OLD TESTAMENT MODELS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION: AN APPLICATION FROM THE POSTEXILIC PERIOD

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At the closing Mass of the 2012 Synodal Assembly on the New Evangelization, Pope Benedict XVI centered his homily around the Gospel account of the healing of Bartimaeus, observing that this story

> has something particular to say to us as we grapple with the urgent need to proclaim Christ anew in places where the light of faith has been weakened, in places where the fire of God is more like smouldering cinders, crying out to be stirred up, so that they can become a living flame that gives light and heat to the whole house.[1]

The Pope's words here reveal both a perspective on the modern situation and a claim that the Sacred Scriptures offer a relevant response to that situation. Benedict comments that the world today is one in which many eyes that once saw the light of Christ have grown dim and in which many hearts that once burned for him have grown cold; the Sacred Scriptures propose to us an answer, one that invites eyes to see again and hearts to burn again. The mission of the New Evangelization encompasses such an invitation to renewed fire and renewed fidelity among baptized Christians. In this thesis, I intend to imitate the Pope's example above by examining some of the responses to the modern situation that God has revealed to us in his Word. I will do so by establishing a typological parallel between the biblical postexilic period and the New Evangelization.

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1. Benedict XVI, Homily at Mass for the Conclusion of the Synod of Bishops, October 28, 2012 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121028_conclusione-sinodo.html (accessed February 1, 2016).

Discovering in these biblical appeals one of the methods by which God, throughout Salvation History, has used some of his people to call other members back to Himself—namely, that of re-entry into the divine-human dialogue through the mediation of leaders who are already immersed in that dialogue—I will propose how Christians can now put this model into practice in the work of the New Evangelization. Thus, my underlying method will primarily take the form of an exercise in biblical theology orientated to contemporary application. It will proceed as follows:

- Chapter I: Old Testament Models for the New Evangelization
    - Proposes that a typological parallel exists between the New Evangelization and the frequent Old Testament instances of Israelite "re-evangelization"
- Chapter II: A Postexilic Parallel with the New Evangelization
    - Applies this type to the postexilic period in particular
- Chapter III: The Postexilic Model
    - Offers an exegetical presentation of the method of re-evangelization that the postexilic period exhibits
- Chapter IV: Application of the Postexilic Model to the New Evangelization

Chapter I: Old Testament Models for the New Evangelization

In order to lay a foundation for examining and applying postexilic typology, I will devote this chapter to establishing that the Old Testament pattern of divine response to covenantal infidelity typologically parallels the New Evangelization. The decades following the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, then, will be seen as one particular period of time that exhibits the pattern described and thus as a period that also offers to provide insights for the New Evangelization today.

The particular link that renders the Old Testament a significant source of methodological inspiration for the New Evangelization can be summed up in the concept of *re-evangelization.* When applied to missionary activity occurring prior to the revelation of the good news of Jesus Christ, re-evangelization admittedly appears to be an anachronistic term. Nevertheless, because "the Old Testament is unveiled in the New,"[2] the concept of re-evangelization can provide a helpful lens through which Christians today can retrospectively view the events of Salvation History "in the light of Christ crucified and risen"[3] and so recognize in God's *past* actions hints of a similar divine action in the *present*.[4] Because this thesis is written from within the context of the New Evangelization and in order to further that same missionary endeavor, I will begin by presenting the present situation and then describe in general terms the manner in which a number of Old Testament cases bear striking similarity to that situation.

One defining thrust of the New Evangelization is the re-evangelization of Christians by other Christians. The call of recent popes for a New Evangelization has

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2. Augustine, *Quaest. In Hept.* 2, 73: PL 34, 623. Quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United Sates Catholic Conference—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 129.

3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 129.

4. An analogous example of this methodology is the biblical and liturgical application of the Exodus event as typifying God's redemption of his people, an event that gains even more significance when seen retrospectively through the lens of the Paschal Mystery.

been a response to the fact that many Christians have become unfaithful to (or have never fully engaged in) the covenant with God that they entered by means of Baptism. The New Evangelization involves faithful Christians in calling members of the Body back into full communion with the God who loves them. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis indicates that the New Evangelization has "three principle settings": (1) "Ordinary pastoral ministry," (2) "the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism," and (3) "those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him."[5] Francis in this instance cites Benedict XVI, who had addressed these three settings in his homily at the closing of the 2012 Synodal Assembly on the New Evangelization.[6] It is particularly the existence of the second group mentioned—baptized Christians whom the synod fathers described as having "become distant from the Church" [7]—that seems to have been the instigating force behind the urgent papal calls for the New Evangelization. This is especially clear in the writings of St. John Paul II, the Pope who guided the Church into an increasing consciousness of the need for a New Evangelization. Ralph Martin makes this evident in his book *The Urgency of the New Evangelization: Answering the Call*, in which he uncovers the roots of the concept of the New Evangelization and offers a succinct synthesis of the history of the papal call to this wider targeting of missionary impulse. Amongst his findings, Martin examines John Paul II's own categorization of evangelization efforts in *Redemptoris Missio*, in which the saint makes a distinction between the same three

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5. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), 14.

6. Benedict XVI, Homily.

7. XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 7-28, 2012, "Final List of Propositions," Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin, English ed., Holy See Press Office. *Propositio* 7. http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b33_02.html (accessed February 1, 2016).

settings that would be identified in *Evangelii Gaudium* more than two decades later. In this case, though, John Paul II applies the title "new evangelization or re-evangelization" only to the setting directed toward areas "where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel"[8] (which corresponds to *Evangelii Gaudium's* second setting alone). Both the initial lineamenta and the final propositions drawn up by the fathers of the 2012 synod reflect this same understanding, designating as "New Evangelization" only the mission to the fallen-away baptized, while placing the other two settings under the umbrella of "evangelization" in general.[9] That *Evangelii Gaudium* opens up the New Evangelization to a broader scope of ministry does not, however, detract from the reality that a central thrust of the New Evangelization is and has always been the mission to Christians who are, in some manner, away from the Church. It is this group of people whom the Church seeks to help toward "a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a

8. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 33. Quoted in Ralph Martin, *The Urgency of the New Evangelization: Answering the* Call, (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2013), pp. 13-14.

9. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 7; XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith: Lineamenta," General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, February 2, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html (accessed February 11, 2016). The text of Benedict XVI's homily and the lineamenta for the synod seem to indicate that the reason for his inclusion of all three settings as aspects of the New Evangelization is the interdependence that exists between them. For instance, the mission toward non-Christians (Francis's third setting) can only flow out of a ministry toward Christians themselves (the other two settings) because it required the awakening of "a new missionary dynamism whose protagonists are, in particular, pastoral workers and the lay faithful." In this case, the fruitful extension of the mission to the nations depends upon the success of spiritual revival among those already in the Church. John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* reflects a like view of the intimate and inseparable connection between these three categories ((John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, 34 (accessed February 1, 2016)).

commitment to the Gospel."[10] It is for this group, no longer operating in cultures that are girded with the Christian worldview, that John Paul II "often repeated the summons to the New Evangelization."[11] The missionaries whom he envisioned for this task of intra-Church outreach were other Christians. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II insists that the New Evangelization "cannot be left to a group of 'specialists' but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God," and springs from the "genuine contact with Christ" that leads Christians to eagerly proclaim Him."[12] In this way, we see that re-evangelization is a Christian-to-Christian movement, one in which the baptized whose lives have been transformed by encounter with Jesus Christ engage in the work of helping other Christians to return to—or to experience for the first time—that same life-changing encounter to which those Christians are invited by their Baptism.

Having established that a central focus of the New Evangelization is the re-evangelization of Christians by other Christians, I will now place attention on the link that enables us to recognize and apply the concept of re-evangelization to the Old Testament. The connection rests on a type that exists between the people of Israel and the Church. The Second Vatican Council devoted an entire chapter of *Lumen Gentium* to the Church's identity as the People of God. Within this chapter, we find that God "chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it," a role that eventually reaches fulfillment in the new covenant established by Christ, which formed "a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God." Thus taking up in fullness Israel's relationship with God as "a people who might acknowledge him and

10. Francis, 15.
11. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte,* 40. Quoted in Martin, p. 15.
12. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte,* 40. Quoted in Martin, p. 15.

serve him in holiness," the Church is now considered "the new Israel."[13] The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that membership in the new People of God comes about "by faith in Christ, and Baptism."[14] Hence, a very real parallel unites the People of God in the Old and New Testaments, and what is written of the Israel of the first covenant prefigures in many ways the "new Israel" that is the Church.

The typological tie between Israel and the Church invites us to examine subsequent parallels between these two groups, particularly parallels that may highlight certain avenues for the work of the New Evangelization. Even a cursory knowledge of the Old Testament reveals that the modern age is not the only time that the People of God have experienced the need for re-evangelization. Today's predicament of "fallen-away" Christians bears striking resemblance to the many Old Testament instances of fallen-away Israelites. The Old Testament does not seek to hide the fact that the Israelites had a history filled with infidelities to the covenant that God had forged with them at Sinai. Their formation as the People of God was followed by a recurring cycle of large-scale infidelity to the covenant, each time rounded out by eventual return to the covenant. God's merciful response to the cries of the unfaithful community for deliverance was often mediated by faithful Israelites who were charged with the work of bringing the Chosen People back into right relationship with their Lord.[15]

This Israelite-to-Israelite model of re-evangelization is evident in the biblical accounts of Moses, the judges and prophets, the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, the postexilic return to Jerusalem, and the witness of other righteous individuals

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13. *Lumen Gentium, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., New rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975) 2:9.

14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 782.

15. When the term "re-evangelization" is applied in this thesis to Israel, it primarily refers to a process of covenant renewal and of spiritual and behavioral reform.

among the Jews.[16] While each of the above examples promises a wealth of insight into the New Evangelization, I will turn my focus primarily to the postexilic return to Jerusalem. By examining the biblical texts surrounding this particular period as a foundation for discovering the manner by which God uses some of his people to call other members back to Himself, I will then show how Christians today can now put some of these models into practice in the work of the New Evangelization.

Prior to moving forward, I wish to acknowledge that some may ask whether this method—that of investigating Old Testament types not as aids for doctrinal understanding (which they certainly are) but, rather, as models for Christian life in practice—is a valid one and whether it truly has something to offer the Church today. My answer is a fervent yes that is rooted in the divine inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures, the value of the Old Testament in particular, and the ongoing reach of typology into the present age. In their co-authored article "Biblical Orientations for the New Evangelization," Mary Healy and Peter Williamson offer a modern example of recourse to the Bible as a powerful font of inspiration for the practical implications of the New Evangelization. They draw attention to Pope Benedict XVI's call in *Verbum Domini* "to make the Bible 'the inspiration of every ordinary and extraordinary pastoral outreach.'"[17] While drawing applicable principles and methods from the Scriptural records of the early Church, they also turn to the New Testament as "a blueprint for the life and mission of the Church today," in a manner that in no way implies "rigid

16. For example: Deut. 30, 32. Judg. 2:1-5, 1 Kings 18, Isa. 3-4, Jer. 3-4, Ezek. 14, Zech. 1, 2 Chron. 29-31, 2 Chron. 34-36, Neh. 8-10.

17. *Verbum Domini*, 73. Quoted in Mary Healy and Peter Williamson, "Biblical Orientations for the New Evangelization," Appendix in Ralph Martin, *The Urgency of the New Evangelization: Answering the Call*, p. 100.

duplication of biblical patterns."[18] Such a deep trust in the value of the Bible as a guide for Christian living is firmly supported by Scripture itself and by magisterial documents, and it flows from an understanding of the continual resonance of divine inspiration for every age.[19] This trust deserves to be just as solid with regard to the Old Testament as with the New. *Dei Verbum* confirms that the contents of the Old Testament "are a storehouse of sublime teaching on God and of sound wisdom on human life, as well as a wonderful treasury of prayers; in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way." [20] Certain Church Fathers shared this understanding, and their examples testify that contemporary pastoral application of the Old Testament is in keeping with Christian tradition.[21]

It is my intention in this thesis to do with the Old Testament what Healy and Williamson have done with the New—to discover and apply Scriptural patterns that are relevant for the New Evangelization. Admittedly, just as adaptations are necessary in order to achieve modern actualization of evangelical methods from the early Church, so too will adaptations need to be made when pastorally applying the shadows of the Old Testament[22] to situations bathed in the light of Christ in the New.

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18. Healy, p. 101.

19. *Dei Verbum*, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., New rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), 1:11, 17, 21; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 108, 141; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 1:16.

20. *Dei Verbum*, 15.

21. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* allegorically applies the contents of the book of Exodus to the monastic tradition of his day, and he records his belief that Scripture (apparently including the Old Testament) can serve as a guide for the "pilotless mind" of modern readers who take it up (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* [New York: Paulist Press, 1978] 11; Charles J. Healey, S.J., *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage* [Staten Island, New York: Society of St. Paul, 1999] p. 42.) Origen, too, undertook pastoral application of Old Testament allegory (Healey, pp. 20-21).

22. *Dei Verbum* notes that the Old Testament contains "matters imperfect and provisional" (15) and that it is in the *New Testament* that God's Word "is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way" (17) but these facts do not remove from the Old Testament's divinely inspired nature (16), nor from the reverence it should be shown (15), nor from the important place it should hold in every Christian's life (22).

It is also worth noting that typology itself is a study that still does, and always will, hold sway for contemporary actualization. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that typology "discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son."[23] Lest we think, though, that the lamp of typology can only shed its light on events prior to the Ascension of Christ and no further, *Dei Verbum* attests that the God who "prepared the way for the Gospel" by revealing himself throughout history to mankind also continues to send forth the Gospel "to every generation" in a manner that continues to "contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."[24] In other words, because Christ still lives and is present with his Church in the work of salvation, a typology that foreshadows what is accomplished in the person of Christ can surely offer us prefigurations of the continuation of Christ's saving work in the contemporary context as well. "The fullness of time" is thus seen to encompass the present age and renders it accessible to the rays of typology.

23. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 128.
24. *Dei Verbum,* 3, 8, 10.

Chapter II: A Postexilic Parallel with the New Evangelization

Up to this point, I have established that the frequent tumbles of the Israelites into covenantal infidelity offer a validly applicable type for the recent diminishment of Christian fervor among a large percentage of the baptized. I have also proposed that a similar correspondence exists between the member-to-member ministries used to remedy each of those unfortunate situations. In this next chapter, I intend to apply to the postexilic period what has already been established of the Old Testament in general, noting six indications that the Jews' experience prior to, during, and after the Babylonian exile put them in need of a re-evangelization of sorts. Having thus shown them to be, in a sense, a foreshadowing of *Evangelii Gaudium*'s "group 2," I will then briefly sketch a number of ways in which the modern era finds Christians in a remarkably similar situation, a situation to which we can then respond in like manner.

The first indication that the postexilic period found many of the Jewish returnees[25] in need of a simultaneous spiritual return to right relationship with God is, very simply, the fact that they had been forced to go into exile in the first place. The Israelites had long known that exile was one of the curses with which God had promised to inflict them if they failed to "obey the voice of the LORD [. . .], carefully observing all his commandments and statutes" (Deut. 28:15). Moses had prophetically proclaimed that such behavior would result in being "plucked out of the land" for which they had already endured decades in the desert, and in being dispersed among other nations, where they would worship idols and suffer anxieties without relief (Deut. 28:63-68). The prophets who ministered during the era of the divided kingdom gave fair warning that repentance

25. In this thesis, I will use the term "Jews" only when referring to the People of God who belonged to the *kingdom of Judah* prior to, during, or after the Babylonian Exile. I will use the term "Israelites" when speaking of the People of God as a whole (as they were before the division of the kingdom that took place in the reign of Rehoboam).

was necessary if exile was to be avoided.[26] Lasting and large-scale repentance apparently did not take place, for the Northern Kingdom (Israel) fell to the Assyrians in 722/721 BC and exile ensued. To the south, the Kingdom of Judah held out for a longer period of time, the religious atrocities of its wicked kings being tempered by such religious reforms as those put in place by kings Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Chron. 29-31, 34-35). Unfortunately, Judah, too, succumbed to exile when Babylon carried off King Jehoiachin and thousands of leading Jewish citizens and soldiers in 597 BC, followed by most of the remaining population in 587 BC when Jerusalem and its Temple were burned to the ground. A small percentage of impoverished Jews were left behind, but it seems that even these fled to Egypt shortly thereafter (2 Kings 25:12, 26; Jer. 43:4-7).

The very fact that God had allowed his people to fall into the hands of enemy nations and to be deprived of their privileged access to God through his presence in the Temple reveals that the exile expressed visibly what had already taken place in many Jewish hearts before their tired feet landed on foreign soil. They had failed to "obey the voice of the LORD," a process quite vividly portrayed throughout the books of 1 Kings, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles, which trace the reigns of the Israelite and Judean rulers until both kingdoms have fallen.

It is worth noting here a pattern that will be discussed in further detail in Chapter III. Although the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy are sometimes grammatically directed toward an audience of one, the context of the passage indicates that the people as a whole are addressed.[27] Nevertheless, the biblical record places a heavy emphasis on

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26. For examples of prophetic calls for repentance in order to avoid exile, see 2 Kings 17:13-23, Isa. 6:12, Isa. 9:7-20, Jer. 1:16, Jer. 6, Jer. 25:1-14, Ezek. 5:11-12, 2 Chron. 36:15.

27. תִּשְׁמַע is the verb used in the Deut. 28:15 phrase, "if you [singular] will not hear/obey," which introduces the curses for disobedience. The context of the passage (see the beginning of Moses' second

the infidelities of the *leaders* of the people, rather than focusing on a mass falling-away, and yet it is the whole people who receive the consequence of exile, and passages like 2 Kings 17:6-23 confirm that covenantal infidelity describes a sin of which both leaders and subjects were guilty. Later examination will take a closer look at the reason behind the Bible's particular emphasis on the level to which the Jewish *leaders* followed the covenant. Here, though, the bottom line is this: the event of the Babylonian exile indicates that a good number of Jews around the time of the exile were in need of spiritual conversion. Rabbi Nosson Scherman, co-editor of a modern series compiling Talmudic, Midrashic, and rabbinic commentaries on books of the Old Testament, pinpoints sin as the origin of the exile when he writes, "Every exile is caused by a specific sin or set of sins, and the exile continues until Israel repents and atones for them. [. . .] The First Commonwealth was brought down by the cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery, and murder.[28] Recognizing, then, that to which the Bible itself testifies—the underlying, sin-related cause of the Babylonian exile—we also begin to recognize that exile is a means by which God chooses to purify his people and to ready their hearts for wholehearted return to the Lord and eventual restoration (see Deut. 30:1-10). In other words, exile readies hearts to be re-evangelized.

The next two indications that the postexilic period was ripe for re-evangelization can be discovered in what we know of the Jews' exilic experience. The first indication is the immersion of the Jews in a non-Jewish culture; the second is their subsequent need

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address in Deut. 4:44) and the use of a plural "you" in the portion specifically about the exile (Deut. 28:63) indicate that all of the Israelites are addressed. For instance, the suffix on the verb וְנִסַּחְתֶּם indicates a plural audience: "and you [plural] shall be plucked." See www.blueletterbible.org for the Hebrew interlinear of this passage.

28. Nosson Scherman, "An Overview: Ezra—Molder of a New Era," Introductory essay in Yosef Rabinowitz, *Ezra*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, Artscroll Tanach Series (Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll Mesorah Publications, 1984), p. l.

to have God's Word expressed to them in a new way. A bit of historical background is necessary here: Israel's covenant with God set it apart from other nations and called its members to resist conformity with pagan cultures. The Babylonian Exile made such separation practically impossible. To some extent the living arrangements of the Jews in exile may have protected them from the full impact of this transition. Nations that were deported by the Babylonians were allowed to establish their own (likely self-governing) ethnic communities when settling in the land of their captivity.[29] Elders and priests held leadership roles in these settlements.[30] Regarding religious practice, being without the Temple meant that liturgical sacrifices were out of the question.[31] The result was a tightening up of disciplinary laws surrounding the consumption of food, the keeping of the Sabbath, and the practice of circumcision.[32] Aside from this, the Jews were possibly able to partake in public reading of Scripture on fast days, and they continued to receive prophetic guidance.[33]

In spite of these cultural safeguards, the Jews were still living in a Gentile land and did not come out unscathed. The fact that the Jews were eventually "in a position to

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29. Mordechai Cogan, "Into Exile: From the Assyrian Conquest of Israel to the Fall of Babylon," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 358; See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in* Israel, Rev ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 152; and Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the* Jews, The Works of Flavius Josephus, trans. William Whiston, A.M. (Auburn and Buffalo: John E. Beardsley, 1895), Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D11%3Awhiston+chapter%3D1%3Awhiston+section%3D1 (accessed February 12, 2016), 10.11.1. For example, Tel-abib, from which the prophet Ezekiel continued his ministry, was one such Jewish community (Blenkinsopp, p. 152; Cogan, p. 360).

30. Blenkinsopp, p. 152.

31. Cogan, p. 359; Note, though, that the Jews who settled in Egypt after the destruction of Jerusalem did, in fact, offer animal sacrifices in the place of their exile, but perhaps in a syncretistic manner (Ibid., p. 361).

32. Blenkinsopp, p. 152.

33. Cogan, pp. 360-364.

purchase property and send gifts back to the homeland" [34] and the discovery of Babylonian business tablets inscribed with Jewish names[35] indicates that they had found work, which likely would have brought the Jews into regular contact with their Gentile neighbors. Such dealings would bring exposure to polytheistic religions, pagan philosophies, and new languages. Joseph Blenkinsopp notes evidence that the postexilic understanding of prophecy seems to have been touched by "[c]ontact with Babylonian scholarship."[36] Babylonian names, too, began to be used among the Jewish population, even among prominent Jews in the Davidic line.[37] The Bible itself gives evidence that a number of Jews were even inserted into the heart of Babylonian culture through their appointment to administrative positions, appointments that put them toe-to-toe with decisions regarding how to continue covenantal life in the face of daily interaction with Gentiles, the imposition of idolatrous practices, and compromising royal decrees.[38]

All of these elements of life in Babylon help to explain the exiles' increased acquaintance with the Aramaic language. During the exilic period, Aramaic began to be used so widely that by the Persian period, it had become "the lingua franca of the empire" and thus even found its way into a number of biblical writings.[39] The impact of such a drastic transition is made clear in the book of Nehemiah, when we are told that after the

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34. Blenkinsopp, p. 152.

35. Samuel Daiches, *The Jews in Babylonia in the Time of Ezra and Nehemiah According to Babylonian Inscriptions* (London: Jews College, 1910), https://ia800302.us.archive.org/32/items/jewsinbabyloniai00daicuoft/jewsinbabyloniai00daicuoft.pdf (accessed February 10, 2016).

36. Blenkinsopp, p. 154.

37. Cogan, p. 358; Also see *New American Bible*, Rev. ed. (Wichita, KS: Fireside Catholic Publishing, 2011), footnote to Dan. 1:7.

38. See Dan. 1, 3, 6; Esther 3:1-4, C:28; Another example of Jewish moral code conflicting with foreign law: Tob. 1:16-20.

39. Metropolitan Museum of Art, "A New Form of Writing and New Colloquial Language," in "The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: Charting a New Empire," June 20-August 4, 2013 Exhibition, New York, http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/cyrus-cylinder/writing (accessed February 5, 2016); See also Cogan, p. 358.

return of many Jews to Jerusalem, some of their children (specifically those with foreign mothers) no longer knew how to speak Hebrew (Neh. 13:24). We are also told that Ezra's reading of the Law had to be accompanied by the assistance of Levitical translators (Neh. 8:7).[40] Jewish tradition even reflects the belief that Ezra himself (the priest-scribe who looms large in a postexilic Judean return to the practice of the Law) transcribed the Torah into Aramaic,[41] the necessity of which would seem to indicate how widespread the use of this new language had become. Jacques Doukhan points out that this linguistic transition seems to mark a deeper spiritual transition, defending the anger that Nehemiah expresses when learning of the loss of Hebraic knowledge among the Jewish children, for Nehemiah "sadly observes that his people are losing their religious identity, and that this tragedy has something to do with lack of interest in the Hebrew language, because they have lost their Hebrew roots."[42] Just as "the influence of Hebrew language and civilization [. . .] certainly played a role in the shaping of Hebrew mentality,"[43] so too would shifts *away* from Hebrew culture understandably cause subsequent shifts in the way the Jews would see the world.

This quick sketch helps us see, then, that life in Babylon had a double effect on the Jews. While drawing them more deeply into those aspects of their religious roots to which they still has access, the exile also caused them—in many ways no longer able to keep themselves apart from the Gentiles—to breathe in the air of a pagan culture and to

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40. See Cogan, p. 359 for the interpretation of Neh. 8:7 in which the explanations given by the Levites were, more specifically, translations of Ezra's words into Aramaic; other commentators protest such an interpretation as "highly speculative," but the alternative translation they offer still involves the Levites in "moving through the crowd" and explaining the Law in a way their listeners can understand ((*The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 3:801)), which still proves the need for at least a *cultural* translation of the text, if not a strictly lingual translation.

41. Cogan, p. 358.

42. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), p. xiv.

43. Doukhan, p. 217.

bear the marks of its influence. All in all, the exiled Jews' contact with non-Jewish culture led to a need for fresh ways to make the covenant and its corresponding lifestyle accessible to them and to their children.

The postexilic period arose almost simultaneously with the rise of the Persian Empire. Biblical and historical evidence from this era reveal that the Jews who returned from exile experienced communal diminishment, a sense of want, and a breakdown in the mission of the family. These three experiences are further indications of the need for a postexilic re-evangelization.[44] In 539 BC, King Cyrus added the Babylonian Empire to his own, and the Persian period began. The following year, Cyrus gave permission for the Jews to return to their homeland and to rebuild the Temple.[45] The book of Ezra recounts that a first wave of Jews answered this call and laid the foundation for a new Temple, but resistance from neighboring peoples brought the work to a halt until the rebuilding process resumed in 520 BC under the prophetic urgings of Haggai and Zechariah and the leadership of the governor (and Davidic descendent) Zerubbabel and of the high priest Joshua. The Temple was completed in 516/515 BC. Jerusalem itself, though, was still in poor shape, and the antagonism of the Jews' neighbors persisted to the point that Artaxerxes I decreed (sometime between 465 and 445 BC) that work on the city and walls of Jerusalem should cease.

One more portion of this history is important for us here. Although modern scholarship debates the time period during which the priest-scribe Ezra was present in Jerusalem, the Bible asserts that he came to Jerusalem with a new wave of Jewish

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44. Appendix A offers a timeline of biblical and secular events in the Persian period as they relate to the Jewish people.

45. Ezra 1:1-4; Ezra 6:1-5; 2 Chron. 36:23; Mary Joan Winn Leith, "Israel among the Nations: The Persian Period," In *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 377.

returnees in 458 BC with a mandate from Artaxerxes I (the same king who had recently stopped restoration efforts), to serve as an administrator of religious observance in the province of Judah. Renewed work on the walls of Jerusalem, though, did not begin for another thirteen years when Nehemiah, the Jewish steward of Artaxerxes I, received the king's permission to depart for Judah and to undertake the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. Nehemiah became the governor of Judah and directed the completion of the wall in 445 BC. It is at this juncture that Scripture recounts the event that will serve as a focal point for the third chapter of this thesis—the re-establishment of the covenant, an event at which both Ezra and Nehemiah were present.

The events of this period reveal that the Jews who returned to the land of Judah in the early years after the exile faced a number of challenges, in spite of being back in the land God had given them. In the first place, "the smallest of all peoples"[46] had grown even smaller, and this is where the Jews' experience of communal diminishment begins to show itself. The period of the divided kingship, followed by the Assyrian exile of the ten northern tribes, had already reduced the Jewish inhabitants of the Promised Land to only two tribes; the exile scattered that remainder across the Persian Empire. Many of those scattered Jews remained away from Judah, even after they were given the opportunity to return.[47] As a result, during much of the first century following the initial return to Jerusalem, the post-exile population of Judah is thought to have been about one

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46. Deut. 7:7.

47. See the second wave of returnees in Ezra 8, Nehemiah's position in Susa even after both waves of return (Neh. 1), and the vast number of Jews still dispersed throughout Persia in Esther 3:8-9, 9:2; Josephus adds his own speculation as to the reason for this neglect: "Yet did many of them stay in Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions" (Flavius Josephus, 11:1:3); The Jewish Talmud also reflects the tradition that some remained in exile either due to old age or out of faithfulness to those who were not able to make the return journey ((Soncino Babylonian Talmud, English trans., ed. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, reformatted by Reuven Brauner, fol. 2a-32a, updated August 10, 2015, http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2012/01/online-soncino-babylonian-talmud.html (accessed February 12, 2016), Megillah 16b.)).

third of its pre-exile population,[48] a percentage that corresponds well to the biblical use of the term "remnant" when speaking of the returned Jews (Hag. 1:12, Zech. 8:6, 11, 12). The city of Jerusalem also covered a smaller portion of land than it had before[49] and was in shambles—no Temple, no palaces, no walls, no noble houses. Living conditions were poor, a situation likely compounded by problems of unjust distribution of wealth among the returnees.[50] These conditions line up with the archaeological evidence that the re-creation of the Judean state (with "proper administrative infrastructure," economic stability, etc.) was a slow process and had still not yet come together by the time Ezra and Nehemiah returned to improve the situation.[51] To top it all off, the Persian governmental system gave the Jews a great deal of autonomy as long as they cooperated with the Persian government,[52] but the fact that they were vassals under a Persian king meant that no Davidic descendent could reclaim the throne that had been emptied seven decades earlier. They were, thus, still a people in a land not their own. To add to the difficulty of this situation, the returned Jews were not the only ethnic group in Palestine upon their arrival home. Palestine had actually become home for a number of displaced peoples, some of whom had already come under the influence of Hellenization and were spreading it.[53] In light of such evidence, Blenkinsopp points out that the period from the rebuilding of the Temple until the resurrection of Jerusalem itself (in the days of Nehemiah) can be

48. Leith, p. 381; Interestingly, a prophecy in the book of Zechariah presents a purified population that again calls on the name of the Lord (after the striking of its shepherd and the scattering of the flock) as being *one third* the size of the initial number: Zech. 13:7-9.

49. Leith, p. 381.

50. Leith, p. 396; Neh. 5:1-5.

51. Stern, Ephraim, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 3:581.

52. Blenkinsopp, p. 196.

53. Leith, pp. 381, 387. See also Stern, p. 581.

seen as a sort of second exilic period.[54] Diminished demographically, geographically, economically, and politically, the returned inhabitants of Judah would certainly have sensed that something was still missing from their experience of restoration. Where was the prosperity and fruitfulness Moses had foretold would come to repentant exiles?[55] Was still more repentance needed before they could claim wholehearted return to the Lord and his covenant?

The writings of the postexilic prophets provide evidence that the returned exiles faced interior struggles alongside the exterior ones described in the previous section. These interior struggles are the second indication from this period that the need to return to God continued beyond the apparent end of the exile. The Bible offers us a glimpse into the spiritual state of the resettled Judeans, a state marked by feelings of emptiness and want. For instance, the prophet Haggai delivers this message to the returned Jews during the period when their work on the Temple had been discarded:

> Reflect on your experience! / You have sown much, but have brought in little; / you have eaten, but have not been satisfied; / You have drunk, but have not become intoxicated;/ you have clothed yourselves, but have not been warmed;/ And the hired worker labors for a bag full of holes./ [. . .] You expected much, but it came to little;/ and what you brought home, I blew away. (Hag. 1:5-6, 9)

Eighteen years after the first wave of exiles came home, their experience still bore more resemblance to Deuteronomy's list of curses (Deut. 28:15-68) than it did to its list of blessings (Deut. 28:1-6), which seems to indicate that covenantal obedience—the fulcrum upon which Israel's destiny tilts—must have still been somewhat lacking. Evidence for this position gains ground when Haggai's prophecies also reveal that the Jews of this time were suffering drought and similar disasters (Hag. 1:10-11, 17), which

54. Blenkinsopp, p. 206.
55. See Deut. 30:1-10.

are, again, consequences promised to a disobedient People. Malachi, too, points out that the postexilic Jews are not yet in right relationship with God. He joins his voice to Haggai's in asserting that repentance (the remedy for the Deuteronomic curses—Deut. 30:2) will bring God's mercy by ridding the land of drought and blight (Mal. 3:10-11).

Along with the messages of the prophets, the historical situation itself reveals to us that something was lacking in the exiles' return experience that needed to be supplied. Liturgically, the Jews were once again able to offer animal sacrifices to God on the Temple Mount (even before the Temple was rebuilt) and thus to reinstitute elements of Torah observance that had not been possible in exile. Even so, many Jews instantly felt that the restoration of their communal religious practice was but little in comparison to the glory of what it had been when the first Temple was still standing. When the Jews laid the foundation of the new Temple in the first year of the return, "a mighty clamor" was the sound their neighbors heard, shouts of joy mixing with the loud mourning of those "who were old enough to have seen the former house" (Ezra 3:12). This sentiment is expressed again by the prophet Haggai when he encourages the Jews to renew their efforts in rebuilding the Temple: "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? / And how do you see it now? / Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes?" (Hag. 2:3). Even after the Temple was rebuilt, Jewish tradition "lamented that the First Temple possessed five things the Second lacked,"[56] again shedding light on a sense that restoration was not yet complete. In Chapter III, it will become clear that this experience of want, along with the postexilic sense of diminishment—both of which correspond to Rabbi Yosef Rabinowitz's description of the Jews' status in the days of

56. Leith, p. 394. The things that were lacking: "the sacred fire, the ark, the urim and the thummim, and the Holy Spirit (prophecy)."

Nehemiah as a "partial redemption"[57]—had the effect of bringing about in the people a deep sense of need for return to right relationship with God so that they would once again receive the blessings promised to the faithful.

The last indication of the need for postexilic re-evangelization is that family life, too, showed signs of trouble. The prophets and leaders of this time recognized that divorce and intermarriage with Gentile women had become notable problems in Judah and that they constituted a deep crisis for covenantal fidelity (Mal. 2:10-16, Ezra 9-10, Neh. 13:23-31). While divorce was not forbidden by the Law (Deut. 24:1-4), God makes it known through a postexilic prophet that he hates divorce (Mal. 2:16)[58]; intermarriage, on the other hand, was expressly forbidden to Jews (Deut. 7:1-4). In either case, obedience to the voice of the Lord would necessitate reform. These wounds to the integrity of the family help to explain why the postexilic prophets consistently urge their Jewish listeners to reflect on and to remember who they are and what God has done for them as his own.[59] The Old Testament frequently affirms that the communication of Israelite tradition to each generation was the role of parents, another point that will be taken up in Chapter III. It is no wonder, then, that we see a sort of disillusioned neglect of communal identity following closely on the heels of a marriage crisis and see in one more way an interior call drawing the Jews to a deeper return to the covenant.

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57. Yosef Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, Artscroll Tanach Series (Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll Mesorah Publications, 1990), p. 190.

58. The NAB footnote to Mal. 2:10-16 interprets the passage as dealing with the joint problem of both divorce *and* intermarriage: Israelites have divorced their Jewish spouses and replaced them with foreign ones. It is clear, though, that God's detestation for divorce is not limited to cases of re-marriage to Gentiles. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* also proposes that this passage could be referring to syncretistic religious practices (Leith, p. 402).

59. Repetition of the call to remember and reflect on the past: Zech. 1:4-6 (a remembrance that leads to repentance), Zech. 7:7-14 (a remembrance of why their exile had taken place), Zech. 10:9 (a remembrance that must take place before return from exile); Hag. 1:5, 1:7, 2:3, 2:15, 2:18 (a call to reflect on one's experience and to see whether or not God has blessed it); Mal. 1:2-3 (remembrance of Israel's divine election), Mal. 2:10-11(a remembrance of the effects one's covenantal relationship with God), Mal. 3:16-18 (a remembrance of Israel's divine election).

In summary, the six indications discussed above give sufficient reason for viewing the postexilic period as period requiring re-evangelization, one that we will now be able to compare with the New Evangelization itself. Before briefly sketching these connections, though, it is important to qualify what has been explained above. Although the Jews of the early postexilic period clearly had need of some sort of further return to the covenant that they had shunned through sinful lifestyles prior to the exile, it would be inaccurate to conclude that they returned from exile in a state just as bad as before. As mentioned earlier, God designed exile as a consequence that would lead to repentance, and the time spent in Babylon does seem to have readied the hearts of many Jews to be able to begin a re-entrance into covenantal living, for we soon see a remnant zealously returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. Later, a remnant allows itself to be stirred forth for the continuation of this work. These Jews had apparently received the fruits of their "desert" experience. What this chapter seeks to prove, though, is that the process of drawing the "fallen-away" People of God back into covenantal living was not yet accomplished when they first set foot back in Judah; rather, the evidence above reveals postexilic Judah to still be in need of re-evangelization. On these grounds, then, we can set forth some parallels between their own efforts toward large-scale return to the Lord and our own efforts for that purpose.

How, then, does the age of the New Evangelization resemble the postexilic scene? It is first worth noting that the application of exilic terms to the situation of modern Christianity is no new concept. To some extent, what was true of the Jews' fall into exile is true today in that many Christians are experiencing a sort of self-imposed exile, far from God and from the Church due to sin or to a corresponding apathy toward the

Christian life. We have seen that idolatry often posed one of the greatest threats to the Israelites' covenantal fidelity[60]; Pope Francis points out that modern man has fallen into a "New Idolatry," namely, worship of money. He says that this has become our golden calf "in a new and ruthless guise, making us lose sight of the primacy of the human person" and that this idolatry leads to "a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God."[61] In another sense of "exile," we can also see today an interesting reversal of terms. Many faithful Christians consider themselves to be "in exile" among their own people and in their own land because it seems that the *rest* of society has moved away from God, and so even though not physically removed from their homeland, they are living in what is now a culture that is spiritually foreign to their way of life.[62] Other Christians today point out that the exilic qualities of the present age are not unique; Christians have always been and will always be exiles in this world, the "strangers and sojourners" of whom St. Peter wrote.[63] In any case, the experience of spiritual exile is one to which most modern Christians can relate in some way.

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60. Scherman, p. l-li (Scherman quotes the Talmud—*Sanhedrin 63b*—as saying that "Israel worshiped idols only as a means to permit itself public immorality" (l), explaining that the real lure of idolatry was that it offered the Jews a "rationalization" for giving into their lustful desires. Scherman comments, "The Jewish religion imposed high standards of behavior – but the idols winked at immorality, so idolaters flourished" (li).

61. Francis, 55, 57.

62. Carl Trueman, "A Church for Exiles: Why Reformed Christianity Provides the Best Basis for Faith Today," *First Things*, August, 2014, http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/08/a-church-for-exiles (accessed February 9, 2016); Rod Dreher, "Orthodox Christians Must Now Learn To Live As Exiles In Our Own Country," *Time*, June 26, 2015, http://time.com/3938050/orthodox-christians-must-now-learn-to-live-as-exiles-in-our-own-country/ (accessed February 9, 2016); David Kinnaman, "The Rise of Exiles," Q Ideas, 2014, http://qideas.org/articles/the-rise-of-exiles/ (accessed February 9, 2016).

63. 1 Pet. 2:11; Examples of those who point out Christianity's consistent state of exile throughout history: Joseph Sunde, "Life in Exile: Why Christians Have Never Been 'At Home' in America," Charisma News, updated July 12, 2015, http://www.charismanews.com/politics/opinion/51398-life-in-exile-why-christians-have-never-been-at-home-in-america (accessed February 9, 2016); John Piper, "Christian Exiles," *Tabletalk Magazine*, May 1, 2011, http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/christian-exiles/ (accessed February 9, 2016).

Similarly to the Jews' exilic immersion in non-Jewish culture and language, the fathers of the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization recognized that Christians today are often immersed in and influenced by a culture that can be foreign to the demands of the gospel. The list of final propositions for the synod admits, "We are Christians living in a secularized world [. . .] in a situation similar to that of the first Christians."[64] It notes "processes of globalization and secularism" that influence the reception of the gospel and, again, "a global Culture" that feeds skepticism and introduces "new paradigms of thought and life."[65] It also pinpoints the influence of the media on "the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being of the youth" in particular.[66] *Evangelii Gaudium* picks up these themes, discussing how the modern "process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal" and identifying a subsequent "growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increased in relativism."[67] Such a cultural setting certainly touches the lives of contemporary Christians who are assigned the difficult task of being in the world but not of it, just as life in Babylon impacted the exiled Jews.

Immersion in a secularized culture leads directly into a third parallel between the two periods under consideration, that of the need for a fresh way to communicate the Word of God to people who are conversant in the ideas and practices characteristic of modern culture. St. John Paul II's call for the New Evangelization urged the need for a transmission of the gospel that was new in "ardor, methods, and expression,"[68] and our

64. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 8.
65. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 17.
66. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 51.
67. Francis, 64.
68. John Paul II, "The Task of the Latin American Bishop," *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983): 659-62. Quoted in Martin, p. 13.

new cultural setting explains why. Just like Ezra and the Levites in Nehemiah 8, Christians today find themselves with a need to explain the Word of God in terms that their listeners can grasp. The contemporary publishing of books such as Matthew Kelly's *Rediscover Catholicism* witnesses to a sort of widespread "illiteracy" among Catholics regarding the liturgy, the Scriptures, Christian doctrine, and Christian practice. Resources like this one recognize that Catholics who have fallen into boredom with the Faith, or even into non-Christian lifestyles, are failing to realize how amazing Christianity really is. These resources seek to re-energize the Church by simply putting the elements of the Faith into a fresh framework of relatable stories and analogies that help to draw forth that sense of wonder and understanding (for instance, describing Confession in terms of a car wash and spiritual direction in terms of athletic coaching). *Evangelii Gaudium* draws a conclusion that offers support for the above approach: "Just as all of us like to be spoken to in our mother tongue, so too in the faith we like to be spoken to in our 'mother culture,' our native language [. . .] and our heart is better disposed to listen." The propositions of the 2012 synod made a similar point by recognizing a special need for "*inculturation of the faith*" [69] a process that involves putting the good news into various cultural "languages" in a way that is accessible to inhabitants of that culture and yet is still compatible with the gospel message. It seems that this process is now just as necessary in lands where Christianity once flourished as in lands where the gospel is being proclaimed for the first time.

The three indications that were mentioned in conjunction with the Persian period also shed some light on the modern world. First, the concept of being part of a "remnant" of faithful people is one to which many Christians can relate. Ralph Martin outlines "the

69. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 5.

radical decline in the practice of the faith in traditionally strong Catholic areas."[70] The synod fathers' conviction that "there is a tension between the Christian Sunday and the secular Sunday" and that "Sunday needs to be recovered for the New Evangelization"[71] most likely flows from clear signs that Mass attendance is increasingly low.[72] This sense of diminishment can lead to what Pope Francis refers to in *Evangelii Gaudium* as "tomb psychology," by which Christians can lose hope for any improvement in the situation.[73] The synod fathers and the Pope both recognize, too, that Christians who are away from right relationship with God often experience a deep lack of fulfillment with life, an experience of emptiness that cannot be satisfied except by God (an experience that can be compared to the postexilic sense of want). The synod fathers, point out that people often experience "loneliness and lack of meaning to which the conditions of post-modern society often relegate them," a problem to which the gospel has an answer.[74] Pope Francis quotes Benedict XVI's insight that "in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life," employing this quote in order to describe "a spiritual 'desertification'" that results from "attempts by some societies to build without God or to eliminate their Christian roots" and ends in depletion and fruitlessness.[75] Just as such a sense of incompleteness marked the need for re-evangelization in postexilic Judah, so it seems to be doing today.

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70. Martin, pp. 16-19.
71. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 34.
72. See "International Mass Attendance," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, 2014, http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/intmassattendance.html (accessed February 15, 2016); Gray, Mark M., "A Micro-scoping View of U.S. Catholic Populations," 1964 research blog for Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, May 11, 2012, http://nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com/2012/05/microscoping-view-of-us-catholic.html (accessed February 15, 2016).
73. Francis, 83.
74. XIII Ordinary General Assembly, "Final List," *Propositio* 13.
75. Francis, 86.

Lastly, we see in modern family life one more connection to the postexilic period. Divorce, even among Christians, is common in the Western world. Even many of the families who are not affected by divorce still face the consequences of a breakdown in the communication of Christianity from parent to child. Oftentimes, parents themselves have not been taught or have never personally engaged in the faith into which they were baptized, and so they are unable to give their children a sense of Christian identity. *Evangelii Gaudium* mentions this problem, speaking of the endangerment of the family and specifically mentioning the importance of the familial role as "the place where parents pass on the faith to their children."[76] Ralph Martin explains what happens when this familial transmission of the faith breaks down: "When the eternal consequences that flow from what we choose to believe and how we choose to act are not spoken of for long periods of time, the silence on these dimensions of the Gospel is often taken to mean that they are no longer important, true, or relevant."[77] We can see, then, that breakdowns in parental communication of the faith result in children who do not grasp who they are as beloved members of the People of God. Rabbi Scherman paints a picture of the Old Testament Israelites that looks quite similar to what has just been described, saying that the Israelites would continue their cycle of idolatry when "new generations that had not lived through the earlier experience [of falling into idolatry, repenting, and being delivered], or perhaps were too young to fully absorb the lesson, reverted to the failings of their forefathers."[78] If covenantal fidelity is the aim of re-evangelization in any period, the family has always played a central role in this process.

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76. Francis, 66.
77. Martin, p. 18.
78. Scherman, p. xx.

Chapter II has shown how Israel's situation after the exile compares to the present situation of the Church. Chapter III will examine what postexilic biblical texts indicate about the way God used some Jews to re-evangelize their fellow Jews. This will lay a foundation for Chapter IV's application of the postexilic model to the New Evangelization.[79]

79. The table in Appendix C offers a visual summary of Chapter II. The reader should be aware that differences, too, exist between the postexilic period and the 21st century. For instance, because the re-evangelization of the Judeans primarily involved a return to the Mosaic Law, we see them employing extreme measures in order to form an exclusively Jewish community. Re-evangelization in the Christian context, on the other hand, involves a return to the New Law and often aims at drawing Christians to a better living of the gospel from *within* the culture rather than apart from it.

Chapter III: The Postexilic Model

- **Part 1: Re-Entry Into the Divine Dialogue**

> History has taught us that exile is followed by redemption, but in those times, many people wondered if a rebirth was possible. [. . .] Let us, therefore, begin to search amid the mists of a difficult period. If we find shafts of light and follow them, we can achieve insights not only into Ezra's time, but our own as well.[80]

It is the purpose of this chapter to do just as the rabbinic comment above suggests—to recognize in the biblical records of the postexilic period a method of re-evangelization that can be adapted in some way to our own time. Chapter I established that re-evangelization—as it applies to both the work of the New Evangelization and to its many typological counterparts in the Old Testament—involves a ministry by which faithful members of the People of God strive to bring fallen-away members back into covenantal communion. Using Nehemiah 8-10 as a starting point, Chapter III will examine the specific ways by which certain postexilic Jews led their fellow returnees back into a deeper engagement in individual and communal relationship with God. In doing so, it will reveal the magnetic influence of prayerful leaders and the missionary fruitfulness that flows from lives personally immersed in dialogue with God.

Nehemiah 8-10 describes a crucial moment for the postexilic community. If a chronological reading of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah[81] is intended, then Nehemiah 8-10 describes an event that took place during the Persian period soon after Nehemiah himself had directed the completion of the wall of Jerusalem in 445 BC, but before the wall had been formally dedicated. The passage itself specifies only the month in which the event occurred, but the context of the book seems to indicate that these chapters transpired in or

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80. Scherman, pp. xvi-xvii.

81. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally viewed as one combined text. See *New American Bible*, p. 451 OT, and *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), p. 955.

shortly after 445 BC, placing them 90-95 years after the first wave of returnees arrived in Judah and about 70 years after the completion of the Temple.[82] Even if the book was not meant to be understood in a strictly chronological fashion, the placement of the covenantal event of chapters 8-10 at the center of two important halves of a major event in Jewish history (the revival of the City of David through the rebuilding and rededication process) can be seen as a textual hint of the corresponding or even superior importance of the event occurring in that gap. The structure of the passage creates a literary frame of *physical* renewal that encloses and centers on a parallel period of *spiritual* renewal.[83] This structure is consistent with the way Jewish readers would have understood the restoration of Jerusalem. Just as Jewish thought considers the human person as an entirety—soul and body being so united that Scripture often conceives of their functions interchangeably[84]—so too would the complete rebuilding of Jerusalem (often characterized in Scripture as a human person, representing the Jewish nation as a whole[85]) need to involve revival of both a physical and spiritual nature. Hence, the book of Nehemiah presents the re-evangelization of the returned Jews—their renewed

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82. Neh. 8:1 relates that Ezra's reading of the Law came about in "the seventh month" of an unspecified year, but the narrative of this event follows quickly upon the heels of Nehemiah's wall-building enterprise, which began in the spring of 445 BC and ended in "the sixth month" (August-September) of, again, an unspecified year. It seems reasonable to make a contextual conjecture that Neh. 8-10 took place in or shortly after 445 BC and that the close succession from the sixth month to the seventh indicates that these two events took place in the same year; Also, the approximately 70-year span between the rebuilding of the Temple and the renewal of the covenant through Ezra offers one more evidence that the early post-exile was for the Jews a sort of second exile, as cited on p. 19 (the first exile also having spanned about 70 years, as Jeremiah had prophesied).

83. Nehemiah 1-7: Exterior Renewal—A leader is moved to rebuild, the people follow his lead, the rebuilding takes place, and a list notes the names of the rebuilders; Nehemiah 8-10: Interior Renewal—The people are moved to rebuild, the leader follows their lead, the rebuilding takes place, and a list notes the names of the "rebuilders" (those who sign the pact in chapter 10).

84. Doukhan, p. 210.

85. Jerusalem as "her": Isa. 40:2, Isa. 66:10, Zech. 8:2-3; Jerusalem as an unfaithful wife: Zech. 1:14-17, Ezek. 16; Speaking to Jerusalem as to a person: Psalm 87:3.

commitment to the covenant in Nehemiah 8-10—as a central and necessary movement, rather than as an afterthought to a more important work.

Nehemiah 8-10 describes three major events by which the Jews renewed their covenant with the Lord:

I. The public reading of the Law, followed by deep contrition, further study of the Law by the leaders, and the celebration of the feast of Booths (Ch. 8)
II. A public gathering for the confession of sin (Ch. 9)
III. The communal signing of a pact and taking of an oath, by which the Jews recommit themselves to the demands of the covenant (Ch.10)

In these three chapters, the remnant of God's people join together in a conscious act of recommitment to the covenant, and we see this from the very outset of chapter 8: "Now when the seventh month came, the whole people gathered as one in the square in front of the Water Gate, and they called upon Ezra the scribe to bring forth the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had commanded for Israel" (1:1). The Jews here—all of "the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand" (1:2-3)—exhibit a readiness of heart for conversion, for it is they themselves who instigate the gathering.[86] After all that they and their ancestors had been through in the exile and in their first century back in Judah's postexilic remains, the Jews appear as a "chastened" community "struggling to take the spiritual and moral lessons of the Exile to heart,"[87] but also as an eager community who truly *want* that for which they ask—a chance to hear the voice of God and to respond, a chance to re-enter a divine dialogue toward which they as a people had long grown deaf.

86. See *The New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 800: The gathering is called by the people themselves.
87. *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, ed. Scott Hahn (New York: Doubleday, 2009), p. 647.

The concept of dialogue lies at the core of this event. A close look at the call-and-response structure of Nehemiah 8:1-12 visibly paints a conversation in progress:[88]

1) **The people gather and ask for Ezra to bring forth the book of the Law (v. 1).**
   a) Ezra responds to their request (by reading) (v. 2-3).
   b) The people listen attentively (v. 3).
2) **Ezra opens scroll (v. 5).**
   a) The people stand (v. 5).
3) **Ezra blesses the Lord (v. 6).**
   a) The people answer "Amen, amen!," kneel, and bow down (v. 6).
4) **Ezra reads clearly, Levites explain (v. 7-8).**
   a) The people weep (v. 9).
5) **Ezra, Nehemiah, and Levites tell people to not weep (v. 9-11).**
   a) The people respond with joy because they have understood (v. 12).

Note that this is a *mediated* dialogue. The nature of the crowd's request (for a hearing of the Law) indicates a desire for conversation not with Ezra but with God. Ezra here is acting as a facilitator of the dialogue, a dialogue in which, we shall see, he himself had long been engaged. Also, while the initiation of the conversation originally seems to spring from the crowd, it is God, through his priest, who quickly takes the lead in this conversation. The transition of the initiatory role from the people to the Lord is exhibited in the outline above, by the anomalous shift from number 1 to number 2. All that the people do in this passage clearly takes the form of *response* to the words and actions of their conversation partner, and it seems odd that the original leader of a dialogue would so quickly—and gladly—take the subordinate role. Had God been the initiator of the conversation all along, which would mean that the initiation of the people in verse 1 was actually just one more response within the context of an ongoing conversation that had begun prior to this passage?

88. To see this conversational aspect at work throughout the *entirety* of Nehemiah 8-10, refer to the outline in Appendix B.

A quick look into what is meant by the "book of the law of Moses" that Ezra reads to the people will shed light on the question above, for the honor and attention with which the people respond to its reading clearly shows that the nature of this book is what makes the dialogue in Nehemiah 8 into a dialogue specifically with God.[89] Scholars have offered a number of ideas regarding what it was that Ezra actually read to the people on this occasion, but the overall consensus is that the book—more precisely, a scroll[90]—was some form of the Pentateuch, the Law given to the Israelites through Moses at Mount Sinai and defining the terms of their covenant with God.[91] The book of Exodus records the giving of the Law, and it is in the narrative architecture of this book that we find evidence that the conversation in Nehemiah 8 did, in fact, have its roots in previous encounters with God. An outline of Exodus 19-20 exhibits a mediated dialogue between God and the ancestors of the Jews:

1) **God, through Moses, tells the Israelites of his desire to forge a covenant with them (19:3-6).**
    a) The elders of the people, through Moses, accept the offer and its terms (19:7-8).
2) **God, through Moses, has the people prepare themselves for a theophany (19:9-13).**
    a) The people, instructed by Moses, prepare themselves (19:14-15).
3) **God comes down to meet the people (19:16).**
    a) The people, led by Moses, come to the foot of the mountain to meet Him; all the while, Moses and God are conversing (19:17-19).
4) **God, through Moses, gives the Israelites a warning (19:20-23).**
    a) Moses and Aaron go up the mountain, as God requested (19:24-25).
5) **God gives the 10 Commandments to the people through Moses (20:1-17, 24:3).**
    a) The people together commit themselves to the terms of the covenant (24:3-11).

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89. Along with the general reverence displayed by the people's postures, a striking parallel exists here with Exodus 33:8, in which the Israelites rose and stood at the entrance of their tents whenever Moses would go to the tent of meeting, then bow down when the column of cloud would descend upon the tent.

90. *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 800.

91. *New Interpreter's Bible* p. 800; *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, ed. Dianne Bergant, C.S.A. and Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), p. 363.

In this passage, we see God himself initiating a covenant relationship with the Israelites. In order to identify the postexilic dialogue of Nehemiah 8 as a continuation of the dialogue begun at Sinai, it is necessary to point out that in Jewish thought, to remember an event from one's ancestral history was to truly be present there.[92] Deuteronomy 5:3-4 reflects this conviction in a passage in which Moses speaks to the Israelites near the end of their forty years in the desert. Although many of his listeners were not yet born when the covenant was cut at Sinai, Moses emphasizes with them that they *personally* had been present there, engaging in conversation with God "[f]ace to face": "The LORD our God, made a covenant with us at Horeb; not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, all of us who are alive here this day." A medieval Jewish commentary expresses the same idea when it speaks about the Sinai event: "Our eyes, not those of a stranger, saw; and our ears, not those of others, heard the fire and the sounds and the flames when he [Moses] approached the blackness, with the voice speaking to him while we heard: 'Moses, Moses, go and say to them . . .'"[93] If they were still operating with this same understanding, the Jews in the time of Nehemiah not only knew themselves to be true members of the covenant people, but also knew themselves to be inserted into a conversation with God that had begun long ago and in which all of their ancestors had also been asked to engage by word and action.

Dialogue is a means of relationship and even intimacy; the covenantal dialogue begun at Sinai was for this purpose. It is clear throughout the Old Testament that God deeply loves his people and that fidelity to the covenant was the way in which the people

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92. Doukhan, pp. 206-207: A "synchronical" view of time in Hebrew thought enables the "actualization" of past (or even future) events so that they are perceived as though occurring in the present. For the application of this principle to the Jewish Passover, see *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, p. 680.

93. Rambam. Quoted in Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, p. 150.

could express a corresponding desire for intimacy with their God. It is fitting, then, that God enshrined in the Torah itself his desire for a continuation of dialogue with them. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the daily Jewish prayer known as the Shema, urges the Israelites to hear and to take to heart the words of the Law and to teach them to their children. *Shema* (שָׁמַע) is the Hebrew verb meaning "to hear," "to listen to," or "to obey." It is one of the most frequently occurring words in the Hebrew Bible,[94] an importance that, especially by its placement in the Shema prayer itself, reveals a key characteristic of Israel's vocation—to take part in the divine dialogue by hearing God's words to them in a manner that leads to a lifestyle that corresponds with those words. Indeed, Israel's very identity is grounded in its role as "the first to hear the word of God,"[95] and the Torah is filled with reminders to *continue* to hear, to remember what has been heard, to obey it, and to communicate it to the next generation. Often, the leaders of the people were given an important mediatory role to play in helping this process along.[96]

Prophecies and events before the exile showed that the ancestors of the Jews of Ezra's day were prone to deafness in regard to the divine dialogue into which they had been invited. The Old Testament is filled with instances when the Chosen People either refused to obey God or failed to remember what God had done for them,[97] situations

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94.שָׁמַע is identified as one of the forty Hebrew words that are each used in the Bible more than 1000 times (Doukhan, p. 65); also, the verb שָׁמַע occurs 1161 times in the Old Testament, and 364 (about one-third) of those occurrences are found in books of the Bible that are associated with the exilic or postexilic periods (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah 40-65, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). This count was compiled from a source that does not take into account any additional occurrences of the verb in the seven deuterocanonical books (https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H8085&t=KJV) (accessed January, 2016)

95. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 63.

96. To remember and teach: Deut. 4:9, 4:23, 30:14, 31:9; To continue hearing and obeying: Deut. 28:1, Deut. 30:1-3, Josh. 24:24, Ps. 119; Roles of Leaders: Deut. 17:19 (kings), Deut. 31:9-13 (elders and priests), Deut. 18:15-19 (prophets), Deut. 31:25 (Levites).

97. For examples, see Judg. 2:2, 2:10, 2:17, 2:20, 6:10; 2 Kings 21:9; 2 Chron. 33:10; Neh. 9; Ps. 81, Ps. 95; Isa. 44:18-22.

often described in terms of hard hearts, stiff necks, or ears and eyes that do not hear or see as they ought. New Testament use of this same terminology[98] shows that even in the age of Christ, humans make themselves deaf to the Word of God and so block themselves from experiencing the powerful impact that true hearing would entail.[99] We see in the Israelites a concentrated form of such voluntary deafness; so many members chose to ignore God's voice that the pre-exilic prophets spoke as though the entire nation was guilty in this regard: "For this is a rebellious people, deceitful children,/ Children who refuse to listen to the instruction of the LORD;/ Who say to the seers, 'Do not see'; to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy truth for us;/ speak smooth things to us, see visions that deceive!'" (Isaiah 30:9-10). A medieval Jewish scholar offers a striking image of this attitude when he attests that the Israelites' experience in the Promised Land had "fattened" their hearts; the commentary citing this scholar's work explains that the Israelites had "become unresponsive to experiences which should have generated feelings of devotion to God and love for their fellows. It was as if their ears were blocked and insulated with fat."[100]

While the prophets prior to the exile were well aware of Israel's hardhearted refusal to hear and obey, the messages of exilic and postexilic prophets offer hints that some hearts were beginning to thaw enough to allow the dialogue to re-open, even if in a limited manner. In Isaiah 1:18-20 (pre-exile), God gently and conversationally offers the

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98. For instance, see Isa. 6:10 as referenced in Matt. 13:15, John 12:40, and Acts 28:27.

99. The footnote to Isa. 6:10 in the *New American Bible* shows that the verse gives evidence of hard-heartedness being a voluntary decision on the part of the listener and evidence of the role of leaders in the "hearing" process: "Isaiah's words give evidence that he attempted in every way, through admonition, threat, and promise, to bring the people to conversion, so it is unlikely that this charge to "harden" is to be understood as Isaiah's task; more probably it reflects the refusal of the people, more particularly the leaders, who were supposed to "see," "hear," and "understand," a refusal which would then lead to a disastrous outcome."

100. Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, p. 158.

Israelites a deal: "Come now, let us set things right," but no response is given. On the other hand, in Isaiah 58 (post-exile[101]), we see the people begin to talk back: "Why do we fast, but you do not see it?/ afflict ourselves, but you take no note?" (v. 3). God responds to them with his own questions: "Is this the manner of fasting I would choose . . .?" (v. 5). The postexilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi show a similar form of communication taking place. Much of the book of Haggai takes the form of what Blenkinsopp describes as "disputation,"[102] and frequent rhetorical questions directed toward the people indicate that at least some ears in the audience are beginning to unplug. God asks listeners to reflect: "You expected much, but it came to little; [. . .] Why is this?" (Hag. 1:9). Malachi exhibits this style more heatedly, with the Lord making claims, listeners whining their protests, and the Lord firing right back at them with the truth of the matter: "I love you, says the LORD;/ but you say, 'How do you love us?'/ Was not Esau Jacob's brother? [. . .] I loved Jacob, but rejected Esau" (1:2). Similar exchanges occur in Malachi 1:6-7 and 3:7-10, with God having finally caught the ear of his rebellious ones and letting them have their say before having his own, but the last instance of this divine "hashing out" of the problem, in 3:13-15, is particularly striking. Here, after hearing God refute their last attempt to excuse their infidelities, the Jews quietly lay down their arms:

> Then those who fear the LORD spoke with one another, and the LORD listened attentively;/ A record book was written before him of those who fear the LORD and esteem his name./ They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts,/ my own special possession [. . .]. (3:16-17)

Zechariah 1:1-6 presents a similar situation. In a calmer tone, the Lord once again makes his invitation to return, noting what befell the Israelites whenever "they did

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101. *New American Bible*, Introduction to the Book of Isaiah, p. 839 OT.
102. Blenkinsopp, p. 201.

not listen or pay attention" to the Lord. The reply of his listeners is this: "Then they repented and admitted: 'Just as the LORD of hosts intended to treat us according to our ways and deeds, so the LORD has done." Each of the postexilic prophets, then, gives us evidence that the effects of grace were becoming manifest in the hearts of the Jews. Somehow, the accumulated obstacles to freely-given, love-filled acceptance of the covenantal life were crumbling in the face of God's parental reproof and simultaneous mercy.

Summing up, then, in light of (1) the covenantal call to hear and obey, (2) the Israelites' poor track record in that regard, and (3) the prophetic indications of budding repentance, the public reading of the Law and response of the people recorded in Nehemiah 8 appears as a moment of grace, in which the Jews freely choose to insert themselves back into the dialogue that their ancestors had so often shunned, a conversation of loving obedience in response to the Word of God. The results—weeping, repentance, rejoicing, and commitment for the future—can be compared to Pentecost, when many people, through the mediation of men stirred by the Spirit, hear the Word of God proclaimed, each in a language he can understand. The factors that aided in bringing about such conversion of heart in postexilic Judah will now become the focus of this analysis, for it is in these that we shall find our model for re-evangelization. [103]

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103. The objection may be raised that the re-evangelization of the Jewish people in the book of Nehemiah was neither complete nor lasting and, therefore, that the model it offers is not useful (or at least not ideal) for application to the New Evangelization. I agree with the first part of this objection, but not with the second. Just as no Christian's commitment to Christ is a necessarily permanent state (every Christian retains his or her own freedom to choose whether or not to continue faithfully in such a commitment), so too would this have been true of the Jews' commitment to God through the Law.

Even soon after the spiritual renewal seen in Nehemiah 8-10, it is clear that the Jews were still in need of *more* re-evangelization. By the time Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem for his second term as governor (his first term had lasted about thirteen years, after which he had returned to Persia for an

unknown period of time), the people were already in need of significant reform regarding care of the Temple and its ministers, observance of the Sabbath, and problems with intermarriage. These reforms evidently didn't last either, for 1 Maccabees later presents a sizeable group of Jews abandoning the demands of the covenant in order to embrace the ways of the Greeks. Jewish commentaries, too, acknowledge that the postexilic Jewish re-commitment to the Law was only partial in nature. A rabbinic commentary on the book of Haggai suggests that "the era of the Second Commonwealth was therefore one of only partial redemption, limited in scope both qualitatively and quantitatively" and lacking in a response of "full devotion" (Yitzchok Stavsky, *Trei Asar*, vol. 2, Artscroll Tanach Series [Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll Mesorah Publications, 2009], p. 170). Another rabbinic commentary, speaking of the public confession in Nehemiah 9, holds that it "was not accompanied by complete, whole-hearted *teshuvah* (repentance). Thus, the redemption, at this time, was also not complete," and the commentary identifies indications that such was the case, including the continued dispersion of a large percentage of the Jews and the continued governance of Judah by foreign kings (Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, p. 214).

At the same time, while it is clear that the Jewish nation had not totally and permanently returned to the Lord, it is also clear that Nehemiah 8-10 and other instances of postexilic desire for a renewal of the covenant mark a period of authentic receptivity to the Word of God and, thus, a period in which real return to the Lord did occur. Rabbi Nosson Scherman seeks to put together these two conflicting pieces (partial renewal on the one hand, and yet renewal nonetheless), noting that the positive response of the people to Ezra's sorrow and urgings during the marriage crisis (Ezra 10) reveals that some level of redemption did occur for the sinful returnees (Scherman, p. lii-liii). There are other instances we could also cite that give evidence of a genuine process of re-evangelization taking place in postexilic Judah (the "stirring up" of the exiles to return [Ezra 1:5], the primacy that the returnees placed on the restoration of worship [Ezra 3], the "stirring up" of the returnees to re-start the building process [Hag. 1:14, Ezra 5], the eagerness of the returnees to rebuild the wall under Nehemiah's direction [Neh.2:18]).

The conclusion that I draw from what has been said above is that (due largely to the continuing effects of concupiscence) every instance of re-evangelization—both for Jews and for Christians—must be followed up by lifelong conversion, formation, and support under holy leadership. *Unitatis Redintegratio,* cited in *Evangelii Gaudium*, declares, "Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling . . . Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way . . . to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is a human institution here on earth" (Cited in Francis, 26). The New Evangelization is aimed not at one-time reversions to Christ but at ever-deepening, lifelong conversion to Him. If such ongoing vigilance is needed even for those who are bolstered up by Christian grace, it is no wonder that the Old Testament People of God still had to struggle in living out their renewed commitment to the Lord, for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states that Jesus "is in fact the only one who could keep [the Law] perfectly" (578). As *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* points out, the structure of the book of Nehemiah seems to show this ongoing re-commitment in action, in that the book closes not on scenes of perfection but on scenes of reform, indicating that perhaps "the biblical writers were suggesting that the work of restoration is a continuing one" (p. 362).

Because even the best of Christian re-evangelization does not promise permanent fidelity in the future, it seems reasonable to conclude that the re-evangelization presented in Nehemiah did not have to be an unqualified success in order to serve as a valuable model for the New Evangelization. Adaptations will certainly need to be made in its application, but it does not seem that the postexilic model itself—a movement led by leaders who are immersed in dialogue with God and so are able to effectively communicate to others what they have received from that dialogue—was the cause of the eventual falling-away of certain Jews from the covenant. Rather, the presentation of the model throughout the Old Testament as a whole shows the model to be quite effective in drawing people back into the fold and reveals that the periods of infidelity were often those periods when the model was *not* being followed (when leaders were either absent or not engaged in the divine dialogue). A more effective application, then, does not require drastic changes to the model but, rather, more consistent application of it, especially now that the new covenant anticipated by the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31, Ezekiel 11:19) enables the foreshadowings of the New Evangelization to come to their full fruition by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Chapter III, Part 2: Leaders Who Hear and Who Cause-to-Be-Heard**

While Scripture identifies a number of factors that paved the way to the conversion depicted in Nehemiah 8-10, [104] this thesis will focus on only one of these factors, namely the influence of prayerful leaders who committed themselves to hearing and obeying the voice of the Lord, and who thus succeeded in communication what they heard to their fellow Jews.

The above description of what made for successful leadership in the postexilic process of re-evangelization can be clarified by expanding upon our earlier treatment of the Hebrew verb *shema*. As is typical for Hebrew roots, the word *shema* can be used to express many facets of the same action.[105] We have already seen that the Hebrew concept of *hearing* also relates to the extra aspect of *obedience* to what one has heard. Hebrew also offers a causative verbal form by which, for instance, "he saw" becomes "he caused to see." In the case of *shema*, then, the use of the causative active form (hiphil) extends the range of the word to include the action of proclamation: "he heard" becomes "he caused to hear." Because the concepts of hearing and of communicating to others what one has heard could be expressed by different forms of the same verb, Hebrew speakers had reason to perceive a potential relationship between these two actions.

An example of the range of meaning in the biblical use of *shema* illustrates the point. When *shema* occurs in its causative form, it often emerges as a prophetic action flowing from contact with the one true God. For instance, in Isaiah 41 (a passage foretelling the liberation of the Jews through King Cyrus), the false gods are mocked as

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104. Other factors include but are not limited to: (1) prophetic calls to remembrance (of Israelite history and of the pattern of blessing or curse in response to fidelity or infidelity), (2) the experience of affliction and restoration (in this case, the experience of exile, and the personal encounter with God's mercy through the restoration of Jerusalem).

105. See Doukhan, pp. 58, 60.

being incapable of foretelling such things: “Not one of you foretold it, not one spoke [*shema*], not one heard [*shema*] you say [. . .]” (v. 26). Because the false gods “are nothing” (v. 24), they have no power to cause others to hear. On the other hand, the true God does possess this power.

Isaiah 45 (still speaking of Cyrus) says, “Who announced [*shema*] this from the beginning, declared it from of old?/ Was it not I, the LORD, besides whom there is no other God?” (v. 21). God is the true source of proclamation, the one who can cause-to-hear and, as a result, God’s prophets are able to participate in that power. For example, Jeremiah 4:5 and 4:15 both use the causative form of *shema* to express prophetic proclamations: “Proclaim it in Judah, in Jerusalem announce [*shema*] it” (v. 5), and, “A voice proclaims it from Dan, announces [*shema*] it from Mount Ephraim” (v. 15). In other passages, verbs other than *shema* are used in reference to prophetic proclamations, but those proclamations are still tied to a prior action of hearing. Isaiah 21:10 says, “What I have heard [*shema*] from the LORD of hosts,/ The God of Israel, I have announced to you.” In like manner, Ezekiel 3:17 presents God declaring to Ezekiel, “Son of man, I have appointed you a sentinel for the house of Israel. When you hear [*shema*] a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me.”

Such is the case, too, if one looks back to the Shema prayer in Deuteronomy. While the vocabulary used to express the passing of God’s words to one’s children does not include *shema*, the text makes it clear that such a transmission of belief is not possible aside from a prior (and continuous) hearing and interior treasuring of “these words which I command you today” (Deut. 6:6).

To sum up, the proclamation of what is true is an action proper to God, and other people are called by God to participate in the work of proclamation. Their ability to do so rests on the measure to which they have already opened themselves to hear the message that is to be shared.

Within the linguistic and biblical context established above, allow me to return to my earlier description of the influence wielded by a prayerful leader. By inserting himself into dialogue with God, the prayerful leader is able to draw other people into that dialogue through a proclamation consisting of both word and example; this proclamation is the result of his own prior (and continuous) act of hearing and obeying the divine word that he subsequently declares. The section of the thesis that follows will focus on Scripture's witness to the powerful impact wielded by those who are practiced in "shema-ing"—that is, those who are committed to listening to God, obeying God, and then causing God's voice to be heard by others.

It should now be obvious that a connection exists between the act of hearing a message from God and the act of helping someone else to hear that message and to take it to heart. Such mediated hearing of the Word of God is the very thing that occurs in Nehemiah 8 when the Jews as a whole decide that they want to re-enter into conversation with their God (which, of course, indicates a return to covenantal living). Before examining the specific leaders who cooperated in that moment of grace (*grace* because, as we have seen, God himself initiated the transmission of the message), it is necessary to add one more layer to the foundation of our analysis by examining whether the leaders of Israel really exercised as great an influence on the people as we are attributing to them. Did it really make that much difference whether or not a leader had his own "ears"

unplugged? A quick look at the biblical record shows that not only was the quality of a leader measured by the level of his fidelity to the covenant, but it was also a frequent pattern in the history of the Israelites that the fidelity of the people rose and fell with that of their leaders.

In the first part of Chapter III, Ezra and Moses emerged as mediators of dialogue with God. The Bible records that other men, too, took up this role. In fact, from the time of the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, the *primary* way that the Israelites were brought into the dialogue with God was through the mediation of their human leaders. At Sinai, God consented to dialogue with his people through the mediation of Moses. The people still promised to *listen* to God's words, but they could not bear to do so directly; Moses would have to teach them so that they could obey.[106] God was pleased with this motive (Deut. 5:29). Moses' mediatory role also goes in the other direction: Moses speaks to God on the people's behalf, and God hears him (Deut. 9:19). Such a role required a two-sided ability to hear; the leader had to have ears open to the Lord but also had to have ears open to the people. This pattern proved effective, facilitating a "face-to-face" encounter with God, the intimacy of which was not lessened by the presence of the mediating party (Deut. 5:3-4). It is also important to note that the dialogue that ended up taking place between God and the people would likely not have occurred without the aid of their leaders.[107]

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106. See Deut. 4:12-14 and Deut. 5:25: The Israelites say in effect, "If we hear His voice anymore, we shall die. *You* listen to Him and then we will listen to *you.*"

107. Quite frequently in the Old Testament, people feared death whenever they realized that they had seen God (Deut. 5; Judg. 6:23, 13:22). Direct encounters with God were greatly feared, except by those who had already experienced intimacy with God, such as Moses and King David, who actually *sought* to see God's glory (Exod. 33) or God's face (Ps. 27:8, Ps. 69:18).

The pattern of mediatory leadership, which began almost simultaneously with the giving of the covenant, continued throughout the history of the Jews, and those in that mediatory office possessed great influence over the people. The office was filled in different periods and in varying capacities by judges, priests, prophets, and kings, but in each the case, the leader was to be the link between the people and their God. If the leader shirked his own responsibility to have an ear open to God, we would expect that the people as a whole would also somehow feel the consequences of their leader's infidelity, and the biblical record confirms that such was indeed the case. When leaders were faithful, many of the people too remained faithful; when leaders were unfaithful, many of the people followed suit. This pattern begins to show its head in the book of Judges, with the people remaining faithful to the covenant until the death of a certain leader and then falling into idolatry until they received a new leader from God.[108] This cycle continued into the age of Israelite kings, which is marked by a biblical chronology of royal successors who are each identified as either walking in the way of the Lord or failing to do so. During the reigns of those who personally fell away from the demands of the covenant, we often see a corresponding falling-away on the part of the people.[109] During the reigns of those who made conscious efforts to keep the covenant, the people generally followed their lead.[110] We also see that certain kings *began* in fidelity but went astray after the death of the righteous men who served as their counselors, revealing that

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108. See Judg. 2:7, 2:10-12, 3:11, 8:28, 8:33.

109. See, for instance, 1 Kings 12:26-30, 15:30 (Jeroboam), 1 Kings 14:22-24 (Rehoboam), 1 Kings 15:34, 16:2 (Baasha), 1 Kings 16:13 (Elah), 1 Kings 16:26 (Omri), 1 Kings 16:30, 18:21 (Ahab), 2 Chron. 21:9 (Manassah); Jewish tradition also identifies the marriage crisis in Ezra 9 as being primarily the fault of Jewish leaders, some of whom gave bad example by personally intermarrying with foreign women and others who neglected to speak out against this abuse ((Yosef Rabinowitz, *Ezra*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, Artscroll Tanach Series (Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll Mesorah Publications, 1984), p. 182)).

110. See 2 Chron. 29-31 (Hezekiah), 2 Chron. 34:33 (Josiah); for a priestly example, see 2 Macc. 3:1-3, 3:14-23 (Onias).

the mediatory leaders of the people sometimes had need of their own mediators who would help them to hear and understand God's voice.[111]

The pattern within Sacred Scripture, then, shows that—because of the mediatory office established at Sinai—the *shema* of the people is largely dependent upon the *shema* of their leaders.[112] Leaders who were personally committed to hearing and obeying the Word of God and to helping their fellow Jews to do the same seem to have been one of the most powerful factors throughout Israelite history in the process of re-evangelization. Every one of the examples of Old Testament re-evangelization listed in Chapter I exhibits this same pattern.

Where, then, do we see such prayerful leadership taking place in the biblical records of the postexilic period, and what do these particular leaders teach modern Christian leaders about hearing God and causing Him to be heard in an effective way? The history presented in Chapter II introduced the men whose leadership proved pivotal for the Jewish returnees and their eventual recommitment to the covenant: regarding the rebuilding of the Temple, Joshua (high priest) and Zerubbabel (governor); regarding the physical and spiritual rebuilding of Jerusalem, Ezra (priest) and Nehemiah (governor). A more thorough analysis of postexilic leadership could highlight any number of qualities possessed by these four leaders and show how those qualities aided in the restoration of

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111. See 2 Chron. 24:2 (Joash, who became king at the age of seven and did right for as long as he had the wise counsel of the priest Jehoiada); 2 Chron. 26:5, 26:16 (Uzziah, who became king at sixteen and "was prepared to seek God as long as Zechariah lived" but who became prideful later on).

112. One notable exception to this pattern seems to be the case of Moses himself. Moses is certainly presented in Scripture as being a holy leader who was very literally in dialogue with God on a daily basis, and yet the people still consistently rebelled against God while under Moses' direction. The fidelity of God's people was obviously not *completely* dependent upon the fidelity of their leaders (otherwise, neither the existence of the faithful "remnant" mentioned at various points in the Old Testament nor the subsequent arrival of a faithful leader to replace an unfaithful forerunner would have been possible). Rather, the combined picture of the biblical pattern and its exceptions confirms that the free will of individual members of the People of God remains but that leadership truly has influence that either makes it easy for subjects to do the good or makes it easy for them to follow their sinful inclinations.

the Jews' dialogue with God, but here I will mention only that each of these men possessed an official leadership role among the People of God and so, in varying manners, had inherited a share in the mediatory role that Israel's leaders had played in the past. If the pre-exilic pattern continued, these were the ones whose personal *shema* (or refusal of such) could incline their fellow Jews to fidelity or its opposite. Having already established that Nehemiah 8-10 displays the re-opening of the people's dialogue with God, our first step here will be to follow the tracks back to the mediators who guided the way to this encounter. Such a method will reveal that these four men were men of prayer whose personal engagement in Israel's dialogue with God came about by four primary means: (1) through the written Scriptures, (2) through the liturgy, (3) through the prophets, and (4) through personal prayer. Each of these categories will be addressed below.

Our primary example of hearing God through the Scriptures is found in the biblical descriptions of Ezra. Ezra was a priest-scribe, "well-versed in the law of Moses given by the LORD, the God of Israel" (Ezra 7:6; also see 7:11), who "had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10, RSV). In the original Hebrew, the verb translated as "to study" is *darash* (דָּרַשׁ), which is used in other parts of the Old Testament to indicate a diligent seeking, such as the wholehearted seeking of God called for in the Torah and the zealous observance of the law by faithful kings of Judah.[113] The grammar here also sets Ezra's commitment to the Law in direct contrast with Rehoboam who "had not set his heart to seek the LORD" (2 Chron. 12:14). A Jewish tradition interprets the phrase in Ezra 7 as

113. See Deut. 4:29; 2 Chron. 14:4, 15:12, 17:4, 26:5; https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H1875&t=KJV org (accessed February 29, 2016).

referring to Ezra's "wholehearted prayer."[114] The Persian king Artaxerxes, when commissioning Ezra to administer religious observance in Judah, identifies him as "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:12), his very mission and occupation resting on his immersion in God's Word. In supplement to the biblical text, Josephus makes this point even more distinct when he records Artaxerxes as titling Ezra "reader of the Divine law" and "reader of the laws of God.[115] Another Jewish tradition adds to this picture of Ezra's commitment to the Word of God by explaining that the very reason Ezra stayed in Persia during the initial return to the Jerusalem was that the elderly rabbi who was instructing him in the Torah was unable to make the trip. Ezra saw being instructed in the Law as holding primacy even over return to the Promised Land.[116]

From the outset of the journey back to Jerusalem, Ezra's example and mission appear magnetic, and so we begin to see the influence he wields because of his personal hearing of God.[117] He gathers leaders to return with him (Ezra 7:28, 8:17-20) and, as a

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114. Yalkut. Quoted in Rabinowitz, *Ezra*, pp. 157-158.

115. Flavius Josephus, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D11%3Awhiston+chapter%3D5%3Awhiston+section%3D1 (accessed February 28, 2016), 11.5.1.

116. Scherman, p. xxxv.

117. In the following sections, phrases describing the postexilic leaders in terms of hearing God or being in dialogue with God should be understood as applying to these leaders the action of shema-ing (hearing and obeying). *Shema* itself is a term that implies dialogue—one listens to a message and responds to the message in a way that invites the relationship between sender and receiver to continue in the future. In this context, hearing and dialogue do not imply the receiving of fresh communication from God, although they do not *exclude* fresh communication (many of the prophets heard God in this manner). Often, the shema of leaders took the simple form of visual or auditory exposure to the Torah (hearing) and doing what the Torah commanded (obeying). Deuteronomy's use of the term *shema* exhibits this understanding by its frequent indications that the Israelites' *shema* of God was specifically to be a *shema* of God's commandments (many of which involved liturgical sacrifice). Thus, we can describe Scripture and the liturgy as means of entering into dialogue with God.

We can also fittingly apply terms of dialogue to prophecy because prophetic messages communicated the voice of the Lord, with the expectation that hearers of the message would respond with obedience. Personal prayer, too, emerges as dialogue with God. At times in Scripture—as with Abraham or Moses—we are privy to both sides of this conversation because we hear God speaking back; at other times, we only hear the words of a petitioner reaching up to heaven, but those words are clearly intended for a God who has already spoken in Israel's past and who is expected to respond with continued dialogue—in

Jewish commentary puts it, "[o]nce the leaders agreed to ascend, others were attracted to accompany them."[118] Back in Judah, Nehemiah 8 reveals Ezra's obvious reputation among the People as the one who is able and worthy to read the Law of God to them. The book of Ezra, too, presents Ezra as an influential and righteous leader, particularly in reference to the marriage crisis in Ezra 9-10. His reaction to the crisis and his prayer of lamentation are clearly steeped in Scripture and a deep knowledge of the Jews' ancestral history recorded therein. Ezra publically goes into mourning, prostrates himself before the Temple, and offers a prayer in which he references the past infidelities of their Israelite ancestors (9:7, 10, 13). He proceeds to quote from the Law in the midst of his prayer, citing the reason for his grief (9:11-12). The effect, as in Nehemiah 8, is that those who hear Ezra's words ("a very large assembly," 10:1) weep profusely and put themselves under Ezra's direction for the correcting of the situation. It is notable that Ezra's hearers do not say that *they* will right the situation; rather, they insist that it is Ezra's duty as their leader to make this happen and they promise to follow his lead (10:4). Aside from this example of the effectiveness of Ezra's hearing of God through the Scriptures, the Septuagint adds another significant example by attributing to Ezra the authorship of the long, public confession proclaimed by the Levites in Nehemiah 9.[119] If such an attribution is correct (and from what we know of Ezra, it very well could be), this prayer, which is steeped in a Scriptural understanding of the entire history of the

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word or action—in the future. Hence, although the Bible itself does not label instances of *shema* as dialogue, this thesis uses dialogue-related terms to describe the biblical reality of hearing and obeying God.

118. Metzudos. Quoted in Rabinowitz, *Ezra*, p. 167.

119. *New American Bible*, footnote to Neh. 9:6-37.

Israelites, would be just one more example of Ezra's internalization of the written Word of God.[120]

The second way we see postexilic leaders engaged in a hearing of God that would enable future proclamation is through the liturgy. We see this particularly played out in the actions of Joshua and Zerubbabel soon after the initial return to Judah. In Ezra 3, we witness a sort of precursor to the Nehemiah 8-10 event when, just as they did for Ezra's reading of the Law, the "people gathered as one" (3:1). Here, a priest and a lay leader unite to re-establish the public worship proper to the Temple even before the foundation of the new Temple has been laid. The restoration of the liturgy, then, emerges as the first priority of the returned exiles. Aside from reinstituting the daily burnt offerings, the Jews under Joshua's and Zerubbabel's care were also able to again participate in the feast of Booths and other religious feasts. It seems that at least part of the reason for such urgency was a consistent turning to God for protection and guidance during the work they had ahead of them, "for they lived in fear of the peoples of the lands" (3:3). The liturgy, then, would have been a means of crying out to God for his aid, a public and communal

120. The Bible presents Ezra as a man immersed in the Word of God and having influence on the behavior of the people because of his own engagement in the written Torah (a primary means by which Jews could listen to the voice of their conversation partner and learn how to obey). Jewish tradition, too, builds upon what we see strictly in the Scriptures about this man. The Talmud makes the impressive claim that "Ezra was worthy for the Torah to have been given to Israel through him, had Moses not preceded him" (Sanhedrin 21b. Quoted in Scherman, p. xxxvi).

Later application of the postexilic model may also benefit from one bit of theological speculation regarding the ministry that flowed from Ezra's devotion to the Scriptures. Many modern scholars question whether Ezra and Nehemiah's ministries in Jerusalem actually overlapped, although Nehemiah 8:9, 12:26, and 12:36 all indicate that this was the case. One commentary suggests that one reason for such skepticism is the inexplicable delay in the completion of Ezra's mission: "If we follow the chronology implied by the present location of Nehemiah 8, then Ezra would have delayed his most important assignment, the one dealing with the law (Ezra 7:14, 25-26), for thirteen years, until Nehemiah arrived, and the Bible would provide no information on what transpired in the intervening years" (*The New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 796). While the hidden events of such a gap do give readers reason to pause, it is striking to realize what the actual organization of the biblical text makes it possible to posit: that what Nehemiah 8 presents is the long-awaited fruition of thirteen years of ministry to an unresponsive people. If this interpretation is the one intended, Ezra presents an example for us of patience in evangelization and also evidence that personal immersion in the Word of God does not necessarily guarantee immediate results among one's hearers.

experience of speaking with God. The reinstitution of burnt offerings also reveals the desire of the leaders to *shema* by being obedient to the Law of Moses in a way that had not been possible for quite some time. When the leaders chose to treat the liturgy as having primacy over other restorative activities, they exhibited faith that their sacrifices would be a foundational means through which they as a people could be justified before God and thus continue in a dialogue of right relationship with Him in the years ahead.

A further look into what the Bible has to say about Joshua and Zerubbabel brings us to the third way we see postexilic leaders entering into conversation with God: through the ministry of the prophets. Joshua and Zerubbabel were guided in their leadership through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. Throughout the history of Israel, God had raised up men who functioned as *prophetic* mediators to the people's *kingly and priestly* mediators. Kings consistently sought their insight regarding battles or future events, but prophetic messages were also frequently delivered unbidden, showing leaders in word and action what God wanted the leaders to know. In this particular context, Haggai and Zechariah played the role of stirring up workers for the rebuilding of the Temple and supporting them with God's affirmations along the way (Ezra 5:1-2, 6:14), modeling what Sirach 49:10 says of the twelve prophets: that they "gave new strength to Jacob and saved him with steadfast hope." The concept of being "stirred up" comes to the forefront here as a term indicating the initiative of God in the re-evangelization process. Ezra 1:1 and 1:5 each use the Hebrew word *'uwr* (עוּר) when speaking of people being "stirred up" by God to begin the restoration from exile. The word connotes a variety of images that range from being roused to engage in warfare to being awakened to romantic love. It is often used in the Psalms when God is urged to awaken and to arise to defend

his people.[121] In this light, "stirring" in the postexilic period represents God's *own* stirring forth to defend his people and to draw them back to himself.[122] It is striking, then, that Haggai 1:14 presents a third instance of "stirring up" in this period, now directed at Joshua, Zerubbabel, and the remnant of the people and mediated through the ministry of the prophet Haggai. Because of Haggai's prophecies, both the leaders and those who follow them are moved to a response of *shema*: they "obeyed [*shema*] the LORD their God" (1:12). Note here that book of Haggai identifies only Joshua and Zerubbabel as the recipients of Haggai's initial prophetic message (1:1), even though the contents of the message seem to be for the whole people as well. The fact that the remnant, too, is able to respond to the message takes for granted that someone had made the message known to them. Whether this task was competed by Joshua and Zerubbabel or by Haggai himself, the biblical record indicates that (a) the message was being proclaimed by someone who had first received it through hearing and (b) it was of primary importance that the *leaders* of the people hear and respond to the message if the rest of the people were to fulfill their own part of God's plan. Note, too, that the books of Haggai and Zechariah (and Malachi, for that matter) include many more prophecies than those mentioned in the chronology of events. As we saw earlier in Chapter III, these prophecies, too (some of which were directly addressed or directly related to Joshua and Zerubbabel[123]) were forming the Jews and preparing their hearts for the hearing of the Word. Here, then, the voices of the prophets emerge as one means by which God makes his voice heard to the leaders of his people.

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121. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. William A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 3:358-359.

122. Zech. 2:17 confirms this point quite poignantly: "Silence, all people, in the presence of the LORD, who stirs forth from his holy dwelling."

123. To Joshua: Zech. 3:1-9, Zech. 6:9-15; to Zerubbabel: Zech. 4:6-10; Hag. 2:20-23.

Lastly, the Bible presents the postexilic leaders as men who entered into the *shema* of Israel through personal prayer.[124] We have already seen some elements of Ezra's prayer life in his response to the marriage crisis. Other parts of the narrative add to our knowledge of his intimate relationship with God that rested not just on his immersion in the Scriptures (which informed his prayer) but also on his own personal dialogue with God. We see him calling for fasting and prayer at the outset of his group's return to Jerusalem, preferring to turn to God for protection rather than to the imperial guards whose services had been offered to him, a refusal for the purpose of better showing forth God's power (Ezra 8:21-23). Nehemiah, too, is frequently shown engaging in personal prayer, such as when he first received word of Jerusalem's woes. On this occasion, he "began to weep and continued mourning for several days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). His prayer, which the Scriptures record, shows him interceding on behalf of his fellow Jews and also begging God's blessings on his upcoming encounter with the Persian king. Soon after, we see Nehemiah invoking God silently in the midst of his conversation with the king ("I prayed to the God of heaven and then answered the king [. . .]," Neh. 2:4).[125] The Bible itself does not seem to include the text of this prayer, but one Jewish tradition identifies Nehemiah's prayer with the conversation itself, believing that what Nehemiah goes on to say to the king *is* his prayer to God (that, "If it please the king [. . .]," was actually being addressed to God, while

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124. In this paper, "personal prayer" is distinguished from formal liturgical prayer and can refer to a prayer expressed either publically or privately.

125. Josephus has Nehemiah also silently praying to God earlier on in his conversation with the king (Flavius Josephus, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D11%3Awhiston+chapter%3D5%3Awhiston+section%3D6, 11.5.6); It is also of note that elsewhere, Josephus presents Zerubbabel, too, as engaging in direct, personal conversation with God (11.3.9) and that Jewish commentary considers "all great leaders of the Jewish people" to be "primarily spiritually orientated" (Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, p. 35). Taken together, the non-biblical Jewish sources seem to exhibit the firm conviction that the postexilic leaders were, indeed, men of prayer.

externally seeming to be addressed to the man in front of Nehemiah). Such an interpretation views this "conversational prayer" as evidence "of Nehemiah's surpassing love of God," by which an earthly conversation "became communion with the Master of the universe."[126] Nehemiah's example as an ever-ready conversation partner with God turns up often in the rest of the book of Nehemiah through his frequent "asides" to God as recorded in his memoirs (Neh. 3:36, 5:19, 6:14, 13:14, 13:13).

It is fitting that a man with such a reputation for prayer would leave a legacy of effective leadership, and Nehemiah did just that. Modern Jewish commentary identifies Nehemiah as "architect of the restoration of Jerusalem" and one whose activities had a "rejuvenating effect" on a "revitalized city," and makes the point that because "Providence does not select men randomly to carry great tasks to fruition [. . .] his deepest personal level of devotion must have reflected the special sacredness of the city [Jerusalem] at that time."[127] The Bible shows Nehemiah to be a leader whose personal conviction that God was initiator of the rebuilding of the wall enables him to explain to those in Jerusalem that they should respond to God by taking up this mission. He expresses that faith in such a way that his listeners' hearts heard and eagerly consented (Neh. 2:18). He also is shown to be one who was humbly willing to entrust the mission to others while directing their efforts and also personally taking part in the work (Neh. 3, 5:16), all the while exercising a Paul-like refusal to be a financial burden to his fellow Jews (Neh. 5:14-19). Under his prayer-filled leadership, the wall was completed and the

126. Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, pp. xxiii-xxv; Rabinowitz's commentary on this Jewish tradition goes on to speak of Nehemiah's behavior here an example of how "commonplace activity was transformed into spiritual experience [. . .] conducted neither in the Sanctuary nor in the halls of learning. It took place, rather, during ordinary activities generally unworthy of attention, in the seclusion of Nehemiah's mind" (p. xxv).

127. Rabinowitz, *Nechemiah*, pp. xv-xvii.

city repopulated and spiritually revived, and so we see here example of a man in whom the message sent forth did not return to God empty but achieved the end for which it had been sent.[128]

Summing up this portion of our analysis, the postexilic model of re-evangelization has been shown to fit into a broader Old Testament pattern in which large-scale returns to the covenantal life (a life described in terms of a dialogue with God) are mediated through leaders who are themselves in constant communication with God. By the hearing and obedience of these leaders to the voice of the Lord as it comes to them through the Scriptures, the liturgy, the prophets, and personal prayer, they are better able to speak God's messages in a manner easily understood and so to draw their fellow members of the People of God back into right relationship with Him. We now move into our final chapter, which will suggest how the postexilic model may be adapted and applied to the New Evangelization today.

128. See Isa. 55:10.

Chapter IV: Application of the Postexilic Model

Up to this point, the present examination has established four main points: (1) Re-evangelization functions by means of faithful members of the People of God drawing other members back into fidelity, (2) Old Testament instances of re-evangelization may be seen as typologically shedding light on the re-evangelization efforts taking place in the modern age, (3) The postexilic period involves a re-evangelization that operated in a cultural situation similar to our own, (4) The postexilic model turns out to be the same model seen in the Old Testament as a whole: attracting fallen-away members back into the fold, through the lived and spoken proclamation of God's Word, by leaders who are in personal and continuing dialogue with God. Now comes the final piece of the puzzle, which offers an initial application of the postexilic model to the New Evangelization. I seek here only to identify a few general principles that flow from the Old Testament pattern and that may be used to guide evangelizers in the concrete application of the biblical model to their particular circumstances. I will briefly discuss each guiding principle below:

1. All Christians are called to engage in dialogue with God. Just as each Jew was called into an intimate love relationship with God[129] and was invited to give consent to the relationship by listening to God's Word and by answering Him in a life-long, loving response of obedience that would express desire for even deeper intimacy, so too, each member of the new People of God is called into that same love relationship ("As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love [. . .]" (John 15:9-10)). Remembering that we are each a

129. For a further treatment of how both Old and New Testaments present the relationship of God to his people as a love relationship, refer to *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* by Brant Pitre (New York: Image, 2014).

beloved upon whom "the LORD set his heart" (Deut. 7:7) makes sense of the need for ongoing conversation with God in word and in deed. The Incarnation has taken this conversation to an exceedingly new level of intimacy, for the hearing of God's Word is now a hearing of the Word made flesh, and it is the Church's proclamation of this Word by which "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son."[130] It is the ideally *continual* nature of this conversation that the Old Testament so strongly exhibits.

In the New Evangelization, the same is true. Looking back to the cultural situation described in Chapter II, many baptized Christians seem to have lost a sense of their identity as ones loved by the Lord. For them, the conversation with God can easily be drowned out by other voices competing for their attention, and the religious illiteracy resulting from the often-lacking transmission of the Faith from parent to child makes it harder for Christians to know how to even *begin* hearing and responding to God's voice. In these cases, baptismal entrance into the dialogue of the People of God frequently does not blossom into life-long conversation as it should, which explains the widespread sense of emptiness cited earlier. What the postexilic period shows us in this regard is that a return to intimacy with God results from the choice to re-engage in the dialogue. The path leading to such a choice brings us to our second principle.

2. Leaders in the New Evangelization must be personally committed to and immersed in the Church's dialogue with God. The term "leaders" here is not limited to what the Old Testament examples seem to suggest to us. In those cases, we primarily see priests, prophets, and kings—those in authoritative offices—functioning as mediators of the divine dialogue. The New Evangelization, though, rests heavily upon the knowledge

130. *Dei Verbum*, 8.

that Jesus is *the* Priest, Prophet, and King, and that every baptized Christian has gained a share in his triple office.[131] Jesus himself is the Mediator in the dialogue between God and man, and He delights in calling others to participate in his mediatory, salvific work. He still calls some to participate in this work in official capacities, as with the priesthood, but he also asks every other Christian, too, to take part in a way proper to his or her vocation. It is no surprise, then, that St. John Paul II declared the New Evangelization "the responsibility of all the members of the People of God," as we saw in Chapter I.[132]

Hence, much of what has been said of Old Testament leaders may be applied in the New Evangelization to all Christians regarding their mediatory influence on fellow Christians and the means by which that influence may be made fruitful. In the workplace, in the home, on social media, on the bleachers . . . their joyful, lived response to hearing God's Word in the person of Christ exercises great influence in corners of society that can only be reached through the voices of cultural "insiders."[133] At the same time, human experience makes it clear that every community and every movement still needs certain roles of authority to be filled in order to function properly, and in some ways, the people filling those roles hold even greater sway—by their personal example and by the choices they make on behalf of the community—over the spiritual welfare of those whom they serve. Thus, what is true of all Christians is *intensely* true of all clergy, consecrated persons, and lay ecclesial ministers, who exercise leadership roles of an especially public

131. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 783.

132. See p. 5.

133. "It is a fact that many men cannot hear the Gospel and come to acknowledge Christ except through the laymen they associate with" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents,* ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., New rev. ed. [Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975], 1:13).

character and who (like the postexilic leaders) help to effectively order the gifts of the faithful so as to equip them for their participation in the mission of the Church.

To all of these leaders, then, the New Evangelization must apply the rule we see played out in the Old Testament: Proclamation of the Word of God has its source and power in God himself; the effectiveness of a leader's communication of this Word (Christ) is influenced by the measure to which that leader has first heard and obeyed (and continues to hear and obey) the message he or she proclaims.[134] One caveat here is that—as both Old and New Testaments attest—successful re-evangelization is a work of grace. To say that conversion could *never* come about through a person who has disengaged from prayer would be inaccurate,[135] as would it be to say that God is by necessity incapable of giving grace except through the ministry of human beings. Even so, the fact that God has given us Jesus—God-made-man—as the Mediator of the new covenant, along with his election of certain men to guide his flock on earth, indicates to us that God *desires* to use human mediators to draw people to Himself. Even when certain lines of mediation fail to prove fruitful, God's continued pursuit of a person who is away from Him often ends up coming through the ministry of a subsequent mediator, rather than bypassing human mediation altogether. The point here is that God can re-evangelize however He wants, but his actions throughout history express a plan that is in

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134. "[T]he fruitfulness of the apostolate of lay people depends on their living union with Christ" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4); "[T]he greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the word" (John Paul II. Quoted in Francis, 149); "[A]ll religious teaching ultimately has to be reflected in the teacher's way of life, which awakens the assent of the heart by its nearness, love, and witness" (Francis, 42).

135. This is especially clear in the sacramental principle of *ex opere operato*, which expresses the teaching that the efficacious nature of the sacraments works "independently of the personal holiness of the minister" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1128). Nevertheless, because "the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them" (Ibid.), the recipients can benefit from the aid of their human mediators in being prepared to *receive* the graces that are being offered to them, and the above footnotes show the holiness of the minister to make a big difference in that process of preparation.

continuity with the plan instigated at Sinai when He consented to the Israelites' request for a mediated dialogue. Since then, God seems to relish in re-evangelizing through the leaders of his people, and history has shown those leaders who hear and obey to be the most effective at helping other people's hearts to hear.[136]

3. The primary means by which leaders in the New Evangelization can personally engage in dialogue with God (and so open themselves to be instruments of a fruitful apostolate) are the Scriptures, the Liturgy, the ministry of the prophets, and personal prayer. The leaders of the postexilic period are remembered in Scripture and in Jewish tradition as being men whose hearing of the Word of God bore the fruits of personal obedience to the Word and, subsequently, of magnetic proclamation of the Word to their fellow Jews. As we saw in Chapter III, this hearing of the voice of the Lord came through the four means listed above. Every one of these means shows up in *Evangelii Gaudium* as a powerhouse of grace for the modern-day re-evangelization that is underway. Regarding Scripture, Pope Francis writes, "All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word."[137] *Evangelii Gaudium* especially calls upon homilists, as the facilitators of dialogue with God,[138] to immerse themselves in the Scriptures:

> "If we have a lively desire to be the first to hear the word which we must preach, this will surely be communicated to God's faithful people, for 'out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.' The Sunday readings

136. Jesus "wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity" (Francis, 268).

137. Francis, 174.

138. Francis, 143.

> will resonate in all their brilliance in the hearts of the faithful if they have first done so in the heart of their pastor."[139]

Liturgy, too, is given a place of primacy in the hearing that produces fruitful proclamation. [140] Pope Francis declares, "The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving."[141] Special attention is given to the role of the parish "an environment for hearing God's word,"[142] as the place where, in the words of John Paul II, the liturgical proclamation of Scripture becomes "a dialogue between God and his People" with the same solemnity "found in the Old Testament at moments when the Covenant was renewed."[143]

As for prophets, Francis speaks of Christians ministering to each other in ways that mirror the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. He calls Christians to the charity of correcting others and helping them grow by recognizing the objective evil of their actions but without judging their culpability.[144] He frequently mentions the necessity of responding to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit by being sent and guided according the initiative of God.[145] He reproves worldly leaders in the Church who fail to heed "the prophecy of their brothers and sisters."[146] His thorough treatment of the homiletic

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139. Francis, 149.

140. "This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is maintained by the spiritual helps common to all the faithful, chiefly by active participation in the liturgy" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem,* 4).

141. Francis, 24.

142. Francis, 28.

143. John Paul II, *Dies Domini* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini.html (accessed February 2, 2016), 41.

144. Francis, 172.

145. Francis, 12, 20, 259, 261, 280.

146. Francis, 97.

preaching of the Word shows it, too, to be a prophet-like function by which Christians may more clearly hear the voice of God through the voice of another.[147]

Lastly, *Evangelii Gaudium* presents the need for personal prayer by emphasizing that evangelization must flow from personal encounter with the love of Christ. He indicates that the desire to draw others to know that same love is increased by "[s]tanding before him with open hearts, letting him look at us" with a "gaze of love" and praying "insistently that he will once more touch our hearts."[148] Individual time of conversation with God helps a person come to the conviction "that it is not the same to live without him,"[149] which is the conviction that drives the proclamation of the gospel.

Even just the brief overview above reveals that the conclusions of this thesis are nothing new. What has been accomplished here is simply the exposition of a biblical precedent to what the Church has always known: Christians need holy leaders. Proclamation flows from encounter, from coming up against the "unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations"[150] and being transformed by that Word who is Christ. St. Gregory of Nyssa, writing about the moments just prior to the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea, reflected that the powerful display of God's love and power in that moment would not have taken place unless Moses turned to God in dialogue. We can apply Gregory's words here: "[U]nless the

147. The Church has long understood prophecy to be one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives in order "to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). In this way, the role of the Christian prophet is understood to be one of leadership. Elsewhere, it is clear that prophecy is not a gift limited to those in authoritative offices; rather, Paul encourages all the readers of 1 Corinthians to "strive eagerly to prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:39). So whether it is a ministerial leader who prophesies or any other member of the Church, the gift is always "done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26), which continues to be its role in the New Evangelization.

148. Francis, 264.

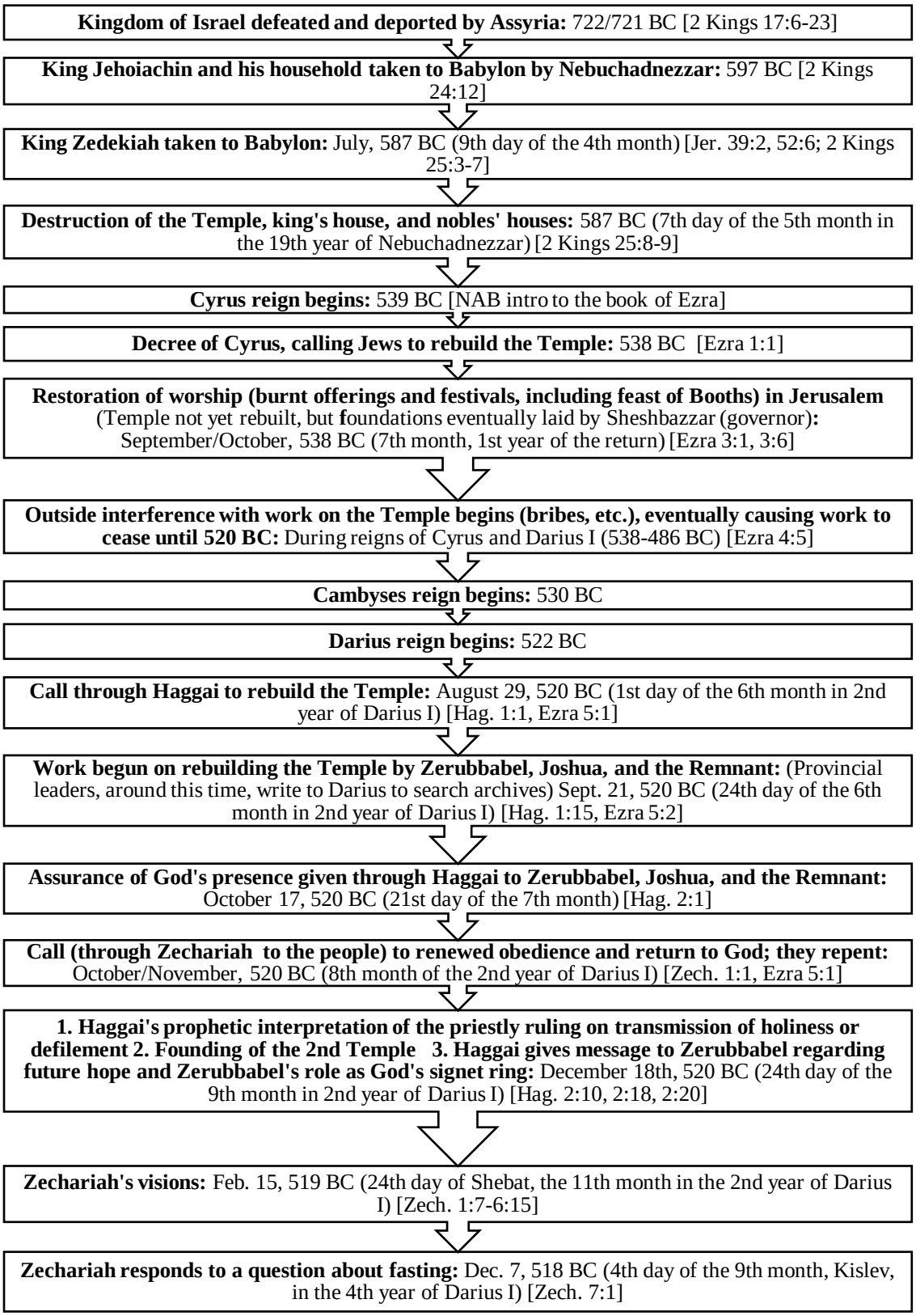
149. Francis, 121.

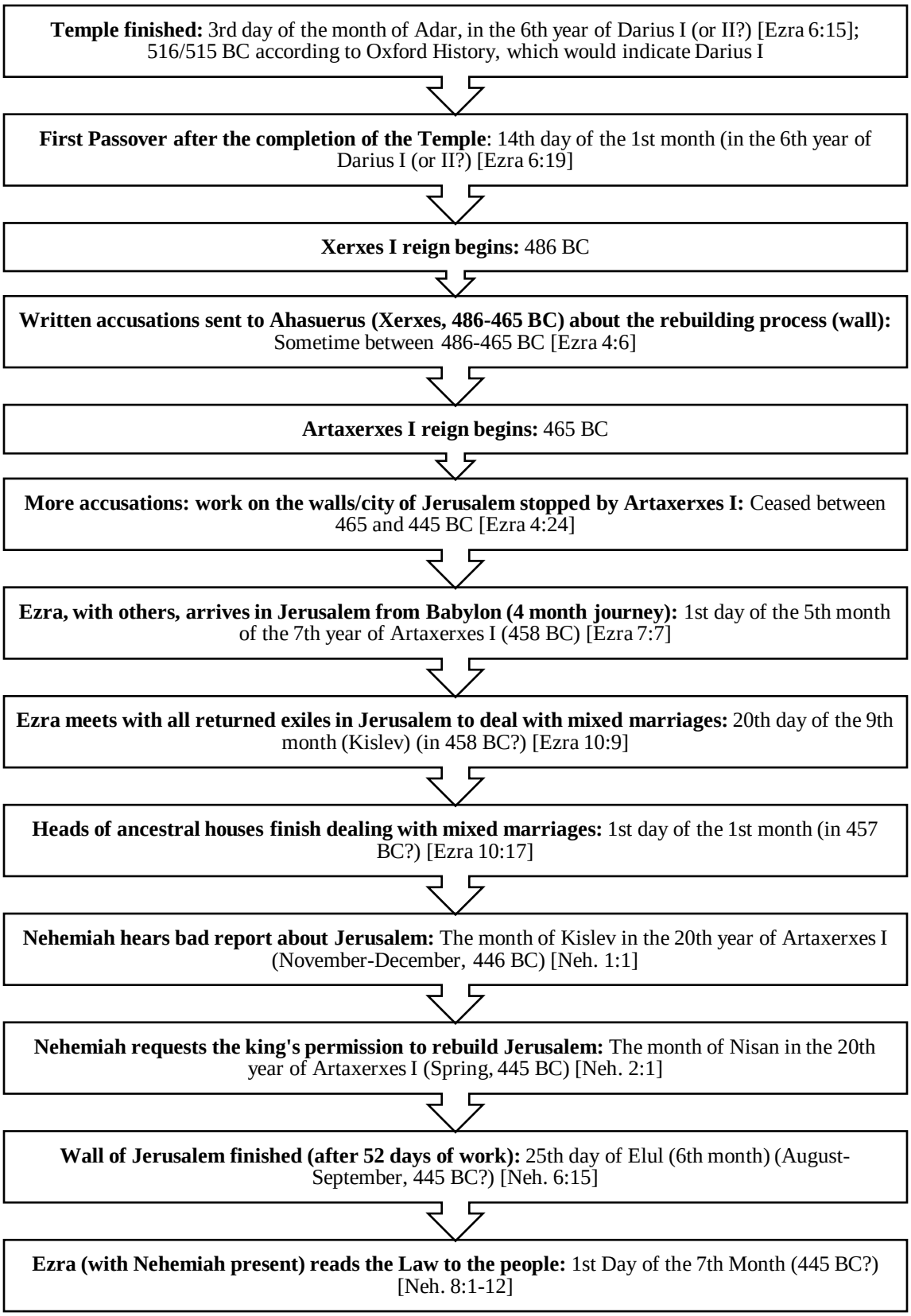
150. Francis, 22.

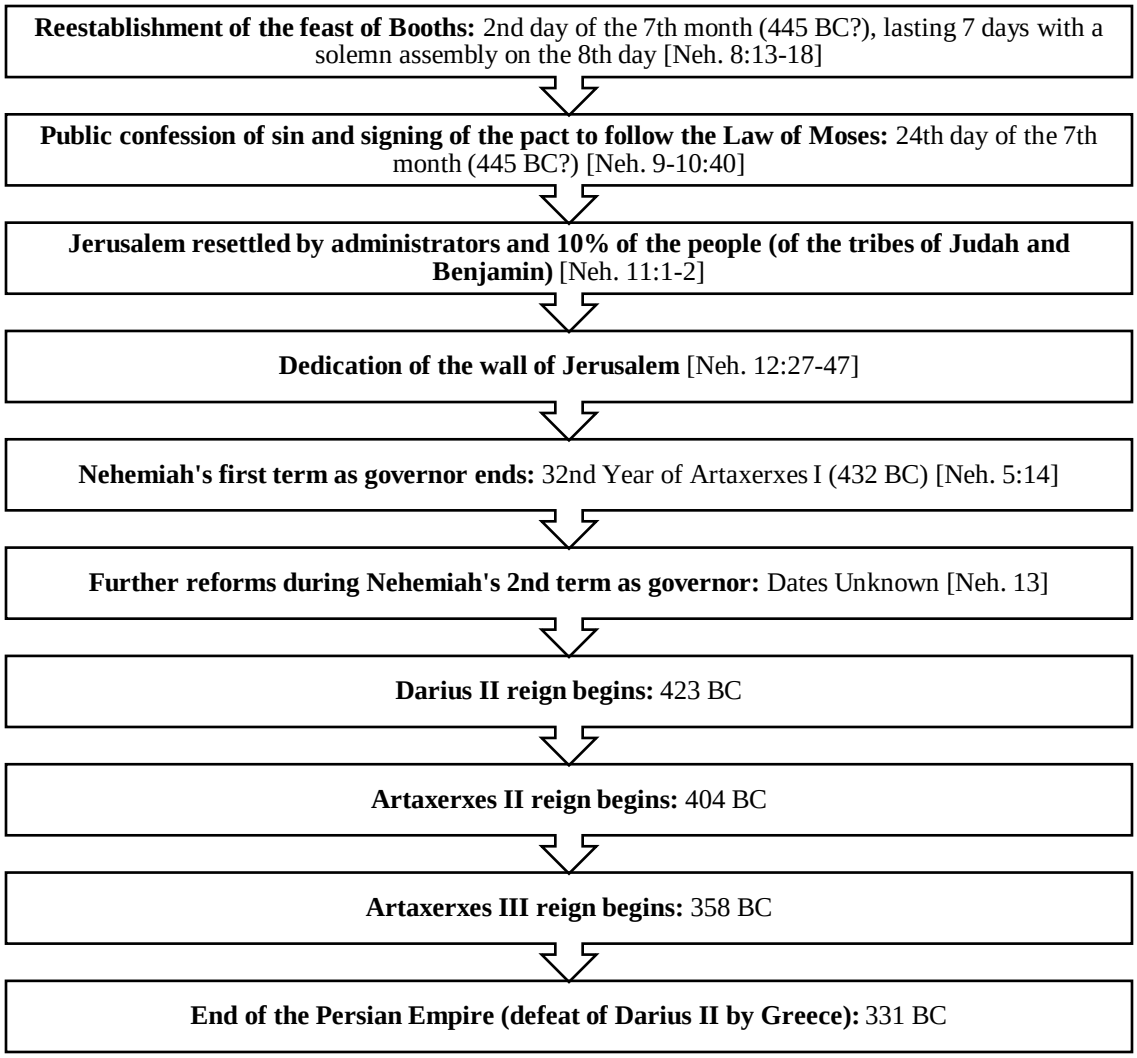
heart of the leader speaks with God,"[151] all the organizing, laboring, encouraging, and planning in the world simply will not bear fruit. The principles derived from this thesis echo Gregory's insight, calling Christians to consciously and daily enter into that dialogue and so be stirred forth by Him in ways we may not have foreseen and with the power of the Word-that-has-been-heard on our lips. Jesus said it best: "Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Let us cling to Him in that daily exchange so that He may bring the New Evangelization to fruition in many hearts, beginning with our own.

151. Gregory of Nyssa, pp. 117-118.

Appendix A: Timeline of Exilic and Postexilic Periods (As Ordered in the Bible)




Temple finished: 3rd day of the month of Adar, in the 6th year of Darius I (or II?) [Ezra 6:15]; 516/515 BC according to Oxford History, which would indicate Darius I
First Passover after the completion of the Temple: 14th day of the 1st month (in the 6th year of Darius I (or II?) [Ezra 6:19]
Xerxes I reign begins: 486 BC
Written accusations sent to Ahasuerus (Xerxes, 486-465 BC) about the rebuilding process (wall): Sometime between 486-465 BC [Ezra 4:6]
Artaxerxes I reign begins: 465 BC
More accusations: work on the walls/city of Jerusalem stopped by Artaxerxes I: Ceased between 465 and 445 BC [Ezra 4:24]
Ezra, with others, arrives in Jerusalem from Babylon (4 month journey): 1st day of the 5th month of the 7th year of Artaxerxes I (458 BC) [Ezra 7:7]
Ezra meets with all returned exiles in Jerusalem to deal with mixed marriages: 20th day of the 9th month (Kislev) (in 458 BC?) [Ezra 10:9]
Heads of ancestral houses finish dealing with mixed marriages: 1st day of the 1st month (in 457 BC?) [Ezra 10:17]
Nehemiah hears bad report about Jerusalem: The month of Kislev in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I (November-December, 446 BC) [Neh. 1:1]
Nehemiah requests the king's permission to rebuild Jerusalem: The month of Nisan in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I (Spring, 445 BC) [Neh. 2:1]
Wall of Jerusalem finished (after 52 days of work): 25th day of Elul (6th month) (August-September, 445 BC?) [Neh. 6:15]
Ezra (with Nehemiah present) reads the Law to the people: 1st Day of the 7th Month (445 BC?) [Neh. 8:1-12]


Reestablishment of the feast of Booths: 2nd day of the 7th month (445 BC?), lasting 7 days with a solemn assembly on the 8th day [Neh. 8:13-18]
Public confession of sin and signing of the pact to follow the Law of Moses: 24th day of the 7th month (445 BC?) [Neh. 9-10:40]
Jerusalem resettled by administrators and 10% of the people (of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) [Neh. 11:1-2]
Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem [Neh. 12:27-47]
Nehemiah's first term as governor ends: 32nd Year of Artaxerxes I (432 BC) [Neh. 5:14]
Further reforms during Nehemiah's 2nd term as governor: Dates Unknown [Neh. 13]
Darius II reign begins: 423 BC
Artaxerxes II reign begins: 404 BC
Artaxerxes III reign begins: 358 BC
End of the Persian Empire (defeat of Darius II by Greece): 331 BC

Appendix B: Outline of Nehemiah 8-10

*The dialogue between God and the people is emphasized here by text style. Bold text represents God's part in the conversation; regular text represents a response on the part of the people.

❖ Nehemiah 8:1-12: The Reading of the Law

6) The people gather and ask for Ezra to bring forth the book of the Law (v. 1).
   a) Ezra responds to their request (by reading) (v. 2-3).
   b) The people listen attentively (v. 3).
7) Ezra opens scroll (v. 5).
   a) The people stand (v. 5).
8) Ezra blesses the Lord (v. 6).
   a) The people answer "Amen, amen!," kneel, and bow down (v. 6).
9) Ezra reads clearly, Levites explain (v. 7-8).
   a) The people weep (v. 9).
10) Ezra, Nehemiah, and Levites tell people to not weep (v. 9-11).
   a) The people respond with joy because they have understood (v. 12).

❖ Nehemiah 8:13-18: Feast of Booths

1) The family heads (leaders of the people) gather for further study of the Law (deepening their engagement in the dialogue) (v.13).
2) They discover a precept they had not remembered (v. 14-15).
(a) They obey the precept (observe the feast) with joy (v. 16-17).
(b) Ezra reads from the Law day after day during the feast (v. 18).

❖ Nehemiah 9:1-37: Public Confession of Sin

1) The people gather with fasting and sackcloth in order to make a public confession of sin (both their own sin and the sins of their ancestors) (v. 1-2).
2) The Law is read aloud (25% of the day) (v. 3).
3) They make their confession (25% of the day) (v. 3).
(a) The Levites, standing on a platform, pray aloud to God on behalf of the people. The prayer paints the history of the Israelites' dialogue with God as a continuing cycle of love and refusal of that love (v. 4-37).

The accounts of God's loving action and merciful responses in this prayer fall into seven sections, each divided by an instance of Hebrew refusal of God's love (six sections). By the time the Levites begin to speak of the current distress of the Jews, they have reminded God that He has a perfect track record of mercy (seven times), and they have an extremely imperfect record of response (six times) – or if the contents of the final plea for mercy count as a seventh admission of guilt, they admit to a perfectly evil record. They seem to say to God, "Be toward us what you have always been from the beginning—loving and merciful."

1. The Confession:
   a. God's history of loving action (v. 6-15):
      i. Creation (v. 6), election of and covenant with Abraham (v. 7-8), response to slavery in Egypt (v. 9-11), guidance in the desert (v. 12), Sinai covenant, including Sabbath prescriptions (v. 13-14), provision in the desert (v. 15)

   b. Israelite history of refusal (v. 16-31):
      i. Refusal to enter Promised Land, stiffened necks, refusal to obey or to remember, chose another leader to take them back to Egypt (v. 16-17)
         1. God's mercy (v. 17)—God did not forsake them.

      ii. Golden calf (v. 18)
         1. God's mercy (v. 19)
            a. Guidance and sustenance in the desert (v. 19-21), gift of kingdoms at the borders of the Promised Land (v. 22), numerous children (v. 23), safe passage into the Promised Land, humbling peoples before them (v. 23-24), everything good was already in the Land for them (v. 25)

      iii. Rebellion against the Law, murder of the prophets (v. 26)
         1. Handed them into the power of their enemies, but always heard their cries and sent them saviors (v. 27)

      iv. Reversion to evil as soon as they were saved (v. 28)
         1. Again handed them over to their enemies, but delivered them over and over again whenever they would cry out to Him (v. 28)

      v. Refusal to obey, sinning against God's commands, stiffened necks (v. 29)
         1. Patient with them for many years, called them out on their infidelities through the prophets (v. 29-30)

      vi. Still would not listen (v. 30)
         1. Handed them over to their enemies, but did not completely destroy them, did not forsake them (v. 30-31)

   c. Petition for a continuation of God's mercy (v. 32-37)
      i. Do not discount the hardships we have endured (v. 32).
      ii. We and our ancestors truly have done wrong (v. 32-35).
      iii. But we are now again in great distress (v. 36-37).

❖ <u>Nehemiah 10:1-40: The Signing of the Pact</u>
   1) Written pact is signed by priests (10:3-9), Levites (v. 10-14), and leaders of the people (v. 15-28)
   2) Everyone else who has chosen to live by the Law take an oath saying that they will do so (v. 29-40)

Appendix C: Parallel Indicators of the Need for Re-evangelization

	POSTEXILIC PERIOD	21ST CENTURY
EXPERIENCE OF EXILE	- Exile as a punishment for infidelity to the covenant - Needed spiritual return to the covenant in addition to physical return to Judah	- Spiritual exile from God and the Church through sin - Spiritual exile of faithful Christians from secular culture - Spiritual exile of Christians in every age until heaven
IMMERSION IN A FOREIGN CULTURE	Immersion in non-Jewish culture: - Exposure to new thought, ethic, religion—Babylonian, Persian, Greek - Occupational situations presenting concerns for Jewish conscience	Immersion in non-Christian culture - Secularization and globalization feeding skepticism - New paradigms of thought - Influence of media - Relativism - Deterioration of ethics
NEED FOR A NEW WAY OF EXPRESSING GOD'S WORD TO THE PEOPLE	New language (Aramaic) and other explanation needed in order to make the Torah accessible to Jews who were influenced by the exile	New ardor, methods, and expression: - Need for modern inculturation of the message in a way still compatible with the gospel, even in places where the gospel has already been proclaimed - Need for a fresh framework for the contents of the Faith
EXPERIENCE OF DIMINISHMENT	Experience of a sense of diminishment: - Size, population, direct reference to "remnant," loss of nationhood and kingship	Remnant experience: - Sense of smallness among Christians (diminished numbers, diminished fidelity and fervor, loss of Christian values in culture)
SENSE OF WANT	- Lack of fulfillment, sense of loss and emptiness (noted by the prophets) - Lack of elements of religious tradition	Lack of fulfillment: - Loneliness - Lack of meaning in life - Thirst for God - Spiritual desertification
BREAKDOWN OF THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY	- Problems with divorce and intermarriage with non-Jews lead to poor communication of Jewish identity to children	- Marital instability common - Parents without personal engagement in their faith lead to poor communication of Christian identity to their children

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