

*Anytime a Catholic converts to a fundamentalist  
Evangelical denomination,  
“Even the altar cries,” and so should we.*

## **Why Do Catholics Become Evangelicals?**

By Gerald J. Mendoza

In an article entitled, *The Glory and Power of the Gospel*, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa—Preacher to the papal household—in a retreat for 1,500 priests and seventy bishops has shockingly described the state of the Catholic Church in Latin America by noting that Catholics there proclaim that, “When we need a labor union we go to our parish priest; when we need the word of God we go to the Protestant pastor,” and that, “In Latin America the Catholic Church has made an option for the poor and the poor have opted for the Protestant Churches.”[1] Ralph Martin too, has noted that, in 1991, Pope John Paul II called a consistory to examine what could only be described as a hemorrhage of the Catholic faithful to Evangelical Protestantism.

The cardinals had a lot to say about the spectacular growth of the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which, in Latin America in particular, are attracting many Catholics. Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo of Managua, Nicaragua, told the Cardinals that a “Protestant explosion” has seen the number of Protestants in Latin America grow from 4 million in 1967 to 30 million in 1985. Fully 10 percent of Latin Americans are now Protestant. According to reliable estimates, only 15 percent of Latin Americans are active Catholics. If the growth factors for each country of Latin America are averaged, the Evangelical and Pentecostal percentage of the population there tripled over a period of 25 years. If it triples again in the next 25 years, Evangelicals and Pentecostals will comprise a third of the population by the year 2010. From 1960 to 1985, Evangelical and Protestant groups have doubled their share of the population in Chile, Paraguay, Venezuela, Panama, and Haiti; tripled their share in Argentina, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic; quadrupled their share in Brazil and Puerto Rico; quintupled in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Peru, and Bolivia; and sextupled in Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, and Colombia.[2]

A cursory look at Hispanic flight from the Catholic Church in the United States shows that the situation here is just as serious. “A 1986 Gallup Poll revealed that in the preceding 10 years, 5 million Hispanics joined Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, approximately 30 percent of the 17 million Hispanics in the United States. Of these, 64 percent converted to these groups from Catholicism.”[3] The situation is not limited to Hispanics in or out of the U.S.

The same trend is visible in the United States. American Catholic leaders have also expressed a great concern about the growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in this country, a growth that often comes through Catholics leaving their churches. Here, statistics are hard to come by. Much anecdotal evidence suggests that many members of Pentecostal and independent charismatic churches are former Catholics. This is especially true of regions with a large Catholic population. One researcher who did an informal survey estimates that 30 percent of the 35 million Evangelicals and Pentecostals in the United States are first- or second-generation former Catholics.[4]

The problem of Catholic flight to Evangelical Protestant denominations is exacerbated by the vast number of non-practicing Catholics who in raw numbers constitute a group larger than—with the exception of Baptists—any other Christian denomination in the United States.[5] As we shall see, the abandonment of practicing one's Catholic faith is one of the greatest determinants as to whether one will leave the Catholic Church for an Evangelical Protestant one, or not. Catholic leaders often blame Protestants for proselytizing Catholics and commend Catholicism for its "richness." However, the Catholic Church needs to face the embarrassing question of why so many millions of Catholics around the world are finding a reality of Christian life in Evangelical and Pentecostal churches that they did not find in their local Catholic church.

### **The current state of Catholic evangelization**

In order to ascertain the current state of the Catholic evangelistic mission as well as its successes and failures, one needs to—at least briefly—survey the theologies of evangelism in the New Testament Scriptures, the sub-apostolic and apostolic period as well as the medieval, scholastic understanding of the Christian (Catholic) evangelical mission in and to the world. It is the Biblical, patristic and medieval theologies of mission or missiology that primarily, from a ressourcement perspective, need to inform and critically evaluate the contemporary, Catholic evangelistic project, in tandem with contemporary documents and ecclesial exhortations. With respect to the New Testament, the mission and purpose of Jesus and his disciples, the nascent Church is, incontrovertibly and unapologetically, missionary and evangelical. It would seem that the almost exclusive purpose and mission of the twelve apostles, as well as the many other disciples that accompanied Jesus and his contemporaneous followers during his earthly ministry was, ostensibly, an on-the-job-training program meant to disseminate the Good News or evangelion, so that God, in his indefatigable love and desire for a personal relationship with his creation, might reconcile it to himself with it.

From the very beginning of the New Testament, the witness and vocation of John the Baptist—often referred to as John the Evangelizer—was to call all who would listen, to repentance, conversion and baptism into the Kingdom of God and in the One (Messiah) who was to come (Luke 3:4,5). Jesus' own evangelistic ministry begins—in Luke 4:19, for example—in his own village where he unsuccessfully went to, "...proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In Luke 4:43—corralled by the people who saw or heard of his miraculous healings, he exclaimed, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God... and he continued to proclaim the message in the synagogues of Judea." Jesus' mission is unmistakably evangelical and missionary and those he called as his first disciples, he called as apprentices to the same evangelical, missionary end that they might become, "...fishers of men" (Luke 5:10). In Luke 9:1-12 Jesus sends his disciples out to the various villages where—following his instructions— they, "...departed ...bringing the

good news (evangelion) and curing diseases everywhere.” This evangelical mission threads throughout all of the Gospels and culminates in Christ’s ascension commandment to, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The Gospels are clear, the mission of Christ and of his disciples was unabashedly evangelical, and it is clear that his disciples understood this mission given the testimony of the foundation of the primitive Church in the Book of Acts.

The very first homily, as it were, after the descent of the Holy Spirit—the monumental and crucial event in the establishment and development of the primitive Church, was an evangelistic one, preached by Peter and heard by all present—through the power of the Holy Spirit—in their own language. Peter’s message was this: That God has made Jesus—with all certainty—Lord and Messiah. (Acts 2:36). The evangelistic nature of this new branch of Judaism—later to become a distinct religion in its own right—was exemplified by the various missions of Paul in which he had preached and/or established Christian communities, “. . . throughout Asia Minor, to Greece to Rome, and perhaps—according to a tradition that cannot be confirmed—to Spain.”[6] While there seems to have been a decline in the evangelical focus of the Church during the middle ages, the establishment of the mendicant orders in the 13th century with their evangelical preaching missions among the peoples of the cities and countryside combined with the Church’s unequivocal support of them, is indicative of a course correction that has endured to the present time. By the time of the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church was—in the face of the spreading and buffeting of the Protestant Reformation—of necessity, defensively evangelistic as she attempted to disseminate the results of the Tridentine Council, namely, the existence and definition of the seven sacraments along with their efficacy in the mediation of grace, transubstantiation, the existence of purgatory, the necessity of the priesthood, Tradition as a source of revelation, the veneration of the saints and Mary, and justification by works as well as by faith.

In case there was any doubt about the teleological, evangelistic nature and purpose of the Church, in 1975, Pope Paul VI—one year after the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which was devoted to evangelism and on the tenth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council—promulgated *Evangelii Nuntiandi, the Apostolic Exhortation On Evangelization In The Modern World*. It noted, among other things, that:

The Church knows this. She has a vivid awareness of the fact that the Savior’s words, “I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God, “apply in all truth to herself: She willingly adds with St. Paul: “Not that I boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty that has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it.” . . . with joy and consolation. . . **We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize,** that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection. . . . The intimate life of this community—the life of listening to the Word and the apostles’ teaching, charity lived in a fraternal way, the sharing of bread, this intimate life only **acquires its full meaning when it becomes a witness, when it evokes admiration and conversion, and when it becomes the preaching and proclamation of the Good News. Thus it is the whole Church**

**that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole.**[7] (emphasis added)

Thus, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* expresses a truth about the Church and her purpose, which is not new, but rather exists since the evangelistic mission of Christ himself and it is the continuing mission of the Church, which he established through the apostles, and the power of the Holy Spirit. That truth is that the exclusive and primary mission of the Church, the reason that she was founded and the reason why she continues to exist is to evangelize. There are many Church documents that directly or indirectly confirm this understanding of the Church. The question becomes then, what exactly does the Church mean by “evangelization?” While the term is multivalent in terms of meaning and interpretation, the Church is clear in what it principally means:

During the Synod, the bishops very frequently referred to this truth: Jesus Himself, the Good News of God, was the very first and the greatest evangelizer; He was so thorough and through: to perfection and to the point of the sacrifice of His earthly life. To evangelize: what meaning did this imperative have for Christ? It is certainly not easy to express in a complete synthesis the meaning, the content and the modes of evangelization as Jesus conceived it and put it into practice. In any case the attempt to make such a synthesis will never end. Let it suffice for us to recall a few essential aspects. As an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes “the rest,” which is given in addition. Only the kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative. The Lord will delight in describing in many ways the happiness of belonging to this kingdom (a paradoxical happiness which is made up of things that the world rejects), the demands of the kingdom and its Magna Charta, the heralds of the kingdom, its mysteries, its children, the vigilance and fidelity demanded of whoever awaits its definitive coming. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 7 & 8)

“The Lord will delight in describing in many ways the happiness of belonging to this kingdom.” The happiness of belonging to the kingdom of God is—according to St. Thomas Aquinas—the teleological purpose of all human existence, a final and perfect happiness that can consist in nothing else than the beatific vision of the Divine Essence, that is the attainment of that perfect blessedness which consists in the vision of God. John Donne expressed this reality poetically:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and  
bend Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new...  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I, except you enthrall me,  
never shall be free, nor even chaste, except you ravish me.[8]

Or as St. Augustine so masterfully put it, “Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”[9] The primary task of evangelization then, is the direct proclamation of the kingdom and reign of God, in continuity of Christ’s own mission of proclaiming the salvific message of the arrival of the kingdom and reign of God, in and through the person of Jesus Christ his son: God incarnate, in order to achieve perfect communion with God which alone can create human happiness.

Unfortunately, this is all too often not the operative understanding of the evangelical mission of the Church and the echoes of Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa's dictum, "When we need a labor union we go to our parish priest; when we need the word of God we go to the Protestant pastor," resound loudly and unfortunately true. He goes on to say—and his comments merit extensive citation—that:

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith." (Rom. 1:16) Obviously even in that time too there was the temptation to be ashamed of the Gospel. For the Jews it was a scandal and for the Greeks, stupidity. (1 Cor. 1:22-25) Paul writes to the Galatians, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel..." ...I think we must repeat this cry of the Apostle again in our times. I have great esteem and respect for "liberation theology." However, like all good things there is always a danger that it can fall short of the fullness of the gospel. The danger, I believe, is not so much that it ends in Marxist ideology, but the much greater danger of once again trusting in works. This occurs when social and political liberation is confused with liberation from sin and evil, and material salvation with spiritual, making both of them depend solely on the efforts of man. When this happens, I believe one slips imperceptibly into what Paul calls "another gospel," a gospel, which is no longer the "power of God." Jesus is reduced to an example of liberation rather than the "cause of salvation" for all those who believe in him. This is not the only way, however, that we can preach "another gospel" ...[but also through]...enneagrams, New Ager (sic) and other such things. These are all "weak and poor elements of this world" as Paul called them compared to the power of the Gospel. ...Today there is a new invasion of Christianity from retreats and spiritual exercises and courses, all inspired by this man-made gospel. These concentrate on the "self": self-knowledge, self-expression, self-acceptance, self-justification, self-realization, in other words, self-fulfillment instead of the self-denial and self-forgetfulness that lies at the heart of Christianity. In this man-centered gospel, salvation comes from within man himself and Jesus becomes reduced to just one more ingredient in the religious cocktail. This "other gospel" originates in those countries, which are rich and sated, from people who believe it is possible to go "beyond faith" and "beyond Christ." As if anything beyond faith could exist. "Be he accursed (anathema)!" says Paul. This is a warning full of love. It means, "Have nothing to do with these people. Keep yourselves separate from them. It is an apostasy from Christ." [10]

While there are some small groups that are dedicated to a revived and authentic evangelism—the new evangelism that Pope John Paul II had so tirelessly promoted—Cantalamessa's description of the spiritual, material, psychological and economic reductionism of the authentic Gospel is unfortunately a fair description of what has become the operative evangelistic mission of the Catholic Church in practice. The practice of her members, in contradiction to the traditional and historical notion of evangelism from the time of Christ, to St. Paul, to the contemporary documents that urge an evangelism that is not self-help, pop-psychology, material, social or economic reductionism or Christianized social service. Rather, it is a proclamation, the apostolic kerygma, the Good News of the loving, self-gift of God who provides for a reconciliation with

him and with others through his own sacrifice past, present and eternal; immanent and yet transcendent, and perennially in imitation of Christ.

Take for example a recent gathering of one of the largest gathering of women religious in the U.S., the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). In August 2003, they gathered in Detroit to conduct Conference business and to elect a new leader. Their comments at the end of the convocation, reported in the National Catholic Reporter (NCR) included this:

We women religious are living out of and growing more deeply into an ecofeminism that is a communion of companionship, responsibility and accountability to the whole web of life...every act sourced in the power of genuine relatedness subverts the power of hierarchy and patriarchy.[11]

While the LCWR does good work and strives to unite women religious in common causes, the NCR coverage is indicative of the what both men's and women's religious orders are primarily concerned with and is axiomatic of this reductive, "other Gospel." It apparently is not—despite what one would expect from women (and men) religious given the missionary mandate of the Church and her members, especially her religious members—an evangelically focused mission. In the entire report there was nary a mention of God or Christ or the Holy Spirit or evangelism. One would think that at a major conference of women (or men) religious there would be some reportable mention of the source of their evangelical vocation. Yet there was not. As the Jesuit Patrick Brannan has noted:

If so called inter-personal relationship on the human level is the avatar of the religious experience, religious vocation is not only unsupernatural: it is unnatural and silly.[12]

This is, of course, not to say that psychology, social service, personal development, environmental awareness and human relations are not important, they are eminently so. However, when these become the operative and substantial Gospel rather than tools that promote and assist it, this "new gospel" becomes—to borrow a term from Dietrich Bonhoeffer—"cheap grace" and a neo-pelagianism where human effort trumps divine grace and the Church becomes merely an institution that people can go to if they want to "establish a trade union." Perhaps there is something to Fr. Cantalamessa's comment about people pursuing the Protestant pastor for God's word rather than to the Catholic priest.

Evangelical Protestantism is growing at a faster pace than the Catholic Church when one includes such variables as the number of Catholics who do not practice their faith, those who enter for other than religious motives (to marry a Catholic, regularize an irregular unions or for cultural reasons, for example) and those who are leaving the Catholic Church for Protestant denominations. While The Evangelical Protestant evangelistic project is far from perfect—especially in its most fundamentalist strains—there is much that the Catholic Church can model and learn from it in order to return to its core evangelistic mission—a mission that is not lost on Evangelical denominations whose growth could only be described as mercurial.

## **An Operative Theology of Exit: Why Catholics Leave**

### ***Lack of active participation***

Out of 60 million Catholics in 1997 in the U.S., only 25% minimally practiced their faith.[13] In 1999, the National Catholic Reporter conducted a study that showed a general decline in Mass attendance, while at the same time a trend toward more personal autonomy regarding all morals.[14] Without question, the person that does not know his or her faith is unable to defend it or to intelligibly critique it against challenges posed by fundamentalists, and a person who does not actively participate in his or her faith, at a minimum, with regular church attendance, cannot know his or her faith.

### ***Lack of scriptural and theological sophistication***

Although the Second Vatican Council did much to restore a more scientific biblical theology, exegesis, hermeneutics and interpretation in order to serve speculative and pastoral theology, that restoration—in spite of encouraging lectionary homiletics rather than non-scriptural, topical sermons—has not trickled down to the average laymen or women in the pew. As Peter Kreeft points out:

No Christian group is growing faster than the fundamentalists. And many of their converts are coming from the Catholic Church—mainly, badly educated Catholics. To halt this “soul drain,” to answer the fundamentalist challenge and, most of all, to understand our faith better, we need to look at...major points of conflict [and the first is] the Bible.[15]

In order to understand “major points of conflict” between fundamentalists and Catholics, the Catholic needs to know his or her Bible and the manner in which Catholic dogma and doctrines are drawn from and complement the scriptures. I suggest—given my own experience in parish ministry—that most Catholics in the pew would be hard-pressed to intelligently distinguish between Gospels, Epistles, and/or Psalms, other than being able to identify which follows which in the Mass. That is, assuming that they regularly attend Eucharistic liturgies, which given the aforementioned statistics regarding Catholic Church attendance, is a huge assumption. This is largely because the Second Vatican Council’s teachings on the Bible, specifically in *Verbum Dei*, have not been pastorally institutionalized.

### ***Lack of appropriate and effective Catholic catechesis***

Related to the lack of Catholics practicing their faith and their lack of scriptural and theological sophistication, is the vacuous state of catechesis in the Catholic Church today. In most parishes, catechesis is limited to those preparing for juvenile or adult initiatory sacraments of baptism, first communion and confirmation. That means that outside of whatever catechesis may be disseminated via the weekend homily—which generally is more practical than catechetical—Church members who are not children or participants in the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) receive no significant catechesis. As a result, most Catholics have a theological sophistication that is stunted at the elementary or junior high school level. For example, as a religious education teacher at a San Antonio parish church, four fifths of the adult class participants in the class did not know what the word, “liturgy” meant.

### *Anemic parishes and preaching*

Evangelical Protestant churches tend to be vibrant, affirming places where people can find good preaching, ministries that feed the soul and warm fellowship and a sense of mission that keeps them coming back. This unfortunately is not happening in far too many Catholic parish churches. Fr. Joseph Wilson of St. Luke Catholic Church in Queens, New York opines that:

I'm sure people drift away for all kinds of reasons, but I think we ought to be especially concerned for people who are turned off by the anemic parish life one finds in so many places in our country. Here in New York City I know of a good number of couples that travel over parish and diocesan boundaries to a parish where they find good worship and teaching. They know something is missing and go out of their way to supply the need. How many more there must be whose faith was simply never nourished in their parishes, and how many there are who end up in 'Bible churches' because they find fellowship, scriptural preaching and teaching, and a sense of spirituality they had been lacking.

As far as preaching goes, I hear a lot about the abysmal state of Catholic homilies. Part of the problem is that in this age a priest or deacon who teaches something clearly and forthrightly will catch flak for it. Early on in his ministry a homilist should be able to make a few mistakes, find his own gifts as a preacher, learn how to phrase an argument or an example and how to talk about sin. Today, however, in the age where everyone is an expert and all truth is subjective, many people do not want to hear uncomfortable teachings expounded. It becomes very easy to fall back on a feel-good approach to the homily, light on content, long on uplifting anecdotes and the power of positive thinking.[16]

Unlike Evangelical Protestant denominations, mainline Protestant churches in the United States have been facing severe membership declines for the last four decades at the same time that many Evangelical denominations are experiencing a meteoric growth building mega-Churches, many with upwards of 15,000 members, many of whom are former Catholics. Pastor Joel Olsteen's Lakewood Church with over 35,000 members in Houston (the church is housed in the former, Houston Rockets arena) has a large percentage of members—especially Hispanics—who are former Catholics. Southern Baptist pastor Rick Warren started his Church in his living room with one family in 1980. Today, that church, Saddleback Church in southern California, enjoys a membership of upwards of 12 million members. Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, has been on the New York Times bestseller list for almost two years. He has sold millions of copies in twenty languages. As part of the spiritual purposes of life, Warren includes evangelism, an area in which many of the Church's members are involved; many of them former Catholics who were evangelized themselves. Saddleback's eighteen-point Statement of Faith includes this:

We believe in world evangelism and accept the commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them, and teach them to observe His commandments. We join with all those believing in Him to accomplish this urgent task, and **accept this as a personal commission as well as a command to the entire Church** (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:20 *emphasis added*).

The Catholic Church continues to grow despite the inroads made by Evangelicals, not because of its evangelical zeal but because of births into the religion and the large number of Catholic



immigrant and refugees entering the U.S. every year. Hispanics have surpassed African-Americans as the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. and the majority of Hispanics are Catholic, often though, only nominally or culturally. That is changing. Upwards of 100,000 Catholics leave the Church in favor of Evangelical denominations each year. These hundreds of thousands of Evangelical converts have learned or are learning how to evangelize and they are recruiting their friends, family and co-workers to Protestant Evangelicalism. For the first time there is one historically Catholic country, Guatemala—which only fifty years ago was 90 % Catholic—that is now approaching a 50% membership in Evangelical Protestant churches. This phenomenon is occurring, not only in Guatemala, but throughout Latin America and Africa as well. The majority of their converts are Catholic.

The Catholic Church has done practically nothing to stem this trend, which if it continues, within several generations will grow to cataclysmic proportions for the Church given present conversion statistics. Something must be done before the Church becomes a putative relic of times past rather than the vibrant transforming body of Christ that she was founded for and meant to be. In Western Europe only three to five percent of Catholics regularly attend Mass. In the U.S., Latin America and Africa, the Catholic Church is still vibrant, but hemorrhaging members to Evangelical churches on a daily basis. The Church must do something. This paper suggests a three-pronged approach.

Firstly, the Church needs to counter the Evangelical evangelistic project with her own, which is after all, the primary purpose and reason for her existence. The evangelical mission of the Church must be prioritized institutionally with at least the same sense of urgency as the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which was conceived and institutionalized within a period of only two years. Dioceses as well as individual parish churches must establish evangelistic programs and the evangelistic effort must be made a top priority from the Vatican down to the national bishop's conferences. A new, special consistory should be called to strategize and establish a new office in the curia to assist with Catholic evangelistic efforts or to reform the existing Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Existing, lay evangelistic movements and organizations should be supported morally and financially and where the Catholic Church expertise is deficient due to decades of evangelistic neglect, it should look to successful Evangelical programs and projects.

Secondly and related to the aforementioned, an international movement to bring home lapsed Catholics and reconcile them with the Church needs to be established. Lapsed or non-practicing Catholics practically constitute a large denomination due to their sheer numbers. A national plan for each country should be established by each national conference of bishops with the support of the Vatican, and each diocese should be required to implement such a program. Such programs are already in effect in several dioceses and parishes and may be used as models for replication. The organization, Catholics Coming Home, for example, describe their mission as:

A program for returning Catholics. It is an evangelization process that helps to welcome inactive Catholics wanting to take another look at the Church. Are you searching? Unsure where you fit in with the Catholic Church and your faith? Have you been away for sometime and do not know how to come back to the Church? The Catholics Coming Home program can help you in your search. [17]

Their purpose is to provide the teaching of the Catholic Church on areas of interest, to provide a safe environment to address questions in an honest, compassionate manner that respects the dignity of the person and to provide a welcoming atmosphere for those who wish to return to the

Catholic Church.[18]

Thirdly, Catholics need to establish in each diocese and parish—with the support of the national bishop’s conferences—an office or department for adult education and catechesis. Catholics who discontinue studying about their faith at the seventh grade carry this adolescent understanding of their faith into adulthood and elder life. Most Evangelical Protestant Churches provide weekend and mid-week, adult religious and biblical education. Few Catholic churches have such programs and until they do, they will be vulnerable to the sophisticated evangelization programs and tactics for which Evangelicals are so very well trained.

Watching a television program recently, a Jewish character opining on the divorce of a Hasidic couple in New Jersey remarked, “There is an old Jewish saying: ‘When a Jewish couple divorces, even the altar cries.’” While this project may not be received enthusiastically by some progressive Catholics who view religion as a sort of spiritual smorgasbord where one can choose from this or that religion, or with one’s own, I submit that anytime a Catholic converts to a fundamentalist Evangelical denomination, “Even the altar cries,” and so should we.

### Notes

1 Raniero Cantalamessa, “The Glory and the Power of the Gospel,” The Newsletter of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service (ICCRS), (September-December 1995) 5.

2 Ralph Martin, “Sects Education,” Our Sunday Visitor, 1991 accessed 28 May 2005; available from <http://world.std.com/~pastoral/sectsedu.htm>

3 Martin.

4 Martin

5 According to the 1999 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches (Abingdon Press) cited in María Ruiz Scaperlanda’s article, “Back to Where You Once Belonged,” in U.S. Catholic in January 2001, accessed 2 June 2005 available at <http://www.uscatholic.org/2001/01/cov0101.htm>, in 1999 there were 17 million non-practicing Catholics in the U.S. According to the online polling organization, Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/rel\\_USA.html](http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html) there were 14.1 million Methodists, in third place and 9.5 million Lutherans in fourth.

6 Justo Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity Vol. I, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1984) 25.

7 Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14-15

8 Donnes, John. “Batter My Heart.” The Complete Poems and Selected Prose of John Donne, ed. M.H. Abrams, New York: Norton, 1979, 56.

9 St. Augustine, Confessions, New York: Penguin, 1961, 21.

10 Cantalamessa. 5

11 Jeff Guntzel, “Sisters Spotlight Eco-Justice,” National Catholic Reporter, 12 September 2003, 3.

12 Patrick T. Brannan, "Priestly and Religious Vocations," *Homiletics and Pastoral Review*, December 1981, 50. C. John McCloskey, "Recovering Stray Catholics", *McCloskey's Perspectives*, 1997 accessed 6 June 2005 available from <http://www.catholic-pages.com/dir/link.asp?ref=16513>

13 C. John McCloskey, "Recovering Stray Catholics", *McCloskey's Perspectives*, 1997 accessed 6 June 2005 available from <http://www.catholic-pages.com/dir/link.asp?ref=16513>

14 Vincent V. D'Antonio, "The American Catholic Laity in 1999," *National Catholic Reporter*, 29 October 1999, accessed 2 June 2005 available from [http://www.natcath.com/NCR\\_Online/archives/102999/102999i.htm](http://www.natcath.com/NCR_Online/archives/102999/102999i.htm)

15 Peter Kreeft, "Whose Bible is it Anyway," *National Catholic Register* accessed 9 may 2005 available from [http://www.christlife.org/library/articles/C\\_understand2.html](http://www.christlife.org/library/articles/C_understand2.html)

16 Kathryn Jean Lopez, "Why Young Catholics Leave the Church and How to Bring Them Back," *Crisis*, 2 December 2002, 8.

17 Catholics Coming Home advertisement accessed 6 June 2005 available from <http://www.respectlifeoffice.ca/cath.html>

18 Catholic Coming Home.

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