

C21 Resources

A S E R V I C E O F B O S T O N C O L L E G E

FALL 2006

Challenges and Opportunities

BY AUDREY LAPORTE VEST

The future vitality of the Catholic Church lies in its young people. Yet anyone who has been paying attention knows that the worshippers at most weekend liturgies are typically a graying congregation. Many people in their twenties and thirties do not attend Mass on a regular basis. Even fewer take active leadership roles in the parish. The obvious conclusion is that young adult Catholics are not

committed to the Church. If this is true, what are the implications for the future of the Catholic Church in America?

Who are today's young adult Catholics? How do they actually live their Catholicism? Do they go to Mass on Sunday? Are they alienated from the Church? How do they respond to the Church's moral teachings? Do they take the popes' statements seriously? Are they leaving for other denominations in significant numbers?

Seeking answers to these and other

questions, a team of sociologists conducted a national survey of more than eight hundred women and men between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine. Their findings, based on questionnaires and followed by telephone and personal interviews, were published in *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* by Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, S.N.D. de N., and Juan L. Gonzales, Jr. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

One of the authors' most striking conclusions is that the leadership of the Catholic Church needs to establish a "preferential option" for this population, a dynamic and sustained outreach. "Resources and energies should be directed toward helping young adult Catholics feel wanted,

welcomed, and actively involved in the life of the Church," they write.

"If religion in general is on the decline in America, as some observers claim, it is not due to the dying of the old but the inability of the Church to retain these young adult Catholics," according to coauthor William D. Dinges. "Church leadership must accept that young adult Catholics are not Catholic in the same way that previous generations have been Catholic. The book should be a flashing yellow light, a warning, that many serious issues need to be addressed if the Church is not to lose this generation."

In an interview with *Liguorian*, Dinges, an associate professor of Religious Studies in the School of Religion at The Catholic University of America, outlined some of the major

IN THIS ISSUE

Young Adult Catholics

Catholics today who have a personal memory of Mass in Latin sometimes experience a "wake-up call" when they consider that the Second Vatican Council, that watershed event that sought to breathe new life into the Church, closed its sessions over forty years ago. What this lapse of time means, among other things, is that there are now Catholic adults who have lived their entire lives after the Council.

If our formative experiences of religion happen during youth and adolescence, it is important to ask how the formation of young adults today differs from that of their parents or grandparents. In addition to the developments within the Church—mass in the vernacular with the priest facing the congregation; a new embrace of religious freedom and ecumenism; a nuanced engagement with the modern world—there were developments in the United States and around the world. The decade from 1965 to 1975 was the era of the cold war and the conflict in Vietnam; the sexual revolution; the scandal of Watergate; and the conflicts between government and universities. During this same era, adolescence and young adulthood were redefined by both cultural and economic forces. Many young adults experienced a greater degree of freedom than their parents had known in their youth.

The ensuing decade, from 1976 to 1986, saw even more change. Catholics born during this period have memories of only one pope, the late John Paul II. His agility in utilizing the media showed many young people a willingness to engage the world they lived in, a world of acceleration of communication and information. His presence at the several World Youth Days too showed young Catholics the face of a man seeking to persuade them to challenge the impersonal forces of the market-driven world. For these rising "John Paul II Catholics"—many of whom are in college now—the late pope represents a benchmark of authentic discipleship in the world.

Catholics whose memories stretch back to earlier popes—Paul VI and John XXIII especially—often find themselves bewildered by what they see as contradictory messages from young adults. On the one hand, there are those who seem disengaged from the Church, a large group which surveys describe as "spiritual, but not religious." On the other hand, there are those whom the theologian William Portier describes as "evangelical Catholics," a smaller group who, following the example of the late pope, are energized by their Catholic faith even amidst what they perceive as a sometimes hostile cultural milieu.

This, our seventh issue of *C21 Resources*, takes up the challenge of helping discern the challenges for the Church as it reaches out to young adult Catholics. We begin with survey data of both white and Hispanic young adults in the United States. Next, we include autobiographical pieces from three young adults today, pieces which reflect the different routes that young Catholics have taken in their religious formation. From there, we engage the voices of two mature Catholic thinkers speaking to their younger brothers and sisters in faith. The final five pieces suggest ways forward in the Church's mission to young adults today.

—The Editors

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Challenges and Opportunities

findings of the survey and their pastoral implications. The research focused on Roman Catholics between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine, members of Generation X and younger baby boomers, who were at least at some point in their lives committed to the Church. The group surveyed included 60 to 70 percent non-Latinos and 30 to 40 percent Latinos chosen from confirmation rolls in various parishes.

On the plus side, these young adult Catholics are not alienated from or angry with the Church in the same way that many older members of the baby boom generation are. Rather, their attitude toward the institutional Church is what sociologists call one of anomie, that is, indifference or a sense of normlessness. They are simply not particularly attached to the institutional Church. This, Dinges says, presents a different kind of pastoral problem than dealing with those who are angry with the Church or contesting aspects of its teaching.

Another encouraging finding was that few young adults have actually left the Church. They like being Catholic and have no intention of leaving. Only about 10 percent of those interviewed have entirely ceased to participate in parish life and no longer call themselves Catholic.

In most cases, those who have left the Church have joined other Christian denominations, a point that illustrates a widespread perception among this population: it rejects the possibility of any kind of objective truth. The generation often labeled Generation X regards religion as basically a matter of opinion or perspective. They have come of age, as the book's subtitle emphasizes, in a culture of choice. Reflecting a major cultural trend, they tend to disassociate spirituality from religion. For this generation, being a spiritual person has nothing to do with being part of a particular historical tradition. Some have a strong sense that they have no need for mediators between themselves and God.

Dinges views this attitude as potentially lethal to the future of Catholicism. "We are a profoundly communal religion," he says, "not a 'me-and-Jesus' religion." For this reason, he believes it is essential that the Church

do more to welcome young adults and do everything it can to instill in them a strong sense of community and Catholic identity.

Many of those interviewed, Dinges reports, see no critical difference between Catholics and Protestants. "Less than 50 percent believe that Catholicism is any more faithful to the will of Christ than Protestant Churches, especially Protestant mainline traditions. For them, the 'bells and incense' differences are largely peripheral. They regard Catholicism as just another denomination and a choice of lifestyle that is not necessarily any truer than other Christian denominations."

The study also found that as much as these young adults like being Catholic, their attachment to the institutional Church and their sense of Catholic identity is weak. "Many of these young people have a particularly difficult time articulating exactly what it means to be Catholic," Dinges says. "Some of them haven't a clue about what is unique or distinctive about being Roman Catholic." Yet the survey revealed several points that most participants agree are relevant to their identity as Catholics.

One of these points is the strong commitment to social-justice issues in the Church. Those surveyed link a commitment to the poor with a sense of what it means to be Catholic. One of the great successes of the Second Vatican Council, Dinges believes, is the strong understanding that where the poor are, Catholics need to be. He believes, however, that educators need to do a better job of linking this commitment to social justice with specific Catholic teaching as an important part of what it means to be Catholic.

Despite this encouraging finding, the researchers saw a declining sense of the salience, or central importance, of Catholic identity in the lives of these young people. There is less conviction that it really matters to be Catholic.

Dinges considers the perception of the Catholic Church as just another Christian denomination, the weak attachment to the institution of the Church, and the unclear sense of Catholic identity among young adults to be extremely important issues that

have serious behavioral consequences. For example, about 50 percent of non-Latino marriages are to non-Catholics, another index of the salience issue. The attitude among many younger Catholics that it doesn't matter that much whether one is a Catholic affects decisions about choosing a spouse or sending one's child to a Catholic school.

Many older Catholics tend to forget that for these younger Catholics, Vatican II is ancient history. Many young adult Catholics have no sense of what the Council was about. They often associate it with the use of English rather than Latin in the Mass and changes in a few prayers. At best, a sophisticated sense of what the whole process was about is lacking.

Older baby boomers should not assume that their agenda in the wake of Vatican II is necessarily the agenda of today's young adults, Dinges says. "The idea that the Church is polarized between left wing and right wing, liberal and conservative, is no longer a helpful way to think about what's going on in the Church."

Another striking difference between young adult and older Catholics is that many in the study have not experienced Catholicism as a cultural system, especially non-Latinos. Lacking a strong communal Catholic experience, young adults have a limited sense of the history, language, and symbolism of the Catholic tradition. Catholic identity is more strongly ingrained in the ethnicity of Latinos than in that of non-Latinos; but for third- and fourth-generation descendants of European immigrants, Catholic ethnic factors are no longer at work.

"The great irony of this situation," Dinges says, "is that for a long time, Catholics were outsiders. This nation has an embarrassing history of anti-Catholicism, especially during the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. This evoked a strong 'us against them' mentality. Now that Catholics have become fully assimilated and anti-Catholicism has waned, this dynamic is no longer working."

On the whole, the researchers found a fairly strong sacramental sensitivity among those surveyed. Clearly, they have been nurtured by sacramental participation. Most identified belief in the Real Presence as essential to

Catholicism. Since only 30 percent of this population attends Mass on a weekly basis, however, it is unclear how this sacramental sensitivity can be nurtured over the long run.

The young adult Catholics interviewed appreciate the Church's global consciousness. Most of those interviewed regard Pope John Paul II as a significant icon of Catholicism. They hold him in high esteem, even though they don't necessarily agree with everything on his moral agenda. They know he is challenging them, and they respect him for that.

The authoritarianism of the Church and its moral code, especially in matters of sexuality, is one of the major points of conflict revealed by the study. As with many older Catholics, there are significant discrepancies between what the Church teaches and how these young adult Catholics actually live their lives. Certainly, a great many of them understand the Church's positions, but they simply cannot reconcile some of those positions with their own conscience.

Although survey participants gave parishes high ratings on meeting their spiritual needs, the central disconnecting point for most of them is the liturgy. As college students, they often experienced meaningful, uplifting liturgies as part of their campus ministries, only to become alienated after they left college and encountered parish liturgies that did not connect culturally with their generation. Spiritual experience is important to young adult Catholics. They like liturgies with music that connects to them culturally and that fosters a sense of community. They also look for meaningful hospitality, good preaching, and edifying homilies that are relevant to the Word and that speak to their lives in an authentic way.

When it comes to meeting their personal needs, their ratings of parishes fell significantly. Many of the young adults surveyed expressed doubt that their voices are being heard by the Church leadership. Many parishes, they say, have programs for children, teens, and parents, but there is no significant outreach to those in their age group. Still others feel alienated because they don't see their peers in active leadership roles in the context of the liturgy.

Overall, those interviewed had a negative reaction to their religious education. Their experiences ranged

from what one young man called a "milk-and-cookies" Jesus to a strong emphasis on social-justice issues. While the latter is a positive point, few of the 67 percent who are registered in a parish reported involvement in social-justice ministries.

According to Dinges, if the survey highlights one unavoidable truth, it is that "the American Church is learning in a somewhat painful way the lesson that compliance with Church teaching can no longer be forced. People need to have a sense of participating in decisions, and these decisions have to appear reasonable to them and derivative to some degree of their own life experience. Otherwise, they're not going to be bound to them."

But how can the Church minister to a population which has made the decision that it does not have to live up to a particular moral principle? How can parishes minister to the core identity of the whole congregation when certain individuals hold dissenting views? What, in short, do young adult Catholics want and expect from the Church, and how can it minister to them more effectively?

One of the questions asked of interviewees was, "What if you had the chance to address the American Catholic bishops, and they wanted to hear from young people?...What would you say?" Their responses are enlightening.

The need for parishes to be more welcoming of young adults and to foster a strong sense of community is a recurring theme. Young adult Catholics are eager to know more about their faith and expressed a desire for more parish adult-education programs. They are aware of many of the flaws and failings of their Catholic tradition, and they need help in learning to see much more that is healthy, edifying, and sanctifying about the Church.

A number of those interviewed said they want to know more about the Bible. Having encountered evangelical Christians in college and on the job, they expressed a sense of inadequacy because evangelical Christians know Scripture so much better than they do.

Dinges also sees a need for better marriage-preparation programs and continuing marriage ministries, especially to that 50 percent of non-Latinos in this age group who are in

interfaith marriages.

"It's the young people of today who predict the old people of tomorrow," he says. "Social science researchers have found that after a certain point, there is a continuity in our beliefs and values. After about the age of twenty-five, there is a kind of solidification of values. The way young Catholics express their Catholic identity now predicts the way they will express their Catholic identity as they age.

"There was a time when the general wisdom was that young Catholics often left the Church for a while, then came back when they had children. The current trend to later marriages has greatly extended that connection point. The Church can no longer just wait for them to get mar-

ried and come back."

Clearly, this study reveals both disquieting and hopeful signs. Yet Dinges does not think that today's young adult Catholics should be perceived as a problem. "They present both challenges and opportunities within the Church," he says. "They are a reservoir of energy, dynamism, and commitment. There are many good young people out there. We need to reach out to them."

Audrey LaPorte Vest is a freelance author and editor from St. Louis, Missouri.

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FROM THE U.S. BISHOPS

Sons and Daughters of the Light

We know that your talents, and those of other young adults, can enrich the Church and can be a sign of God's presence in society. We invite you to share them with us and to become part of a welcoming community for other young adults as well. Not too long ago, our Holy Father spoke of your importance to the life of the Church: "The Church needs your energies, your enthusiasm, your ideals, in order to make the Gospel of life penetrate the fabric of society, transforming people's hearts and the structures of society in order to create a civilization of true justice and love."

...In a special way, we would like to speak to those men and women in difficult situations: to those who are unemployed or underemployed, who have been abused, who experience discrimination because of economic or ethnic prejudices, who struggle with their sexuality, who are newcomers to our country, who are struggling in their marriage, who seek wisdom and guidance in raising children, or who are having difficulty making and keeping commitments. We want you to know that you are not alone and that we will continue our efforts to listen

to your concerns and speak on your behalf, offering you a hope rooted in the embrace of Jesus Christ.

During your life journey, continue to hope and to dream. We want to support you in every way we can, even as we acknowledge that this support has not always been present. This is one of the works of the Christian community—to help you live your life in Jesus Christ. Do not hesitate to make Jesus the center of your life, the focus of your choices in life. In the words of our Holy Father, "Build your lives on the one model that will not deceive you...open the Gospel and discover that Jesus Christ wants to be your 'friend' (cf. Jn 15:14). He wants to be your 'companion' at every stage on the road of life (cf. Lk 24:13-35). He wants to be the 'way,' your path through the anxieties, doubts, hopes, and dreams of happiness (cf. Jn 14:6). He wants to be your God (cf. Mt 16:13-17)."

From the U.S. Bishops, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (1997)

(<http://www.nccbuscc.org/laity/ygadult/toc.shtml>)

Young Adult Catholics

BY DEAN R. HOGE,
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Editors' note: The following is an excerpt from the book described by Audrey LaPorte Vest in the preceding article. In this excerpt, the authors of the study make recommendations to Church leaders about how to minister to young adults today.

Our Recommendations

In light of our study of young adult Catholics, we present the following recommendations:

I. A “Preferential Option” for Young Adult Catholics

Church leadership should initiate a “preferential option” for young adult Catholics. This means a dynamic and sustained program of outreach. Resources and energies should be directed toward helping young adult Catholics feel wanted, welcomed, and actively involved in the life of the Church. Liturgy is a primary venue for such outreach, since it is the institutional context in which the vast majority of young adults experience themselves as a church.

Efforts must be made to develop programs, ministries, and initiatives in parish settings specifically directed toward young adults. We cannot assume that programs which are efficacious for adolescents or married couples are also appropriate for young adults. Respondents told us that while some young adult groups in parishes were faith sharing, others were little more than de facto singles groups. Parish and diocesan levels should highlight particular issues for young adult subpopulations—single life, marriage, work, elderly parents, children, ethics, social justice, sexuality, and the problems of relationships and intimacy—and develop appropriate programs.

Young adult Catholics who have stopped practicing the faith and who return to the Church on the occasion of a wedding or funeral or baptism should not be greeted with the question, “Are you registered in this parish?” Such queries will drive many

away. Parishes must be pastorally sensitive. Young adult Catholics need to be welcomed and encouraged to reconnect with the Church before being confronted with juridical requirements.

II. Promote a Distinct Catholic Identity

Young adult Catholics should be imbued with a positive and distinct sense of Catholic identity. While ecumenical dialogues should continue, Catholic religious educators should refocus some of their energies on promoting the distinctiveness of Catholic identity. This means responding creatively to the yearning for core values and faith content alluded to by young adults. As one respondent cogently put it: “I want to be a Catholic. I want to know more about my faith. I want some substance.”

“Resources and energies should be directed toward helping young adult Catholics feel wanted, welcomed and actively involved in the life of the Church.”

We concur with Davidson et al. (1997) in bringing attention to the negative consequences of religious education that emphasizes ecumenism and a common Christian heritage but that fails to include a focus on what is distinctive about being Catholic and why that matters. To continue this generic orientation will have detrimental consequences to the future of the Church.

III. Build a Catholic Identity in a Positive Way

Emphasizing the distinctiveness of Catholic identity can be done in a positive way. Approaches based on exhortations to obligations may produce momentary compliance, but not the positive motivations which are foundational to spiritual growth. We believe that the strengthening of Catholic identity will necessitate more

than a simplistic emphasis on learning traditional doctrinal positions. Young adult Catholics must be listened to and consulted regarding their own values and concerns and in terms of their own visions of what they can contribute to the future of the Church. The type of positive approach associated with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) with its emphasis on mentoring, deliberation, community, and discipleship is a helpful model in this respect. Church efforts to enforce boundaries, rules, and regulations that are not widely accepted by those involved are likely to be counterproductive. Nor will Catholic identity be strengthened by disparaging what is different about non-Catholic traditions.

In Chapter 8, we say that elements in the total identity structure achieve more or less centrality and more or

less influence over other elements, depending on how well they serve the total spiritual needs of the person. Elements of an individual’s personal identity which enhance self-confidence will grow in importance. The reverse is also true. If Church leadership wants to strengthen Catholic identity, what is done must contribute to the confidence and strength of the individual believer. People who experience empowerment through the Church will become stronger Catholics.

We believe that Catholic distinctiveness can be accentuated in positive ways by special emphasis on three dimensions of Church life: (a) sacramentalism (especially the Mass as noted below), (b) the struggle for peace and justice in a fashion that builds on distinct elements of contemporary Catholic theology, and (c) the centrality of community and promo-

tion of the common good. All three are distinctive in Catholic identity. And they are values and orientations that counter many of the prevailing forces of materialism, secularism, and exaggerated individualism in American society. They can be affirmed in ways that are not excessively sectarian or that imply a return to pre-conciliar Catholic triumphalism. In combination, they can provide a healthy and necessary tension with society conducive to the commitment of young adult Catholics to the Church and its mission.

IV. The Liturgical Context

The Mass has a compelling power in the spiritual life of many young adult Catholics. Although not the only context, it is one in which many Catholics encounter community, the Word, and the sacred. The solidarity expressed in the liturgy is fundamental to Catholic identity and critical to a generation of young adults concerned with problems of intimacy and caring. Parish resources of every type should be poured into enhancing the quality (spiritual, communal, aesthetic) of liturgies. Young adult Catholics must not experience liturgies as outdated, mechanical, irrelevant, or boring. This means that young adults themselves must be *meaningfully integrated into the liturgical act in a variety of ministerial roles*. Appropriate room must also be made in the liturgy for musical, artistic, and cultural forms with which young adults can resonate.

V. Build Better Community

The communal nature of the Church should be emphasized. More attention and energy should be given to building community in parish life. But the liturgy alone should not bear the entire burden of this task. Small faith communities and action-oriented projects will also be important.

This community building initiative should not be construed simply as bringing back young adults who are feeling isolated and in need of social support and intimacy. Young adults must see that community is an ecclesial dimension that is intrinsic to their Catholic identity, that being Catholic is not something simply between the

individual and God or even between the individual and the hierarchy representing God; they must feel it is a communally mediated and articulated identity.

VI. Better Young Adult Religious Education

There is a critical need for credible and relevant adult religious education. As one young adult observed, “The Church settles for less than the best.” This is especially true in three areas: Bible study, Vatican theology, and the Church’s social teachings.

Disputation over Vatican II’s meaning and implementation is an undercurrent in the contemporary Church. It is still a source of polarization and division among Catholics. Yet many young adult Catholics know little about the Council, its deliberations, documents, and theology, and what

is known is piecemeal and superficial. A respondent’s comment that “My understanding of the Vatican Council was it made the Latin Mass become non-Latin and...changed some of the words in prayers,” is emblematic of the situation. This is a serious lacuna in Catholic life today—as is the general lack of knowledge regarding Catholic social teachings since Vatican II.

The three areas—Bible, Vatican II, and social teaching—need to be addressed with programs that are intellectually edifying and challenging, action oriented, community building, and helpful for integrating young adults into parish life. Many young adult Catholics are eager for instruction in their faith and will prove receptive to initiatives.

The problem of Catholic young adult religious education transcends the issues of content and the development of curriculum, it is also one of pedagogy. Greater attention needs to be given to the teaching of teachers and those involved in young adult education. Resources should be directed to these ends, along with the development of youth groups, community service projects, and retreat programs which implement these teachings.

VII. Better Marriage Preparation

One of the most challenging areas in our interviews was the relationship of the respondents to people of other

faith traditions. The topic is broad and includes everything from knowledge of Catholicism and of non-Catholic traditions to feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in defending Catholicism.

Attention should be paid to the specific needs of the large number of Catholics who are marrying people of other faiths or no faith—and, where possible, to the increasing number who are marrying outside of the Church. The rate of interfaith marriage is high. Parishes need to develop programming that will address interfaith questions ranging from basic information about different faiths to issues of child rearing, religious education, and holiday celebrations.

VIII. More Recruitment to the Priesthood, Religious Life, and Lay Ministry

The low percentage (15 percent) of young adults who indicated that they had been encouraged to think about a vocation to the religious life or priesthood is a cause of concern. We believe that efforts to empower the laity to take their rightful place in the Church do not preclude the invitation of some young adults to consider religious life and priesthood and the education of all young adults about the various ways of life in the Church. Young adult Catholics should be brought to greater awareness of ministry in service in the Church and the world. This involves both encouragement for new forms of non-ordained lay ministry and encouragement for priests, brothers, and sisters. One young woman told us that she had never been taught about the option of religious life. She said her religious education focused on “Christian lifestyles” but only presented the options of marriage and single life.

For those who were encouraged to think of a vocation to the priesthood and religious life, the encouragement came primarily from their family. Our findings suggest the Church should explore why more intensive recruitment does not come from within the priesthood and religious life itself.

Attention should also be paid to the vocation of lay ministry. While the Church often talks about the laity assuming more ministerial roles in the future, we found that very few young adults were employed in full-time work within the Church. Will

lay ministers in the Church continue to be found in older generations alone?

IX. Spirituality, Prayer, and Meditation

The Church needs to continue to teach young adults about its many rich and diverse sources of spiritual renewal. Efforts should be made to assist young adult Catholics in reappropriating specifically Catholic symbols and spiritual traditions. This is especially important in view of the fact that most of their spiritual seeking occurs within the tradition (Chapter 7). This reappropriation will facilitate their sense of connectedness and continuity with Catholicism, even while these symbols and traditions are transformed in a new cultural and historical context. The Church’s emphasis on prayer and meditation in conjunction with social action is also important.

We learned from our interviews that retreat experiences in particular are effective in the above respects. There should be more and a greater variety of retreat opportunities that are affordable, relevant, and offered at convenient times and locations.


X. Young Adult Catholic Initiatives

The effort to incorporate young adults into a more meaningful experience of the life of the Church is not a one-way street. While persons in leadership positions in the Church have responsibilities in this region, so do young adults themselves. Young adult Catholics should try to take the spiritual offerings and mission of the Church more seriously. This involves learning more about the Church and its rich intellectual tradition and investing more time in its institutional, sacramental, and liturgical life. Making the effort to get to know Catholics who are parish connected will help reinforce the sense of community and solidarity essential to Catholic life. Peer relationships will also make a difference in encouraging Mass attendance and participation in small groups or parish service projects.

From Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, S.N.D de N., and Juan L. Gonzales, Jr., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) pp. 231-234.

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Between Two Cultures

BY JEFF GUNTZEL

The 2000 census confirmed all the hunches: The Hispanic population in the United States is soaring.

The numbers are eye-opening: A 58 percent increase in the overall Hispanic population since 1990. Hispanic young people ages 15 to 29 grew by 54 percent. And Hispanic children ages 0 to 14 grew by 62 percent. Hispanics will soon be this country's largest minority group. By some counts, they already are.

Everyone has taken notice: politicians, TV networks, and certainly the Catholic Church. It is a rare Church meeting or convention that does not in some way recognize the growing demographic reality. There's a big difference, however, between noticing the changes and knowing what to do about them.

A recent report, "The Status of Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the United States," published by Instituto Fe y Vida, assesses not only how the Catholic Church in the United States is facing the challenges and opportunities presented by such a dramatic shift, but also how much is at stake.

"The Catholic Church must come to terms with the challenge of ministering to its Hispanic population," the report warns, "or it may risk losing a significant portion of the faithful for generations to come."

The Institute, source of the earlier statistics on Hispanics, is an organization focused on evangelization, formation, and leadership among Hispanic youth and young adults. It estimates that Hispanics now account for more than 45 percent of all Catholics under the age of 30 in the United States. And that number, by most accounts, is climbing.

So it would seem an easy assumption to some that the Church would be shifting significant resources to the new population. But that is not often the case, according to the report and interviews with workers in the field who are left to battle for funds and against assumptions of some who lead the Church.

One of the 10 Largest

Joe Castro didn't need a census to

understand the challenges posed by the new demographics. He is the Spanish program director at the Christian Renewal Center, a retreat center in Dickinson, Texas, run by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Castro works with Hispanic young adults from the parishes of the Galveston-Houston diocese.

"What we have accomplished here," said Castro, "hasn't been without a struggle and we are still struggling."

The Galveston-Houston diocese

the institute.

"There seems to be a myth among Catholic youth ministers that Hispanic teens will be cared for by the Hispanic adults who are of their culture, so the non-Hispanic ministers need not reach out to them," the report's author, Ken Johnson-Mondragon, wrote in an article summarizing the document's more than 100 pages.

"The reality," the report continues, "is that most Hispanic youth are living between two cultures, neither of which is fully theirs. This means

Table 1

By 2010, more than 50% of all young Catholics in the U.S. will be Hispanic.

37% of the U.S. Catholic Church was Hispanic in 2005.

(Most recent estimates from Instituto Fe y Vida)

50% of all Hispanics are younger than 27 years old.

(U.S. Census Bureau estimates for July 2005)

Among Catholics under age 30 in the U.S., Hispanics have increased 70% in the last 15 years, while non-Hispanic whites have decreased 16%.

(Most recent estimates from Instituto Fe y Vida)

Only 5% of ministers to youth and young adults in the U.S. were Hispanic in 2000.

(Based on participants surveyed at the 2000 National Conference for Catholic Youth Ministry)

has one of the 10 largest Hispanic populations in the country. And in 2000, according to the report by Instituto Fe y Vida, as many as 70 to 75 percent of Catholics under the age of 30 in the diocese were Hispanic.

"But if you go out in the diocese," said Castro, "and you see who has been contracted to work in the parishes, you'll find that the only youth ministers out there are working almost exclusively with English-speaking Anglos."

And if you look at diocesan spending, he continued, "the majority of the resources—both financial and manpower—are going to the English and not to the Spanish programs."

Instituto Fe y Vida calls this phenomenon "structural exclusion." And the problem is widespread, according to the report recently published by

that adult leaders of youth ministry—both Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike—must learn to do cross-cultural ministry in order to reach more of today's Hispanic youth."

Castro has taken this message to diocesan meetings. But progress—and there has been progress—is slow. "It's a constant struggle," Castro said, "to make them aware and also to make them respond."

According to the Fe y Vida report, Hispanics account for more than 45 percent of all Catholics under the age of 30 in the United States. But that percentage—big and getting bigger—is not reflected in Church leadership.

"Most dioceses now have a diocesan director of youth ministry," Johnson-Mondragon explained. "Probably less than half of these directors have a coordinator of pastoral juvenil hispana, which is the Spanish counter-

part and focuses on Spanish-speaking immigrant young adults."

In addition, he said, "Only 5 percent or less of the diocesan directors are themselves Hispanic. That's not necessarily a problem in itself...they receive very little training in the area of cross-cultural ministry."

On the Radar Screen

Barbara Anderson is the Program Coordinator for the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women, and Youth at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Anderson says the issues surrounding the Church's challenge in reaching out to Hispanic youth and young adults are on their radar screen.

In concert with the Bishops' Committee on Hispanic Affairs, the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women, and Youth has adopted an initiative to address the needs of Hispanic youth. "One of the tasks outlined in the initiative," says Anderson, "is promoting the collaboration between Hispanic ministry offices and youth and young adult ministry offices within the various dioceses. And definitely to reach out both in English and Spanish with any kinds of materials that we produce."

Of course, there are bound to be obstacles. Among those, said Anderson, is recognizing cultural differences. "There really is a very different perspective in terms of family and youth between the Hispanic culture and what I guess we would term the American culture."

"We must realize that not every program we offer to the Hispanic community will automatically translate just because we put it in Spanish. We sometimes have to adapt things that we've always done in the mainstream to make sure that the Hispanic community feels welcomed and is comfortable with the activities or the materials that are being provided."

Jeff Guntzel is a freelance writer living in Indianapolis.

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Coincidence and Conversion

BY ALICIA CHESSER

Editors' note: The following three stories are first-person accounts by young adults about their experiences of conversion and of entering the communion of the Catholic Church. Each describes a very different route to communion, reflecting the diversity among young Catholics in the United States today. The first, by Alicia Chesser, is excerpted from a longer piece in First Things, which describes also the conversion stories of her boyfriend and parents. The second, by Reid Locklin, is from his autobiography, and reflects upon the beginning stages of a journey that led him to his current work as a Catholic theologian. The final piece, by Stephen Martin, illustrates the key role that a teacher can play in the religious life of a young person.

When you grow up in a place like Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, seeing a Polish Capuchin monk is a bit like seeing the Sasquatch—an exotic, rare, somewhat terrifying being whose habits are both foreign and fascinating. If you're a nondenominational Protestant whose main experience of men of the cloth comes from camp meetings, Bible studies, and altar calls, the sight is even stranger.

I don't think I had ever seen a Catholic priest in person when, in eleventh grade, I saw Father Norbert—wearing a coarse brown robe and sandals, carrying a tattered Bible—walk past the door of my European history classroom. Older friends who'd heard him lecture in our school said his name in the same hushed tone they used for rock bands like Depeche Mode or U2. This guy in the robe? He was cool. There were a few other priests like him, I'd heard, at St. Anne's parish down the street; men who lived in community and wore ropes around their waists and preached long, difficult sermons. I'd even heard that one of them grew bitter herbs in his garden, which he ate throughout the year as a sort of mortification. A few of the smartest guys in our high school would meet with Fr. Norbert from time to time to discuss the work of someone named Thomas Aquinas. They'd talk with him for hours, then go out and mow the grass around the church. It sounded pretty

cool, in its way.

In fact, it sounded more than cool. It sounded like these people understood something different about God than I had ever understood, like they lived in God in a way I never had. And I was ready to live in God again. I just had no idea how to start.

As is often the way with brainy, moody teenagers, I had come to believe in the gospel according to Jack Kerouac, Dizzy Gillespie, and a hodgepodge of Japanese poets, absurdist playwrights, and existentialist philosophers whose works I'd found on adjacent shelves on the second floor of the public library. My mother worried that such devotion to these notorious hedonists, depressives, and live-fast-die-young types would lead me to drugs or worse, but there was little risk of that. Mine had to be a fairly ascetical Beat Generationism, since my real religion was the daily discipline of ballet. I had studied dance seriously since the age of five, and by junior high it consumed nearly twenty hours of my time per week, sometimes more during the performance season of the Tulsa Ballet, with which I danced as a member of the corps de ballet. I worked hard, both in and out of school, and my desire to do well at everything shielded me from the profligate influences of my extracurricular reading. But something else was shielding me, too.

My parents and I had not been members of a church for a long time. Our excuse was that, because of my demanding schedule and that of my father, who owned his own remodeling business, we simply didn't have time. The deeper reason, I think, was that we had not found a denomination we could call home. My father, Wayne Mosier, raised Lutheran, and my mother, Suzanne, raised Presbyterian, had been born again shortly before I was born. Deeply involved in the charismatic revival that swept the midwest in the late 1970s, they moved from Nebraska to Oklahoma to be part of the burgeoning "Faith Movement." While still in Nebraska, we traveled to nursing homes and community centers singing gospel songs, with mom at the piano and three-year-old me taking the harmony part. We went to revivals, where people

beyond number would "go out under the power," falling to the floor under what seemed to be the influence of the Holy Spirit. We read the Bible constantly.

Before long, though, my parents became concerned about what they were seeing in the charismatic movement. The churches in which we worshiped kept breaking into factions over everything from doctrine to finances. Members could not agree on what to preach, how to pray, how to interpret Scripture rightly, and finally there would be a split, usually a bitter one. But that wasn't the worst of it. The "faith message" said that you could have anything you wanted—even a new car or a bigger salary—if only you believed enough. When our friend Greg got pneumonia, he was urged not to see a doctor but rather simply to declare himself healed. If he had enough faith, the church said, his health would be restored; going to a doctor would demonstrate, in fact, a lack of faith. Greg died soon thereafter, a martyr to what my parents began to see as an increasingly suspect and even blasphemous gospel.

Shaken and disillusioned, my parents abandoned the charismatic church, and during my later elementary school years we shuttled between Lutheran and Methodist churches, finally settling for prayer at home as schedules grew busier and church

help and guidance I took for granted—more a school counselor than the Alpha and Omega.

It was around this time, age fourteen or fifteen, that I began to be attracted to the writers and thinkers who described the world as a fundamentally meaningless, if more or less benign, place. I read up on Buddhism, finding its depiction of "nothingness" appealing. A common thread throughout these writings—existentialist, Buddhist, and "beat" alike—was that joy was possible despite the absence of a source for that joy, that good could be done even though no such thing as "the good" existed. I wanted to believe it. I wanted to love life, but I didn't want God interfering to tell me how or what to love. It would soon become clear that what I wanted was, very simply, a lie.

One summer afternoon, my two closest friends came to my house to tell me that our friend Rachel—the free spirit of our group, the smartest and funniest and most creative person we knew, though also the most troubled—had driven her car far out onto a rural road, climbed a hill, and shot herself in the mouth.

None of us knew how to handle this: the shock of her death, the way it happened, the loss, even how to relate to each other now. At her memorial service, which we all knew she would have hated, the minister had no idea

"It sounded like these people understood something different about God than I had ever understood, like they lived in God in a way I never had."

worship less fulfilling. "Settling" is the wrong word, perhaps, for my parents continued to be deeply devout, and we prayed together about everything; however, our lack of a faith community affected all of us. We had questions about the faith, but there was no one to answer them. I simply stopped asking. While I never stopped believing in God, He became for me just someone to talk to, someone whose

who she was, and there were prayers in the service at which, in her sly way, she would have smirked. But as we prayed the Our Father that day, tears came to my eyes, not just for Rachel but for the emptiness that was in all our hearts. For many in our group of friends, whose homes were broken or filled with abuse and sadness, who had not grown up in the Church, the very idea of a loving Father was an absurd-

Coincidence and Conversion

ity. I knew that He existed, that He loved me. I grieved that Rachel hadn't lived to know it. Nothingness was now very concrete to me and my friends. It wasn't freedom. It was hell.

Truth, trust, community: much later, John Paul II's trinomial would teach me what was missing. True community can't exist without trust, which in turn can't exist without a foundation in the truth. That trinomial's mirror image—untruth, fear, solitude—was the very definition of my experience in those years. I didn't know where to go, how to get out, how to return to a life that had...life. Suddenly, though, a path began to break.

My advanced placement English class had me reading stories and novels by that brilliant Catholic apostate, James Joyce. They were full of words I'd never heard before: chasuble, monsignor, transubstantiation. For help in understanding Joyce's points of reference, I went to my friend Emily, a devout Catholic and, as it happened, a member of Fr. Norbert's parish. An after-school talk about definitions turned swiftly into a probing conversation about the Church, in which Emily described what happened during Mass. She was calm and thorough, but when she arrived at the Canon, her voice grew intense. Her eyes shone when she said: "The whole Mass culminates in what happens here, in the Eucharist, when Christ becomes present." As she explained what Catholics believed about the Eucharist, something stirred in me, as well. "Christ becomes present." I didn't know quite what that meant, or how it happened, but I knew it was him I wanted to see. Emily invited me to join her at Mass, purportedly to get a firsthand look at all those chasubles and things. The next Sunday I found myself kneeling next to her near the altar at St. Anne's.

My mind was in chaos in the midst of this strange ceremony. As I knelt before the stone table, covered with an intricate lace cloth, and gazed at the mother-of-pearl icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa and the huge gold tabernacle—while Fr. Norbert sang the antiphons and censed the sanctuary—I felt as though I was moving about in a dark room where strange figures brushed up against my shoulders, and strange voices guided me

along. I was lost, but not afraid, and when the bell rang after the words of consecration—when I looked up to see Fr. Norbert holding the white Host above his head—I wasn't even lost. It was Jesus. And I was home.

After Mass, Emily introduced me to Fr. Norbert. He grasped my hand and looked into my eyes, and I felt the Holy Spirit's power coming into my heart. It was the same steady, physically palpable force I had felt when that preacher laid his hands on my leg so many years before. Before long, I told him that I would like to enter the Catholic Church. "Well, come and see," he said with a gentle smile, and he told me to be at the religious education building on a Tuesday night a few weeks later, when RCIA classes would begin.

There were about twenty of us: young and old, couples and singles, workers and students. We gathered once a week in a bland little room and, with somewhat cautious looks, gave ourselves to Fr. Norbert's care. It's no exaggeration to say that many of us were a little frightened of him. He had done his dissertation on Aquinas at the Catholic University of Lublin, John Paul II's alma mater. He spoke many languages, could read Hebrew, and quoted as easily from St. Athanasius as from the Sermon on the Mount. But it wasn't just his knowledge that made him intimidating. He had spent many years in Guatemala serving the poorest of the poor. He had lived under communism in Poland. He was a Capuchin, which meant a life of asceticism and poverty. He was young, perhaps in his early forties, but his face bore the signs of great suffering; his voice was low but forceful, especially when he preached about the culture of death. He was quite clearly a man who had intimate knowledge of the Cross.

He began that first night by discussing a single Latin word he had written on the blackboard: *latria*, worship. Over the next eight months, he took us through the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, the virtues, the doctrines of original sin, atonement, infallibility, the role of Mary, and on and on through the entirety of Catholic history, life, and thought. At all times, his big Jerusalem Bible sat before him on the table, more dog-

eared even than the Catechism that sat beside it. These classes were overwhelming and not a little over my head, but they were also exhilarating. It was a blessing, in a way, that I came in knowing so little theology, because I was free to absorb the Church's teachings without an intellectual struggle. Some teachings didn't quite make sense to me, but that didn't worry me; they would make sense in time. The more Fr. Norbert explained how the Church understood both God and human beings, the stronger my commitment became to the "body" in which the Body of Christ had been made present on the altar. The Church "had me at hello," to paraphrase a line from the movie *Jerry Maguire*. As I began to know her more intimately—to learn what she thought, how she expressed herself, why she wore green on some days and purple on others—I grew more and more in love with her.

On Good Friday, Fr. Norbert asked me to meet with him one last time before the Easter Vigil. He asked if I had any final questions. He had taught us so well that most questions about doctrine had already been answered, but one thing did come to my mind. "I'm not sure I really understand humility," I said. "I know I don't have it. How can I get it?" His response astounded me. "Humility is simply telling the truth," he said, "about yourself, about others, and about who God is."

Looking back, it does not seem that God was anonymous at all in these events. He was always there—His extravagant, exuberant grace available at every moment. My childhood experience of a personal relationship with Him opened my heart to the fullness of that relationship in the Catholic Church. In the writings and the witness of Pope John Paul II, the Church

has reasserted her ancient awareness that a person stands at her center. This is not just any person, but the one who, as the Second Vatican Council put it, both reveals God to man and reveals man to himself. After all, what is at the center of the Mass but Jesus' body and blood? What is at the heart of our prayer, but the man who by his death and resurrection draws us into the conversation of the Trinity? What is the beginning of the Apostolic Succession but Peter's realization of who this Jesus actually is?

It's not too much to say that my charismatic upbringing trained my eyes to see all this. In the rituals of the Catholic Church, in the saints, in the papacy, and in the sacraments, I was able to recognize a drawing near to the person of Christ—in large part because another tradition taught me to recognize him in the first place. I continue to invoke the Holy Spirit; I rely on the Word. In the confessional, there is a powerful sense of Jesus' healing mercy and my own radical dependence on it. All of this, all learned from the faith of my parents, converges with and deepens my experience of the Church. I have traveled very far, and there is far to go. Through it all, I know Christ will keep leading me home.

Alicia Chesser was until recently the Managing Editor of First Things. This article is adapted from a chapter in The Catholic Mystique: Fourteen Women Find Fulfillment in the Catholic Church (Our Sunday Visitor Press, -2004).

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Spiritual But Not Religious?

BY REID LOCKLIN

The Professor:

As a college sophomore in East Tennessee, I certainly would not have called myself a Christian. Yet it was at this very time in my life that I wrestled seriously with faith in a God who had assumed human flesh for our salvation. The reason was simple enough: I had enrolled in a course on Indian culture and religion.

The course texts were the twin Hindu epics, Ramayana and Bhagavad-Gita. In the figure of Rama—hero of the Ramayana—I encountered humanity writ large, a dramatic hero journeying, fighting demons, and crossing a great ocean to recover his beloved wife in relentless accord with holy duty, or dharma. In the Gita, on the other hand, I met the revealer of dharma itself, divinity writ small, the charioteer Krishna. These were the images of an incarnate God with which members of my class were beginning to grapple. Gathered in a circle around the Professor, whose expertise extended from Indian religions through William Faulkner to farming in the Mississippi heartland, we probed these ideals, familiar to some but coming now from an unexpected source. How did these Hindu ideas of incarnation compare with those taught in the Christian Churches?

One of my colleagues, perhaps the most outspoken critic of institutional religion in the class, voiced a strong opinion. “There’s nothing special about Christianity. All of these religions are just basically cults of personality.” Although I found more value in general notions of God and spiritual life than did my friend, I concurred with his basic point. All religions are the same, for better or for worse. There’s nothing that gives a religion like Christianity, or Hinduism for that matter, some kind of privileged status.

The Professor considered the objection for a few moments and smoothed his thin white mustache. “There is something unique,” he finally drawled. “Christ.”

In retrospect, I know that there are several ways that the Professor might have developed this idea. He might, like the nineteenth-century scholar Adolf von Harnack, have given a long lecture on the unique moral excellence or religious intuition of the historical

Jesus of Nazareth, trying to illustrate how this figure stands totally apart, not only from Rama or Krishna, but also from his Jewish and Hellenistic contemporaries. Or the Professor might, like the third- and fourth-century historian Eusebius of Caesarea, have given an account of the remarkable success of the church that followed in this historical figure’s wake. Finally, the Professor might, like so many shrill voices in our contemporary world, have insisted upon the uniqueness of Christ and the Church and inviolable principles to which any person of faith must hold absolutely and unrelentingly fast—simply cutting short any voice that ventures to question this assertion.

The Professor, wisely, chose none of these options. Perhaps he saw that they are all, ultimately, dead ends. Instead, he uttered the single word: “Christ.” Then he paused, offered a gentle, enigmatic smile...and moved on to other topics. In my imagination, the word reverberated throughout the classroom. What makes Christianity unique? Just Christ, that’s all: an answer—or, perhaps, non-answer—as obvious as it was elusive. My mind couldn’t struggle free of its elegant simplicity.

I was still not yet Christian. But I was intrigued.

The Priest:

Just a few months separated the moment the Professor intrigued me with that single word from the moment I stumbled across the path of the Priest.

It wasn’t as though I had never heard the word “Christ” before. In fact, my early years were largely defined by a vague commitment to various Christian communities insofar as they involved me in choir, youth retreats, and comic book treatments of the Apocalypse. Along the way, however, a combination of academic study, a deepening sensitivity to cultural and religious diversity, and a healthy dose of shallow nonconformism had worn down my would-be faith, leaving a more or less secular humanism in its wake. Pressed to give a reason for spurning the Church, I might have used the example of an independent Baptist congregation across the way from the house of a close friend. Internal divisions had driven the congregation to reject one pastor after another;

eventually, such divisions led to what I believed was a deliberate torching of the church steeple by an irate parishioner. Much later, I would discover that the steeple had in fact been struck by lightning. But this inconvenient fact did not alter my basic conclusion: as far as I could tell, the only part of the Church that appeared to be fulfilling its authentic purpose was the graveyard.

To me, the conclusion from this and other examples of religious dysfunction seemed obvious. The great religions of the world, especially Christianity, resembled the kudzu-draped trees I often saw along highways in my north Georgia home: whatever life-giving idea had once sprouted and reached for the heavens there had long since suffocated under a dark canopy of corrupt institutions and empty religiosity.

As we have already seen, it was the Professor who piqued my curiosity and set me on a new course. Nevertheless, as I began to look at Christianity anew and to test the waters in various faith communities, I renounced none of my criticisms and acted them out in a definite and predictable way. After attending a few services, I would make a private appointment or somehow corner the pastor with a few pointed questions. One of these questions went to the heart of my concerns: “What about corruption in the institutional Church?” The answers I received inevitably struck me as, at best, historically naïve, or at worst, deeply self-deceptive. So I moved from one community to another, searching for a religious leader who could answer my questions with honesty and intelligence, all the while quietly confident that none would.

This is when I encountered the Priest.

We met in his office at the local Catholic student center, where I had attended Mass with friends several times already. The Priest surprised me a bit by coming out from behind his desk and sitting in a chair directly across from me. I was a bit unnerved by his clerical garb and collar, having moved in predominantly Protestant circles thus far, but I suppose I also felt that such obvious institutional accoutrement virtually guaranteed his defeat by the sharp edge of my critique. Besides, by this point I had the pattern down cold. I warmed him up with pleasant banter around my background

and studies, asked a few purely informational leading questions about Catholic practice and belief, and then let him have it. “So, what about corruption in the institution? What about all the wrongs that have been committed in the name of the Church?”

“What”, I asserted forcefully in various ways, “about the mess that you and yours have made of your adherence to this tradition? What about all the failures and injustice? What, in short, about the real Church of history and day-to-day life? What about that?”

I don’t remember for sure, but I think the Priest shrugged. “What about it?”

I was stunned into silence. Was this sarcasm or indifference?

Neither, as it turned out. The Priest continued with something like the following. “It’s not really the right question, is it? I mean, you’re old enough to have seen something of the world. What do you know about organized groups like school administrations, the United States government, or even your clique of closest friends? Whenever people get together to organize much of anything they screw it up. You inevitably find domination, manipulation, and vindictive assaults—rhetorical or actual—on those who are regarded as outsiders. Now apply that insight to what might be the largest single organization in the world. What do you think is going to happen?”

“So there is massive corruption in the Church. What about it? If you know anything about history or sociology, this is not an interesting question.” He leaned forward. “I’ll give you a question that is interesting. The institutions of the Church are corrupt. Okay. What are you going to do about it? What, exactly is your stake in the question going to be?”

A year and a half later I received baptism, confirmation, and First Communion in the Roman Catholic Church.

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Reprinted with permission from *Spiritual But Not Religious? An Oar Stroke Closer to the Farther Shore* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

A Catholic Presence

Duke's Wallace Fowlie

BY STEPHEN MARTIN

For Catholics of any generation, the question of how to remain loyal to the age-old traditions of our faith while also engaging new ideas poses plenty of challenges. For college students squeezed between modernity and Catholicism, the struggle for answers is particularly intense and given to extremes. Some students choose to remain loyal to their faith and shelter themselves from campus activities that threaten their beliefs. Many others can hardly wait to toss their religious upbringing aside entirely—and if that's what you wanted, Duke University was a thrilling destination in the early 1990s.

Being and English major in the department ruled by controversial literary critic Stanley Fish was even better. Longstanding assumptions about the meaning of literature, even about the act of reading itself, were under assault, gaining Duke national notoriety. For many of Fish's faculty colleagues, truth in literature and the larger world was relative, the notion of God passé. Though Duke had been founded by Methodists, it was by now a playground for post-modernists who had steamrolled much of the university's spiritual heritage.

All of that was fine with me. I felt a lingering attachment to the impressive faith of my mother and her large Italian-Catholic family. But could a church that had relied on twelve years of mediocre CCD classes to win my heart and mind really be on to something? I was caught in a tug of war between wide-open modernity and traditional Catholicism, between glittering new ideas and very old ones. And as when Duke's dominant basketball teams of my student days suited up, there wasn't much question about which side was going to win. I went to Mass my first weekend on campus and didn't go back for a long time.

It might have been much longer. But about halfway through college I learned that my strongest urge, where God was concerned, was not to rebel any longer but to reconcile—to make peace as it were between the Bible and

Stanley Fish. I didn't come to this crossroads by accident. I was led there by a professor, a convert to Catholicism, who taught a popular course on Dante's *Inferno* and who, like Virgil, guided me out of the maze of my own misconceptions.

His name was Wallace Fowlie, and he was unlike any Catholic I'd ever met. A prolific writer and distinguished scholar, he never achieved the renown of Thomas Merton or Dorothy Day, but I've always thought he was very much in their class as a writer, a thinker, and, above all, a pilgrim. Fowlie died in 1998, at the age of eighty-nine, but his influence lives

on—in the more than forty books he wrote or translated, among the more than six thousand students he taught, and perhaps most of all in those of us who found a new depth of meaning and adventure in Catholicism through his example. Fowlie was a consummate educator who still has much to teach fellow Catholics about the crucial business of grasping and fulfilling our vocations in an increasingly fractured American Church, about not only co-existing with modernity—those ideas and behaviors that characterize the current age—but actually learning from it, rather than fearing or ignoring it as many Church leaders seem increasingly prone to do. If the Church hopes to influence the modern world, if lay people and religious alike are to honor Pope John Paul II's insistent calls for the “evangelization of culture,” we must first engage it—and that's what Fowlie did.

At eighty-five, Fowlie published the final book of his career: *Rimbaud and Jim Morrison: The Poet as Rebel* (Duke University Press). The book explores parallels between the work of

nineteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud and the songs Jim Morrison wrote as lead singer of the 1960's American rock band The Doors. Both men died young, becoming cultural icons after brief but spectacular careers defined by vivid art, personal adventure, and the reckless pursuit of self-liberation. (Morrison died of a drug overdose.) In the late 1960's, Fowlie received a note from Morrison praising his groundbreaking bilingual translation of Rimbaud's poetry. “I am a rock singer and your book travels around with me,” Morrison wrote. Some years later, Fowlie started listening to The Doors and became startlingly conversant on their albums.

This was no anomaly, for in literature, art, music, and cinema, Fowlie eagerly engaged contemporary culture. Nothing demonstrated that more powerfully than his enduring friendships with two of the twentieth

“It was at that moment that I became, in precisely the sense that Pope John Paul II intended, evangelized.”

century's most celebrated avant-garde writers—Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin. While teaching at Yale in the 1940's, Fowlie befriended Miller, hugely controversial at the time for his sexually charged novel *Tropic of Cancer*. It was a friendship founded on a love of literature, and their voluminous correspondence was later collected in a book, *Letters of Henry Miller and Wallace Fowlie, 1943–1972*. Miller introduced Fowlie to Nin, whose diaries later transformed her into a feminist icon. Fowlie makes an appearance in volume 4 of the diaries, with Nin describing her impressions of him upon their first meeting: “When Fowlie came to see me I found a quiet, small man, dressed in a dark suit, with soft hands. Some how, he seemed muted, self-effacing, impersonal. His love of Henry Miller's writing did not seem compatible with the first impression I had.”

Though he often was self-effacing, Fowlie was also prone to a characteristically modern vice—a preoccupation with the self that sometimes bordered on the obsessive. He was, after all, a

man who wrote five memoirs and was at work on a sixth when he died. We might expect such effusion from a world leader, not from a career academic who spent much of his life teaching in Vermont and North Carolina. Without question, though, Fowlie had led a fascinating life. He knew it and didn't mind having homage paid to him. In fact, he refused to teach the Dante class I was supposed to take my senior year because the university wouldn't give him the lecture hall he wanted. When he graded our quizzes, no one scored higher than a 98 percent. “I reserve 99 for myself and 100 for God,” he liked to say.

Despite his modern sensibilities, he led an impressively countercultural life. Fowlie, who never married, once casually mentioned to me and two friends that he'd practiced celibacy for the previous forty-five years. He felt called to it, he told us, as we sat in stunned silence. And it wasn't just modern sexual mores that Fowlie rejected—he also eschewed consumer culture. He once wrote: “My home is a rented apartment with furniture that is sparse and simple. All that I own can be seen in literally three minutes, or in ten minutes, if the titles of books are examined and if the pictures on my walls are looked at individually...Cleaning my apartment means discarding each week an object, a book, even a notebook that has served its purpose.”

Fowlie's celibacy and minimalism were not simply the eccentricities of an offbeat professor. They were, I believe, the natural expression of his deep and enduring Catholic faith. While modernity energized and challenged him, it was in faith and tradition that he found stability and meaning. Born outside of Boston, Fowlie was raised a Baptist before joining the Episcopal Church during his student years at Harvard. Then in the 1930's, while teaching at Bennington College, he became a Catholic. A chapter from his memoir *Aubade* explains this progression: “I felt at each of those decisions in my life, as I still feel today, that I was carrying forward all that I had learned and believed, moving into a wider context, understanding more fully historical Christianity, committing myself more firmly to the past as well as to the present and the future.”

A serious student of Church history, Fowlie found particular inspiration in the large number of saints it had canonized and in the Church's

role, as he put it, “as the guardian of the truth.” He also recognized its shortcomings: “It is painful to acknowledge the vulgarity in the Church, its lack of scholarship, its lack of intellectual honesty. We are a church of sinners in which Christ is crucified by all of us,” he wrote in the early 1980’s. Still, despite spending his life largely at liberal colleges and universities, Fowlie never wavered in his own essentially conservative core of religious beliefs. “For myself,” he writes in *Aubade*, “I summarized the liberal religious viewpoint which I heard from Protestant and Jewish students, and even some Catholic students, in this way: man has never fallen, man never incurred guilt, man is ultimately perfectible by his own works, by his own efforts....I usually ended up stating my own view, which is the orthodox view: man has fallen and he is perfectible only by God’s grace, and not by his own efforts.”

Grace was a central theme for Fowlie. Invited once to deliver a sermon at Duke Chapel, he offered a meditation on Luke 23, in which Jesus is crucified between a scornful thief and a second thief who begs Jesus for remembrance and is promised salvation. This is “the most spectacular story of belief in the Bible,” Fowlie said. “Grace in one instant came to the thief. Not only was he absolved by Christ, he was sanctified, he was canonized. In one moment he moved

from alienation to redemption....The thief, in turning to our Lord, quite literally stole Paradise.” Characteristically, Fowlie drew on a modern-day writer, the playwright Samuel Beckett, to drive home a point crucial to his faith: we have the choice to live God or to reject him, and that choice carries serious consequences. He quoted from his conversation between the two tramps in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. As they discuss the events in Luke 23, one tramp appears hopeful, the other pessimistic. Through their dialogue, Fowlie said in his sermon, we are challenged to see the Gospel’s thieves and Beckett’s tramps “as dividing all humanity into two groups, believers and nonbelievers.” To Fowlie, that was among the most critical of distinctions.

French philosopher Jacques Maritain, Fowlie’s friend and godfather, urged Christian artists to glorify God by finding and fulfilling their unique vocations. Fowlie responded with arguments and theories—but with a whole-hearted and concrete commitment to his calling as a teacher, a writer, and, above all, a spiritual seeker. Rather than pitting tradition and modernity against one another, he instead blended them seamlessly in service of a higher pursuit: his vocation. For Fowlie, engagement with the contemporary culture was anything but threatening. Rather, it exposed him to new ideas that challenged his assumptions and ultimately enhanced the scope of

his teaching and writing, which ranged gracefully across centuries. It’s not a coincidence that he counted such modern giants as Graham Greene, Flannery O’Connor, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin among the writers who influenced him the most as a Catholic. At the same time, he looked back hundreds of years—to St. Augustine, Dante, and Pascal—for wisdom and guidance. “The reading and teaching of Dante,” he wrote, “always restored for me the Catholic sense of history: everything a man does in his life moves him toward his true end in God, or moves him away from it. Everything is ultimately redeemed or lost. Hell and paradise are eternal places and eternal concepts.”

Fowlie’s capacity to balance his commitment to tradition with his fascination with contemporary culture had very real consequences—one of the most powerful of which was his ability to connect with and mentor jaded college students as much as sixty years his junior. Once that connection was made, his manner of living was bound to make an impression. I first heard about Fowlie from a friend who was taking his Dante course. I wasn’t really interested in Dante, but when I heard that Jim Morrison had written to Fowlie, I could hardly wait to sign up for his class on Proust the following spring. Within weeks of starting it, I was captivated by Fowlie’s warm demeanor, his scholarship, and his passion for teaching. It wasn’t until

halfway through the semester that I learned about the sophisticated spiritual life that underpinned all of this.

A small group of my classmates and I were visiting his apartment one night after dinner, and we were peppering him with questions. I was standing in the dim light, half listening to his soft, baritone answers, more entranced by the Jim Morrison poster on the wall, when I heard him say, “Well of course, I’m a Catholic.” It was at that moment that I became, in precisely the sense that Pope John Paul II intended, evangelized. Here was a man who had personally known many of the writers I loved—from T.S. Eliot to Robert Penn Warren—a man whose learning and sophistication far exceeded those of anyone else I’d ever met, and he was saying, quite matter of factly, that he was a Catholic, that he, too, accepted all the rewards and demands and bafflements that came with it. I felt an immediate bond—and knew in a flash that I would one day rejoin him in the church. It took another half-dozen years to get there, but I did come back. I don’t plan to leave again.

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Stairways to Heaven

Some cautionary thoughts for those who are spiritual but not religious

BY LAWRENCE CUNNINGHAM

Editors’ note: The next two articles, by Lawrence Cunningham and Robert P. Maloney, are exhortations by older Catholics to younger Catholics. Cunningham’s piece seeks to persuade those who describe themselves as “spiritual, but not religious” that religion is a community’s way of “remembering God.”

As soon as the dust settled at ground zero in New York City and the scope of the 9-11 tragedy became apparent to all, makeshift shrines began to spring up near the site and at adjacent firehouses.

Pictures of those lost in the tragedy were pinned on walls, and at the foot of those same walls people left flowers, candles, mementos (teddy bears were a favorite), and scrawled messages—notes of loss or grief, passages from the Bible, or prayers. The candles often had religious decals of Our Lady of Guadalupe or Saint Anthony or Christ with a crown of thorns; other candles were those known among Jews as *Jahrzeit* (remembrance) lights.

Before too long, people began to stop at these sites to look or pray or take pictures. When the World Trade Center site cleanup ended the following May, the workers left standing an

upright steel girder festooned with messages and photos; an American flag flew on top. The girder then was cut down and ceremoniously hauled away as tearful viewers watched.

These makeshift shrines often show up on the American landscape: in front of Columbine High School after the April 1999 shootings there or along highways where a white cross marks a fatal automobile collision. These clusters have the look of something primordial: the kind of display found for centuries at sacred shrines or pilgrimage chapels so common in Mediterranean Catholicism. Sacred spots are marked; gifts and tokens are

left; people come to pray or meditate; community bonds are formed.

What do those displays “say”? Briefly this: We want to mark the spot; we want to remember; we want to symbolize our grief, our sadness, our bewilderment. Plainly put, people reach back to some of the most ancient gestures of spiritual symbolism to articulate something too deep for words. In a broad sense, we want to make a spiritual statement.

Americans have an insatiable desire for the spiritual. Our bookstores have groaning shelves that try to teach us how to “get in touch” with our inner child, our guardian angel, our bliss,

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Stairways to Heaven

our soul. We want chicken soup for the soul to warm and heal us.

What many seekers desire (to repeat what is now a weary cliché) is to be spiritual without being religious. One hears this with some frequency: “I am spiritual but not religious.” Observers of the American religious scene have studied this phenomenon in works from Wade Roof’s *A Generation of Seekers* to Robert Wuthnow’s more recent *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*.

Every cliché bears within it a nugget of truth. This particular cliché about being spiritual but not religious seems to mean something like this: I would like to have some kind of fulfilling experience in my life but I do not want to be constricted by the demands of institutional religion. Being spiritual is to be uplifted by the spectacular awe felt at watching a sunset over the Gulf of Mexico, while being religious is sitting on a pew listening to some dreary moralizer preaching about sin to a bored congregation. Spiritual means freedom and exaltation. Religion means rules, rote rituals, and, well, religion. Spiritual is large and religion is small. Being spiritual will make me feel fulfilled but being religious will make me feel guilty. Being spiritual, then, is good but being religious is, if not bad, at least second best.

Is that, in fact, the case? Is the gap between religion and spirituality to be described in such stark oppositions? That distinction works only if we accept such a narrow caricature of religion and if we resist caricaturing spirituality as being the desire for some kind of “wow” experience to go along with all of the other comforts of post-industrial Yuppiedom. After all, the aim of certain forms of New Age spirituality (warm feelings of contentment and peace with the world) could as easily be obtained by the regular use of a hot tub.

To be sure, there are certain forms of spiritual discipline that not only exist outside the walls of institutional religion but do so with great benefit to large numbers of people. Alcoholics Anonymous and other serious 12-step programs come immediately to mind. Alcoholics Anonymous puts a premium on confession, repentance, and dependence on some transcendental

principle (a “Higher Power”), together with a desire to help others gain sobriety. That A.A. has a religious or spiritual component is so clear that some efforts have been made by militant unbelievers to adapt the 12 steps without reference to any Higher Power. It is also true that certain forms of New Age spirituality bring healthy benefits: meditation does lower blood pressure, and a vegetarian diet might well forestall the Big Pain in the Chest.

The limits of “spirituality,” as opposed to belonging to a religious tradition, are also well known. Much spirituality (think of the preachments of such best-selling authors as Thomas Moore or Deepak Chopra) is highly

“In the last analysis, religion can be seen as the way we remember God.”

narcissistic and not easily distinguishable from old self-improvement schemes and/or the standard smorgasbord of psychotherapies. One might call such tendencies “spirituality lite.”

Because such strategies are for the “self” they are not so easily transmitted to others. A good test case for a “spirituality” is this: Can you teach it to your children? Does it spill over into more loving relationships with others who are not part of your own nurturing community? An even better test: Does a way of being spiritual help in moments of profound crisis, like coping with serious illness? Nothing focuses the mind, the great Doctor Samuel Johnson once said, like being sentenced to hanging.

Of course, religion and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. In Roman Catholicism, the religious tradition I know best, there is a spectrum of every kind of spiritual discipline. Being a member of a religious tradition like Catholic Christianity, in fact, nurtures a person who desires to become more spiritual. Contrary to what many think, being religious is the larger concept and being spiritual but not religious is its pale cousin.

The word “spirituality” has an honorable history in the Catholic tradition. The noun derives from Saint Paul’s teaching that those who are in

Christ “walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). By flesh, Paul does not mean the body. For Paul, flesh is that which is not life-giving. He uses a polarity to make the point: “To set the mind on the flesh is death but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). We might more clearly see the distinction if we translate Paul’s language into contemporary discourse: hatred is flesh/love is Spirit; violence is flesh/reconciliation is Spirit; rape is flesh/marital love is Spirit; greed is flesh/generosity is Spirit.

To be spiritual in Paul’s sense of the term comes to every person in whom the Spirit of God (who is also called the “Spirit of Christ”) dwells (Romans 8:9). This is fundamental to the Christian life. To put it boldly: To be a

Christian is not to join a religion but to possess the spirit of Christ and live under the impulse of that life-giving force. It is that gift of Spirit that allows us to call God “Abba” (Father) as Christ did, which results in us becoming Children of God, “then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

We, then, are first called to be spiritual people in the sense just described, and the way we receive God’s Spirit in Christ is by being part of that community in which we can be made transparent to God, learning how to grow, how to live, how to act with others, how to share the gift of grace to all. To be religious means to be bound (the word religion comes from the Latin verb *religare*: to tie or bind) to God and to others who are part of the gathering of those who seek a similar relationship.

If being religious/spiritual is so simple, what does it have to do with this enormously complex historical reality called the Catholic Church? What have popes, bishops, parishes, devotions, pilgrimages, sacraments, the Vatican, icons, moral dicta, leather-bound tomes of theology, schools, and universities to do with living in the Spirit of Christ? Does not the sheer weight of the Catholic tradition simply serve as an obstacle

through which one must pass in order to be the person of spirit discussed by Paul? Is not the Catholic tradition as expressed in the factual reality of the Church no better than other large corporations (as some might assume from the most recent scandals)?

Such objections are legitimate, but a few important distinctions must be made. First, one need not bear the total weight of the accumulated Catholic tradition in order to be a Catholic, anymore than an American citizen need constantly worry about what goes on in the various offices in Washington in order to be a loyal American. While both institutions can become burdensome in specific circumstances (an IRS audit or an unreasonably pompous rule issued by some Church functionary), institutional structures are designed at their best to serve, not to obstruct. We are more at ease as citizens knowing that our borders are protected, our prisons hold the malfactors at bay, our highways are safe, and so on. In the same way, as believers we want churches to be ready to help us celebrate everything from birth to death. We’d like the spiritual memory of our Christian tradition safeguarded and passed on. We desire opportunities for various ways of discipleship from contemplative monasteries to agencies of social care.

It is often said, dismissively, that too many Catholics are “cafeteria Catholics”—they pick and choose only those parts of the tradition that appeal to them. There is, however, another way of thinking about that criticism. By judicious choice, you can get an excellent and nutritious meal in a cafeteria. It all depends on what is chosen.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that there are three essentials that make up Catholicity: the profession of the full apostolic faith; the full sacramental life; and the union of the local bishop with all other bishops including the center of that unity, the bishop of Rome, who is the pope. Once that essential core is present, there is a huge panoply of specific ways in which a person may choose how to live in the Spirit of Christ.

Even here in South Bend, a bewildering array of avenues for deepening the life of the spirit exists. If one wishes to follow the way of service, volunteers are needed at the Center for the Homeless or the Saint Vincent DePaul Society or at Saint Margaret’s

House or the local hospice. If one likes the Taize prayer experience, there is a group that prays in that style, just as there is a charismatic group, a community that uses centering prayer, and a Sant'Egidio group. At Notre Dame, there are daily rosary groups at the Grotto as well as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. There are Bible study groups. One can serve as a volunteer for RCIA or catechism classes. If one seeks contemplative prayer, the Thomas Merton Society can help. One can get spiritual direction at Mary's Solitude or at the local retreat center. One can start or join a support group or a 12-step program. There are small Christian communities and large parishes. There are devotees of Marian apparitions of various stripes, with groups regularly jetting off to Medjugorje. There is Mass in Spanish and English and Latin and Slavonic and God knows what else. If one has lost faith in the revised liturgy, one can worship in the Byzantine rite at either the local Melkite church or the Ukranian one. There is indeed food for everyone's tray.

Such activities and their variations are found in every diocese in the world. Some possess a long history and some are new. Within a mile of Notre Dame's campus there is both an Opus Dei house and a Catholic Worker house. Take your pick; both are Catholic. (And, by the way, a word of caution: If the group you investigate tells you that their way is the only way, run. Christ is the Way but there are many ways to follow the One Way.)

The Catholic spiritual tradition urges us to be obedient to two fundamental laws; namely, to love God and to love neighbor. Those laws are not separated into two impermeable boxes. Their intimate connection was stated two millennia ago: "Those who say, 'I love God' [yet] hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen" (I John 4:20). The real test, then, of an authentic spirituality is not how pious a person is or how good one feels about oneself, but whether the cultivation of the spiritual life spills over in love for others.

This connection between love of God and service to others is the constant teaching of the great spiritual writers. Saint Teresa of Avila, for instance, maps out the path of intense prayer in her classic work *The Interior*

Castle (written in five months in 1577!). This prayer, Teresa asserts to the nuns who were her intended audience, is not only for enjoyment but for the service of others. The test about whether someone has reached the pinnacle of the life of prayer is quite simple: Does the person love more?

Implicit in that fundamental truth that we should love God and love our neighbor is a criticism of much of New Age spirituality, which is almost totally oriented to the satisfactions of the self. It would be a caricature of Christianity to say that it hates the self (after all, Jesus tells us that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves), but Christianity does say that self-giving love is for the sake of others. One good test about the value of any spiritual discipline is this: Does it help in some way the needs of others? True Christian spirituality ought to radiate out in a series of widening concentric circles from the self to the family to the local environs to the nation and to the world. That sense of responsibility and care for others seen globally is part of what it means to be a Catholic, which is to say, universal.

Being Catholic is like living in a huge home that has been occupied over the generations. Some furnishings are timeworn, some are packed away. It is a multigenerational home with old and young alike living cheek by jowl. There might even be a peculiar aunt or a tipsy uncle living quietly in the attic. More than likely someone in the family has had a scrape or two with the law. It is a house that has its stories, its memories both good and bad; there are places where it needs some touching up or even major redecorating. The house has seen its fair share of happy events of births and marriages and its sad times of sickness and death. It is a place where some, getting heartily sick of the house, have left either in bewilderment or anger. It is a place, however, where one can return. A home, a wise person once said, is where they have to take you in when you knock at the door.

To extend the metaphor a bit: Much of what passes for spirituality is like four rooms in an apartment complex furnished with things from the old house. The apartment may be comfortable, but it is a wan reflection of the original house. Many of the "spiritual" writers who gain popularity today do so by cobbling together

some fragments of an older tradition on a framework of trends in psychotherapy. The result is a dash of Jung and a sprinkling of a sanitized Jesus, topped off with a badly understood Eastern meditation technique.

Many people say that they seek out groups who teach such disciplines as yoga or meditation techniques because they do not find such resources within the Church. That such resources are not easily found is a criticism of the Church, which has failed to highlight its long and rich spiritual tradition. Within the broad Catholic tradition, profound ways of prayer, meditation, and contemplative practices do exist. In recent times, there have been concerted efforts to bring such resources to the attention of people. Not only are there written resources for every form of Catholic spirituality, but, since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a renewed interest in prayer circles and other such groups. There is also a burgeoning movement of lay affiliation with contemplative orders of both men and women.

It is ironic that the hidden treasures of Catholic spirituality have been popularized by people who are not Catholic but who see the contemplative wisdom that is available in the Catholic tradition. The books of the Protestant poet and writer Kathleen Norris, including *Dakota* and *Cloister Walk*, have spawned a host of other such works by those who are rediscovering the writings and practices of Catholic monasticism. Such writers as Patricia Hampl, Nancy Mairs and Annie Dillard have mediated Catholic spirituality in an accessible but serious fashion that some of our traditional "spiritual" writers have been unable to do. Fiction writers Ron Hansen and Andre Dubus have imagined the Catholic faith in new and original ways. They have shown—as spiritual writers including Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton did in their day—that there is no need to create a chasm between spirituality and religious fidelity. Indeed, the most creative of these thinkers have done what is the best thing that Catholics do: They have dug deep into the Catholic past—the tradition of Ignatian, Salesian, Carmelite and Benedictine spiritualities—and re-imagined them for our own day.

In the last analysis, religion can be seen as the way we remember God. In that remembering, we become spir-

itual persons. To remember God is to recall his presence in our lives. We remember God by signs in our sacramental life at the beginning through baptism and at the end in the last rites. We recall, remember, represent Christ in the liturgy. In the great eucharistic prayer of the liturgy we pray to God, "Remember your people"—"Remember all of us gathered here before you"—we celebrate "the memory of Christ your Son"—We recall "passion, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into glory."

In the little gestures of grace before meals, blessing our children, praying for our dead, marking our homes with crucifixes and pictures, and wearing a cross on a chain, we remember God in the daily exercise of our lives. We honor the saints canonized and uncanonized by remembering their lives and deeds. Every time we tell or listen to the Word of God we call to mind the story of salvation. We teach our history, study our theologians, read our spiritual authors, recite time-honored prayers as a way of remembering our tradition.

To remember is to call to mind. That "calling to mind" is the fundamental task of the faith as it is enshrined in our lives as Catholics. In a number of places in the New Testament, Jesus tells his disciples, "Remember the word I have spoken to you" (John 15:20). Paul urges Timothy, "Remember Jesus Christ" (II Timothy 2:8) and Paul asks the Ephesians to "remember that you were without Christ" at one time (Ephesians 2:12). To the degree that we call to mind (which is to remember) the presence of God in our lives, we live in the spirit of God. To be a Catholic Christian is—to paraphrase Saint Augustine in the Confessions—to "roam the spacious halls of memory." And from that living comes the spirituality worthy of truly being named as such.

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A Letter to Young American Catholics

BY ROBERT P. MALONEY

My dear younger brothers and sisters: I write, as an older brother, to encourage you. In August 2005, more than a million young Catholics gathered with Pope Benedict XVI in Cologne for World Youth Day. Twenty-five thousand of them were from the United States. The Lord entrusts the future of the Church to young people like them and you. Our countryman Walt Whitman once wrote:

*Youth, large, lusty, loving,
youth, full of grace, force fascination...
Day full-blown and splendid
day of the immense sun, action, ambition,
laughter....*

In that spirit, I urge you to use the gifts of youth to be fully alive, actively responsible members of the Church and alert citizens of the world community.

Many factors beyond your control will shape the future, but your response is crucial to the vitality of the Church and its role in the world. Sixty-four percent of the world's population is under the age of 25. In some places, particularly in the West, religious practice has declined dramatically among young people. In Rome, where I lived until recently, it is almost fashionable for a young person to say, "I'm not a believer." Practice has fallen beneath 10 percent in Italy. In Spain, in the last five years, it has declined to 13 percent. In France, some estimate it at 1 percent. How many young people in the United States believe and live out their beliefs? One astute writer says this: "The great problem confronting the churches today is indifference: the massive absence of God from so much of the contemporary world—with all the final emptiness, religious cynicism, or meaninglessness of that experience."

Though there are significant differences in various parts of the world, young people increasingly have the following characteristics in common:

- Deepening immersion in an information culture. Most young people

do not grow up in a Catholic culture, where their environment and a stable family setting support religious values. Many spend more time each week before the television than they do in school.

- Plasticity. Rapid change is woven into the fabric of contemporary life. A century ago, most people lived, worked, and died in their hometown. Today, people change jobs, and homes (and sometimes spouses or religious commitments) frequently. Of course, the positive side of this plasticity is flexibility, the capacity to change, be formed, and grow.

- Hesitancy in making commitments. A young woman I know recently told me that she would never get married in the Church. She said that she couldn't imagine saying that her marriage was forever. The word "forever" sticks in the throat of many young people. They have seen too many broken marriages, too many divided families, and too many fractured religious commitments.

- Yearning love. Young people long to know how to love. The desire for significant relationships occupies a huge space in their psyches. In fact, a counselor once told me that for many young people, this is the only item on their agendas. Many too are drawn toward transcendence. They are ultimately unsatisfied in the relationships they experience. They yearn for a love that goes beyond their everyday experience of love.

Contemporary society often attempts to sell youth the wrong dream: money, the triumphant Lone Ranger, the need to have more of everything and to have it now, perfect sex. Who, then, are the models young people seek to imitate: Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Mother Teresa, the saints and martyrs? Or are they more likely to be LeBron James, Julia Roberts, Denzel Washington, and Maria Sharapova?

To use the play on words of one contemporary writer, we live in an era of "clashing symbols." The values that our faith presents often collide against those that our culture promotes, with a discordant clang.

So I urge you to sing a new song.

What might that song be like?

Sing a Deeply Spiritual Song

This seems quite obvious, but nothing is more important. To quote St. Paul (Rom 13:14), all Christian life aims at "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ." For the Christian, Jesus is the absolute center: "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he says; "no one comes to the Father except through me.... I am the vine.... I am the gate.... I am the shepherd.... I am the light.... I am the true bread come down from heaven. The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever."

I encourage you to make a commitment today that will slowly change your life. Spend a quarter-hour each day with the Lord in silent, meditative prayer. This is not an easy commitment to keep in the midst of a busy schedule at school or at work or at home. But find a place where, in the words of St. Matthew's Gospel, you can shut the door on the noise of the world and talk to the Lord and listen to him. Read a short passage from the New Testament and ask the Lord: "Lord, what are you saying to me? What do you want me to do today?"

If you learn to live in the presence of the Lord, love him deeply and ponder his word, then you will surely sing a deeply spiritual song in life.

Let Your Song Be Not a Solo, but a Chorus

Learn to pray with and work with others, too. Pope John Paul II wrote this: "Our Christian communities must become genuine 'schools' of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening, and ardent devotion, until the heart truly 'falls in love.' Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, No. 33).

Our prayer together should lead

to action together. Divorced from action, prayer can turn escapist. It can lose itself in fantasy and create illusions of privatized holiness. On the other hand, service divorced from prayer can become shallow. It can have a driven quality to it. It can become an addiction.

A healthy spirituality is at its best when it holds prayer and action in dynamic tension with each other.

Let It Be a Song of Service to the World

Because of rapid transportation and communication, the world community is becoming smaller. At the same time, the gap between the rich and the poor is becoming larger. It is hard for most of us here in the United States to imagine the terrible imbalance in the distribution of this world's goods, because we rarely come face to face with the poorest of the poor.

Let me give you just one example. Not long ago, *Time* magazine published some remarkable statistics about Africa. The question posed was this: What percentage of the population in various African countries lives on less than \$1 a day? The answer might surprise you:

Populations Living on Less than a \$1 per Day

Congo	—91%
Ethiopia	—85%
Chad	—82%
Zambia	—80%
Tanzania	—79%
Niger	—74%
Angola	—73%
Somalia	—72%

There are millions of people on every continent who live in dire poverty. In the spirit of today's Church, make the poor a key element in your vision of the world, in your spirituality. Find practical ways

of serving the poor as you study or work now and, later on, wherever you may be. Always ask yourself: What is the need of the poor person crouched in the doorway of the building nearby? What is the AIDS patient's most acute pain? What does the sick person at home or in a hospital yearn for? What are other young people calling out for in the school I attend ?

Let Yours Be a Wake-Up Song to the World

At one of their synod meetings, the world's bishops wrote this rousing message to young people:

"You, young people, you are 'sentinels of the morning'....How is the

Lord of history asking you to build a civilization of love? You have a keen sense of what honesty and sincerity require. You do not want to be caught up into divisive ethnic struggles nor poisoned by the gangrene of corruption. How can we be disciples of Jesus together and put into practice Christ's teaching on the Mount of the Beatitudes?"

In the ancient and medieval worlds, sentinels stood guard on the city walls, looking toward the East to catch the first glimpse of the rising sun. Since there were no clocks or bell towers in those days, they beat a drum or rang a gong to wake up the city.

In a Christian worldview, the ris-

ing sun is Jesus, the risen Lord. How I urge you to rouse the world to his presence! Do not settle for indifference. Do not be lulled to sleep by a continual hunger for material possessions or an overabundant diet of them. Be aware of the presence of Jesus the risen Lord, the rising sun, and develop a profoundly Gospel-centered, service-centered spirituality in your life.

Over 2,500 years ago, reflecting gratefully on the mystery of God, the composer of one of the psalms cried out (Ps 27:5), "I will sing and make music for the Lord." I encourage you today to sing a new song. Sing a deeply spiritual song, not a solo, but a harmonious sym-

phony, a song of service, a liberation song, a wake-up song to the world. Let your song be a rousing, beautiful hymn, a great chorus resounding to the glory of God and ringing out as good news for the world.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M., who until recently served as the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, is now on sabbatical in Washington, D.C.

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Contributing Publications

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How God Invites Us to Grow

Six Stages of Faith Development

BY REV. RICHARD J. SWEENEY

Editors' note: The following article describes one influential model for understanding the process of growth in faith. This question about faith development has been important as parents, grandparents, and religious educators consider how to hand on the faith to young people today.

Researchers guided by the important work of Professor James Fowler of Emory University have been conducting interviews on the faith-lives of men and women for nearly 20 years. Currently, they have identified as many as six different stages of faith people seem to exhibit. In each case, the movement to the next stage occurs when some life experience invites a person to a new understanding of God. The new stage of faith imparts a fuller, more adequate insight into life and makes possible more responsible and more truly loving decisions.

1. Imaginative Faith

Until around age seven, a child's faith can be expected to be highly imaginative. A host of different and sometimes conflicting images of God, the world, and the hereafter fill children's minds at this stage. God may be the ever-loving, ever-present, grandfather figure somewhere in the sky, or perhaps the exacting mother or father seemingly impossible to please. A child's faith is "healthy" at this stage if the images that fill his or her mind are positive ones that picture the world as a friendly, welcoming place and God as a loving, dependable parent. This is true of one five-year-old's comment that "God can go all around the world in one day. And he can't ever do bad things to you!" It is less apparent in another young boy's comment that, "The devil can come up out of a hole in the ground and get you when you're bad!"

Images of God that cause fear, guilt, and worry to a child are the real dangers to faith at this stage. Some destructive images of God and the world may continue into adult life and give one's faith a scrupulous, anxious or pessimistic cast. But, by the time a

child reaches the "age of reason" around age seven, the desire to know how things really are lessens reliance on imagination alone. Now a child wants to know more about how the world really is and how things fit together. The child is ready for the world of story and for a new stage of faith.

2. Literal Faith

Children in the early years of school are fascinated with stories. Not surprisingly, then, learning the religious stories of one's family or church group gives children at this age a clearer, more consistent picture of God. Bible stories, in particular, remain a very apt method of religious instruction. However, for children at this time, all Bible stories are taken literally. For example, the story of Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, Moses and the Ten Commandments, Jesus' crucifixion, and Paul's conversion are all read the same way—as literally and historically true. While literal faith is appropriate for children at this stage, adults whose faith remains literal throughout their later lives may at times appear anti-intellectual or resistant to the deeper meanings of Scripture and life itself.

The central feature of literal faith is a view of God as the rewarder of good and punisher of evil. God is presumed to operate as the parent who loves and praises us for being good, but also corrects and penalizes us for wrongdoing. Faith then entails bargaining with God: "If I do what God expects of me, I can count on his help in return." I remember in elementary school often promising to say ten extra Our Fathers and Hail Marys if God would help me do well on a test or in an important baseball game. And often it worked! God kept the bargain! But I noticed eventually that God was not always as predictable or reliable as I thought. This breakdown of a too literal view of God as the grand arbiter of weal or woe ushers in a new understanding of God and a new stage of faith.

Yet, some adults may live much of their lives with a literal faith. Some years ago, a brilliant, retired scientist astonished me with the remark:

"When it comes to my faith, I do better staying with what I learned in the third grade." Indeed, he continued to view God as the judge who doled out fortune or misfortune according to one's behavior. But this faith proved woefully inadequate in the scientist's life. He continued to blame himself for the misfortunes of an alcoholic son and an emotionally troubled daughter. Somehow he must have done something wrong! Why else would God allow this? A faith so strongly rooted in moral bargaining with God will rarely prove adequate to resolve the complexities of adult life.

3. Group Faith

Since most young people naturally value the importance of friendship, they often come to view God as one who treats them much like a trusted companion. At the same time, young persons often tend to model themselves after admired heroes or respected authority figures. This growing significance of companions and esteemed heroes and authority figures leads faith in the adolescent and early adult years to be very influenced by the group.

As a result, a central feature of faith at this stage is that it is largely conformed to the expectations, values, and understandings of the significant groups to which we belong. The significant group may be our family, church community, peer group, or colleagues. Greater identification with a group usually strengthens and supports our understanding of God and makes us more aware of community responsibilities. One young man well expressed faith at this stage by commenting: "My faith has always helped me keep on the right path in life and reminded me what God expects of me."

A further feature of faith at this stage is that it remains largely unquestioned. Confidence in the authority and dependability of the group eliminate all questioning. Typical is the following statement made in a faith interview: "My father was a good Catholic, went to daily Mass, followed the Ten Commandments, and told my brother and me to do the same....He

said whenever we wondered how to act, we should follow the exact teaching of the Church. Questioning it would only get us into trouble." While group faith imparts helpful clarity and consistency, it also runs the risk of discouraging personal responsibility. In the extreme, it gives rise to a blind defense of one's own group. "My country—right or wrong!" "Our Church is the true Church!" Also, religious practices done because "everybody else does them" eventually become lifeless and mechanical.

For many adults, certain experiences sooner or later force a questioning of earlier beliefs. It may be the experience of seeing opposing opinions or even conflict among religion teachers, priests or bishops. Or it may be the inability to accept or understand some Church teaching or a change in Church practice. The Second Vatican Council provoked questions for countless Catholics. Questioning of this kind, troubling as it is, often signals the birth of a new, more challenging stage of faith.

4. Personal Faith

According to the Gallup survey mentioned above, three out of four adults in the U.S. now believe that faith is strengthened by questioning earlier beliefs. Apparently, more adults are recognizing that it does not suffice to hold certain beliefs and perform religious practices only "because my parents did, or my teachers taught me to, or Church authorities say I should, or everybody else does." A desire to take personal responsibility for the beliefs I hold and the values I live by points to a more personal (though not private!) faith less dependent upon group expectations. My understanding of God is now increasingly shaped by my personal life experience. Former beliefs are examined and may be altered, renewed, deepened, or, if found faulty, discarded altogether.

The passage to a personally "owned" faith rarely occurs without significant tension and struggle. St. Teresa of Avila found her own journey from a conventional to a more

personal faith to be a wrenching experience. In describing this experience, she wrote, “I have sometimes been terribly oppressed by this turmoil of thoughts.” She noted wisely that at that point the presence of doubts and questions may lead persons to feel that they are losing their faith.

The opposite is often true. God may be leading them to probe the deeper meaning of their previous faith. Such was the case with one 43-year-old woman who mentioned that for years she had received the Sacrament of Penance at least biweekly. She knew it had become merely a routine for her, but was afraid to stop going for fear that something bad might happen in her life. But her growing appreciation of God’s constant love and ready forgiveness gave her courage to alter this routine. As a result, she said, “I go to confession less frequently now, but it seems much more meaningful to me.”

For some, the transition to a personal faith means that they must be willing to endure the pain of standing at odds with friends, family members, and Church leaders. For one college student, it meant enduring the ridicule of his peers as he chose to adhere to his Christian values in the face of the differing sexual practices of his university roommates. For a young Catholic woman, it meant a decision to expand her awareness of other Christian Churches by attending for a time Protestant worship services—much to the distress of her parents. For others, it has entailed the painful process of finding themselves unable to accept completely a particular Church instruction.

Such decisions may be necessary if persons are to develop a mature conscience and assume responsibility for the values they choose to live by. Faith-filled living now means accepting that even the most helpful laws, norms, and guidelines are sometimes limited in their ability to point out the best behavior. Reliance upon a God who is ever-loving and who has blessed us with the gift of human reason now makes it possible for persons to act increasingly according to their own most honest judgments and decisions. Still, those who continue to search for answers to the more complex questions of life are often led to the discovery of a source of wisdom that lies sometimes even

beyond personal reason.

5. Mystical Faith

Don’t let the word “mystical” put you off. It simply suggests communion with God. The hallmark of this fuller stage of adult faith is nothing other than an experience frequently described by Christian mystics—the experience that God dwells in us. St. Paul witnesses to this mystical faith when he says, “The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me” (Galatians 2:20). He calls others to this faith by reminding them, “You are in the spirit since the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Romans 8:9). For most people, this awareness of God’s inner presence begins with a longing or a compelling desire to be one’s whole self or to live one’s life as meaningfully as possible.

The Trappist writer Thomas Merton expressed this longing with the words, “When I have found my truest self, I will have found God.” This inner yearning to be all that God invites one to be leads persons at this stage to listen more intently to their thoughts, feelings, and deepest desires. They begin to heed Paul’s reminder that God often speaks to us through “inner groanings that cannot be expressed in speech” (Romans 8:26). A woman religious in her 50’s captured this view of faith when she said, “I believe that listening to the deepest part of me is identical to listening to God. At that point we are one.”

At this stage of faith, the awareness of God’s inner presence leads one to become more aware that God also dwells in all others. As a result, one begins to see people of various creeds, races, and nationalities as brothers and sisters to one another. Typical is one 70-year-old man’s comment, “I have learned to have respect for anybody. I could sit down and talk to a Muslim or a Jew or an Arab or anyone, and if they started talking religion in their way, I could really and completely fit my mind to theirs, see where their mind is going, and understand their ideas.” Interfaith dialogue now becomes not a threat but an opportunity for new understanding. Recognition of the sisterhood and brotherhood of all people also intensifies one’s commitment to the well-being of all humankind.

Not surprisingly, mystical faith can strongly influence one’s relationship to religious institutions. Heightened

awareness of the ultimate authority of the Holy Spirit lessens one’s reliance upon the limited authority of human groups. Adults who live a genuinely mystical faith discover a new responsibility to challenge and strive to improve the very institutions (church, government, civic groups) to which they belong. However, they also discover at times that an even further degree of faith may be needed to live up to their ideals.

6. Sacrificial Faith

Occasionally, history provides us with examples of persons who have so identified with the well-being of others and who are so committed to the values of truth and justice that they have a capacity for selfless love that outreaches most of us. Jesus, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, and Archbishop Oscar Romero are examples of this sacrificial faith. Such persons display a radical and consistent commitment to the doing of God’s will that is uncompromised by concern for personal status or security. In some cases, the willingness to sacrifice self for others has led to martyrdom. For many other less famous persons, it leads to a constant dedication of self to the growth of other persons and the improvement of society as a whole.

Robert Bolt’s highly regarded play *A Man for All Seasons*, presents the political life and death of St. Thomas More and portrays well the features of a truly sacrificial faith. Thomas More resists King Henry VIII’s claim to be head of the Church of England and reveals the faith that inspires him with his famous last words, “I die the King’s good servant, but God’s first.” For a person of such faith, following the will of God, carefully discerned, leaves no room for compromise. One’s commitment to values of truth, justice and love becomes all-consuming.

What Faith Is Right for You?

So what stage or degree of faith should you or I have? Should we seek the “highest” stage? Should we all hope to reach the point of a totally sacrificial faith? No doubt, we all tend to see that as an ideal. But dare anyone tell you where you should be at a given stage of your faith journey? To insist that you reach complete maturity now is like grabbing a budding flower by the stem and trying to yank it upward into full bloom. Such an effort would be violent and destruc-

tive. And it ignores the truth that there is a season for everything.

Faith remains always a gift of God. The precise stage of faith to which we are called by God depends greatly on our life experiences. God loves us at each stage of our development, affirming us at the level at which we are and, when the time is right, inviting us to fuller life. This invitation may come in the form of a gnawing dissatisfaction with our way of life or through the unrelenting pressure of doubts and questions. It may be spoken in our search for better solutions to life’s problems.

As we become more conscious that faith develops in stages, we also come to some practical conclusions. For example, we may need to learn patience and realize that some things are beyond our control: It may simply take a certain amount of time, and even trial-and-error, to get from one stage to another. We need to trust that God is in the often uneven process of our growth in faith. Therefore, it’s okay to feel conflict, fear, and doubt or to face hard questions. This may even be our cue to reach out to others for help and guidance, which is already a sign of growth.

Finally, the stage-by-stage process of faith teaches us that change is not a bad word. It’s the stuff of human life, the meaning of conversion, the way the Kingdom comes—like the little mustard seed, becoming by grades a full-grown tree. Openness to change, to the ongoing invitation of the Spirit, may well be the gift of God we need the most.

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Both Gen-Y and Catholic

They are their own breed, modern and unapologetically Catholic

BY MARK MOSSA

“Isn’t he so cute!” coos Amy. She is not talking about some fraternity boy she’s in love with. She’s melting over John Paul II chanting a Latin hymn on a CD she has brought with her on retreat. Only the pope is that kind of cute.

Even after 15 years of working with young people, such moments still strike me as odd. Yet, odd as it may seem, I hesitate to label Amy a freak or even a conservative (though she might be happy to describe herself as such). I know Amy, and coming from her this is not odd. She’s one of the many college students I meet from day to day, each searching for God in his or her own way. When it comes to things Catholic, she may be extreme and at times even close-minded, but not more than many other students at a Catholic college or university. The difference is that other students are extreme about things like alcohol, sex, their studies (sometimes), and maybe even social justice. Many of us who work at universities are accustomed to seeing these extremes as normal and, in the case of the last two, even laudable. Yet, while we are inclined to forgive the students these “normal” obsessions, we sometimes tend to see the love for the pope and enthusiasm for the Catholic faith expressed by students like Amy as weird and even dangerous.

Amy is one of the more enthusiastic members of a group of traditionally minded students I began working with this year. When I walked into their first meeting last year, attended by 40 students, I wondered how I would be received. Would it be as the “liberal Jesuit,” of whom some of them had been taught to be suspicious, sent perhaps to disabuse them of their faulty notions about Catholicism? They had no way of knowing that I had been much like them during my college years, struck by the newness of things I had not been previously taught about my faith, eager to know and put into practice what it meant to be Catholic, zealous, and, yes, sometimes extreme and close-minded.

I had no agenda for my work with them. I just wanted to get to know them, and I hoped they would want to get to know me. What good could I do them if I didn’t start there? So often what we know of such students is not who they really are, but who we imagine them to be (usually either someone who thinks as we do, hence worthy of praise, or someone who thinks the opposite, and so subject to our criticism)—not unique individuals with names, just some predetermined set of character traits and opinions. But in my experience, things are much more complicated than that. Let me introduce you to some of my students.

Some, like Amy, were easy to get to know. Physically imposing, vocal, and passionate, like a town crier she led the effort to rouse the whole campus to celebrate the 25th anniversary of John Paul II’s pontificate.

The mouse-like and gentle Tara, while physically and temperamentally the opposite of Amy, is just as serious about her faith and especially fierce—though in a gentle way—in her promotion of pro-life causes.

I thought I had Alex, a freshman, pegged as far too serious, rigid, and kind of scary (this was prompted by his graphic explanation of why *Dante’s Inferno* was his favorite book), yet by the end of the year he was one of the more relaxed and open of the group. Alex even surprised us all by being a finalist in a sorority contest. When asked, “What’s your favorite pick-up line?” he told how he would kneel down next to a pretty girl in church and ask, “Confess here often?”

Peter, an introverted, aspiring folk-singer/rock star, was harder to get to know, but at his concerts he became more transparent. His songs betrayed what he was thinking about. In the spring semester, he took my ethics class, which gave us the opportunity to talk about serious issues, like the Iraq war, and not so serious ones, like our common interest in superheros.

Mary, quiet and unassuming, with a dry sense of humor, participates in the group’s meetings, sings in the choir for Mass, and joined us for both the protest at the School of the Americas

and our alternative Mardi Gras mission to Mexico.

Laura, though devout, is far from the stereotypical prude. She is petite, her language peppered (more like sauced) with the word “like.” In appearance, she is hardly distinguishable from other young women her age, except that her form-fitting baby-T’s frequently carry announcements like, “Mary is my homegirl.”

Christopher was this year’s homecoming king, and he is trying to bring back the 80’s “popped collar” fashion.

Jessica, who struggles with her relationships in a dysfunctional family, wants certainty for herself and everybody else. She got married this year and speaks enthusiastically about her N.F.P. classes. Without the confidence of her faith, her personal struggles might have kept her from getting this far. On her wedding day, just after graduation, she lit up the church with her smile and raised her arms in triumph.

This is not the homogeneous group one might expect (their names, by the way, have been changed to protect their privacy), and you’d be surprised that, while sharing certain affinities, they are as different in their individual opinions and beliefs as they are in character. This becomes apparent during our meetings, which consist of reflection and conversation about the coming Sunday’s Gospel, as well as a discussion focused on some aspect of the Church’s teaching. The latter is usually presented by the students. Some limit themselves to material right out of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, but others explore their topic in more creative ways. Despite their seriousness, a few manage to make the presentation comical (albeit in a kind of nerdy way) with “Saturday Night Live”-style dialogues and puns using religious terminology, funny more for being deliberately bad than for their cleverness.

For the Gospel reflection, a different Jesuit priest is invited each week. I made gentle suggestions that a lay person, perhaps from the religious studies faculty, might be O.K. once in a while. But so far the only exception the group has made was to invite a soon-

to-be-priest (me), once. And my clever (I thought) take on the Gospel—Jesus pulling a “bait and switch” on the ambitious James and John (Can you drink the cup? Wink, wink)—was only tepidly received. They prefer a more straightforward, academic approach. They showed more excitement at a later meeting about my decidedly drier review of the history and significance of priestly celibacy and its place in the context of our common vocation to chastity—which might have been a snoozer with another crowd.

Our lively discussions reveal that while some find in Church teaching easy answers, others really struggle. But no matter how they may differ in their commitment to various interpretations of Church teaching, what always comes through is their love for the Church and enthusiasm about being Catholic. I’m reminded of my own youthful vigor for the Church, which sowed the seeds of my Jesuit vocation.

As for their presumed aversion to “liberal Jesuits,” the way they admire and include a variety of Jesuits in their conversation and activities seems to suggest otherwise. This does not mean they are never critical, but I find them much more accepting and patient with us than we more mature Catholics often are with them. One of my favorite moments with them occurred the night some of them arrived at the meeting very troubled. It was pro-life awareness week. Although they had earlier that week adorned our statue of St. Ignatius Loyola with a T-shirt that said, “My mother chose life,” someone had now replaced it with one that simply said, “Choice.” Campus security told them they could do nothing about it. Certain that Ignatius would not be keen on promoting that cause, and not wanting any of them to get in trouble, I climbed up and removed the T-shirt. Suddenly, I was the hero, not for being liberal or conservative, but just for being my Catholic and Jesuit self.

With these students, I have learned this year to question the inclination to see them as strange or dangerous. It pains me to see how some of my colleagues do not appreciate these students I’ve grown to love. Their de-

votion and eagerness to do what God wants (as they understand it) is often met with suspicion and consternation. They can become scapegoats for people's animosities toward conservatism, especially heightened on a college campus. And I have grown weary of being congratulated for the great sacrifice I have made in choosing to be with these students. They are not perfect; they don't have it all figured out. They're adolescents, after all. But should they be disdained and spoken of in negative, hushed tones because they prefer to kneel at Mass, even in the absence of kneelers? Yes, they make us uncomfortable with their questioning, sometimes because they are arrogant and impertinent when they do it. And we should call them on that. But sometimes it's because they are right.

My experience this past year has taught me a few things. When it comes to these students, ultimately it is not a matter of who is on the right or the left, or even who's right or wrong, but of who they are and, to invoke the old Baltimore Catechism, who made them. The biggest detractors of these students were those who had made no effort to get to know them. The prejudices against them are born of old fights, old animosities, and anxieties that too much love for the institutional Church will somehow force us through a time-warp back to the 1930's. That may be the desire of some of the baby boomers, but that's not what these young people want. Rather, they want to be connected to their Catholic tradition in an age when it sometimes seems we are meant to apologize for it. Perhaps they have a rosary tucked in their pocket next to their cellphones and P.D.A.'s, but these are 21st-century kids. They have never known a time without John Paul II, the Internet, vernacular liturgy, or the pop singer Madonna, even if they are more partial to the mother of God. They are their own new breed, thoroughly modern and unapologetically Catholic—which you will find out for yourself when you get to know them.

Mark Mossa, S.J., was a professor of philosophy and a part-time campus minister at Loyola University in New Orleans, La.

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What Catholics Under 30 Are Doing Right

BY CLAIRE NOONAN

In Catholic circles, there's one group that is much maligned and little appreciated. But it's a group that I have been blessed to work and pray with for many years. They are some of God's most inspiring friends, who get from our church neither a lifetime of employment security nor the status of ordination, but who don't do this work for money or power anyway. They do it for love.

They are Catholics under 30. Here are some of the things they are doing right.

Service 101

Despite the demands of increasing tuitions, rising debt burdens, and heavy class loads, countless university students are still giving incredible service to the Church and the world.

I work as a university minister at Loyola University Chicago, where we are graced with a vibrant liturgical life and transformative social justice programs.

Imagine 600 students in a standing-room-only chapel for Sunday Eucharist, beginning student-style at 10 p.m. After Communion, the congregation blesses 90 students who will spend their spring break on alternative break immersion trips. They are sent to build houses in Appalachia; serve meals in Baltimore; demonstrate for peace in Washington; pray with the Lakota people of Rosebud, South Dakota; and listen to the stories of the unemployed in Camden, New Jersey.

These 90 students actually had to be selected for those trips. Nearly twice as many students applied as we were able to send. It is a beautiful sight to see: All of these young men and women clad in their matching bright green T-shirts standing around the altar, a visible sign of God's presence and love.

Of course, this scene is not unique to Loyola. Boston College sends nearly 150 students on international trips each year. Notre Dame's well-known summer project works with 200 community organizations around the country to provide 8- to 10-week service-

learning internships to their students. Most Catholic universities and many Newman Centers around the country have similar programs.

For many students, these short-term experiences launch an even deeper commitment to Gospel love and Christian friendship. Some of these students are so profoundly challenged that they become the teachers and evangelizers of their institutions.

A few years ago, for instance, a group of Loyola students began urging the university community to befriend impoverished Latin American coffee farmers. These students insisted that we First World consumers could and should pay a living wage to the families around the globe who produce the drink we have the luxury to enjoy. Their insistent voice brought a fair-trade coffee contract to Loyola. Now farmers who produce the coffee we drink at Loyola are guaranteed a minimum price of \$1.26 per pound of coffee, while the free market bears the starvation wage of 54 cents per pound.

While many in the Church bemoan the younger generations, plenty of 20-somethings are working to bring about the kingdom of God.

A "New Novitiate"

In 1973, Dominican Sister Marcella Connelly returned to the United States from her mission in Bolivia with a fresh vision. Reflecting on her life of prayer, community, and service to the poor of South America, Connelly imagined a new partnership of sisters and young people.

The work she was doing, Connelly concluded, did not need to be limited to religious women. It was apostolic—that is, it was about being sent by Jesus to proclaim the reign of God. And all Christians, Connelly realized, were by their baptism sent into the world by Christ.

So when she returned home, she and her congregation began inviting graduates of what was then known as Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois into their homes and ministries. Young women and men were invited to share in the apostolic life: They would teach in innercity schools, staff shelters for the homeless, direct youth programs in poor parishes, or provide nursing care in rural health clinics. They would live communally on small stipends and pray regularly together. Though the Apostolic Volunteers (now known as Dominican Volunteers USA) lived and worked alongside the sisters, this was never meant as a recruiting program for the convent. Rather, it was the beginning of a new future for laypeople in the Church.

When Connelly founded the Apostolic Volunteers, there were only about 20 other programs like it around. The Jesuits had been recruiting laypeople to help teach in their Alaskan schools for about 20 years. Edwina Gateley was bringing young European laypeople on missions to Africa. Father Ralph Beiting invited friends to share in his outreach ministry to the people of Appalachian Kentucky.

But in the past 30 years, the vision of Connelly and her colleagues caught on with post-Vatican II Catholics. Now, more than 200 Catholic programs are placing laypeople, the overwhelming majority of whom are under 30, into full-time, faith-based volunteer service around the United States and abroad. These volunteers typically spend one or two years living and working with poor and marginalized communities, learning about the social injustices that create poverty, praying over their joys and hardships, living in voluntary simplicity, and trying to build friendships based on Gospel love.

I call these programs the "new novitiate" because, like the traditional

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What Catholics Under 30 Are Doing Right

preparation for religious life, lay volunteer programs are an intense form of training for lifelong commitment to the mission of Jesus. They are now a major cultivating ground for professional lay ministers in the Church and for workers in faith-based movements for social justice.

Consider this: In the year 2000, 500 new priests were ordained and 700 women entered religious life in the U.S. That same year, 3,600 young people completed at least one year of service in a lay volunteer or missionary program. Tens of thousands of graduates of these programs are out in the world now.

Tom Gaunt, S.J. concluded from his study of 1,400 former members of the Jesuit Volunteers Corp (JVC) that “the one (or two) year experience of JVC produces more ‘influential people’ in a person’s life than family, school, workplace, Church, or any other relationship.” As any former Jesuit Volunteer will tell you, they’re “ruined for life.”

Gaunt’s results could undoubtedly be duplicated in other lay volunteer programs. Rooted in Christ’s self-sacrificing love, grown in a community of friends, the experience of lay volunteers bears fruit that lasts. It is perhaps the formative experience of their adult lives. It influences their decisions regarding faith, work, family, money, and politics. These experiences allow a new generation of

Catholic leaders to practice living in the reign of God.

The effects are great—not only on them, but on the Church and the world as well. By way of illustration, the Alliance for Catholic Education, whose members teach in underserved Catholic schools in the South, reports that 75 percent of its graduates remain in education after completing the program. Catholic Network of Volunteer Service member programs send about 200 young adults on to graduate study in ministry or theology every year.

These programs capture the spirit of our age. They give young adults the opportunity to deepen their faith, knowledge, and commitment. They nurture them on a path toward ministry, respecting the vocation to which they feel called. They provide a way to lay down their lives in service of the reign of God.

Expanding Lay Ministry

Thirty-five thousand lay men and mostly women are currently in professional-level formation for ministry in the United States. More than 10,000 of these are under 40. An estimated 100,000 lay ministers serve the U.S. Church. Uncounted thousands trained for professional ministry in the Church but have gone elsewhere because they found no place for themselves within the current structures.

Without the financial support of

a religious community or its major donors, without the status of social recognition, without the least bit of job security, women and men are responding to the call of Christ for service in the Church in growing numbers.

Since the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) first studied lay ministry formation in 1985-86, “the number of programs [preparing laypeople for professional ministry in the Church] has expanded by more than 50 percent, and the number of participants in these programs has grown more than three-fold.” These faithful and courageous Catholics are laying down their lives. They are giving themselves to their friend—that is to say, the whole Church.

Some are creating new ministries imagined freshly for our time. Some are serving in quite traditional roles, positions formerly occupied by the ordained or religious. They are parish administrators and hospital chaplains, liturgical musicians and theology teachers, writers, and campus ministers. You know them.

They are career-changers like Mike Hayes of New York City, who used his professional experience in the secular media to help create www.Busted-Halo.com, a dynamic spirituality web site for young adults. They are parish staff members like Karon Van Antwerp of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, a vibrant

30-year-old pastoral associate with a gift for preaching and a wicked sense of humor. And they are artists like Dana Spottswood of Oakland, California, who created a new ministry painting beautiful icons of the saints for neighborhood parishes with her own homemade, earth-friendly paints.

Some in our church lament the passing of a day gone by or curse those who do not wish to recreate it. We need to stop pining for the past. We need to meet the resurrected Jesus and receive the gifts the Holy Spirit is offering us now.

A good place to start is in celebrating those who are already living into our imagined future. We can retrain our eyes to see the places where friendship, service, and life are growing. We can recognize those who have clearly been chosen for ministry in this time. We can acknowledge those whose lives are bearing fruit. These young people are not only the future of the Church, but also its vibrant present.

Claire Noonan is the chaplain at Loyola University Chicago’s University Ministry.

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Look What’s Brewing at Theology-on-Tap

BY JEREMY LANGFORD

In Chicago, summers and theology go together like a ball and glove, parks and picnics, fireworks and the lakeshore. Thousands of young adults include attending one or more sessions of the annual Theology-on-Tap speaker-and-discussion series in their summer plans.

“Come Again?” you say. “What on tap?”

Sponsored by the Young Adult Ministry Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Theology-on-Tap is a four-week summer program exclusively for

young adults in their twenties and thirties, married and single. An ideal way for parishes to focus some time, attention, and resources on one of the most underrepresented groups in the Church, Theology-on-Tap provides a weekly opportunity for parish communities to work together regionally to gather young adults for conversation, food, drink, and good theology. The grand finale of the program is an archdiocese-wide Mass, celebrated in Chicago’s Holy Name Cathedral by the cardinal-archbishop, followed by a picnic on the lawn of his residence.

Founded in June 1981 at St. James

Parish in Arlington Heights, Illinois, Theology-on-Tap was the direct result of a conversation between Father John Wall (a parish priest who would go on to transform Old St. Patrick’s Church just west of Chicago’s downtown from a dying parish into one of the most vibrant in the country) and a young man from the parish who was about to graduate from college. The young man was looking beyond his final few months of college to a career in the real world and wondering about the future. He was concerned about his personal identity and finding meaning in life. “Will I be more than my job?”

What will it mean to fall in love? Where does God fit in all this? What does it mean to be Catholic?” Father Wall not only responded to this young man’s questions but decided that it was time to develop a safe, casual, and relaxing environment for young adults interested in discussing their faith.

“For twenty-four consecutive years, Theology-on-Tap has been addressing the key questions being asked by young adults,” explained Father John Cusick, who has been involved with young adult ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago since

1977 and has served as director of its Young Adult Ministry Office since 1985. Along with his talented associate director, Ms. Kate DeVries, with whom he joined forces in 1988, Father Cusick has been on a mission not only to connect with young people but to help parishes, Church leaders, parents, and members of the Catholic community embrace young adults as a vital part of the life of the Church.

Cusick and DeVries are very specific about who they mean by “young adults”: college students who are home for the summer and are hungry to either find or build upon positive Church experiences, young singles seeking community and even dating opportunities with people who share similar questions and values, married couples hoping to find resources to enrich their relationship, young parents interested in having their children baptized or in enhancing their own understanding of the Faith so that they can pass it on. Without exception, the cutoff age for those participating in young adult ministry is forty.

Both Cusick and DeVries base their special brand of ministry on what they call the “Jesus method of organizing.”

“The Lord Jesus did not put a sign on a tree saying, ‘If you want to be an apostle, sign up here and bring a friend,’” Father Cusick said. “He called the disciples one by one and said, ‘Let’s go. I’ll show you what life can be.’ If that style is good enough for the Lord, what’s our problem? This is a generation waiting to be invited in, but we can’t expect them to get fired up by a flier. We’ve got to seek them out, walk with them, and invite them to journey with us on the path of faith. And we’ve got to offer them a safe, dynamic venue in which to ask their questions and meet peer seekers.”

Following Jesus’ example, DeVries and Cusick go out into the crowds—sports events, coffeehouses, college campuses, events in the city—with their spiritual antennas up so they can hear what young people are asking and how they communicate the hungers of their hearts.

“Over the years, the basic human questions young adults ask have remained pretty constant, but in recent years, I find many are asking fewer questions about work and more about matters of faith,” Cusick said.

“In the aftermath of 9-11 and in the face of so much violence on our television screens, young people are awakening to the deeper questions of faith. While the recent success of books like *The Da Vinci Code* and movies like Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* make it easier to raise issues of spirituality and religion, there still exists a huge chasm between personal faith and organized religion. We live in a highly secular culture in which spirituality is often dissociated from religion: people make distinctions like ‘I’m spiritual but not religious.’ When Theology-on-Tap works right, it serves as a bridge between the two.”

“For twenty-four consecutive years, Theology-on-Tap has been addressing key questions being asked by young adults.”

Over the years, Theology-on-Tap has been hosted by 240 different parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago. Hundreds of speakers have been privileged to address thousands of young adults on topics such as recognizing God in everyday life, saints and sinners, relationships, morality, the passion and resurrection of Christ, salvation, reconciliation, and social justice. Each two-hour session begins with a warm greeting and includes a presentation by a speaker (or speakers), a break for food and refreshments (yes, in many cases beer and wine are available), and discussion. According to Cusick, Theology-on-Tap works so well “because people are made to feel welcomed and not judged, the presentations are hopeful but not dictatorial, peers connect with peers, and the Faith is seen as exciting rather than as a burden.”

Cusick and DeVries handpick presenters based on their having something to say about faith and their ability to say it in an engaging way. They work hard to identify and invite young adults to serve as speakers. “The point of each session is to connect with what we all have in common—human experience,” added Cusick. “The risen Lord dwells in human experience, and when you respect human experience,

you are on holy ground. The point of Theology-on-Tap is to get some young people together, listen to someone who can say something intelligent and creative about God and faith, and turn everything over to the Holy Spirit and let people talk to one another.”

Another key to the program is its cohesive structure. The Young Adult Ministry Office in Chicago prides itself on working with individual parishes in planning and executing successful Theology-on-Tap sessions, always stressing that the Church is working together as a whole and is a sum of its parts. To emphasize this point, the Mass and picnic at the end

of the program bring the planners and participants together so they can feel part of one body. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, former archbishop of Chicago, developed a special relationship with young adults. He presided at the Theology-on-Tap Mass with young adults and hosted them at his residence for fourteen years until his death in 1996. In his homily at the Theology-on-Tap Mass in August of 1985, he remarked, “If I had children of my own, they would be your age. You are very special to me and to this archdiocese.”

Francis Cardinal George continued that relationship with young adults in 1997. When he arrived as the new archbishop of Chicago, he enthusiastically agreed to preside at the Theology-on-Tap Mass and host over one thousand young adults at a picnic on the grounds of his residence. In a letter inviting young adults to attend the Mass and picnic, Cardinal George said, “You are very important members of the Church. Your energy, talent, and faith will give me much help as together we build up our local church to be a vital presence in the Chicago area. Together we can continue the mission of Jesus Christ to bring the Gospel of love, forgiveness, and holiness to all the places where we live and encounter others.”

In the early 1990’s, Theology-on-Tap spread beyond the Archdiocese of Chicago to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as well as to the Dioceses of Joliet and Rockford, Illinois, and Gary, Indiana. Four years ago, Cusick and DeVries copyrighted and trademarked the program so they could ensure that any parish or diocese which uses it is, in fact, reaching out to young adults. “We have been very picky about whom we license. We want to make sure that Theology-on-Tap continues to be exclusively for this wonderful generation of people whose presence in the Catholic Church is all-too-often tenuous,” Cusick explained.

In addition to the program’s expansion in the immediate geographical area surrounding Chicago, several (arch)dioceses and organizations have obtained licenses, including the Archdioceses of Atlanta, New York, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Denver, Miami, and Washington, D.C.; the Dioceses of Toledo, Arlington, Wilmington, Charlotte, and Cleveland; and the campus ministries/Newman Centers of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, and Columbus State University in Georgia. In most cases, Theology-on-Tap sessions are held in pubs and restaurants and run at different times of the year, depending on what makes sense for the local area.

Shannon Loughlin is the director of Rochester’s young adult ministry. In an article published in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, the thirty-one-year-old said that Theology-on-Tap offers a comfortable atmosphere for young adult Catholics. The article goes on: “Connecting with peers who share similar religious values is an important part of the program,” Loughlin said, “but equally important are connecting with Jesus, the Church, and its mission. ‘It’s about living a life of faith,’ with discussions on the particular topics that come up in the lives of young adults—jobs and identity, dating, family relationships, transitions from school to work.”

Anne Xuereb, twenty-seven, is a graduate of Columbus State University and a member of St. Anne Catholic Church in Columbus, Georgia. “There really is a distinction between what you learn as a kid at

church and what you need to know as an adult,” the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer quotes Xuereb as saying. “So many things we have to take on faith, but there are reasons behind it. “As the paper points out, the Sought is predominantly Protestant, and many young adult Catholics feel the need to know answers to theological questions posed by non-Catholics. They find Theology-on-Tap a very helpful venue for exploring their questions and learning the intricacies of their faith.

What began as one priest’s modest response to a young adult’s sincere faith questions has turned into an explosive movement that is sweeping the nation...and beyond. “The program has reached all the way to Hong Kong and is being translated into Cantonese,” Cusick proudly explained. “And Renew International is going to use Theology-on-Tap for its renew program with young adults!”

As one who has benefitted enormously from Theology-on-Tap as both a participant and a speaker over the past seven years, I asked my friend Father Cusick to share a few thoughts about the success of the program he has nurtured so lovingly for so long. “The value of it for me is that after all of these years of working on behalf of and with young adults, it looks like the program we started here in Chicago is giving new life to the Church across the English-speaking world and beyond. Theology-on-Tap is an avenue to connect and reconnect with the Faith. Every day I see the hunger for faith in this generation, and for so many churches to say they are willing and thrilled to open their doors to young people is a blessed thing.”

If Theology-on-Tap is available in your area, it is a wonderful program to recommend to the young people in your life. If not, perhaps you can be a catalyst for starting something special for the young adults who would benefit from it.

Jeremy Langford is the Director of Publications and Public Relations for the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus.

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Reaching an Invisible Generation

BY ROLAND MARTINSON

Editors’ note: Roland Martinson is the Carrie Olson Baalson Professor of Children, Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2001, Dr. Martinson gave the Heim-Fry Lecture at the Seminary on the subject of ministry to young adults. The following text excerpts much of that lecture’s themes. As a Lutheran, Martinson has witnessed many of the same phenomena that apply to the challenges facing Catholics in handing on the Faith to young adults.

What does post-modernity mean for how Christians go about living the Faith today or discerning the presence of God in the face of a new generation? Or, put more directly, How have we, the latest generation of the Church’s leadership, been doing theologically and strategically in participating with God in passing on faith to this next generation?

The group of young people aged 18 to 30 is an invisible generation. At the height of the baby boomer generation (born 1943-1961), 4.3 million children were born in one year in America. At the depths of the baby buster generation (born 1962-1981), only 3.1 million children were born in America. Following the buster generation, the millennial generation (born 1982-present) is even larger than the boomer generation. The buster generation is lost in the shadows of the larger generations on either side. It has become an invisible generation.

Today’s 18- to 30-year-olds grew up in a time in which children were devalued. Forty percent of them say, “I was a latchkey kid. I raised myself. I grew up alone.” Societal transformation was taking place during the years these young adults were growing up. Very often they were lost in a complex web of changing human identity, relationships, and lifestyles.

Disconnected from the Church, this young adult generation’s religious drift is more expansive and has continued longer. On almost any Sunday, these young adults are absent, invisible in our churches. As their faith experience shifts, more young adults go away and stay away. The chasm between the language, the symbols, and the music of the Church and the realities of their world has become very great. They

often feel like strangers in their church’s places of worship.

There are 69 million persons in this buster generation (born 1962-1981) in the United States compared to 79.2 million boomers (born 1943-1961) and 80.4 million millennial kids (born 1982 to present). The two huge demographic groups on either side of the smaller Buster generation can make them feel as though they are invisible in the larger culture.

Joel Kotkin, in *The New Geography* (New York: Random House, 2000), calls this generation “social pioneers.” Forty percent of them grew up in families where their parents divorced. Thirty-five to forty percent say, “I raised myself.” These people do not return regularly to their homes to celebrate Christmas, anniversaries, and birthdays. Their peers have become their friends, their communities, their families. They experience high rates of drug use, AIDS, violence, and mobility—often moving at critical junctures in their lives. AIDS has been a major factor in shaping their attitudes toward sexual relationships. They have suffered the consequences of their parents’ generation’s lack of relational commitments and accountability.

High rates of depression and suicide, later first marriages, later first children, and materialism characterize this generation. They are by nature independent; they question authority, work long hours at jobs while in high school and college, and remain single longer. They are “technopolites,” growing up on computers, electronic communication networks, global awareness and interactivity, and sitcom neighborhoods. They live in a world that is wired and wireless—marked by instant, constant communication.

Those aged 18 to 30 are “media-vores”—conversant with TV, music, MTV, VH1, movies, and the Internet. They are immersed in pop culture. This media world creates a certain kind of shared consciousness. They are accustomed to infomercials; carefully honed consumer materialism has been regularly pitched into their lives.

There is a great interest among this generation in spirituality, but few are interested in religion. Most find religion boring, trivial, and unengaging. Most know little of the major faith traditions. Their spirituality and morality

are shaped by pop culture. They are self-absorbed and yet they serve others in very direct ways. They browse a spiritual marketplace.

Their response to our society’s emerging pluralism and multiculturalism is often either relativism or fundamentalism. Whatever else their response, power differential concerns regularly lie behind their questions. They want to know who holds the power. For this generation, change is fast-paced, constant, and chaotic.

What we have discovered is that roughly 75 percent of young men and women leave the Church between the ages of 16 and 24. Forty percent who leave the Church return by age 35. Thirty percent of those return to other denominations. Many young men and women now are swelling the ranks of congregations best described as nondenominational.

Among the 25 percent who have stayed involved in the Church, we have discovered varying combinations of eight characteristics we call faith factors. Many of these “participating young adults” say faith was deep in the identity and practices of their family. One young woman said in an interview, “In my family, faith was in our armpits and our pores!” These faith participants speak about mentors being a vital part of their faith. Significant relationships with leaders whose faith is a vital part of their own lives have had a huge impact, whether these leaders are coaches or teachers or people in the Church—pastors, Sunday school teachers, or youth directors. Generally, they have three or more of such faith-filled leaders in their lives.

Service in the name of Christ is important in keeping these young adults in church. They speak about the power of “doing God” with others; that is, seeing God at work through them making a constructive contribution to other people’s lives. Being apprenticed into leadership early is another experience they cite as being a significant factor in sustaining their faith.

Other factors these young men and women who stay and lead say was critical for them was having a safe and open place during their senior high and college years to ask tough questions, being in relationships with other persons like themselves, and having the opportunity to do good in

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Why Young Adults Need Ignatian Spirituality

BY TIMOTHY P. MULDOON

A number of articles and books over the last few years have asked: What will the Church look like in 20 years? Underlying this basic concern is an awareness that today's young Catholic adults have not, it seems, employed the models of earlier generations to appropriate the Faith and lack the commitment to that faith that would seem necessary for the future well-being of the Church. What I offer here is a reflection on how Ignatian spirituality in particular can speak to young people and help us develop a vocabulary of faith.

Why Ignatian spirituality? There are two major reasons; the first is practical, the second theological. The practical reason is that this spirituality is available. There are many Jesuit high schools and colleges in the United States, and they have a long history of ministering to the spiritual and intellectual growth of young people. Ignatian spirituality works because we have learned how to encourage young people to use it.

The theological reason for focusing on Ignatian spirituality is that this tradition emphasizes faith as an ongoing dialogue between the person and God. It thus represents the kind of dynamic approach that young people have often discovered for themselves. To see spirituality as a demanding exercise and work is to see it as more than the either/or proposition that is too often presented as the correct view: If you don't believe in God, you're going to hell.

There are five elements in Ignatian spirituality that today's young people can use to help themselves grow in an understanding of their faith. To list them in an abbreviated style, they are: the first principle and foundation; finding God in all things; walking with Christ; the experiencing of consolation and desolation; and the ideal of social justice.

The Principle and Foundation

In a post-modern world, the very notion of a foundation is questioned: Can anything be regarded as foundational when it seems that everyone believes something different from everyone else? Robert Ludwig has written in *Reconstructing Catholicism*

(1995) that younger Catholics have grown up in what he calls a "deconstructed" context and seek a "constructive worldview." Practically, this means that younger adults have a hard time with any claim of incontrovertible truth, even the existence of God, but long for clarity. In this context, what Ignatius in his book of spiritual exercises called the first principle and foundation can be seen as remarkably refreshing. It is a disarmingly simple proposition: We are created to praise, glorify, and serve God, and by this means to achieve our eternal well-being. Such a suggestion cuts to the heart of our longing for truth and offers a simple recommendation: Live as though this first principle and foundation were true. Here I am reminded of Ignatius' own advice for the making of his *Spiritual Exercises*: Trust God as if everything depended on you, and at the same time work as if everything depended on God.

I recently had an experience that illustrates the attractive power of this first principle and foundation. During an introductory philosophy class, I said philosophy begins with a sense of wonder at the so-called "limit questions" that confront us as human beings. Among these are questions about death and suffering, love, and the meaning of life. Looking out over a room full of only partly interested students, I threw out an offhand comment: "You know, the meaning of life is easy—we are created to praise, glorify, and serve God, and by this means to achieve our eternal well-being!" Immediately, the collective posture of the room changed—they all sat up straight and began writing. "Can you say that again?" they asked. I repeated every word slowly. I had, of course, only lobbed this comment to catch their attention, but they were fascinated at the idea that the meaning of life could be encapsulated in a handy sentence.

Because we live today in a world in which truth claims are constantly weighed and judged against one another, young people have been given very little reason to think that any one way of living is better than any other. Sharing an articulation of Christian faith that is so direct challenges people to consider what sort of truth claim it is and what kind of life it offers.

God in All Things

While the notion that God is to be found in all things is not uniquely Ignatian, it is characteristically so. Among the Jesuits of the last century and a half who lived this worldview were the British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), the French paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), and the German theologian Karl Rahner (1904-84). They all had a strong sense of what Hopkins called "the dearest freshness, deep down things"—that sense that God's grace animates the whole of the created order so that one cannot but encounter it if one is attuned to it. This celebration of God's grandeur appeals to the youthful mind, which encounters a panorama of people, traditions, beliefs, and styles and draws meaning from sources different from those of traditional Catholic worship. Indeed, young people today draw their spirituality from such nontraditional places as pop culture, as Tom Beau-doin noted in *Virtual Faith* (1997).

To speak about finding God in all things is to admit that no doctrine, no tradition, and no Scripture can exhaust the mystery that is God. It is to remember that our theology, our prayer, and our teaching are limited in their ability to convey this mystery, and that as a result we must ultimately stand in awe before God. We who have grown up in a pluralistic world have seen good things in people of varied backgrounds; we know that any talk of ultimate truth must be humble before the vastness of human experience and of creation. On the flip side, to speak of God in all things is to remind us that ours is a sacramental understanding of God—God among us in the faces, the words, and the gestures that make present the reality of grace. It is to emphasize that God is not distant and "other," but present and intimate with us. It is to underscore a belief that our lives are not beyond the scope of God's love, but rather they are already the objects of God's care.

Walking With Christ

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, a handbook for the making of a retreat, asks the retreatants to enter deeply into the stories of Jesus' life and to use their imaginations to place themselves in the Gospel scenes. This is a spiritu-

ality about sharing in the story, not only by remembering it but also by taking part in it, in order that one might more fully come to know Jesus. Today, this counsel is still valuable for young people, many of whom know the Gospels only secondhand. I have often heard people say how surprised they were by the Jesus of the Gospels, because they had never had the chance to meet him directly. Too often, young men and women rely on the faith of their parents and never have the opportunity to confront for themselves this attractive figure ("Who do you say that I am?") and to answer the fundamental call: "Come, follow me." Young adults undergo a period of distancing themselves from their parents, and part of this distancing involves religion. They need, therefore, the chance to develop their own mature faith. Asking them to consider the real Jesus can be an important step in this growth.

Consolation and Desolation

It is important on this spiritual journey for young people to understand that this is not a straight, easy path toward enlightenment, but rather a struggle that involves highs and lows. Ignatius' teaching about what he calls the discernment of spirits is helpful, because it helps us understand that both consolation and desolation are part of the life of faith. Ignatius reminds us that God loves us deeply, but also moves us toward growth even when we think he is distant. In short, Ignatius shows us that spiritual suffering is part of the life of faith and that it forces us to confront the false images of God that prevent us from growing as human beings. For young people this is a hard message, but very necessary in a culture that tells us that all suffering is to be avoided. My generation has grown up in a sound-bite, throw-away culture. We have learned that it is possible to insulate ourselves from reality by turning our short attention span to the next interesting thing. We need a spirituality that emphasizes that faith sometimes requires us to confront reality and to trust God even when God is hard to understand—for example, in the face of such mysteries as the death of a loved one or experiences of failure and loss.

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Social Justice

An important final element in Ignatian spirituality that distinguishes it from so many self-help spiritualities in the marketplace is that of social justice. Jesuit education has stressed that Christian faith reaches out to others and does not rest content with a doctrine of personal fulfillment. Although young people today are criticized for self-centeredness, many of us long to make a difference for the better in the world. Having inherited an individualistic worldview, we find that it can be difficult but rewarding to show concern for others. One benefit of living in a pluralistic world is that we have come to appreciate the legitimate differences among people, and so we have a sense that all people share a basic moral equality. We must be reminded, though, that in spite of our culture's tendencies to exalt the individual, we are called to a concern for those people who have been left out.

Jesuit institutions have led the way in making these spiritual teachings of Saint Ignatius available to many. In my own experience, the so-called "19th

Annotation retreat" described in the *Spiritual Exercises*—one that is made part-time, so to speak, while continuing one's ordinary pursuits—is a great way to offer students the opportunity to learn about and practice this spirituality. I have made this sort of retreat at two different Jesuit institutions and have helped conduct it in a university Newman center, so I know that it can attract people from different walks of life and help them to grow in their faith lives. The invitation to try authentic Christian spirituality is vital if we want to encourage the faith of young people. Ignatian spirituality offers just such an invitation so that people may come to know for themselves what it means to follow Christ.

Timothy P. Muldoon is the author of The Ignatian Workout: Daily Spiritual Exercises for a Healthy Faith, and the Director of The Church in the 21st Century Center.

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Reaching an Invisible Generation

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the world. They tell us how important excellent senior high ministries are. Post-high school young adult ministries are equally important. The Church needs to discover, recognize, and utilize their gifts.

For young people who remain in congregations, worship is found to be interesting because it is an engaging intersection of the Gospel with their lives. Another major influence that keeps them connected to a church is friends from a faith community who invite them to worship, Bible study, or support groups.

The final component that has kept these young adults involved in the church is Christian community support during times of transition or crisis. They face—crises in the lives of their friends—overdosing on drugs, suicide, and conflicts at school. They tell stories of intimidation and emotional abuse in their high schools. These young adults face family crises

such as parents divorcing or losing their jobs. One young woman said, "I got pregnant when I was 15, and my church walked every step along the way with me, and I know I am here today because they cared—they were tough, honest, and truly helpful."

In fact, following young people into all aspects of their lives, including their hardships, is at the heart of this research. As I follow, I sense that this is not a lost generation but a generation invisible to much of the world and certainly to the Church. As I get to know this generation, I see an emerging spirituality, an emerging hunger for God and God's presence in all of life, especially the one real public world in which they live.

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