

# **Becoming Catholic: The Effect of the Initiation Process on Conversion**

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In his 1956 Haskell Lectures, Mircea Eliade (1958:ix) commented: “It has often been said that one of the characteristics of the modern world is the disappearance of any meaningful rites of initiation.” The initiation rituals and rites of passage that get most attention in contemporary American society are almost universally negative (fraternity gang rape, hazing, military desensitization, excessive drinking). Into the vacuum created by the disappearance of positive initiation rituals has swept renewed popular and academic interest in the phenomenon. As Ronald Grimes notes, “the past two decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the construction of rites of passage.” The reason for this is deep seated, he argues. “Without rites that engage our imaginations, communities, and bodies, we lose touch with the rhythms of the human life course, just as we become temporally disoriented without seasonal and commemorative rites that recreate our connections to the natural world and the course of human history” (Grimes 2000:3).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, less than a decade after Eliade’s comment, the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church meeting at the Second Vatican Council called for a restoration of the ancient process for ritually initiating adults called the “catechumenate.” In 1988, the bishops of the United States promulgated and mandated the use of the new “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” widely known by its acronym, RCIA. Although it is not yet fully implemented in every parish, the RCIA is the officially recognized liturgical and catechetical process by which adults “become Catholic” today (Erickson 1995).

Since 1988, upwards of a million individuals have entered the church through this ritual process. On average over the past five years, 74,395 adults annually have been Baptized and 86,737 Received into Full Communion with the Roman Catholic Church. These 160,000-plus people becoming Catholic *annually* in themselves would comprise the 50<sup>th</sup> largest religious body in America.<sup>1</sup> A group this large clearly deserves serious study.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the RCIA has become an influential model for other Christian traditions. According to the ecumenical North American Association for the Catechumenate, “The catechumenate—a process of faith formation and discipling that began in the early centuries of the Christian Church—has been reclaimed in the twentieth century, primarily as a result of the work of the Roman Catholic Church in the development of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.

During the past two decades non-catholic Christian churches have slowly begun to understand the catechumenate as a process of faith formation and spiritual development for twenty-first century people who have little or no previous association with the Christian faith.”<sup>3</sup> Among the denominations that have already implemented a catechumenate or catechumenal process of ritual initiation are the Episcopal Church, USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Mennonite Church USA (Johnson 1999a).

This paper addresses two related questions: Do individuals who participate in the RCIA process in the Catholic Church experience conversion? If so, is the extent of conversion explained by aspects of the RCIA process itself?

To answer these questions, we build on the complementary strengths and weaknesses of case studies of conversion to “new religious movements” (NRMs) and statistical studies of switching among established religious traditions. The relationship of initiation to conversion and switching—embodied in the RCIA process itself—can be expressed formulaically as follows:  
*initiation = conversion + switching.*

In applying this idea, we employ a quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test design—collecting data on individuals early in their involvement in the RCIA process and after their initiation at the Easter Vigil—to concretely identify the extent of conversion in different domains of religiosity over the course of the RCIA process. Organizational-level data allow us to relate differences in the extent to which individuals experience conversion to parish differences in the extent to which the RCIA process is fully implemented. Thus, we are able to assess directly the effect of differences in the implementation of the RCIA on the extent of conversion to Catholicism.<sup>4</sup>

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: CONVERSION, SWITCHING AND INITIATION**

Just as the reemergence of religion on the political scene in the late-1970s led to a “rediscovery of the religious factor in politics” among scholars, so too does the reality of the RCIA in Roman Catholicism and the catechumenate in other Christian traditions force us to revisit the large but stagnant body of sociological literature on religious conversion. To frame the question of initiation, we bring together the two streams of research—on switching and

conversion—that have developed at times in opposition, but more frequently in splendid isolation from each other.

### ***Conversion***

The study of conversion experienced a revival in the 1960s and 1970s which coincided with the discovery and growth of NRMs. In their review of the literature, Snow and Machalek (1984) noted that over 60 percent of the behavioral science literature on conversion had appeared since 1973. Although conversion to NRMs is without question important to understand—after all, even Jesus had to gain his first 12 converts (Stark 1996)—this stream of conversion research has been too closely tied to the study of NRMs. The single most influential study of conversion was, by the authors' own admission, “a theory of conversion to a *deviant* perspective”—the Unification Church or “Moonies” (Lofland and Stark 1965, emphasis added).

Much of the literature that followed attempted to modify, extend, or refute Lofland and Stark also using case studies of single NRMs. Among the most notable are studies of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement (Snow and Phillips 1980), the Divine Light Mission (Downton 1979), the Jesus People (Richardson, et al. 1979), the “Church of the Sun” (Lynch 1978), and UFO cults (Balch and Taylor 1977).<sup>5</sup> Although the vast majority of the activity in any given religious economy takes place in and among established religions (Finke and Stark 1992), conversion to these “mainstream” religious traditions has been comparatively understudied.

### ***Switching***

As interest in NRMs waned in the 1980s and 1990s, however, more attention was given to mobility in the mainstream of the American religious economy.<sup>6</sup> Roof and McKinney (1987) and Finke and Stark (1992) were signal contributions in this regard. Sociologists studying what is often called religious “switching” or “everyday conversion” between established denominations took advantage of large data sets like the General Social Survey (Suchman 1992), methodological advances like religious mobility tables (Sherkat 1990, 1991), and theoretical innovations like rational choice theory (Sherkat 2001, Sherkat and Wilson 1995) to explore this fertile ground. By employing statistical analyses of large-scale survey data sociologists in this

growing area overcame some of the methodological weaknesses of the single group, idiographic case studies predominant in the study of conversion to NRMs.

At the same time, exclusive reliance on individual-level, cross-sectional data makes it impossible to study the organizational embeddedness and process of conversion that are the hallmark of case studies of conversion to NRMs. While they could statistically model the “predictors” of conversion in ways that were impossible in the case studies, they ignore entirely the question of what becoming a member of different religious groups actually means and entails. No one converts in general. Conversion is always to some concrete, particular religious group or tradition. The meaning and process of conversion differs from group to group. As Greil and Rudy (1984:318-19) note, “There is no such thing as *the* conversion process; rather, there are as many conversion processes as there are organizational contexts in which conversion takes place”(see also Snow and Machalek 1984:184).

The strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches, then, are mirror images. Beyond these complementary limitations, both the study of conversion to NRMs and switching between established traditions share a common weakness: treating conversion as unidimensional rather than multidimensional. For example, Lofland and Stark’s (1965:862) study of the Unification Church focused only on worldview: “When a person gives up one . . . perspective or ordered view of the world for another we refer to this process as *conversion*.” Similarly, Snow and Machalek (1984:170) understand conversion as a change in one’s “universe of discourse.” Studies of “everyday conversion” or switching exclusively rely on nominal changes in religious affiliation—e.g., from Protestant to Catholic or Catholic to Jew—as their dependent variable.

But conversion is not one-dimensional; it is a “multifaceted process of transformation” (Rambo 1993:6). Conversion is not limited to affiliation or worldview, to beliefs or practices, to the spiritual or moral life. Conversion is multidimensional and comprehensive and sociologists of religion studying it should at least attempt to capture as much of its complexity as possible.

### ***Initiation = Switching + Conversion***

Stark and Finke (2000:114) attempt to bring more precision and clarity to the study of individual religious change by defining conversion as “shifts across religious traditions” and

reaffiliation (what others have called “switching”) as “shifts within religious traditions.” But this distinction is operationally untenable. Change from a nominal Lutheran to an active Catholic is more than (mere) reaffiliation, and change from a non-practicing Catholic to a non-practicing Jew is less than (radical) conversion. Rather than seeing conversion and switching as mutually exclusive alternatives, we agree with Snow and Machalek (1984:171) that membership change (switching) and conversion are “two related but not identical phenomena.” For example, conversion may precede membership change or follow it. People used to follow Jesus around before they had converted to the Jesus movement—reaffiliation before conversion. Today, some people convert to Roman Catholicism in practice (*de facto*) before they ever join officially (*de jure*)—conversion before reaffiliation.

The concept of initiation helps us to bring these two concepts together. If we define *switching* as changing religious affiliation without (necessarily) experiencing any other religious change, and *conversion* as experiencing change in the direction of greater religiosity (as understood by the tradition to which the individual affiliates), then *initiation* can be defined as a process of reaffiliation that seeks to foster conversion to the faith. Or, again: *initiation* = *switching* + *conversion*.

What is unique about the RCIA process is precisely that it seeks to tie the process of conversion to the process of reaffiliation by offering an extended period of formation leading up to the rites of initiation and full membership in the Catholic Church. At the same time, there is no guarantee that an individual in the RCIA process will either reaffiliate or experience conversion. This is precisely the empirical question our research begins to answer.

## **HISTORY AND OVERVIEW OF THE RCIA PROCESS**

The first document of the Second Vatican Council—the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), published on December 4, 1963—declared, “The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time” (no. 67). The Latin text of these rites, *Ordo Initiationis Christianae*

*Adultorum*, was published by the Congregation for Divine Worship on January 6, 1972, and introduced into the Catholic Church in the United States with a provisional English translation made available in 1974. It was not until 1988, however, that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published the official American English translation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) and promulgated the *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*.<sup>7</sup> At that point the RCIA became the formal and mandatory procedure and ceremony of admittance to the Roman Catholic Church for adults in the U.S.

The RCIA process unfolds over the course of several months (and often takes more than a year) as individuals make their way through the four distinct periods or stages in the process leading to full membership in the Church community. The movement from period-to-period is marked by publicly celebrated rituals.<sup>8</sup>

—TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE—

Although the RCIA is one of the church’s universal rituals, like most rituals in the church, it is variably implemented in practice (McCallion, et al. 1996). That said, most parishes in the United States and in our sample do implement—to a greater or lesser extent—these basic elements of the RCIA process (four periods and three major transition rituals).

Beyond these basic elements, however, there are other aspects of the RCIA process that are less widely implemented. These elements help to distinguish those parishes which aspire to implement what can be called the “full vision” of the Rite from those that accommodate it to a 9-month “school year” model. The full vision emphasized the initiation of adults as an always ongoing process that unfolds differently and at different rates for different individuals (Morris 1997). In the school year model, the process of initiating adults begins every year around September when a new inquiry group is formed and ends following Easter when the new Catholics “graduate.” Five major factors distinguishing these two approaches.

(1) **Ongoing Precatechumenate:** Does the parish welcome inquirers on an ongoing basis, whenever the inquirer is ready to begin? Or do they always begin the precatechumenate in the early fall? On average for US dioceses, only 21 percent of parishes have an ongoing

precatechumenate. Among the parishes in our study, 72 percent have an ongoing precatechumenate.<sup>9</sup>

(2) **Multiple Rites of Acceptance:** Not everyone enters the precatechumenate at the same time and not all those entering the precatechumenate will be ready to commit to entering the catechumenate at the same time. Parishes can accommodate to this reality by celebrating the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens more than once during the year. On average for US dioceses, only 22 percent of parishes celebrate the Rite of Acceptance more than once per year. Among the parishes in our study, 32 percent celebrate this rite more than once per year.

(3) **Year Minimum of Formation:** The ritual text specifies that the catechumenate “may last several years” (RCIA, no. 7.2), and the US bishops’ *National Statutes* maintain that the catechumenate “should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation” (NS, no. 6). However, on average for US dioceses, only 15 percent of parishes presume a minimum of one year of formation for catechumens. Among the parishes in our study, 34 percent require a minimum of one year of formation.

(4) **Rite of Dismissal:** Because they cannot partake of the Eucharist, as part of their formation during the period of the catechumenate, catechumens are sent forth by the assembly after the Liturgy of the Word to reflect more deeply upon of the Word of God. On average for US dioceses, only 22 percent of parishes celebrate the dismissal of catechumens year-round. Among the parishes in our study, 36 percent celebrate dismissals year-round.

(5) **Mystagogia:** The goal of this final period in the RCIA process is for the newly initiated to more deeply celebrate their new faith, examine the mysteries of the church, and enter into the mission of the Church. The neophytes, therefore, spend the Easter Season (the 50 days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday) deepening their sacramental life and involvement in the community. According to the US bishops, 64 percent of parishes offer a period of mystagogia during the Easter season. But 46 percent of individuals the bishops surveyed indicated their mystagogy lasted three weeks or less. In our study, 87 percent of parishes offer a period of mystagogia, but only 13 percent of parishes offer a full seven weeks (50 days). The average mystagogia in our study lasts only four weeks.

The fact that the Rite is universally scripted but variably implemented in parishes allows

us to ask and answer the question: does the extent of implementation of the RCIA process make a difference, directly or indirectly, in the extent to which individuals experience conversion in the process of switching from their previous religious affiliation (or nonaffiliation) to Roman Catholicism? That is, are there advantages of the full vision of the Rite over the school year model?

## **DATA AND METHODS**

The core analyses presented here employ structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques to predict the extent of conversion experienced by those completing the RCIA process in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana in 2001 and 2002.

In fall 2000 and again in fall 2001 we collected baseline survey data on 224 individuals who were in the early stages of the RCIA process in 30 different parishes in the diocese. In the summer of 2001 and 2002, we collected a complete second wave of data on 167 of these individuals. Analysis of the nonrespondents and those with incomplete surveys in comparison to the respondents yielded no differences of consequence for our analyses here.<sup>10</sup> Of the 167 individuals for whom we have two complete waves of data, 159 had completed the RCIA process. The eight individuals who did not complete their initiation in the Catholic Church were excluded from the analysis. In the end, these analyses are based on these 159 individuals completing the RCIA process in 30 different parishes.

### ***Dependent Variables***

Although we included a number of measures of religious belief in our survey, this paper focuses on religious practice. Using five measures of religious practice, we construct two dependent variables (see Table 2 for dependent variable descriptions).

—TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE—

**Ecclesial Conversion** represents the extent to which individuals increase their involvement in their parishes. This dependent variable is operationalized as the aggregate change

in an individual's mass attendance, involvement in spiritual groups, and involvement in parish ministry from wave 1 to wave 2 of the data collection.

**Spiritual Conversion** represents the extent of involvement in more individualized religious practices that are related to the development of the respondent's interior, spiritual life. This dependent variable is operationalized as the aggregate change in the individual's private prayer and bible reading from wave 1 to wave 2 of the data collection.

### ***Independent Variables***

This analysis pays particular attention to two explanatory variables: the extent to which the RCIA process is implemented in the parish, and the individual initiate's subjective evaluation of the RCIA process (see Table 3 for independent variable descriptions).

—TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE—

**Level of Implementation** represents the extent to which the full vision of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is implemented in a given parish. It combines the five measures of implementation listed above that most distinguish fully-implemented RCIA processes from those that more closely track the "school year" model.

**Parish Size** is used to control for the possibility that level of implementation is simply a measure of parish resources, since larger parishes may have more resources to dedicate to initiating new members.

**RCIA Rating** represents the respondent's overall subjective evaluation of the RCIA in their parish. The items that constitute this composite variable cover both informational and experiential aspects of the process. Although the overall rating on average is quite high (23.36, where the maximum possible is 27), there is sufficient variation to allow us to use rating to predict the extent of conversion.

**Voluntary RCIA Hours** captures the amount of effort the individual put into the RCIA process. It is operationalized as the response to the following question: "How many do you spend on [RCIA related] activities which are above and beyond what is required?" This variable

is used to predict both the individual's RCIA rating and the extent of conversion experienced.

**R's Gender** and **R's Education** are used as demographic control variables, both for predicting RCIA rating and extent of conversion.<sup>11</sup>

## RESULTS

Linear structural models were employed to examine the relationships between the independent variables and the outcomes of interest here, ecclesial and spiritual conversion. These models were estimated with Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS, Version 4.01), a structural equation modeling (SEM) program adopted by SPSS as an alternative to LISREL (see Arbuckle and Wothke 1999). Input to AMOS includes data and a hypothesized model; output includes individual parameter estimates as well as various fit indices.

### *Ecclesial Conversion*

As Table 2 shows, on each of the three individual measures used to create the ecclesial conversion dependent variable, there was an increase in involvement in the sample as a whole. This indicates that over the course of the RCIA process, initiates became more involved in the life of their parishes—a key indicator of successful initiation. Our causal models, then, seek to determine whether the RCIA process itself helps to account for some of this change.

Table 4 reports the unstandardized and standardized maximum likelihood estimates and Figure 1 graphically displays the results of the best fitting structural equation model predicting ecclesial conversion (see Table 6 for fit statistics).

—TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE—

—FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE—

First of all, note that RCIA rating has a significant positive effect on ecclesial conversion. Those individuals whose subjective evaluation of the RCIA process in a variety of domains is higher are more likely to be involvement in the life of their parishes. Two variables significantly predict the respondents' rating of the RCIA process. At the individual level, the number of

voluntary hours the individual devoted to the RCIA process has a positive effect on rating. At the organizational level, parish size has a negative effect on rating and the extent of RCIA implementation has a positive effect. Thus, although parish size and RCA implementation are significantly positively related, they have opposite impacts on the subjective evaluation of the RCIA process. In larger parish settings, individuals may feel they get lost in the crowd, though this is more than offset by the extent of RCIA implementation.

Indeed, the extent of RCIA implementation is the real workhorse in this model. The direct effect of RCIA implementation on ecclesial conversion is more than twice as large as the direct effect of RCIA rating (0.599 compared to 0.241). If we consider the total effect of implementation (its direct effect plus its indirect effect through rating), we see it is over three times as large as the effect of rating (0.77 compared to 0.241).

### *Spiritual Conversion*

Turning now to the second outcome variable--spiritual conversion--Table 2 shows that both of the individual measures of spiritual conversion--private prayer and bible reading--decline in the sample as a whole from wave 1 to wave 2 of the survey. This indicates that over the course of the RCIA process, initiates generally became less involved in these spiritual-life animating practices. This decline is the opposite of what would be hoped for by those seeking to initiate new members into the Catholic Church. But the question remains, does the RCIA process itself have an effect on this change, positively or negatively?

Table 5 reports the unstandardized and standardized maximum likelihood estimates and Figure 2 graphically displays the results of the best fitting structurally equation model predicting spiritual conversion (see Table 6 for fit statistics).

—TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE—

—FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE—

In this model we begin with the previously observed pattern of relationships between voluntary hours spent on the RCIA process, parish size, implementation of the RCIA process,

and the individual's rating of their RCIA experience. From there, however, the model begins to deviate somewhat from the model predicting ecclesial conversion. Most importantly, the effect of RCIA rating on spiritual conversion is significant but negative. The better they liked the process, the lower their level of bible reading and private prayer at the end of the process compared to the beginning. One possible explanation of this counterintuitive finding is that these two aspects of the spiritual life were not stressed in the process, so that the individual could like the RCIA process perfectly well but not experience any increase in their level of spiritual practice. Our year-long participant observation case studies of the RCIA process in seven parishes supports this. In only one of the seven parishes were these two spiritual practices emphasized on a regular basis (Yamane and MacMillen, forthcoming). Particularly with respect to Bible reading, this conforms to widespread stereotypes about Catholic practice.

Significantly, however, the relationship between the extent of implementation of the RCIA process and spiritual conversion is positive. In this case, the direct effect of implementation on the extent of conversion is larger than the total effect (0.571 compared to 0.433), given the negative relationship between rating and spiritual conversion.

—TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE—

## **CONCLUSION**

Two related questions motivated these analyses: Do individuals who participate in the RCIA process in the Catholic Church experience conversion? If so, is the extent of conversion explained by aspects of the RCIA process itself? In answering these questions, we make both substantive and methodological contributions to the sociological study of conversion.

First of all, by focusing on ritual initiation as embodied in the RCIA process we see that conversion and reaffiliation are distinct but related phenomena. The goal of initiating new members is to tie reaffiliation to conversion. In fact, we find that characteristics of the RCIA process itself are significantly, positively related to individual conversion.

Second, the fact that the overall pattern of change in the sample was different for ecclesial conversion (positive) and spiritual conversion (negative) suggests the value of seeing conversion

as multidimensional rather than unidimensional.

Finally, these substantive findings were made possible by our methodology. To the extent that these findings are interesting and important, this suggests the value of using quasi-experimental designs to study initiation as an organizationally-embedded process (as the conversion literature suggests), but one that can be quantified (as the switching literature suggests).

## NOTES

1. Catholic data from the *Official Catholic Directory*, published annually by P.J. Kenedy and Sons. Comparison is to the 170 denominations in the United States which reported membership data to the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 2000*. On the larger body of Catholic converts in America, consider the following: In 1995, James Davidson's "National Catholic Pluralism Project" survey of American Catholics who were at least 18 years of age found that 6.3 percent had converted to Roman Catholicism. Assuming that this proportion has remained relatively stable since 1995, by the end of the second millennium over 3 million adults in the United States were Catholic converts. These 3 million Catholic converts alone would constitute one of the ten largest religious bodies in America. The "National Catholic Pluralism Project data are available at the American Religion Data Archive ([www.thearda.com/archive/natcath2.html](http://www.thearda.com/archive/natcath2.html)).

2. We realize the importance of understanding ritual initiation of new members is not merely numerical. As McCallion (2000:718) has recently written, "In the wake of the Vatican II changes (post-1965), controversy of various proportions and kinds has stewed among Catholics. But no area of change has caused more controversy, conflict, and outright anger than the changes in the liturgy." Liturgical changes are changes in church identity. The process of initiating new members, as theologian Aidan Kavanagh (1991:145) has argued, "defines simultaneously both the Christian and the Church, and the definition is unsubordinated to any other except the gospel itself, no matter from what source other definitions may originate" (also Turner 1969). Thus, not only is the RCIA the officially recognized order by which adults become Catholic today, its implementation also has the potential to tell us a great deal about the state of American Catholicism in general. At a time when so much attention is paid to what divides Catholic Americans—and much of the division revolves around generational and attitudinal differences centered on Vatican II (Davidson, et. al. 1997; D'Antonio, et. al. 2001)—it is remarkable how well received the RCIA has been. Even the Liturgy Forum of the Centre for Faith and Culture at Westminster College, Oxford—a group largely critical of post-Vatican II liturgical developments—counts "the enrichment of the process of Christian initiation" as a positive development (see its "Oxford Declaration," 29 June 1996). We take up these wider implications of the RCIA for the church in the broader project of which this analysis is a part (Yamane and MacMillen, forthcoming).

3. From the home page of the NAAC ([www.catechumenate.org](http://www.catechumenate.org)).

4. In October 2000, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops released *Journey to the Fullness of Life*, a report on the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the US based on a three-year study overseen by Dean Hoge and Rev. Dr. Robert O'Donnell. Like most good research, the study raises as many questions as it answers. By collecting diocesan-level data on the implementation of the RCIA—reporting the percentage of parishes in the dioceses that had implemented various aspects of the process—the study reveals the RCIA to be widely but unevenly implemented. Unfortunately, by neglecting the parish as a unit of analysis, the NCCB study does not allow for a systematic investigation of the relationship between the implementation of the RCIA in different parishes (the organizational-level) and the experiences

of converts in those parishes (the individual-level).

5. Greil and Rudy (1984:307) summarize the ten prominent case studies of the conversion process they review as follows: “Three of ten cases studied deal with conversion to ‘Eastern religions’ (Hare Krishna, Nichiren Shoshu and the Divine Light Mission); five deal with groups that derive from the Christian tradition (Christ Communal Organization, Crusade House, Mormons, Levites and Unification Church); the remaining studies deal with groups whose ideology could perhaps best be described as ‘occult’ (The Church of the Sun and UFO cult).”

6. This periodization is meant to capture the broad trend in the sociology of religion, not to suggest that there were no studies of switching prior to the 1980s or studies of conversion to NRMs after the 1970s. See, e.g., Stark and Glock (1968) and Berger (1998).

7. The *National Statutes* have the status of a “complementary norm” in accord with Canon 788§3 on the Catechumenate and thereby official govern the catechumenate in the United States.

8. Although the RCIA takes as its norm the unbaptized, uncatechized adult, the reality is that these individuals are a minority of all those who join the Catholic Church in any given year. In recognition of this, the US bishops issued (as appendix to the normative text of the rites) texts of “combined rites” for situations in which both unbaptized and baptized individuals are present. For example, although only an unbaptized individual can becoming a “catechumen” and enter the “catechumenate” by going through the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, baptized individuals can go through a parallel Rite of Welcoming and enter a period of continuing formation that in practice is no different that the formation received by the catechumen. Combining these individuals into a single process is both a practical pastoral (Yamane and MacMillen, forthcoming) and theological problem (Johnson 1999b).

9. National data are from *Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), and on-line methodological appendices to the study (“Amazing Growth: The RCIA Story”) at [www.usccb.org/evangelization/data.htm](http://www.usccb.org/evangelization/data.htm). The levels of implementation in our study are higher than nationally in large part because we have complete data only for the more advanced RCIA processes in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

10. We used a logistic regression analysis to assess whether there is a significant difference between the 75 percent of the original sample for which we have two waves of data and the 25 percent of the sample that dropped out or were excluded due to data limitations (which we for convenience will call “nonrespondents”). The analysis revealed the nonrespondents to have lower levels of education on average than the respondents, and also to be more likely to be married but not have children. Other variables such as gender, whether the individual is baptized, residential mobility, and the amount of time the individual spent per week on RCIA related activities were not significant predictors of responding to the second wave of data collection.

11. Initially, we also included a gender sensitive measure of socioeconomic status, but dropping the variable improved model fit.

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**TABLE 1**  
**OVERVIEW OF RCIA PROCESS**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Length/Timing</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Period 1	Evangelization and Precatechumenate	Unspecified, varies by individual need	Ensure that “the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates.” Look for “the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community” (RCIA, no. 42).
<i>Ritual Transition</i>	<i>Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens</i>	<i>Whenever inquirer is ready</i>	<i>During a liturgy, inquirers declare their intentions to continue their faith journey; the church welcomes them as persons who intend to become its members</i>
Period 2	Catechumenate	May be “several years” (RCIA, no. 7); “should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation” (NS, #6)	To give the candidates “suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life.” The four means of achieving this are: catechesis, community, liturgy, and service (RCIA, no. 75).
<i>Ritual Transition</i>	<i>Rite of Election</i>	<i>Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday</i>	<i>Held at Cathedral, presided over by ordinary (bishop or archbishop)</i>
Period 3	Purification and Enlightenment	Lent (40 days)	This is “a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance” (RCIA, no. 139).
<i>Ritual Transition</i>	<i>Rites of Initiation</i>	<i>Easter Vigil</i>	<i>Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, in the same liturgy and in this order</i>
Period 4	Mystagogia	Eastertime (50 days)	Sometimes called the period of “postbaptismal catechesis” because it seeks to lead the newly initiated more deeply into reflection on the experience of the sacraments and membership in the community.

NOTES: This is the normative vision of the process specified in the ritual text and the US bishops’ *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, promulgated in 1988. This table was inspired by Lewinski (1983:12-13).

**TABLE 2**  
**DESCRIPTION OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES USED IN ANALYSES**

Question/Description	Pre-/Post-Test Change Range	Pre-Test Mean (Std. Dev.)	Post-Test Mean (Std. Dev.)	Mean Change (Std. Dev.)	% Change	t-value
<b>ECCLESIAL CONVERSION ITEMS</b>						
How often, if ever, do you attend Mass in the Catholic Church? (1 = never; 7 = more than once a week)	-3 to 4	5.49 (0.86)	5.52 (1.08)	0.314 (1.22)	+0.5	-0.325
How often, if ever, do you participate in any spiritual group in the parish, such as Bible study, a prayer group, a faith sharing group, or any others? (1 = never; 7 = more than once a week)	-5 to 6	1.92 (1.62)	2.98 (2.07)	1.063 (2.21)	+55.2	-6.07*
Are you currently participating in any ministry or committee in the parish, such as the ushers, the school committee, youth ministry, outreach ministry, or any others? (0 = no; 1 = yes)	-1 to 1	0.14 (0.35)	0.34 (0.48)	0.201 (0.56)	+142.9	-4.53*
<b>SPIRITUAL CONVERSION ITEMS</b>						
How often, if ever, do you pray privately? (1 = never; 7 = more than once a week)	-5 to 5	6.66 (0.99)	6.57 (0.99)	-0.088 (1.17)	-1.4	0.95
How often, if ever, do you read the Bible? (1 = never; 7 = more than once a week)	-5 to 5	4.82 (2.04)	4.29 (2.02)	-0.529 (1.76)	-11.0	3.77*

\*p < .001 (2-tailed paired samples test)

NOTE: In the statistical models, the values mass attendance and participation in spiritual groups are divided by seven so that each of the three items in ECCLSCN7 have a maximum value of 1.

**TABLE 3**  
**DESCRIPTION OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES USED IN ANALYSES**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Question/Description</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean (Std. Dev.)</b>
<b>R's Gender</b>	What is your sex? (Female = 1)	0 to 1	0.59 (.493)
<b>R's Education</b>	How much formal education have you completed? (1 = some high school or less; 6 = graduate or professional degree)	1 to 6	3.60 (1.42)
<b>Voluntary RCIA Hours</b>	How many do you spend on activities which are above and beyond what is required?	0 to 11.50	1.99 (1.85)
<b>Parish Size</b>	Number of households listed in diocesan directory for year 2000	400 to 2,500	1340 (531)
<b>RCIA Implementation</b>	Aggregate of the following five items	0 to 9	4.30 (2.90)
precatec	Which of the following best describes the precatechumenate or period of inquiry in your parish? Do you have a precatechumenate always ongoing, year-around? (Yes = 1)	0 to 1	0.289 (0.455)
accept	In a typical year, how many times do you celebrate the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens?	0 to 3	1.289 (0.80)
dismissyr	Do you celebrate the Rite of Dismissal of Catechumens during the Sunday liturgy year-around? (0 = no dismissal, 1 = not year round, 2 = year round)	0 to 2	0.956 (0.78)
yearform	Do you typically require catechumens to spend a minimum of one year of formation in the catechumenate? (Yes = 1)	0 to 1	0.327 (0.47)
mystlast	How many weeks does mystagogy typically last? (0 = no mystagogy; 1 = 1 to 4 weeks; 2 = 5 to 7 weeks)	0 to 2	1.338 (0.72)
<b>RCIA Rating</b>	Aggregate of the following nine items. Scale for each is: very adequate = 3; somewhat adequate = 2; not adequate = 1	10 to 27	23.36 (3.10)
rtteach	I would rate the RCIA for. . . My gain in knowledge of Catholic teachings	1 to 3	2.73

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Question/Description</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean (Std. Dev.)</b>
knobible	My gain in knowledge of the Bible	1 to 3	2.21 (0.63)
knowsacr	My gain in knowledge of Catholic sacraments and prayer	1 to 3	2.77 (0.45)
faithque	Providing answers to questions that I had about the Catholic faith	1 to 3	2.68 (0.55)
concerns	The opportunity to discuss all my concerns	1 to 3	2.66 (0.56)
expercon	Helping me grow close to God and experience conversion	1 to 3	2.52 (0.53)
mission	Helping me feel a part of parish life and mission	1 to 3	2.77 (0.45)
grprayer	The value of group prayer times	1 to 3	2.58 (0.61)
grshare	The value of group sharing times	1 to 3	2.43 (0.59)

**TABLE 4**  
**MAXIMUM LIKELIHOOD ESTIMATES OF THE EFFECTS OF RCIA IMPLEMENTATION**  
**AND OTHER VARIABLES IN A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL OF ECCLESIAL CONVERSION**

Variables	Standardized Coefficient	Unstandardized Coefficient	S.E.	C.R.
<b>PREDICTORS OF RCIA RATING</b>				
Voluntary RCIA Hours	0.192	0.320	0.107	2.986
R's Education	-0.004	-0.009	0.140	-0.065
R's Gender	0.004	0.023	0.401	0.057
Parish Size	-0.224	-0.001	0.000	-2.621
RCIA Implementation	0.715	0.767	0.093	8.296
<b>PREDICTORS OF ECCLESIAL CONVERSION</b>				
Voluntary RCIA Hours	-0.085	-0.040	0.026	-1.560
R's Education	-0.055	-0.034	0.032	-1.034
R's Gender	-0.001	-0.002	0.093	-0.018
RCIA Rating	0.241	0.068	0.018	3.681
RCIA Implementation	0.599	0.181	0.020	9.264
<b>COVARIANCES</b>				
Gender <—> Education		-0.083	0.056	-1.486
Education <—> Voluntary RCIA Hours		-0.375	0.210	-1.789
Gender <—> Voluntary RCIA Hours		0.115	0.073	1.582
Parish Size <—> RCIA Implementation		1011.7	146.8	6.893

NOTE: A critical ratio (C.R.) with a value of 2.58 or greater is significant at the .01 level, of 1.96 or greater is significant at the .05 level, and of 1.64 is significant at the .10 level.

**TABLE 5**  
**MAXIMUM LIKELIHOOD ESTIMATES OF THE EFFECTS OF RCIA IMPLEMENTATION**  
**AND OTHER VARIABLES IN A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSION**

Variables	Standardized Coefficient	Unstandardized Coefficient	S.E.	C.R.
<b>PREDICTORS OF RCIA RATING</b>				
Voluntary RCIA Hours	0.196	0.328	0.109	3.019
R's Education	-0.007	-0.014	0.141	-0.101
R's Gender	-0.002	-0.013	0.406	-0.033
Parish Size	-0.255	-0.001	0.001	-2.823
RCIA Implementation	0.726	0.766	0.096	7.975
<b>PREDICTORS OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSION</b>				
Voluntary RCIA Hours	-0.035	-0.043	0.090	-0.480
R's Education	0.067	0.108	0.113	0.948
R's Gender	-0.015	-0.071	0.326	-0.218
RCIA Rating	-0.189	-0.139	0.063	-2.197
RCIA Implementation	0.571	0.443	0.066	6.674

NOTE: A critical ratio (C.R.) with a value of 2.58 or greater is significant at the .01 level, of 1.96 or greater is significant at the .05 level, and of 1.64 is significant at the .10 level.

**TABLE 6**  
**GOODNESS OF FIT INDICES**

<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Ecclesial Conversion Final Model</b>	<b>Independence Model</b>	<b>Saturated Model</b>
$\chi^2$	11.39	2036.9	0.00
df	7	28	0
n parameters	28	7	35
CMIN/DF	1.627	72.75	-----
CFI	0.998	0.00	1.00
IFI (Bollen $\Delta_2$ )	0.998	0.00	1.00
RMSEA	0.063	0.674	-----

<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Spiritual Conversion Final Model</b>	<b>Independence Model</b>	<b>Saturated Model</b>
$\chi^2$	7.014	1935.0	0.00
df	7	28	0
n parameters	28	7	35
CMIN/DF	1.002	69.107	-----
CFI	1.00	0.00	1.00
IFI (Bollen $\Delta_2$ )	1.00	0.00	1.00
RMSEA	0.004	0.657	-----

NOTES: Regarding fit statistics given in AMOS Version 4.01, see Appendix C of Arbuckle and Wothke (1999). Specifically:

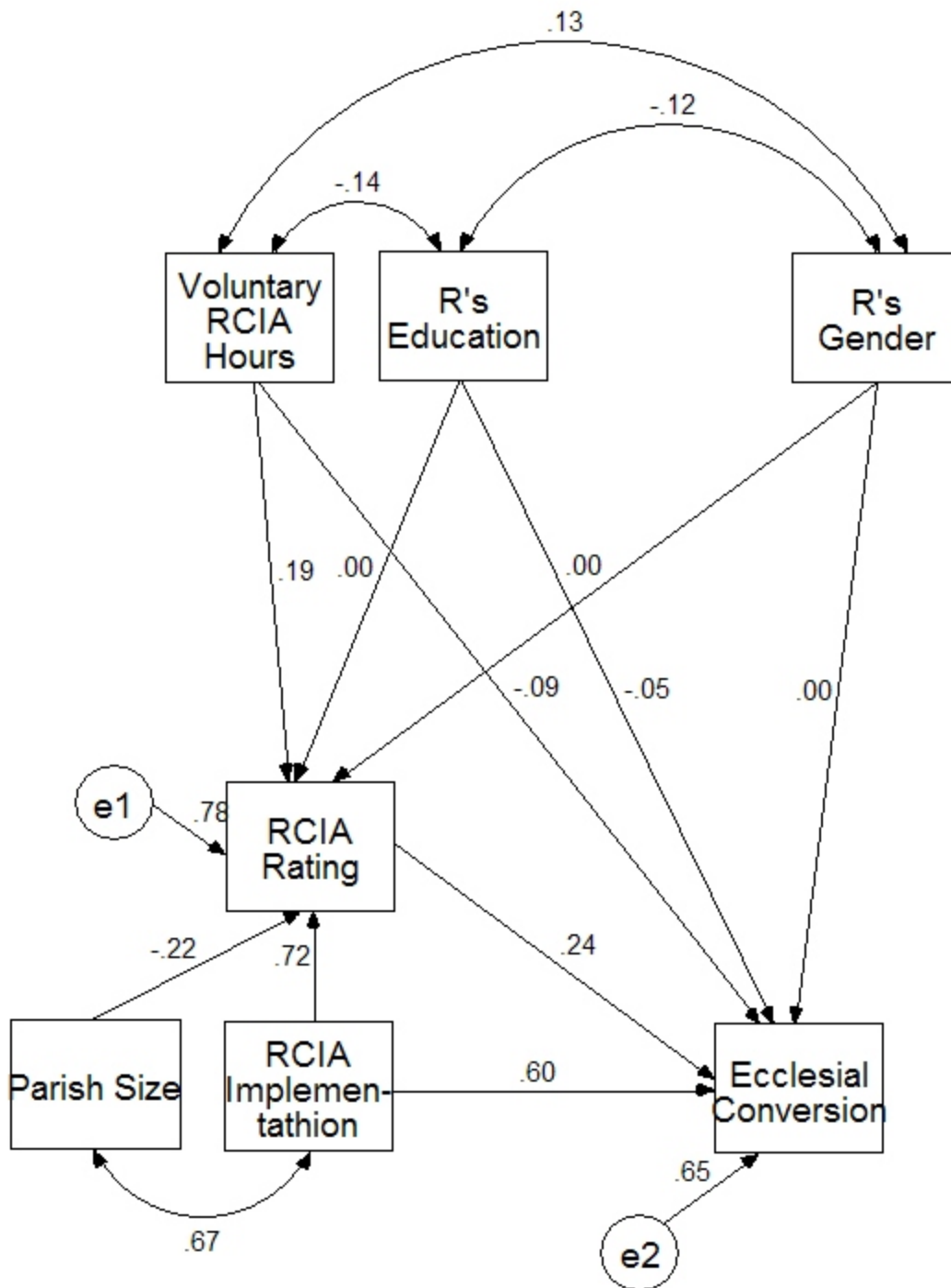
CMIN/DF. “In our experience, chi-square to degrees of freedom ratios [CMIN/DF] in the range of 2 to 1 or 3 to 1 are indicative of an acceptable fit between the hypothetical model and the sample data” (Carmines and McIver, 1981: 80).

CFI. Values for Bentler’s (1990) “Comparative Fit Index” range from 0 to 1, and values greater than 0.90 are indicative of good fitting models. An advantage of the CFI is that it does a good job estimating model fit even in small samples.

IFI. Bollen’s (1989) “Incremental Fit Index” is also known as delta square. IFI values closer to 1 indicate a better fitting model.

RMSEA. “Root mean square error of approximation.” According to Browne and Cudeck (1993), “a value of about 0.08 or less for the RMSEA would indicate a reasonable error of approximation and [we] would not want to employ a model with a RMSEA greater than 0.1.”

**FIGURE 1.**  
**AMOS STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS FOR ECCLESIAL CONVERSION**



**FIGURE 2.**  
**AMOS STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSION**

