

CATHOLIC CHURCH IS BOOMING

All we ever hear from the wild-eyed critics of the Catholic Church, including the dissidents within, is that the Church had better “get with it” and change its teachings on abortion, homosexuality and women’s ordination. Yet it is precisely those religious institutions that are the most liberal on these issues—the mainline Protestant denominations—that are collapsing. Not so the Catholic Church. Indeed, its numbers are going north while the mainline denominations are going south.

The latest findings by the “Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership” project, a collaborative effort with Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, are illuminating. In the last 40 years, the Catholic population has increased by 75 percent; it has grown by 50 percent since 1990. More important, Catholic attendance at Mass is up 15 percent since 2000. And in the last five years, contributions have increased by 14 percent. It is also important to note that there has been a 40 percent increase in Latinos in the Church over the past five years.

Shedding more light on the statistics is a study released a few months ago by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion. Its “Landscape Survey” found that of those Catholics who have left the Church, roughly half became unaffiliated while the other half became Protestant. Regarding the latter half, only 23 percent did so because of the Church’s teachings on abortion and homosexuality; only 16 percent left because of the way women are treated. Importantly, two-thirds of these Catholics elected to join a Protestant evangelical church.

In other words, disaffected Catholics who left for another religion opted to join a more conservative church. That they did not run down the block in search of a mainline denomination—one that entertains the liberal agenda on issues

governing sexuality and women—is telling.

It's time some people took a hard look at the data and made some hard choices. This is great news for the Catholic Church.