

Periodicals

A 2001 Barna Group survey found that the divorce rate among born-again Christians was 33 percent, about the same as the rate for the population as a whole. Twenty-five percent of the born-again Christians surveyed had lived with a member of the opposite sex outside marriage, not much different from the national average of 33 percent. And a recent study of 12,000 evangelical teenagers who took the “True Love Waits” pledge to postpone intercourse until marriage found that only 12 percent kept the promise. Indeed, a quarter of the most committed, “traditional” evangelicals and nearly half of “nontraditional” evangelicals tell pollsters they find premarital sex morally acceptable.

The biblical injunction to help the poor likewise gets short shrift from many evangelicals. They gave six percent of their income to charity in 1968 and, after decades of

growing affluence, only four percent in 2001. That’s better than the three percent given by mainline Protestants, but still much less than the biblical tithe of 10 percent.

Yet there’s evidence that religious commitment does lead to better behavior—though Sider laments that so many Christians still fall short. For example, the relatively few born-again Christians who strongly adhere to a biblical worldview are indeed “different”: Half of them did more than an hour of volunteer work for an organization serving the poor in the week before one recent poll, compared with only 22 percent of other Christians. “When we can distinguish nominal Christians from deeply committed, theologically orthodox Christians,” says Sider, “it is clear that genuine Christianity does lead to better behavior, at least in some areas.”

The Vatican’s Lost Monopoly

“The Economics of the Counter-Reformation: Incumbent-Firm Reaction to Market Entry” by Robert B. Ekelund, Jr., Robert F. Hebert, and Robert D. Tollison, in *Economic Inquiry* (Oct. 2004), Texas A&M Univ., Dept. of Economics, College Station, Texas 77843-4228.

When the Protestant Reformation began in the 16th century, it was as if a new business firm were seeking to gain a share of the religious market from an established monopoly. And in the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church responded just as monopolistic firms typically do—with a corporate reorganization plan. But the plan failed.

It’s enlightening to subject the whole episode to a business analysis, say economists Ekelund and Hebert, both of Auburn University, and Tollison, of Clemson University. The medieval Catholic Church had evolved from a vertically integrated firm into a powerful monopoly that sought returns from its properties and “sold assurances of eternal salvation and other religious services.” The church created and manipulated doctrine to increase revenues (virtually inventing purgatory, for instance, along with a system of indulgences whereby payments and other sacrifices could cut the time one posthumously had to serve in it). By the 16th century, the church had “sheared too much wool from the sheep.” Its doctrinal manipulations, complex reward and

punishment schemes, and monopoly price discrimination combined to push certain consumers to the limits of their demands for the Church’s product.” Hence the market opening for Protestantism, which made “‘all-or-none’ offers, using an uncomplicated pricing scheme.”

At the Council of Trent (1545–63), the church responded to the Reformation with public efforts “to lower the price (or increase the quality) of its services.” Among the proclaimed reforms: It limited the number of benefices (revenue-producing assets) each bishop could hold; established minimum competency requirements for the clergy; set penalties for concubinage and other abuses; prohibited bishops from selling rights and offices; eliminated charges for providing certain services; and “tried to institute quality control over the doctrine of Purgatory and the veneration of sacred relics, and to abolish ‘all evil traffic’ in indulgences.”

Such measures “permitted at least the advertised cleaning up of abuses at the retail level of Church organization,” actions that ap-



Pope Paul III convened the Council of Trent in 1545. It lasted until 1563, eliminating some of the more egregious abuses of the Catholic Church but failing to bring about the fundamental reorganization of the church's structure needed to meet the challenge of the Protestant Reformation.

parently slowed down defections.

Despite the outward appearance of reform, say the authors, the Council of Trent's measures "failed as a reorganization plan." "The [Vatican] bureaucracy, entrenched in its power for at least a century before the

Council of Trent, defied actual reform at the wholesale level of church organization." Nepotism, the sale of sacred offices, and other abuses continued behind the scenes. As a result, the powerful firm's monopoly was permanently lost.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

No Compromise

"Why Nature & Nurture Won't Go Away" by Steven Pinker, in *Daedalus* (Fall 2004), Norton's Woods, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

The question of what shapes human behavior has become such a highly charged political issue that many people are eager to wish it away. Everyone now knows that heredity and environment play an intertwined role, they argue, so let's just agree that the answer to the nature-nurture question is "some of each."

Bad idea, says Pinker, a psychologist at Harvard University. It's not even true that

everyone acknowledges the role of heredity in human behavior. Some scientists cling to the theory of the mind as a blank slate, and postmodern thinkers in the humanities insist that virtually all human emotions and behavioral categories are "socially constructed." More important, it's not true that "some of each" is always the proper answer. Environmental influences provide 100 percent of the explana-