his/her promotion to be the route, the subject matter and the goal of evangelisation: The human person is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church (sic), the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption.¹¹

In the light of this brief survey, we can conclude that in the thinking of the Church’s Magisterium, evangelisation and human promotion now signify one and the same reality.¹² To evangelise (preach the good news) is to engage in an activity which aims at the total and integral development of the human person in all his/her dimensions: body and soul, socially, economically, spiritually, politically, and so forth. The task also calls for the humanisation of structures and the improvement of the environment. This shift in focus is due to the increased awareness that the human being was created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27; 9:6). Furthermore, though originally created very good by God (Gen 1:31), both the man and woman and their entire world have been redeemed and recreated supremely good by God in Christ

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, no.42.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 13 (Milano: Edizioni Ancora, 1979), 28.

¹¹ John Paul II *Redemptor Hominis*, 13.

¹² John Paul II, “Christifideles Laici.” The Holy See, December 29, 1988.
https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.pdf. Accessed 21 March 2026.

through the mystery of his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection (Eph 1:5-10, Col 1:15-20; Rom 8:19-23).

Moreover, just as the pre-Vatican II approach to evangelisation and human advancement was influenced by the dualistic Greek anthropology, this new understanding is itself strongly influenced by research in modern anthropology and the social sciences, particularly African anthropology, which, unlike the Greek one, views the human person as a unity. This new position is also influenced by emerging Third World theologies which call attention to the integral relationship between the faith and actual human conditions.¹³

The preceding survey demonstrates that, within the Church's current understanding, evangelisation and human promotion are regarded as synonymous activities. This recognition provides a foundation for examining the New Testament perspective on this issue. The following analysis employs a combination of literary and theological approaches, with attention to historical context where relevant. This methodology includes close reading of key Gospel passages, analysis of their literary features and theological themes, and consideration of the historical circumstances in which these texts emerged. By outlining scriptural motifs and their implications, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how New Testament foundations support the integration of evangelisation and human promotion. The discussion further considers whether this contemporary ecclesial understanding is firmly grounded in the New Testament and explores its implications for the Nigerian and broader African contexts.

2. Evangelisation and Human Promotion in the New Testament

It is important to note that neither the term 'evangelisation' nor 'human promotion' appears explicitly in the New Testament. However, the concepts they represent are implicit in the ministry of Jesus and his first disciples. The commitment to proclaim the gospel, or to evangelise with renewed fervour and in ways appropriate to contemporary contexts, should be grounded in an accurate understanding of the biblical use of the term 'gospel.' In current usage, 'gospel' often refers to the biblical books recounting the life of Jesus Christ, and the act of proclaiming the gospel is frequently equated with narrating his life. This narrow interpretation, however, does not fully capture the term's biblical origins.¹⁴ Accordingly, the following section analyses the meanings of the verb *euangelizomai* and the noun *euangelion* as they appear in the Bible.

The Use of "*euangelizomai*" in the Bible

In the Old Testament, the general sense of the Hebrew root corresponding to the Greek *euangelizomai* is "proclaiming good news" (see 1 Kings 1:42), often alluding to a military

¹³ Congregation of Faith, "Human Development and Christian Salvation." Vatican II Documents. 1976. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1976_promozione-umana_en.html Accessed March 21, 2026. Also see Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1975), 167.

¹⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Gospel." 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gospel-New-Testament> Accessed March 21, 2026.

victory,¹⁵ a more specific religious connotation. The messenger from the top of the hill cries out, “Peace and salvation, Yahweh is king” (Isa 52:7), thereby announcing the victory of Yahweh over the whole world and his return to rule in Zion. In Isa 61:1, the prophet proclaims this good news to the poor. The proclamation of the royal dominion of Yahweh, characterised by salvation and peace, becomes a reality, inaugurating a new era. The proclamation of the word is not just breath and sound but is also charged with a performative power.

In the New Testament, Jesus brings the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist (Matt 11:5, Luke 7:22) confirms that the good news, expected from the time of the Second Isaiah, is now being proclaimed, and this announcement has the power to bring into effect what it proclaims. According to Luke 4:18, Jesus applies the prophetic words of Isaiah to himself in his inaugural sermon at Nazareth. Although the apostolic missionary activity began only after Pentecost, the Twelve already went throughout the country proclaiming the kingdom of God, sometimes accompanied by prodigious signs (Luke 9:1-6).

The Use of *euangelion* in the Bible The performative dimension of the verb *euangelizomai* is also associated with the substantive *euangelion*.¹⁶ In the Old Testament, the noun has a twofold meaning: “good news” (e.g. 2 Sam 18:20) and “the reward for good news” (see 2 Sam 4:10), which reinforces what was just observed, that the spoken word has the power of effecting what it proclaims. Therefore, “bad news” brings sorrow, while “good news” evokes joy.¹⁷ Moreover, the bearer of good news is held responsible for the good fortune he brings, whereas the bearer of bad news is guilty of the misfortune that he announces. Among the Greeks, *euangelion* was used in connection with the imperial cult. In particular, the accession to the throne of the emperor, proclaimed as the divine ruler with power over the whole creation, was received as “good news” by the people, since it marked the dawn of a new era of peace and security.¹⁸

In the New Testament, Mark uses the substantive eight times compared with four times in Matthew and none in Luke (he prefers the verb). Neither the verb nor the substantive is found in the Johannine writings. The highest occurrence of the substantive is found in Paul’s epistles, sixty times. Further, in Mark 1:14, Jesus is the herald of the good news that God declares to the world, whose content reflects the imminent breaking in of the kingdom of God.

In Matthew 19:29, *euangelion* is equated with Christ’s name. In Paul’s letters, however, “gospel” has a specific content which is both proclaimed (1 Cor 15:1; 9:14; 2 Cor 11:7) and heard (Col

¹⁵ Gerhard Friedrich, “Euangelizomai”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel; trans. G.M. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:707-37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:721-37.

¹⁷ John Odey, A. Elizabeth, Edor John, Ekpenyong O. Ekpenyong, Louis A. Edet, Offiong O. Asuquo, Emmanuel N. Nwobu, Gabriel A. Eneji, and Inyang E. Bassey. “Relevance of Language Learning Evangelism and Education in the Spread of Christianity in Nigeria.” *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i1.7356> Accessed March 21, 2026.

¹⁸ Michael J. Gorman, “Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters.” Eerdmans. <https://www.everand.com/book/482212221/Apostle-of-the-Crucified-Lord-A-Theological-Introduction-to-Paul-and-His-Letters>. Accessed March 21, 2026.

1:23; 1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 11:4). For Paul, the core of the good news is Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (Rom 1:3- 4; 1 Cor 15:1) through which God has brought about the possibility of salvation. The connotation of these gospel words is not purely historical or simply evocative of Jesus' sayings. The good news does not merely bear witness to the history of salvation but, as message and proclamation, is a living power that breaks into human life and transforms it. The transformative power of the good news is also so compelling that the receiver feels an irresistible desire to announce to others what she/he experienced.¹⁹ Paul's assertion "Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16) suggests that the proclamation of the gospel was an obligation whose origin came from his love for Christ, who commanded him to preach the good news (1 Cor 9:19-23) as well as his paternal concern for the people he served.

Through the gospel, God gathers people into salvific communities. Since "gospel" has God as its author, it is not just an empty word (2 Cor 11:7; Rom 15:16); it performs what it says. Preaching of the gospel can bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles (Eph 3:6) by inviting them to live in communion with one another. By causing regeneration, the gospel gives new life (1 Cor 4:15). Moreover, the gospel does not entail just missionary proclamation but manifests the glory of God in history. Through an experience of such missionary zeal, those who encounter the good news of God's unconditional love know that he forgives their sins and gives them new life through his Son. Effective missionary activity, especially when conditioned by appropriate methods of communicating God's Word, evokes a more authentic response to the typical and often degrading socio-cultural demands of human history.²⁰

3. Jesus, Evangelisation, and Human Promotion

What did the New Testament authors mean when they used the terms *euangelizomai* and *euangelion* to describe the ministry of Jesus? The answer, in my view, is to be found in two key texts that describe, both summatively and programmatically, the ministry of Jesus: Luke 4:18-19 and John 10:10. These two passages also establish most clearly the synonymous relationship between evangelisation and human promotion in the ministry of Jesus. For though these terms, as already mentioned, do not exist in the New Testament, their meaning is embodied in the verb, *euangelizomai* and the noun *euangelion*.²¹ While in John 10:10, Jesus declares that the whole purpose of his coming and ministry was so that human beings may possess life in all its fullness, Luke 4:18-19 furnishes the content or agenda of this life-giving ministry of Jesus programmatically.

In Luke 4:18-21, Jesus in his inaugural speech in his home town of Nazareth, declares that his presence and ministry mark the fulfilment of God's end-time promise made through Isaiah,

¹⁹ David Wenham, "The Good News of the Gospels." *Themelios* 34, no. 2 (2009): 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.2113/gstmelios34.2.3> Accessed March 21, 2026.

²⁰ Georges Houssney, "Redeeming Missiology." *Biblical Missiology*. 2020. <https://biblicalmissiology.org/blog/2020/04/27/redeeming-missiology/> Accessed March 21, 2026.

²¹ The *Computer Concordance to the Novum Testamentum Graece* of Nestle-Aland 26th Edition and the *Greek New Testament* 3rd Edition (2nd ed; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 722-723.

namely, to preach the good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, and the setting at liberty those who are oppressed and thus proclaim the Lord's year of favour (vv.18-19). Scholars believe that the passage is a conflation of three Deutero-Isaiah passages (Isa 61:1a, b, d; 58:6d; 61:2a), which deal with the consolation of Zion. If Luke used these passages as his source, then he has omitted two phrases from the original texts, as Fitzmeyer has pointed out, namely: "to heal the broken-hearted" (Isa 61:1c) in verse 18 and "the day of vengeance to our God" (Isa 61:1b) at the end of verse 19b.²²

The omission of Isaiah 61:1c may be explained by the fact that the idea expressed here is already included in the notion of preaching the good news to the poor (v. 18a).²³ The poor (*ptōchoi*) in Old Testament biblical thought were not exclusively those who were materially deprived, the destitute; they included those who suffered from straits of any kind.²⁴ As in Luke 6:20 (the Beatitudes, read against the background of the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55), the poor may be those who suffer unjust and oppressive measures meted out to them by others in society.²⁵

In this passage, Luke mentions three such groups: prisoners (those imprisoned for non-payment of debt), the blind, and the downtrodden (or oppressed). That the idea of release from oppression underlines this passage is revealed by the repetition of *aphesis* (a release or a freeing in v.18) reinforced by the words *euangelisasthai* (aorist inf.) prisoners and downtrodden (v. 18) and the declaration of the Lord's Jubilee Year (v. 19) The verb *euangelizomai* in the LXX renders the Hebrew *bissar* (to announce, tell, publish; see 1 Kgs 1:42; Jer 20:15), which is used for Yahweh's universal victory over the world and for his kingly rule (Ps 96). This Hebrew verb described the good news, mostly of victory over an enemy, which was brought to an individual or the community.²⁶ The news thus brought was good because the recipient felt it to be so.

The defeat of the enemy brings relief from oppression, the removal of the threat to life, and freedom to lead one's life in perfect harmony and peace. In short, the news was good because fundamentally it affected the very lives and welfare of the individual or community concerned. The captives were either those taken prisoners by their compatriots because of their inability to pay debts (see Matt 18:23-35, the wife giving debtors), or it could be those held captive/enslaved by sin (see John 8:31-36; Luke 7:36-50, explained by Jesus with reference to two debtors vv. 41-42); or by evil spirits: "Satan" (Luke 13:10-17), seven demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). Similarly, the downtrodden (*tethrausmēnous*) are literally those whose spirits are broken and crushed. This

²² Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X I-IX* (Anchor Bible 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 532.

²³ . CHARLOTTE, "The Use of Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19." *REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY* – (2025). <https://cdn.rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Gospels-Paper-Zhuo.pdf> Accessed March 21, 2026.

²⁴ *TDNT* IV, 886-915.

²⁵ Gary T. Meadors, "The 'Poor' in the Beatitudes of Matthew and Luke." *Grace Theological Journal* 6, no. 2 (1985): 305-314. <https://docslib.org/doc/1163458/the-poor-in-the-beatitudes-of-matthew-and-luke> Accessed March 21, 2026.

²⁶ *TDNT* 2, 714.

could be either by misfortune (e.g. the death of the son of the widow of Nain, Luke 7:11-17), by being denied justice (Luke 18:1-8), held in contempt (Luke 7:36-50, esp. v. 39), or, for the little people, by being stepped upon by the rich and powerful (see Luke 150-52). Oppression could be carried out by those who consider themselves holy, in contrast to sinners. The oppressed could also be those marginalised by society (see lepers, Matt 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-26). Whatever the case, the perfect participle form of the verb underlines the relentlessness of the oppression or affliction and the affront to which these classes of people are daily subjected.

The poor could, of course, be those materially deprived, like the masses (the *am-ha-aretz*), deprived of their land and heritage by people like Herod.²⁷ They could also be destitute, the lowest social class (see Luke 7:22; 16:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 18:22; 19:8; 21:3). Yet these Lucan passages make it clear that this class of people exists only because others, “the rich and mighty,” are negligent, selfish, greedy and exploitative. They take more than their share of the goods of the land (see Dives and Lazarus). Yet Israel’s vocation as Yahweh’s people was to hold all things in common since the land and everything in it belonged to Yahweh. They were to ensure that none of their brothers or sisters was ever in want. Isaiah 58:3, 6-7 desires this type of sharing and caring as the condition for true religion. Luke will portray the early Christian community in Jerusalem as the ideal and concrete embodiment of these virtues (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37).

Whatever the case, the poor, the captives and the downtrodden are classes of people who are weak, powerless and helpless. Their lives are less than human because of the afflictions they endure, different and unrelieved. The blind, physically and spiritually, are given special mention. The eye is the lamp of the body (Matt 6:22-23). Judaism considered physical blindness to be the severest of sufferings (Midr PS 146.5 on 148.8) and some texts compare the blind to the dead (*b.Ned* 64b).²⁸ Because of this, blindness was persistently regarded as the result of sin (see John 9:1-2). The blind were deprived of enjoying certain blessings of the Torah. Because of this, it was believed that in the eschatological restoration, the age of salvation, the blind will be “the first to be healed” (Midr. Ps 146:5 on 148:8).²⁹ The blind were also often ill-treated by society, as in the case of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52, v. 48). Spiritual blindness included blindness to knowledge of the Torah by both Jew and Gentile; for the Jew, the Torah held the key to all happiness and fullness of life (see Ps 119). Jesus decries this type of blindness among his Jewish audience (John 9:39-41). Ultimately, He is the light for the revelation to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32) and a light for people who walk in darkness (Matt 4:14-16).

It will be noted that the focus in this whole passage is the human person whom the various types of afflictions render less human. But whatever the cause or nature of their sufferings, Jesus’ evangelising mission will bring them total, decisive and lasting relief. When the good news is proclaimed, its effect is total liberation. The proclamation affects what it says; it brings salvation. The eschatological, messianic times were expected to bring the perfect fulfilment of every good

²⁷ Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Gospel and the Poor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 214.

²⁸ Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Gospel and the Poor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 214.

²⁹ *TDNT* VIII, 282.

thing the human heart could desire. It marked the end and the fulfilment of all expectations, the peak of human promotion. That is why it rules out all thought of vengeance as expressed in Isaiah 61:2b, and as mentioned above.

This whole idea is embodied in verse 19, the proclamation of the Lord's year of favour. The jubilee year signified the granting of release and liberation from all types of social afflictions/oppressions to all classes of people: slaves, debtors, and so forth. Even the land had to be allowed to enjoy this freedom by not being ploughed, and whatever it produced of its own accord was to be freely left for the poor and wild animals to enjoy (Exod 23:10-13; Lev 25:2-22, 23-55). This Lucan passage thus underscores the point that Jesus' proclamation of the good news has in view the total integral liberation or well-being of the person as its exclusive goal and objective. To evangelise for Jesus meant to free, enable and empower his evangelised to lead fully human lives in all dimensions, and to become the author (not slave or servant or prisoner) of this life. Take up your sleeping mat and walk (e.g., John 5:8) meant empowerment to become whole (*hygies*) and to take up one's life and live (v. 6). It also entailed being in a good relationship with God and other human beings, together with whom one then built up a loving and caring community.

The idea of being freed to determine what one does with one's life *coram Deo* is basic to Jesus' evangelising activity. This is a key aspect of human promotion which cannot be overemphasised. In Matthew 11:5 (Luke 7:22) Jesus cites to John the Baptist, as a *sign* of his messianic identity, the witness that the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear; in short that the poor have the good news preached to them, quite contrary to the ministry of fire and brimstone which the Baptist had expected (Matt 3:4-12, esp. v. 10). Jesus' person-centered evangelization is often a source of scandal to the rigidly religious.

This Lucan message is reinforced by that of John (10:10). Like Luke 4:18-19, this passage is also a summative and programmatic passage. Jesus declares that the sole purpose of his coming into the world is so that human beings may have life (notice the emphasis on their having, not his giving, life), and have it to the fullest. The word *perisson* here translated "fullest" means that which exceeds measure (*quod mesuram excedit*),³⁰ or that which is wanting in nothing. Life, in Jewish thought, was already considered the supreme human good, the good which held the key for all other goods, and without which no good was possible.³¹ The statement in 10:10 then emerges in all its rich significance when read within the context of the whole parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18) and against its Old Testament background (Ezek 34:1-31).

The passage contrasts the plight of the sheep under false, self-seeking, mercenary shepherds with their condition under Jesus, the good shepherd. While the mercenaries exploit, steal and plunder the sheep and leave them to enemies, Jesus provides them with constant and unfailing pasture,

³⁰ Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of NT Greek* (Latin Version; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1960), 231.

³¹ Abraham J. Heschel, "God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism." *Jewish Publication Society*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Search_of_Man Accessed March 21, 2026.

absolute and dependable security and utter freedom: they come in and go out at will and find pasture (v. 9). There is no hidden personal agenda in Jesus' pasturing activity of the sheep. The welfare of the sheep constitutes the *raison d'être*, the alpha and omega of his coming and mission, so much so that he is prepared even to lay down his life for his sheep and take it up again still for the sake of the sheep (vv. 15-18).

This is actually what Jesus did. When the "wolves" of the Jewish leaders came to arrest him in the garden, he asked them to take him and "let these others [his sheep] go" (John 18:8) in fulfillment of his promise "not one of those you gave me have I lost" (v. 9, see 6:39; 10:23; 17:12). And thus, he died for the people (v. 14) as Caiaphas had prophesied (11:50). Yet after his life-giving resurrection (John 16:7), he went in search of them and gave them his life-giving Spirit (John 20:14-18; 19-29). By his passion, death and resurrection Jesus effectively ushered in, and definitely established, the Lord's year of favour which He spoke of in Luke 4:19, thereby also fulfilling God's promise in Ezekiel 34: that God would look after his sheep himself in order to administer true justice among them and restore right relationship between sheep and sheep (vv. 11-31).

Concern for the personal, human welfare of the sheep then characterises Jesus' entire ministry. The same concern underlines his charge to Peter to feed his lambs and tend his sheep (vv. 15-18), as a singular proof of his (Peter's) love for him.³² Love of God and of Jesus is manifested concretely in fostering fullness of life in God's beloved children (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16). Evangelization for Jesus was not a post-historical reality, a preserve of the next world, but a reality to be lived here and now and expressed in one's relationship with God and with other human beings. That this is so in the Johannine perspective is heightened by the Gospel's realised eschatology. Jesus' passion, death and resurrection ushered in definitively a brand-new era in the history of humanity, a state of well-being here on earth as in heaven (Matt 6:10).

The question to be raised now is: Did Jesus' mission actually bring about human advancement among his immediate disciples/believing audience in the ways described here? A New Testament Perspective on Evangelisation and Human Promotion described, or was all this merely a way of theologising? Did his disciples experience liberating freedom and empowerment for life from his having evangelised them? The answers to these questions hardly need searching for. One has only to read any of the synoptic Gospels to encounter the crowd of witnesses to Jesus' liberating human activity against all sorts of diseases. Some of those witnesses have already been mentioned above: the lame, the blind, lepers - outcasts - publicans and sinners (Zacchaeus), the paralysed, the possessed of unclean spirits, those considered as ritually unclean; those racially discriminated against and considered by Jews as possessed of demons (the Samaritans, John 8:48; see Luke 10:29-37; 17:11-19). The list is endless. That these people really felt relieved by Jesus' ministry is evident in the admiration with which they held him, in the fact that some followed him

³² Teresa Okure, *Johannine Approach to Mission. A Contextual Study of John 4: 1-42* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr Paul Siebeck, 1988), 220-226.

rejoicing and declared that a great prophet, God's representative, had arisen among them, and that God himself had visited them.³³

Even in John's Gospel, where the healings are designated along with his words and works as "sign" or pioneers to his Messianic identity, none can deny that the focus here is primarily on those healed or reinstated (see the Samaritan woman, a public sinner turned into a successful evangelist, John 4:1-29; 31-42).³⁴ The summative witness to this is the reply to the Pharisees of the man born blind, whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that I was blind, now I see (John 9:25). We also meet those whom Jesus reinstated in society, gave a sense of self-worth, and, by his very unaccusing presence, empowered them to put right, on their own accord, their relationships with other human beings (Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10). His teachings on forgiveness and his active search for the lost sheep are most vividly reflected in his parables (Luke 15:1-3), especially that of the prodigal son (vv. 11-32). In actual fact, this was not merely a parable; it was about God's invincible love for us shown in his giving us his uniquely beloved son (the *monogenes*; John 3:16), to be our food and drink for eternal life (John 6:25-71). Jesus even liberated his people from the oppression of rigid, excessive ritualism in religion: he defended his disciples' right to satisfy their hunger, even if that meant breaking the sabbath laws; he himself constantly broke the sabbath to meet human need. Not only that, he subjected the sabbath itself, the most sacred of Jewish institutions, said to be observed by God himself (Gen 2:2-3), to human need here and now.

It cannot, therefore, be overemphasised that the human person constituted the one and only goal and focus of Jesus' mission. He did not evangelise them from afar, but had a personal solidarity with them by his own lifestyle (see Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11; 13:33; John 1:35-51; see Cor 8:9; Phil 6:1-11). Freedom to choose, to be, to live, a full human life, constructed the most fundamental aspect of Jesus' Good News. This freedom can ultimately be found in him, the Good News (John 8:31-36). That is why Paul can say in Galatians 5:1, "for freedom, Christ has set us free." That is, when Christ set us free, he really intended us to be free.

As Yahweh raised the poor from the dung heap to sit them in the company of the princes of his people, so Jesus effectively raised his cowardly disciples, all Galileans and, by Judean standards, the rejects of God (John 7:52), to the dignity and status of apostles and princes of the Church (see Rev 21:14; see Heb 12:18-24). Never did Jesus use the human being as a function of abstract theological principles, called "the faith". Faith was rather an energy that empowered and mobilised the individual to take up his or her life and live: your faith has healed and saved you; go in peace.

³³ "Miracles of Jesus." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracles_of_Jesus Accessed March 21, 2026.

³⁴ Seoyoung Kim, "The story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus (John 4:1-42) focusing on water within an ecofeminist theological perspective." *Practical Theology* 15, no. 5 (2022): 467-478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2022.2059429> Accessed March 21, 2026.

Even specifically religious issues were treated from the human perspective: a man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her, and one who marries a divorced wife commits the same sin. In the same vein, the story of the paralytic in John 5 is told to give hope to the poor, the oppressed, and those treated as less than human, to whom Jesus proclaimed the Good News, feeling loved, appreciated, and empowered to take up their lives and live. Human promotion constituted the most fundamental and all-inclusive category of Jesus' evangelising activity. What mattered most to him was the human person and his/her personal and communal needs. Ultimately, the kingdom of God, which he preached, was foremost in them.

3. Evangelisation and Human Promotion in the Nigerian Context

At this point, it is not possible to delve in depth into the questions just raised and others. It is hoped that the discussion period will provide ample opportunity for discussing them. I would, however, like to cite three key areas that, in my view, we need to address seriously if we desire our evangelisation to be centred on human promotion, or person-centred, as that of Jesus was and as the Church enjoins upon us. These three areas are: (1) the need to emphasise the vocation and challenge to become fully human, (2) liberation from the oppression of false religion in its multiple forms, and (3) emphasis on the social dimension of the Gospel message.

Our concern with evangelisation and human promotion is mainly occasioned by the broader development of our country and continent. It needs to be observed that we cannot have a developed continent unless we first have fully developed, mature and balanced human beings. If we have underdeveloped or Third World countries, it is because we have underdeveloped persons and people who consider themselves (or have been made to consider themselves) inferior to others.³⁵ The first obstacle we need to identify, then, and seek to overcome, is the damage which colonialism has done to the psyche of the African. Previously described summatively as a "baboon on two legs gifted with speech,"³⁶ the African is still treated as subhuman and incapable of sound reasoning.

We need to discover how deeply this attitude has been assimilated by Africans themselves and how it has affected their self-conception. It has, for instance, inspired the tendency to make life choices which will either win them the approval of the so-called superior white race, or make them be considered important by other Africans. The waste in prestigious personal spending and the tendency to embark on grandiose public projects rather than on useful and fictional ones are deeply rooted in his attitude. Underlying it all is the desire to be considered persons of worth.³⁷ This desire is, in itself, good, since every person has intrinsic worth as a child of God. It is to enable people to discover where their true greatness and worth lie and to adopt the right measures

³⁵ Enyioko I. Jacinta, and Robert. O. Bayefine "Development and Underdevelopment in African States: A Critical Evaluation of How Europe Underdeveloped Africa." *Top Journal of Public Policy and Administration* 12, no. 3 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16779499> Accessed March 21, 2026.

³⁶ J. W. Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society* (Middletown, Connecticut; Wesleyan University, 1985), 67.

³⁷ "DON'T WASTE YOUR MONEY." Cedar Ministry. 2024. <https://cedarministry.org/dont-waste-your-money/> Accessed March 21, 2026.

to appropriate this God-given greatness. This can be done through solid theological and psychological formation, among other ways, and through involving the people in a process of historical evaluation and social analysis. These measures will constitute sound efforts to promote human well-being in the most fundamental sense of the term.

The theological formation should not only be content with showing the people that in Christ they, like all other Christians, have the status and dignity of the first-born child (see Heb 12:23). It should also challenge the people to accept and assume full personal responsibility for living out their Christian faith in all its dimensions. Liberation from the oppression of false religion is multifaceted. As a rule, our people believe firmly in God and want to do what God wants. But their very ideas of God and of what God wants, in many ways, need to be liberated. It is often said that Africans are more at home with the OT God, because of the similarities between their cultures and the OT Semitic culture, than with the God of Jesus Christ and of the Gospels.³⁸

Concretely, this false idea of God and God's will manifests itself in excessive ritualism and fundamentalism with regard to the interpretation of the Scriptures and the laws of the Church. We may think, for instance, of the misplaced zeal of persons who harass women in Church on Sundays and prevent them either from entering the Church in the first place or from going to Communion on the grounds that their heads are not properly covered. Biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 11: 1-16, read out of context, are used to justify and sustain this practice. With regard to Church law, most people are unaware of the growth and development in the Church that the Second Vatican Council ushered in.

Again, liberation from the false ideas of God, holiness, and religion generally needs to be effected through sound theological formation, in which the NT should have pride of place. The Good News of Jesus Christ does need to be preached to our people so that they can personally feel its liberating and life-enhancing impact. Then they will assist in taking personal responsibility for living it out in their lives. To this effect, they will need to be led to reflect on their various religious practices, to see whether they are in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel and the meaning of Christ, the Good News of God in our midst. Age was a much-neglected area in previous efforts at evangelisation, as we saw at the beginning of this study.³⁹ The new approach will emphasise the social dimension of the Gospel and of our Christian vocation.

We saw that, theoretically at least, the Church has moved beyond a theology and spirituality that emphasised the saving of the soul to the neglect of the body, with all the ramifications this separation entails. But the spiritual formation our people have had in the past, and which is still reinforced by old hymns, prayers, and daily homilies, emphasises this dichotomy of soul and

³⁸ Isaac Boaheng, and A. Ebenezer Jnr. "Essays in the Old Testament & African Life and Thought." *Noyam Journals* 1 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.38159/npub.eb20701> Accessed March 21, 2026.

³⁹ Pope Francis, "Chapter Four of *Evangelii Gaudium*: The Social Dimension of Evangelisation." *Vatican News Service*, November 23, 2013. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html Accessed March 21, 2026.

body, Church and State, the sacred and the profane. So, too, does the prevailing attention to doing one's Christian Catholic duties, e.g. paying the AMC, so as to save one's soul. As a result, it becomes possible to go to confession and receive Holy Communion (both sacraments of reconciliation) without being on talking terms with one's neighbour, trading with them or caring about their welfare. Similarly, homilists can expound on the worthlessness of material goods and the blessings of giving rather than of receiving. But they may become quite unaware of Jesus' injunction to his disciples: "You give them something to eat" (Luke 9:12-13).

Attention to the social aspect of the Gospel will motivate Christians to care for one another, share their bread with the hungry, and be persuaded that whatever they do to the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters, they do it to him. Furthermore, this dimension of the Gospel will affect a synthesis between a Gospel-based Christianity and our own African traditional religions. In both, the concept of community entails mutual caring to ensure that none of the members is in want. It also ensures that each member of the community takes responsibility for its welfare, unlike in the current Nigerian mentality, where everybody scrambles for their share of the national cake without bothering to bake it in the first place. Failure to emphasise the social aspect of the Gospel constitutes today one of the major reasons for the exodus from the Catholic Church in our continent.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The New Testament presents evangelisation not merely as the proclamation of the Gospel, but as a holistic mission that encompasses human promotion in its fullest sense. Rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, evangelisation calls for the transformation of individuals and communities through the message of salvation, love, and justice. It underscores the inseparable connection between proclaiming the Good News and fostering human dignity, social well-being, and integral development.

It should be noted, however, that not all scholars interpret the New Testament in this integrated way. Some maintain that the New Testament primarily emphasises spiritual salvation and personal transformation, with social and material dimensions treated as distinct or secondary concerns. For example, certain interpretations stress the 'otherworldly' focus of Jesus' teachings or highlight the early Church's expectation of an imminent eschaton, which could suggest a priority on preparing souls for the afterlife rather than on earthly advancement. Though these views do not negate the presence of human promotion in the text, they offer a perspective in which evangelisation and human promotion can be seen as related but not inseparable. By engaging with these alternative scholarly positions, we gain a fuller appreciation of the complexity of the New Testament witness.

Throughout the New Testament, evangelisation is portrayed as a dynamic encounter that leads to both spiritual renewal and tangible improvement of life conditions. Jesus' ministry emphasises healing, liberation, and restoration, signifying that the Gospel engages the totality of human

⁴⁰ Donatus Udoette, "Stop the Exodus to Pentecostal Churches." *The Southern Cross*, December 31, 2018. <https://www.scross.co.za/2019/01/stop-the-exodus-to-pentecostal-churches/> Accessed March 21, 2026.

existence—body, mind, and spirit. The Acts of the Apostles further illustrates this linkage, showing how early Christian communities shared resources, welcomed the marginalised, and worked towards communal harmony. This model reflects the intrinsic relationship between faith and works, reinforcing that authentic evangelisation inspires concrete actions aimed at uplifting the poor, advocating for justice, and promoting peace.

Moreover, the New Testament reveals that human promotion through evangelisation respects the freedom and dignity of each person. It invites individuals to respond willingly to God's grace, fostering maturity and responsibility. The Pauline epistles emphasise the development of virtues and the building up of the community, indicating that evangelisation promotes personal growth and social cohesion.

In conclusion, a New Testament perspective on evangelisation inevitably includes a commitment to human promotion. The mission to spread the Gospel compels believers to engage in transformative actions that elevate human life, dignity, and freedom. Thus, evangelisation is a comprehensive endeavour that nurtures both faith and human flourishing, calling Christians to witness through words and deeds in the service of the Kingdom of God.

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