

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*We should evangelize everyone: Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, pagans.*

*“Go out to all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching all that I have taught you; and know that I will be with you to the end of time.”*

*“Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you do not have life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.”*

*“Jesus Christ in Whom we live, move, and have our being.”*

*“Jesus, the only name in heaven and on earth by which man can be saved.”*

*“Believe and be baptized in the name of Jesus.”*

*“Always be ready to give a reasoned explanation of your faith in Christ, but do so with kindness and gentleness.”*

*Evangelization to my definition is to witness to Jesus as we Catholics know Him from Scripture and Tradition.*

*Everyone deserves to know Jesus and the fullness of the truth because **“they are people like me.”***

## Should We Evangelize Protestants?

By [Casey Chalk](#)  
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We should stop trying to evangelize Protestants, some Catholics say. “Let’s get our own house clean first, before we invite our fellow Christians in,” someone commented on a **recent article** of mine that presented a Catholic rejoinder to a **prominent Baptist theologian**. Another reader argued that, rather than trying to persuade Protestants to become Catholic, we should “help each other spread God’s love in this world that seems to be

falling to pieces before our eyes.” As a convert from Protestantism, actively engaged in ecumenical dialogue, I’ve heard this kind of thinking quite frequently. And it’s dead wrong.

One common argument in favor of scrapping Catholic evangelism towards Protestants is that the Catholic Church, mired in sex-abuse and corruption scandals, liturgical abuses, heretical movements, and uneven catechesis, is such a mess that it is not, at least for the moment, a place suitable for welcoming other Christians.

There are many problems with this. For starters, when has the Church *not* been plagued by internal crises? In the fourth century, a majority of bishops were deceived by the Arian heresy. The medieval Church suffered under the weight of simony and a lax priesthood, as well as the Avignon Papacy and the Western Schism, culminating in *three men* claiming, simultaneously, to be pope. The Counter-Reformation, for all its catechetical, missionary and aesthetic glories, was still marred by corruption and heresies (Jansenism). Catholicism has never been able to escape such trials. That didn’t stop St. Martin of Tours, St. Boniface, St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius Loyola, or St. Teresa of Calcutta from their missionary efforts.

The “Catholics clean house” argument also undermines our own theology. Is the Eucharist the “source and summit of the Christian life,” as *Lumen Gentium* preaches, or not? If it is, how could we in good conscience not direct other Christians to its salvific power? Jesus Himself declared: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have

no life in you.” (John 6:53) Was our Lord misrepresenting the Eucharist?

Or what of the fact that most Protestant churches allow contraception, a mortal sin? Or that Protestants have no recourse to the sacraments of penance or last rites? To claim Protestants aren't in need of these essential parts of the Catholic faith is to implicitly suggest we don't need them either.



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Moreover, in the generations since the Reformation, Rome has been able to win many Protestants back to the fold who have made incalculable contributions to the Church. St. John Henry Newman's conversion ushered in a Catholic revival in England, and gave us a robust

articulation of the concept of doctrinal development. The conversion of French Lutheran pastor Louis Bouyer influenced the teachings of Vatican II. Biblical scholar Scott Hahn's conversion in the 1980s revitalized lay study of Holy Scripture.

Another popular argument in favor of limiting evangelization of Protestants involves the culture war. Catholics and theologically conservative Protestants, some claim, share significant common ground on various issues: abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, euthanasia, religious freedom, etc. Secularism, the sexual revolution, and anti-religious progressives represent an existential threat to the survival of both Catholics and Protestants, and thus we must work together, not debate one another. "Let's hold back any criticism of them," a person commenting on my article wrote. "Believe me, in the times that we are in, we need to all hang together, or we will definitely hang separately on gallows outside our own churches."

This line of thought certainly has rhetorical force: we don't have the luxury of debating with Protestants when the progressivists are planning our imminent demise! Ecumenical debate is a distraction from self-preservation. One problem with this argument is that it reduces our Christian witness to a zero-sum game – we have to focus *all* our efforts on fighting secular progressivism, or we'll fail. Yet the Church has many missions in the public square – that Catholics invest great energy in the pro-life movement doesn't mean we shouldn't also focus our efforts on other important matters: health-care, education,

ensuring religious freedom, or fighting poverty and environmental degradation. All of these, in different ways, are a part of human flourishing. Even if we consider some questions more urgent than others, none of them should be ignored.

Besides, there is a vast difference between mere polemics and charitable, fruitful discussions aimed at resolving disagreements. The former can certainly cause bad blood. The latter, however, can actually foster unity and clarity regarding our purposes. Consider how much more fruitful our fight against the devastation of the sexual revolution would be if we persuaded Protestants that they need to reject things like contraception and the more permissive stance towards divorce that they have allowed to seep into their churches. Consider how non-Christians could learn from charitable ecumenical conversations that don't devolve into name-calling and vilification.

Finally, abandoning or minimizing the evangelizing of Protestants is to fail to recognize how their theological and philosophical premises have contributed to the very problems we now confront. As Brad Gregory's book *The Unintended Reformation* demonstrates, the very nature of Protestantism has contributed to the individualism, secularism, and moral relativism of our age. A crucial component to our Catholic witness, then, is helping Protestants to recognize this, since even when they have the best intentions, their very paradigm undermines their contributions to collaborating with us in the culture war.

I for one am very grateful that Catholics – many of them former Protestants – persuaded me to see the



problems inherent to Protestantism, and the indisputable truths of Catholicism. My salvation was at stake. I also found and married a devout Catholic woman, and am raising Catholic children. The Catholic tradition taught me how to pray, worship, and think in an entirely different way. It pains me to think what my life would be like if I hadn't converted to Catholicism.

Why bother to evangelize devout Protestants? Because they are people like me.

**\*Image:** *The Council of Trent* by Pasquale Cati, 1588 [Santa Maria Trastevere, Rome]

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