

the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY

# C21 Resources

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## When Children Reach for God

*Handing on the faith can be a two-way street*

BY JULIE DONOVAN MASSEY

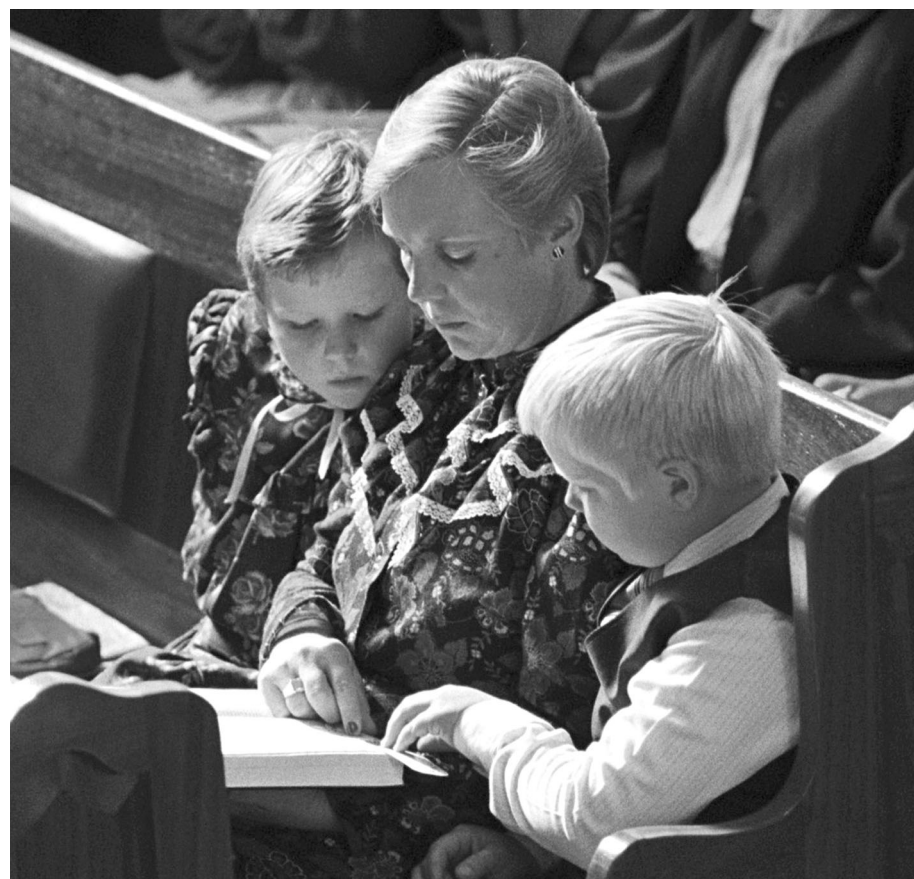
It was a quiet Saturday morning. I cuddled on the couch with one of our daughters as we looked at the small book of children's Bible stories. We examined the stories of Moses and Noah and Jonah. Each page held a brief text accompanied by a powerful illustration. Soon enough we arrived at a page that quoted Jesus saying, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Mk. 10:14).

The image beside these words was lovely, serene. It depicted a sunny day with just a few clouds. We saw Jesus seated on a rock under a tree, children

gazing at him with fond reverence. But before I could become lost in the painter's skillful strokes, one of my children yanked the book from her sister's hand as another child spilled a container of juice on the newly scrubbed kitchen floor. Ah yes, real life with children! So I sighed and admitted that our children are not sitting quietly anywhere, much less gazing reverently into the Redeemer's eyes. But despite the fact that they cannot touch Jesus, I know they experience a vibrant relationship with God. On a good day, I hear what the children have to teach me.

### **First Lesson: Joyful Noise**

Our two-year-old daughter, Bridget, is fond of the simple family ritual of



David Turnley/Corbis

grace before meals. She first encountered the familiar tune "The Lord Is Good to Me" in the loving home of her day care provider. Now she re-

quests that prayerful song by calling out "apple seed!" each evening. And she is right that we should daily thank the Lord "for giving me the things I

### IN THIS ISSUE

## *Catechesis, Culture and Conflict*

We live in a popular culture of disbelief and, too often, cynicism. Thus, handing on the faith to those who come after us is a gift of great value and a core duty and challenge that come with membership in the Catholic Church. It is also an act of faith, for, as Thomas Groome makes clear in his article in this issue, it is only a lived faith that sinks its roots and spreads surely among future generations.

Before the recent evidence that sexual abuse of minors was a reality among priests yet often swept under the rug by the hierarchy, and before all the pain and questioning it caused, young Catholics and many adults were looking more critically at the institutional authority of the Church and were less willing to take at face value what it teaches. While the crisis has not made this challenge any easier, there is not the least reason to be less confident about the truth and appeal of the Good News that the Church embodies.

The question is not the message, but how the people of the Church can be better messengers of Catholicism. That is the focus of this third issue of *C21 Resources*, and the third focus as well of the Boston College initiative, the Church in the 21st Century.

When religious education is mentioned, teaching may be the first thing to come to mind. The articles in this issue would have us recognize the importance of listening as well. Listening to those who question the Church's teachings does not mean dumbing down or relativizing the message of the catechism. It does mean, however, establishing a relationship and authentic connection with the listener. In many cases, that is the best channel, over time, through which to hand on the faith.

—The Editors

the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY

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need, the sun, and the rain, and the apple seed." Thus Bridget, a tiny priestess with blond ringlets, gathers her little flock around our table and reminds us to thank and praise the Lord—not quietly, but in jubilant song that ends with a vigorously made Sign of the Cross and, finally, "Eat Papa, eat!" She knows, no doubt, that God sits at the table with us and wants nothing more than that the meal be celebrated with joy. "O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation" (Psalm 95:1).

**Second Lesson: Living Water**

A friend told me about the experience of allowing her two-year-old daughter to receive Communion in the family's Episcopal church. It is their pastor's conviction that children should not be refused Communion if they genuinely desire it. Little Elisabeth was begging to receive and finally, after reflecting on the matter with their priest, her parents consented. Elisabeth's reception of the host went without incident. But as she and her mother arrived at the cup, Elisabeth enthusiastically plunged her entire hand into it. As a parent who takes young children to Mass, I can fully understand why my friend went slinking to the rear of the church, grateful that she could be at the end of the Communion line. But I can envision a carpenter's son smiling by the side of a well: "If there's living water in there, honey, don't be shy; go for it!"

**Third Lesson: On Prayer**

Megan, our middle child, intently notices everything her big sister does. On a recent visit to Grandma and Grandpa's house, Grandma gave all the girls rosaries. One day, our oldest daughter was reverently fingering her rosary and making her way, with reasonable accuracy, through the corresponding prayers. "Where does the Our Father go?" she would ask, trying to recall the lessons from her first grade teacher. Megan must have been watching. A day or two later I found her quietly perched on top of the bunk bed, rosary in hand, offering the only prayer she can recite: "Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts..." Rest assured, dear Megan, that even when we cannot yet "pray as we ought," the Spirit of God looks upon our desire to pray and "intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).

**Fourth Lesson: A Friend of Jesus**

Some years ago I was praying with our children at bedtime. We had already concluded when I recalled an additional intention—a sick friend whom I thought we should remember. I suggested we add the friend to our prayers. Our oldest daughter shook her head, "We can't. God just left. He went out the window," she informed me. And then, to my tremendous surprise, with a smile she added, "And he wasn't wearing any pants!" I knew there was no need to run to the analyst's couch with that one, for children somehow dwell in Eden for at least a few years after their birth. Instead I found myself musing about how real, how present God was to our child in that moment. As though God were a close friend, sitting in the room and conversing with us that evening. "I do not call you servants any longer; I have called you friends" (Jn. 15:15).

God to another? She is no student of theological anthropology. Here is what she knew: my husband and I brought her into being. We give her love on a daily basis. We forgive her mistakes. We sustain her little life. While we clearly are not God, at this moment Shannon recognized the ways in which we mirror God for her. "I in them and you in me" (Jn. 17:23).

We are each summoned to receive the kingdom of God with the simplicity of a little child. But how is that—wearing pigtails, sporting skinned knees and giggling? No. Our children possess much greater depth. If we are willing to learn from them, we may be lucky enough to grow in our faith—faith that is joyful and eager, faith that is reverent and familiar, faith that looks upon goodness and love and proclaims God's presence. Perhaps this is the prayer that God whispers into each child's ear:

May you not become so preoccup-

*The beauty and weight of her words engulfed me. How did a three-year-old child come to understand that each of us, created in God's good image, can reveal at least a piece of the face of God to another?*

**Fifth Lesson: Encountering God**

Mountaintops, deserts and bathtubs—God is always there if we are looking. Our daughter Shannon was nearly four when she looked up at me from her evening bath and spoke with quiet reassurance: "You are my God sometimes." "What?" I replied with something like alarm in my voice that I really meant as surprise. "Nothing," she said sheepishly. "No, it's okay, honey, you didn't say anything wrong. I just didn't quite hear you. What did you say?" Once again she spoke directly, "You are my God sometimes." The beauty and weight of those words engulfed me. How did a three-year-old come to understand that each of us, created in God's good image, can reveal at least a piece of the face of

God to another?

May you not become so self-assured that you forget eagerness.

May you not grow self-conscious of the manner in which you speak to me.

May you not relegate me to distant, heavenly thrones.

May you know that I am with you always... and may you continue to recognize my face!

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# Toward Total Catechetical Education

*A communal approach to help people integrate their lives and faith*

BY THOMAS H. GROOME

A favorite though false myth of modernity is that we can find a solution, even *the* solution, to just about any problem. We presume that there must be a formula, even a mathematical equation, to explain all reality and solve its mysteries; finding it only requires the full power of human reasoning. In the great challenge of educating the young, *the* solution that dominates is *schooling*. Talk about educating children, and modern consciousness does not think family, or community, or society, or apprenticeship, or mentoring but only schooling. And it understands the latter as a didactic process in a formal setting—teaching as telling to children assembled by rows of desks in classrooms.

For its catechetical education, the Church generally swallowed the schooling paradigm hook, line and sinker. Education in faith was presumed to be done best by appointed teachers in some kind of school context, parochial, Sunday, or a didactic program of some kind. Even when the Church realized that the schooling paradigm is limited, and reclaimed the old conviction that parents are the primary religious educators of their children, it often preached this and parents heard it as calling them to be like schoolteachers—sitting children down regularly for periods of instruction. But to empower parents as educators—in faith or otherwise—we must stop equating education with schooling. Huckleberry Finn was wise when he said that he tried not to let his schooling interfere with his education.

Schools are fine institutions (generally) and I'm certainly not arguing against them. I'm only claiming that the schooling paradigm for educating children in faith is far too limited, and especially in these postmodern times. To move "beyond schools" certainly does not mean to leave them behind; it's that we need something more. We must forge a diverse coalition of

efforts that I describe as *total* catechetical education.

Since Vatican II, of course, many have proposed creative alternatives to the schooling paradigm for faith education. But it shows stubborn resistance to leaving center-stage; and oftentimes the proponents of these different approaches make them sound—again—as *the* one solution. So, catechetical education of late has reflected a collage of bandwagons—lectionary-based catechesis, family-centered catechesis, catechumenal catechesis, and so on—all heralded with messianic promise but none alone being able to deliver the needed salvation.

Apart from the complexity of the postmodern world, there could never

lifelong conversion into holiness of life. Thus, Christian faith engages the whole person, head, heart, and hands. Echoing the breadth of its Great Commandment, to be Christian is to invest one's whole mind, heart, and strength as a disciple of Jesus. And Jesus himself summarized his own sense of purpose—and thus discipleship—as living for God's reign; to realize God's will of love and compassion, peace and justice, wholeness and fullness of life for all, and the integrity of creation. Given this holistic nature of Christian faith, we can summarize the intent of catechetical education as *to inform, form, and transform persons and communities as disciples of Jesus for God's reign in the world*. No one program or approach

This realization means that we must broaden catechetical education beyond schooling and didaction, that we employ instead a *total* strategy. Only thus can the fundamental role of family be effectively engaged. For it is the ethos of the home, the shared life of a family, that is most educational. Parents don't need to become didactic teachers but they must more consciously attend to the value system, world view and self-understanding mediated through the whole family milieu. For catechetical education in particular, a family's faith is more caught than taught; its communal life is its faith curriculum. Then, we can say likewise of the parish community, and extend this socialization emphasis into the school and formal programs as well.

## A Grand Coalition

Total catechetical education attempts to honor the holistic and communal nature of Christian faith, convinced that there is no one way to educate in such faith. So:

- *Not the "program" or the "school" alone* can fulfill all the Church's responsibilities of catechetical education, although a parish program or parochial school with trained catechists and a curriculum with sound theology and good pedagogy are indispensable to education in faith;
- *Not the "parish" alone* can do all catechetical education, though a vibrant faith community is vital, and every aspect of parish life should be intentionally crafted to educate in faith;
- *Not the "family" alone* can be the sole catechist, though it is ever the "first educator in faith" (ritual of baptism) and must harness every aspect of its life to foster Christian identity and commitment;
- *Not the liturgy alone* can be the anchor for catechetical education, though likely nothing is more effective in fostering people's faith than good liturgy, nor more haz-

*The goal of total catechetical education is to inform, form, and transform persons and communities as disciples of Jesus for God's reign in the world.*

be any one way to educate in Christian faith, given the holistic nature of "being" in such faith. Karl Rahner claimed that what revolutionized modern catechesis was the redefinition of Christian faith effected by the Second Vatican Council. His point was that when faith was defined as *belief* in stated doctrines, then catechesis could be done by a catechism, summarizing *the beliefs*, and taught in a school by a teacher. Two great blessings of the Council were its reclaiming of Christian faith 1) as engaging the whole person and 2) as radically communal.

Christian faith has a *cognitive* aspect in which a person needs to be informed and to reach conviction, an *affective* aspect that encourages prayer, worship and a relational spirituality, and a *behavioral* aspect that demands living "the way" of Jesus as

could achieve as much.

The holistic and communal nature of Christian faith brings into stark relief the imperative role of the family and parish. School didaction, though helpful, of itself cannot form the very "being" of people—as noun and verb, who they are and how they live. To nurture people's identity in faith requires the socialization and inculturation of faith communities—and the primary candidates are family and parish. For all the social sciences agree that we become who we become—in large part—through the influence of our socio-cultural contexts. We interiorize the world view, value system, and self-image mediated to us from our context, and nothing is more influential than the primary socialization of family and immediate community.

- ardous to faith than poor liturgy;
- *Not the (published) curriculum alone*, though the texts and media used in formal catechetical education should reflect a theologically sound presentation of Christian faith and a pedagogy that actively engages participants in the teaching/learning dynamic;
  - *Not catechists and religious educators alone* can take all responsibility for faith education, though well-prepared catechists and religious educators who are credible witnesses to what they teach are vital to educating in faith;
  - *Not the catechumenal model alone*, though it is powerfully effective for initiating neophytes into the Christian community and its values can inspire good catechetical education;
  - *Not the lectionary alone* can provide the scope and sequence for “the whole Story” of Christian faith. Though lectionary-based curricula can draw upon the symbiotic relationship between liturgy and catechesis and help to recenter the Bible for Catholic Christians, it should be a supplement rather than the mainstay curriculum.

Instead of any one program or emphasis or approach, total catechetical education calls for a coalition of parish, family, and school or program, engaging all aspects of these communities and their every member in sharing faith together toward lifelong conversion as disciples of Jesus for God’s reign in the world. This would represent a paradigm shift beyond “schooling didaction” to “community faith sharing.”

My proposal entails a major change in consciousness for Christian persons and communities. For the person, the key shift is to see oneself as an educator in faith, ever both learner and teacher of *the way* of Jesus. It calls for what the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) calls “permanent catechesis” as both sharer and receiver of Christian faith, ever catechist and catechized. On that hillside in Galilee when the Risen Christ gave the great commission to “Go, make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19), he addressed all there present. Two thousand years later, the GDC states that catechesis is “an educational activity which arises from the particular responsibility of every member of the community” (#220). By baptism, all Christians are

to be teachers as well as taught, evangelizers as well as the evangelized, agents instead of dependents.

For Christian communities, total catechetical education requires an educational consciousness in every aspect of their shared life. As noted earlier, human identity is formed, in large part, by our communal contexts; we become who we become through our relationships and community. So, total catechetical education engages every family, parish, and school/program to be a Christian community and with a “catechetical consciousness.” This means to ask of every aspect of community life—every activity and effort, structure and arrangement, symbol and ritual—“what is this teaching?” and then to consciously craft the whole ethos to nurture Christian faith. A Christian community must not limit faith education to its ministry of the Word but see and harness the educational possibilities of all its functions.

Christian family should bear *witness* to its faith; this is how it educates.

*Family as a worshipping community* calls it to integrate shared prayer and sacred ritual into its patterns of daily life. To be effective as catechetical educator, every Christian family needs its own “liturgy” to symbolize and celebrate its faith. I once asked a devout Jewish friend how she came by her strong Jewish identity; she immediately responded, “Oh, from the rituals in my home.” Surely every Christian family can create or rediscover—old Christian cultures had plenty of them—sacred rituals for the home that will nurture the Christian identity of its members.

*Family as providing human welfare* requires care for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of its own members, rippling outward to share responsibility for others and society. Family life must reflect love and compassion toward all, promoting

### The Whole Parish as Catechetical Educator

The whole life of a parish community should be consciously crafted to nurture the faith of its people. All the functions of ministry should be done with a catechetical consciousness, maximizing their potential to educate in faith. Traditionally, we have thought of catechesis as a parish’s ministry of *the Word*. But every function of ministry can be an occasion for catechetical education; like the family, the whole life of a parish is its faith curriculum.

*Parish as Community of Witness:* A parish should reflect the Good News it preaches, be recognizable as a community of faith, hope and love. Members must constantly ask: “Does the life of this parish—its worship, shared prayer and spiritual nurture, its community ethos, lifestyle and structures, its human services, outreach and social values, its preaching, catechesis and sharing faith programs—does everything about us bear credible witness to *the way* of Jesus?” To the extent that the answer is “yes,” the parish will be effective as educator in faith.

*Parish as Worshipping Community:* Every parish must assemble as a Christian people to worship God together. Often forgotten, however, is that this “public work” is likely the most educational function that a parish performs. Nothing educates in faith—or miseducates—as effectively as a parish’s liturgy. We should never forget that the primary function of liturgy is to worship God. To cite Vatican II, “the sacred liturgy is above all things the worship of the divine Majesty.” So, liturgy must not be used to catechize in a didactic way. On the other hand, because it is so symbol-laden, the liturgy contains “abundant instruction for the faithful.” Referring to all the sacraments, the Council said that “Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it.” For the Council, then, a parish educates well by caring for the quality of its liturgy.

*Parish as Community of Human Welfare:* Living *the way* of Jesus demands the works of justice and compassion, of reconciliation and peace. Every parish must be a community that cares for human welfare—spiritual and physical, personal and social. It should offer people the inspiration

## Instead of a narrow cognitivism, such informing in Christian faith must reach into the ‘deep heart’s core’ of people’s very being—into their ‘souls’—educating their heads, hearts, and hands.

What might such *total catechetical education* mean in practice?

### The Family as Catechetical Educator

Besides the nuclear image of two parents with two children, “family” must include extended and blended families, single, double, and triple parent families; in fact, *any bonded network of domestic life* can function as a family for faith education. The Second Vatican Council reclaimed an ancient image of the family as “the domestic church.”

*Family as Witness* requires that the whole life of the home be suffused with the values and perspectives of Christian faith. The members must constantly review the family’s environment and atmosphere, lifestyle and priorities, relationships and gender roles, language patterns and conversations, work and recreation—every aspect—to monitor how well it reflects the convictions and commitments of Christian faith. Everything about the

justice within itself and the social values of God’s reign in the world. If children grow up and adults dwell within a family that lives the values of mercy and compassion, of justice and peace, they are most likely to embrace the social responsibilities of Christian faith.

*Family as a community of Word* calls members to share their faith around scripture and tradition, among themselves and in the broader community. While participating in the formal programs of a parish, every Christian should be “home-schooled” in their faith. Parishes must help parents—with resources, training, suggestions, support, encouragement, expectation—to integrate God’s word into the conversations of family life. In my own childhood, I recall how much God-talk suffused daily talk; phrases like “with God’s help,” “God willing,” “God is good,” and so on, were woven into our everyday speech. They can still be so in any home.

and organization, the support and persuasion that prompts them to carry on this aspect of God's saving work in the world.

*Parish as Community of Word:* Every parish must give its people ready access to the Word of God that comes through the Hebrew Scriptures, through the New Testament, and through Christian Tradition over time. The parish achieves this most eminently through its preaching and formal programs of catechetical education.

#### School or Program as Catechetical Educator

By "school" here I include any church-sponsored school that educates in Christian faith. By "program" I mean any formal process of catechetical education, e.g., the graded parish curriculum for children and adolescents, intergenerational and family-centered programs, all efforts at adult religious education, RCIA, youth ministry, faith-sharing groups, base communities, and so on. So, "school" and "program" epitomize the Church's intentional efforts to provide a formal curriculum of faith education. The point I emphasize, however, is not to approach such catechesis solely as a ministry of the Word but to integrate the other functions of ministry into its curriculum as well.

*School or Program as Communities of Witness:* The whole environment of the school or program should reflect

the values of a Christian community—respect and reverence for every person, hospitality and welcome toward all, and living witness to faith, hope and love. Years ago, John Dewey argued that schools should reflect the values of a democratic society—if they intend to educate people for democracy. Surely we can say as much of a Christian school or parish program, that it should be suffused with the values and commitments of Christian faith since the intent is to educate people therein. And formal catechetical education should encourage participants to be active in their local parish, nurturing their ecclesial identity.

*School or Program as Communities of Worship:* I'm not suggesting that the Catholic school or catechetical program replace the parish in its ministry of worship. Yet, opportunities for shared prayer and worship, for spiritual experiences like retreats and discernment should be integral to the curriculum of every school or program. And the very pedagogy of a class or gathering can include moments of prayer and contemplation, of ritual and celebration—within the teaching/learning dynamic. I know a parish program which designates its grade level gatherings as "Christian communities" instead of "classes." Each one chooses an inspiring name for itself, and has its own rituals for praying together and celebrating the liturgical year—Advent wreaths, Christmas plays, Lenten fasts, Easter

candles, and so on.

*Program or School as Community of Welfare:* Here I simply make the point that the Thanksgiving baskets or visits to the local rest home or serving at a soup kitchen are not an add on to the formal curriculum but integral to it. In fact, throughout US Catholic education, in both parishes and schools, "service programs" have come to be recognized as powerfully effective in faith education. I would highlight that such social praxis by students should be subsumed into the formal curriculum, giving students opportunity to name and reflect on their experiences.

*School or Program as ministry of the Word:* This is their most obvious purpose—to inform people in their faith. Content-wise, formal catechetical education should teach people the spiritual wisdom of Christian faith, thoroughly grounding them in "the whole Christian Story," in its scriptures and traditions, its creeds of belief, codes of ethic, and ways of worship. Process-wise, teaching should engage participants as active learners, encouraging them to think for themselves, to understand their faith, to make it their own, and choose to live it. The intent of such informing is to enable people to integrate their lives and their faith as "living faith." This suggests a pedagogy whose dynamics enable people *to bring their lives to their faith and their faith to their lives.*

Instead of a narrow cognitivism, such *informing* in Christian faith must

reach into the "deep heart's core" of people's very being—into their "souls"—educating their *heads, hearts, and hands*. Instead of unreflective indoctrination, catechetical education should engage people's reason, memory, and imagination to probe and question, to see for themselves what the Christian Story means for and invites from their lives.

To conclude, we indeed live in different times and the challenges facing catechetical education seem more daunting than those encountered before us. Postmodern culture place new exigencies on families, parishes, schools and formal programs, making catechetical education all the more demanding. There is no simple solution to this. Instead, it will require a coalition of efforts by the whole family, parish, and school/program. It will take *total catechetical education*, with all Christian persons and communities called to a catechetical consciousness that permeates their whole way of being in the world, ever teaching and learning together for lived Christian faith.

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Reprinted with the author's permission. This essay is a shorter version of a paper Groome published in 2002 in the journal *Concilium*.

## Teaching the Fullness of Christian Life

### An excerpt from the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church

*From sections II, III and IV of Prologue, which gives an overview of the purpose and structure of the Catechism.*

#### II. Handing on the Faith: Catechesis

**4** Quite early on, the name catechesis was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct

them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.[7]

**5** "Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life." [8]

**6** While not being formally identified

with them, catechesis is built on a certain number of elements of the Church's pastoral mission which have a catechetical aspect, that prepare for catechesis, or spring from it. They are: the initial proclamation of the Gospel or missionary preaching to arouse faith; examination of the reasons for belief; experience of Christian living; celebration of the sacraments; integration into the ecclesial com-

munity; and apostolic and missionary witness.[9]

**7** "Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis." [10]

**8** Periods of renewal in the Church are also intense moments of catechesis. In the great era of the Fathers of the Church, saintly bishops devoted an important part of their ministry to catechesis. St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, and many other Fathers wrote catechetical works that remain models for us. [11]

**9** "The ministry of catechesis draws ever fresh energy from the councils. The Council of Trent is a noteworthy example of this. It gave catech-

esis priority in its constitutions and decrees. It lies at the origin of the Roman Catechism, which is also known by the name of that council and which is a work of the first rank as a summary of Christian teaching.” [12] The Council of Trent initiated a remarkable organization of the Church’s catechesis. Thanks to the work of holy bishops and theologians such as St. Peter Canisius, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Turibius of Mongrovejo or St. Robert Bellarmine, it occasioned the publication of numerous catechisms. **10** It is therefore no surprise that catechesis in the Church has again attracted attention in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which Pope Paul VI considered the great catechism of modern times. The General Catechetical Directory (1971), the sessions of the Synod of Bishops devoted to evangelization (1974) and catechesis (1977), the apostolic exhortations *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) and *Catechesi tradendae* (1979), attest to this. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 asked “that a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed.” [13] The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, made the Synod’s wish his own, acknowledging that “this desire wholly corresponds to a real need of the universal Church and of the particular

Churches.” [14] He set in motion everything needed to carry out the Synod Fathers’ wish.

### III. The Aim and Intended Readership

**11** This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church’s Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the

catechists. It will also be useful reading for all other Christian faithful.

### IV. Structure of the Catechism

**13** The plan of this catechism is inspired by the great tradition of catechisms which build catechesis on four pillars: the baptismal profession of faith (the Creed), the sacraments of faith, the life of faith (the Commandments), and the prayer of the believer (the Lord’s Prayer).

**14** Part One: The Profession of Faith.

Creator; his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour; and the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, in the Holy Church (Section Two).

**15** Part Two: The Sacraments of Faith. The second part of the Catechism explains how God’s salvation, accomplished once for all through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is made present in the sacred actions of the Church’s liturgy (Section One), especially in the seven sacraments (Section Two).

**16** Part Three: The Life of Faith. The third part of the Catechism deals with the final end of man created in the image of God: beatitude, and the ways of reaching it—through right conduct freely chosen, with the help of God’s law and grace (Section One), and through conduct that fulfils the twofold commandment of charity, specified in God’s Ten Commandments (Section Two).

**17** Part Four: Prayer in the Life of Faith. The last part of the Catechism deals with the meaning and importance of prayer in the life of believers (Section One). It concludes with a brief commentary on the seven petitions of the Lord’s Prayer (Section Two), for indeed we find in these the sum of all the good things which we must hope for, and which our heavenly Father wants to grant us.

## *The Church’s inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan depend essentially on catechesis.*

Church, the liturgy, and the Church’s Magisterium. It is intended to serve “as a point of reference for the catechisms or compendia that are composed in the various countries.” [15] **12** This work is intended primarily for those responsible for catechesis: first of all the bishops, as teachers of the faith and pastors of the Church. It is offered to them as an instrument in fulfilling their responsibility of teaching the People of God. Through the bishops, it is addressed to redactors of catechisms, to priests, and to

Those who belong to Christ through faith and Baptism must confess their baptismal faith before men. [16] First, therefore, the Catechism expounds revelation, by which God addresses and gives himself to man, and the faith by which man responds to God (Section One). The profession of faith summarizes the gifts that God gives man: as the Author of all that is good; as Redeemer; and as Sanctifier. It develops these in the three chapters on our baptismal faith in the one God: the almighty Father, the

## *What was the Baltimore Catechism?*

BY PAUL BOUDREAU

**Y**ou want to know why God made me? Sometimes I wonder myself. But I can give you the absolutely correct answer without even looking it up.

Here goes: God made me to know him, to love him and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in the next. I am able to make that statement with the utmost certainty because it is indelibly burned into my memory, stored in a learned-by-heart hot file on my cerebral desktop along with such indispensable items as my name, date of birth, and PIN number. It’s there because Sister Faleeta, my grade-school catechism teacher, put it there.

It’s the answer to question number 6 in the *Baltimore Catechism*.

If you grew up Catholic in America during the middle of the last century as I did, you probably know it, too—especially if you had Sister Faleeta, who would squeeze your face into fish lips if you didn’t get the answer right. Catholic kids in my neighborhood often wore the imprint of her fingers on their cheeks as a kind of catechetical stigmata attesting to their familiarity with the little green book they carried in their pockets.

The *Baltimore Catechism* was indirectly a product of the Council of Trent, the 16th-century version of Vatican II. To counter the Protestant Reformation, Trent published a manual of Catholic teaching called the *Roman Catechism*. Written in Latin (the word *catechismus* meant “oral teaching”), it was

used by clergy to instruct the faithful.

In 1884, the bishops of the United States, gathered in Baltimore, decided to publish an English version for use by American schoolchildren. The first *Baltimore Catechism*, published in 1891, contained 100 questions. A larger edition, No. 2, held 421 questions, and a still larger version, No. 3, had 1,274 questions plus prayers. No. 4, the whopper, included lengthy “explanations” for teachers. It was the No. 2 that was pressed into my hands in 1953 by Sister Faleeta with the implied threat of fish lips if I didn’t learn all 421 items by heart.

After Vatican II, the old catechism fell out of favor. Then a gathering of bishops in Rome proposed a new catechism. That became a reality in 1994, when Pope John Paul II introduced the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Like the catechism of Trent, it was designed as a reference book to be used when preparing teaching texts for adults and children. But it doesn’t fit in your pocket like the *Baltimore Catechism*.

However, old No. 2 lives on. Paragraph No. 1—*one!*—of the new catechism says that God calls us “to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him” just like He did in question six of the little green book. Sister Faleeta must be thrilled.

*Paul Boudreau is a priest of the Diocese of Norwich and writer of the “This Sunday’s Scripture” feature from Twenty-Third Publications.*

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# Believing and Belonging

*Responding to the spiritual needs of youth requires flexibility and compassion*

BY RICHARD A. KAUFFMAN

**Y**outh culture in the U.S. is being reinvented every three years, according to Robert J. McCarty. Keeping up with youth culture is like mapping territory that is constantly changing, he says.

A Catholic with an evangelical zeal for youth ministry, McCarty has observed the shifting youth territory for a long time. He's been in Catholic youth ministry for 30 years, 14 of them in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and the last six with the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, where he is the executive director. In that capacity, he consults with youth directors and Catholic schools throughout the country, and serves as an adviser to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

McCarty believes this generation of American youth may well be one of the most spiritual ever, but they tend to be "believers," not "belongers." They are interested in spirituality and issues of faith, but are indifferent toward institutionalized religion. "The challenge for the Church is, what is it that we can do communally that responds to the spiritual hungers of young people?"

McCarty believes that kids in a virtual age are looking for companionship and connection. As documented by Patricia Hersch in *A Tribe Apart*, many youth are living in environments where adults are largely absent. As a result, they create their own value and social systems. "This has tremendous implication for youth ministry. How do you connect kids to healthy, caring adults?" asks McCarty.

His answer is to create small-group

settings in which youth can relate to adults. He talks not about "youth groups," but about "youth groupings"—small faith communities in the larger faith community which bring adult mentors and small groups of youth together around common interests, or involve them in service projects together or engage them in the life of the larger parish, not just in activities that isolate youth from the rest of the Church.

"When somebody says, 'How many kids are involved in your youth program?' my only good answer is, 'All of them; you just never see all of them at one time.'"

McCarty admits that this approach requires more adult volunteers. The key is to involve more adults who each do less. If you ask an adult to be involved with youth every Sunday night for a year, they're inclined to say no.

But if you ask, "Can you volunteer to teach three sessions on a particular topic?" they'll say, "Of course I can." The other key is to be clear about what is expected, giving the adult volunteers job descriptions and timelines.

Moving youth from being believers to being belongers is one component of youth ministry. Getting them to behave as Christians is another. Here too, adult mentors are important as

*Moving youth from being believers to being belongers is one of the major tasks of youth ministry.*

models of Christian discipleship. "It's not enough to say to a kid, 'You need to be a follower of Jesus,' unless you can say, 'Here's what it looks like, and here's how disciples act,' and then ground that in scripture. You have to help the kids develop the skill to live out discipleship." Skill-building in

## Contributing Publications

*America*, the national Catholic weekly magazine, has been published since 1909 by Jesuits in the United States for thinking Catholics and those who want to know what Catholics are thinking. During 2003, it published numerous articles, analyses and editorials on the aftermath of the sexual abuse crisis. *America* is online at [www.americamagazine.org](http://www.americamagazine.org). Subscribe via the Web site or call 800-627-9533.

*The Christian Century* is a biweekly ecumenical journal of news and theological reflection. It reports on developments in the Church and on the moral and religious issues of contemporary life. Each issue contains news, commentary, editorials, book and film reviews, and reflections on scripture. For subscriptions, call 800-208-4097.

*National Catholic Reporter* is an independent newsweekly that is frequently the first to report on serious issues important to thinking Catholics and a place to find open, honest and ongoing discussion of those issues. Founded in 1964, NCR features fearless, balanced writing on topics including spirituality, human rights, living the Catholic faith, social justice, and liturgical developments. It is published by the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company. To subscribe, visit [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org).

*U.S. Catholic*, a monthly magazine published in Chicago by the Claretian Missionaries, believes that it makes a difference whether or not you are Catholic and that Catholicism is a spiritual path that helps us live better and richer lives. We invite readers to explore the wisdom of our faith tradition and to

apply it to the challenges of contemporary life. We embrace a positive vision of Catholicism today. For information or to subscribe, call 800-328-6515, or visit [www.uscatholic.org](http://www.uscatholic.org).

*Harvard Divinity Bulletin* is published three times a year by Harvard Divinity School. It is composed of faculty and alumni/ae news; articles on current issues in theological education and the study of religion, especially how religion affects contemporary culture and politics; book and arts reviews; interviews and essays. To view issues online or to order a free subscription, go to [www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin](http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin).

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only the greatest names in Catholic theology, but also exciting new voices from every part of the world. To subscribe, visit [www.Concilium.org](http://www.Concilium.org)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS. *The Pilot*, first published in 1829, is America's oldest Catholic newspaper. It is the weekly archdiocesan newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston. *Western Catholic Reporter*, which serves Catholics in Western Canada, is published weekly in Edmonton, Alberta, and is Canada's largest religious weekly. *Eucharistic Ministries* is a monthly publication of articles and practical resources for the spiritual and ministerial growth of Catholic eucharistic ministers in the United States. It is published by the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company.

discipleship is crucial—learning how to pray or how to worship corporately, for instance.

McCarty thinks adult mentors also need to challenge simplistic views of faith. Some kids think that if they have faith in God, bad things won't happen to them or those they love. They need to know that faith won't keep people from dying or getting sick or keep relationships from breaking up.

So there is a cognitive dimension to faith. Youth need to learn how to use scripture, and they need to be taught to think theologically and critically. McCarty wonders how many Catholic kids could make a judgment about the war in Iraq. "Does it fit the criteria of a just war?" he asks, drawing on the classical Catholic means for discernment about war. Making moral decisions is a faith skill, says McCarty. Even learning how to forgive is a faith skill that can be learned.

McCarty envisions youth ministry happening in four venues. One is traditional youth programs. Another is involvement in the life of the parish as a whole. (He sees some kids involved at the parish level who never show up for youth programs, and he thinks that is just fine.) The third venue is family programs—retreats for families, for example, where parents and youth interact with each other in informal settings. Youth ministry also involves ministries to the parents of teenagers. His own parish conducted a three-session seminar for parents of teenagers on how to survive the teenage years and how to communicate with teens. Simultaneously, they held a seminar for teens on how to survive their parents.

The final venue is civic and service activities. Youth, says McCarty, are interested in social ministry. "Teenagers right now have the highest rate of volunteering of any age group in our society. Part of it is due to some schools making service hours mandatory, but I'm finding, across the board, that kids are doing service way beyond what they're required to be doing, because they want to do it." They're interested in the common good and idealistic about making a difference.

*Richard A. Kauffman is an associate editor of The Christian Century.*

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# Teens on the Spiritual Edge

*Pressured on many sides, adolescents display spiritual yearning*

BY D. MICHAEL LINDSAY

**T**he current cohort of American teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 is lonely, spiritually hungry and intensely aware of the threat of violence. That's the profile that emerges from a recent Gallup Youth Survey.

Young people fear for their safety at school more than ever, despite dramatic increases in security measures. Nearly one in two (48 percent) teens say they have had bomb threats in their own school since the 1999 Columbine school shootings in Colorado. Close to one in four (23 percent) say they are fearful of going to school because of school violence. Black students

to their own orthodox beliefs. They are persuaded that faith is an important component in their lives, and many of them want to deepen their religious understanding. The challenge for churches is to help channel teenagers' free-floating, often vague interest in spirituality into sincere religious conviction that grounds a life of faith.

The Gallup survey showed that 92 percent of teens consider their religious beliefs important to them. A third say faith is the most important influence in their lives. That number goes up to 52 percent for African-American teens. Close to four in ten say they pray alone frequently (42 percent) and read the Bible at least weekly (36 percent).

statistic tumbles after high school with 35 percent of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 reporting attendance within the past week. It then climbs steadily with age: 40 percent for ages 30-49; 45 percent, ages 50-64; and 56 percent among adults over 65.

The strongest showing of youth church attendance occurs among American Protestants; three in five of them report attending within the past week. Also, young people endorse the idea that parents and their children should attend church together. Only 27 percent of the teen population expressed reluctance to have parents and teens in worship services together.

Even more teens report being part of a church youth group. Sixty-five percent of teenagers today say they have been involved in a youth group at some point, and of those, close to half (46 percent) are still involved. When Gallup asks teens why they became involved, the answers reveal a surprising degree of depth. The top response (82 percent) is that they want to learn more about faith. Seventy-three percent got involved because of parental encouragement. Over seven in ten (71 percent) say they wanted a place to talk about what's important to them, and nearly two in three (65 percent) say they became involved because of a friend's invitation.

Although the American religious scene is slowly becoming more pluralistic and diverse, the number of non-Christian teens in this country remains relatively small. In fact, American young people are more likely to have no church preference than they are to prefer Mormonism, Judaism or Islam. While 9 percent of teens state that they have no religious preference, only a slim number assert that they are either atheist or agnostic.

Perhaps most pronounced about the religious lives of American teens is their spiritual curiosity. Over half of them want to learn more about Roman Catholicism (54 percent) and Protestantism (52 percent). A higher proportion of Protestant teens want to learn about Roman Catholicism than

*The spiritual hunger among teens is remarkable. Teenagers express a burgeoning interest in learning about other faith traditions, yet most remain faithful to their own orthodox beliefs.*

are twice as likely as white students to report that they fear for their physical safety (26 percent versus 13 percent).

Also, teenagers today express feeling pressured and lonely. Among high school leaders, these feelings can be intense. A Gallup study of student leaders in the nationally recognized Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership seminar found them three times more likely than other teens to express feelings of loneliness. In addition, while 30 percent of the general teenage population feels "pressured," over half (55 percent) of student leaders claim the same.

The spiritual hunger among teens is remarkable. Millions of teens attend church and youth groups regularly. Teenagers express a burgeoning interest in learning about other faith traditions, yet most remain faithful

Teens report a higher or comparable degree of Christian orthodoxy and confidence in the Church when compared to their parents or other adults. Ninety-five percent express belief in God, and 67 percent have confidence in organized religion. Over half (55 percent) call themselves "religious," with an additional 39 percent referring to themselves as "spiritual but not religious."

American teenagers today more closely resemble their grandparents in church attendance. On average, the Gallup Youth Survey documents teen church attendance that is 10 percentage points higher than the national figures for all adults. In a recent study, 50 percent of American teens 13-17 report attending a local faith community within the past seven days. The



# Sex Education: If Not You, Who?

*Parents should not let popular culture do the talking on sex*

BY KEVIN AND MARILYN RYAN

**H**ave you talked to your kids about sex lately? —or ever? We know. It's hard enough to talk to them about their hair or their homework, let alone get into the tar baby of human sexuality. Where do you start? When do you start? And anyway, who are we to take on this topic? Maybe we have made our share of mistakes. We've sinned ourselves and violated our own consciences and the Church's teachings. We had premarital sex. We have been adulterers. We used birth control or had an abortion. Our kids start asking us what we did and why.

## Teens

*Continued from page 8*

Roman Catholic teens want to learn about Protestantism. Even more intriguing is the finding that the third most popular faith tradition American teens express a desire to learn about is Native American spirituality (44 percent).

Recognizing the culture of violence in which they live, over half (53 percent) of teens say "violence on TV and in movies sends the wrong message to young people." One in three teens (33 percent) says they watched a "particularly violent TV program in the past month." A similar proportion saw a strongly violent movie as well. Male teens report being exposed to more violence, but they are less concerned about it than female teens.

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A good friend of ours in Chicago, an outstanding father of five, was recently asked by his 13-year-old son, "Dad, did you ever do drugs?" He quickly answered, "Son, I'm not going to answer questions like that. That's why we have confession. You should know, though, that like the rest of us, your dad is a sinner, but I work every day to please Christ and so should you."

Or maybe we kept to the sexual rules, but are still enormously uncomfortable talking about sex. Our experience is so limited. We don't have the vocabulary to discuss topics like sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), AIDS or the gay lifestyle with our children. We don't know what they know or don't know. It is such a private matter. And the world has changed so since we were their age.

Once upon a time, as teenagers, our friends and we were focused laser-like on the question, "How far can you go?" The answer was readily given by parish priests and religious educators. Their answers (rarely the ones we were hoping to hear) were the stuff of some of the most intense discussions of my youth. But the point is, there were answers. Again, not always the ones we wanted, but they were clear and authoritative. Contrast that with today.

When was the last time you or any of your children heard a sermon on the Church's position on premarital sex or masturbation or even abortion? Perhaps the current crisis in the Church will shake the clergy out of their comfortable, "non-judgmental" stance.

Let's face it, though. It is not exactly comfortable to be whining and complaining about the current sexual scene. It's reactionary. Worse, it's not "cool." Unavoidably, though, sexuality is perhaps the most central and vital issue confronting a young person. How they live out their sexual lives is of fundamental importance to their future happiness and their spiritual well being. Those are rather high stakes. Still, we hear parents say, "They don't want me to talk to them about sex." In contrast,

there are the myriad young people who grumble that their parents never mentioned anything about the "facts of life." Clearly, parental silence is a major sin of omission.

Be assured that while we are being silent about sex, other "teachers" are not. Our teenagers and younger children exist in a sex-saturated world, with one sitcom after another preaching the glories of recreational sex. The tougher TV crime shows play on our natural fascination with sex, weekly outdoing one another with a menu of gang rapes, group sex and perversions yet to be named. What was called "jiggle television" when it made its debut

Ideally, dads should talk to sons and moms should talk to daughters. But that is only the ideal. The important thing is to open the door and step in.

Luckily, there is a wonderful book, recently updated and revised, written by a Catholic psychologist, Tom Lickona, his wife, Judy, and William Boudreau, M.D., which can be a fine resource for parents and their children. *Sex, Love & You: Making the Right Decision* is published by Ave Maria Press. This short, little gem is highly readable and sells for \$10.95.

When the book was first released, Tom Lickona sent us a copy. Our then 15-year-old son saw it in our room.

*When was the last time you or any of your children heard a sermon on the Church's position on premarital sex? Perhaps the current crisis in the Church will shake the clergy out of their comfortable, 'non-judgmental' stance.*

in the 1980s, is now standard fare from CNN's fashion show with strutting models to beer commercials with buxom mud-wrestlers. Much of talk radio has become a sexual sewer. Then, there are the sex education curriculums of our public schools. But more about them on another day.

We, the parents, cannot remain silent and let "the culture" do all the teaching. We have to start the conversation and then keep it going. If we are not in the habit of talking to our children about sex and human love, now is the time to start. It will probably be awkward. There may be false starts and embarrassment on both sides. Be assured, however, there will be interest.

That weekend, he had four boys from school for an overnight. At two in the morning, we heard an argument going on. Investigating, we found five hulking teenagers hunched over *Sex, Love and You* in heated discussion. They reported that they had been at it for three hours. Is there any doubt that they are interested in the topic?

So, start. If we learn how to talk to them about sex, their hair and homework will be a piece of cake.

*Kevin and Marilyn Ryan edited Why I Am Still a Catholic (Riverhead Books, 1998) and live in Chestnut Hill, MA.*

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## Preaching to Post-Pubescent Pagans

Lower your expectations but don't give up

BY WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY

I've taught Christian apologetics to senior boys for 41 years. What works is an intelligent challenge to the firmly held but misguided truisms of the young. Trying to sell the self-surrender of the cross to an audience brain-washed since infancy to self-absorption is like trying to sell the idea of Israel to an al-Qaeda platoon.

*So how do you  
turn dyed-in-the-wool,  
good-hearted pagans  
into soldiers  
of Christ?*

Even the best have almost impregnable certitudes, like: Money, fame, sex and power guarantee happiness; You can feel innocent until you are proven guilty; Homosexuals choose their sexuality; If she wants it as much as you do, who's getting hurt?

Despite years of Catholic education, they don't know what genuine Christianity entails. In the worst cases, it means being a sap. Moving up, it means being "un-bad," avoiding sin, eluding Big Brother God. In more gratifying cases, it means kindness, care for outcasts, service projects. But that doesn't reach even the outskirts of Christianity. The symbol encapsulating Christianity is a crucifix, a corpse utterly drained in order to lift the unresponsive into hyper-aliveness, God-life muttering, "Father, forgive. They don't know what they're doing."

Boys I've taught in Rochester, the Bronx, England and Australia are not ready for that. Neither were men or women at Georgetown and Boston College. Preach to an audience whose preconceptions you ignore, and you need no enemies.

Many hate religious education. Studies by Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg show adolescents simply can't comprehend what might motivate celibacy or martyrdom. The best one can hope for in them is an internalized sense of law and order and a comprehension of reciprocity: If I know the agony of hunger, loneliness, pain, what's inside that bag lady? If we achieve that, we're doing just fine.

So how do you approach the impossible: turning dyed-to-the-marrow, good-hearted pagans into soldiers of Christ?

First, lower your expectations. Jesus himself wasn't too successful selling the same message to his first students. He taught with stories whose message was inescapable. We don't.

Second, they are cunning in their arguments and yet simple-minded in the understanding of those arguments. They think any adult who claims a fuller grasp of the facts is arrogant. Many cherish the certitude: My opinion's as good as anyone else's.

So in preaching, begin with epistemology: What validates opinions? Only the objective facts. Whatever my opinion, fire burns, rape degrades, cyanide is toxic.

Give questionnaires, assign no-holds-barred reflections. Only then can you anticipate their specious arguments.

Intelligent emergent-adults don't want to be coddled or indoctrinated. They want to be challenged. We've known that since Socrates. But we forget.

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## Of Myths, Mermaids and Girls

*Some thoughts on nurturing the spirituality  
of adolescent Catholic girls*

BY JANET CLAUSEN AND  
MARILYN KIELBASA

ONCE UPON A TIME..." With these words, the power of story comes alive for children whose imaginations are the doorway to identity and meaning in life. Whether read aloud or viewed on the wide screen of Disney's media kingdom, the myths of childhood can be a healthy aspect of development. On the other hand, these myths can be problematic—especially if you're a girl.

Of all the fairy tales popular with today's generation of girls and young women, few are as beloved as *The Little Mermaid*. Based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale but liberally revised by the Disney studios for an animated version, it is a classic example of an age-old formula: maidens without mothers who find meaning in life only through a man. But the plot of this particular myth is a metaphor for the reality that today's girls face in a culture that devalues their experience, silences their voices and promotes loss of self in pursuit of beauty, boys and being nice.

Ariel is a strong-willed, 15-year-old mermaid with an inquisitive mind, a well-developed body and a beguiling voice. She falls in love with a human prince. Despite the admonitions of her father and her bodyguards, she finds her way to the cave of the ugly, evil sea witch named Ursula. There Ursula tempts Ariel by suggesting that all she needs to win the kiss of true love is her "body language." Declaring that men don't listen to women anyway, and "it's she who holds her tongue that gets her man," Ursula persuades Ariel to strike a Faustian bargain with her: relinquish her voice, give up her family and change her body to get her man.

By examining *The Little Mermaid* under the microscope of media literacy, we can open the eyes of girls to the power and negative influence of cultural myths. They come to understand that as they are bombarded with messages promoting beauty over brains and feminine wile over authentic self-esteem, they are actually being encouraged to give up their voices. Multiple studies, from Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* to the Girl Scouts of America's report, *Girls Speak Out*, have confirmed that the myth of the mermaid is a reality today. The Girl Scout study revealed that girls as young as eight have taken its messages to heart. Consider these statements from girls who are in third and fourth grades:

- The perfect girl is stylish, very pretty and acts nice. Everybody likes her.
- Sometimes I feel ugly. I wonder if I should use makeup.
- Well, it's like if you're cute and everything, people just like you better.

"Being liked" is high on the priority list of girls, who evaluate their lives in terms of relationships. But a quick review of pop culture reveals that the price paid for popularity is great. Advertisers present images of young women with bodies that are nearly impossible to achieve. In recovery for an eating disorder, a high school junior from the South wrote, "I remember always thinking that other people, especially guys, would look at me in a different way if I gained a single pound." And a thousand miles away in the Midwest, an insightful 15-year-old remarked, "We are made to feel unimportant because of materialistic things. There is such a high demand for the perfect look and face that an inner self can be—and usually is—lost."

Magazine covers display headlines about ways to get and keep boys, while pop music lyrics often screech sexualized messages that abstinence is a liability and sexual activity a requirement in the game of love. Television, movies and other media reinforce the exploitation of girls and women, promoting values that often conflict with the wisdom of caring adults in their lives. Eating disorders, depression and lower self-expectations and self-esteem are symptomatic proof that girls today buy into the myths of the culture as they sleepwalk through puberty into adulthood, much like Sleeping Beauty, who lies comatose waiting for her prince to awaken her.

#### **The First Step: Awakening**

A kiss from a prince is not the kind of awakening that empowers girls in the world today. But deconstructing these fairy tale dreams can be. It is a

models of prophetic leadership, we say: Walk with us as we seek to follow the way of Jesus Christ.... We ask you to join us in a commitment to far-reaching transformation of church and society in non-violent ways.”

The next generation will walk this path only if we meet them where they are. Paying attention to the world of girls allows us to recognize how pervasive are the negative messages. Yet most girls are not even conscious of their impact. A recent graduate of a Catholic women's college reflected on her experience: “For me, it wasn't until college that I even began to recognize, let alone understand, how much my behavior and attitudes as a teenager reflected cultural messages about how I should look, interact with boys and feel about myself.” Until girls become aware of these things, it is unlikely that they will do anything but drift along in a sea of expectations

*We can open the eyes of our girls to  
the power and negative influence of what  
our culture tells them about being a girl.*

starting point for listening to and affirming girls' voices. Convincing girls that their favorite mermaid and other feminine archetypes still exist in the culture is one antidote to the toxic messages that endanger rather than empower girls. Critiquing the scene where the voice and soul of Ariel are sucked out, girls articulate what they observe and how this scene makes them feel. Then they consider what choices they would make, if they were in the same situation. A high school sophomore from the East Coast remarked, “After watching *Mermaid* when I was a little girl, I would try to blow my voice into a bottle. Little did I realize that as I got older, I was doing the same thing.”

Adult women express their concerns about the next generation and desire to pass on a faith that is vibrant, active and respectful of the feminine experience. At Saint Mary's College at Notre Dame last year, 16 renowned women of faith wrote in their message of hope and courage, “The Madeleva Manifesto”: “To young women looking for

and images that are not their own.

#### **The Second Step: Taking Action**

When given the chance and the tools, girls are able to see through the culture. For the most part, they are willing to examine the situations and eager to work for change. They are ready to hear about the struggles and stories of biblical women. They delight in discovering unknown saints and mystics who challenged the status quo. And they revel in learning about expanded images of God. A high school junior expressed well the impact such exploration had on her own spirituality: “I prayed to a feminine image of God. I envisioned Mother God, as well as my own mother, holding me. It was so powerful.”

Parents, educators and church leaders can make a positive difference by addressing the unique needs and gifts of girls. Here are five proven methods:

- Create girls' groups. Whether in schools, parishes, communities or as scouts, girls need to come together

—in the longstanding tradition of women's circles—to explore, learn, dream and pray.

- Educate girls in media literacy. When girls are awakened to the messages and methods of the media, they are more likely to resist the pressures and expectations they face hundreds of times each day.
- Introduce girls to women's spirituality and theology. Girls will find reasons to stay active in their faith communities if they see themselves as part of the rich tradition of women who have heeded Jesus' call to be prophetic witnesses to the good news.
- Empower girls to use their voice. Encourage girls to challenge systems that demean them or prevent them from becoming the persons God created them to be. Give them the necessary tools, and support them in their efforts.
- Give expression to girls' hopes, dreams and prayers. Create age-appropriate opportunities for personal sharing, shared prayer and evocative rituals that are based in a uniquely feminine experience.

Nurturing the spirituality of adolescents is about nurturing their whole being and inviting them to fullness of life. Nadia, a 16-year-old girl from the Midwest, expressed that fullness in this way:

*God is with her.  
God works for her.  
God fills her.  
God chooses her.  
God accepts her.  
God praises her.  
God listens to her.  
God cries with her.  
God knows her.  
God loves her.*

*We are her.*

*Janet Clausen and Marilyn Kielbasa are the co-directors of the Voices Project, which focuses on the spirituality of adolescent girls. They edited Listen for a Whisper: Prayers, Poems and Reflections by Girls (Saint Mary's Press, 2001) from which the prayer at the end of this article is taken.*

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## CHECK OUT THE CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND ONLINE ARCHIVES OF THE CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY



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*the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY*

# Rebuilding on Faith

*Being admired for who she was turns a wayward girl back to community and God*

BY MARY PENCE

At the age of 15, I was a girl who made it difficult for anyone—even myself—to love. My upbringing has been a turbulent ride. There were struggles with anorexia, friends poorly chosen and my parents' divorce. The only positive thing about me was something that I did not earn. I was blessed with a certain look that others found attractive, and in the absence of any other reason to feel good about myself, this one quality achieved pre-eminence. Most viewed me as just another pretty face, and that is exactly how I viewed myself. I yearned to be accepted socially, and because of my low self-esteem I allowed myself to be manipulated.

I defined myself solely by the company I kept, and I felt comfortable only with those who were as damaged as I was. It did not take long for me to become a person whom I disliked and could never respect. The one person who had the power to change all this was a mildly retarded girl who possessed not one of the attributes that I desperately wanted to call my own.

I withdrew from my family, allowed myself to fail academically and sought the friendship of people with ulterior motives. Along the way I acquired a self-destructive eating disorder, not so much to stay thin, but for the feeling that I could control at least one aspect of my life. On a good day I would wonder if my life would ever add up to anything; on a bad day I had no doubts at all. My stupefying actions became routine—so routine that I began to settle into my role as “the family failure.” Deep down I felt that everyone who was supposed to love me had failed me. So instead of using their disapproval as motivation to improve myself, I actually began to revel in it.

My Catholic high school had established a quota for time to be spent each year in service of others. To meet this quota, I became a Sunday school teaching assistant at a local parish. Perhaps

this was an odd choice, because at this time in my life I had no real faith in God. Like many teenagers, I was angry, frustrated and cynical, but all of this did not explain my lack of faith. No, the main reason I had no faith in God was that I had no faith in myself. I was alienated from my family, my school, my future and my God. So in this sixth-grade Sunday school class I performed by rote. I figured that as long as I took attendance and sat quietly for two hours a week, I was meeting the minimum for my required service hours. And I stuck to this battle plan with little sense of personal investment and no sense of accomplishment.

However, the plan failed when it encountered a girl named Caroline (not her real name).

There are many people of low intelligence whose appearance does not betray them. Caroline is not one of these people. With a slack jaw, misshapen head and asymmetrical eyes, Caroline's appearance announced the fact that she was not “normal.” Complications at birth had caused minor brain damage, making it difficult for her to grow academically and socially to the level of her peers. These disabilities made her painfully shy, and her one objective in class was to blend in and draw as little attention to herself as possible.

Given her disposition, it seemed particularly unfortunate that every Sunday she came to class late. Week after week, Caroline would show up 10 minutes after class started. She would turn the knob to the classroom door with painful slowness, open the door just wide enough to accommodate her slender form and then would quickly step across the room, never raising her eyes to meet the disapproving stares of every other member of the class. I sat far from the door, yet each time she entered she would pass by vacant seats to find the one empty chair that was closest to me. For her, that passage from door to seat was a horrific distance.

It is evidence of how self-involved I was that I never asked myself why

she would traverse that painful distance to find a place close to me. In hindsight it is obvious that Caroline realized that her place was not with her peers. Acceptance and hospitality were two things she rarely found among people her own age. Like an injured bird, she was used to seeking cover under the wings of people older than she was. I am sure that one of the things that brought Caroline next to me was the simple fact that I was older.

I wish I could tell you that I went out of my way to be kind to her, but in fact I treated her with the same casual disregard I had for everyone else in class. That equal treatment is precisely why she had affection for me. And for her it was far better than she was used to being treated.

One morning the Sunday school teacher took more time than the hour allowed. He ushered the children off to Mass and asked me to stay behind and put the room in order for the class that was to follow. I began collecting Bibles and storing materials away. Then I noticed I was not alone. Caroline had stayed behind. My first thought was to tell her to leave and catch up with the rest of the class. Instead I decided it would be less hassle to let her stick around and then follow me when I walked to the chapel.

She joined enthusiastically in the small chore I had to perform. Caroline made the collection of Bibles and the straightening of chairs seem like an honor conferred by God himself. Every seatback was perpendicular to every table, the materials were stacked with neat precision, and every stray piece of litter was delivered to the wastebasket. The last chore brought us to the same shelf, where we were putting Bibles that had been left behind. Once the Bibles were properly shelved, Caroline looked up at me with an expression of wonderful satisfaction. Her sense of grateful accomplishment was delightfully contagious. We stood there in silence for a long moment, sharing only a smile. Finally she looked up at me and said in the most unpremeditated and

guileless way, “You are the only reason I come to class.”

I stood there in awe, completely befuddled and not knowing how to reply. All at once I realized that whatever slight attention I had offered her she interpreted not as attention, but as affection. Though utterly clueless, and without in any way intending it to happen, I had made her world a happier place. I had received compliments before. I had received encouragement before. But never had any compliment or encouragement come to me in such a pure form. Caroline's words were completely unalloyed by flattery or ulterior motive. She communicated to me with a clarity that no one else could match. Of all the people I knew, Caroline was the only one ever to deliver a sentiment that I knew came entirely from the heart. She described the simple truth as she knew it, and the power of her words are with me still.

Finally I had met someone who admired me for qualities that I had forgotten were mine. Appreciation from a mentally retarded girl became the magic that turned me away from my headlong rush to self-destruction. Her esteem became a treasure that I wanted to earn, and could not waste. I also realized that Caroline and I were more similar than different, and perhaps the two of us were joined as two people seldom are. Each of us suffered from the same demons of poor self-esteem and a genuine hunger for good company, and both of us were accepted or rejected for reasons that had everything to do with our appearance and nothing to do with our hearts. I am convinced the two of us were a channel of God's grace to each other.

That was three years ago. I am still teaching Sunday school and looking for one more Caroline to call my own.

*Mary Pence is a student at St. Mary-of-the-Woods College in Indiana.*

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# Young Adult Catholics: Conservative? Alienated? Suspicious?

*Catholic young adults are skeptical—but not leaving Catholicism in any great numbers*

BY MARY JOHNSON, DEAN R. HOGE, WILLIAM DINGES, AND JUAN L. GONZALES, JR.

**W**e would be hard pressed to find a Catholic in the United States who does not have an opinion about where young adult Catholics are on their faith journey. Anecdotal evidence abounds. Parents, pastors and teachers tell tales of the religious journeys of their young adult children, parishioners and students. But the listener must beware whenever the storytellers suggest that the road they describe is the one traveled by all young adult Catholics. The task of the social scientist, upon hearing these stories, is to ask: How widespread is this phenomenon? How representative are these accounts? Can we generalize from these cases to the whole population? And when claims are made, social scientists have the responsibility to ask: Where are the data that prove or disprove these claims?

These are not always welcome questions, especially when the tellers of the tale are popular people. But the questions are necessary here because of the size of the young adult Catholic population and their significance to the Church.

We need not go far to find examples of generalizations about young adults. In an article about Generation X in *America* in 1998, Tom Beaudoin responds to church ministers who ask, "Why do we need to start a 20- and 30-something ministry? Generation X will come back to the Church when they get married and want their babies baptized." Mr. Beaudoin counters: "This is untrue. According to both anecdotal and emerging sociological evidence, X-ers are continuing to hang back from the Church out of suspicion or indifference."

Mr. Beaudoin makes similar state-

ments in his 1998 book *Virtual Faith*. He says that "X-ers challenge religious institutions in general" and "specifically assault the Catholic Church." "Generation X approaches religion with a lived theology that is very suspicious of institutions. Indeed, X-ers have a heavily ingrained (one could say 'institutional') suspicion or skepticism (even cynicism) in general."

Second, in a previous *America* article (1997), Rev. Willard F. Jabusch speaks about the conservative tendencies found in some college and graduate students. After observing that these young people "form only a small, though vocal, group," he adds that "there are enough of them in universities and seminaries to give campus ministers and seminary rectors an acute case of dyspepsia. Yet they clearly do not speak for the majority, who are neither so rigid or so judgmental." Jabusch then goes on to assert, "But it must also be said quite honestly that many, if not most, young adults who are still coming to church are conservative and at least slightly right of center."

## A National Study

We recently gathered national data on young adult Catholics that test statements such as these. We interviewed a national sample of Catholics who had been confirmed during adolescence and were now between the ages of 20 and 39. We collected two samples, one of Latinos and one of non-Latinos (that is, everyone else). We interviewed 848 persons by phone (421 Latinos and 427 non-Latinos) whose names we randomly chose from confirmation lists in 44 representative U.S. parishes. The parishes were located in inner-city, urban, suburban and rural areas in dioceses across the United States.

We designed our study to get the proper mix of Catholics by race and ethnicity for both samples. From the United States Catholic Conference,

we calculated that as of 1980 (near the midpoint of the confirmation years), 3 percent of all U.S. Catholics were African Americans and 2 percent were Asians or Pacific Islanders. Our non-Latino sample had similar percentages. The remainder were of European origin. The Latino sample was based on 1980 U.S. census data that indicated the following origins: 59 percent Mexican, 14 percent Puerto Rican, 6 percent Cuban and 21 percent other.

We took lists from the parishes, and of the non-Latinos we found 74 percent on the lists and interviewed 74 percent of them. Of the Latinos, we found 51 percent and interviewed 73 percent of these.

Regarding Latinos: In our sample, 88 percent were born in the United States (contrasted with 62 percent in the total Latino population in the United States today), and 63 percent

said they speak mostly English at home (another 24 percent use both languages equally). These Latinos are above average in education and economic level.

Not all Catholics are confirmed during adolescence. The best estimates are that in the 1980's, 60 to 70 percent of non-Latinos and 30 to 40 percent of Latinos were confirmed. Thus our sample is not representative of all young adult Catholics. Certainly the ones who were confirmed as adolescents have a history of relatively more religious education and more Catholic influence in the home. Thus our sample is somewhat more involved in Church life today than is the case of all young adult Catholics. However, this sample has the virtue of representing the group from whom many future leaders of the Church will come.

## Hypotheses and Findings

We asked questions to measure attitudes regarding religious identity and beliefs, as well as levels of church involvement. (Because we found few important differences in attitudes by age, gender or ethnicity, we are not showing those breakdowns.)

### FIRST ASSERTION:

#### AN EXODUS OF YOUNG ADULTS FROM THE CHURCH

One of the most striking findings of the study is that 90 percent of the young adults who were confirmed continue to identify themselves as Catholic, and a majority consider themselves active and are registered in a parish. Only 7 percent of young Catholics change their self-identity to something other than Catholic. Today, 31 percent attend Mass once a week or more, only about 6 percent never attend, and 69 percent of the non-Latinos and 66 percent of the Latinos attend Mass once a month or more. It is probable that some persons exaggerated their Mass attendance in the interview, as has been the case in other surveys, so the true figure is lower. Also, a sample of confirmands would be expected to attend Mass more often than a sample of all young Catholics. For example, a 1995 nationwide random survey of Catholics by James Davidson and his colleagues found that 24 percent of Catholics 35 or younger attended Mass weekly, 7 percentage points lower than our finding.

Is it common for young Catholics to become inactive some time after confirmation? Yes. Around 60 percent of the respondents became inactive in

TABLE 1 (in percents)

### Reason for Becoming Inactive

	Non-Latinos	Latinos
Left home or family	19	8
Conflict with parents	3	2
Too busy, lack of interest, lazy	35	41
Bored	3	2
Disagreed with Church, alienated	12	7
Too busy with family or babies	1	4
Lifestyle in conflict with Church	1	3
Doubted, questioned, lost faith	5	4
Conflict with spouse	2	2
Didn't like parish or priest	3	5
No more parental pressure	5	6
Influence of spouse or partner	2	2
Disliked liturgies or homilies	2	0
Other, don't know	7	14

Church life—that is, for a time they did not attend Mass as often as 12 times a year. This phenomenon of widespread dropping out is found in most Christian denominations.

About 35 percent of those who became inactive did so because of indifference (too busy, lack of interest, lazy). Mr. Beaudoin argues that, besides indifference, suspicion is the other reason for young adult Catholics' "hanging back." The only data that might back up that argument is the 12 percent of the non-Latinos and 7 percent of the Latinos who disagreed with the Church, or the 1 percent of the non-Latinos and the 3 percent of the Latinos who said they became inactive because their lifestyle was in conflict with the Church. Suspicion was not an important motive. The majority who became inactive did so for a variety of reasons, some having to do with personal and family issues. Only 18 percent of the non-Latinos and 15 percent of the Latinos mentioned Church issues explicitly (disagreed with Church, lifestyle in conflict with Church, disliked parish or priest, or disliked liturgies or homilies) as the reason for their inactivity. Mr. Beaudoin's characterization of the group as "suspicious" is too extreme.

About half the people who went inactive became active again before we interviewed them—48 percent of the non-Latinos and 45 percent of the Latinos. The most common reasons for returning were feelings of spiritual need (26 percent) and concern about family life and religious education for their children (24 percent). When they returned to Church involvement, not all returned to Catholic parishes. By that time they were influenced by higher education, marriage and geographical changes. The figure for those who returned to Catholic parishes was the same for Latinos and non-Latinos: 86 percent. The other 14 percent switched to a variety of Protestant denominations. In sum: About three-fifths dropped out and half of them returned later.

**SECOND ASSERTION:  
YOUNG ADULTS DISTRUST  
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS**

The responses to the first three statements in Table 2 show that a clear majority of these young adults like being Catholic. The statements do not distinguish being a member of the Catholic community versus being loyal to

**TABLE 2**

**Attitude Toward  
Catholic Church**

*Non-Latinos*      *Latinos*

(Percent who agree:)

There is something very special about being Catholic which you can't find in other religions.

**68**                      **74**

I cannot imagine myself being anything other than Catholic.

**75**                      **81**

I could be just as happy in some other church; it wouldn't have to be Catholic.

**23**                      **20**

An individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues.

**61**                      **69**

One can be a good Catholic without going to Mass.

**64**                      **64**

the institutional Church, yet the third statement includes the institutional Church. Our interpretation is that these young adults feel a sense of belonging in the Catholic community.

The last two statements shown in Table 2 tap feelings of individual authority over and against Church teachings. In both, the majority sentiment supports individual decision-making. These young adults do not feel that they need to adhere to certain Church rules in order to be Catholic. Table 2 shows that for the majority, personal authority is more compelling than hierarchical authority.

**THIRD ASSERTION:**

**YOUNG ADULTS ARE CONSERVATIVE**

This topic divides into three parts. First, when it is a matter of central doctrines, these young adults generally adhere to Church teachings. We asked if they agree or disagree with several

**TABLE 3**

**Attitude Toward  
Laity and Women**

*Non-Latinos*      *Latinos*

(Percent who agree:)

Lay people are just as important a part of the Church as priests are.

**88**                      **91**

It is important that the Catholic Church put more women in positions of leadership and authority.

**75**                      **75**

The Catholic Church should facilitate discussion and debate by the laity on doctrinal issues such as divorce, remarriage, and human sexuality.

**80**                      **79**

statements. For example, 87 percent of the non-Latino Catholics and 95 percent of the Latinos agreed that "in Mass the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ." With the statement, "I believe in a divine judgment after death where some shall be rewarded and others punished," 80 percent of the non-Latino Catholics and 82 percent of the Latinos agreed. With the statement that Jesus Christ was God or the Son of God, 91 percent of the non-Latinos and 96 percent of the Latinos agreed.

Second, regarding the place of laity and women in the Church today, these young adults are ready for change. They are not right of center (see Table 3). They clearly want more involvement of laity in general and women in particular.

Third, the young adult Catholics clearly support Catholic social justice efforts. Table 4 shows they hold progressive views.

From these responses, we can see the need to be more precise when asserting that young adults are conservative.

Are regular Mass attenders different from irregular attenders? Is it just the non-attenders who are liberal in doctrine, ecclesiology and social justice, or is this true also for loyal Churchgoers? We compared regular Mass attenders and irregular attenders on all the attitudes in Tables 3 and 4 as well as on their doctrinal beliefs. Mass attenders are stronger than others in their belief that in the Mass the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, and they are stronger in believing that Catholics have a duty to try to close the gap between the rich and the poor and to live simply to preserve the environment.

On other items—for example, those concerning laity and women—the regular and irregular attenders held similar opinions. In short, the regular attenders are a bit more progressive in social justice than the others, and we found no evidence to support Father Jabusch's view that young adult Churchgoers today are right of center.

**Far From Monolithic**

Catholic young adults are far from monolithic in their behaviors and attitudes, and it does them and the Church a disservice when their collective portrait is painted in strokes that are overly broad. Our sample of young adults who were confirmed during adolescence provides a picture that offers a

sense of proportion. We believe our findings are credible; they are supported by much of what we heard in our in-depth interviews and focus groups. Catholic young adults are not leaving Catholicism in any great numbers. They are not suspicious of the Church, although they maintain a certain level of individual judgment about its teachings.

These young Catholics are neither cynics who reject the Church nor are they right-of-center on Church institutional issues. They affirm key Catholic doctrines. On questions of ecclesiology and Church government, they advocate empowerment of the laity in general and women in particular. We agree that some are angry, but it is not a large number. More common is a conviction that authority resides in the individual. On socio-economic issues, those interviewed are again left of center-supportive of

**TABLE 4**

**Support for Church's  
Social Teaching**

*Non-Latinos*      *Latinos*

(Percent who agree:)

Catholics have a duty to try to end racism.

**86**                      **90**

Catholics have a duty to try to close the gap between the rich and the poor.

**76**                      **83**

Catholics have a duty to try to live more simply in order to preserve the environment.

**73**                      **80**

Church efforts to end racism, poverty and environmental degradation. These findings should be kept in mind if there is to be an accurate portrayal of young adult attitudes that will serve the whole Church and its mission in preparing for the future.

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# Generation-X Catholics Stick to Own Agendas

*They are neither as conservative, nor as liberal, as some commentators think*

BY TOM BEAUDOIN

**A**re Gen-X Catholics basically young and conservative? The future of pastoral outreach to this generation depends on a frank answer: Young, yes. Conservative, no. We may be young—in our early 20s to mid-30s—but beyond that single adjective, things get murky pretty fast.

In a much-discussed 1997 article in *America*, Willard Jabusch suggested that Gen-X Catholics—those born in the early '60s to the late '70s—are largely conservative. From his experience ministering to Xers at the University of Chicago, he described with appropriate adulation those who are discovering classic Catholic authors (like Bonaventure) and inquiring about forgotten Catholic pieties (like the rosary).

But Jabusch hints that he is aware of some counter-conservative spiritual currents among Xers. He names these “a strange mix of heterodox opinions about Christ, the Eucharist..., the Church, and morality.” Nevertheless, Jabusch argues that Gen-X Catholics are interested in “conserving” what has been “good, beautiful and true” in the past two millennia.

Recently, that view has been contradicted by Dean Hoge of the Catholic University of America. Hoge rightly rejects the notion that Gen-X Catholics are more conservative but promotes an equally serious misunderstanding by suggesting their views are basically the same as their Baby Boom parents.

In my view, neither Jabusch nor Hoge offers a helpful description of the sort of Gen-X spiritualities I find in my own ministry (both formal Gen-X ministry in a Church context and informal ministry in Boston's subways and coffee shops). The conservative tag is also at odds with the spirituality evident in that sacred-and-profane haven wherein many Xers practice their spirituality: the popular culture (such as music videos, CDs, fashion, comic books, movies).

Xers are a diverse generation, and a substantial slice of that diversity needs to be reported and affirmed. Many Xers practice a spirituality that is largely eclectic, justice-oriented, heavily mediated by popular culture, irreverent and yet strangely drawn to traditional religious symbols.

Xers do often find “religious lore quaint but fascinating,” as Jabusch writes, but he misses the reality that it's often reassembled in Gen-X pop culture in a unique way. Madonna, the most obvious example of a Gen-X pop-culture symbol, reassociates religious symbols and sensuality in a way that is irreverent but strikingly Catholic in its implicit sacramentality.

The generation is on its own spiritual journey, one whose questions and discoveries have much to teach the Church. (And if the Church can listen it may find itself with an opportunity to teach, as well.) Characterizing Catholic Gen-Xers as conservative or as a repeat of their parents ignores the generation's unique spirituality, an important “sign of the times.” The coffee house, for example, is one key Gen-X religious space, a sanctuary at least as meaningful for many as the sanctuary of most churches.

The larger problem is that both Catholic conservatives and liberals want to cast Xers as supportive of their agendas. While some want to see the generation as mostly “young and conservative” (which of course some Xers are), liberals want Xers to carry forward the “Vatican II project” as they interpret it. While it is impossible and undesirable to give one simple generalization about all Gen-Xers, it is safe to say that there is no widespread Gen-X religious sensibility that is simply conservative or liberal.

Most Xers embrace much more pluralism (spiritual, racial, sexual and so on) than conservatives would like. And they find attractive—often with an admixture of irony and sentimentality—many more traditional symbols than liberals can typically stomach. Similarly, Xers are often too politically and multiculturally sensitive (espe-

cially with regard to the politics of tolerance) for most conservatives, and too apathetic and bourgeois for most liberals.

Conservatives have to remember that we are a living “hermeneutic of suspicion” and are largely a postmodern generation, hesitant about embracing truths that purport to explain everything.

Liberals have to keep in mind that we are a generation born after the social and ecclesial revolutions of the '60s. We have no personal memories of the hope and possibilities inspired by that era. What could have been just doesn't typically move us. As one Xer wrote to *Wired*—a widely read journal about the Internet—it is no use “fantasizing about the revolution which, if you studied the 1960s, you know will never come.”

I find this attitude to be true of my peers not only in regard to society but the Church as well. We can't be easily folded into the agendas of the liberals or conservatives.

Several commentators have helpfully characterized the desire, prevalent among Xers, to retrieve the forgotten

Catholic tradition is, as I see it, primarily an attraction to excluded and marginalized symbols. If so, then the other aspects of Gen-X reality of which we are already aware, such as concern for the poor and lived acceptance of plurality, of otherness, have a real spiritual significance as well. This spirituality does not admit to being folded into a simple narrative of “return to the riches of the past” nor “liberals-in-training for the future.”

We do share some spiritual affinities with Baby Boomers, such as an interest in the authority of personal religious experience and a deep suspicion of institutional religion. At the same time, we confound our liberal and conservative elders with the ambivalent content of our spiritualities. As recent surveys have shown, Gen-Xers both endorse John Paul II as the “vicar of Christ” and in the same breath and by the same large majority favor ordaining women to the priesthood.

As much as I love my generation—and as much as I do not want to see its spiritualities absorbed simplistically into the narratives of our elders—I also want to remind our elders that my

*I want to lift up Catholicity because the Catholic way of being in the world affords, among other things, a rich sense of practical grace.*

practices of Catholicism. Whether these are interesting as exotica or not is another question. Truly postmodern in this sense, Xers are fascinated by the power of the other to evoke spiritual encounter, even the other within our own traditions. The retrieval of the forgotten symbols of Catholicism's past is not necessarily a foreclosure of justice work nor a neglect of a spirituality committed to this world, as is frequently implied.

Our interest in the retrieval of

generation has no living memory of Vatican II. You owe it to my generation to offer Xers—the many lay as well as the few ordained—access to the riches of this great work of the Spirit.

And not just Vatican II, but access to the whole tradition! Pope John Paul II is all Xers have known as our prime Catholic icon. There's nothing wrong with that, except that John Paul II is far from the summation of the Catholic tradition. In fact, what I find that

many Xers want is not a grand summation of the tradition, its final meaning, but access to its plurality, a plurality rooted in unity—a true catholicity and a tradition alive for today, not a dead traditionalism.

What we need to recall is that, aside from elite students at the University of Chicago or a handful of Gen-X priests offering the tiniest specks of hope of an end to the priest shortage, tens of thousands of alienated Gen-X Catholics languish in the pews, or (more likely) out of the pews.

What they need, deserve and in most cases have not gotten is loving small-community ministry led by peers

who have grown up in their culture; a place where they can query the Church, where the Church will be there for them, where they will have access to the tradition (including its riches of sacramentality and spirituality), where they can encounter the tradition in its paradoxical otherness and intimacy, where their own pop culture and experience will be taken seriously as a source of God-in-all-things, where they are allowed to feel that they have as much stake in the future of the Church as any bishop or cardinal, and where, most fundamentally, they will know that they—not they alone, but they also—are the Church Catholic.

I want to lift up Catholicity because the Catholic way of being in the world affords, among other things, a rich sense of practical grace. Catholic ministry to Gen-X must always include the communal experience of this practical grace. Too many times I hear from ministers that “Gen-Xers will come back to the Church when they have their own families.” This is code for saying they will come back when they enter on the Church’s terms. This sentiment lets Xers know that we not only do not care for them now, we don’t care enough about the future of the Church.

What is at stake in the attempts of

our elders to fold us into their narratives? Whatever it is, it deprives Catholic Xers of their unique spiritual voices—and the Church of a much richer future.

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## Confessions of a Generation-X Catholic Woman

*Feeling a mix of love and aversion, joy and anger toward the Church*

BY RENEE M. LAREAU

We sit at the kitchen table in our pajamas, the late morning sun filtering through the windows. *The Washington Post* lies untouched on the table, along with bagel crumbs and big mugs of tepid, strong coffee. It is New Year’s Eve day, and four of us, our college friendships eight years young now, have traveled to Washington, D.C. to spend the long weekend together. A coterie of Catholic-educated Generation Xers, we discuss our burgeoning careers and our emergence into the “real world” as young adults. Sitting around the table are a medical student, a nascent theologian, a nonprofit worker and an engineer—all strong women with strong opinions. We chat sleepily until our conversation shifts to politics and religion.

My college roommate says to me, “I don’t see how you can be satisfied with life in the Church. The Church has so many problems, and it is hardly a bastion of opportunity for women.” I take a deep breath. Here comes a debate I have had with many a friend in recent years. I search for the right words. “Well, people often point out

that we didn’t give up on democracy just because of Watergate or think about being an American,” I try. “There are lots of things that are disquieting about being an American, but most of us work within the system to uphold things that we like and change things that we don’t.” My dubious friend shakes her head and laughs, “If it were easier to start a life in Canada, I’d be there by now.”

We eventually moved on to other topics, having glossed over our disagreements. Upon my return home, however, questions and issues floated about in my mind. I wish I had responded to my friend’s blunt question more thoroughly and thoughtfully. I have been thinking a lot about it since then. How would I describe my rela-

tionship with the Church as a young Catholic woman? My love of the Church abounds, as do my frustrations with it. In general, my relationship with the Church is characterized by love and aversion, joy and anger, quiet complacency and fierce determination. More specifically, I can say that I am challenged because of my gender and given opportunity because of my age.

My experiences and opinions of

*My love of the Church abounds, as do my frustrations with it. While I face challenges because of my gender, it is also true that I am given opportunity because of my age.*

the Church in the United States are inextricably tied to my gender. I find more than a little discomfort in the lack of leadership opportunities available to American Catholic women. Yet there are indeed more opportunities for women in the Church today than there have ever been, something of which I am constantly being re-

minded by those whom I affectionately call “my elders,” people in both the pews and the pulpit. A priest friend recently pointed out to me that when he was a youngster, the women did almost nothing in the Church except clean the sacristy and launder the liturgical vestments. Still, I find it difficult to appreciate the advances because I did not experience “the way things were before the council” or “in the old Church.” I expect more because I am coming of age during a different time. Some might say I am ungrateful to the strong females who worked to establish more prominent roles for American Catholic women, and they may be right.

As I try to understand the events of the past, I look to the future of women in the Church with some trepidation. Women are still viewed in some papal documents as mere objects of passion rather than as active and contributing members of the Church. These documents embrace what is characterized as a theology of complementarity rather than of mutuality—that is, there is a “woman’s” way of being and a “man’s” way of being. I am uncomfortable with these bounds and the fact that the institutional Church reinforces them. A theology of complementarity has the potential danger of dictating what women’s roles in the Church will be: educating the children, organizing the bake sales, leading the moms’ group. These are important ministries, but women’s gifts spill over and beyond these bounds, something yet to be recognized in documents from the current pope. Other recently issued documents, though not from Rome, offer a sense of hope to Catholic women. For example, the “Madeleva Mani-



festos,” issued in April 2000, confirms that women must be respected as leaders and given public roles in the Church.

### E-vangelization

As a Gen-Xer, I am the product of a generation raised on “Jesus Loves Me” Catholicism. I made lots of collages in religion classes while growing up. I watched “Jesus Christ Superstar” in seventh grade. I earnestly sang the music of the St. Louis Jesuits at all school Masses. I was never taught that I needed to “fear the Lord.” I have never laid eyes on the *Baltimore Catechism*. I do not know any Latin other than what appears in the popular press.

Growing up as a Gen-X American Catholic, I have had the tremendous opportunity to come of age in the period often dubbed “the information age.” Because of this, I often feel that as a member of the “Church in the modern world,” I have my feet in two different centuries. Take, for example, the recent explosion of Catholic Web sites. The Church’s use of the Internet demonstrates the sometimes strange yet wonderful juxtapositions that are present in cyberspace.

Thanks to the Irish Province Jesuits, I can now pray a 10-minute Ignatian exercise every day. (To end the prayer, I just click my mouse on the hypertext “Amen.”) I can submit prayer requests to religious orders and even participate in an online 34-week Ignatian retreat. I can have a spiritual meditation sent to me by e-mail every Monday—a bit of grace at the beginning of a long week. I can easily access Salvador Dali’s modern painting “Crucifixion,” or Andrei Rublev’s icon “Trinity.” I can search the back issues of just about any Catholic periodical. The World Wide Web gives the faithful unprecedented access to information that both informs and inspires. Timeless truths and ancient spiritual practices are juxtaposed with lightning-fast technology and contemporary images.

I feel truly fortunate to have grown up with access to all the major media tools: computers, televisions, films and compact disc players. If there is one characteristic gift of Generation Xers, it is that they are quite media savvy. They need only to be asked, and are glad to help other generations, to assist the Church in learning to use these wonderful means of communication to further preach the Gospel, to evangelize in innovative ways.

My affinity for modern media is no doubt characteristic of my generation, as is my fierce pride in Catholic social teaching and those who preach and live it. When I struggle (and often fail miserably) to live a life in accordance with Gospel values, I turn to the example of people like the late Archbishop Oscar Romero, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Dorothy Day. These “modern-day saints” struggled to model their own lives after Jesus, performed the works of mercy and never shied away from positioning themselves at the vanguard of political change. St. Augustine captured the way these pioneers lived: “By passing along the narrow road they widened it, and while they went along, tramping on the rough ways, they went ahead of us.” I am grateful that these leaders have widened the road of Christian discipleship, making it a bit easier for one to follow.

### Witnesses to Faith

Through the example of Archbishop Oscar Romero, I have witnessed the reality of resurrection. When he was asked about the many death threats he received, he responded simply, “I shall rise again in the Salvadoran people.” And indeed he has; the battles to end injustice are still very much alive.

From Cardinal Bernardin I have learned the importance of prayer. I often picture him in his study, awake at five o’clock in the morning, devoting the first hour of his day to private prayer, a practice that he shared in his book, *The Gift of Peace*. He has both challenged me in my prayer life and given me permission to be imperfect.

It is the example of Dorothy Day that keeps me uncomfortable when I am lured by the many material temptations that come my way daily. Magazines that are geared toward women my age tell me that these are my “me” years and that there is nothing I should deny myself, whether it be extensive travel, cutting-edge fashions or premarital sex. There are not many voices that tell me that there is something wrong with this picture. Dorothy Day’s life story and writings serve me well here, and I continue to be challenged by this articulate, determined woman, an ardent defender of the poor and an outspoken critic of material wealth.

I hold fast to the example of people such as these, overwhelmed yet inspired by their radical stances. The social teachings of the Church and the

life stories of those who have lived them in radical ways have enlarged my vision of the bounds of “Church.”

And my life has been graced with very fine mentors. I think in particular of an internship I recently completed at a Midwestern parish, where my supervisor modeled how to allocate resources to the poor on a parish level. He was part social worker, part spiritual director, part community organizer. He lived simply, prayed often and wrote eloquent thank-you notes to donors. His ministry was firmly rooted in Scripture without being too literalist. He encouraged me to write in a journal regularly and constantly challenged my assumptions about the poor.

At a local homeless shelter, my mentors were single, itinerant women. These women, some battered, some timeworn, some fighting substance abuse, taught me how to be tenacious.

## Young women in the Church need the courage and endurance to hang in there.

They taught me that if I am having a bad day I should wear purple because, according to them, it is the color of strength. They taught me that people need one another; they seek connection—both with others and with spiritual truths.

### The Catholic Imagination

The Rev. Andrew Greeley claims that Catholics are more likely than most to find the good, the sacred and the holy, smack-dab in the center of the world. Such an imagination, a way of perceiving the world, is characteristically, if not uniquely, Catholic.

One of the benefits of this “imagination” unique to Catholics is that in the Church there seems to be a spirituality for everything, even for running! For 12 years I have been a runner. I’ve pounded the pavement on the Chicago lakefront, run the hills at dawn at the Abbey of Gethsemani, pursued a gorgeous sunset in Key West and dodged cars during rush hour in downtown Dublin. I have finished many a marathon. I initially began running for physical reasons—to stay in shape and keep a healthy heart. But I kept run-

ning for spiritual reasons, which I just recently have begun to express clearly. An article in a Catholic publication written by a Chicago priest provides a spiritual framework for running that articulated what I have been feeling for all of these years. He framed a spirituality of running—something of which I had never previously been aware—all in terms of devotion and endurance through pain, in terms of discipline and discipleship. This new spirituality has allowed me to view my long runs as a time of prayer, a time of discipline, an exercise in discipleship.

Music, too, has held equal importance in my life. Playing the flute started out as a hobby, something learned since childhood, a way to become acquainted with classical music. Everything changed when I started to play the flute at Mass in college. I committed the psalms to memory. I learned that there was a patron saint of music, St. Cecilia. I came to recognize the text of the *Lorica* of St. Patrick, the *Liber Usualis*, experienced the feasts of Candlemas and Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was through playing the flute that I began truly to live in the cycles of the Church, that I began to look for the changes in the colors of vestments. I began to learn how the Church keeps time. I started to notice the different Mass parts, the different eucharistic prayers. I learned what it means to use one’s talents to minister. I saw a metaphorical connection between the flute and an instrument of God. My spiritual life is now infused with meaning. I see my everyday interests as intimately linked with my faith.

If there is one thing that running marathons has taught me, it is endurance in the face of difficulty and adversity. It has taught me a certain level of mental toughness that spills over into other walks of life. It is often difficult to live as a young woman in the Church, and there is no shortage of challenges. But when one perseveres in pursuit of truth, in exploration of issues and questions, and when one is open to the Holy Spirit, ultimately a great love for the Church prevails.

And that is what keeps me in the race.

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# Adult Faith Formation: Will It Ever Catch On?

*Catechesis is not just for the young, but few parishes take it seriously enough*

BY JANE REGAN

**W**ith growing clarity and insistence, voices within the Church—both official and unofficial—speak repeatedly of the importance of the faith formation of adults to the life and vitality of the Church. Of course, adult faith formation is not a new concern. Most of the ecclesial documents that currently address the topic cite the General Catechetical Directory of 1971, which states that “catechesis for adults must be considered the chief form of catechesis” (No. 20). Most recently, the bishops of the United States approved and published *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*, in which they affirm that adult faith formation must be seen as “the central task in the catechetical enterprise” (No. 5).

So if we have been talking about this for over 30 years, why does the vision of vibrant parishes with adult faith formation at the center of community life still seem so far away? It is the rare parish that sees the faith formation of adults as an essential component of the faith formation of children and youth. Rarer still is the parish that places the faith of adults at the center of the work of catechesis.

Religious educators and pastoral ministers generally recognize the necessity and importance of adult faith formation. So why is there such a general mismatch between our convictions and our actions? I believe it is due to a failure to recognize the significant shifts in attitudes that this new focus requires. Surveying the adults in the parish concerning their needs and interests and then adding more programs or inviting in more speakers does not suffice, or at least will not serve as a firm foundation for placing adult formation at the center of the work of catechesis.

To add yet more programs to an already overextended parish calendar and parish staff does little to shift the focus

from children and youth to adults. It is more likely to place added stress on families who are already juggling multiple commitments. In addition, periodic programs unconnected to the life of the parish or the parish vision can easily reinforce the already well-established belief that adult catechesis is something on the side, to be addressed when there is time and energy to do it. Or, even worse, if the program is poorly attended or unenthusiastically received, it can be discouraging to all involved. Soon the attitude becomes: “We’ve tried that before—it doesn’t work. The adults in our parish just aren’t interested.” What is needed are not more programs but the genuine investment of focused energy and resources to make fundamental shifts in how we think about parish life, adult faith formation and the mission of the Church. I propose four central shifts.

*We’ve been proclaiming its importance for 30 years, but the vision of vibrant parishes putting adult faith formation front and center is still far off.*

This shift from children to adults is the most obvious and the one that is essential for moving adult faith formation to the center of parish communal life. But it does not mean that children and youth are set aside. Rather than minimizing the faith life of children, shifting the focus to adults provides a broader and more vibrant context within which to welcome children and youth into a life of faith.

Instead of having programs for children and youth to which adults are invited, consider the implications of having a program for adults to which children are welcomed as cherished guests.

First, it would affirm the fundamen-

tally adult demands of the Christian faith. Adults have the responsibility both to know their faith and to consider critically how the local parish or the wider Church is true to that faith. Adults are not merely recipients of a tradition; they are to be responsible and judicious participants in the ongoing shaping of the living tradition for the present time and context.

Second, it recognizes the faith-building potential of the family, or “domestic church.” When religious educators and catechetical documents proclaim that parents are the primary educators of their children in the faith, the expectation is that the adults in the family will give expression to their faith in the day-to-day realities of family life and that they are able to talk with their children about the presence of God in their lives, including God’s action within the family. Making these faith and

implications for Christian living and join with others in giving confident expression to their faith in the world.

## **From Information to Transformation**

The fundamental focus of adult religious education is not remedial; it is not about instructing adults in propositions of the tradition that they did not receive or have forgotten from their last experiences of formal religious education. In other dimensions of their lives, adults gain the information they need to function effectively: how to use a computer, how to negotiate the best interest rate for a home loan, how to read a quarterly retirement statement. The same is true of faith and Church membership.

But the information is not enough—it is not information for its own sake, but information that is in service of formation and transformation. By the way adult faith formation is structured, we can invite adults to look beyond the “what” of our tradition to the “so what?” What difference does this make to how I live my life, raise my children, spend my money and engage in the political dynamics of my town and state?

## **From Programs to Process**

The call for a new focus on adult faith formation is often interpreted as a call for more programs, more lectures or more Lenten series. While religious educators consistently speak against a “schooling model,” we often return to that model as we begin our planning for adults. We ask about available resources and programs that can be used effectively, whether we are in South Boston, Hillsborough, North Dakota, or Santa Monica, California.

But again, adult faith formation is not exclusively about information; it is primarily about providing opportunities, within a faith context, for adults to talk with other adults about things that matter. As such, the best process for adult faith formation is not lecture but conversation.

Sustained, critical conversation is an essential component of the faith formation of adults. It is sustained in that

it takes place regularly over an extended period of time, and each conversation is long enough to allow for a genuine interchange of experience, insights and commitments. It is critical in that the conversation is directed so that participants are invited to examine and talk about their beliefs and experiences of faith, consider the source of those beliefs and discuss what it means to live a Christian life.

The parish provides the context by working to create a space where conversation can be freely conducted. We can speak of the space needed for sustained critical conversation among adults as having three dimensions. The first is the physical space. Attention to comfort, aesthetics and details are all in service to the creation of a space where adults can gather to talk with other adults about things that matter. Next there is a psychic space, where hospitality is of the essence. It is to be a safe space where telling stories is welcome and recalled faith experiences are heard as just that, a person's experience. Finally, there needs to be temporal space, that is, time marked off in the rhythm of the parish that allows for the continuing conversation.

#### From Membership to Mission

The final shift, from membership to mission, is the most significant one for understanding in a new way the place of adult faith formation in the life of the Church. Why have few heeded the 30-year-old call for adult faith formation? At least part of the reason is that no one has been too sure why adult formation is so important. Bible study, prayer groups, Lenten lecture series all have been included under the general heading of adult education. Not as often included as adult education, but nonetheless part of the life of many parishes, are the various forms of formation for liturgical ministries and catechist meetings. Each in its own way has contributed to the faith of adults and enhanced the participants' sense of membership in the local faith community. But adult faith formation invites the believing community to look beyond their own community to the wider mission of the Church.

I propose that the renewed call to attend with care and diligence to the Church's mission of evangelization is a strong mandate and clear rationale for the work of adult faith formation. The goal of adult faith formation is not only to enrich the faith life of the

participants and strengthen the parish community. It does these things in response to the Church's primary task and reason for being: to evangelize. Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *On Evangelization* (1975), spoke clearly of this: "Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (No. 14). Adult catechesis has as its central goal forming, strengthening and challenging the adult faith community to be active participants in this task.

In November, four years will have passed since *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* was approved by the bishops of the United States and published for use in the dioceses and parishes across the country. In that document the bishops state: "We are well aware that placing ongoing adult faith formation at the forefront of our catechetical planning and activity will mean real change in emphasis and priorities" (No. 14). As we move forward in shaping parishes that are ever more clear signs of God's reign, we will do well

to embrace this insight and begin the sometimes difficult but always promising work of change.

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## On Being a Catholic Parent

*A father realizes that his religious faith and his role as a parent are tightly interwoven*

BY TOM MCGRATH

**T**o explain how my experience as a parent has been a spiritual path, I have to begin seven years before my first child was born.

At age 22, I was feeling more lost in my life than I've ever been before or since. My life was devoid of meaning and more than grim. In my lowest moment I latched onto one bit of Jesus' teaching that I'd learned in Catholic schools and I clutched it as if it were a life raft in a storm-tossed sea. The teaching: "Love one another as I have loved you."

With that as my guiding principle, I signed on to work as activities counselor at an orphanage for kids who were wards of the state. I suspect I turned to the work hoping for some kind of escape, but instead I came face to snot-nosed face with life in the form of 16 five- to nine-year-olds. What I found was a life that could have gone either way—drudgery or joy. On any given day, the job provided good amounts of both. But over the course of time, I learned that one of the best ways to become a better human being is to find yourself in charge of youngsters who need your love, attention and steady care.

I was blessed with work so relentless and demanding that I had to forget myself, at least for periods at a time,

and simply pour out my energy for others. My ennui evaporated in the face of games to be organized, marshmallows to be doled out and scraped shins and tender hearts to be soothed. These kids relied on me. It was abundantly clear I wasn't perfect at the job, but the boys forgave me my imperfections and went right ahead needing me. Over time I came to know just how much I needed them.

Forgetting myself and willingly caring for the basic bodily and spiritual needs of others reduced life to its essence, and reminded me of what I was so busy trying to forget—my own human vulnerability and need. And of course when it comes to spiritual growth, accepting one's vulnerability is where it all begins.

So I was somewhat prepared to find that being a parent would demand a lot from my faith, as well as do a lot for my faith. But I never expected fatherhood to be such a radical experience.

Being a parent begins in awe. And awe, which is akin to fear of the Lord, is a religious experience, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Even the most jaded and cynical new parent, it seems, is not immune to the miraculous nature of birth witnessed up close. Our defenses give way to awe.

Each of my daughters' births was an invitation to a new consciousness. These events confronted me with a truth I had previously overlooked or

forgotten: that we are all miracles, products of life's incessant desire to bring forth more life. It was God, the Creator, pulling off yet another glorious encore. Standing so close to this miracle irrupting into the world changes everything forever.

It seemed like much more than coincidence that Stevie Wonder's song "Isn't She Lovely?" was playing over the hospital's Muzak system when I first held my older daughter, moments after her birth on the first day of summer, the longest and brightest day of

*The communal nature of family life is a spiritual opportunity.*

the year in 1979. Holding her, I knew that my life and identity had changed forever, even unto eternity. She and I were now linked as father and daughter, always and everywhere. This both overwhelmed and redefined me. It called me to a new consciousness and a whole new set of challenges. Holding her in my arms, I realized how totally helpless she was and how dependent she would continue to be for years to come. I kept thinking, "When do I get off duty? Shouldn't there be someone

else in charge? Someone who knows what they're doing? God, help!" And so, after awe, my second response to parenthood was prayer.

Awe and prayer: two great ways to energize your faith. They are both invitations to a transformed awareness. Awe lets you know that there are truths in life to reckon with, realities worth paying attention to—like tenderness, commitment, honor and care, plus an aching, fierce love. And I've learned that prayer has been a ready companion during every age and stage through which I have accompanied my children. My struggles as a parent give me plenty to pray for, and my children's lives give me plenty to pray about.

My faith and my work as parent are tightly interwoven. It is hard to tease out where exactly my faith feeds my family life or vice versa. When it comes to family, not much is neat and tidy. As Barbara Coloroso, author of *Kids Are Worth It!* says, "Parenting is an inefficient vocation." It is much more about mystery than mastery. But over time, certain lessons have become clear. Here are a few.

Family life regularly reveals the patterns of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This cycle is not just a piece of historical data about Jesus, but is the seed of truth at the heart of Jesus' message. We call it the paschal mystery.

In family life, this pattern of dying and rising shows itself early. We see it in the twin parental disciplines of welcoming and letting go, which begin long before the child is even born. When the desire to conceive a new life comes into focus, the couple dies to its old life and becomes willing to disrupt their lives in ways they cannot even yet imagine—all in order to take on the holy work of caring for another human being.

My wife and I remember fondly how our first years of childless marriage were relatively carefree, how we'd work long hours all week and meet at a local pizza joint on Friday nights to catch up over drinks and dinner and then enjoy an uninterrupted romantic night at home. To everything there is a season, and the season of being married and childless was a good one. But we had to let that one pass away in order to enter fully into the season of making room for children in our life. Being a parent begins with welcoming, with making room. We create a space in our home or apartment, but also in our lives for them. We give up that den

where we were going to write the great American novel, or the home office where we can "finally get organized." Instead we buy Winnie-the-Pooh lamps, Bert-and-Ernie bedsheets and a "Toy Story" mobile. We shift our budget and cut back on our extracurricular activities in order to be present and available.

We welcome our child's new abilities and independence (the day you can stow the diaper bag permanently stands as a monumental day in most parents' lives), and yet those new capabilities mean we also loosen our controls. Soon they're playing down the block, then crossing the busy street, then going on overnights at friends' homes, off on dates, and the next thing you know you're dropping them off at college or watching them leave for their full-time work. Navigating these changes takes faith and trust. Parents do a lot of praying the day their teenage child drives off in a car for the

see not just aggravation but opportunity, not just burden but also grace.

Being a parent means that you live in community. A while back I visited a friend who is a monk. She lives in a cloistered community with two dozen other religious sisters who all get up before dawn for morning prayer. They spend their day in prayer, meditation and doing their share of mundane chores. I asked her what she found the most spiritually challenging aspect of her life in the monastery. She laughed as she responded, "The annoying personality traits of my fellow monks." To which I replied, "I hear ya!"

Living in a house with four adults and one bathroom means I get up early, and sometimes my day begins by praying mightily that my turn at the facilities will come quickly. We have our chores. We have our chairs at the kitchen table. We have our times of daily prayer and our times of silence, occasionally preceded by a slammed

lives and worships and plays and prays together, I am strengthened and emboldened to follow Jesus' way.

Being a parent offers opportunities to perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. When Jesus was asked who would qualify for heaven, he tells them those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless. These are the stuff of daily family life. Parents do this all the time.

Parents not only feed the hungry, they also know the hungry child's favorite kind of pickles. They not only give drink to the thirsty, but they deliver it in a favorite Winnie-the-Pooh cup. We clothe the naked (sometimes we want to follow author Barbara Coloroso's lead and have our kids wear a pin saying "I dressed myself!"), shelter them (and sometimes their lost friends), tend to them when they're sick, help them out of prisons, whether literal or emotional, and we show them what to do and what we believe when it is time to bury the dead. Sometimes, tragically, we have the unspeakably horrible task of burying our own children.

Perhaps more than anywhere else, this is where my faith most informs my work as a parent. This is where I get glimpses of God. "When did we see you hungry, Lord, and feed you?" We see Christ in the need, in the hunger. And when we respond to it with generosity of heart, we nourish not only our children and ourselves, but we nourish Christ in our midst.

In the end, I don't see my role as my kids' "first teacher of the faith" to be yet another developmental chore to check off—like seeing they get art lessons and music lessons or braces when they need them. I have hoped to raise my children immersed in a hearty broth of faith because God is our origin and our destiny, and it would be terribly sad for them to go through life unaware that they are, in Thomas Merton's words, "shining like the sun." I saw them shining that way the day they were born. I want them never to forget that.

*Tom McGrath is the author of At Home With Our Faith, a family spirituality newsletter from Claretian Publications. This text is adapted from an essay in Professions of Faith: Living and Working as a Catholic (Sheed & Ward: 2002).*

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*I was somewhat prepared to find that being a parent would demand a lot from my faith, but I never expected it to be such a radical experience.*

first time, new driver's license in hand, to round up his or her friends to go who-knows-where.

Parental welcoming and letting go extends to our children's personalities as well. At our best, we welcome who they are rather than who we want them to be. The Ph.D. mom learns to welcome the daughter whose highest aspiration is to follow in the latest pop star's footsteps. The sports-loving dad discovers his son has a passion for science and wouldn't know Sammy Sosa from Knute Rockne. When we can die to our expectations (especially those we didn't realize we had), we are able to rise to the new and glorious life that awaits us in truth.

And we often need to die to our own traits that get in the way of being the parent we want to be. For some, this means nurturing the patience, consistency or stability they never believed they had. For others, it might include facing up to a debilitating addiction (to drugs, alcohol, work, worry) they'd rather believe "isn't hurting anyone." Family life is loaded with instances of dying and rising to new life. Practicing my faith helps me look at my life and

door. And we certainly each have our annoying personality traits that outsiders might find charming but don't wear so well day after day.

The communal nature of family life is a spiritual opportunity. People used to ask an acquaintance of mine how it turned out her family was so close. She always replied, "We live in a small house." There was no getting away from one another. That can breed contempt, or it can promote intimacy and care. My faith gives me tools—humility, forgiveness (both given and received), respect for the dignity of each individual, patience and even a sense of humor—to navigate the straits of family life with a certain amount of grace.

As a Catholic, I also know that my family is merely one community with many other larger communities, including our parish, our neighborhood, society and the Church around the world. We are even part of the communion of saints, who witness to a way of living and a set of beliefs that give our lives meaning. On our own it would be easier to let these values slide away. Living in a community that

# Handing on the Faiths

*Interfaith couples face the challenge of practicing and passing on two religious faiths*

BY MARIANNE COMFORT

**A**s they gather around the dinner table each evening, the Yala family of Oak Park, Illinois gives thanks to God in both English and Arabic. Dana bows her head and intertwines the fingers of both hands, just as she was taught as a young Catholic. Her husband, Mohamed, keeps his hands open with palms up, as he learned as a Muslim growing up in Algeria. Their daughter follows Dana's example, while their son switches from one form of sitting in prayer to the other.

"In that moment every night when we pray together we feel that we incorporate both traditions," says Dana Yala.

Such creativity is an important ingredient for successful interfaith marriages, say Catholics married to non-Christians.

Increasingly, interfaith couples actively participate in each other's places of worship and celebrate holidays from both faith traditions in their homes. They select symbols and rituals they both can agree on for their weddings and for ceremonies that dedicate their children to God or recognize their children's coming of age. Some Catholic-Jewish couples have designed combined Catholic-Jewish religious education programs and developed joint Baptism and baby-naming ceremonies that are recognized as valid sacraments by the Catholic Church.

While interfaith marriages are nothing new—especially between Christians and Jews—they are becoming increasingly common in our society that is more diverse and integrated, say experts in interfaith relations. No longer are Catholics growing up in predominantly Catholic neighborhoods or attending predominantly Catholic schools. They are meeting non-Catholics—and non-Christians—on playgrounds and in school.

Also changing, say the experts and interfaith couples themselves, is each partner's insistence on retaining some of his or her faith traditions and pass-

ing them on to their children.

In the past, couples tended to choose to raise their children in one faith. One spouse may have been more involved in his or her faith than the other; one spouse may have converted to the other's religion; or, in some rare instances, the two chose as a family to participate in a third, neutral tradition. Often the family chose the easiest path: observing no religion at all.

Now, however, couples are seeking out new options that allow them to share two faiths in one house and immerse their children in both traditions.

"It's the openness of society. Interfaith marriage was taboo...until fairly recently," says Joan Hawxhurst of Dovetail Publishing in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which publishes a journal by and for Christian-Jewish families. Also, she says, "people are less willing to give up something that's important to them to appease the extended family than they used to be."

Statistics about interfaith families are difficult to come by, but researchers estimate that there are about a million Christian-Jewish couples in the United States. About a quarter of them are Catholics married to Jews.

This is a more touchy subject for Jews than for Catholics, as Jews fear the gradual loss of religious identity, researchers say. According to a 1990 Jewish population study, more than half of all Jews are marrying outside their faith, and only 28 percent of Jews who marry non-Jews are raising their children as Jews.

Catholic Church law permits clergy to preside alongside rabbis at interfaith marriages. But the national Orthodox and Conservative Jewish bodies forbid their rabbis from officiating at such ceremonies, and only a minority of Reform rabbis are willing, say Jewish scholars.

Within the past 15 years, however, there has been a "radical shift" toward including and welcoming interfaith families into synagogues, according to Egon Mayer, director of the Jewish Outreach Institute at the City University of New York's Center for Jewish

Studies. Synagogues of all but the most Orthodox branches are offering classes in Jewish holidays for non-Jewish partners and hosting discussion groups for interfaith couples, he says.

The openness varies by geographic region, Mayer says. The East Coast tends to be more traditional, and it could be difficult to find an Orthodox congregation that would welcome an interfaith family. In the larger cities of the West Coast, some Orthodox rabbis have chosen to include these families instead of taking the risk of alienating the Jewish spouse.

"People want to be present, want to have the benefits of a communal life but not at the expense of their families," Mayer says.

and encourage discussions about differing values. A few support groups for Catholic-Jewish couples around the country also help with creating a ceremony that can be meaningful to people of both faiths—and then with the issues that come up well after the marriage ceremony.

In Chicago, for instance, Dan and Abbe Josephs helped establish a support group for Catholic-Jewish couples at Old St. Patrick's Church about 10 years ago. Started with 10 couples, the group has since grown to about 530 couples from all over the metropolitan area. Participants include dating couples as well as those who have been married for 25 years.

The group meets monthly to dis-

*Increasingly, interfaith couples participate in each other's places of worship and celebrate holidays from both faith traditions in their homes.*

The Catholic Church is also reaching out to interfaith couples.

Mixed-religion couples no longer have to commit in writing to raise their children as Catholics. The Church now requires only that the Catholic spouse verbally agree to do his or her best to raise the children in the Catholic faith—and lets each couple decide how that would best be accomplished.

Canon law ordinarily requires a couple to marry before a priest or deacon in a church. But interfaith couples may receive a dispensation form, out of recognition that a secular setting or a secular presider at the ceremony may be more comfortable for all the families involved.

Some dioceses have established marriage-preparation programs designed specifically for Catholics engaged to non-Catholics. These programs—which include Catholics marrying other Christians as well as those marrying non-Christians—explain the Catholic Mass to the non-Catholics

discuss such topics as raising children, celebrating holidays, and dealing with extended families. Three times a year couples meet to discuss dating issues or wedding plans. Once a year the group hosts a seder to teach non-Jews about the ritual Passover meal.

The group, which includes a priest and rabbi as consultants on religious matters, also clears up religious misconceptions and disentangles faith-based beliefs from customs to help couples find room for compromise, says Dan Josephs, who is Catholic.

The group has helped create a more hospitable environment for interfaith couples. It has even established a religious-education school at Old St. Patrick's that offers students a grounding in the traditions, symbols, and rituals of both faiths. The school has five classrooms, with a total enrollment of 49 children, the oldest of whom are in the seventh grade. "It wasn't a blending of faiths," explains Eileen Smith, one of the school's founders. "It was

offering full rituals and faith traditions in a safe environment.”

Overall, Catholics and Jews have much common ground, making it less than surprising that they are increasingly marrying, researchers and the couples themselves say. Both faith traditions rely on rich rituals and on theological interpretations instead of just on biblical teachings, factors that distinguish them from many Protestant denominations. Many Jews and Catholics also share a Mediterranean cultural heritage.

Marriages between Catholics and other non-Christians pose new challenges—and are only just beginning to get attention, researchers say.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Islamic Circle of North America have cosponsored a gathering of Muslims and Catholics from several dioceses and Islamic centers in the Northeast. Participants discussed marriage and family life as a basis for possible future cooperation on interfaith families, according to John Borelli of the bishops’ staff for interreligious affairs.

Some individual dioceses and national groups of Catholic family-life ministers also report that they are just beginning to look into how to support a broader spectrum of interfaith couples.

#### Cultural Symbols

Chester Gillis, a Georgetown University theologian and a specialist in interfaith marriage, notes that challenges begin with the wedding ceremony. Muslims, for instance, don’t permit religious symbols in their worship space and consider prayers to the Christian Trinity as violations of their belief in one God. Hindus, meanwhile, have multiple gods and symbols.

Cultural customs, such as dietary and alcohol restrictions, complicate things further, Gillis says. People need to deal with practical matters such as: What do you do with Grandma at the wedding or the reception?

Religious and cultural differences are sometimes difficult to disentangle, says Dana Yala. “It’s an ongoing challenge. I don’t know if I’ll ever feel we’ve worked it all out.”

Dana says she focuses on the similarities between their faiths, not their differences. She reads Bible stories to the children and shows them religious videos that incorporate the shared stories of the creation, Abraham, and Mary’s virgin birth.

Older interfaith couples, meanwhile, are confronting questions of funerals and burials. A Christian spouse may worry about not knowing the Jewish Prayer for the Dead, which is recited as a sign of respect for the deceased. And spouses wanting to be buried together may have to decide on a neutral cemetery.

Mary and Ned Rosenbaum of Carlisle, Pennsylvania provide a model of how interfaith couples can weather the years. Married in 1963, the couple confronted various challenges without the assistance of publications or support groups.

At the time, Ned, who is Jewish, was not religiously active. They each signed papers agreeing to raise any children as Catholics, but Mary says she defined that in her heart as exposing the chil-

dren to both religions even after they were baptized.

Now their oldest son doesn’t practice any religion and their younger son is interested in Christianity generally. Their daughter, who decided at age 13 to convert to Judaism, distanced herself from Catholicism at age 10 when she heard a prayer about Jesus dying “for us men.” “Her head went up, and she said, ‘Didn’t he die for me, too?’” Mary recalls.

The conversion was a joyous event, she says. “I didn’t see it as turning away [from me]. I saw it as embracing an older religion that has roots for my own. It’s more of a problem for me that my older son has not chosen either [religion] and is not raising his child in any religion.”

As Ned deepened his Jewish spiri-

tuality over the years, the couple has embraced both traditions in their own lives. They keep a kosher kitchen and observe the Sabbath with the lighting of candles and reciting of prayers at dinner. Mary has served as executive director of the Reform synagogue, and they both serve on the Harrisburg Diocese’s marriage-preparation board.

“His discovery of his Jewishness brought us closer together as we shared a spiritual bond,” Mary explains. “To me, the real ‘mixed’ marriage is between someone who is religious and someone who isn’t.”

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## Crisis Highlights Catholicism’s Troubled Theology of Children

*The absence—or unstable presence—of children in Catholic culture*

BY ROBERT A. ORSI

Whatever else the dreadful crisis still unfolding in the American Catholic Church is about—and the news media, the courts, the Church hierarchy in Rome and in the United States, and an increasingly infuriated laity have offered different interpretations—it is fundamentally about children.

It is about children’s vulnerability to adult power and to adult fantasy in religious contexts and it is about the absence of real children in these settings—real children as opposed to “children” as the projections of adult needs and desires or “children” as extensions of adult religious interiority. The necessary response to the crisis must be about children, too. We must ask: What accounts for the strange doubleness of children in Catholic culture, for their simultaneous presence and absence?

There has always been a deep ambivalence in Christianity about the spiritual and moral status of children.

St. Augustine thought that children were naturally depraved; other theologians suggested that children were good only because they lacked capacity and opportunity for sin; others found children angelic and innocent. Christian conceptions of children throughout the Middle Ages “oscillate between extremes,” writes church historian Janet L. Nelson, “because children’s behavior was taken to indicate good or bad supernatural power: on the one hand, lack of control suggested diabolical influence, on the other, weakness and unprotectedness suggested access to the divine.” Nelson concludes that the child was a protean figure to be “exploited in legal or political as well as moralizing contexts.” In the Christian imagination, the child-as-holy-innocent and the child-as-demonic-other have spun around each other in an unsteady dance.

It was the child-as-holy-innocent, however, that came to dominate European and American Christian understanding in the modern era. Children were brutalized in industrial workplaces; in European colonies they suffered the same fates as their parents

(modern times have not been kind to children). And in these same years, the European and American middle classes elaborated an extensive fantasy of childhood innocence in the idioms of romanticism, religion, and consumerism.

Among Catholics, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the age of the child. Catholics thrilled to the sight of children in ecstatic communication with the Virgin and to the sound of their voices speaking her messages of consolation and warning. That Mary chose to reveal herself to children at Lourdes and Fatima and elsewhere was taken by the Church as proof of the validity of the events—because how could innocent children deceive anyone—and by critics as proof of the Church’s intolerable and decadent corruption of the minds and hearts of simple people. The age of the child had its pope, Giuseppe Sarto, Pius X, who was determined to bring children into full participation in the life of the Church. Pius radically lowered the age at which children might make their first communion (in a widely reported story, the pope himself gave the host to a 4-year-old boy), encouraged young-

sters to receive often, and promoted the cult of the baby Jesus (to whom the Pope was devoted).

Catholics prided themselves on offering their children direct access to the sacred, not what they imagined as the scaled-down, make-believe, Sunday-school version of Christianity given Protestant children. Childhood became the model of adult faith in the age of children. In an allocution in 1929 on St. Theresa of the Little Flower, whose autobiography was a major inspiration for the age of the child, Pope Benedict XV summed up the ethos of the period: “In spiritual childhood is the secret of sanctity for all the faithful of the Catholic world.”

Pope Pius told an audience of French children in April 1912 that their guardian angels every day beheld the face of God “in the souls of these little ones where God is reflected as in the mirror of their innocence, their splendor, their purity.” The comment reveals the dilemma of real children in the age of the child: Innocence is a mirror—but there is nothing in a mirror other than what is reflected in it. Innocence is empty. “Childhood can be made a wonderfully hollow category,” literary historian James Kincaid writes of Victorian fantasies of the innocent child, “able to be filled with anyone’s overflowing emotions, not least overflowing passion.” The emptiness of the discourse of innocence creates a space into which adult desire can be projected. The innocent child is bound to adult desire; he or she does not exist apart from this.

This is not to say that there were not countervailing modern accounts of the child in Catholic and Protestant cultures. When Christians aligned with progressive political initiatives in defense of young people’s rights, for example, they developed richer accounts of children’s real lives that challenged normative religious views. Nor am I saying that the hollowing out of the child in modern Christian culture is the only source of children’s distress and oppression. Many of the children abused by the priests assigned them by Boston’s bishops were poor and dark-skinned; in these cases, race and class deepened children’s invisibility. The demon child endured into modernity, moreover, the necessary shadow of the holy innocent. The innocent child is uncanny, and adults are made anxious by the emptiness they themselves have imposed on children. When this hap-

pens, innocence is transposed into evil. But the major trope of the modern Christian conception of the child is innocence, with all that this brings.

Let me give an example of children as the objects of adult desire in modern Catholic culture. The decision of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore virtually to mandate that American parents send their children to parochial schools under penalty of sin ensured that Catholic youngsters and the adult religious assigned the task of forming them in the faith spent a great deal of time together, much more so than religious figures and children in any other American religious culture. Children and adults watched one another very closely in this world, the inevitable result of their daily proximity, and one of the things that adults searched children for were signs of religious vocation. It was common before the Second Vatican Council for youngsters to enter

religious fantasies and the lives of children—this is children’s fate in Christian modernity. Children may have been safer in premodern Christian contexts where they were not burdened by adult fantasies of their sacredness or by the peculiar attentions that follow the imposition of holiness.

religious fantasies and the lives of children—this is children’s fate in Christian modernity. Children may have been safer in premodern Christian contexts where they were not burdened by adult fantasies of their sacredness or by the peculiar attentions that follow the imposition of holiness.

The problem, then, is not celibacy, homosexuality, or liberalism but the unstable presence/absence of children in a religious and political culture that denies them the full complexity of their experience and renders them porous to adult need and desire. The necessary response to the crisis in the Church is to find ways of making children more authentically and autonomously present in contemporary Christian contexts and of genuinely protecting them.

The issue at stake, in other words, is children’s rights in religious environments. (I have not read a single commentator on the Catholic crisis say that what is needed are mechanisms for giving children greater voice in the Church.) Making children truly present means recognizing first of all their separateness from adults (at the same time honoring the bonds of love, responsibility, and dependence that form between the generations). Clearly defined boundaries between children and adults are essential especially in religious contexts where not only the boundaries tend to be weak but also the absence of such boundaries between generations is often seen as morally and spiritually appropriate and good.

Children are not extensions of their parents’ religious worlds. Churches might begin a season of reflection on their own theological traditions and moral practices (the resources for this are becoming available in the emerging study of children’s religious history) to examine how theology and denominational practices deny children’s lives and experience and what they have affirmed of children’s lives. At a minimum, such a season of reflection calls for honoring children in the fullness and complexity of their real lives in the circumstances of the present and in their autonomy.

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### *Making children truly present means recognizing first of all their separateness from adults.*

religious life at a very early age, directly out of elementary school; these special children were identified as such by adult religious, sometimes taking hold of children’s own religious fervor, sometimes imposing their vision on children.

The children singled out for this special kind of religious attention were marked off from the rest of their peers and usually found themselves relentlessly pursued, the objects of a long and complex seduction process that involved special privileges in school, little gifts of religious objects, special field trips, and the delight of adult attention. Some children found this intense religious scrutiny flattering, but many others were terrified by it.

The hollowing dynamics of innocence and the absent/present “child” generated by them are evident across American Christianity. There are two dominant discourses about children among contemporary American Christians and post-Christian practitioners (in New Age and Pagan groups, for instance). The view that children are innately spiritual, which develops out of the nineteenth-century discourse of the holy innocent, holds liberal imaginations; the view of chil-

and that children speak with prophetic voices. In such fantasies of childhood spirituality, maturation can only be seen as a fall from grace; holy children cannot really grow up.

Adult fantasies of innately holy children deny youngsters the full range of human experience and emotion. The fantasy is predicated on children not having normal lives (normal lives are the privilege and prerogative of the adults who nostalgically situate children in a presocial space of holiness). The fear that children may indeed have more complicated lives, emotions, experiences than is allowed them by fantasies of their natural holiness—that in fact they might be just like adults in this regard—produces the damned children that populate the American gothic as well as the moral hysteria that periodically grips American Christians, liberal and conservative. The discourse of the holy child generates as its necessary counterpart the fantasy of the dark teenager that so haunts contemporary imaginations; the dark teen is the holy child come to adolescence. The trope of innocence, the hollowing out of children’s own interiorities, desires, and autonomy, the blurring of boundaries between adult

# Daughter, Dad Tangle Over Religion

*Conservative Catholic thinker and adult daughter think about their faith together*

BY DEAN SARNECKI

**H**ave you ever received from one of your children a question regarding the existence of God or about God that has stumped you?

Have you fallen back on the old “because that is what you are supposed to believe,” or, “that is what the Church says,” or, even more honestly, “go ask your mother!”

I have to admit, both as a parent and a teacher, I am often posed questions that I cannot answer. While I try to avoid evasive answers, I wish I could provide the answer that would lead the questioner to solid faith or at least to lead them to inquire further into their own beliefs.

This is somewhat the situation that Michael and Jana Novak found themselves in. However, unlike my children or students, when Jana, a recent college graduate, asked her father, Michael, an eminent Catholic theologian, to answer some deep questions regarding faith, Church and morals, he was able

to provide for her clear direction and responses.

The result is their book, *Tell Me Why: A Father Answers His Daughter's Questions About God* (Pocket Books, 1998), a dialogue between father and daughter. It started quite innocently when Michael was attending a conference in Warsaw and received a fax from Jana.

Jana had asked for a couple of books on religion before Michael had left and a few days later a long fax, filled with questions about God, faith, Church and religion, arrived. Michael leapt at the chance to answer his daughter.

Due to the number and depth of the questions being answered, it was decided by Michael to complete the activity as a book.

Michael Novak had written a similar text in the 1960s entitled *Belief and Unbelief*. Over a period of time, discussions between father and daughter, and a number of rewrites, the final product was completed and reads somewhat like an extended dialogue.

I found the book intriguing. The questions posed by Jana are real ques-

tions and presented in a way that I encounter as a teacher in a Catholic school on a daily basis.

Her attitudes and opinions are those of a young person raised in the 1980s and '90s. Her interest and investigation in popular New Age philosophies and the practice of moral relativism found among her friends are not uncommon among teenagers in Alberta today.

Jana makes it clear from the beginning that she struggles with much of “traditional” Christianity and Catholicism. And while Michael is a Catholic theologian, he does present in his responses an ecumenical attitude.

His ability to draw from various Christian, Jewish and Muslim teachings to represent the nature of the divine is excellent. The Jewish roots of Christianity and what we share in common heritage with the Jews is clearly presented.

Make no mistake, however, Michael Novak is Catholic and this comes through clearly in his defence of specific Catholic doctrines and customs. He strongly defends the Church's hierarchical structure, the ban on women

priests, the role of women in the Church, and Catholic moral teachings on contraception and abortion.

Michael Novak's depth and scope of knowledge and reading is immense. He quotes from a variety of sources, depending heavily on C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton, who wrote many defences of Catholic teachings in the early part of the 20th century.

In regards to biblical material, Novak relies on Raymond Brown (Christian Scriptures) and John McKenzie (Hebrew Scriptures).

I found this to be an excellent resource book as an introduction to Christianity, specifically Catholic Christianity. This would be an excellent tool for use in RCIA and for teachers of religious education who are trying to understand and share with others the basic issues of faith and belief.

I did not necessarily agree with all of his positions regarding ecclesiology and some of his conservative views; in fact, often I found myself siding more with Jana in her questioning. In general, Michael and Jana Novak have produced an interesting and readable text dealing with basic theology.

*Dean Sarnecki teaches religious studies at Archbishop Jordan Catholic High School in Alberta, Canada.*

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