

## In defence of proselytizing

H. E. BABER

*Department of Philosophy, University of San Diego, 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110–2492*

**Abstract:** In *Ethics in the Sanctuary*,<sup>1</sup> Margaret Battin argues that traditional evangelism, directed to promoting religious belief, practice, and affiliation, that is proselytizing, is morally questionable to the extent that it involves unwarranted paternalism in the interests of securing other-worldly benefits for potential converts. I argue that Christian evangelism is justified in order to make the this-worldly benefits of religious belief and practice available to everyone, to bring about an increase in religious affiliation for the purpose of providing a more supportive social environment for Christians, and to promote the survival of the institutional Church, which benefits Christians and nonChristians alike by maintaining church property, providing access to church buildings and doing liturgy visibly and publicly for the sake of all people.

### **Preliminaries: Battin's dilemma**

In her discussion a study of ethical issues that arise from the practices of organized religion, Margaret Battin notes that doing the professional ethics of religious institutions raises special methodological difficulties to the extent that religious groups espouse specifically religious doctrines which may be cited in support of the moral propriety of their practices. Battin notes that, for the purposes of discussing the ethics of organized religion, we must adopt a stance of neutrality as regards these doctrines.

An approach that accepts religious claims generally as true would also accept as true precisely those religious claims that appear to settle (or disguise) the very kinds of moral problems within religious institutions that are to be examined... it would simply precluded recognition that there is an issue. Alternatively, a metaphysically sceptical approach would reject religious claims altogether as without foundation in reality, counting them all false.... However, whether or not this latter approach is metaphysically correct, it too is unable to distinguish between various kinds of religious claims and, by dismissing all religious claims generally, makes it impossible to see how religious structures generate genuine moral dilemmas....

**Instead of these essentially theist or atheist approaches, a neutral procedural rule will be adopted...complete restraint from either affirmation or denial of the traditional metaphysical and religious claims forming the Judeo-Christian tradition is necessary to examine the moral problems generated by its varieties of institutional religious, without either dismissing or insulating them from critique.<sup>2</sup>**

In addition, she stipulates that in order to be assessed under the aegis of professional ethics, religious practices must conform to requirements which are constitutive of 'professional' as distinct from other sorts of social behaviour: 'Only those practices can be critiqued in which the religious practitioner is obligated to satisfy the fiduciary principle – to act in a way that is worthy of the client's trust and does not undermine those interests with respect to which the client consults him or her.'<sup>3</sup>

Given this model of evangelism, missionary efforts which are conducted in the interests of what she calls 'gun-notching', 'church-aggrandising' or social control would appear to be ruled out of the discussion insofar as they seem to be beyond the purview of professional ethics thus understood. Nevertheless, even where missionaries act in (what they take to be) the interests of their clients, their activities may be morally suspect to the extent that they are paternalistic.

Paternalistic intervention is morally suspect. It may be warranted in cases where the beneficiary is, for reasons of age or mental impairment, unable to make rational decisions for himself. Mill, and other writers in what may be broadly understood as the liberal tradition, recognize this rationale for paternalistic treatment. We might want to hold that paternalistic intervention is morally appropriate in other circumstances, providing that the intervention is in proportion to the benefits to be gained or the harms to be averted. Intuitively, where the intervention is relatively mild while the harm it averts is severe, we believe it may be warranted. So those who are sympathetic to seat-belt laws might note that the inconvenience of buckling up is negligible compared to the harms which the use of seat belts avert – hence that coercion is justified. Again, arguably highly manipulative anti-smoking advertisements may be justified on the grounds that the benefits they bring about and the harms they avert are sufficiently great to override the prima facie wrongness of this sort of propaganda.

Battin distinguishes between what she calls 'aggressive evangelism', which incorporates such practices and is prima facie wrong to the extent that it involves paternalistic intervention, from 'invitational convert-seeking'. The latter project, according to Battin, is unexceptionable insofar as it does not involve intervention or any attempt to alter the potential convert's beliefs and values but rather serves to expand his information about religious beliefs, practices and institutions.

If aggressive evangelism is ever morally permissible, however, it can only be justified to the extent that the benefits it secures or the harms it averts are sufficiently great to offset the level of aggression involved. According to Battin,

however, this poses what I shall call Battin's dilemma, which can be formulated as follows:

- (1) Aggressive evangelism is justified only if it secures sufficiently great benefits or averts sufficiently great harms of either a this-worldly or other-worldly nature and there are no morally preferable means to accomplish the same results.
- (2) Since no this-worldly benefit or harm is sufficiently great or so difficult to secure or avert by other means as to justify aggressive evangelism, citing this-worldly considerations does not license aggressive evangelism.
- (3) Since (allegedly) other-worldly benefits and harms are infinite and impossible to secure or avert by other means, citing other-worldly considerations licenses any means of aggressive evangelism whatsoever.
- (4) Either arguments for the legitimacy of aggressive evangelism fail or they prove too much.

Battin suggests, in particular, that appeal to other-worldly considerations is suspect to the extent that we resolve, as a matter of methodological principle, that 'unprovable, off-scale, self-interest gratifying theological claims are to be considered suspect when their central function is to excuse violations of moral norms'.<sup>4</sup> That is, citing the 'off-scale' values of eternal bliss and endless torment in order to support practices that are *prima facie* unacceptable is itself suspect.

Given the methodological requirements of refraining from assuming truth values for the metaphysical assumptions on which conversion activities rest or for the fundamental imperative that commands them, we cannot decide whether the theological bases of these excuses are adequate or not.... We cannot at any deeper level prove that they are fraudulent, but it is also clear that there is no adequate moral justification for the practice that has developed of using them in this way.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, if Battin is correct, aggressive evangelism is, at best, morally suspect.

I shall, however, argue to the contrary, that in her discussion of aggressive evangelism Battin covertly assumes that religious claims are, at best, unlikely, thus violating her own methodological constraint. I suggest that her assessment of the level of 'aggressiveness' exemplified by various evangelistic practices and the harms and benefits associated with these practices, is affected by this assumption and, in particular, that she overestimates the harm incurred by the subjects of aggressive evangelism, grossly underestimates the this-worldly benefits of religious participation, and completely overlooks the extent to which, in spite of deceptive and manipulative attention-getting stratagems, the primary method of aggressive evangelism is argumentation. Thus I suggest we can safely grasp the first horn of Battin's dilemma: aggressive evangelism is justified as the most efficient and effective means of providing converts with this-worldly benefits.

More radically, however, I suggest that we can also leap between the horns of the dilemma and justify aggressive evangelism as a method of ‘church-aggrandising’. On this account, the evangelist’s clients are not potential converts but members of the Church whose welfare depends upon the continued existence and expansion of the institution.

### **Grasping the first horn: calibrating the aggression scale**

Citing examples, Battin suggests that evangelistic efforts can be ranged on a scale of ‘aggressiveness’, depending upon the extent to which they exploit deception, manipulation, coercion and other means of nonrational persuasion in order to induce belief (or, at least, institutional affiliation) in potential converts. She contrasts traditional aggressive evangelism which, for the reasons suggested above, she regards as morally suspect, with what she calls the new ‘invitational’ model of missionary practice.

**The new model of missionary practice is often coupled with a new theoretical model of how conversion occurs. In the traditional conversion model, the candidate for conversion was seen as passive, subject to external or internal forces that would effectuate changes in his or her belief.... According to the newer paradigm, in contrast, the subject is active: a meaning-seeking individual who exercises volition in deciding to convert.<sup>6</sup>**

While this account of the ‘new model’ is far from clear the suggestion seems to be that, according to this nonaggressive paradigm, missionaries invite potential converts to examine their theological wares and decide whether to buy. The suggestion is that what is objectionable about ‘traditional’ evangelistic efforts is the use of coercive or manipulative methods to induce belief into a passive subject.

It soon becomes apparent, however, that Battin’s objection is not so much to the methods ‘traditional’ missionaries allegedly employ to induce belief and bring about conversion *but simply to the project of inducing belief and religious practice as such, that is, to proselytizing as such.*

**The new missionaries have increasingly curtailed interventionist efforts to change the beliefs of prospective converts and have instead begun to represent themselves as models of examples of faith.... Evangelism, in this newer model, consists in acting in a way that expresses one’s own religious beliefs: living one’s beliefs is in itself a way of announcing them to others... done under the assumption that for a nonbelieving individual simply to see or interact with someone for whom faith is central may be sufficient to bring faith to that individual. This might be considered a ‘contagion’ as well as an invitational model.<sup>7</sup>**

The problem with this ‘contagion’ model is that unless faith can be transmitted magically, it is hard to see how the core theological beliefs of Christianity, or any other theistic religion, can be conveyed nonverbally. One can, after a fashion, ‘live’ his beliefs about the desirability of kindness, honesty, courage and other virtues, but such beliefs are not specifically Christian or, indeed, specifically religious.

Moreover the exercise of these and other moral virtues does not convey the character of those metaphysical beliefs which are central to Christianity. The doctrine of the Trinity is no more amenable to nonverbal expression than Gödel's proof. Unless we adopt an extreme reductionist understanding of religious faith as 'morality tinged with emotion' it is hard to see how virtuous behaviour by itself, even to the extent of extreme self-sacrificial altruism, could be thought to bring faith to others.

Consider an example of the new-style missionary for whom Battin expresses admiration.

Sister Emmanuel, aged seventy-four when she was celebrated by *Time* several years ago, who had been living for ten years among the ten thousand garbage pickers of Cairo.... Sister Emmanuel, a Roman Catholic nun, was conducting a school for the children of families living in the garbage dump, and while she preached about cleanliness in a world of rotting garbage and broken glass, she said she did not attempt to convert the Muslim children in her school to Christianity. 'Today we don't talk about conversion any more', *Time* quoted her as saying. 'We talk about being friends. My job is to prove that God is love, to bring courage to these people'. Insofar as she wishes to bring these people an understanding of God as love, and with this to bring them a new fundamental attitude toward life (an attitude that she calls 'courage' but that is best understood as faith-based hope), her effort is clearly missionizing, but she is correct in thinking it is a long way from seeking to convert these people to a new set of theological doctrines.<sup>8</sup>

No-one can doubt Sister Emmanuel's moral heroism or the value of her self-sacrificial virtue. However, unless both theological doctrine and cultic participation are taken to be nonessential to religious faith it is hard to see why we should regard the attitude Sister Emmanuel seeks to convey as 'faith-based hope'. It seems highly unlikely that garbage pickers in a traditionally Muslim culture would get even an inkling of the theological doctrines or cultic practices that would normally be regarded as essential to Christianity from Sister Emmanuel's charitable endeavours, given her reticence about the theological assumptions and cultic practices of Christianity. No matter how inherently valuable her programme is, it is not a specifically religious enterprise nor, except in a revisionary sense, evangelism of any kind, since it is not intended to persuade its beneficiaries to espouse theological doctrines or to take up Christian cultic practices.

Battin selectively overlooks the propositional and behavioural elements which most people, and including most religious believers who support evangelistic practices, would understand to be fundamental to religious faith. The goal of Christian evangelism, as it is ordinarily understood, is to persuade potential converts of the truth of metaphysical propositions within the Christian tradition, propositions about the existence and nature of God and His actions in history through Christ and His Church, to induce them to participate in cultic practices, most particularly church-going, and to mark their commitment through some act of institutional affiliation as, for example, being baptized or confirmed.

Battin's suggestion that we take Sister Emmanuel's efforts in the Cairo dump as a model of evangelism and, perhaps even more significantly, her apparently innocuous throwaway line that the attitude Sister Emmanuel described as 'courage' was in fact best understood as 'faith-based hope' suggests that she understands 'faith' to be a fundamentally nondoxastic state and that she regards cultic practice and institutional affiliation as, at best, peripheral.

This assumption is contrary to the fundamental commitment of all orthodox Christians to the importance of propositional belief and participation in the life of the Church. It is not merely fundamental to my religious belief that God exists – it is fundamental to my faith that belief in God is essential to faith and that no-one who fails to hold this belief and a number of others counts as a Christian, regardless of however he may excel in 'faith-based hope' and other desirable nondoxastic psychological states. Most religious believers would rightly take umbrage at Battin's characterization of efforts to change potential converts' beliefs as 'interventionist'. It is, however, atheists who should be most offended by her pious platitudes about the religious character of moral virtue.

In any case, Battin's suggestion that attempts induce people to acquire religious beliefs is 'interventionist', and to that extent morally suspect, would appear to violate her proposed neutrality constraint. In support of such a view she must hold either that any attempt to change other people's beliefs is in and of itself *prima facie* wrong, or else that attempts to induce specifically religious beliefs in others are morally suspect.

Now there are people who do, in fact, believe that any attempt to induce them to acquire new beliefs is suspect. Some students, for example, regard their beliefs virtually as physiological characteristics and regard attempts to alter them, by, for example pointing out the shortcomings of ethical relativism or the superiority of *modus ponens* to affirming the consequent, as tantamount to an attempt at physical mutilation. If, in fact, Battin wishes to hold that all attempts to alter the beliefs of others are suspect, then she should include education and scholarship as well as 'aggressive' evangelism, since the purpose of argumentation, scholarship and the educational enterprise generally is precisely to persuade and alter belief. It seems unlikely, however, that she holds this view about a practice in which she herself engages.

So, presumably, she must hold that while some attempts at persuasion are legitimate, attempts to induce people to acquire religious beliefs are, at best, suspect. The most obvious reason why one might hold this view would be the assumption that religious beliefs are simply false. This would, however, clearly violate her neutrality constraint.

Another reason a person might have for holding that attempts to persuade others of the truth of religious doctrines might be the view that metaphysical propositions and creeds, whether true are false, are irrelevant to religion which 'really' is, or should be, a compound of good character, altruistic behaviour,

political activism and appropriate social graces. Of course most people who hold this view in fact reject religious doctrine but need to affirm their religious commitment in order to maintain their positions as theologians and clerics. One could, however, consistently affirm some theological doctrines central to Christianity while holding that religion ought to be nondoctrinal, and regarding institutions committed to maintaining and promulgating religious doctrine as undesirable – in light of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the recent activities of the religious right.

This would nevertheless violate the neutrality constraint as well. Christians who affirm the Church's creed are not only committed to doctrines about the existence of God, the nature and status of Christ, and the hope of survival; they are committed to doctrines about the character of religion, and to supporting the Church as a doctrinal institution: 'We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church'.

Christians may differ about the interpretation of this doctrine, and not all would take it to entail commitment to promoting the interests of a visible institution with a hierarchy and historical pedigree, which proclaims Christian doctrine, maintains distinctive buildings which visibly embody its doctrinal claims, and does liturgy through which participants affirm their doctrinal commitments. But Battin's methodological principle of neutrality, construed in any plausible way, does not merely commit her to maintaining neutrality between atheists and religious believers; it commits her to impartiality regarding different religious traditions and doctrinal claims. The dismissal of this characteristic commitment of traditional catholic Christians violates the neutrality constraint.

Consequently it is hard to see what reason Battin can produce, given her commitment to neutrality, for regarding attempts to induce religious belief as in and of themselves morally suspect.

The strongest case Battin can make appeals to the intuition that nonrational persuasion is *prima facie* wrong together with the observation that proselytizing typically involves nonrational persuasion. On this account, evangelistic efforts are 'aggressive' to the extent that they involve coercion, manipulation, deception or other nonrational means to induce belief or institutional affiliation. Battin cites the following case as an example of mildly aggressive evangelism:

**A couple of summers ago, three bright young college students knocked at my door. They were on a scavenger hunt, they said. One wanted a paper clip; another needed a three-inch length of blue thread. There's a certain co-operative, contributory delight that occurs when you can find the silly things scavenger hunters want, and I also managed to find a turkey wishbone, a cigarette butt, and a European road map. However, by the time one of them asked for 'a person who has been thinking about the meaning of life' I realized something was different. Sure enough, they were not on a scavenger hunt at all, or at least not an ordinary one; they were missionaries from the Campus Crusade for Christ and they had come to talk about Jesus... this strategy has multiple morally problematic features. Its bait-and-switch opening gambit is deceptive; its use of requests for items that**

**have informative value is invasive of privacy; and it exploits an ordinary human relationship to serve ulterior purposes.<sup>9</sup>**

Even if such methods are ‘morally problematic’ Battin does not wish to hold that the use of nonrational methods of persuasion is always actually wrong. As she notes, the Campus Crusaders’ technique was comparable to methods sales people hawking secular goods commonly use to get a foot in the door. The question of whether a practice of this sort is wrong turns upon the extent to which the practice is coercive, manipulative or deceptive, as compared to the desirability of the end to be obtained through its use. Charities feature pictures of starving children in materials soliciting donations and antismoking advertisements are often highly manipulative. Political lobbies solicit contributions in the guise of surveys. My own intuition is that these practices are morally permissible, though it is hard to give any account of how the level of coercion, manipulation or deception involved in a practice is to be balanced against the desirability of the end to be achieved. Whatever our intuitions about these examples, we would want to hold that in some cases nonrational persuasion is morally justified.

Battin also overlooks the fact that once traditional evangelists get their foot in the door they typically attempt to persuade their potential converts of the truth of Christian doctrine by rational means, including arguments from Scripture and, occasionally, natural theology – typically versions of the Argument from Design. The arguments may not be very good ones but they are arguments nonetheless – attempts, however feeble, at rational persuasion. Moreover once such evangelists manage to get a hearing, they are upfront about the product they are attempting to sell. To the extent that ‘invitational’ evangelists are interested in promoting their religious beliefs through ‘contagion’, by displaying moral virtue and bribing needy people with secular goods, they are disingenuous and covert in their evangelistic activities: it is they who are engaged in manipulation and nonrational persuasion.

Though her discussion is highly nuanced, Battin however suggests that, apart from purely ‘invitational’ evangelism – of which her only model is that of Sister Emmanuel and other individuals engaged in what could best be understood as Church-sponsored social work – evangelism is morally problematic. Arguably, however, she underestimates the this-worldly benefits of religious practice, overestimates the coerciveness of evangelistic practices and, contrary to her methodological commitment to strict neutrality, appears to assume that there is a prima facie case against religious belief, so that inducing religious belief is not warranted if there are secular means to produce similar beneficial results.

**Though in some cases religious conversion may provide advantages, these advantages could also be attained through psychotherapy or other forms of mental and emotional care, changes in social or political conditions, and so on...the lonely need friends; the insecure need reinforcement that improves self-confidence; and those with deep-seated fears need therapy, not preaching about love.<sup>10</sup>**



This is, of course, the traditional view that religion is the opiate of the people, a palliative for the misery of the masses that could, and should, be alleviated by secular therapies and social change.

When it comes to therapy the assumption is highly questionable. Battin paints a picture of lonely, insecure people desperately seeking to alleviate their unhappiness through religious practice, at a high price, when they could easily get it fixed by going into therapy. As a matter of empirical fact, while there may be such people, there appear to be many more lonely, insecure people desperately seeking to alleviate their unhappiness by reading self-help books and trying one expensive therapy after another when they might be able to get it fixed more easily, and certainly more cheaply, by going to church. In any case, we cannot assume that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, secular methods are to be preferred without violating neutrality.

Finally, Battin's list of the this-worldly benefits of religious belief and practice significantly excludes precisely those benefits that are specifically religious, namely religious experience, the knowledge and love of God and the enjoyment of participation in the life of the church. Throughout her discussion she assumes that religious belief and practice are a *cost* that evangelists persuade converts to pay in order to obtain extrinsic ends, whether this-worldly or other-worldly, rather than benefits that are valuable and pleasurable in and of themselves. Her worry is that 'aggressive' evangelists exert undue pressure in persuading converts to take on the burden of religion, the benefits of which are not sufficient to warrant the investment. If, however, we regard religion itself as a benefit, one of the good things of life, we should worry rather that 'invitational' evangelists are keeping their clients in the dark about one of the most important goods they have to offer: participation in the life of the Church.

So, if we take Battin's neutrality constraint seriously, and reject unwarranted assumptions about the costs of religious belief and practice, we can safely grasp the first horn of her dilemma: arguably, the this-worldly benefits of religious belief and practice justify aggressive evangelism.

### **Leaping between the horns: in defence of Christendom**

In addition to their interest in benefiting others, Christians also have self-interested reasons for promoting religious belief and practice – and there is no reason why people should refrain from acting on self-interested motives when promoting their own interests does not conflict with the interests of others, or, as I have argued, in this case where it is actually consonant with other people's interests. Conversion is a win–win situation for the evangelist and the convert alike.

First, Christians have an interest in promoting a state of affairs in which they are in a comfortable, socially acceptable majority rather than states of affairs in

which they are in a persecuted or despised minority. Being safe and having ones convictions respected is more productive of utility than being persecuted and despised.

Romantics may hold that Christians were somehow better off in the early days, when they met secretly in the catacombs and martyrdom was a real possibility, or under the Nazi regime, in the former Soviet Union, or at other times of persecution. But Christians in such circumstances did not regard persecution as a desirable state of affairs or promote the maintenance of dictatorial regimes in order to enjoy the benefits of martyrdom. The goal of the early Christians was to get out of the catacombs and the Church welcomed Constantine's support when it came. Christians in Nazi Germany and the former Soviet Union made the best of a raw deal; many heroically practised their faith and lived out their moral convictions in highly adverse circumstances. But they did not support Nazi or communist regimes in order to enjoy the opportunities they provided for self-sacrifice.

Christianity has always helped people make the best of a raw deal – to cope with poverty, injustice, sickness and all the ills to which flesh is heir, including the inevitable fact of death. But Christianity does not require the faithful to prefer misery to happiness or to seek out a raw deal. 'The Enemy', as Screwtape says of God, 'is a Hedonist'.

*Pace* Kierkegaard, living in Christendom, a state of affairs in which Christianity of at least the nominal variety is widespread, socially valued, and taken for granted, is conducive to Christians' hedonistic interests. Therefore, in order to promote the re-establishment of Christendom, Christians have a legitimate self-interested reason to support evangelism.

In addition to the benefits of living in Christendom, many Christians need the goods and services of the institutional Church to flourish religiously. Christians within the Church's liturgical traditions need distinctive buildings, clothing and equipment, and the services of professional musicians and clergy to do liturgy effectively in order to support their religious practice.

This is a hard saying for those Christians who are, whether religiously or culturally, heirs of the Puritans and the left wing of the Reformation. We have absorbed the idea that true Christianity is a matter of inward conviction and does not require elaborate buildings, liturgy or 'externals' and the sense that 'real' Christianity, the expression of seriously held religious convictions, is not, or should not be, comfortable or enjoyable.

This strand of Protestantism is well within the scope of Christian orthodoxy and has produced saints and moral heroes. But it is not the only available orthodox Christian alternative and, moreover, it is precisely the version of Christianity that gives credence to the assumption of Battin and other secularists that the practice of religion is a burden rather than a benefit, a cost religious believers take on in order to secure extrinsic rewards or avoid even greater costs here or hereafter.

There is however a Christian alternative. We can see the Church on earth, as an outward and visible sign of the Church in the larger sense, the blessed company of all faithful people who enjoy the presence of God, the Church's liturgy and sacraments as a foretaste of good things to come, and our religious practice as participation in a larger cosmic drama. If we see the Church in this way so that the 'externals' are not extrinsic to the real business of religion but an essential part of it, then our religious practice will be dependent in a more crucial way on the Church as an institution.

The Church as an institution relies on the voluntary contributions of members to fund its activities. Where a critical mass of contributing members is absent, the Church cannot function so, for pragmatic reasons, Christians who rely upon the Church to provide adequate services in support of their religious practice have an interest in recruiting new members.

Battin, with no argument, dismisses 'church-aggrandising' as a suitable motive for evangelism and many Christians share her sentiments. Christians within cultural traditions where there is an ahistorical, individual, relationship between the believer and God, unmediated by priests, unimpeded by set liturgical forms and uncluttered by ecclesiastical paraphernalia, are often ambivalent about the Church as an institution. Intuitively, we who inherit this version of Christianity as a cultural tradition, feel evangelism should aim at benefiting converts directly, by 'saving souls' or providing some psychological benefit, rather than by promoting the interests of the institutional Church.

If, however, as I have suggested, the institutional Church is an institution which exists precisely to benefit Christians and all people who take advantage of the services it provides, then the purpose of promoting the Church's institutional interests is precisely to serve its members and other beneficiaries of its services. We do not object to efforts by other non-profit-making institutions to recruit paying members in order to support the public services they provide. It is hard to see why there should be any objection to the Church's soliciting support in like fashion.

It may be suggested that unlike other non-profits, the Church is not a public institution: it exists to benefit members only and does not provide goods or services to the general public. Again, however, this assumes the model of the gathered church as a community of believers, which is not the only available model. In fact many churches, as they have traditionally operated, function as public institutions providing benefits to all people without requiring affiliation. Church buildings are open – all people can come in to escape from the dirt, noise and bustle of the city and to enjoy a moment in sacred space. Church services are public events: there are no gate-keepers, anyone may participate anonymously, without being pressed to affiliate. In many places the Church provides rites of passage to all people, regardless of their affiliation, and a variety of social and cultural events for the general public.

In many respects, the Church is like the Public Broadcasting System in the United States, a network of television and radio stations supported entirely by institutional grants and the voluntary contributions of individuals who sign on as members. While PBS actively recruits members through periodic pledge drives, during which it broadcasts appeals for contributions featuring testimonies of the benefits it provides by members, appeals to viewers' sense of decency and attempts to instil guilt, the majority of its audience do not contribute. A substantial minority, however, become members because they enjoy the services it provides and are willing to support a large population of freeloaders. Similarly, the Church provides benefits to a large population of freeloaders and, like PBS, given the public services it provides, it seems legitimate for it to solicit members in order to continue providing benefits to all people.

Arguably, like supporters of PBS, Christians, both for self-interested reasons and in the interest of benefiting others, should engage in evangelism to support the institutional Church so that it can make its services available to all people.

### **In defence of aggressive evangelism**

At bottom, concern about the propriety of evangelism is motivated by the implicit assumption, which many Christians share with their cultured despisers, that religious belief and practice, whatever extrinsic benefits they may produce, are inherently costly and burdensome. This is false. Quite apart from any extrinsic benefits, being a Christian is a 'good and joyful thing'. The Church, as an institution, has a matchless treasure in its liturgy and sacraments, and in the sacred space and holy things it maintains. Evangelism is justified in order to provide people with the benefits of religious belief and practice and to support the institutional Church so that it can make its treasure visible, accessible and available to all people.<sup>11</sup>

### **Notes**

1. Margaret P. Battin *Ethics in the Sanctuary* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
2. *Ibid.*, 16.
3. *Ibid.*, 149.
4. *Ibid.*, 172.
5. *Ibid.*, 175.
6. *Ibid.*, 142.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 142–143.
9. *Ibid.*, 129, 132.
10. *Ibid.*, 155–156.
11. I am grateful to participants in the 1998 Pacific Regional Meeting and 1999 Mountains-Plains Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, and in particular to Margaret Battin, for their comments.