

# EVANGELISM VS. PROSELYTISM – WARNING!

The words to proselytize are not found in the Bible. Four times people are called *proselytes*, referring in general to a convert.

To proselytize is an English transliteration of a Greek word *proselytos* that has gone through several definitions and now mainly refers to converting someone from one religious faith to another. In social, political, and of recent, in religious circles, it has taken on objectionable qualities, making it now a serious issue.

In 1975 Professor Carl Lawrenz from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was commissioned by his church to study proselytism. His report was entitled *A Definitive Study of Proselytizing*.<sup>[1]</sup> Surprisingly, he concluded that a pastor of a “Christian church” should not interfere with a pastor or his members of another “Christian church” (even if non-orthodox) in any corrective or shepherding way, though that pastor might be teaching false doctrines. That would be, he said, *alotriepiskopus* or “meddling,” as noted in I Peter 4:15. There, it is listed along with other serious sins such as murder and theft. He concluded in this supposed scholarly article that that would be acting as a “busybody” in other men’s matters. Lawrenz then quoted Martin Luther from his *Lectures on Galatians*:

“So today we still call the Church of Rome holy and all its sees holy, even though they have been undermined and their ministers are ungodly. For God ‘rules in the midst of his foes’ (Ps 110:2), antichrist ‘takes his seat in the temple of God’ (2 Th 2:4), and Satan is present among the sons of God (Job 1:6). Even if the church is ‘in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,’ as Paul says to the Philippians (2:15), and even if it is surrounded by wolves and robbers, that is, spiritual tyrants, it is still the church. Although the city of Rome is worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, nevertheless there remain in it baptism, the Sacrament, the voice and text of the Gospel, the Sacred Scriptures, the name of Christ, and the name of God. Whoever has these has them; whoever does not have them, has no excuse, for the treasure is still there. Therefore the Church of Rome is holy because it has the holy name of God, the Gospel, baptism, etc.”

Sound far out? Professor Lawrenz didn’t think so. He concluded:

“On the basis of these considerations we cannot approach an active member even of the Roman Catholic church as though he were an unchurched heathen and as though he had no relation to a Christian ministry, no matter how great our fears may be about his faith and his salvation because of the horrendous errors by which he is being tyrannized in his heterodox church and by its ministry.”

He continued: One can share “judiciously and carefully” their Christian testimony in social work, leisure or travel settings. But – “visiting members of Christian congregations of another denomination with the intention of persuading them to leave that congregation is forbidden; for a pastor or any other Christian has no right to break into the flock of another.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Two years ago (November 2001) a large contingency of pastors in Chicago, calling themselves *The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago*, wrote a letter to the then President of the Southern Baptist Convention, Paige Patteron, to curtail a planned evangelistic campaign. The Baptists had organized 100,000 evangelists to penetrate the Chicago area. Those plans, the council said, would interfere with interfaith dialogue and might even encourage violence.<sup>[3]</sup>

Immediately, the Baptists cried, “censorship” and “intolerance” and told the Dallas Morning News that their religious liberty rights were being threatened. They then spearheaded the formulation of a major document

called the *Chicago Declaration*, which was signed by many denominations and Christian agencies opposing the Chicago council's resistance. What happened to the 100,000 evangelists? They never went to Chicago. Only a simple outreach program was conducted by a few people. The Baptists were told they could not *proselytize*.

What Carl Lawrenz said over 25 years ago to the Lutheran Church is a crescendoing issue today all over the world. In the last two decades the Catholic Church has been pushing this also. This year they openly stated proselytizing is a *moral issue* religious leaders must address. *Evangelism* would be acceptable but *proselytism* is "meddling" in another's religion.

Talking about Jesus is "in." Trying to convert to another Christian religion is "out."

In May Catholic Archbishop John Vlazny of Oregon said:

"People often confuse the call to evangelize with the strategy to proselytize. When we proselytize we are actively seeking to increase membership in our own church community. But when we evangelize we spread the good news in word and deed so that God's reign will sanctify and transform the world. Certainly if our efforts to evangelize result in an increase in church membership, we won't complain. In fact, in order that we might be a more effective evangelizing church, we have acknowledged that we need to be more welcoming to strangers, newcomers and the unchurched."[\[4\]](#)

At the same time that Vlazny spoke out, the Archdiocese of Cleveland published a pamphlet "for Catholics," illustrating proselytizing by describing a Jehovah Witness, a Mormon or a Seventh-day Adventist knocking on "your door on Saturday morning." They emphasized that Catholics evangelize but don't proselytize.[\[5\]](#)

This matter is being pushed further as a social issue by a book that was recently published called *Second Exodus Evangelization*. It tells Catholics how to evangelize and "avoid" proselytizing. What does it say? Radiate the testimony of being a Catholic to Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Atheists, Freemasons, Liberals and New Agers. Tell them that only the Catholic Church has Christ's direct authority and can prepare them for eternal life. Demolish the Protestant doctrines of *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide*. Realize that as you testify, you are joining "God's forces in an epic war against Satan's forces."[\[6\]](#)

What is this duplicit message saying? No church or other religious body can proselytize, but Catholics can. In fact, in June, Maria Jose' Ciaurriz, a "Catholic legal expert" (professor of ecclesiastical law at Madrid's Natural University of Long-Distance Education) was interviewed by the Vatican News Service about "Proselytism or Evangelization."

This is what was reported of that dialogue:

"MADRID, Spain, June 10, 2003 –For Maria Jose' Ciaurriz, 'to evangelize is a legitimate act of proselytism....'

"Ciaurriz is the author of 'The Right to Proselytize in the Framework of Religious Liberty,' published by the Center of Political and Constitutional Studies. In her book, the author defines religious liberty as the framework within which to exercise *the right* to proselytize, and analyzes the right to proselytize in relation to confessions and states."

Ciaurriz then concluded that proselytizing is a *legitimate religious liberty right* just so it is not accompanied by coercion. What is coercion? What religious “sects” are doing in Latin America, as an example, making Protestants out of Catholics.<sup>[7]</sup> That is Protestant proselytizing.

Is all this a concern to the Vatican? Repeatedly Pope John Paul II has been speaking out for nearly two years to make a “New effort to curb ‘sects’ in Latin America.”<sup>[8]</sup> Recently, this was reported:

“During the plenary meeting of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America in March, the proliferation of sects on that continent remained a key issue throughout the week. The Pope asked those participating: ‘Is not the phenomenon of sects, which also in your lands is spreading intermittently from area to area and with accentuated signs of proselytism among socially and culturally weaker people, a concrete sign of an unsatisfied aspiration to the supernatural? ...

“Speaking to the commission ... John Paul II also offered keys ‘to address with determination the grave and insidious problem of sect.’<sup>[9]</sup>

Who are those sects? Evangelicals and Pentecostals – specifically Assembly of God and Church of God are mentioned. Many Protestant churches have been reaping a rich harvest of converts in both Latin and South America for over a decade.

As noted last month under the ecumenical umbrella and the rubric of “Christianity,” growing forces are projecting subliminal guilt on any church or religious body that is not within a defined witnessing “standard.” Passive neglect of this strengthening cultural trend will find many unready to effectively resist.

Be prepared for opposition. To those who cherish sharing their faith and honor their religious heritage, resistance will be experienced.

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., M.D.  
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## **References:**

- <sup>[1]</sup> <http://www.wls.wels.net/library/Essays/Authors/L/LawrenzDefinitive/LawrenzDefinitive.htm>
- <sup>[2]</sup> John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 65 as quoted by Lorenz above (Ref. #1).
- <sup>[3]</sup> [www.baptiststandard.com/2000/6\\_12/pages/chicago.html](http://www.baptiststandard.com/2000/6_12/pages/chicago.html)
- <sup>[4]</sup> *Catholic Sentinel*, Vol. 2003, No. 32, 2003-08-06.
- <sup>[5]</sup> [www.dioceseofcleveland.org/parishlife/welcome\\_brochure.htm](http://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/parishlife/welcome_brochure.htm)
- <sup>[6]</sup> [www.secondexodus.com/html/book/aboutthebook.html](http://www.secondexodus.com/html/book/aboutthebook.html)
- <sup>[7]</sup> Zenit June 10 & June 11, 2003.
- <sup>[8]</sup> [www.christianitytoday.com/global/pf.cgi?/ct/2001/116/56.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/global/pf.cgi?/ct/2001/116/56.0.html)
- <sup>[9]</sup> *Inside the Vatican*, August 2003.