

Some Principles for the Evangelization of Younger Catholics in Secular Cultures

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Abstract: *This paper proceeds on the assumption that many Catholic youth and young adults in secular cultures reach, relatively early in life, a plateau of religious involvement and commitment. This plateau is characterized by, among other things, a loose religious affiliation but not an overt hostility to the tradition. In order to move beyond this plateau those who work with these young people need to develop a pastoral response that is sensitive to this cultural reality. A number of guiding factors and principles are suggested such as the difficulty of the task and the need to focus more on proactive proclamation. Many of these strategies are reflective of the need for a new evangelization as envisaged by Pope John Paul II.*

Key Words: Evangelization; youth; Generation Y; secularization; Catholic identity; John Paul II

The weakening of religious identity amongst young people from so-called mainstream Churches is a well-described phenomenon in a number of Western countries.¹ As a way of explaining the disaffiliation process, the concept of a Catholic plateau was introduced.² This was typified as reaching a level of maximum commitment relatively early and then experiencing a stabilization often followed by a gradual reduction in commitment. Whilst not hostile to religion many young people on the plateau do not seem to be very interested in increasing the strength of their religious affiliation or in exploring new spiritual paths. Smith and Denton in their landmark study encapsulated this mentality well when they wrote:

The majority of U.S. youth appear to believe that it is okay for others to be eclectic seekers, but they themselves are not particularly interested. They seem happy being part of the tradition they were raised in, which to them looks largely satisfactory even if it is not terribly central or important.³

This paper will not elaborate on or argue for the existence of the Catholic plateau. Instead it will focus on a pastoral response to it by elaborating on some of the principles for

¹ Michael Hill and Richard Bowman, "Religious Adherence and Religious Practice in Contemporary New Zealand," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 59 (1988): 91-112; Reginald W. Bibby, "Religionless Christianity: A Profile of Religion and Convergence the Canadian 80s," *Social Indicators Research* 2 (1988): 169-181; Eva M. Hamberg, "On Stability and Change in Religious Beliefs, Practice and Attitudes: A Swedish Panel Study," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (1991): 63-80.

² Richard Rymarz, "Reaching the Plateau; A Follow Up Study on Active Adolescent Catholic," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 6 (2007): 9-23.

³ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 266.

engagement with youth and young adults. In advancing this argument a case will be made that overcoming the Catholic plateau has many similarities with Pope John Paul II's concept of the new evangelization.⁴

SOME GUIDING FACTORS

The new evangelization as envisaged by Pope John Paul II is a bold strategy in as much as it sets a clear benchmark for success, which is of course not guaranteed. Indeed Weigel, noting the legacy of Pope John Paul II, commented that despite his best efforts, at least in its initial stages, the new evangelization of Europe has floundered: "No pope since the Middle Ages had tried harder to arouse Europe's Christian spirit. The response, to be charitable, was tepid."⁵ The Church understood, however, as an agent of evangelization not by choice but by its very nature, must carry on its Pauline mission with an eye to more long-term goals and not be discouraged by apparent failure.⁶ The commitment to reaching out to young Catholics needs to be constant, realizing that the task ahead is difficult but can be mitigated by intelligence and resourcefulness. As Lonergan remarked, "Ours is a new age, and enormous tasks lie ahead. But we shall be all the more likely to surmount them, if we take the trouble to understand what is going forward and why."⁷

The interaction between the Church and the wider culture must be viewed as a dynamic, but not discontinuous, process. In this view it is legitimate to describe ebbs and flows in the vitality of the Church. In increasingly secular countries such as Australia, the Church is not at a historically strong or powerful moment, although but no means is it facing an unprecedented crisis or low point. It does not, however, have limitless resources and energy. It must, therefore, give much thought to how best to deploy its energies, bearing in mind that not all activities and new initiatives can be supported, nor can all historic ministries and policies be maintained. The first guiding factor then is that the Church must develop a strategic sense toward its pastoral ministry.

Related to this, the second guiding factor is a sense of continuity which is not bound by the past. Expectations about the results of working with young adults and youth should not be set too high. The "terrain" for engaging young people is difficult and there is no strong prospect that this will change significantly in the foreseeable future. With this in mind the Church in the first decades of the third millennium must free itself from using the immediate pre-conciliar era as a constant reference point. The nineteen fifties, in many ways, were a unique set of circumstances. Levels of Catholic practice and solidarity in this time were unusually high and should not be seen as normative. This was the tail end of an era when religious socialization was strong and the prevailing culture often supported or did not challenge Christian norms. In another sense the pre-conciliar era should not be regarded as a cultural prison from which Catholics emerged resolute never to return again. Any religious group, and certainly one with the ancient roots of Catholicism, needs to make its history a strong aspect of its claims for plausibility. As Wuthnow put it: "The

⁴ Richard Rymarz, "John Paul II New Evangelization," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 4 (2009).

⁵ George Weigel, *God's Choice: Pope Benedict XVI and the Future of the Catholic Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 57.

⁶ For stylistic reasons, in this paper Church refers to the Catholic Church.

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, "The Future of Christianity," in William F. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (eds), *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 163.

church must ... be backward looking; it has a special mission to preserve the past, to carry on a tradition.⁸ Reaching out to young adults in the future rests on a hermeneutic of continuity, where all eras have something to offer the contemporary Catholic.

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR EVANGELIZING CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS

1. Be Prepared to Give an Answer

Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, quoting from the First Letter of Peter, captures well the need for Catholics to be able to give a cogent justification for their lives. This is especially important in a culture where choice and options abound and no one metanarrative is dominant.⁹ Catholics need to be able to provide an answer to why people today should be religious in a manner that moves well beyond the passive acceptance of vicarious religion in all its manifestations.¹⁰ This implies that Catholics have something to offer in a religious marketplace that is competitive and highly diverse.¹¹ If many individuals can be described as religious consumers, a number of consequences follow. As consumers, in a fractured postmodern milieu, they have abundant choices, including the popular choice of becoming or remaining loosely religiously affiliated, and not easily compelled into changing this affiliation. Religious groups then can only rely on persuasion to communicate their message.¹² One way of persuading people, moving them beyond weak association, is to provide them with cogent answers to the great issues of life and to convince them that their lives will be improved by what is being offered. As Weber pointed out humans have a need both to see the world and their place in it as meaningful.¹³ Religions in general are well placed to provide what Bouma identified as one core driver of society, namely “hope and meaning grounded in a connection with that which is more than passing, partial and broken.”¹⁴ To have firm, ready and engaging answers is not to be a fundamentalist or to peddle simplistic nostrums.¹⁵ It is responding in a Pauline way to the task of evangelizing both individuals and culture. Today much of the developed world is a new Areopagus. Just as Paul was not only prepared to engage all, but to seek them out, Catholics in the early decades of the third millennium need to recapture the sense that they have something profoundly meaningful to offer. A message that is transformative and not “an eclectic resource ... but rather the unified vision of faith and hope the Church stands in need of.”¹⁶

⁸ Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 48.

⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 22.

¹⁰ William J. O'Malley, *Why be Catholic* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

¹¹ John C. Cavadini, “Ignorant Catholics: The Alarming Void in Religious Education,” *Commonweal*, 131, April (2004), 13-15.

¹² Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton and Ruth Webber, *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia* (Melbourne: John Garrett Publishing, 2007), 338.

¹³ Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 23-49.

¹⁴ Gary Bouma, *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21st Century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 205

¹⁵ Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995).

¹⁶ John Thornhill, “Understanding the Church's Present Difficulties and the Reactions they are Producing,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 76 (1999): 3-13.

2. Celebrate the Distinctiveness of Catholicism

The previous principle sets out, among other things, an answer to the question, “why should I be religious?” This principle addresses the question, “why should I be Catholic?” In this era Catholic identity needs to be strengthened, not in a triumphalistic way but in the sense of being proud of a culture and heritage. Many groups in contemporary society are quite rightly trying to recapture something of their cultural and spiritual heritage. Catholics should also be part of this movement. This is one way of establishing the boundaries that give any group its cohesiveness and purpose. Re-establishing boundaries is, however, difficult. In recognition of this a first step could be preserving those distinctive features of Catholicism which still exist.¹⁷ This would involve both core beliefs and finding new ways to animate what can be loosely called Catholic culture. To paraphrase Greeley’s term, the Catholic rainforest of metaphor needs to be regrown. This is no easy task but a necessary one.¹⁸ Hoge and his colleagues made three suggestions in this area. They argued that Catholics need to reemphasize the importance of the sacraments, especially the Mass, the struggle for peace and justice and the promotion of the common good.¹⁹

The challenge to maintain and establish boundaries that mark them as distinct from secular groups presents itself to all mainstream Christian Churches. This is especially evident in areas such as ethical teaching and social outreach. If people on the periphery of religious groups cannot distinguish between “the Christian life and the life of good people” they have no compelling reason to make a profession of faith.²⁰ The boundaries which mark Catholic identity also need to be maintained. Catholic identity can be defined in comparatively broad, generic terms. In the current era, however, as opposed to the immediate post conciliar time, a reemphasis of distinctive features, over and above what the good person would recognize and identify with may be in order.²¹ This is in keeping with Moule’s point “At no point within the New Testament is there any evidence that the Christian stood for an original philosophy of life or an original ethic. Their sole function was to bear witness to what they claimed as an event—the rising of Jesus from the dead.”²² At every opportunity the distinctiveness of Catholicism should be encouraged. An absolute necessity is to maintain the importance of Eucharistic worship. As Dulles remarked, “Unless there was a Church, there would be no one to celebrate the Eucharist, but unless there were a Eucharist, the Church would lack the supreme source of her vitality.”²³

¹⁷ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution and the Second Vatican Council: New Wine, Old Wineskins* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 137.

¹⁸ Smith strikes an optimistic note about this task, “religious actors are quite capable of reclaiming and reinvigorating lost and dormant sacred themes, traditions, and practices; of generating new religious groups while relinquishing others,” Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 101.

¹⁹ Dean Hoge, William Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan Gonzales. *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in a Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 151-152.

²⁰ Dean Hoge, Benita Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens. *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 191.

²¹ Thomas Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003).

²² C.F.D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London, 1967), 14. Quoted in Bernard Lonergan, “The Future of Christianity” in William F. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (Eds), *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 156. Lonergan himself adds “what distinguishes the Christian then is not God’s grace, which he shares with others, but mediation of God’s grace through Jesus Christ our Lord,” *ibid.*

²³ Avery Dulles, “A Eucharistic Church: The Vision of John Paul II,” in *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 443-454, at 443-444.

3. Remind People of God

Kasper argued that the best challenge to what he saw as pervasive contemporary practical atheism is a full and vigorous presentation of the Trinity.²⁴ This argument reflects the need to bring God back into the centre of Catholic life and discourse. Gallagher extended this idea, remarking that one of the features of contemporary Catholicism is a somewhat excessive acculturation. This results in an unbalanced emphasis on individual expression at the expense of a more genuine Christian anthropology. This anthropology stresses the transcendent, pre-eminently in symbol.²⁵ Those working with young adults should, at every opportunity, engage with the transcendent.²⁶ Flanagan speaks of this in terms of a need for the Church to move beyond a passive engagement with culture and be conscious of the need to actively create a space where the discernment of the sacred can be undertaken.²⁷ In many places this will not occur spontaneously as many of the dominant cultural forces tend to accelerate the secularization of societies. This is not to neglect the “horizontal” dimension of faith but to acknowledge that what gives religious communities distinctiveness are their claims to have a special connection with divine.²⁸ A renewed emphasis on the transcendent takes religion out of the purely vicarious realm of providing a “safety net” or serving as a type of civil concord. It also provides a much firmer rationale for those individuals who choose to be religious or to be Catholic in the absence of strong initial socialization.²⁹

4. Be Focused on Who to Reach Out To.

Increasingly parishes cater for those who are well past middle age, fulfilling what some have characterized as a maintenance model of ministry.³⁰ But what of pastoral outreach to those in the critical younger years when lives are being shaped by great decisions? A commitment to expanding pastoral outreach to young adults is a crucial first step. It must be seen, however, in unison with practical plans to identify, nurture and develop those individuals who can best minister to young adults. These are young lay people who can act as effective peer ministers. The fundamental question is how to best assist these young ministers into becoming witnesses who manifest both a close relationship with Christ and a desire to evangelize others.

More thought must be given to who the initial targets of the new evangelization should be. Bibby argued that one key to the revival of mainline Churches is organized

²⁴ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 313-317.

²⁵ Michael Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), esp. 130-137.

²⁶ David Martin, *Christian Language in the Secular City* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2002), 139-141.

²⁷ Kieran Flanagan, *The Enhancement of Sociology: A Study of Theology and Culture* (London: Macmillian, 1996), 17-20.

²⁸ Peter Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 88-111.

²⁹ Smith sees as one of the reasons Christianity can be successful is that it has the potential for “transcendent worship.” Christian Smith, “Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account,” *Sociology of Religion* 68 (2007): 165-178.

³⁰ Robert Rivers, *From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

invitational outreach to what he calls affiliates.³¹ These are large groups who have remained affiliated to a home tradition and who are wary of alternative groups. D'Antonio and his colleagues extended this argument when they discuss ways of reaching out to less committed Catholics along lines of affinity.³² A strong strategy is to utilize the natural links that people have with other like-minded individuals. The best human agents for evangelization are people who share much in common with those who are on the periphery of the church.³³ People are unlikely to join a religious community or activity alone without some type of personal entrée. A much more likely scenario is if they are asked along by a friend or an associate. New or returning members can then build new relationships and extend their network.³⁴

5. Be Prepared to Respond to the Needs of the Community and Give Strong Affective Experiences.

Ongoing fellowship groups should be established that provide abundant strong affective and joyful experiences. Walker pointed out that joy is the “fundamental trait of the Christian ethos.”³⁵ Joy should shape the Christian temperament and provide a bulwark against the scandal of evil and the temptation of forsakenness. Any group, certainly a religious community, flourishes when its members are joyful and where they feel that their needs are being addressed.³⁶ A feature of many Evangelical churches is that they develop ministries that are aimed at different members of the faith community. With this type of conscious targeting the group is much more likely to be able to provide communal experiences which are affirming, positive and joyful. People are likely to come to, and then to increase their commitment to, a body where they frequently have a good experience.³⁷ To take one example, a group with specific needs in the postmodern milieu are young adults in their twenties. Many of these individuals come from unsettled familial and social backgrounds. They are faced with significant educational and financial challenges in establishing their lives. In terms of Christian commitment they may never have had a strong socialization into belief and practice. In many ways they are exhausted for choice in the number of activities that they can choose to give their time and energy to. A group

³¹ The idea of searching out to affiliates is well illustrated by careful analysis of evangelical rallies such as those conducted in the 1950's by Billy Graham. These largely attracted individuals who had some connection either actual or historical with a Christian community. A similar finding was made among those who made public profession of faith at these rallies. The point here is not that these rallies were ineffective. Rather the task of reaching completely unconnected individuals is very difficult. For a discussion of the Graham campaigns see Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief and Experience* (London: Routledge, 1997), 128-130.

³² William D'Antonio, James Davidson, Dean Hoge, and Mary Gautier. *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 148-151.

³³ The importance of networking in attracting new people into religious groups was established as early as the 1960's. John Lofland and Rodney Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective,” *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 862-875.

³⁴ Kimon Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 113.

³⁵ Adrian J. Walker, “Rejoice Always. How Everyday Joy Responds to the Problem of Evil,” *Communio* 31 (2004): 200-235, at 201.

³⁶ Milton J. Coalter, John M. Miller and Louis B. Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1996), 112-113.

³⁷ Many people, both adults and teenagers, already affiliated with Christian churches do not find them comparatively enjoyable. When asked to select sources of enjoyment both adults and teenagers rated their religious group as last in a nine category scale. Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 213.

which recognizes this cohort, which sets out to provide social and other opportunities for them to network will have some chance of providing a strong affective social experience of community. If this is coupled with effective mentoring and witnessing then a pathway to become more committed has been established even for those on the periphery of the group. Looking at this age cohort as coterminous with people twenty or so years older is to almost certainly overlook their legitimate and in some ways unique situation.

One possibility in providing experiences of supportive communities, which may augment more ongoing structures are intense, episodic experiences of community. These seem to be particularly well suited to groups who share some type of common interest or background. Gathering people together for a relatively short period of time even on a yearly basis seems to be a novel response to the challenges of post modernity but in fact this type of Christian outreach is well established. To give one example, one of the most significant aspects of Romano Guardini's ministry was the time he spent as a leading figure in the *Quickborn* (wellsprings of life) youth movement in pre war Germany.³⁸ A key part of this organization were summer camps held at *Burg Rothenfels am Main*. These attracted university students who were interested in deepening their Christian commitment.³⁹ As well as Guardini other prominent mentors attended and the participants experienced excellent preaching, innovative liturgy, a variety of cultural and spiritual pursuits and strong fellowship.⁴⁰ The camps ran in the summer beginning in early 1920's until they were closed by the Nazi's in 1939. Rather than being seen as competition to conventional parish life this type of focused ministry provides revitalization for the group who attend and then return to more conventional modes of faith expression.⁴¹

In this context a number of activities seem to be a high priority in any program of the new evangelization. Ministry to younger adult is marriage preparation is one such area. Those young adults who wish to explore in more depth the Catholic perspective on married life could be at a particularly graced moment of their lives. The Catholic message here on the importance of fidelity, openness to family and permanence of the marital bond is a counter-cultural message which distinguishes itself from societal norms. It is a message, nonetheless, which resonates deeply with human aspirations. Many younger people in contemporary culture are uncomfortable with what has been described as the hook up culture.⁴² This is verified in much recent research on young adults. Regnerus and Uecker, for instance, note ten myths about sex and relationships amongst undergraduate university students.⁴³ Refutation of these myths equates very well with the Catholic view

³⁸ Robert A. Krieg, "A Precursor's Life and Work," in Robert A. Krieg (ed), *Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 21-23.

³⁹ Karl Rahner was one of the many young adults deeply influenced by their attendance at these intensive summer camps. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, Ma: Blackwell, 2007), 87.

⁴⁰ The liturgical style at *Burg Rothenfels* is worth noting. Krieg describes these as "informal Masses at which they sang hymns in German instead of Latin, discussed the scriptural readings for the day, and stood around an altar at which the priest faced the people," Krieg, *Precursor*, 23.

⁴¹ Dulles offers the idea of "novitiates for life" as a basis for training lay leaders in the community of disciples. These are "brief gatherings for spiritual renewal are a great help toward achieving authentic discipleship in the Church." Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* Exp. Ed. (New York: Image Books, 1987), 219.

⁴² Kathleen Bogle, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating and Relationships on Campus* (New York: New York University, 2008).

⁴³ Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think About Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

on sexuality, relationships and marriage⁴⁴. Marriage education is also a very pertinent example of the potential of peer ministry, married couples witness and educating those about to be married.

Consideration could also be given to providing specialized pastoral ministry which recognizes the inherent difficulties associated with evangelization in the contemporary religious and spiritual marketplace. Here no particular worldview is privileged and all are in some sense in competition with each other. In light of these challenges a best practice methodology could be used when dealing with interested youth and young adults. One example of this could be a regular program, organized in parishes or schools, that would expose youth in a systematic way to the best the tradition has to offer. This program could involve: those priests and religious best suited to dealing with young people; the speakers skilled at dealing with the questions of adolescents; the best peer ministers who could provide great witness; experiences of beautiful, reflective liturgy and other sacramental experiences such as penance. At the very least such an ongoing program will let interested Catholic youth know that they are valued and something is being done in a very tangible way to foster and encourage them in their faith journeys. It would also provide a critical venue where those younger people on the periphery of the Church could find a place where they can see the faith as a lived reality, evident in the lives of people like them.

6. Don't be Discouraged and be Prepared to Try New Strategies

The new evangelization is a difficult task. It is worthwhile to recall Ratzinger's quote here about success not being one of the names of God. Those engaged in it, therefore, must be prepared to try new strategies to help promote it and to be aware that some of these may fail. The new evangelization sets itself high goals and as a result can often lead to what seems to be disappointment. But with high goals comes the possibility of high returns and these are not always best measured in gross numbers. As Wilson points out, using Augustine as a model, conversion in the post modern world is a dynamic process that engages the whole person and needs to be seen in individual terms and not as a mass movement.⁴⁵ The key point is not to be overawed by numbers or lack of them. What are more important are the activity and the audience.

The new strategies that are anticipated by the new evangelization may not all be successful. This is not a reflection of the futility of the task rather its difficulty. It is important to maintain a responsible consciousness in these endeavours. Implementers of the new evangelization need to be convinced that by being attentive, intelligent and rational that they can affect a course of action that will be fruitful at least on its own terms and in due course. As Lonergan puts it "concern for the future work itself out by human means, by drawing on human experience, human intelligence, human judgment, human decision but again this is quite compatible with a profoundly religious attitude."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The congruence between overcoming the ten myths and what I would call a Catholic sensibility is well worth noting, see Regnerus and Uecker, *Premarital Sex*, 236-249. To note just three myths: Myth One, "long-term exclusivity is a fiction"; Myth Six, "porn won't affect your relationships"; Myth Ten, "moving in together is definitely a step toward marriage."

⁴⁵ Phillip Wilson, "Shaping the Future of the Church," *Origins* 78 (2007): 37-41, at 40.

⁴⁶ Bernard Lonergan, "The Absence of God in Modern Culture," in William F. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (eds), *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 109-115.

A CONCLUDING COMMENT

In contemporary culture those who work with youth or young adults must be in the “market square” like Paul at the Areopagus. The task is not easy and requires persistent effort.⁴⁷ In the first instance what is needed is a clear understanding of the concept, its origins and implications. Following on from this is a schema, set out here as a series of principles and guiding factors that can be translated into action or pastoral practice. Of importance also, and especially so, if contemporary evangelization is not to remain a concept rather than an actuality are human factors. These include a resolve to bring about the not easily attainable goals. Pope John Paul II has set a high bar for success. Related to this is the need for perseverance in what may seem to be a pathway strewn with difficulty. The new evangelization in its practical dimension is not a vast undifferentiated agenda, much less a vision, but a series of initiatives, each of which may add to an incremental effect. The concept of the new evangelization can be understood on a cognitive level, but to bring it about often takes courage and persistence.

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⁴⁷ Brown in his analysis of the decline of religion in Britain notes that one of the key factors was the decline of the “industry of evangelization,” that is, the amount of effort required to effectively evangelize in contemporary culture. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 166-169.

A key moment for the New Evangelization is the evangelization of culture, for it is here that believers live faith, discover their vocation and build up the Kingdom of God. Culture is not extraneous to the Gospel. Culture is formed and shaped by whatever forces are present. Culture by its very definition is organic and the very venue by which faith is experienced and lived. Secular humanism replaces God and positions man as the goal of culture. American Catholics and believers of God remained silent overall. The social sins we see today in American society are the result of silence. Today, however, we see young Catholics, young families, seminarians, young women in consecrated life, college students and many more who are no longer bashful about their faith.