

Evangelization for Dummies like me. Two great tools

Having been trained in personal evangelization using the EE3 program, I realized the difficulty in getting an entire parish on board in an evangelization effort where the training takes 16 weeks and requires much homework in memorizing the scriptures needed for effective effort. Life in the Spirit Seminars provided an excellent alternative but required a degree of Christian maturity of the leaders not always available in any “normal” parish.

So, one wondered, how were we to carry out the wishes of all our recent Popes and some other hierarchical leaders for a “new evangelization” which was calling out for the involvement of all the baptised. Now, either the same thing was puzzling the Blessed Trinity, or there had been a plan A to be implemented. The latter was the obvious choice in the first place. This was the beginning of both Alpha and Rescue.

These share aspects in common that had come with common sense or divine inspiration, or both, you choose. In the first instance, there was the need for an attractive presentation of the Gospel that would appeal to the modern way of presenting age-old truths, in the second was the challenge of the perceived absence of community sense in the 3rd millennium. The first was resolved using talented presenters and technology, the second by restoring the fellowship naturally occurring in ancient shared-table experience, something evident in the scriptures themselves. “.... He eats and drinks with Drunkards and Sinners”. Thus, we got videotaped presentations of the Gospel by gifted preachers and simple meals which solved the problems of distractions caused by bodily needs. Alpha pioneered this and Rescue followed suit.

So what have these innovations got to do with Evangelization by dummies, you do well to ask.

Well, as ever, the Gospel is passed on by being heard. Who can initiate the passing on of the Gospel? **The best way in my own experience, is by inviting someone to listen to it, but how is this done? Again, there is no better way than by inviting someone to enjoy a spot of tea or wine, and a bite to eat.** The penalty for accepting is to listen to an interesting and often amusing presentation of a very serious business, the only way to eternal life. On one occasion a friend decided to attend an Alpha course by hearing that a free, if simple, meal was on offer. He remained for the duration, eventually happily joining and contributing to the leadership team. So the difficult task of gaining someone’s interest is by offering hospitality and a chance to discuss the first order questions of life, which interest everybody.

That is the route followed by Alpha, where the course is in essence a series of answers to the difficult, but important questions of life. Rescue follows this pattern in many respects but focusses mainly on the resolutions of similar questions by taking on the Biblical view of these, the answers provided by Jesus and the Fathers of the Church. Alpha does so as well, but the emphasis is different.

Rescue looks at the meaningful aspects of the life, death, resurrection and kingship of Jesus in the struggle against evil for individuals and communities, Alpha on the same, mainly for the individual. The outcomes are the same. More devoted Christians and moral people. So both of these courses offer much to the Church and the World. Thanks be to the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the whole body interceding for them. For Catholics Rescue is probably ideal, for Evangelicals Alpha, for Jesus, both.