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## The Evangelical Milieu: Defining Criteria and Reproduction across the Generations

*The authors give the first description of evangelicalism in Switzerland using representative data. It is shown that evangelicalism can be conceived of as a “milieu” which is characterized by certain structural and cultural traits, boundaries and high internal communication. The relative success of the evangelical milieu compared to other religious milieus is explained by its remarkable ability to retain its own numerous offspring, while on the other hand providing a “religious product” that is also attractive to people without an evangelical familial background.*

**Key words:** *evangelicalism · milieu · Switzerland*

*Les auteurs utilisent des données représentatives afin de faire, pour la première fois, une description de l'évangélisme en Suisse. Ils montrent qu'on peut parler de l'évangélisme comme d'un “milieu” qui se caractérise par certains attributs structurels et culturels, des frontières et une communication interne élevée. Le succès relatif du milieu évangélique comparé à d'autres milieux s'explique par sa capacité remarquable à retenir les enfants de ses membres dans le mouvement tout en offrant un “produit religieux” attractif aux personnes sans arrière-fond évangélique.*

**Mots-clés:** *évangélisme · milieu · Suisse*

Most people in western Europe these days would find it hard to believe that prayers can actually heal illnesses, prevent earthquakes or stop wars, that misfortunes are caused by the devil, that we should at times exorcise some of our contemporaries of the dark forces troubling them or that the Holy Spirit gives the power to prophesy and predict the future correctly. Despite the—as many would think—waning plausibility of these and similar views in modern society, religious groups that propagate such beliefs, like the evangelicals, are very much alive; they even seem to be outdoing the competition that supposedly is more compatible with modernity. This article gives, for the first time, a description of the “evangelical milieu” in Switzerland using representative data.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the article is twofold. First, we want to propose a conceptual tool, the “milieu”, to analyse evangelicalism. Second, we

describe the reproduction of the evangelical milieu across the generations, which is at the same time at least a partial explanation of its relative success compared to many competitors.

### The Problem

Sociology has to use theoretical terms to describe and classify its objects of research. Without these terms, one can neither understand (*verstehen*) nor explain (*erklären*) these objects. Faced with what is commonly called “evangelicalism”, sociologists of religion would therefore like to know—and this is our first question—what theoretical concept they should apply. The answer given in this article is: evangelicalism can be conceptualized as a “milieu”. Evidently, concepts are not true or false, but only fruitful or not. We cannot therefore *prove* that evangelicalism really “*is*” a milieu, but only that it is a good idea to use this concept. We do not wish to suggest that other concepts at a similar level of abstraction such as “movement”<sup>2</sup> or “field”<sup>3</sup> are useless and should from now on be replaced by the term “milieu”. These terms all have their own definitions and can and should be used for different purposes.<sup>4</sup> Here, we just show that for specific purposes, evangelicalism can be looked upon as a milieu, enabling us to show cultural, structural and identity differences between the milieu and its societal environment. It also enables us to describe differences between sub-milieus or to do comparative work on different types of milieus. The aim of working on this first question is wholly descriptive, not explanatory.

Our second question concerns the *reproduction of the evangelical milieu*: how does the reproduction of the milieu differ from other religious groups or milieus? What differences concerning reproduction do we find inside the evangelical milieu? Here, our main objective is both descriptive and explanatory. With a type of data that—for Switzerland—has never been available before, we show what differences in reproduction we have to account for, then we try to explain these differences in actor-based, theoretical terms.

### Evangelicalism

Before applying the concept of milieu, let us take a quick look at our assumptions concerning the theological characteristics, main branches and important lines of conflict in evangelicalism. Although there are great differences on other points, evangelical groups seem to have a *common theological denominator* in that they subscribe to the following (Bebbington, 1989; Jung, 1992; Fath, 1999). First, a *literalist and crucicentrist view of the biblical scriptures*. In this view, stories of miracles are readily accepted as true facts, any attempt at “demythologizing” (Bultmann) is harshly rejected and the sinfulness of man leading to the possibility of being saved is put at the centre of the message. Within these limits, there is still a wide range of different

theological options. Some evangelicals do, for example, take historical research into account, while others do not. A second point is the importance of a singular *conversion* (to be born again) in which one gives one's life to Jesus Christ, thereby gaining a personal relationship with him. Both conversion and the relationship with Jesus are conceived of as something not just intellectual but also (and more importantly) emotional. It is something one feels and experiences in one's daily life. The state of being born-again quite clearly indicates whether a person can be considered as belonging to the milieu or not—regardless of specific church affiliation. Finally, we should note the importance of *evangelizing*, of trying to win other people to Christ.

In Switzerland one may distinguish *three main branches* in evangelicalism (Jung, 1992: 88):

1. *Charismatic and Pentecostal evangelicals*. The charismatic/Pentecostal movement started out at the beginning of the last century; further charismatic or neo-Pentecostal waves followed in the 1950s/1960s and in the 1980s. The movement emphasizes the experience of the Holy Ghost. Charismatic or Pentecostal Christians think that after conversion there is a second experience called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”, which can sometimes be directly observed, for example, when a person is “speaking in tongues”. Often they are convinced that to be a fully qualified Christian one has to have had not only the born-again experience, but also that of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Emotionality is a very important aspect of charismatic worship (Föllmer, 1994; Willaime, 1999).
2. *Moderate evangelicals* emphasize the emotional relationship with Jesus and the experience of being born again, while not being either especially fundamentalist or charismatic (therefore we baptize them “moderate”). They have their roots in pietism, Methodism, the great awakenings and the free church movement (Jung, 1992).
3. *Fundamentalist evangelicals*. For these evangelicals, the infallibility of the Bible, a very clearly regulated life in the faith of God and “separation from the world” are of utmost importance, while (Pentecostal or charismatic) emotionality is less emphasized or even considered suspicious. They will also be extremely critical of any type of ecumenism (Marsden, 1991). One root of this current goes back to the Oxford Movement of the 19th century.

In Switzerland, evangelicals can be found mainly among the free churches. Using the data from the 2000 census,<sup>5</sup> one can estimate the evangelical milieu in Switzerland to include 161,075 people or 2.2% of the 7,288,010 residents. The actual milieu, however, is larger, since a number of evangelicals are to be found in the state churches (mainly the Reformed church);<sup>6</sup> others have a double membership both in a state church and an evangelical free church. The three subgroups can be estimated to be of the following relative size: charismatic: 33%, moderate: 55%, fundamentalist: 11%. There are about 1500 evangelical churches in Switzerland – including the new ethnic groups.

### The Reproduction of the “Evangelical Milieu”

The concept “milieu” emerged because of problems with earlier concepts such as class or strata. Researchers were increasingly aware that the differences and inequalities they found empirically did not fit the classical class model. Differentiation of social status, measured by education, job prestige and income, is not the only important mechanism that creates large social groups. Several researchers therefore thought that the concept of milieu might be a new descriptive tool to map social reality in a better way. But what is meant by the term milieu? Sometimes, milieu is defined as a kind of environment, e.g. the natural, geographical, or social environment. Other authors, however, define “milieu” as a system itself (Hradil, 1987): a large group of people with certain similarities and shared differences from their social environment. Colin Campbell ([1972] 1995) has suggested the concept “cultic milieu”. This term continues to be widely used (Kaplan and Loow, 2002). Some researchers (Riesenbrodt, 1995: 42–59; Stolz, 1999, 2001) have argued that we can use the term milieu for evangelicalism and fundamentalism. In this article we will draw extensively on the definition of “milieu” by Schulze (1995). Our view differs from Schulze’s in that we are convinced that milieu theory can be grounded in methodological individualism. This means that not only can we use the term “milieu” as a descriptive category but we can also place it in the framework of explanatory sociology (Stolz, 2001).<sup>7</sup>

#### *Defining Criteria of the Milieu*

According to Schulze, a milieu has the following characteristics. First: *shared structural and cultural traits*. Individuals in the same milieu will have similarities, for example, in their age-range, their income, their level of education; furthermore, there will be similarities in their values, their view of the world and their way of expressing feelings and everyday aesthetics (likes and dislikes) (Schulze, 1995: 171). A second trait is to be found in *boundaries*. These are drawn with the help of easily visible milieu signs. Individuals inside and outside can use certain milieu signs to judge whether a certain person is a member of the milieu or not. Individuals can also observe themselves in order to find out if they can pass as a member (Schulze, 1995: 108). Boundary signs have to meet two requirements. They have to be evident (easily visible) and they have to be significant (i.e. there has to be a high probability that these are the correct signs for the designated object). What examples do we have of milieu signs? According to Schulze, a milieu can use language codes, behavioural conduct, dress codes, consumer goods and the like to show milieu membership. Third, we find an *elevated level of internal communication*. There is a higher probability that individuals will communicate and look for partners for communication in their own milieu (Schulze, 1995: 174). Milieus, like many other social systems, can be *internally differentiated*. Above we spoke of the important segmental differentiation between the moderate, fundamentalist and Pentecostal/charismatic branches. There are, however, other types of internal differentiation as well, for example the centre/periphery type (Stolz, 2001).

One goal of the empirical section below will therefore be to show empirically that evangelicalism does indeed have common structural and cultural traits, boundaries and an elevated level of internal communication.

### *Reproduction across the Generations*

Milieus – like all social systems – have to continually reproduce themselves, if they do not want to simply vanish. Since some milieu members leave and others die, the milieu has to constantly recruit new members. Milieus can reproduce themselves in basically two ways. Either they recruit new members from outside the milieu or they recruit their own offspring. In order to keep up the number of members, it has—by recruitment from these two groups—to at least compensate for the losses by disaffiliation and death.

Turning to evangelicalism, we can observe that the ideology of the milieu is largely based on the idea of recruiting new members, i.e. individuals from outside the milieu. Conversion is, by definition, an act in which the individual accepts his or her deep sinfulness and turns to Jesus, thereby becoming “saved”. Looking only at the ideology and rhetoric of the milieu, one might therefore expect that reproduction works very much by recruiting from the outside. Apart from evangelical rhetoric, there is also an important sociological theory making the case for “conversions from the outside”. It is claimed that the success of conservative or “strict” churches lies mainly in the fact that their religious “product” works better than that of the more liberal competition, implying that consumers “choose” this strict religiosity in a “free religious market” (Iannaccone, 1994). There have been, however, other scholars who maintain that strict churches are strong mainly because they are able to keep their members and offspring and rely on a high birth rate. Bruce (2003: 67), for example, discussing the relative success of evangelical organizations and groups in Great Britain, concludes: “. . . it seems clear that little of this relative success was due to recruiting either non-Christians or liberal Christians. Mainly it reflected the greater success in retaining existing members and, most importantly, retaining their children”. In conclusion, we can say that in order to understand the reproduction of evangelicalism, we will have to investigate empirically the relative extent of recruitment both from their own offspring and from outside the milieu.

### **Data and Method**

Our data stem from two representative surveys, one conducted in 1999 covering the whole population of Switzerland, and a second survey from 2003 among the members of the evangelical free churches in Switzerland. The first data set (1999) was produced by conducting 1562 computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI), based on a random sample of the inhabitants of Switzerland within the age-range of 16 to 75.<sup>8</sup> The response rate was 54%. The second data set (2003) was produced by a mail survey of 1100 evangelicals from evangelical free churches in Switzerland, based on a stratified cluster sample. Cluster sampling was carried out by randomly choosing

evangelical free churches from a list and then randomly selecting members from these churches. Stratification was achieved by dividing the sample into three groups: charismatic, moderate and fundamentalist.<sup>9</sup> Since the fundamentalist group in our population only amounts to about 11%, the fundamentalist category was over-represented in the sample, in order to be able to make a better comparison between the three groups. Some 1850 questionnaires were distributed, and 1100 were returned, giving a response rate of 59.4%. The response rate was 57.9% ( $N = 359$ ) for the charismatic group, 54.6% ( $N = 377$ ) for the moderate, and 66.9% ( $N = 361$ ) for the fundamentalist group. These response rates can be seen as very satisfactory for a mail survey. The data were collected between June 2003 and September 2003. This sample can be said to be representative of the members of evangelical free churches in Switzerland. For a number of analyses we aggregated the data sets from 1999 and 2003. One of the central features of the design of our study of evangelical free churches was to include a large number of questions that had already been used in the 1999 survey of the Swiss population, in order to be able to compare the evangelical milieu to the “societal environment”.

## **Empirical Evidence**

### *Defining Criteria of the Milieu*

We argued above that, in order to prove how fruitful the milieu approach is, we would have to show empirically that “evangelicalism” does indeed have common structural and cultural traits, boundaries and high internal communication. In our data there is a tremendous amount of evidence for these claims; due to lack of space, however, we shall only give a selection of items backing our argument. First, we look at common structural/socio-demographic and cultural characteristics (Table 1, Section 1).

The most important *structural/socio-demographic* attribute of the evangelical milieu is a specific *family structure*. Other attributes of the milieu concerning education, income, rural/urban residence, that are less clear-cut, will be omitted at this point. Concerning family structure, we note that in the evangelical milieu marriage is common, and the number of children and the percentage of housewives are relatively high. While, for example, 52.2% of Reformed Church members are married, the figure for Charismatics is 72.3% (Moderates: 72.6%, Fundamentalists: 72.4%). While the average number of children per woman is 1.6 for Reformed Church members, it is 1.8 for Charismatics (Moderates: 2.1, Fundamentalists: 2.4). Consequently, families with a relatively high number of children are frequent in evangelicalism. Furthermore, we can see that there are not only differences *between* the milieu and its societal environment (especially strong concerning the percentage of married persons) but also important differences *within* the evangelical milieu.

The milieus exhibit not only common *structural* but also common *cultural features*. In evangelicalism some of these lie of course in religious ideology

**TABLE 1**  
**Defining characteristics of the “evangelical milieu”: common structure and culture**

	Evangelical free churches (%)			State churches (%)		
	Charismatic	Moderate	Fund.	Reformed	RC	No religion
<i>Common structure</i>						
Married	72.3	72.6	72.4	52.2	56.1	53.0
No. of children <sup>(a)</sup>	1.8	2.1	2.4	1.6	1.6	1.1
Three or more children <sup>(b)</sup>	24.2	36.9	44.3	23	23.1	11.0
Housewives	30.1	34.7	38.0	28.1	29.8	13.6
<i>Common culture</i>						
God exists, he has shown himself in Jesus Christ (% agree totally)	98.6	96.8	98.3	31.9	44.6	18.4
The Bible has to be taken literally <sup>(b)</sup>	57.1	39.5	66.9	9.1	9.8	5.4
Sex before marriage is always wrong <sup>(b)</sup>	75.2	56.0	88.2	6.3	4.2	0.9
Abortion is always wrong <sup>(b)</sup>	53.2	42.3	63.0	12.6	11.7	6.4
Husband should go to work; wife should look after the children (agree or agree totally) <sup>(b)</sup>	59.3	47.8	78.5	37.6	34.9	15.4
<i>N</i> <sup>(c)</sup>	361	378	361	564	776	136

*Notes:* <sup>(a)</sup> The data for the Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church and No Religion stem from the census data 2000 (Claude Bovay, Mandat de l'École d'Études Sociales et Pédagogiques de Lausanne pour l'Office fédéral de la Statistique “Une analyse des résultats du recensement fédéral de la population (RFP) de 2000 pour le thème ‘paysage religieux’”). <sup>(b)</sup> Data for the Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church and No Religion stemming from ISSP. <sup>(c)</sup> *N* for Reformed, Roman Catholic and No Religion is the number of individuals in groups in RLS Data.

(Table 1, Section 2). Let us take, as a first example, the statement that “God exists, he has shown himself in Jesus Christ”. Evangelicals agree with this statement totally to almost 100%, while it is only 31.9% of Reformed Church members and 44.6% of Roman Catholics who agree totally. An item on faith in the Bible such as “The Bible is the actual word of God and it is to be taken literally word for word” brings out certain differences *within* the evangelical milieu: total agreement varies between 39.5% (Moderates), 57.1% (Charismatics) and 66.9% (Fundamentalists). Yet, the differences between the milieu as a whole and the “Christian environment” of state-church Protestants (9.1% agree totally) and Roman Catholics

(9.8% agree totally) are tremendous. Cultural differences of this magnitude are not confined to religious doctrines in the narrow sense, but show up in various attitudes and values. Here, we concentrate again on one specific aspect, that is: values relating to family and reproduction. As can again be seen in Table 1 Section 2, we find an extremely strong stance against abortion and sex before marriage. On the other hand, evangelicals are generally in favour of traditional gender roles, for example, a family in which the husband goes to work and the wife looks after the children. Although, again, there are substantial differences within the evangelical milieu concerning these issues, we can see quite clearly that the *system as a whole* stands in great contrast to its social environment on these cultural values. Again, therefore, we can speak of substantial evidence for the existence of a *milieu*. Interestingly, it is very likely that it is not the structural/socio-demographic factors that cause or influence the cultural values, but rather the other way round: the family values cause this unique family structure in evangelicalism. There is no clear rationale for arguing that marrying, having a lot of children or being a housewife make evangelicalism especially attractive. However, it is clear that the strongly enforced norm of “no sex before marriage” forces individuals into marriage; the fundamentalist norm of the man being the head of the household encourages a traditional gender-role model for the family and while the use of contraceptive devices in a marriage is accepted by charismatic and moderate evangelicals, it is not recommended by the fundamentalists, leading to larger numbers of children in this sub-milieu.

Evangelicalism is, furthermore, characterized by important *boundaries*. The most important boundary lies arguably in the concept of “conversion” that was explained above. As can be seen in Table 2 between 94.3% and 97.2% of evangelicals claim to have experienced a “turning point” in their life when they “made a new and personal commitment to religion”—the same is true only of 24.6% of Reformed Church members and of 20.3% of Roman Catholics. Of course, evangelicals are referring here to what they call “conversion” (which can take the most diverse forms). The fact of having experienced a conversion is an attribute of the individual that is thought to be either present or absent and it therefore serves well to distinguish between “evangelicals” and “non-evangelicals”, “in-group” and “out-group”. The importance of conversion and of the social status conversion implies can clearly be seen in the fact that a vast majority of evangelicals believes that one cannot be a “true Christian” without having experienced a conversion. We can therefore see that a clear distinction is drawn inside Christianity between “true, converted Christians” and people who—in the view of many evangelicals—just call themselves Christians without having a true faith. Evangelicals also draw a second boundary between Christianity and other religions. In fact, whereas only 8.4% of Reformed Church members and 6.0% of Roman Catholics (!) think that there is “truth only in only one religion”, most evangelicals subscribe to this exclusivist view (Charismatics: 58.1%, Moderates: 54.8%, Fundamentalists: 88.7%).

Finally, let us investigate *internal communication* in the evangelical milieu. From Table 2, Section 2 it becomes clear that internal communication is extremely high in the milieu: 54.1% to 79.5% of evangelicals (depending



**TABLE 2**  
**Defining characteristics of the “evangelical milieu”: boundaries and internal communication**

	Evangelical free churches (%)			State churches (%)		
	Charismatic	Moderate	Fund.	Reformed	RC	No religion
<i>Boundaries</i>						
Religious turn <sup>(a) (b)</sup>	97.2	94.3	96.6	24.6	20.3	21.8
Conversion	98.6	95.9	98.9	–	–	–
Without conversion one is not a true Christian (totally agree)	75.8	60.3	89.4	–	–	–
There is truth only in one religion <sup>(a)</sup>	58.1	54.8	88.7	8.4	6.0	7.2
<i>Internal communication</i>						
All three best friends converted	54.1	57.4	79.5	–	–	–
Spouse converted/same denomination	90.7	93.9	98.1	67.3	73.8	48.6
<i>N</i> <sup>(c)</sup>	361	378	361	564	776	136

*Notes:* <sup>(a)</sup> Data for the Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church and No Religion stemming from ISSP. <sup>(b)</sup> Item wording: “Has there ever been a turning point in your life when you made a new and personal commitment to religion?”. <sup>(c)</sup> *N* for Reformed, Roman Catholic and No Religion is the number of individuals in groups in RLS data.

on the type) indicate that their three best friends are all converts, and virtually all married evangelicals have spouses who are converts. It is also true that 67.3% of Reformed Church members have Reformed spouses (Roman Catholics: 73.8%), but this is to a great part due to probability: since both churches together are still largely in the majority in Switzerland and since in many cantons one confession is in the majority, the probability of picking a spouse of the same confession would be very high, even if one picked randomly among possible partners in the geographical area. If an evangelical picked randomly, the probability of getting an evangelical spouse would, however, only be around 2 or 3%!

Summarizing this section, we can say that there is very clear evidence for the existence of an “evangelical milieu” on all the hypothesized dimensions. The analysis has also drawn our attention to important differences within this milieu, especially between the three different sub-milieus.

### *Reproduction across the Generations*

Having applied the notion “milieu” to evangelicalism, we now turn to the investigation of the reproduction of this milieu. Our central question is:

**TABLE 3**  
**Generational reproduction of the “evangelical milieu”<sup>(a)</sup>**

	Evangelical free churches		
	Charismatic	Moderate	Fund.
<i>% of parents converted</i> (conversion of respondent in)			
1940s	70.8	84.1	96.1
1950s	60.7	65.3	78.6
1960s	68.3	62.2	81.1
1970s	43.6	68.3	85.3
1980s	40.3	59.3	83.1
1990s	30.0	53.4	84.7
Total	44.4	63.8	84.2
<i>N</i>	330	334	323
<i>b</i>	-.079**	n.s.	n.s.
<i>% of children over 16 converted<sup>(b)</sup></i> (conversion of respondent in)			
1940s	84.6	73.1	82.3
1950s	75.9	71.8	81.6
1960s	61.4	82.9	89.6
1970s	75.0	87.6	84.5
1980s	60.7	61.7	92.9
Total	68.3	77.2	84.6
<i>N</i>	128	155	156
<i>b</i>	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

*Notes:* <sup>(a)</sup> 70.8% of the parents of charismatic evangelicals who converted in the 1940s were also converted. Only 30.0% of the parents of charismatic evangelicals who converted in the 1990s were also converted. <sup>(b)</sup> Only people with children over 16 are included.

how does the evangelical milieu reproduce itself? Does it mainly recruit people from non-evangelical backgrounds or is it a fairly “self-recruiting” phenomenon? Do we find differences as to reproduction within the evangelical milieu? And if so, how could these differences be explained? Data concerning these questions are found in Table 3.

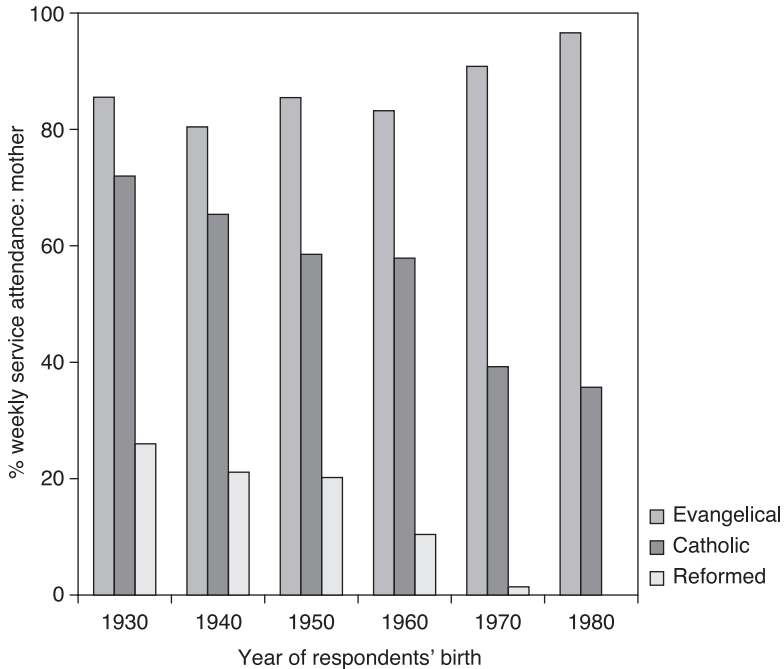
We first investigate the *percentage of converts with evangelical and non-evangelical family backgrounds* and we trace the evolution of this statistic through time for the three evangelical sub-milieus (Table 3, Section 1). We asked if the parents of respondents were converted when respondents were 15 years of age. This allows us to compute the percentage of converted parents of respondents in the different subgroups. It is interesting to note that recruitment from their own offspring differs substantially between the charismatic, moderate and fundamentalist groups. Thus, 84.2% of fundamentalist evangelicals come from a family with at least one evangelical parent, whereas only 44.4% of charismatic evangelicals and 63.8% of

moderates come from an evangelical background. These differences between the three groups are fairly stable across time, with a slight (but significant) movement towards relatively less self-recruitment, especially in the charismatic group.<sup>10</sup> Cautious interpretation is mandatory; one could not draw the conclusion, for example, that Charismatics were much less successful in retaining their own offspring than fundamentalists; the low percentage of recruitment among their own offspring could also be the result of greater success in recruiting other people! One can say, however, that the fundamentalist sub-milieu is a much more closed system concerning recruitment than the other two; there are very few individuals who choose this “product” that have not been raised in this milieu. But in the case of moderate and charismatic sub-milieus too, it is true that they are reliant to a considerable degree on their own offspring, to whom this type of religiosity seems to be attractive for a number of reasons.

A second indicator for type of reproduction is the *ability to retain their own offspring* (Table 3, Section 2). In our questionnaire we asked how many of the children over 16 had experienced a conversion. This allows us to compute the percentage of converted children over 16 in the different generations of converts. On the whole, we find a similar pattern to that of the parents. Fundamentalists have most success in retaining their offspring: 84.6% of their children are converted compared to 77.2% (Moderates) and 68.3% (Charismatics). It is interesting to note that the differences between the three groups are much smaller concerning the converted children than the converted parents (described in the paragraph above). The reason for this is easily explained: charismatic and moderate groups not only retain their own offspring with considerable success, but also attract new followers from outside, which makes their “converted-parents rate” drop. Fundamentalists, however, retain their offspring, but have almost no success in attracting converts from outside, keeping both the rates of “converted parents” and “converted children” at a high level.

Summarizing, we observe that there is a very substantial amount of reproduction by recruiting own offspring, which is almost exclusively the recruiting mode of the fundamentalist sub-milieu, while moderate and charismatic groups have also recruited significant numbers of individuals who do not have an evangelical background.

Finally, we turn to the question of why evangelicals are so successful in retaining their own offspring, while the state churches are faced with more and more defection. It is well known that parental commitment is by far the most important causal influence on the individual religiosity of children and, therefore, also the best predictor of a child’s decision to disaffiliate. So, one part of the answer to the above question certainly lies in the stable, or even growing, commitment of parents in evangelical groups compared to the waning commitment in the state churches. This can be seen in Figure 1. It shows the percentage of mothers attending church weekly or more often when respondents were 15 years of age. Clearly, there are very great differences between the groups: mothers of evangelicals (and here we only look at converted evangelical mothers) attend church more often than mothers of Roman Catholics who, in their turn, attend more often than mothers of



**FIGURE 1**

**Weekly service attendance of mothers of Evangelical, Reformed and Roman Catholics when respondents were 15 years of age**

Reformed Church members. This was to be expected. However, there are also clearly different trends: while attendance of evangelical mothers stays high or even increases, that of Roman Catholic and Reformed mothers declines over time. If service attendance of mothers is a good indicator of the strength of religious socialization of their children, this means that in the evangelical milieu socialization remains very healthy while in the Reformed and Roman Catholic milieus it is weakening and encouraging disaffiliation.

## Conclusion

In this article we have demonstrated that the concept of “milieu” is useful for describing and analysing evangelicalism. In future analyses, we intend to show how the milieu concept can also be very fruitful for comparative work: much could, for example, be learned by comparing the famous “cultic milieu” (Campbell, [1972] 1995), the “Catholic milieu” (Altermatt, 1989) and the evangelical milieu that has been presented here. Moreover, we have dealt with the way evangelicalism reproduces itself. From this analysis

we learn that accounting for the evangelical success in modern society cannot rely solely on the market model, but that it must also include the human-capital model that takes into consideration the religious socialization of individuals. Thus, we were able to explain that evangelicalism succeeds in retaining a substantial part of its own members' offspring and at the same time creates a market product that attracts individuals from different backgrounds. All this having been said, it becomes less of an enigma that, even in our modern society, there should be a lot of people who believe that prayers can actually heal illnesses, that misfortunes are caused by the devil and that we should, at times, exorcise some of our contemporaries of the dark forces.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A study that is in some ways comparable to ours was undertaken by H. C. Stoffels (1990) in the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> *Social movements* can be defined as groups of people who try to change (or resist change in) certain important characteristics of society.

<sup>3</sup> A "*field*" can be defined as a system of interrelated societal positions (Bourdieu, 1984). Often, the relationships involve power and subordination (Bourdieu, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Thus, depending on one's theoretical interest, one should choose different concepts in order to apply them to evangelicalism. If the focus is on societal goals, one might choose the concept "movement"; if it is on power relations between related, but functionally different positions, one could choose the concept "field"; if the research is on cultural, structural and identity similarities and differences, the concept "milieu" is preferable.

<sup>5</sup> The Swiss census is a survey of the total population of Switzerland which has taken place every 10 years since 1850. In the year 2000 Protestants could choose among "Reformed", "evangelical free church" or "other Protestant community". The 2.2% cited in the text is made up of the people from "evangelical free churches" or "other Protestant communities".

<sup>6</sup> The state-church evangelicals are not included in our research, except for the two groups "Evangelisches Gemeinschaftswerk" and "Vineyard Berne".

<sup>7</sup> In our view, milieu-theory should be clearly linked to an actor-based systems theory (for example, Coleman, 1990). The central idea is to assume rational actors with certain properties (interests, resources and faculties) who create their identity both for themselves and for others, by using milieu-cognition and milieu-structures. As a result of the multiple individual actions the milieu-system emerges, showing certain emergent properties, like boundaries, a high level of internal communication etc. This system in turn influences the cognition and the actions of the individuals (Stolz, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> The project was entitled "Religion et lien social" and was directed by Roland J. Campiche. Respondents were asked to complete another (mail) survey afterwards (ISSP); 1212 of the respondents also took part in this second survey.

<sup>9</sup> We operationalized the categories as follows: Charismatics: Churches who are affiliated to Pentecostal organizations; fundamentalists: churches that do not want to join the evangelical alliance (= separatism); moderates: remaining churches. This typology was later checked empirically and found to be an extremely good fit.

<sup>10</sup>. A regression was performed for each subgroup. Only the b in the case of the charismatic subgroup was significant with  $b = -.079$ . This means that in each new 10-year period the percentage of converted parents goes down by 7.9%.

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