



# The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

## Lausanne Occasional Paper 10 Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics

The Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) are historically important documents that have emerged from global consultations involving widely recognized evangelical leaders. The LOPs have been placed in the Lausanne Website to make more accessible and understandable the historical context and development of the various aspects of world evangelization.

*Held in Pattaya, Thailand from 16-27 June 1980*

*Sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization*

### Prefatory Note

This report, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics*, is one of a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) emerging from the historic Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980. The report was drafted by members of the "Mini-Consultation on Reaching Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics," under the chairmanship of Mr. Royal L. Peck, who also served as international coordinator of the pre-COWE study groups on Roman Catholics.

The major part of this report went through a draft and a revised draft, which involved all members of the mini-consultation. It was also submitted to a wider "sub-plenary" group for comment, but the responsibility of the final text rests with the mini-consultation and its chairman.

The report is released with the prayers and hope that it will stimulate the church and individual members in reaching this large segment of the population.

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### Introduction

Among approximately one billion people in the world who are classified as "Christians" it is recognized that many still need to be evangelized. They are "nominal Christians" who have not committed themselves to Jesus Christ and do not acknowledge his claims on their lives. These nominal Christians are found extensively among Protestants, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. This document will focus on the third category. Other study groups are concentrating on evangelizing nominal Christians among Protestants and Orthodox.

### The Purpose of our Study

Our purpose is to gain an understanding of nominal Christians among Roman Catholics and to formulate a strategy that gives promise of reaching them for Jesus Christ. It is our further desire to develop a strategy of evangelization that will produce a radical change of life-style in the new believer, so that he or she progressively conforms to the likeness of Jesus and to the truth of his Word. A mere decision to receive Christ, without accompanying evidence that the seed of the divine nature has been implanted by faith within the soul and is growing up into Christ Jesus, is not sufficient. The biblical ideal is to produce men and women who centre their lives entirely on Jesus Christ, who daily live out the Word of God, and are committed to grow progressively (1) in the knowledge and worship of God, (2) in fellowship with the Body of Christ in the local church, and (3) in doing the work of God in the world.

### The Process Used in Preparation of this Study

More than 250 persons collaborated in preparing the 35 study papers that were finally submitted. Each of these papers has contributed to our understanding of the vast need. During our 11 days together at COWE we devoted much time to prayer and reflection. Experiences and insights from 51 members of our group (representing 24 countries) enriched our discussions.

As we studied, we were impressed with the complexity of our task and of the many issues involved. Because of the diversity of our group, and the pressure of time, these were not always fully debated and many questions were set aside. We had come to COWE prepared by our years of experience in working in Roman Catholic lands, and by the studies to which many of us had dedicated ourselves in preparation for COWE. It was evident (when our discussions began) that each participant was firmly committed to an evangelical position in matters of doctrine; but we could not always agree about relationships with Roman Catholic individuals and groups, or on methods and strategies for reaching them.

We agreed there should be no winners and losers in our debates and discussions concerning methods and strategies. We did not seek to convince one another that our concept or method was the correct one, nor did we seek to change the opinions held by others. We knew we were listening to brothers and sisters in Christ, all of whom were committed to evangelical doctrinal positions. When we found ourselves opposed, we sought to express our opinions and to listen sensitively in Christian love, hoping to learn more about what is happening in the world in the evangelizing of nominal Christians among Roman Catholics. We sought to understand the "how" of such evangelization. What we heard was sometimes disturbing, but we determined to allow our fellow members in the Body of

Christ to express themselves freely, and we sought to develop our attitude of love towards each other.

The following summary of our deliberations is not a declaration purporting to be the unanimous conclusion of all present. Our differences and the broad diversity of people and culture where nominal Christians are found did not allow us to make such a declaration. We have chosen to adopt the position paper of the International Co-ordinator as our basic working document and have sought to adapt it to our thinking as a group. Hence, we have changed it when needed, deleting some sections and adding others, amplifying some thoughts and correcting terminology. Where we found ourselves to be in major disagreement we have sought to express each side of the issue by using phrases like "some feel . . ." ". . . some believe," "others feel" and "others believe." We have used the plural "we" and "us" where we found we were in basic agreement.

We urge those who use this document not to assume that our work eliminates the need for a thorough analysis of the nominal Christians they attempt to reach. Our strategies are not necessarily applicable wherever Roman Catholics are found, and they will need to be carefully evaluated and perhaps adapted in order to be effective.

We dedicate this report to the world-wide network of study groups which contributed so much to our understanding, with the prayer that God will use the results of our deliberations to encourage themâ€”to further study and that he will cause other study groups to be formed. Furthermore, we pray that as a result the Lord will bring a new ingathering of men and women into the household of Godâ€”especially from among those millions who bear the name of the Lord Jesus but do not really know him.

## 1. Definitions

It is impossible to talk about world evangelization and ignore the fact that multitudes need to be evangelized, although they are already church members or adherents and consider themselves Christians. This phenomenon of "nominal Christianity"â€”a Christian allegiance in name but not in heartâ€”is to be found among Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants alike.

Many in our consultation believe issues are confused when major evangelical agencies declare that one-fourth of the world's population is Christian. A billion may claim to be "Christian," but we cannot conclude that all these persons are true Christians. We believe many in the Body of Christ have misunderstood the deplorable need for evangelism among nominal Christians. This is one of the reasons we seek to define the meaning of the term Christian.

It appears to us that the problem of nominal Christianity is particularly serious in the "unreformed" Roman Catholic Church because it tends to view Christian initiation largely, if not solely, in terms of baptism, and so regards all the baptized as genuine Christians, even if lapsed. Evangelicals, however, are unable to accept this view. To us it is clear that the baptized cannot be regarded *ipso facto* as Christians. The New Testament itself warns that baptized, communicant membership in the church does not render us immune to the judgment of God (e.g., I Cor. 10: 1-12).

Accompanying an apparent trust in the regenerating efficacy of baptism, there seems to us to be in the Roman Catholic Church confusion about justification. Historically, the teaching of the reformers that justification (or acceptance with God) is "by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone" is so central to the gospel as to be non-negotiable.

Therefore, we are convinced that we have an evangelizing responsibility toward every person who, though baptized, does not appear to be trusting in Christ alone for salvation. We are aware that our conviction causes offence to many. But we are at least consistent in our position, since we apply the same principle to Protestants, Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, and all mankind.

We have a further problem. Although we rejoice in the increase of Christ-centred movements within many churches, and wish to share in such renewal ourselves, we cannot ignore the fact that the official doctrinal stance of the Roman Catholic Church remains to a great extent "unreformed." Many Evangelicals, therefore, believe it right to encourage members of this church, if they come by God's grace to justifying faith in Christ, to leave their church and join an Evangelical church. Some Evangelicals recognize the validity of Roman Catholic baptism, others do not and, therefore, urge converts to be baptized, not judging this to be rebaptism. We are conscious that, by these practices, we lay ourselves open to the charge of "proselytism." Certainlyâ€”we wish to avoid causing unnecessary offence, and we confess that sometimes we have been clumsy. Nonetheless we affirm that the truth of the gospel is of primary importance.

### A. Nominal Christians Defined

A nominal Christian is a person who has not responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord. He is a Christian in name only. He may be very religious. He may be a practising or non-practising church member. He may give intellectual assent to basic Christian doctrines and claim to be a Christian. He may be faithful in attending liturgical rites and worship services, and be an active member involved in church affairs. But in spite of all this, he is still destined for eternal judgment (cf. Matt. 7:21-23, Jas. 2:19) because he has not committed his life to Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10).

### B. Christian Defined Biblically

A true Christian is one who has responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord. God's Word reveals that the person who is a Christian, in addition to having made a commitment to Jesus Christ, will reveal a life-style that is in contrast to that of the natural, unredeemed man.

A Christian's fundamental attitude is one of faith and reveals itself in trust and dependence upon God and his Word. It involves God in daily activities, choices and plans. Jesus explains faith in the terms of "abiding" in him. Such faith makes Jesus the centre toward which a person's life is directed. Faith sustains him. Faith enables him to have confidence for the future.

A Christian progressively displays love in word and deed in the terms of I Cor. 13. Love will be the fundamental demonstration of the presence of Christ in his life. A Christian cannot help but love because the God who is within him is Love. This love will be poured out toward both God and man (cf. John 13:34-35).

A Christian is one who is committed to learning obedience to the Lord (cf. Luke 6:46, John 14:15). The person who is a true Christian may not be obedient at every moment of his life, but he will yearn to be like the Saviour. Obedience is a Christian's pursuit. A Christian is not only a hearer but a doer of the Word.

Although much more could be said about a true Christian, it is sufficient for our purposes to say that the heart of true Christianity is being a disciple of Jesus Christ in the terms of faith, love, and obedience.

We believe that the definition of a true Christian is further clarified and summarized in the Lausanne Covenant (paragraph 4) where we discern the elements that must follow evangelization to produce growing Christians:

- Commitment to the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord
- Repentance and reconciliation to God
- Acceptance of the cost of discipleship in following Christ, denying self, and taking up the cross.
- Incorporation into Christ's community, the local church
- Engaging in responsible service in the world for Christ

## 2. Description of Roman Catholic Church and Culture

### A. Developments in the Roman Catholic Church.

Vatican Council II has brought about many changes within the Roman Catholic Church in liturgy, catechism, regulations, and formulations. It did not alter the central dogma of the sacramental system of salvation, but it did produce a favourable atmosphere for evangelical witness among Roman Catholics.

Several affirmations of Vatican II have proved to be very helpful in opening doors of opportunity for the people of God to proclaim the Good News to Roman Catholics. God has mightily used these new avenues to bring many into the joys of new life in Christ.

The document on Divine Revelation urges Roman Catholics to own, study, and circulate the Bible as diligently as their "separated brethren," the Protestants. This has generated a growing interest in the Word of God among Roman Catholics. It has resulted in Bible studies conducted in homes, offices, and communities; and in the salvation of many who have found "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

The Council's statement on Ecumenism is a tacit admission that salvation can be found under certain conditions by non-Catholics. This has helped to remove some of the strong religious enmities between Catholics and Protestants. Attendance by Catholics at non-Catholic churches is no longer considered a serious sin by the Roman Catholic Church. This enables Evangelicals to share their faith with Roman Catholics even in the pulpits of some Catholic churches.

Other post-Vatican II developments have also helped build new bridges for Evangelicals in reaching out to the Catholics. The Papal encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* ("Evangelization in the Modern World"), issued in 1975, focuses Roman Catholic attention on evangelism and on the need of evangelism within the church.

The charismatic movement world wide seeks a spiritual renewal within the church among Roman Catholics. Bible study is central in many groups. Faith and obedience to Christ is claimed to be the basis of their communities.

Another development has caused some church members to question the infallibility of the Pope and made them open to change. The 1968 encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, forbade the practise of some artificial methods of birth control. Polls taken in the United States reveal that 80% of the Roman Catholics reject this ban. This has sometimes led them on a quest for another authority for faith and practise.

The accession in 1978 of John Paul II to the Holy See revealed him to be a different kind of leader than was his predecessor. The Polish Pope has given his church a new public image. He has quickly become the most travelled Supreme Pontiff in history, as he has visited countries where the church's concerns are crucial. His actions have revealed him to be "traditional." Some of those "traditional" actions would seem to signal an authoritarianism and rigidity that are not conducive to fostering a favourable atmosphere for evangelism. He reaffirmed the church's belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist through transubstantiation. He emphasized the veneration of Mary. He admonished the Dutch church, which carried ecumenism farther than any other, by expressly forbidding "ecumenical excesses." He ruled that some Roman Catholic clergy cannot hold elective office in spite of Canon Law 139. He is reluctant to grant requests by priests to leave the priesthood. He rebuked the Society of Jesus for "regrettable deficiencies," and he reminded them, as the Pope's "soldiers," of their fourth and additional vow to be loyal to him.

Other of the Pope's "traditional" actions have been appreciated by some Evangelicals because these accord with their own position. He has banned from Roman Catholic instruction one of the Church's most prominent liberal theologians, Hans Kung of the University of Tubingen, West Germany. He opposes the ordination of women to the priesthood. He has permitted the investigation of Edward Schillebeeckx of the University of Mijmegen in Holland for his unorthodox views of Christ's divinity and Mary's virginity in his book, "Jesus, an Experiment in Christology." He appointed a curial conservative to head the Congregation for the Clergy, which oversees the life of priests.

#### B. Understanding the Mind-set of Roman Catholics.

There is a general pattern to the mind-set of the nominal Christian among Roman Catholics. Comprehension of the general pattern will enable the evangelist to determine more accurately the specific components of his local situation.

##### (i) Major Roman Catholic groupings

The Roman Catholic Church and its people vary from country to country. Variation is evident within a given country. Our studies have identified some of the major groupings existing in the world today. These are not all-inclusive.

- Tridentine Roman Catholics (holding the dogma of the Counter-Reformation as defined by the Council of Trent): Traditional and conservative; often politically right.
- Modernist/Progressive Roman Catholics: Post-Vatican II liberals; theologically, and often politically, left.
- Cultural Roman Catholics: This includes a family, tribal, and social identity with little knowledge of theology. It is often manifested in popular religiosity and syncretistic superstition.
- Ethnic Roman Catholics: Often migrants using their religion to provide a sense of belonging. They feel that not to be Roman Catholic is not to belong, and to lose nationality and roots.
- Charismatic Roman Catholics: Some are truly born again and committed to the Lordship of Jesus, and enjoy the emotional uplift and personal freedom. They are committed to remain Roman Catholics.
- Alienated/lapsed Roman Catholics: These are indifferent not only to Roman Catholicism but also to the God of Catholicism whom they equate with Christianity.
- Moderated Roman Catholics: The "Montinian Center" which is more attached to Vatican II documents. Some are biblically oriented, some are political reformists. Others see themselves as evangelicals.

##### (ii) Why does a Roman Catholic become non-practising?

In seeking to understand this phenomenon, one must not overlook or underestimate the fact of man's moral bankruptcy and his sinful nature. Unregenerate mankind cannot be expected to appreciate God. A few of the principal causes of alienation are:

- The Vatican and Church exercise of temporal authority. Church involvement in government affairs has made it vulnerable to blame for the political ills of a nation.
- Secularism has had its impact and caused people to believe that Christianity is no longer relevant.
- Priests and religious (Roman Catholic terminology for those who live under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience) who are poor examples of Christian living.
- The church's stand on matters of sex and marriage
- Mobility and urbanization, which have resulted in diminished loyalty to a specific parish, impersonal relationships between priest and people and the religious community, progressive disintegration of the family, and broken ties with the old social and family restraints that forced outward conformation.
- Changes in the church are either too many or too few
- A spiritual vacuum within the church
- A general malaise. There is a lack of priests and pastoral care in many areas.

##### (iii) To what degree are most Roman Catholics aware of the gospel?

Many Catholics (like many Protestants) have a superficial understanding of basic Christian doctrine. They give intellectual assent to the truths of Jesus' person, work, and nature. They believe in the existence of sin, but are unclear as to its practical implications. They may admit that they are sinners, but guilty only of "little" sins. They may have no clear concept of heaven and hell, and are convinced that man will be saved by his good deeds. Many feel that holiness as taught by Roman Catholic doctrine is attainable only by the "saints."

Like all nominal religionists, including nominal Protestants, they recognise that God exists. He is the creator of the universe, but is remote and disinterested in daily human affairs. They may fear his punishment and often seek to placate him in ways mixed with superstition. They may see no need for a personal relationship with him.

Few probably read the Bible, except for those passages contained in their missals. They may have no understanding of Christianity apart from the Roman Catholic Church and have a difficult time believing Protestants to be other than members of a sect. When a Protestant attacks the Roman Catholic Church, they very likely will rise to its defense even though they do not practise their religion. Catholicism is their cloak to protect them from an unwanted and personal discussion of religion.

Materialism and humanism are at the root of the typical nominal Roman Catholic's world and life view. Although one may give mental assent to the supernatural, to the future life and to the hope of salvation, all that really matters is what is experienced and accumulated here and now in life. Preoccupation is with the present. Most are convinced that all one has, or will have, is wrought by personal effort.,

During our discussion, we recognized that some of us view the Roman Catholic Church not as a Christian denomination, but as a syncretistic Christo-pagan religion. From this presupposition, Roman Catholics are considered nominal Christians *ipso facto* because they are not exposed to the gospel in their church. According to this position, a Roman Catholic may become a real Christian not because of the Roman Catholic Church, but in spite of it. Others of us view the Roman Catholic Church as a Christian denomination, and believe in the possibility of a deep evangelical renewal, under God's guidance; although we recognize that the task is enormous due to the fact so many have a superficial understanding of biblical doctrine.

*(iv) Values they hold*

Many Roman Catholic countries received their religion at the hand of a "Latin" missionary and therefore there are many similarities in values and felt needs among the people. In most cases, the name "Roman Catholic Church" is not a misnomer. The Italian mind and values have greatly influenced theology and life-style. The Spanish and Portuguese spread Roman Catholicism around the world, but they were carrying Rome's (Italy's) mind-set and values with their crosses.

The following values illustrate some basic patterns of Catholic culture in general.

- There is a high regard for the family nucleus, which extends to aunts, uncles, and cousins.
- There is a deep appreciation for authority figures. This is due to appreciation for stability.
- There is a humanistic/materialistic underpinning. The tangible, sensual, visual, and rational are matters that appeal to them most. Security is a driving force.
- Traditions and festivals are aids to social well-being (both inside and outside the family).
- True friendships are binding and consuming.
- They have a keen sense of altruism and readily express empathy for the oppressed, suffering, and needy.

*(v) Needs they feel*

Felt needs may or may not be expressed verbally. This is true of their sense of oppression and need of liberation from social-economic injustice. For years quiet submission and passive resistance were evident. Today, especially in Latin America, there has been an explosion of social action on all fronts. Other felt needs that may be identified are:

- The need for a mediator, both earthly and heavenly. Letters of recommendation are basic to getting ahead in life. There is a feeling that what counts is not *what you* know, but *whom you* know.
- Identity with a larger "whole" and dislike of isolation. Solidarity and continued relationship with their cultural roots maintain their feeling of well-being.
- In many countries "Mama'ism" is a force, especially in intimate relationships. Outwardly, "father" is the power figure, but behind the scenes it is mother who rules, manipulates, and takes family leadership. This is in apparent contrast to the popular view of machismo.
- There is a deep sense of unworthiness and lack of merit, and the need to do something to become worthy of salvation. They often feel the need for more faith and a better relationship with God.

*C. Unacceptable Roman Catholic Doctrines*

We agree that sound doctrine is of utmost importance and is basic to our strategies for evangelizing nominal Christians among Roman Catholics. It is primarily doctrine that separates Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. We are in unanimous agreement that we cannot compromise these doctrinal differences. We are further agreed that any person wishing to be involved in reaching Roman Catholics must have a full and clear understanding of these theological divergencies.

There was disagreement within our group as to how we ought to present in this paper the Roman Catholic doctrines which are unbiblical. Some felt we ought to elaborate on these doctrines; others proposed that we merely list them. All agreed, however, that the following non-biblical doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are some of the major points that we find unacceptable:

- A synergistic view of salvation. Justification by faith and works
- The possibility of salvation outside of explicit faith in Jesus Christ
- The mediation of the church
- The Roman Catholic view of sin and forgiveness
- Purgatory
- The meaning of the mass and transubstantiation
- The Roman Catholic view of the authority of tradition
- Veneration of Mary and the saints
- Sacramentalism (*ex-opere operato*)
- The primacy and infallibility of the Pope

*Evangelistic strategy with regard to Roman Catholic doctrine*

Some participants felt that the proper starting point for reaching Roman Catholics is the official teaching of that church, not the beliefs or practices of any of its members, groups, or priests. Other participants expressed the view that the study of these doctrines is not practical at a local level. Some cited examples of priests who are not following the express dogma of the church and instead are leaning toward an evangelical position in worship and life-style. Others felt, however, that these are exceptions rather than the rule, and that the private persuasion and practices of certain priests may not always reflect the *de fide* dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. Some suggested that practices at local levels which do not conform to the official doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church are "cosmetic" in that they do not deal with any real change of doctrine.

There was also a diverse reaction to the extent to which the study of Roman Catholic doctrine was beneficial. Some contended that most Roman Catholics have little knowledge of doctrine, and wished to avoid giving the impression that knowledge of doctrine was necessary to evangelization. Others however, felt that Evangelicals should know the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church better, citing the fact that some Evangelicals do not know their own doctrines.

The view was expressed that doctrinal debate put Roman Catholics on the defensive. And the need was not so much a clear comprehension of doctrine, but rather a positive proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*D. Barriers That Hinder Evangelization of Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics**(i) Barriers erected by the Evangelical**(a) Lack of love*

Evangelical lack of love looms as a formidable barrier. Our Lord has given us a clear command: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another... All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34,35, and 17:21). It is our conviction that God does not demand the dissolution and union of the hundreds of different Protestant denominations, but he does require us to demonstrate love for one another in terms that the world can understand. However much love we might claim to have for one another, the facts are clear: the lost world and Roman Catholics often see just the opposite.

*(b) Lack of discernment*

A second evangelical barrier comes from the misconception that Roman Catholics do not constitute a valid field for evangelism. This is caused by ignorance of two fundamental factors:

- Great numbers of Roman Catholics are considered to be outside the grace of God by the church itself. Our studies reveal that 500-600 million of the 742 million are living as non-practising Catholics.
- The serious differences of theology that continue to separate us from Roman Catholics. At the present time, there is a tendency to urge Evangelicals to fellowship with Roman Catholics, solely on the basis of experience, without honest discernment concerning a biblically and theologically sound experience of the new birth. If we have no sense of their need, and only desire "fellowship and communion," there will be no urge to evangelize.

*(ii) Barriers erected by the Roman Catholic* Although the historical barrier of "anti-Protestantism" persists in the mind of many Roman Catholics, it has greatly diminished since Vatican II. There are, however, other cultural and practical barriers which must be considered. Unless the evangelist understands the mindset of the people he wishes to reach, he cannot evangelize adequately. Evangelization depends for success on the convincing power of the Holy Spirit, but this does not excuse us from understanding the obstacles. Some of the more evident barriers may be described as:

*National and family heritage.* To not be a Catholic is equivalent to not being a Spaniard, Italian, etc. It would also signify rejection of one's family.

This, however, does not seem to be the case in Belgium, France, and England.

*Skepticism and cynicism.* It is the view of many that Christianity does not work. They have also observed priests, nuns, Protestant pastors, and many "Christians" living lives inconsistent with their profession.

*The threat of "changing" religions.* Most Catholics feel that what is being demanded is a change of religion. They are ignorant concerning the fact that a valid Christian option exists apart from their church.

*Evangelicals identified with the sects.* Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are viewed as "Evangelicals." Some, having rejected the sects, reject Evangelicals in like manner.

*Demands made on personal responsibility.* The degree of commitment required to be a Christian makes it easier for them to trust a saint or the virgin Mary to mediate on behalf of their shortcomings.

*Persistent Roman Catholic practises.* Many continue to engage in certain aspects of religious devotion and depend upon prevailing superstitious practises. This can lead to occultism which brings even deeper bondage to Satan.

*Concept of authority.* Being accustomed to the idea of an organisation being the "one true church," many balk at the "unauthoritative" diversity of Protestant denominations. They ask: "How can I ever decide? Which denomination is the true one?"

*Christianity and politics.* Many Protestants and Roman Catholics identify their Christianity with a particular political philosophy involving rejection of the "left" or "right." Thus Christianity becomes "pro-right" or "pro-left."

*(iii) Barriers erected by the Roman Catholic hierarchy*

One of the foremost barriers is religious persecution. This has greatly subsided in most Roman Catholic countries, but it continues to be a force in more subtle and refined ways, as in the refusing of prime time for religious broadcasts, or delay in responding to requests for permits.

Economic pressures are also a barrier. In villages, a priest can effectively keep an Evangelical from flourishing economically. Becoming an Evangelical in urban centres does not pose the same risk, but the fear of economic pressure is not entirely removed.

The semantics of the hierarchy also raise a barrier that must be recognized if we are to evangelize effectively. This barrier manifests itself in the use of terminology and in the understanding of religious authority. The Roman Catholic's mental perception of religious terms often differs from the Evangelical's perception. For example, to the Roman Catholic, "born again" means baptism at birth; "Christian" means member of the Roman Catholic Church; "receive Christ" means to take communion; "to have faith" means to believe what the church teaches.

Religious authority belongs to the hierarchy. When dealing with religious matters, the Evangelical seeks to face issues, solve problems, and pose questions. He goes to the Bible for answers. The Roman Catholic is taught to feel secure that the "church" has all the answers. Its documents are final authority. Whatever problems might exist are to be solved by the church and not by the individual. If he desires to ask questions, the priest is his resource for the answer.

Although ecumenism may serve as a bridge, it also presents a barrier. Confusion often arises in the minds of Roman Catholics when liberal Protestants are so active in making ecumenical overtures toward Rome. Evangelicals may lose their identity because of this confusion. Conservative Catholics tend to identify liberals and Evangelicals as doctrinal equivalents and equally open to ecumenical rapport.

*E. Bridges to Effective Evangelization of Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics*

Consideration of barriers to communicating with Roman Catholics should not be permitted to overshadow the fact that there are unprecedented opportunities today for evangelization of the nominal Christians among them. Sensitive Christians will discover that, in contemporary Roman Catholic circles, there are several characteristics and areas of concern that can be bridgeheads for communication of the gospel.

Vatican II and other recent trends, for instance, have brought changes in attitude and assumptions in many members of that community. Two important changes of that nature are noted below (i & ii). They make possible meaningful points of contact for presentation of the Christian witness.

In addition, however, there are long-standing characteristics of Roman Catholics that cannot be overlooked, and which still serve as excellent points of contact for a Christian witness (iii, iv, & v below).

It is important that these bridges be kept in mind.

*(i) The Church now encourages Bible reading*

Vatican II furnished an important bridge to the evangelization of nominal Christians among Roman Catholics in this regard. Council documents stressed the place of the Bible in the pulpit and in personal study and devotion. Hence the Roman Catholic friend will not be on the defensive when pointed to the Bible.

*(ii) The Church now regards other Christians as "Separated Brethren"*

The Council's documents described Protestants and others in the larger Christian community as "separated brethren" not as "heretics." That change makes possible meaningful communication and personal relationships with nominal Roman Catholics. Where there once was a wall, a bridge can be erected.

*(iii) Many Roman Catholics maintain basic religious convictions*

Their beliefs include the conviction that God exists (even though he is remote) and that Jesus is God and Saviour. Unlike secularists, they have a recognition of the reality of salvation and an underlying desire for it—even though their understanding of what constitutes salvation may be inadequate.

*(iv) They have a strong sense of community and loyalty*

Roman Catholic loyalties continue to exist and are often expressed in a deep sense of community and in adherence to the family unit (both immediate and extended) That sense of family loyalty is seen even in Evangelical churches in predominantly Roman Catholic cultures. That trait is also evident in large Roman Catholic migrant populations when, in their new country of residence, immigrants maintain a close knit community and protect the family unit.

*(v) They seek practical solutions to life's problems*

Many nominal Christians among Roman Catholics feel that Catholicism (hence Christianity) has proven sterile in offering practical solutions to life's problems. The church, they feel, has placed too great an emphasis on the "hereafter" and has failed to speak to the problems of this present existence. A holistic gospel finds a ready response in that situation.

**3. Developing a Strategy for Reaching Roman Catholic Nominal Christians**

*A. Components of an Effective Strategy.*

Formulation of effective strategies for reaching nominal Christians among Roman Catholics involves at least five basic components: correct attitudes, correct doctrine, consistent lifestyles, community and interaction, and practical application and solutions.

*(i) Correct attitudes*

*(a) Our attitude toward ourselves as Evangelicals.*

We Evangelicals must examine the reality of our divisions which contradict our unity in Christ (Eph. 4:1-7). Party spirit infects our relationships. This affects the dynamics and credibility of the gospel. It seems that any believer desirous of evangelizing among Roman Catholics should ponder deeply the accusation of Catholic scholar Louis Bouyer:

"The Protestant Churches set themselves up ... as Churches aiming at total submission to the Word of God ... (they) either spend their energies endorsing, and vainly attempting to impose particular systems of theology, which seems to their authors alone a true reproduction of the divine Word, or else yield to the force of things and give up teaching any definite doctrine, even that of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, however

much it might seem to be the only serious ground of their opposition to the Catholic Church" *Modern Catholic Thinkers*—*An Anthology*, edited by Aloysius R. Caponigri, Books for Libraries Press, 1970, p. 624).

Bouyer is not totally wrong in his biting analysis of us. It is possible for us to be so biased regarding our theological position that we unwittingly assume the Roman Catholic attitude—*that our interpretation of certain doctrines is the only interpretation of truth allowable.*

It is time for us to obey the Lord and put on the attitude he demanded of his disciples, when they sought to rebuke another disciple who was not a member of their own group (cf. Luke 9:49-56). Jesus pointed out that one could be his disciple without identifying with those who were numbered among the twelve. But the moral is difficult to learn, for immediately after this lesson on identification, James and John requested permission to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans. They were incensed that the Samaritans would not receive the messengers of Jesus (due to a doctrinal dispute with the Jews). Jesus severely rebuked his two disciples for not understanding what a Christ-like reaction really should be. Jesus wanted fire to fall on Samaria, but it would be the fire of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:4-17).

*(b) Our attitude toward Roman Catholics.*

A correct biblical attitude demands that we love Roman Catholics with the Saviour's love. We confess we have sometimes lacked this. Such a Christ-like love does not diminish our responsibility to proclaim truth. We agree that we must propagate truth and that we must speak "truth in love."

Some of us expressed hope that the Holy Spirit will move within the Roman Catholic Church bringing repentance, renewal, and revival. The hope of others was expressed with regard to the Roman Catholic people, rather than for the institution. The same Lord who promised to build his church, to present it without spot, or blemish, and who raised up the reformers; and who, through them, brought life to millions of Roman Catholics, is with us today.

*(ii) Correct doctrine*

Effective evangelization and sound doctrinal content are corollaries. Although the average nominal Christian living in a Roman Catholic culture has some knowledge of Christian theology, his awareness of Bible doctrine is limited. Bible study is the key to his conversion to Jesus Christ; however, the studies must be programmed to illuminate and correct the person's knowledge, attitude, and behaviour. Although approaches to Bible study will vary from evangelist to evangelist, there are certain basics that need to be considered.

*(a) Avoid an anti-Roman Catholic spirit.*

Do not attack or seek to discredit Roman Catholic doctrine. Biblical answers need to be given when requested, but a systematic attack on the position of the Roman Catholic Church is counter-productive.

*(b) Present the Lordship of Christ.*

Most nominal Roman Catholics will profess to be Christian. Do not attack them by disclaiming the reality of their Christianity. Accept their statement at face value and lead them into Bible studies, indicating that the new birth results in a progressive change of attitude and behaviour. Submission of the will and learning of daily obedience should be taught as basic to true discipleship. The Roman Catholic may equate his baptism with the "new birth" (this is the official church doctrine). In this case, ask him to identify what changes Christ has made in his behaviour since he has been "born again." It is often easy to assist the seeker to understand how far he really is from the new birth by a study of 2 Corinthians 5:17. Most Catholics can be quickly brought to the awareness that they want Jesus as Saviour, but have never really given consideration to living in personal relationship with him as Lord. This point is often the determining factor in their acceptance or rejection of Christ.

*(c) Assure them of the supreme authority and trustworthiness of Scripture.*

Total trust in the teaching authority of their church must be displaced by total confidence in the Scriptures, which alone can show us the way of salvation and will be the basis of judgment in the last day (John 12:47,48). Because many contemporary catechisms support the mythological view of Genesis, apologetic approaches need to be considered at times. Whether with individuals or with groups, evangelistic Bible studies can help greatly in accomplishing this task. The public preaching of evangelistic teams needs to include this theme.

*(d) Acquaint them with salvation truth.*

Clear presentation of the completeness of the substitutionary work of Christ is essential, in view of their former concept that they themselves must complete suffering for sin through the sacrament of penance.

*(e) Arm them with biblical principles of decision-making and moral choice.*

The Roman Catholic has been taught to let the hierarchy (the church) make his moral choices for him. He knows little about using God's Word in decision-making. He is coming out of a legalistic background, and needs to develop a capacity for choosing God's will. Unfortunately, Evangelicals often lead the new convert into a new legalism that differs little, in principle, from that experienced in the Roman Catholic Church. God's man or woman must be equipped to rightly divide the Word of truth, to "know," to "discern," to "choose," and to "grow up in" Christ Jesus.

*(f) Advocate confidence in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.*

Although evangelicals may not be fully agreed as to the manifestations and action of the Holy Spirit, they are, and must be, agreed upon the importance of his person, and his presence in the life of the believer.

Authority is important to the Roman Catholic. He must be shown in God's Word that the believer has been given the Holy Spirit, and therefore has authority to know and to understand God's Word. God's Holy Spirit is his illuminator, teacher, and interpreter of the Word. The believer must understand, however, that this does not assume "private interpretation," but rather understanding of the Word of God in community with the Body of Christ. Jesus' instruction about the Holy Spirit in John 14:26; 16:13,14 is applicable to all Christians as individuals. But we must not be so independent that we do not admit that Jesus was also speaking to the disciples collectively. The Lord dwells in the midst of his Church, his Body.

God gives understanding through proper hermeneutics, under the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Individuals and groups of Christians may differ on certain doctrines, but it is amazing how the Holy Spirit has maintained a central core of truth that all true believers have attested to from the beginning. Where there is a difference on peripheral matters, the Holy Spirit instructs us (Romans 14 through 15:7) how to live in harmony.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit within the new believer must be taught. The new believer must realize how important it is to enter into a relationship with the triune God. Herein lies the believer's motivation and energy.

*(g) Attune them to the practise of prayer and praise.*

The sterility of formalized, repetitious praying must be supplanted with the privileges and joys of intimate talking with our Father through his Son, Jesus. Communal and private prayer and praise are to be encouraged, and the biblical basis taught. Herein is the new believer's personal relationship with God developed and strengthened. When the believer begins to learn and practise the joys of praise, and the power of specific praying, then he will begin to know that God is not remote. He will know God acts in the here and now, in all his caring love.

*(h) Conclusion.*

The above matters are only indicative of what doctrinal subjects are to be taught. It ought to be self-evident that many other doctrines must also be treated. The meaning of sin and repentance, the new birth and its consequences, the community of God, the local church, etc., must all find their place within our teaching. Above all, the believer should be taught to go to the Bible, God's Word, for his faith and practise.

*(iii) Consistent life-style*

The world needs a Christ-like life-style demonstrated. The believer needs to desire one if he is to grow. The church needs an apostolic model if it is to increase. The teaching of Philippians 4:9 must permeate our Christian commitment. Normally we teach new believers to "learn, receive, and hear" from us, but then we tell them to "look to Jesus and not to look at man." Rarely do we instruct them to look at us to see Christ in us. Paul demonstrated Christian living for the believers. He was not perfect (Phil. 3:12), but he did not hesitate to urge: "Look at me, imitate what you see" (Phil. 3:17). Those who knew the Apostle Paul and his team knew what manner of men they were (1 Thess. 1:5-7); the believers imitated their lives, became followers of them and of the Lord, and finally became

examples themselves. This is God's plan for Christian life-style.

*(a) Life-style of growth.*

The character and conduct of the witness is of utmost importance. The Roman Catholic understands all too well how great the gulf can be between "saying and doing." He is convinced that the Christian life-style is not practicable. He must see that holy, Christian living is progressive (as well as positional in Christ). We often set before the believer a state of Christian being, but do not allow him to peer into our lives in order to see exactly how we are in the process of growth. We do not clearly model for others the process of change that is taking place in our lives as we apply the Word of God and learn obedience and submission to him in daily practise. This growth is demonstrated naturally if we are in the Word of God together and sharing our actions and reactions to it. This will allow those we are seeking to lead to look into our lives. It will help them to see how the hand of God is at work conforming us from faith to faith into his perfect image. It will reveal to them how we correct sin in our lives and repent from it. We must let them see us pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

*(b) Life-style of witness.*

Most Roman Catholics understand Christian witness, evangelism, and doing the "work" of the church in the terms of "professional" activities. Such matters are the "job" of the clergy, the nuns, the monks. Few laymen feel responsible for these activities.

Unfortunately, Evangelicals often perpetuate the "professional" model. Only the full-time worker and the highly trained are able to dedicate time to witnessing and evangelism. "Let the paid workers do it!" is all too frequently the attitude.

It is not that we do not teach witnessing. Rather, we do not *model* witnessing. Many teach "about" winning others to Christ, but do not win others themselves. They say and do not. New believers need to "see," as well as hear. The modeling process must involve the teacher taking one or two of his new believers with him when he goes out to witness to unbelievers. Later, the believer should do the witnessing himself while accompanied by the teacher. Finally, the teacher should send out the new Christian to witness alone, evaluate his effectiveness, and start him on the road of training others to witness for Christ as he himself has been trained.

*(c) Life-style of caring.*

Paul reminded his spiritual children that he "travailed until Christ was formed in them." He also noted that in their imitation of him, they had freely given themselves to a "labour of love." Personal relationships are the best of all strategies in winning the lost to Jesus Christ. People are not objects to win; they are persons to love and care for. Beginning with the initial pre-witness contact, the unredeemed need to see that we really care for them and for others. Our love must be demonstrated more than spoken. We must become their servants for Jesus' sake. This takes time. This is consuming. It is difficult, therefore, to have too great a number of persons with whom we are developing a caring relationship.

Evangelicals sometimes are unwilling to pay the price of caring for follow-up. New believers are "dumped" into the local church, told to attend meetings, and left to flounder. In many churches, so few give themselves to witnessing that those who do have more "babes" in Christ than they can care for. Others in the assembly watch, but do little about being models of caring and nurturing. Disciples are trained to care by using the same process suggested for developing witnesses.

*(iv) Community and interaction*

Nominal Roman Catholics have a strong sense of the church as an organisation, but have rarely experienced the church as a community. For many Protestants, "church" means a building. It is incumbent upon us that we involve the new believer in the family of God. He must experience the church as a body, the Body of Christ. The family values of culture must be shown to be satisfied in a new and greater dimension within the family of God. It is within the Body that the new believer should find love, help, individual attention, and opportunity for interaction. Small group fellowships within the body ought to furnish the "crib" in which the babe finds nurture, security, and caring love.

*(a) Relationship to family.*

The webs of family relationships need to be strengthened, rather than broken, when the nominal Roman Catholic commits his life to Christ. Efforts to reach, love, and involve the other members of the new believer's family must be pursued. "You and your house" is a New Testament example to be followed, and the individual must accept and be grateful that God has chosen him to be the first link in a chain of conversions within his family of blood-relatives. We need to seek to win the individual who is head of the household (usually the man). The, others will more readily follow.

*(b) Relationship to church.*

Whether or not the new follower of Christ should leave the Roman Catholic Church and join a Protestant church is a question that is debated with great concern among Evangelicals. Three positions surfaced during our discussions.

*(1) Remain in the Roman Catholic Church.*

The proponents of this position believe that those born again in Roman Catholic Churches are the precious seed for a spiritual renewal in that church. This is, they contend, a model for evangelizing Roman Catholics. To reach the Roman Catholics, the method must be to evangelize from within the church, with the encouragement and assistance of the Evangelicals.

*(2) Leave the Roman Catholic Church.*

Some participants strongly urged a clear position regarding church membership for born again Catholics. They believe that Evangelicals should encourage them to leave the Roman Catholic Church for Evangelical churches, for their spiritual growth and effective witness. It was pointed out that, in countries where this position is held, tremendous church growth has been experienced.

*(3) The mediating position.*

A third option was offered by other participants. The Word of God should be taught and the Holy Spirit trusted to accomplish his work. The individual makes his own decision whether, or when, to leave.

It was pointed out that these diverse strategies are influenced by the particular political-economic-social, religious conditions of the country. It must also be recognised that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world; and like the wind, "blows wherever it pleases." He moves in many wonderful ways in the world, so that many will be saved.

*(c) A New Testament model of church association.*

In prayerfully considering this issue, it is important to seek guidance from the Lord by examining biblical models of church association.

The situation of the Roman Catholic who was a nominal Christian and as a result of the proclamation of the gospel is regenerated, is very similar to the Israelite in the Temple at Jerusalem, or the synagogue at Berea. His Jewish background made him familiar with the coming of Messiah. When introduced to Christ through evangelistic preaching or teaching, some of the Israelites responded and accepted Christ. What did they decide regarding relationship with their traditional religion and its forms? We find they actually made two different decisions.

From a reading of early Christian history in the book of Acts, it is obvious that the Apostles and thousands of disciples remained for a while in the Temple participating in its religious forms. However, when their peers rejected the gospel (which the Temple worship claimed to look for and believe in), the new believers left their traditional place of worship and its forms and established new assemblies and worship forms. At first they gave a witness within it, and then they bore a witness from without. This same experience and result is demonstrated in Antioch, Pisidia, Lystra, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.

It is to be noted that when the gospel was rejected in their traditional religious associations, they did not compromise their new light of the gospel for the sake of religious unity and harmony with a position that denied the completeness and finality of the person and work of Christ. They left and formed new assemblies or churches.

In some cases, as the new believers bore a witness in their traditional synagogues, the result was that the whole synagogue group responded and thus they did not have to leave in order to form a new fellowship committed to the gospel. This possibly happened at Berea. It was rare, but it did

happen.

Historically, during the days of the Reformation, whole Roman Catholic congregations and, in some cases, whole Roman Catholic dioceses embraced the Evangelical faith. However, they did ultimately sever their relationship with larger parts of the church and formed new vehicles of fellowship and partnership.

With these precedents, we can glean some principles to guiding our evangelization of people.

- (1) Regenerated persons will desire fellowship with other regenerated persons, just as did the regenerated Jews who continued daily with the apostles and the disciples. The regenerated person who is a nominal Christian Roman Catholic will continue with those who reach him.
- (2) Evangelize those who are in traditional churches and associations. The best way to see more nominal Christians regenerated is for the evangelist to teach new converts to witness to those in their circle of influence. Regenerated Roman Catholics may have an effective witness to other Roman Catholics during the period of their new experience.
- (3) Opposition to the witness will take place. Ultimately the new convert's own church will oppose him; but the circle of regenerated persons will increase. Opposition will necessitate forming new churches.
- (4) Form new churches when the group is large enough to withstand the old culture and when spiritual gifts are discernible. Paul followed this procedure among the Gentiles. In Acts 14 it was months after their conversion that he returned to ordain elders.
- (5) During this waiting period, there is the possibility (although many consider it doubtful) that a whole Roman Catholic parish or diocese could respond to the gospel. This did happen in the Reformation-it may happen again.

*(d) Principles for determining church association.*

To tell the person what the "correct" answer should be is to defeat the spiritual goal of teaching the believer to know God's will and to learn to make biblically correct moral choices. To tell him what he should do is to denude him of much of the joy of walking in the Holy Spirit. It is likely to demonstrate that we, ourselves, have little or no trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the guide.

This does not mean that we must avoid the subject of what church the believer is to attend. It does mean, however, that we give the person the biblical principles of making a right choice in the matter. Among the criteria given to help the person to know how to decide should be:

- (1) *Growth.* "Am I growing and being spiritually nurtured where I am at present a church member? If I bring new believers to my church, will they grow?" (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Pet. 3:18).
- (2) *Instruction.* "Is the Word of God, the Bible, the basis of teaching and preaching where I am at present a member?" (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Rom. 10:17).
- (3) *Worship.* "Am I stimulated in my worship of God? Am I able to participate in prayer and praise of the Lord, or am I relegated to being only a spectator?" (Luke 4:8; Acts 2:42-47; Col. 3:16).
- (4) *Fellowship.* "Am I able to participate and share in the life of my fellow-believers, and are they willing to participate in my life for mutual encouragement and edification?" (Heb. 10:24, 25; 1 John 1:3).
- (5) *Witness.* "Am I being encouraged and enabled to witness for Christ?" (1 Pet. 3:15; 1 Cor. 9:16)
- (6) *Examples (Models).* "Are the leaders of my church exemplary in their Christian life-style and commitment?" (1 Cor. 4:1, 2, 16; 1 Tim. 3:2-6, 4:12, 6:11,12).

*(e) Conclusions*

After a person has been regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit through faith in the powerful work of God, it takes time for conscience to change and all his former concepts to become adjusted to a biblical understanding. Freedom to remain associated with his traditional church and practise needs to be granted. Scripture as well as history demonstrates that time will take care of the problem. God's Word will direct the person into a biblical experience of identification with other regenerated persons.

(v) *Practical application and solutions.* Modern man has lost the ability to cope. Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics tend to believe that they have "tried" Christianity and found it to be inadequate in meeting their needs for daily living. Clear answers for coping must be given. God's Word is relevant to man's needs. God has given us his written expression of love and concern. He purposes to be involved in all the details of daily living. Reading and knowing God's Word does not necessarily enable us to cope. Coping comes through application of the Word. *Application* must be linked with *schedule* and *time priority* so that it is transformed into *action*. Hearers must become doers of the Word. Doers find that God is adequate.

*(a) Careful students of the Word are needed* Individuals need to demonstrate that God is adequate. Knowledge of God's Word gives wisdom to discern and decide. The word *orthotomeo* (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15, "correctly handling") is used in the Septuagint (cf. Prov. 3:6 and 11:5) in the sense of directing one's path or way. God's approved workman (and each of his children is a workman) is the one who acts, who decides, who copes with life in accordance to the Word. That man will plow a straight path (*orthotomeo*) through life. The Word of God will be the cutting edge of all he thinks, says, and does.

Small group Bible studies within the local church present one of the best means of supplying opportunities for interaction and growth (change in character and conduct). Whatever method of studying God's Word one chooses, each lesson ought to conclude with *action*. Studies that bring both teacher and student to personalize the intent of Scripture will encourage discernment and growth. Personalization is fostered by formulating a measurable application that will be acted upon (if possible) within the following seven-day period.

Hearers of the Word of God become doers when the Word is personalized. We would suggest a simple method for getting the Word into action. Both teacher and student should conclude their study in silence, writing out measurable answers to the following questions:

What does God wish me to do in applying this passage?

- To what specific action is God calling me?
- To whom is my action directed? List the specific name(s) of the individual(s)
- When will I do it (on what day of the next seven)?
- Whom will I allow to hold me accountable to accomplish what I purpose?

Scripture studied in such a manner will lead God's workman along a path of approval, and will enable him to demonstrate that Christianity meets life's basic needs.

*(b) The caring church and committed Christians demonstrate God's adequacy.* (1 Thess. 1:2-10, 2:13, 14, 5:1-12)

The young church in Thessalonica is a fine example of what the community of Christ needs to be. They turned from their idolatrous, ungodly ways to serve the living God. Their service was exemplified in a labour of love. They worked hard at loving. They put their faith to work. They let God's Word work in and through them. They served God not only among the brethren, but also among the unbelievers outside the Body of Christ (chapter 3:9-12 and 5:14,15). This is what God intends the church to be. This kind of church will successfully penetrate its community. These kinds of Christians will show the world in concrete actions what Christ is all about. Such a church will not allow itself to be confined to a Christian ghetto, where almost all relationships are with Christians. It will risk breaking with tradition and will put Christians where they ought to be-in the world,

even though they are not of the world. A few examples by which this might be accomplished are as follows:

*The Sunday meeting schedule could be altered once a month in order to allow the entire church congregation to meet for prayer and then go out, either as a body or by twos, and witness to the unsaved during the hour when most are at home or out in public places.*

*Christians need to increase in hospitality.* Every Christian family ought to have at least two unredeemed families with whom they have close friendship and a caring relationship. Christians must identify and meet the needs of these non-Christian friends. Blocks of priority time need to be given to them, as friends, but the Christians should always be ready to present the claims of Christ if the occasion materialises. Christian homes need to be open to those outside the Body of Christ, but opened in a way that makes the non-Christian feel accepted and unthreatened. This demands hard work—a labour of love. Perhaps the church might omit one Sunday evening meeting a month, so that each family could use the time for having unsaved friends in their homes. Single people could invite singles or families.

Each local church ought to give a *regular time priority to meeting some need within its community*: distribute food and clothing to the needy, sending out all members of the church to aid in this distribution. Material help ought to be given without obligation, but always in the name of the Christian community with love. A community clean-up day could be scheduled. The sick could be ministered to. Mothers could periodically baby-sit for the unsaved. Clothes could be washed, meals could be prepared. The church must open its eyes to needs around it and outside of it. Such social action must be kept in the context of all the other priorities that God demands of his church, but it must not be omitted.

Whatever strategy is developed, it is important that we allow *needs* to determine our programme. A review of the statistics reveal how little we have accomplished in Catholic lands since the days of the Reformation. Our success in reaching the lost among Roman Catholics has been limited. We have a long way to go and radically new strategies are required, if we are to convince nominal Christians among Roman Catholics that we have a viable faith to offer.

As Alcebiades Vasconcelos of Brazil noted in his study prepared for this Consultation, our situation is similar to the person who finds a dog chewing on a bone, thinking it is nourishing his body. If he attempts to take away the bone, the dog will attack him. But if the dog is offered a piece of meat, he will readily drop the bone and accept the meat being offered.

Love that does not attack, and a message that offers the true meat of eternal life, will find many hungry recipients.

### *B. Examples of Effective Strategies*

The participants recognised the methodological diversities used by Evangelicals engaged in evangelizing nominal Christians among Roman Catholics. As case after case was shared, we were awed by the creativity of God's Spirit as he leads his people in response to unique circumstances. Many methods and strategies were shaped by political, economic, and social conditions of each particular country. It was felt that one must be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and flexible as to the method that will best meet the need and effectively penetrate the bastions of spiritual resistance. The methods that follow are not being utilized by all members of our group. Some are controversial, but we have included them in order to show the latitude of methods being used by members of the Body of Christ. What follows is to serve as examples, rather than as normative models, and should be adopted only when deemed appropriate.

#### *(i) Saturation evangelism in Brazil*

*Barriers and bridges*—Brazil is a predominantly Roman Catholic country although spiritism is the fastest-growing religion and pervades all levels of society. Many Evangelicals in Brazil feel that the Roman Catholic Church cannot be considered a Christian church, but rather a Christo-pagan syncretism. The complex socio-political reality of this diverse land is beyond the scope of this description, but contributes to the great spiritual hunger of its people.

*Strategy*—In sensitivity to God's direction, Evangelicals have utilized many forms of saturation evangelism with the mass media and church activities. These include Scripture distribution, radio and television programmes, newspapers, magazines, Bible correspondence courses, preaching, crusades, and visitation. Undergirding the success of these strategies is the indispensable element of fervent prayer. While these are not unique strategies for reaching nominal Roman Catholics, they are readily adapted to this situation with a content designed to reach Brazilian Roman Catholics in terms of their felt needs. The large evangelical church in Brazil is due mainly to the results of these types of ministry.

*Application elsewhere*—These traditional methods of saturation evangelization are used almost universally in evangelical outreach. Because of their wide popularity and use, we have not dealt extensively with them here. We do affirm, however, that these methods have undoubtedly played a major part in the conversion of Roman Catholics world-wide.

Care must be taken to measure the effectiveness of the mass media efforts to ensure that they communicate meaningfully with the target audience.

Saturation evangelization is often promoted by para-church organisations, which sometimes seem to be disconnected from local congregations. Care must be taken to ensure adequate follow-up and discipling of new converts in the context of a Christian community. Saturation evangelization is often limited to those with ample financial resources and professional staff. Where these resources are not available locally, it may lead to dependence on financing and control that is not sensitive to the local needs.

#### *(ii) Upper class ladies of Quito, Ecuador*

*Barriers and bridges*—Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is a city of 750,000 which still maintains a colonial flavor. Strong social ties exist among the cultured upper class. For most of these, Roman Catholicism, the dominant religion, is a social obligation rather than a meaningful relationship with God. It is not socially acceptable for them to attend an Evangelical church, most of which are among the poor. The Bible is readily available, but many consider it beyond their ability to understand, giving it an almost magical quality. With their ignorance of the Bible, there is a good deal of curiosity about it and an openness to study it. Modernization and industrialization have put a great strain on upper class families. The economic, social, and political pressures are intense. Marital unfaithfulness and divorce are common, as are drugs and psychological problems among children.

*Strategy*—A group of some 80 upper class Roman Catholic women studied the Bible regularly for six months. The meetings were held in the Chamber of Commerce, which was secured in answer to specific prayer. The series of basic studies required each lady to do several hours of personal study prior to the biweekly meetings. They met in small groups of ten to share what they had discovered. The second part of the meeting was a plenary lecture in which the central truths were clarified and affirmed. Leaders of the small groups, some of whom were Roman Catholic Christians, met together prior to the meetings to study the materials and pray individually for each participant. The choice of a socially acceptable neutral location and the presence of Roman Catholics as group leaders eliminated the problem of attending an "Evangelical" meeting. Evangelical group leaders were carefully instructed to avoid criticizing the Roman Catholic Church or persuading participants to leave it. Rather they were encouraged to allow the Holy Spirit to work through the ministry of the Word. Several of the ladies have indicated a deep interest in spiritual things and have sought counsel with the study leaders on family problems. The group has insisted on continuing with a second series of studies, while repeating the initial series for others who are interested.

*Application elsewhere*—There are strategic questions that must be resolved. Is it valid for the Bible study to be a supplement for ladies with an ongoing commitment to the Roman Catholic Church? If one feels they must leave their church, the timing of that change will be crucial, given the high social pressure against such change. An alternative Evangelical church must be found that will meet their special needs. Leaders must take advantage of opportunities to build personal relations with participants and relate to them socially. They must be available for counselling in family crises.

In our zeal to avoid unnecessary obstacles, we must not use deceit to hide our identity as Evangelicals.

How does one reach the men? They may respond to a similar program directed to them, or to Bible studies for couples.

*(iii) Suburban families in Southern Italy*

**Barriers and bridges**—Like most Latins, southern Italians place high importance on social gatherings and festivals. They are especially loyal to their family. Luigi Barzini, a leading authority on Italian life and culture, says that it is neither politics nor the church but rather the family which provides the only cohesive force for Italy today. Historically, Evangelicals have not made a great progress in Italy. One reason may be their emphasis on individualistic salvation which has not been family-oriented. If our evangelism in Italy is going to result in the establishment of churches, then we must go after the family. This also means the extended family. One of the largest Evangelical churches in Italy has about 700 in regular attendance. It is composed of six or seven basic families.

**Strategy**—One church was started in a suburb of a large city in southern Italy through a tent campaign. During a period of ten days, a team of workers from various churches saturated the area with publicity. They put particular emphasis on the children who came to the tent. The team asked the children to invite their parents, because each night the children had some part in the program. The team *prayed much* that God would prepare the hearts of the people—especially those who could be influential in their families. Out of all those who confessed Christ during the campaign, one man seemed particularly promising. He was encouraged to tell others and particularly those of his own family. One-by-one, he brought each member of his family to Jesus Christ. He also led some close friends to the Lord. This began another chain reaction. In one year, 31 persons obeyed the Lord's command to be baptized.

Seeing the need to keep the church centred on family relationships, and seeing the importance of social gatherings and festivals, the church planter encouraged a little festival at the home of one of the believers on the occasion of his baptism. Very often, when baptisms were held outside, it would be an occasion for a picnic by the entire church. Once a month, the young people had a party to celebrate the birthdays of all those birthdays that fell in the month.

Recently the church has begun a program of "apartment building evangelism." Each family in a building invites all the other families in that building to attend a three-week Bible study. At the end of that time, the family is invited to continue the Bible study if they wish to do so. The family is invited to the church fellowship after the first series of Bible studies. They may make a public declaration of their faith in Christ at that time or during the Bible study.

Five years after the campaign, there are 52 baptized believers with about 100 in attendance. On the street where the church is located—a street 400 meters long—there are now nine families which attend the church.

**Application elsewhere**—How do you encourage a new convert to be actively involved in witnessing to his family? How do you get a church built on family relationships to reach unrelated new people who are unchurched? What role can child evangelism have in reaching the entire family?

*(iv) Guatemalan Indian Community*

**Barriers and bridges**—Roman Catholicism is the official religion of Guatemala. However, only twenty percent are practising Roman Catholics and not many of them attend mass regularly. The religious practices of the people are largely motivated by fear. The threat of purgatory and excommunication keeps many among the masses in submission to the guidance of the church. One of the largest barriers facing Evangelicals in many of the rural areas of Guatemala is the common notion that they are heretics and, therefore, any contact with them should be avoided. Vital to overcoming this barrier is demonstrating the credibility of the evangelical faith. Evangelicals need to demonstrate the love of God to a people who have no assurance of salvation and who only see God as One who is to be feared. In particularly resistant areas this may mean carrying on social concern for years before people are ready to respond to the proclamation of the gospel.

**Strategy**—In 1970 two doctors, a husband and wife, moved with their family to Nahuala, a strong Indian community. It was difficult for them at first to find a place to rent because the Nahualans did not like strangers, especially Evangelicals. In order to establish credibility, they opened a clinic and learned the tribal dialect, even though the people had basic understanding of Spanish. They demonstrated the love of God by indiscriminately giving medical care without expecting anything in return. Their children proved to be vital bridges into the homes of the people as they made friends with the other children. As this family continued to minister to the health needs and serve the community daily in practical ways, the Nahualans became receptive to the gospel. The Lord called this family, after seven years of labor, to minister elsewhere, leaving behind a growing church of baptized believers.

**Application elsewhere**—Be prepared to respond quickly to national and personal tragedy (greater opportunities for the gospel have been opened as a consequence of the Evangelical response to meeting basic needs of Guatemala after the 1976 earthquake). Be sensitive to what the Lord has called you to, in a ministry of social compassion (how long, to whom, what services).

At what stage do you present the gospel to a person receiving assistance?

*(v) Middle class workers in Spain*

**Barriers and bridges**—It is estimated that only 15% of Spaniards attend the Roman Catholic Church, and most of the others are indifferent to religious matters. Many are anti-clerical atheists. Reports indicate that young workers as well as the university students are against the church. Spaniards keep a religious background, while looking in other directions for solutions. Spain is a country prepared for the gospel today. It is into this spiritual vacuum that Evangelicals have entered. Even though there has been some success in evangelism (especially among the lower class), Evangelical Christianity is seen as a foreign cult. It is believed that to become an Evangelical is to renounce the Latin culture and to accept Protestant ideas from the Anglo-Saxon world. Most Spaniards believe that Evangelical Christianity is not relevant to the issues and problems of everyday life.

**Strategy**—In order to reach Spaniards for Christ, one evangelist developed a strategy that has been particularly successful among the middle class. His plan has been to *demonstrate the relevancy of the gospel* by using the mass media and by giving lectures on topics of special concern to his audience—such as marriage, divorce, youth and drugs. He often takes opportunities to lecture in public locations, to write in public newspapers and magazines, even though he may not always be permitted to use a Bible or present any Evangelical doctrine whatsoever. For example, he asked the mayor of Sevilla (a city of one million people) for permission to use a town hall to give two lectures. These lectures were advertised as discourses on the writing of two respected Spanish poets, Antonio Machado and Geraldo Diego. Along with discussing various themes from their writings, the lecturer revealed that these poets were believers in God, even though they were disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church. His purpose was to prove to his audience that genuine faith in God is not something foreign, but that respected Spanish intellectuals could believe in God. At the end of the second lecture, the evangelist gave the addresses of the nearby Protestant churches to those in the audience interested in learning more about God and the gospel. At other times, he uses the Bible in his lecture and the mass media communications. He, then, clearly presents the gospel and demonstrates how the Bible offers solutions to the problems of life. He is careful to make sure that each person indicating interest is given personal attention and that those who respond to the gospel are incorporated into a church in God's timing.

The results of this style of ministry have been fruitful. Using the methods, in conjunction with others, he has planned 16 churches during the past 14 years.

**Application elsewhere**—When using mass media methods, be careful to follow up respondents not simply with correspondence and literature but with personal contact with other Christians and a church. Design programmes that are relevant to the felt needs of your audience. Present the gospel according to the principles of Colossians 4:2-6.

*(vi) Poland*

**Barriers and bridges**—Eighty-five percent of Poland's 35 million people are Roman Catholic, although there are strong atheistic and secular forces in the society. The Evangelical church is small, but many of its leaders are respected as serious Bible scholars and examples of living faith. The pressures of atheism and secularism on both the Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches have promoted an openness between them, cordial

relations, and often common concerns for ministry. Evangelicals have small facilities which cannot accommodate united meetings or special events.

*Strategy*—In response to invitations from Roman Catholic leaders, the Evangelical pastors often teach and preach in Roman Catholic Churches. They have ample freedom to preach evangelistic messages. On one occasion, after such a service, the priest told the pastor, "What we want from you is the living gospel from a man with living faith." In addition, joint meetings and special events, such as Billy Graham's crusade, are held in Roman Catholic Churches with many Roman Catholics attending. Often Roman Catholics who are converted do not leave their church because Evangelical congregations are so few. Normally they become involved with one of the renewal movements within the Roman Catholic Church. Others leave and are swelling the ranks of Evangelical churches. On occasion, Roman Catholic priests are invited to speak in Evangelical churches. Evangelical leaders have found their messages to be evangelistic and true to the Word of God.

*Application elsewhere*—

(a) What are common problems facing both Catholics and Evangelicals which could make this strategy useful in other countries where the Roman Catholic Church is the dominant church?

(b) How far can Evangelical pastors participate in the Catholic liturgy without becoming identified with an unacceptable doctrinal position?

(vii) *Upper middle class Filipino*

*Barriers and bridges*—Since the second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has encouraged its members to study the Bible. This has resulted in a tremendous openness of Roman Catholics in the Philippines to Bible studies. Even though they are spiritually hungry they still face a stigma in going to an Evangelical church. Homes and offices provide an ideal atmosphere for Roman Catholic nominal Christians to put their hearts at rest. Preconceived misconceptions as to the untrustworthiness of Evangelicals are dealt with in a natural setting where relatives and friends carry out a caring ministry to meet the needs of one another. The home Bible study offers ample time to build up genuine friendship that leads to mutual trust. In such a Bible study encounter, the Christians become the message in word and deed. This prepares the way for the nominal Christian to receive divine illumination as he studies God's Word.

*Strategy*—A topical Bible study is prayerfully started in a neighbourhood. A group of concerned Christians organise the study within their kinship and friendship network. A home, generally belonging to a Christian, is selected as the meeting place. In other neighbourhoods, the meeting place changes each week from one family's home to the next. Invitations are normally by word of mouth. The leader is not normally the host of the Bible study. This ensures freedom of discussion and maximizes participation from every member of the group. He is not to preach but to moderate the discussion. He gently guides participants to discover for themselves what the Bible says concerning the topic. During the Bible study a simple question-and-answer method is used. Participants are encouraged to ask questions, and the leader points them to the text. The participant is asked to read the text, to explain it in his own understanding, and when necessary, is aided by the leader and the other Christians in the group to a proper understanding of the text. In this way, God speaks to the participants directly and discloses his love for them where they are. The Bible is the only text and the objective authority. It is the framework of the discussion. The group doesn't study church membership or religious dogmas. Christ is the central subject. Then, at the end of the study, a presentation of the gospel and a prayer for the needs of participants are given. The Bible study is combined with socials and fellowships. Because the Bible study itself often evolves into a Christian community, integration into Evangelical churches of the new Christians, if desired, becomes very natural. Bible studies work in all strata of the Filipino society but most especially among the middle and upper income groups.

*Application elsewhere*—How do you prepare your Bible study leaders so that they become good moderators who keep the group from wandering from the text, keep the more expressive individuals from monopolizing the discussion, encourage the less aggressive members to enter into the discussion, co-ordinate personal follow-up and discipleship of those who come to saving faith in Christ?

How does a church co-ordinate the various Bible study groups so that there is not a conflict of interest between groups (for example: several Bible studies on the same night as choir practice)?

(viii) *A life-related, holistic gospel in Latin America*

Reference was made earlier to the feeling within the Roman Catholic Church that too much emphasis has been placed upon the hereafter. As a consequence, many nominal Roman Catholics are looking for a message that speaks to issues, aches, and problems of daily life.

That quest does not preclude recognition of the supernatural. Indeed, miraculous intervention of the saints and the Virgin are accepted and even expected by many non-practising Roman Catholics. Stripped of its superstitious and unscriptural elements, their perception is that the gospel should involve God's intervention here and now.

In that situation, Evangelicals need to take seriously the work of the Holy Spirit and to present the gospel in the joyous expectation of God's intervention in human affairs. The biblical God who works and cares must be shown in the concerns of daily life.

Pentecostal Christians in many parts of Latin America, in particular, report an overwhelming response to a healing ministry that meets the felt needs of people. This probably contributes to their phenomenal growth in that region.

In the same area of the world, Evangelicals may discover some important principles from the experience of a cultic group that offers to potential followers practical solutions to life's problems.

In Colombia, that group uses, as a bridge, a television programme in which it presents the problems, solutions, and adventures of a family. Viewers can readily identify with its daily trials, its life-style, and relationships between husband and wife and parents and children. The spiritual dimension is introduced against that life-related backdrop.

In the cult's door-to-door work, its missionaries ask if those in the home have viewed the programme. On receiving an affirmative response, the visitors say, "We are from the same church as the family in that programme. We'd like to talk over with you the questions and problems which that family and yours encounter."

That procedure assumes an intimate acquaintance with the real-life situations and the culture of those we are attempting to reach.

#### Appendix A:

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#### Appendix C:

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