

# Lines between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics slowly fading

By Richard N. Ostling  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics—the nation's two largest religious blocs—have a relationship that's been marked in the past by hostility and tension.

But now, almost 500 years after Martin Luther, one of the top U.S. evangelical thinkers has co-authored a book that finds an increasingly warm relationship between Catholics and evangelicals.

## Father's urgent request

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as he went the people thronged him.

What motivates Jarius's urgent request of Jesus is now apparent: his only daughter, perhaps his only child, is sick and is becoming steadily worse. Any loving father will do whatever he can to save the life of his little girl, and one can almost see Jarius pushing his way through the crowds that are pressing in on Jesus. When the need is most urgent, you will go to extreme measures to have that need met. It is apparently not easy for him to get close to Christ. Muscling and elbowing his way through the crowd undoubtedly draws dirty looks. But Jarius is focused. He does not stop until he has the Lord's attention and can make a plea on his daughter's behalf.

**Thought to Remember**  
Seek spiritual healing about all else.

"Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism" (Baker) by Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom argues that not only on contemporary political issues such as abortion but also on matters of spirituality Catholics and the Protestant conservatives have ever more in common.

Summarizing the situation, Noll—a historian at Wheaton College in Illinois—said in an interview that he sees "quite serious differences, but not differences of life and death as they were regarded for at least four centuries."

He believes three events in particular fostered harmony: Catholicism's Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which encouraged contacts with Protestants and abolished for good the papacy's one-time hostility toward democracy and freedom of conscience in religion.

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 liberal ruling on abortion, which provoked joint social activism, now reinforced by the same-sex marriage issue.

The 1978 election of Pope John Paul II, who became a hero to evangelicals for helping topple European Communism and for speaking effec-

tively on behalf of Christian tradition.

Other religious thinkers beyond Noll and Nystrom, a freelance writer who attends Noll's Presbyterian church, agree that the climate is warming.

"The admiration for John Paul II is simply astounding given (evangelicals') historic real hatred for the papacy," says William Shea of the College of the Holy Cross.

His 2004 work "The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America" (Oxford) parallels the Noll-Nystrom book from the Catholic side. If anything, he thinks, Pope Benedict XVI is closer to the evangelicals' outlook than John Paul II.

Even Michael S. Horton of Westminster Seminary California, an evangelical who remains sharply critical of Catholic theology, says that "the perceived cultural collapse of the West has become such an overwhelming preoccupation of conservative Catholics and Protestants that just about anything and everything else is on the back burner."

The political turnabout since the 1960 presidential campaign was neatly framed last year by religious right activist Gary Bauer:

"When John F. Kennedy made his famous speech that the Vatican would not tell him what to do, evangelicals and Southern Baptists breathed a sign of relief. But today evangelicals and

Southern Baptists are hoping that the Vatican will tell Catholic politicians what to do."

Though the culture wars command much of the media attention, Noll and Nystrom are more interested in spiritual links between the two groups, which combined make up more than half of all American churchgoers. A notable example: When the Rev. Billy Graham first preached in Cracow, Poland, the man who invited him was in Rome being elected Pope John Paul.

Meanwhile, on the official level, the Vatican and the U.S. Catholic bishops are much more engaged with the centrally organized "mainline" Protestant churches than the conservative evangelicals.

That increases the importance of unofficial talks, in particular "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," led by Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus of First Things magazine and prison evangelist Charles Colson. Participants have issued four joint statements (Noll endorsed the first two, while Horton was opposed) and are at work on a fifth.

Noll and Nystrom acknowledge that evangelicalism can be prickly and puzzling—a complex movement consisting of denominations, local congregations, independent organizations and individualistic leaders.

Like Noll, Shea thinks most Please see RELIGIOUS/6B

# Church activities

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register, call (803) 802-2565.

**August 28**  
Chappell Memorial will celebrate Men's Day with guest speaker, concert at 4 p.m.

"Men of Majesty: Serving Outside the Garden" will be this year's theme for the annual Men's Day celebration held on Sunday, Aug. 28, at Chappell Memorial Baptist Church.

The event will feature some of the region's most dynamic male groups. Although the event is free, each program participant is asked to donate a canned-good or non-perishable item to the church's Food Pantry to benefit and feed those in need.

Rev. Reginald Flynn, pastor of Temple Zion Baptist Church, in Columbia, S.C. and founder of the Nehemiah Project Inc.—a faith-based, non-profit, community renewal and housing development initiative—will serve as the 11 a.m. guest speaker. A special Men's Day Choir also will perform.

October 15

Gospel Music Day is back in the 2nd year at Paramount's Carowinds. This year's festival includes artists Tonex, J Moss and Stephen Hurd. Grammy nominated artist and gospel sensation Tonex will headline this fall's event. Tonex's latest release Out of the Box has garnered a Grammy nomination as well as six 2005 Stellar Awards. Appearing before Tonex is Detroit-raised artist J Moss whose album The J Moss Project garnered him several Dove award and Soul Train nominations. Also appearing on the lineup is music minister and Integrity Gospel recording artist Stephen Hurd.

Paramount's Carowinds will be open from 10am to 8pm. Gospel Music Day performances will begin in the early evening. The combination concert ticket includes admission to Paramount's Carowinds and all the concerts in the Paladium Amphitheater plaza. Seating is limited, so early ticket purchases are suggested. Seating is reserved.

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