

GENERATIONS OF AMERICAN CATHOLICS

I want to commend Terry for making “generations” the theme of this year’s meeting. By picking that theme, he is asking us to think about the research showing that generation is an important influence on Catholics’ beliefs and practices. He also is inviting us to explore the effects that generation might have on the way Catholic theologians think about faith, morals, and the Church. These are timely and important invitations.

Terry has asked Maureen and me to get the discussion started. My job is to put “generations” in a sociological frame. First, I will identify four generations of American Catholics and describe the formative experiences of each one. Second, I will show that these formative experiences have lasting effects on the way Catholics think and act. Finally, I will conclude with some of the implications I think these findings have for theologians. When I am done, I will turn things over to Maureen, who will offer a theological response.

FOUR GENERATIONS AND THEIR FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

As I have said, American Catholics belong to four different generations.¹ Pre-Vatican II Catholics were born in or before 1940. They are now about 17 percent of all adult Catholics. The Vatican II generation was born between 1941 and 1960. It is about one-third of Catholics. Post-Vatican II Catholics were born

¹See William V. D’Antonio and Anthony Pogorelc, *Voices of the Faithful* (New York: Crossroads, 2007); William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: The New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Lanham MD: Alta Mira Press, 2001); William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Ruth A. Wallace, *Laity: American and Catholic* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1996); James D. Davidson, “The Catholic Church in the United States: 1950 to the Present,” in *The Church Confronts Modernity*, ed. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, 177-207 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 2007); Ibid., *Catholicism in Motion: The Church in American Society* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2005); Ibid., “American Catholics: Three Generations, One Church,” *Liguorian* (January 2000): 12-16; James D. Davidson, Andrea S. Williams, Richard A. Lamanna, Jan Stenftenagel, Kathleen Maas Weigert, William J. Whalen, and Patricia Wittberg, *The Search for Common Ground* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Books, 1997); and Dean R. Hoge, William Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan Gonzales, *Young Adult Catholics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

Generations of American Catholics

Pre-Vatican II (*born in or before 1940*)



Vatican II (*1941-1960*)



Post-Vatican II (*1961-1982*)



Millennial (*1983 to present*)



between 1961 and 1982. They are 40 percent of the Catholic population. The millennial generation includes people who have been born since 1983. They are about 8 percent of adult Catholics.

In some respects, these generations have had very similar formative experiences. Most American Catholics have been raised in the United States, in Catholic families, and in Catholic parishes. Most also have been taught that belief in the Trinity, Mary's role as the Mother of God, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, Christ's real presence in the sacraments, and concern for poor are core elements of the Catholic faith.

However, in other respects, the generations have had very different experiences during their formative years. By that I mean the experiences people have when they are in their teens and early 20s—the years when they are separating themselves from their parents, forming their own identities, and making important decisions about their educations, the kinds of work they will do, and the kinds of lives they want to live.² I will emphasize three differences: differences

²See Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Wade

Formative Influences

<i>Generation</i>	Institutional Church in the U.S.A.	Status of American Catholics	Leaders' Control of Laity
<i>Pre-Vatican II</i>	Culture I	Lower, Outsiders	High
<i>Vatican II</i>	Culture II > I	Middle, Outsiders/Insiders	Medium
<i>Post-Vatican II</i>	Culture I = II	Upper-Middle, Insiders	Low
<i>Millennial</i>	Culture I > II	Upper-Middle Insiders	Low

in the cultural orientation of the institutional Church, differences in the status of American Catholics, and differences in church leaders' control over the laity.

Pre-Vatican II Generation

The pre-Vatican II generation's formative years were in the 1930s and '40s. When these Catholics were coming of age, Pius XII was pope, and the institu-

Clark Roof, A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation (San Francisco: Harper, 1993); *Ibid., Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Douglas A. Walrath, *Frameworks: Patterns of Living and Believing Today* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1987); and Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. P. Kecskemeti, chapter 7 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

tional Church emphasized what Kennedy³ has called Culture I Catholicism. Culture I Catholicism stressed the importance of Catholic identity, the core doctrines contained in the Nicene Creed, sacraments—especially, the Eucharist—and concern for the poor. It also viewed the Catholic Church as the one true Church and as a hierarchical institution headed by clergy who had ultimate authority on matters of faith and morals. Record numbers of priests, sisters, and brothers embraced this understanding of Catholicism and used the *Baltimore Catechism* to pass it on to the laity. Laypeople were taught to practice their faith, support the Church, and comply with its teachings (in other words, to “pray, pay, and obey”).

Most American Catholics were either immigrants or the sons and daughters of European immigrants. They desperately wanted to prove that they were good Americans. However, they were below average in education, occupational status, and income. They also had to deal with considerable anti-Catholicism. They were low in status, and they were religious outsiders.

The Church was their refuge. In cities throughout the Northeast and Midwest, Catholics could turn to an elaborate infrastructure consisting of a whole array of specifically Catholic organizations, such as parishes, schools, youth groups, hospitals, and professional associations for social as well as spiritual support.⁴ And they did. The priests and nuns who were the leaders of this infrastructure were more educated than the laity was and were seen as having higher status in the Church. Laypeople looked up to them and taught their children to obey these religious authorities.⁵ These conditions gave priests and sisters tremendous control over the laity. The proof was in the pudding. There were extraordinarily high levels of religious participation and “doctrinal orthodoxy” in the pre-Vatican II period.⁶

Vatican II Generation

As members of the Vatican II generation were coming of age in the 1950s and '60s, Pius XII died and was succeeded by John XXIII, who surprised everyone when he announced his intention to convene Vatican II. Core teachings such as Incarnation, Resurrection, Jesus' Real Presence in the sacraments, Mary

³Eugene Kennedy, *Tomorrow's Catholics, Yesterday's Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

⁴Joseph A. Varacalli, *The Catholic Experience in America*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006); Chester A. Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and John Cogley and Rodger Van Allen, *Catholic America: Expanded and Updated Edition* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1986).

⁵Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961).

⁶Joseph Fichter, *Social Relations in the Urban Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Ibid., *Southern Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); D'Antonio, et al, *Voices of the Faithful*, Davidson, “The Catholic Church in the United States,” and Lenski, *Religious Factor*.

as the Mother of God, and concern for the poor did not change, but many other things did.⁷ Culture I Catholicism persisted, but in the documents of Vatican II, the emphasis shifted toward Culture II Catholicism.⁸ There was a shift from seeing the Church as a hierarchical institution to seeing it as the People of God; from an emphasis on ordination to an emphasis on baptism; from laypeople passively complying with Church teachings to laypeople taking more responsibility for their own faith; and from seeing the world as a place to avoid to seeing it as a place we should participate in.

The status of American Catholics also was changing. With the assistance of parochial schools, Catholics climbed into the middle class. Anti-Catholicism also declined, and Catholics began the transition from being outsiders to being insiders.

As Catholics moved up and toward the center of American life, they increasingly worked in non-Catholic settings, had non-Catholic friends, entered into interfaith marriages, and sent their kids to public schools. They did not turn to the Church quite as much as earlier generations did. For these reasons, but also because of Vatican II, the pre-Vatican II Catholic infrastructure also began to change. Fewer and fewer Catholic schools were built; some were closed. Enrollments in parochial schools leveled off, then began to decline. Other Catholic organizations, such as the American Catholic Sociological Society, were radically transformed or disappeared altogether.

As Catholics became more fully integrated into American society, they also experienced the cultural revolution of the 1960s. In the spirit of the time, they learned to be skeptical of all institutions, including the Church. As parents, they put less emphasis on obedience and more emphasis on thinking for one's self.⁹ The result was that church leaders began to lose their control over the laity. They could no longer produce the high levels of religious participation and doctrinal conformity they once did.¹⁰ This was most apparent in the laity's negative response to *Humanae Vitae*.

Post-Vatican II Generation

As members of the post-Vatican II generation came of age in the 1970s and '80s, Pope Paul VI was succeeded by John Paul I, who was pope for one month, then John Paul II, who was pope for 27 years (1978 to 2005). Among other aspects of his papacy, such as his very pastoral approach to young people and

⁷Melissa Wilde, *Vatican II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); and Davidson, "The Catholic Church in the United States."

⁸See Kennedy, *Tomorrow's Catholics*.

⁹Duane F. Alwin, "Trends in Parental Socialization Values: Detroit, 1958-1983" *American Journal of Sociology* 90 (1984): 359-382.

¹⁰See D'Antonio, et al, *Voices of the Faithful* and Davidson, "The Catholic Church in the United States."

people of other faiths, John Paul II wanted to restore order in what he considered an unruly Church. Progressives like Hans Kung, Leonardo Boff, Raymond Hunt-hausen, and Charlie Curran were disciplined. In 1993, *Veritatis Splendor* reaffirmed natural law. In 1994, the new *Catechism* codified what the Church stands for. In 2000, *Dominus Iesus* reasserted the traditional view that the fullness of truth is found in the Catholic Church. Episcopal appointments went to people who were Culture I-oriented. Although Culture II Catholicism persisted at mid to lower levels of the institutional church, there was increasing emphasis on Culture I Catholicism at the highest levels.

Catholics continued making progress up the social ladder. This progress was more pronounced among white Catholics of European descent than it was among African-Americans and the post-1965 wave of immigrants, but, by the 1980s, Catholics were clearly in the upper-middle class. They also had shed their status as outsiders. They became more fully integrated into American society and more comfortable with American culture, including its emphases on individualism and voluntarism.¹¹

The pre-Vatican II Catholic infrastructure continued to decline. So did the laity's dependence on the Church. Although church leaders reasserted their authority, Catholics increasingly emphasized the value of thinking for one's self.¹² Leaders could not convince the laity to accept the institutional Church's renewed emphasis on Culture I Catholicism.¹³ Levels of church participation slipped even further, and doctrinal differences became even more pronounced—especially on sexual and reproductive issues.¹⁴

Millennial Generation

Millennials have been born since 1983. The oldest millennials, who are now in their early twenties, came of age under John Paul II. Younger millennials, who

¹¹Dean R. Hoge, William Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan Gonzales, *Young Adult Catholics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); David G. Myers, *The American Paradox* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Duane F. Alwin, "Religion and Parental Child Rearing Orientations: Evidence of Catholic-Protestant Convergence," *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1986): 412-440; and *Ibid.*, "Trends in Parental Socialization Values."

¹²Alwin, "Religion and Parental Child Rearing Orientations."

¹³Tom Beaudoin, "What Young Theologians Owe Their Elders," *National Catholic Reporter* (October 31, 2003).

¹⁴See Davidson, "The Catholic Church in the United States"; D'Antonio, et al, *Voices of the Faithful*; Hoge, et al, *Young Adult Catholics*; and George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli, *The American Catholic People: Their Beliefs, Practices, and Values* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987).

are still in junior high and high school, are coming of age under Pope Benedict XVI. Both popes have emphasized Culture I Catholicism. Their influence is felt in the U.S., where cardinals and bishops continue to reemphasize the authority of the clergy and the laity's need to comply with church teachings.

Catholics' overall rate of upward mobility is slowing down as the Church absorbs the new wave of Asian and Hispanic immigrants, but Catholics are still in the upper-middle class.¹⁵ Although they still face pockets of anti-Catholicism, it is nothing compared to what their ancestors faced 75 to 100 years ago. For the most part, Catholics are highly integrated in American society and highly assimilated into its pro-individual, pro-choice culture.¹⁶

The pre-Vatican II infrastructure continues to erode. Even as the Catholic population increases, the number of seminaries, convents, and parochial schools declines. Laypeople also are less dependent on the Church. They do not think church leaders are any wiser or holier than they are, especially in the wake of the sex abuse scandal.¹⁷ In raising their children, Catholic parents continue to stress the importance of thinking for one's self.¹⁸ As a result, church leaders have less and less control over the laity's lives. Laypeople are expressing little interest in leaders' emphasis on Culture I Catholicism. Relatively low levels of religious practice and relatively high levels of doctrinal disagreement persist.¹⁹

LASTING EFFECTS

These experiences have had two kinds of lasting effects. First, to this day, there is general agreement on issues that most of us would say are core elements of our faith, such as belief in the Trinity, Incarnation, Christ's death and resurrection, Jesus' real presence in the sacraments, Mary's role as the Mother of God, and concern for the poor.²⁰ Most Catholics not only recognize these as the core

¹⁵James D. Davidson and Ralph E. Pyle, "Social Class," in *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh, 185-205 (New York: Springer, 2006); and Ralph E. Pyle, "Trends in Religious Stratification: Have Religious Group Socioeconomic Distinctions Declined in Recent Decades?" *Sociology of Religion* 67 (2006): 61-79.

¹⁶Thomas Rausch, *Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006); and Hoge, et al, *Young Adult Catholics*.

¹⁷James D. Davidson and Dean R. Hoge, "Catholics After the Scandal," *Commonweal* CXXXI (November 19, 2004): 13-19.

¹⁸Brian Starks and Robert V. Robinson, "Who Values the Obedient Child Now?" *Social Forces* 84 (2005): 343-359.

¹⁹Davidson, "The Catholic Church in the United States"; D'Antonio, et al, *Voices of the Faithful*, Christian Smith, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and James Heft and James D. Davidson, "The Mission of Catholic High Schools and Today's Millennials: Three Suggestions," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*. 6 (June 2003): 423-437.

²⁰D'Antonio, et al, *Voices of the Faithful*; and Davidson, *Catholicism in Motion*.

of their faith, they also agree with these teachings. When it comes to these issues, American Catholics and the institutional Church are on the same page.²¹

Second, these formative experiences have produced generational differences in the way Catholics think about their faith and their Church. I will emphasize three effects: (1) what Catholics think it takes to be a good Catholic, (2) their commitment to the Church, and (3) their views on the locus of moral authority. These certainly are not the only possible outcomes, but they are the three on which we have the most longitudinal data, and they are good indicators of how laypeople think about other issues of faith and morals.

As I go along, I will show the difference between generational effects and age effects. The two are very different. Generational effects have to do with the consequences of the experiences people have during their formative years. Age effects have to do with the consequences of passing through the various stages of the life cycle.²² Although many theologians and church leaders emphasize the importance of age differences, I will show you that generational differences are even larger. I also will compare generational differences with differences based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. These findings also may surprise you.

The data are from national surveys that my colleagues and I conducted in 1987, 1993, 1999, and 2005. I will compare pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and post-Vatican II Catholics in all four studies. The 2005 study gives us our first opportunity to look at the millennial generation. However, because we are only looking at the leading edge of that generation, and we have only seventy five 18-25 year olds in our sample, we have to be cautious about these findings.

What it takes to be a Good Catholic

We have asked Catholics a variety of questions about what it means to be Catholic. Some questions have dealt with issues such as the Resurrection and Real Presence. Others have to do with marrying in the Church, divorce and remarriage, abortion, birth control, Mass attendance, donating to parishes, and

²¹James D. Davidson, "Yes, Jesus is Really There: Most Catholics Still Agree," *Commonweal* (October 12, 2001):14-16.

²²Michele Dillon, "Age, Generation, and Cohort in American Religion and Spirituality," in *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, eds. James Beckford and N. J. Demerath III, 526-546 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007); Michele Dillon and Paul Wink, *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Keith A. Roberts, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2004), 326; Duane F. Alwin, "The Political Impact of the Baby Boom: Are There Generational Differences in Political Beliefs and Behavior?" *Generations* 22 (1998): 46-54; Duane F. Alwin, Katherine L. Cohen, and Theodore M. Newcomb, *Political Attitudes Over the Life Span: The Bennington Women After Fifty Years* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); and C. Ray Wingrove and John Alston, "Cohort Analysis of Church Attendance, 1939-1969," *Social Forces* 53 (1974): 324-331.

What it takes to be a good Catholic

Can be good Catholic without obeying church teaching on divorce and marriage

Survey Year	Generations				Generation Effect
	Millen- nial	Post- Vatican II	Vatican II	Pre- Vatican II	
1987	--	65%	64%	44%	→ (+21)
1993	--	67	66	50	→ (+17)
1999	--	68	65	54	→ (+14)
2005	83	69	66	52	→(+17/+31)
Age Effect		↓ (+4)	↓ (+2)	↓ (+8)	

helping the poor. These items certainly do not exhaust the list of possible considerations, but they address important changes that have taken place in both society and the Church.

There is considerable agreement that a person cannot be a good Catholic without believing that Jesus physically rose from the dead; without believing that, at Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ; and without helping the poor. There is more disagreement on the other items. About six in ten people say one can be a good Catholic without obeying the Church's teachings on abortion and without donating time or money to help the parish. Two-thirds say you can be a good Catholic without getting married in the Church and without agreeing with the Church's teachings on divorce and remarriage. Three-quarters say you can be a good Catholic without going to Mass every week and without obeying church teachings on birth control.²³ As one

²³William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2001), 27.

might expect, the pre-Vatican II generation has more traditional views on these issues than the Vatican II and post-Vatican II generations. Generation effects are two to four times the size of age effects.

The item on divorce and remarriage is a good example. In 1987, 44 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics said you could be a good Catholic without agreeing with this teaching. Sixty-five percent of post-Vatican II Catholics felt that way—that is a twenty one-percentage point difference. In 1993, half of pre-Vatican II Catholics said you could still be a good Catholic. Sixty-seven percent of post-Vatican II Catholics said that—a 17 point difference. In 1999, 54 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics said you could be a good Catholic without agreeing with the Church's views on divorce and remarriage. Sixty-eight percent of post-Vatican II Catholics said that—a 14 point difference. In 2005, 52 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics said you could still be a good Catholic, compared to 69 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics—a difference of 17 percent. If we compare pre-Vatican II Catholics with the millennials, the generational difference is 31 percentage points. As all of the generations have aged, the percentage of their members saying that you can be a good Catholic without agreeing with the Church has increased only slightly (plus four for post-Vatican II Catholics, plus two for Vatican II Catholics, and plus eight for pre-Vatican II Catholics). Thus, the largest age increase involved pre-Vatican II Catholics, who are more liberal now than they were in 1987.

Commitment to the Church

We have used three items to measure commitment to the Church. About 55 percent of laypeople say they would never leave the Church. About 45 percent say the Church is the most important or among the most important parts of their lives. One-third go to Mass at least once a week. Again, these items do not capture all of the ways in which people might be attached to the Church, but they are both subjective and behavioral,²⁴ and they are rooted in a rich history of research on Catholic religiosity.²⁵ Once again, pre-Vatican II Catholics are more committed to the Church than Vatican II and post-Vatican II Catholics. This time, generation effects are five to six times the size of age effects.

Look at the results for the item on leaving the Church. In 1987, 80 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics said they would never leave the Church. Fifty-three percent of post-Vatican II Catholics felt that way—a 27 percentage point differ-

²⁴James D. Davidson and Dean D. Knudsen, "A New Approach to Religious Commitment," *Sociological Focus* (April 1977): 151-173; and James D. Davidson, Dean D. Knudsen, and Stephen R. Lerch, "Involvement in Family, Religion, Education, Work, and Politics," *Sociological Focus* (January 1983): 13-36.

²⁵Joseph Fichter, *Social Relations in the Urban Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); and Ibid., *Southern Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

Commitment to the Church

Would never leave the Church

Survey Year	Generations				Generation Effect
	Millennial	Post-Vatican II	Vatican II	Pre-Vatican II	
1987	--	53%	58%	80%	→ (-27)
1993	--	48	55	84	→ (-36)
1999	--	46	60	78	→ (-32)
2005	35	51	58	69	→ (-18/-34)
Age Effect		↓ (-2)	↓ (0)	↓ (-11)	

ence. In 1993, the percentages were 84 for pre-Vatican II Catholics and 48 for the post-Vatican II generation—a 36 point difference. In 1999, 78 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics, but only 46 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics said they would never leave the Church—a 32-point difference. In 2005, 69 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics felt that way, compared to 51 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics—a difference of 18 percent. When we compare the pre-Vatican II and millennial generations, the difference jumps to 34 percent. Once again, the largest age difference is among pre-Vatican II Catholics: the older they get, the more liberal they are becoming on this issue too. The age differences among post-Vatican II and Vatican II Catholics are too small to matter.

Locus of Moral Authority

Culture I Catholicism says that the locus of moral authority is the magisterium. Culture II Catholicism says it is the individual conscience.²⁶ Where do the generations think it is? We have explored this question by asking laypeople who has the “final say” on the rightness or wrongness of five behaviors: birth control,

²⁶Kennedy, *Tomorrow's Catholics*.

Locus of Authority

Church leaders have final say on abortion

Survey Year	Generations				Generation Effect
	Millen- nial	Post- Vatican II	Vatican II	Pre- Vatican II	
1987	--	23%	24%	39%	→ (-16)
1993	--	15	19	30	→ (-15)
1999	--	10	27	28	→ (-18)
2005	0	21	30	33	→ (-12/-33)
Age Effect		↓ (-2)	↓ (+6)	↓ (-8)	

abortion, homosexual behavior, sex outside of marriage, and remarriage without an annulment. The response categories were church leaders, individuals, or both.

On average, laypeople are most likely to say “individuals” (48 percent), are second most likely to say “both” (30 percent), and are least likely to say “church leaders” (21 percent). Again, the pre-Vatican II generation is the most traditional, and the post-Vatican II generation is the least traditional. The average generational difference on these five items is at least three times the average age difference.

Here are the results for the item on abortion. In 1987, 39 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics said church leaders had the final say on abortion. Twenty-three percent of post-Vatican II Catholics felt that way—a 16 percentage point difference. In 1993, the percentages were 30 and 15—a 15 point difference. In 1999, they were 28 and 10—an 18 point difference. In 2005, one-third of pre-Vatican II Catholics said church leaders have the final say, compared to 21 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics—a difference of 12 percent. If we include millennials, the difference is 33 percent. As post-Vatican II Catholics age, the percentage who are willing to grant church leaders the final say on abortion

changes very little. It goes up slightly among Vatican II Catholics and down slightly among pre-Vatican II Catholics.

Thus, to this day, pre-Vatican II Catholics are the most traditional and most committed. Post-Vatican II and millennial Catholics are the least traditional and least committed.²⁷ Generational differences are consistently larger than age differences. Not only are age differences smaller; they also challenge the conventional wisdom that the older one gets, the more traditional and more committed one becomes.

Generation, Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender

However, research shows that factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender also affect the way Catholics' think and act.²⁸ Therefore, just as I asked how important generation is compared to age, I also need to ask how important it is relative to these other factors. Previous studies suggest that generational differences are as great as, if not greater than, differences based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Our 2005 study shows the same thing. When I averaged the differences across all 15 of the items we have discussed, here is what I found. The average generational difference is 27 percentage points if we include the millennial generation and 12 percentage points if we do not. The average race difference is 11 percentage points. Class differences are eight percentage points. Gender and ethnicity produce five percentage point differences. These findings do not diminish the effects of other variables. Rather, they remind us that, when we try to explain variations among Catholics, we should not overlook the importance of generation.

IMPLICATIONS

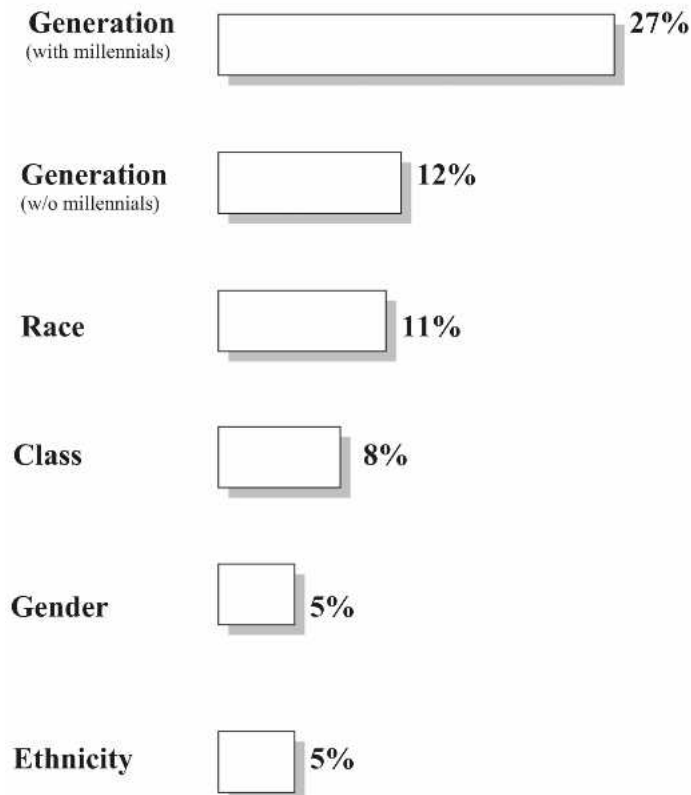
This analysis has several implications for theologians. First, if people's views of God, the faith, and the Church are forged in the fires of personal experience—which they are—then generation is one of the hottest flames. It explains more of the variance in Catholics' beliefs and practices than age does. Despite the widespread belief that people's religiosity changes over the course of the life cycle, the more important insight is how little it changes once the basic pattern has been established in their formative years. Thus, the best predictor of how people are going to think and act when they are in their 70s is how they thought and acted when they were in their teens and early twenties, not what their parents and grandparents were like when they were in their 70s. Therefore, if you want to affect the paths people take on their spiritual journeys, you will have

²⁷See also Anthony J. Pogorelc and James D. Davidson, "One Church, Two Cultures?" *Review of Religious Research* 42 (2000): 146-158.

²⁸James D. Davidson, Andrea S. Williams, Richard A. Lamanna, Jan Stenftenagel, Kathleen Maas Weigert, William J. Whalen, and Patricia Wittberg, *The Search for Common Ground* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Books, 1997); Hoge, et al, *Young Adult Catholics*; D'Antonio, et al, *American Catholics*; and D'Antonio, et al, *Laity*.

Generation, Race, Class, Gender and Ethnicity

Average Differences on 15 Items



more impact when they are in their teens and early twenties than when they are much younger or much older than that. You should maximize your contact with adolescents and young adults while they are in junior high school, high school, and college, and through other programs that reach 13 to 23 year olds in other settings.

Generation also is at least as important as race, ethnicity, class, and gender—if not more so. If theology and religious studies departments have courses and programs that are organized around race, ethnicity, class, and gender, should they not also have some that are organized around generation? In addition, if achieving diversity is an important goal for you and your institutions, should you not make sure to include not only blacks and whites, Anglos and Hispanics, rich and poor, men and women . . . but also people from all generations?

Second, generation affects people's views on several key issues in the Church. I have focused on three of them. As we move from the pre-Vatican II

generation to the millennial generation, we see that today's young adults are (a) less likely to use institutional rules and regulations as their criteria when judging whether a person is a good Catholic or otherwise, (b) less attached to the Church, and (c) less willing to grant religious authorities the final say in deciding what is right and wrong. In other words, we are witnessing a major trend from Culture I Catholicism to Culture II Catholicism.

This trend is due to the fact that the social and religious conditions that prevailed during the pre-Vatican II generation's formative years no longer exist. The institutional Church does not stress Culture I Catholicism to the extent that it did prior to the Council. Catholics are no longer poor and marginalized. Moreover, church leaders no longer have as much control over the laity as they once did. If these conditions persist, the percentage of Catholics who are Culture I-oriented will continue to decline. For that trend to change, all three conditions would have to change. There is some movement toward Culture I in the institutional Church, but Catholics' status is not deteriorating or laypeople are not willing to grant church leaders the control they once had. Therefore, the trend toward Culture II is likely to persist in the near future.

Third, inter-generational interaction is natural and inevitable in the Church. So is inter-generational conflict. Assuming that you participate in such interactions on a fairly regular basis and that you might play a leadership role in them on some occasions, let me suggest three ways to cultivate constructive relationships across generational lines. First, recognize that the generations have much in common. Regardless of what generation Catholics belong to, the vast majority believe in core teachings such as the existence of God, Jesus' death and resurrection, Mary's role as the Mother of God, and the need to be concerned for the poor. This finding is not controversial, but it is important. It is a corrective to recent claims that Catholics no longer agree with core elements of the faith. It also explains why Catholics who disagree with more peripheral church teachings still think of themselves as good Catholics and do not leave the Church.

A second step is for each generation to put itself in the place of the others. Younger Catholics might gain an appreciation of why many older Catholics think that some key elements of the faith have been lost, that in the course of their upward mobility Catholics have lost their attachment to the Church, and that the current emphasis on individual conscience ignores the wisdom that church leaders have accumulated over the centuries. Older generations might learn why young Catholics think they can be good Catholics without obeying all the rules, why they are so indifferent to the Church, and why they think they have a right to make up their own minds on issues of faith and morals.

A third step is to embrace the "both-and" mentality that is such an integral part of the Catholic tradition.²⁹ Unlike some other faith traditions, Catholicism

²⁹David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. (New York: Crossroad, 1986); and Rausch, *Being Catholic*, 20-35.

recognizes the coexistence of seemingly incompatible elements. God is both a lover and a judge. The Church is both a hierarchical institution and the People of God. The world is both good and evil. If we are to be a church, and not a sect, we need to build bridges, not barricades, between these seemingly incompatible elements.

Fourth, be aware that there are internal variations in every generation. Although pre-Vatican II Catholics tend to have traditional beliefs and practices, some are quite liberal. Pre-Vatican II liberals are over-represented among the members of Call to Action, Voice of the Faithful, and other groups that want to reform the Church.³⁰ Conversely, while post-Vatican II and millennial Catholics tend to be liberal, some are not.³¹ The young “orthodox” Catholics that Colleen Carroll described in her book *The New Faithful*³² and the young “evangelical Catholics” that Bill Portier talks about³³ are over-represented among today’s seminarians and newly ordained priests. As Katarina Schuth, Dean Hoge, and others also have shown, they are more conservative, both theologically and politically, than the Vatican II generation of seminarians and priests.³⁴

The same thing seems to be true among young theologians. To my knowledge, nobody has tested this hypothesis in a national, empirical study (maybe that is something you ought to look into at this meeting). Until such a study is done, we cannot “prove” that post-Vatican II and millennial theologians are more Culture I-oriented than Vatican II theologians are. Nevertheless, there are some convincing indications that this is true. People such as Tom Rausch³⁵ and Tom Beaudoin³⁶ have observed this generational shift. Richard Gaillardetz recently put it this way:

“the most compelling division in American Catholic theology today is not orthodoxy versus dissent. The most compelling tension is largely generational in character and centers on differences between older Catholic theologians whose work

³⁰Nancy Ammerman, “The Social Sources of Dissent,” in D’Antonio and Pogorelc, *Voices of the Faithful*, 95-104.

³¹Richard Featherstone, “Compliance as Dissidence: Young Catholics and Sexual Ethics,” *Sociological Focus* 34 (2001): 139-154.

³²Colleen Carroll, *The New Faithful* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2002).

³³William Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004): 35-66.

³⁴See Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); Paul M. Levesque and Stephen M. Siptroth, “The Correlation Between Political and Ecclesial Ideologies of Catholic Priests,” *Sociology of Religion* 66 (2005): 419-429; and Damian F. Ference, “Why We’re Different: Bridging the Priesthood’s Generation Gap,” *Commonweal* (May 23, 2008): 10-12.

³⁵Rausch, *Being Catholic*.

³⁶Beaudoin, “What Young Theologians Owe Their Elders.”

has been explicitly shaped by the agenda of Vatican II and a younger generation of theologians who, without repudiating Vatican II, are more concerned with the need for the church to fashion a more constructive response to the demise of a coherent Catholic subculture.”³⁷

If these people are right, and I think they are, then there are growing gaps between generations of theologians. There also are growing theological gaps between young theologians (who are increasingly Culture I oriented) and young laypeople (who are continuing their journey toward Culture II Catholicism). The growing gap between younger and older theologians introduces both substantive and communication issues among religious scholars.³⁸ The growing gap between young theologians and young laypeople contributes a larger pattern of separation between the laity and leaders of the institutional church. Both problems need to be discussed this week.

Since I will be with you for a couple of days, I hope we will continue this discussion of generations in the hallways and breakout sessions. I would love to hear what you have to say about the issues I have put on the table. But, now let me turn things over to Maureen.

JAMES D. DAVIDSON

*Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana*

³⁷Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

³⁸Ference, “Why We’re Different.”