



STUDIES

IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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"Whatever!" Is Not Ignatian Indifference

Jesuits and the Ministry to Young Adults

DAVID E. NANTAIS, S.J.

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THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the journal, while meant especially for American Jesuits, is not exclusively for them. Others who may find it helpful are cordially welcome to make use of it.

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“WHATEVER!” IS NOT
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*Jesuits and the Ministry
to Young Adults*

David E. Nantais, S.J.

STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

36/3 · FALL 2004

The first word . . .

James Tyrone in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* waged a constant battle with the power company. Perhaps more accurately, he used the power company to wage war against his family. O'Neill illustrates his miserly ways through his ongoing campaign to get his family to turn off the lights. Is the alcoholic, narcissistic actor a source of darkness for his family? Do we get a suggestion of the author's dread of the inevitable encroachment of darkness, spiritual as well as physical, over the entire universe? In act 3, his beleaguered wife Mary speaks up from her customary haze of drugs and depression: "Why don't you turn on the light, James? It's getting dark. I know you hate to, but Edmund has proved to you that one bulb burning doesn't cost much. There's no sense letting your fear of the poorhouse make you too stingy." James replies through his own haze of whisky: "I never claimed one bulb cost much! It's having them on, one here and one there, that makes the Electric Light Company rich."

The line has stuck in my head since I first saw Jason Robards deliver it on television at least twenty years ago. Tyrone's line is one I had heard many times before. "Making Con-Ed rich" was always a great fear in my childhood household. No, we were not poor, and my parents were anything but stingy, but as I've reflected upon those days, I concluded that memories of the Great Depression continued to shape their consciousness. Leaving lights on was more than forgetfulness. It meant wasting money, and having money was not something to be taken for granted. As I got more involved with my mother's finances near the end of her life, I chased all over Brooklyn to track down modest savings accounts placed in several different banks for fear of another rash of bank failures. *Long Day's Journey into Night* was set in 1912, at a time when electric lights were still a bit of a novelty and families were still adjusting to the idea of a monthly bill, so the scene rings true for the Tyrone family. It was also written in 1941, when the Great Depression still shaped the landscape of American thought. How many other children of the 1940s and 1950s were warned not to make the electric companies rich?

Every generation has an event or cluster of events that shapes its view of the world. I was still a bit young to remember much of the Second World War. We were probably one of the few generations not to play cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers. Instead, we had a foxhole in an empty lot down the street and took turns protecting the block from invading armies. Years later, we had a juniorate professor who occasionally tried to enliven his deadly classes with what he called "a contemporary exam-

ple,” a phrase that invariably led to “during the Waaaaaar.” All of us young Jesuits were five or six when the War ended, and to us his “contemporary” example might just as well have been Austerlitz. Eyes rolled heavenward in disbelief.

Time works sweet revenge. For a wide swath of American Jesuits today, the key events that shaped our consciousness were probably the twin traumas of Vietnam and Watergate. It was a nasty time that set the agenda for a generation, and it’s clear that many wounds remain unhealed. Who could ever trust the institutions of government again? Remember the campus riots, the pitched battles between hippies and hardhats, assassinations, flag burnings, student strikes, Woodstock (the rock festival, not the theologate), the free-speech movement, Kent State, the Democratic Convention of 1968? In *The Wild One* (1954) Marlon Brando delivered the inaugural for a new generation soon to arrive on the scene. When someone asked the young motorcyclist what he was rebelling against, Brando replied, “Whaddya got?” By contrast, today’s culture wars, at least the domestic variety, are fought through clenched teeth, closed minds and ugly character assassination. Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, and the spin doctors of both political parties have yet to lead chants of “Burn, Baby, Burn,” like some of the activists of a bygone generation. By the standards of the past decades, today’s morbidly polarized electorate stands as a shining beacon of unity and love.

Of course, all of this sounds surreal to younger people, and in this context, the adjective “young” may extend to people well into their forties or even fifties. A mention of Vietnam in a classroom brings the roll of the eyes familiar from juniorate days. A pointed comparison to Watergate brings a blank stare. Attempts to provide background and explain the intensity of feeling around the fractious events of recent history sound like our parents’ terror at the prospect of factory closings, breadlines, and bank failures. These events mean a great deal to us, and nothing to those who have not lived through them. They’ve shaped our consciousness, and evoke only blank stares from young people, who readily, and perhaps rightly, dismiss us as “still fighting the battles of the sixties.” It may be some slight consolation to realize that one day our present students will stand in front of their own computer-glutted classrooms, and some innocent freshman will ask them to explain what the numbers “9/11” mean.

This relentless and ever-accelerating march of generations takes on a special urgency for Jesuits. Those of us of a certain age owe much of our worldview to the Second Vatican Council and the horrendous aftermath of *Humanae vitae*. The conflict between liberal and conservative that marked civil society migrated easily into the ecclesiastical world, and we faced divisions and mistrust that are not completely healed to this day. As young Jesuits, we followed the “long black line” of uniformity, and when it dispersed, we gulped greedily at the fresh air of *aggiornamento*. Junking cas-

socks and daily order provided a rush that led to an epidemic of silliness, as most of us realize now. Of course, younger Jesuits never marched in the “long black line” and never celebrated their personal liberation. On the contrary. In the scary, chaotic world of today, many younger men look to religious life for stability and certainty. They find us aging revolutionaries if not neurotic anarchists then simply quaint survivors.

The old liberal/conservative split does disservice to both groups. We find among old-timers with their polyester bell-bottoms and faded Che Guevara T-shirts men of extraordinary devotion to the Church and personal holiness. Once we get beyond the clerical shirts (if not rabats and French cuffs) heavily scented with incense, we find young men utterly unsparing in their commitment to social justice. We are all Jesuits, all devoted to the same goals, but we diverge drastically in our imaginative universes, which in turn are products of our vastly different worlds. How do we talk to one another? So much has happened, so quickly.

Speaking of the juniorate (cf. *supra*), a thought from Homer comes to mind. In the sixth book of the *Iliad*, the blind bard writes, as Alexander Pope recreates the sentiment in his stunning rhymed couplets:

Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground;
Another race the following spring supplies;
They fall successive, and successive rise.
(6.181–85)

Homer’s melancholy battlefield reflection on the inevitable passage of generations holds a poignant meaning for our ministries. In this age of cell phones and the Internet, of credit cards and frequent-flyer miles, we live in a world of instantaneous obsolescence. Last year’s trendsetter is this year’s retro. References to the Beatles, for example, make no sense to a generation that was born after John Lennon was murdered in 1980. How do we talk to one another? Is there a common language, a common imagination?

The challenging fact remains, whether in a classroom, a retreat house or a parish, we deal with people whose conceptual and imaginative universe may be far different from our own. How do we adjust to meet the needs of those we serve and when do we try to bring them along into our world? If this were the kind of academic journal that professors feel obliged to subscribe to but rarely read, we could make a distinction. We are pretty good at *spatial* enculturation, but less successful at *temporal* enculturation. We learn the language and culture of the *place* wherein we reside, less frequently the thought patterns of the age cohorts we serve. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, I’m not suggesting feigned involvement in youth culture as a tactic for ministry. I do suggest that it’s salutary and humbling to realize that generations operate in different imaginative space and develop different networks of operative symbols.

Dave Nantais has provided a fine insight into the cultural crevasse that separates ministers from those they serve, teachers from students, older Jesuits from younger, and it might be added, vice versa. As one who couples the advantage of youth with the experience of ministry, he invites us to a shared reflection on what it means to serve an apostolate across cultural lines. If this is not the only number of *STUDIES* written by a scholastic, it is certainly one of the very, very few. I think you'll enjoy his comments, even though they might make some of us squirm a bit under our Che Guevara T-shirts.

A few second words. . . .

The start of the academic year brings with it the annual recasting of our masthead. Many thanks to our departing Seminar members, Bob Bireley, Claudio Burgaleta, Larry Madden, and Ron Murphy. The Seminar will miss their contributions and companionship.

Our new class offers equal promise, and it's both a pleasure and a source of great pride to be able to introduce them in this issue at the start of their three-year terms.

Readers of *STUDIES* will recognize **Jim Bernauer's** name from his masterly essay in the Summer issue: *The Holocaust and the Search for Forgiveness*. Jim is a professor of philosophy at Boston College. He specializes in contemporary postmodern thought, and for two years worked with Michel Foucault in Paris. His most recent book is *Michel Foucault and Theology*, published this year.

T. Frank Kennedy is a professor of music and director of the Jesuit Institute at Boston College. An accomplished harpsichordist and music historian, he has produced several baroque operas for both performance and recording and has collaborated most recently in publishing *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540–1773*. He was the Martin D'Arcy Professor at Oxford in the Winter Term of 2004.

Bill Reiser has been teaching theology in the Religious Studies Department of the College of the Holy Cross since 1978. His most recent book is *Seeking God in All Things: Theology and Spiritual Direction*, published by Liturgical Press. He has also been active in Hispanic ministries in the Worcester area.

Tom Schubeck taught theology at Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley and then served as director of novices for the Detroit and Chicago Provinces. After his work in formation, he began teaching social ethics and Latin American moral theology at John Carroll University. Among his writings are *Liberation Ethics*, which provided the historical overview of Latin American theology in the *Encyclopedia of Christianity*. He

is currently working on *Love and Justice* as a fellow of the Woodstock Center in Washington.

This cast of characters, formidable as it is, should not deter other Jesuits or their colleagues from participating in the work of the Seminar. We keep the transom open to receive ideas, outlines, drafts and completed manuscripts from anyone who wants to say something about Jesuit history, spirituality, and practice.

Richard A. Blake, S.J.

Editor

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|| The author offers a warm "Thank you" to Tom Beau-
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"WHATEVER!" IS NOT IGNATIAN INDIFFERENCE

Jesuits and the Ministry to Young Adults

Young adults have grown up in a highly mobile, media-saturated culture. Many know very little about religion, distrust institutions of all sorts, avoid commitment and are skeptical about any claims to possession of the truth. At the same time, many seek community, eagerly serve the needs of others and long for meaning in their lives. With some flexibility and imagination, Ignatian spirituality can support and enhance ministry to people facing key decisions in their lives.

Hundreds of students from Jesuit schools around the United States gathered with campus ministers, teachers, and friends under the "Ignatian Teach-In" tent in Columbus, Ga., on November 16, 2002, to celebrate the Eucharist. The evening was cool and the ground was wet and muddy from the intermittent rain showers, but the conditions did not deter the crowd at all. Some of the congregants even had to stand outside the crowded tent in the rain in order to participate in this spectacular liturgy, during which students served as readers and Eucharistic Ministers, sang in the choir, and bowed their heads in prayer. The homily beautifully wove together the Gospel message with the ideals that motivated so many students to travel for hours on cramped buses. Everyone present knew that this wonderful celebration of thanksgiving was in preparation for the following day's protest of the United States Army School of the Americas. This Mass was, in my mind, a manifestation of exactly what Jesuit spirituality

and ministry are supposed to impart to young adults, the seamless melding of faith and justice.¹

Setting the Stage

Working with young adults is nothing new to Jesuits. Since the first Jesuit schools opened in Europe during Ignatius's time, Jesuits have been engaging young adults in questions of faith, religion, philosophy, and social mores. This tradition continues today in the hundreds of Jesuit schools around the world, as well as in parishes and a variety of social apostolates. James DiGiacomo, S.J., cogently addressed the topic of Jesuits and young-adult ministry in modern times in this journal thirteen years ago.² In some ways, the story today is similar. Young adults still wrestle with issues such as moral relativism, the relevance of organized religion, sexual morality, and individualism. The Church, perhaps in anticipation of young adults' coming back to the flock after getting married and having children, is not doing enough to attract this population. To be fair, many young adults exhibit a level of apathy toward religious practice that is disturbing. While often calling themselves "spiritual," they do not wish to be labeled "religious," as this would imply a commitment to an institution some consider irrelevant to their lives. If the Church and the Society of Jesus wish to communicate the relevance of the Christian message to young adults, then they must get serious about inculturation; this implies learning what is important to young adults and then helping them mine their life experiences for God's presence.

In the book *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice*, the authors report the results of a comprehensive phone survey they conducted with Catholics aged twenty to thirty-nine.³

¹ While I have not yet had the chance to go, I am told the pro-life rally in Washington, D.C., which many students from Jesuit schools attend, is similar in its focus on faith and justice.

² James J. DiGiacomo, S.J., "Ministering to the Young," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 23, no. 2 (March 1991).

³ Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, S.N.D.de N., and Juan L. Gonzales Jr., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

Their questions focused on issues such as catechism, Church teachings, Mass attendance, sexual ethics, and devotional life. The results of this survey highlight some trends to which the Church (and the Society of Jesus) should pay attention. For example, the young adults involved in this study (including Latinos) were asked to rank what they consider essential to the Catholic faith. Topping the list is "belief that God is present in the sacraments," followed by "charitable efforts toward helping the poor," and, in fourth place, "devotion to Mary the Mother of God." The three elements that these young adults found to be least relevant to Catholicism are "teachings opposed to the death penalty," "belief that only men can be priests," and the "Church's traditional support of the right of workers to unionize."

Based on these data, should modern young adults be labeled "progressive" or "traditional"? The answer is both . . . and neither. These categories are, in many ways, meaningless today. Catholic young adults are not "traditional," because they are very ignorant of the Catholic tradition. They are not "progressive," because they do not know where they wish to progress to, and they have not done enough collective reflection on the Church to speak uniformly on this topic. In short, from my experience, I would characterize modern Catholic young adults as desiring guidance from the Church, but on their own terms.

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In the first part of this essay, I describe some characteristics of young adults and their approaches to religion and spirituality. By "young adults" I am referring to unmarried men and women in the United States, aged eighteen to thirty-two. These include the students at Jesuit colleges and universities, and alumni and alumnae who are beginning their professional careers. Some young adults toward the upper end of this age range have been labeled "Generation X" or "Xers," and the others are often dubbed "Generation Y" or "Millennials." After briefly mentioning some distinguishing characteristics of these two post-Vatican II generations, I posit that their many similarities warrant addressing them together as "young adults." In the second part of this essay, I offer some suggestions

about how Jesuits can utilize resources to minister more effectively to young adults in the twenty-first century. Specifically, I touch upon the issues of discernment, prayer, spirituality, and teaching. And even though my time as a young adult is quickly waning, I will offer some of my own life experiences to help animate the ideas I discuss.

I: Who Are Young Adults?

Tom Beaudoin, author of *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, is one of the best-known young Catholic theologians today. His knowledge of popular culture, combined with his experience of ministering to young adults, makes him a very important voice in the Catholic world. His entry on "Generation X" for the *Encyclopedia of Religion and American Cultures* is an excellent characterization:

The term Generation X attempts to describe those in the United States born between the mid 1960s and the late 1970s, whose shared cultural symbol system has mediated a generational spiritual maturation marked by common themes. This generation grew up in an age of the implosion of the nuclear middle class family, the explosion of the influence of popular media culture over everyday life, an increasing American pluralism, an economically unstable middle class, the expansion of market logic over everyday life, and in the immediate wake of the decline and general suspicion of institutions created by the crises of the 1960s. Thus, the spiritual identities of many in this generation are strongly influenced by the relationship that individuals and groups take up to pluralism, media culture, individualism and contemporary capitalism.⁴

This description is all too true. A number of my friends from childhood, high school and college were victims of a skyrocketing divorce rate. Traditional commitments once taken for granted were called into question. I remember when my second-grade teacher left our school and married a former Jesuit, and one of the priests from my home parish married the mother of one of my grade-school classmates. After a while, none of this seemed abnormal; it was just the world into which we were born. Jeremy Langford, an editor at

⁴Tom Beaudoin, "Generation X," in *Religion and American Cultures: An Encyclopedia of Religion and American Cultures*, edited by Gary Laderman and Luis Leon (2001), 414–16.

Sheed and Ward, was forced to deal with his parents' divorce, which he describes in his book *God Moments*.

When our parents got divorced in 1980, my brother and I felt first-hand the effects of being separated from an institution we had come to count on. Our once-familiar lives suddenly seemed foreign. Our vocabularies grew to include words like *separation, lawyer, divorce, ex-husband/wife, broken home, "for the good of the children," single parent, visitation, alimony, annulment, re-married, step-parent*. In what seemed like a flash we lost our rights to childhood and were told that the "courts" and the "adults" would be looking out for our "real rights" and our "best interests." Fortunately for us, Josh and I had each other, and together we processed all that was going on and tried to make sense of things as we moved forward in life.⁵

As a result of these kinds of experiences, many young adults have a hard time committing to any specific life project, especially a relationship with another person or with God. This is not an impossible hurdle to overcome, but one about which ministers of the Church should be aware.

"The New Millennials"

Mary Ann Glendon, professor of law at Harvard University, in an address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity's Eighth Annual Youth Forum, summarized the blessings and challenges that face Generation Y (those born after 1980). Simply stated, Generation Y is similar to Generation X, but "even more so." Glendon highlights the incredible educational opportunities open to Generation Y, especially to young women: "More young people from more diverse backgrounds are attending universities than ever before."⁶ Generation Y is more computer savvy than Gen Xers because many grew up with home computers, which were first introduced in the

The teachings of Jesus affect the culture, and the culture, in turn, affects the images of Christ.

⁵Jeremy Langford, *God Moments: Why Faith Really Matters to a New Generation* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 17 f.

⁶Mary Ann Glendon, "University Students Today: Portrait of a Generation Searching," Pontifical Council for the Laity, 8th International Youth Forum, held in Rome, Italy, on April 3, 2004. Online, *Zenit*.

early eighties. Interestingly, Glendon points out that “no generation has ever had the opportunity to know their grandparents for so long a time” (ibid). Along with these benefits, according to Glendon, come heavy burdens. Many members of Generation Y have grown up in single-parent households, due to the high rate of divorce. Regarding the religious formation of Generation Y, Glendon states, “Thus we find ourselves in a curious situation where all too many of the most highly educated men and women in history have a religious formation that remains at a rather primitive level” (ibid.). As a result, young adults do not see the relevance of religious practice or, at least, find issues of faith very confusing.

Beaudoin’s and Glendon’s work, along with the research done by Dean Hoge and his colleagues, as well as that of James Heft,

S.M., and James Davidson, show that there are many similarities between Generation X and Generation Y.⁷ In order to better understand who young adults are and how they approach religious issues, I will elaborate on four themes that Beaudoin and Glendon mention in their descriptions that are necessary to this end: the

Musicians like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Joni Mitchell looked at their cities and their world and wrote about the injustices they witnessed.

importance of Popular Culture, Relationship with Authority and Institutions, Volunteerism, and Religious Education.

Popular Culture

When two young adults hailing from middle class backgrounds have a conversation, they will likely find some common ground in their experiences of popular culture.⁸ Tom Beaudoin refers to popular culture as the *lingua franca* of young adults. In order to

⁷James L. Heft, S.M., 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, no. 4 (2003): 410–422.

⁸Not all Catholics from Generation X are from middle-class backgrounds, which is one limitation of this analysis. However, many of the students who attend Jesuit high schools, colleges, and universities are from the middle class. Since these are the young adults with whom we work, it makes sense to focus on them and the culture from which they come.

understand young adults, the Church needs to listen and take pop culture more seriously. Beaudoin writes, "Just listen to snippets of any conversation among people in their 20's and 30's. We often explain ourselves to each other, including our deepest intimacies, by way of pop culture references: movie quotes, sitcom scenes, pop song hooks."⁹ Beaudoin does not believe that popular culture is immune from critique. Indeed, much of modern pop culture is gratuitously sexual, violent, and materialistic. Nevertheless, pop culture has been a large part of the lives of young adults through their formative years, and it has helped mold their spiritual imaginations. Therefore, in order to understand this population and in order to have any credibility when critiquing it, Church ministers need to take pop culture seriously.

Our ideas about religion and God often come from the culture in which we live. For example, images of Jesus are often created to reflect Jesus' care for the people of a particular culture. The teachings of Jesus affect the culture, and the culture, in turn, affects the images of Christ. It is not surprising that there are depictions of Jesus that portray him as black, European, Indian, or Hispanic. In order to discover the Christology/theology of a culture, one must examine the culture and their images of Christ. In his book *Virtual Faith*, Beaudoin writes: "Theology is always found and created within a particular cultural perspective. In order to understand our culture, therefore, we must think theologically. And in order to comprehend our theology, we must know our culture."¹⁰ Beaudoin goes on to apply his understanding of theology and culture to modern popular culture. In order to find the theology or religiosity of modern young adults, look to their culture, which comes primarily from movies, music, and cyberspace.

The skeptical and dismissive attitude some young adults have about organized religion, politics, and marriage is captured by the word "Whatever!"

Even though I have called our pop culture a form of "surrogate clergy," I do not mean to imply that it is merely preached to us or

⁹Tom Beaudoin, "Beginning Afresh: Gen-X Catholics," *America*, Nov. 21, 1998, 11.

¹⁰Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 30.

forced on us; it is “produced” by us as well. Fashion, cyberspace, and music video are forms of culture in which our own religious needs and interests help make items popular. (ibid., 11)

Christian images abound in modern popular culture, especially images of Jesus Christ. In an interview in the *Boston Globe* (January 17, 2004), Stephen Prothero, chairman of the Religion Department at Boston University and author of *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, says this is not surprising. “Christians believe that God chose to take on this human body. As soon as you do that, you are in this big mess, this world of human culture, of economics

and politics and human desire. Jesus has no choice but to operate through radio and TV and popular fiction. This is what happens to a religion that chooses to put God in the world.”¹¹

It is not that we do not need to challenge these attitudes, but rather we must understand them to minister more effectively to this population.

Prothero’s words ring true, especially for Catholicism with its tradition of sacraments that “make God present” through elements from the created world. Young

adults have used religious images in popular culture to express their relationship with God, organized religion, and their spiritual lives. Their version of these religious images is often irreverent, but the fact that young adults are injecting their own meaning into traditional religious symbolism shows that these images are able to capture their imagination. I offer two examples of how popular culture expresses young-adult religious beliefs and spirituality.

The first is a now infamous depiction of Jesus in the movie *Dogma*. At the beginning of this film, writer and director Kevin Smith unveils his statue of the “Buddy Christ.” Jesus is winking and giving the “thumbs up” sign to the crowd, as if to say, “Hey, you’re great! Keep up the good work!” (If you would like to see a picture of the “Buddy Christ,” he graces the cover of the November 23, 2001, issue of *Commonweal*.)

It is likely that Smith, a thirty-something Catholic, used his image of the “Buddy Christ” to poke fun at the catechism he was

¹¹ David Mehegan, “Personal Jesus,” *Boston Globe*, Jan. 17, 2004, sec. C, p. 1.

taught in the 1970s. In his film, Smith successfully communicates that his Catholic faith is important to him, but there is room for improvement. In her review of the film in the *New York Times*, Janet Maslin writes, "Sharply satirical yet gratifyingly cynicism-free, *Dogma* honestly embraces the outlook summed up by one of its characters: 'I have issues with anyone who treats faith as a burden instead of a blessing.'¹² Smith is a good ambassador for young-adult Catholicism, and his high-profile career brings his faith into the limelight with him. After speaking with many young adults about *Dogma*, I realized that while not all of them liked the movie, it did invite them to at least address the issue of religious faith more than most films in recent years. Smith, like many young-adult Catholics, is skeptical about blindly accepting faith without critiquing it. This message comes through loud and clear in his film, and that is probably why it resonated with some young adults.

To put it differently, the characteristics of Jesus upon which many religious institutions place their emphasis may not be relevant to the concerns and struggles of modern young adults.

Hip-hop culture, once a largely African American urban phenomenon, has crossed over to include the primarily white suburbs. A growing population of young adults share an interest in the music, the clothing, and the attitude of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop music, also referred to as "rap," was born in the late 1970s. The new genre was utilized by many of its artists to bring attention to the struggles of inner-city African Americans. At times, the music has drawn criticism for employing violent and misogynist lyrics to achieve this goal. Some of the music deserves such criticism, but, as African American cultural commentator and preacher Michael Eric Dyson points out, hip-hop music is often inspired by religious themes. In his book *Open Mike*, Dyson makes this assertion:

In fact, some of the most hardcore rappers are more God intoxicated than some believers in religious circles, some of whom claim to be obsessed with God but who are in truth consumed with their worldly goods and status. To a remarkable degree, many hardcore rappers,

¹²Janet Maslin, "Dogma: 2 Fallen Angels Want Back In," *New York Times*, Oct. 31, 1999.

as profane and vulgar as they can be, are figures who by virtue of their meditations on fate, judgment, death and God force us to contend with the ultimate truths and proclamations of the gospel. They are, in a sense, secular hermeneuts who through their work invite us to reflect on the kerygmatic content of religious identity, spiritual truth, prophetic articulation, and ecclesiastical assertion.¹³

In many respects, modern hip-hop artists are taking the baton from some 1960s folk artists. Musicians like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Joni Mitchell looked at their cities and their world and wrote about the injustices they witnessed. Hip-hop musicians do the same, though in a different form. Hip-hop emerged from African American religious and social experience, but it is now also being used and enjoyed by suburban white young adults. This phenomenon may provide an opportunity for those who minister to these populations

to raise concerns with them about respect for cultures and religious experience, while also acknowledging the importance of music in their lives.

Many of the students from Jesuit universities gathered at the Ignatian Teach-In in Georgia spoke about their faith in Jesus Christ impelling them to reach out in solidarity with the victims of injustice.

The Church and the Society might be more effective in reaching young adults if we took popular culture seriously. This is the culture of young adults, it is where much of their religiosity is

expressed and from where this religiosity is learned and understood. What I do not wish to imply is that all pop culture is good and leads to God. This is a matter of discernment, and we Jesuits can only help with this discernment if we examine pop culture along with young adults.

¹³Michael Eric Dyson, *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex, Culture and Religion* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 309.

II. Authority and Institutions

How can the Church claim to know the truth? Jesuits who teach philosophy and theology have likely heard some of their students proclaim, "Well, that might be fine for you, but my experience is different." Modern young adults are very skeptical of truth claims. Some would say that young adults have raised relativism itself to the level of a "Truth."¹⁴ Theologian Timothy Muldoon nuances the young-adult approach to truth claims by stating that "[t]oday, there is a more sophisticated attitude toward authority, especially since a person can so easily confront different claims to authority by the click of a mouse or the changing of a channel. Many young adults look upon religious questions in a very pragmatic way: it is true if it affects me directly."¹⁵

Muldoon's point is a good one. Within the last thirty years, young adults have either witnessed or read about their president lying to or misleading the people of the United States, the Church covering up the truth (in the sexual-abuse scandal), and an enormous elevation in the divorce rate. These institutions—the government, the Church, and marriage—have all lost credibility in the minds of young adults. Along with this comes, unfortunately, a mistrust of the truth claims made by each of these institutions. Is it surprising that young adults do not vote in large numbers in presidential elections, or that many do not attend churches regularly, or that many couples live together before marriage (if they even get married)? The skeptical and dismissive attitude some young adults have about organized religion, politics, and marriage is captured by the word "Whatever!" which they have co-opted as a slang expression of exasperation regarding anything they believe unworthy of their time or consideration. It is not that we do not need to chal-

As a result, many young adults know very little about the Catholic faith and do not have a binding Catholic identity.

¹⁴R. R. Reno, "American Satyricon," *First Things*, Oct. 2001, 38.

¹⁵Timothy Muldoon, "Starving outside the Banquet Hall," *The Living Light*, Fall 2000.

lenge these attitudes, but rather we must understand them to better minister to this population.

The breakdown of and skepticism toward traditional institutions has also affected young-adult identity formation. In an insightful article about young-adult spiritual development, Allen Gustafson,

executive director of the Crossroads Center for Faith and Work in Chicago, borrowing from modern psychology, posits that the decline of traditional institutions has led to a crisis in young-adult identity formation. Gustafson uses the term "deconstruction" to describe, "the critical examination and subsequent breakdown of the traditional meaning-making institutions and structures of Western culture."¹⁶ This deconstruction has been an obstacle to young people's forming their own sense of self as adults in the modern world. Gustafson articulates this point well:

Theology and Religious Studies Departments at Catholic universities do not typically view basic Catholic faith formation as their responsibility.

Young adults reach the post-adolescent developmental point when a person becomes a self-conscious self, and the authority-bound, conventional way of knowing self and world have fallen victim to the person's new powers of critical self-awareness. The responsibility of the young adult is to create a vision and to choose the path of one's own fidelity. Deconstruction has called into question the social contexts which operate as pathways of a young adult's fidelity. The social pathways available to the young adult all seem questionable and inherently flawed. Claiming and sustaining a personal identity in this environment is a difficult challenge at best, and at worst, leads to confusion, isolation and despair. (ibid., 28)

Gustafson points out that, within this milieu of skepticism and uncertainty, young adults have two choices to "latch onto" for their identity. The first is the consumerist and materialistic culture of the Western world that promises an identity through what they own and how much they spend on themselves. The other option is to feel their way on their own, thus feeding the individualistic tendencies that already threaten any sense of community in Western

¹⁶ Allen M. Gustafson, "Generation X: Its Challenges and Possibilities," *New Theology Review*, Feb. 1999, 25.

culture. Both of these options serve to anesthetize the painful lack of guidance that many young adults experience, and are, at best, only temporary solutions to a larger problem.

Although the obstacles Gustafson describes are formidable, they are not impossible if ministers are willing to mine the culture of young adults for signs of hope and pathways to go "in their door." The examples of young adults appropriating religious symbols, which I mentioned earlier under the section "Popular Culture," could be seen as an attempt by this generation to avoid throwing away the baby with the bath water. It is possible that integrating religious symbols into their popular culture is a way for young adults to "rescue" the truths and the meaning that they do see in religion, by separating them from the religious institutions that they see as corrupting these symbols. This interpretation showcases the desire of young adults to find truth rather than completely abandon it. Tom Beaudoin makes the observation that the many images of Jesus in music videos could be attempts to reclaim Jesus as a prophet for this generation.¹⁷ The image of Jesus that the Church professes may not be sufficient for young adults today. To put it differently, the characteristics of Jesus upon which many religious institutions place their emphasis may not be relevant to the concerns and struggles of modern young adults. A young adult who lived through a rough divorce may better relate to a Jesus who himself was abandoned on the cross, rather than Jesus the "high priest." This interpretation implies that there is hope. Young adults have not totally abandoned religion, but they do need something different from religious institutions.

III. Volunteerism

Many young adults are not interested in talk with no action. They do not hesitate to get involved with charities and justice organizations, and they are not afraid to get their hands dirty pounding nails for Habitat for Humanity or picketing against sweatshop labor. In an article that appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Ted Halstead writes thus: "Although Xers have forsaken conventional political participation en masse, it would be a mistake

¹⁷ Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 69.

to assume, as many do, that they are wholly apolitical. There is considerable evidence to suggest that volunteerism and unconventional forms of political participation have increased among young adults."¹⁸ Halstead's observation is confirmed by many of the authors cited in this article, and it is also confirmed by the steady flow of young adults into the dozens of faith-based volunteer programs around the United States, including the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Still, young adults' involvement in political and social action still raises the question, "What is their motivation?" Is this typical young-adult rebelliousness or could there be a spiritually informed impetus underlying this activism? Experience tells me that both of these are the case. Many of the students from Jesuit universities gathered at the Ignatian Teach-In in Georgia spoke about their faith in Jesus Christ impelling them to reach out in solidarity with the victims of injustice. But I doubt that all young adults present made this connection.

I have led many immersion trips with college students over the past eight years. When given an opportunity to reflect on their service and discuss it with their peers, many young adults recount their excitement on seeing their volunteer work actually helping others as a primary reason why they continue their efforts. They do not, however, see the same benefits emerging from political avenues,

Some recent research suggests that there has been a growth in interest among young adults for a more traditional brand of Catholicism.

again, often due to their mistrust of institutions. Young adults can get on the Internet, find a charity that needs their volunteer service, and put in as much time as they wish. There is no need to go through a church or any faith-based organization. None of these organizations question their motivation or challenge them in any

way. It is consoling to witness the desire of so many young adults who want to focus their energies on making others' lives better. But if young adults do not reflect on these experiences (or if they are solely pursued to produce a more attractive graduate-school application), then they are missing out on a potential source of growth for their spiritual lives.

¹⁸ Ted Halstead, "A Politics for Generation X," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Aug. 1999, 38 f.

IV. Religious Education

In another article I summed up the Catholic catechesis I received in the 1970s as, "Jesus loves you; now draw a rainbow."¹⁹ Perhaps that was some of my own young-adult cynicism coming through, but I believe there is some truth underlying this statement. In the wake of Vatican II, with so many changes that the laity, priests, and religious were attempting to absorb, there was likely a lot of confusion over how to pass the faith on to children. As a result, many young adults know very little about the Catholic faith and do not have a binding Catholic identity. This point is buttressed by the nationwide surveys conducted by Hoge and his associates for their book on young-adult Catholics. They report that the responses from young adults regarding religious education were surprisingly similar: "The content of religious education programs was a sore spot. Some respondents reported that there was no content in their programs at all. Those who spoke in that vein describe their experience: 'It was insufficient.' 'It was silly.' 'It was abysmal.' 'We got nothing in depth.' 'We got God loves you, but not much else.'"²⁰ There is a profound lack of knowledge about Catholicism among young adults, and as a result, it is very difficult for them to have any sense of identity in the Church.

Even if young adults exhibit an interest in learning more about the Catholic faith, there are few solid options for them. Theology and Religious Studies Departments at Catholic universities do not typically view basic Catholic faith formation as their responsibility.²¹ University ministry programs and parishes do not always have the experience, time, or money to initiate a "Catholicism 101" course. Some young adults grew up in a household where parents helped them learn the Catholic faith, but this pertains to a minority. As Hoge and his associates state:

We observed that in one-on-one interviews, young adults occasionally noted that the most influential norm of spirituality in their life was a grandparent rather than a parent. . . . Some young Catholics

¹⁹David E. Nantais, S.J., "Retro-Catholicism," *America* 186, no. 17 (2002): 17.

²⁰Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 136.

²¹John C. Cavadini, "Ignorant Catholics: The Alarming Void in Religious Education," *Commonweal*, April 9, 2004: 12–14.

today need to look back to a time before the Council (or to an immigrant expression of Catholicism) to find inspiring models of commitment to the gospel of Christ.²²

Certainly, there are extremist groups on both sides of the political spectrum who are willing to indoctrinate these young adults, and sometimes this is what happens. Some of these groups can feed young adults all the “black and white” answers they can swallow, while others will capitalize on young-adult cynicism and turn them away from the Church. I find this unfortunate, for the Church and the Society are missing an opportunity to help young adults learn more about the rich tradition of the Catholic Church. I

Teaching contemporary young adults how to discern prayerfully is one of the greatest and most needed gifts Jesuits could offer them.

also find it curious that two of the best young-adult faith-formation programs I have seen outside the Jesuit system are at public institutions, namely, the University of Michigan and Iowa State University. The St. Thomas Catholic Student Center at Iowa State University founded a Chair of Catholic Studies at the school, and they

consistently bring in speakers to challenge their students and to help them learn more about their faith. Neither of these Catholic student centers forces their students to memorize doctrine (or they would find themselves closing shop rather quickly). But these programs care about what their students are saying that they need from the Church and then try to give it to them.

Some recent research suggests that there has been a growth in interest among young adults for a more traditional brand of Catholicism. One example of this is a rise in interest among some young adults who seek traditional Catholic devotional practices and demand more orthodox Catholic teaching from theology professors. Colleen Carroll's recent book, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, cites the lack of substantial religious education and a hunger to be challenged by their faith as two of the reasons why young adults have a desire for devotions and orthodoxy. She writes as follows:

²²Hoge et. al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 159.

The primary cravings of young orthodox Christians in America—for tough time-tested teachings and worship imbued with mystery and a sense of the transcendent—are often the result of deficiencies in their childhood spiritual diet. Those raised in mainline Protestant and Catholic churches typically complain that their faith formation consisted of vague platitudes about tolerance and love, not the "hard gospel" of sin and salvation. They recall church leaders so absorbed with chic social causes that they failed to lay the faith foundations for their service work.²³

An article in *Review for Religious* describes an experience a teacher had with a college student who asked some questions about Catholic practices. The student had wondered for years why there were pictures hung all around her church. She did some research on the Internet and discovered that these pictures were used for a devotion known as the "Stations of the Cross." The narrative continues, "Waiting for a time when she felt 'safe' in walking the Stations,

she came to the church and walked them and prayed them. Her comment and question to me was, 'Why are these such a big secret today?'"²⁴ Young-adult Catholics feel that their religious-education formation was lacking and they are searching for something to fill the lacunae. On the positive side, young adults who pursue a more traditional brand of

A fear of commitment is multiplied by the lightning-quick images young adults have grown accustomed to from videos, television, and computer technology.

Catholicism want to be in the Church and want to learn more about it. If they encounter resistance or neglect because some young-adult ministers are not comfortable with devotional practices, then these young adults will look elsewhere for spiritual nourishment.

One recent attempt to teach young adults about their faith has led to a program quickly spreading through the United States called "Theology on Tap" (ToT). Founded in 1981 by Father John Cusick, a very popular young-adult minister in Chicago, ToT programs seek to

²³ Colleen Carroll, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 62.

²⁴ David M. Whalen, O.S.F.S., "The Emergence of the Contemporary Traditionalists," *Review for Religious*, Nov.-Dec. 2002, 591.

meet young adults on their own terms and delve into topics theological and spiritual in which they are interested.²⁵ The format is simple. Young adults gather at a parish center or a bar and listen to a twenty- to thirty-minute presentation on one aspect of Catholic life and practice, such as the sacraments, Church history, decision making, and relationships (always a popular topic!). Following the presentation, the speaker answers questions and facilitates a discussion. I helped with a ToT program in Detroit for two years and can attest to the popularity of this format. Young adults appreciate this format because it is relaxed and it is expected that the discussion will focus on religion. Religion may be on their minds at other times, but it can be a bit “weird” or out of place to bring it up in another context. (Most young adults will gladly embrace a discussion about religion after their third beer!) It is important to choose the topics carefully, as some are more popular than others:

Fr. Cusick notes that this generation as a whole struggles with developing and maintaining quality relationships in their lives. Issues surrounding spirituality and relationships naturally top the list of favorites. Subjects related to Scripture and how it applies to everyday life usually attract higher numbers. In most cases, he reports, the meetings are populated with individuals who have an unabashed curiosity about all things Catholic.²⁶

The ToT model seems to be working well. “Nationwide, 381 parishes and organizations in forty-four states and three countries have asked permission to host Theology on Tap” (ibid., 24). There is much more that needs to be done for Gen-Xers and other young adults before they feel so alienated that they leave the Church completely, but the ToT model is a good example of inculturating to meet the needs of young-adult Catholics.

²⁵ For a description of how to initiate a Theology on Tap program, see John C. Cusick and Katherine De Vries, *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 140–145.

²⁶ Phyllis M. Hanlon, “Food for Young Appetites,” *America* 189, no. 8 (2003): 23.

V: How Can Jesuits Minister to Young Adults?

The Spiritual Exercises are Ignatius's gift to the Church. In different times and places, Jesuits and other ministers have adapted the Exercises to the specific needs of people of various cultures and languages. Early twenty-first-century young adults have a unique culture and language, which I have attempted to outline in the first half of this essay. The question for the second half of this essay is: How can the Society of Jesus engage young adults and share with them the gift of a 450-year-old spiritual tradition that is still vital and very much needed?

Discernment and the Two Standards

The novel *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby is a young-adult favorite (as is the movie version starring John Cusack). The main character, Rob Fleming, is a young-adult record-store owner in Britain who is charming enough to attract the opposite sex, but a bit immature when it comes to following through with a relationship. Toward the end of the novel, Rob and his girlfriend Laura have just reconciled after a messy separation, and they are getting along fairly well. Then Rob meets another attractive young woman who seems to be interested in him. He flirts with her, and even makes a "compilation tape" of some of his favorite music for her. Rob finds himself daydreaming about this new and exciting woman. He wonders what it would be like being with her. Suddenly, in an important moment that I would describe as classic Ignatian discernment, Rob realizes that his fantasies about this woman are hollow. He understands that leaving his girlfriend to pursue another relationship would be the wrong thing to do, for it would just continue the cycle of selfishness that has ruined most of his previous relationships. Rob describes his moment of clarity, which, while not equivalent to Ignatius's vision at the Cardoner, is a wonderful example of young-adult discernment

I'm going to jump from rock to rock for the rest of my life until there aren't any rocks left? I'm going to run each time I get itchy feet? Because I get them about once a quarter, along with the utilities bills. More than that, even, during British Summer Time. I've been thinking with my guts since I was fourteen years old, and frankly speak-

ing, between you and me, I have come to the conclusion that my guts have shit for brains.²⁷

Though irreverent, this scene illustrates a modern young adult doing a “good discernment” and growing in self-awareness as a result. There are obvious similarities between this narrative and Ignatius’s own story of discerning his daydreams while recovering from a war injury. The similarities extend to how both of these men “stumbled upon” the discernment of spirits at about the same age without realizing what was happening to them. Ignatius did not set out to find a way to figure out God’s will for his life. He simply began to reflect on his everyday experience and noticed patterns in his life. Some of these patterns gave him a sense of comfort, while others accentuated his vanity and arrogance. Ignatius was about thirty years old when he was wounded in the battle at Pamplona. Up to that point of his life, as he states in his autobiography, “he was a man given to the follies of the world; and what he enjoyed most was exercise with arms, having a great and foolish desire to win fame.”²⁸ Ignatius realized that the life path he had chosen was leading him nowhere. He eventually wrote about how the various spirits, good and evil, worked within him, and he shared his reflections with others. Young adults in the twenty-first century urgently need his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. Prayerful discernment has lost none of its relevance since Ignatius’s time, although it does need to be introduced and explained in a way that is understandable to today’s young adults. Teaching contemporary young adults how to discern prayerfully is one of the greatest and most needed gifts Jesuits could offer them.

“He makes them imagine delights and pleasures of the senses, in order to hold them fast and plunge them deeper into their sins and vices.”

The experience of “jumping from rock to rock” that Hornby’s character describes is a typical young-adult way of proceeding. It can apply to relationships, college majors, brands of spirituality, jobs, churches, and geography. Commitment is not easy for young adults.

²⁷ Nick Hornby, *High Fidelity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 315.

²⁸ Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim’s Testament*, trans. Parmananda R. Divarkar (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 4, no. 1.

A fear of commitment is multiplied by the lightning-quick images young adults have grown accustomed to from videos, television, and computer technology. We have never been used to waiting for something different to come our way—the American media have seen to that. Young adults' immersion into media culture with its fast-paced marketing makes any slow and deliberate discernment very difficult. Top all of this off with mistrust toward institutions (including the Church), and we see why young adults might be skeptical about their spiritual lives' actually having any impact on their day-to-day decision making. Can Ignatius's Rules for Discernment apply to this culture?

In paragraph no. 314 of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius puts it this way:

With people who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy ordinarily proposes to them apparent pleasures. He makes them imagine delights and pleasures of the senses, in order to hold them fast and plunge them deeper into their sins and vices. But with persons of this type the good spirit uses a contrary procedure. Through their good judgment on problems of morality he stings their consciences with remorse.²⁹

Michael Ivens, S.J., posits a more nuanced translation of this paragraph, which is the first rule of Ignatius's "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" for the First Week. He explains that those who go from "one mortal sin to another" are regressing in regard to their call to love and serve God, even if this is a slow-paced regression. These people are putting their own needs and desires before those of others, without considering what Christ wants for them. Ivens writes, "By *sensual delights* one is to understand not only (or even primarily) crass hedonism, but the gratification of any instinct—e.g., for power, wealth, fame—insofar as the instinct is not integrated into, and ordered by, a true relationship with Christ."³⁰ Margaret Silf's modern notion of this type of person provides a fine analogy. She believes that the person Ignatius describes in paragraph 314 is one who has not come to the realization that the Copernican revolution has occurred. In other words, this person believes that he is the

²⁹ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (SpEx)*, ed. and trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 314^{vv. 1-2} (p. 121).

³⁰ Michael Ivens, S.J., *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 1998), 212 f.

center of the universe.³¹ It makes perfect sense in his mind why his needs should come first, and why his impulses should be gratified without concern for how others might be affected.

The majority of young adults are not moving from one deadly sin to the next. The post-Vatican II generations are no more vulner-

able to sin than any other generation in human history. The cultural milieu from which many young adults come, however, can leave them feeling numb or empty. Since childhood young adults have been bombarded with media messages announcing "new and improved" goods. Entertainment and communications technologies are obsolete soon after purchase. Cell phones, beepers, video games, and ipods are normal facets of life, and they successfully allow young adults to avoid any silence invading their lives. Audio (and video) streaming on the Internet means

The sin that plagues young adults is not so much the conscious and continual turning away from God through mortal sin Ignatius writes about, but rather, it is ignoring God, or replacing God with something "new and improved," whether this is a new technological toy or a superficial relationship.

they can get what they want when they want it with no commitment required. And when they grow tired of these things, they grab the "updated" or "improved" version and dispose of the "old stuff."

Popular culture can be a useful tool for young adults' spiritual life³² but there are aspects of that culture that encourage exaggerated autonomy and avoidance of commitment. The sin that plagues young adults is not so much the conscious and continual turning away from God through mortal sin Ignatius writes about, but rather, it is ignoring God, or replacing God with something "new and improved," whether this is a new technological toy or a superficial relationship. The evil spirit encourages this behavior, and since family, friends, and television reinforce it, it is difficult to see the sinfulness, so the behavior continues. The good spirit, according to Ignatius's rules, is always trying to break in and disturb persons so

³¹ Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999), 38.

³² David E. Nantais, S.J., "CDs Don't Kill People . . .," *America* 182, no. 1 (2000): 14.

that they change their ways. But this feeling is often not recognized as the work of God. The emptiness or anxiety they feel is not seen as an invitation to growth. Instead, it is mollified with more purchasing, more sex, and more music. Since these behaviors are all socially acceptable, how does the cycle get broken? In Rob's case, after years of following the same impulses, he found that the emptiness had grown tired and he needed something else.

In *High Fidelity*, Rob's struggle is with finding his true desires in a milieu that encourages superficial desires. He likes the "thrill of the chase" and the sexual relationships that result, but as soon as the adrenaline rush halts, he becomes restless and searches for a new target. A good spiritual director could help Rob recognize this pattern in his life by encouraging him to reflect on his affectivity in these relationships. When he is getting ready to run from a relationship, what is it that impels him? Fear? Listlessness? Intimidation? All of these could be signs of the "enemy of our human nature" at work. Likewise, what are the feelings associated with his thoughts of finding a new relationship—the "apparent pleasures" Ignatius mentions in his rules for discernment. This assessment of Rob's situation is a bit overly simplified, but it points to a question of discernment that is necessary for many young adults: "Who or what is worthy of my commitment?" This is an especially vulnerable point for contemporary young adults, as they find commitment to anything very difficult.

Ivens's modern interpretation is very helpful in making the point that the temptations of riches, honor, and pride will look very different to modern young adults than to people in other eras.

The meditation on the Two Standards in the Exercises is a helpful context in which to place the struggles of modern young adults. All human beings experience what Ivens dubs, "The pull within ourselves between the two sets of values, two wisdoms."³³ The two sets of values are those of Christ, which lead to God and freedom, and those of the enemy of our human nature, which lead to sin and broken relationships. Ignatius writes that the enemy works by tempting us with riches, honor, and pride, and through

³³ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 108.

these, “entices them to all the other vices.”³⁴ Ivens’s modern interpretation is very helpful in making the point that the temptations of riches, honor, and pride will look very different to modern young adults than to people in other eras. Ivens writes that

[i]n the wider sense, *riches* and *honour* can be anything at all that meets the inherent human need for identity, security, esteem, love. The particular significance we attach to the things, situations or relationships that for us meet these needs, the quality of our desire for these, our criteria for seeking or accepting them—all this raises the basic issue of the kind of persons we are and want to be in relation to God and others.³⁵

Regarding the temptation of pride, Ivens posits that it is “a stance in relation to God, consisting in the refusal to give praise and reverence, and hence a tendency, in however subtle a way, to try to establish oneself as absolute” (*ibid.*). What are the temptations of riches, honor, and pride for young adults? Certainly these will differ from person to person, but given the social milieu from which most middle-class young adults in the United States come, they likely face some common struggles in this regard.

Young adults are encouraged by media and social pressures to base their personal worth on income, clothing, appearance, occupation, and autonomy. As a result, many young adults either pursue the latest trends, or define themselves through their opposition to these trends. But either way, they are drawing a sense of identity from what marketers are communicating to them. This tendency, it seems to me, is the temptations of riches and honor found under the standard of the enemy of our human nature. The subtle message these temptations convey is that one’s value as a human person is based on external rather than internal goods. The key problem is not the possessions in themselves, but rather how tightly young adults grasp onto them for the

Young adults are encouraged by media and social pressures to base their personal worth on income, clothing, appearance, occupation, and autonomy.

³⁴ Ganss, *SpEx* 66.

³⁵ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 109.

sake of their identity. Reality shows on television, which feature primarily young adults, tap into their temptation to believe that a person gains self-worth by appearing in the media. One extreme example is a reality show on a very popular cable channel in which young adults submit themselves to cosmetic surgery in order to look like their favorite movie or music stars. The temptation to try to become something else, either through surgery or other means, is a symptom, I believe, of a very low self-esteem, and it will not be assuaged by spending more money on material goods.

The tendency to avoid commitment is one way that young adults are tempted by pride. Again, this temptation can be very subtle. Being leery of commitment can be a very good thing if an institution or person has been harmful. At some point, young adults' fears about commitment can morph into a belief that there is nothing greater than their needs. No one can make a claim on them and no person, institution, or religious organization is worthy of them. As long as they are not hurting anyone by their actions, everything is fine. But there is a faulty logic in this line of thinking. As social beings, human persons cannot help but affect one another. And as social beings, human persons must make a commitment to someone or something in their lives, preferably something that gives them hope and a true sense of freedom. If young adults do not acknowledge that there *are* persons and institutions worthy of their commitments, then they will hop from one superficial relationship or spirituality to another, and they will be left feeling empty and helpless. One point of the Two Standards meditation is to turn the spotlight on how the enemy of our human nature works, so as to increase self-awareness and help us make better decisions out of freedom.

Relationships are important to young adults. Many have seen their parents' relationships crumble, and they may hesitate to give themselves to a relationship if they are uncertain about its permanence.

Prayer and Spirituality

If young adults stay connected to the Church, it is often because they crave a sense of community. A couple of recent young-adult reflections bring this point home. "In quieter moments, my peers and I pulse with the conviction that there is meaning in relationships. It is one of the few things we believe in absolutely. The world may be harsh and indecipherable, but there is meaning in

human connection—even if that connection is not permanent."³⁶

Ignatius draws the comparison between relationship with Christ and relationships with good friends in order to tap into the retreatant's experiences and affectivity.

"The young Catholics still here stay because we assent to the community consuming God together, to the message that we are all connected, to the idea that the divine is present in all of us, and to the belief that this assent nourishes us."³⁷ These testimonies are good news! There is ample evidence for increasing individualism among

young adults (among many Americans, for that matter), but when given the opportunity to reflect, many young adults see the lack of community in their lives as painful. This fact does not mean that they will all eventually fill up churches around the country, but it does provide some insight about how to reach out to them.

Ignatius had a firm grasp on the tension between someone's personal spiritual life and the community of believers. Ignatius is adamant that the director not get in the way of God's work in the exercitant's prayer. Annotation 15 makes this abundantly clear: "Accordingly, the one giving the Exercises ought not to lean or incline in either direction but rather, while standing by like the pointer of a scale in equilibrium, to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord."³⁸ Simultaneously, Ignatius included his "Rules for Thinking, Judging, and Feeling with the Church" in the *Exercises*. Ignatius did

³⁶ Karla Manternach, "Staying Catholic at Twenty-Something," *America* 185, no. 11 (2001): 122.

³⁷ Eileen Markey, "In Their Own Words," *Commonweal*, Nov. 23, 2001, 14.

³⁸ *SpEx* 15^{vv.1-2} (pp. 25 f.).

not see these as mutually exclusive, but, presumably, he believed that one built upon the other and both movements came from the same Spirit (*SpEx* 365). This being said, young adults will likely be more attracted to the idea that God can (and desires to) work directly with them. God has desires for their lives and wants to be in a personal relationship with them.

The theme of "mutuality" is very important to young adults. The hang-ups about organized religion are steeped in the post-modern notion that no one can claim to have the truth, including the Church. Therefore, when the institutional Church tells young adults what they can and cannot do, they will react negatively. This is not to say that we should not direct young adults to the Church. But a good starting point is inviting them to enter into a relationship with Christ. The theme of mutuality, regarding the exercitant's relationship with God, is found throughout the Exercises. Ivens sums up very nicely the dynamic of "mutual communication," found in the second part of the Contemplation to Attain Love.

The mutual communication here described is that which characterizes the love of friendship, a love which is spontaneous and which is directed on each side towards the good or pleasure of the other. In friendship, the giver's generosity does not coerce, but simply gives the experience of being loved; and the desire of the beloved to give in return comes not from a sense of being put under obligation but from the wish to give, which is of the essence of friendship. Nor in friendship is there any question of loving the other for their gifts and not for themselves, still less of loving only on the condition of receiving gifts.³⁹

Ivens also states that the entire dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises is directed toward this end—the growth in mutual loving friendship with God, and it is stated first in Annotation 15. The Creator will deal with the creature because the Creator loves the creature. This is not a love that encourages individualism, but rather one that impels the creature to love others. This is what the two parts of the Contemplation mean. Love will express itself as deeds rather than words because the Creator has loved the creature into loving others through deeds. Ivens very helpfully points out that the word "attain," as in "attain love," "is used not in the sense of 'obtain' but

³⁹ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 173.

rather of 'reaching to' or 'arriving at.' The love to be 'attained' is a growing love on our part for God."⁴⁰

Relationships are important to young adults. Many have seen their parents' relationships crumble, and they may hesitate to give themselves to a relationship if they are uncertain about its permanence. For these young adults there is an opportunity to introduce them to the theme of friendship with Christ. Ivens points out two other places in the *Exercises* where the theme of mutual communication in friendship with Jesus occurs. The first is when Ignatius is describing a colloquy in the First Week. "A colloquy is made, properly speaking, in the way one friend speaks to another, or a servant to one in authority—now begging a favor, now accusing oneself of some misdeed, now telling one's concerns and asking counsel about them."⁴¹ Ivens posits that there is a spontaneous and a personal quality to the colloquy. It is not a formal "prayer" like an Our Father, and words do not necessarily have to be spoken. It is a prayer from the heart, directly to a friend who can truly understand the concerns of the one praying. This leads into a second description of Jesus as a friend that Ivens points out in the *Exercises*. "Consider the office of consoler which Christ our Lord carries out, and compare it with the way friends console one another."⁴² Here again, Ignatius wants to emphasize to the exercitant that the love of Christ, the consolation of Christ, is not some ethereal notion accessible only to Gnostics and mystics. Ignatius draws the comparison between relationship with Christ and relationships with good friends in order to tap into the retreatant's experiences and affectivity. Young adults who have suffered through divorces or who are grasping at some sense of meaning for their lives in a very confusing world need this message of consolation and they can appreciate the comparison of Christ with their circle of friends—the ones whom they have learned to count on.

A telltale sign of how much young adults crave authentic relationships is the growing popularity of computer Web Logs or "blogs." Blogs are electronic diaries kept on the World Wide Web. Bloggers can chronicle their lives for others (strangers and friends) to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *SpEx* 54^{vv.5-6} (p. 43).

⁴² Ibid., 224^{v.1} (p. 92).

view and comment upon. A recent article in the *New York Times Magazine* by Emily Nussbaum about blogs revealed what is attracting so many young people to log on. Nussbaum describes the experience of one "blogger." "He called it 'better than therapy,' a way to get out his true feelings—all the emotions he thought might get him in trouble if he expressed them in school or at home. Online he could blurt out confessions of loneliness and insecurity, worrying aloud about slights from friends."⁴³ Using blogs is more common among high-school and college students because it is a more recent technology. Many young adults across the age spectrum, however, desire to be heard and understood and consoled by others. Blogs are not without their problems. If young adults become too attached to conversing over the Web and avoid cultivating other kinds of relationships, all the writing in the world will not alleviate their sense of emptiness. The important point to note here is that young adults desire a connection, a relationship with someone who will accept them without judgment. The blog and the colloquy come from the same spiritual hunger to be known and loved by another.

The Chicago Province Jesuits, in response to the growing need for young-adult Christian formation, started Charis Ministries about four years ago.⁴⁴ Initiated by Michael Sparough, S.J., Charis began as a retreat program specifically designed for young adults. The first Charis retreats, held in Chicago and Cincinnati, were very successful. The program has grown to include a variety of retreat models, including preached and silent-directed, as well as many faith-based social events, such as tours of Chicago-area churches. Charis markets its programs well also to a wide range of young adults. It offers retreats geared toward "seekers" and those who are reflecting about their choice to be Catholic. Charis invites young adults to consider what it means to choose to be Catholic. This is an important point for reflection for a generation that did not have the Catholic faith handed to them neatly in a box like their parents and

Many young adults across the age spectrum, however, desire to be heard and understood and consoled by others.

⁴³ Emily Nussbaum, "My So-Called Blog," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 11, 2004.

⁴⁴ For more information about Charis Ministries, see www.jesuits.net/charis

grandparents. It is a choice, and Charis seems to strike a good balance between naming this reality and encouraging young adults to embrace faith as their choice.

Charis retreats help young adults explore how God has been in their lives, a very important theme, given the abandonment many feel about divorced parents and the difficulty of finding meaning in a postmodern world. Charis retreats also offer something not found too often in the lives of young adults: silence. Silence is so rare in the lives of many young adults, and it truly is countercultural to escape the communications vortex of cell phones, the Internet, and beepers. Finally, Charis seeks to connect (or reconnect) young adults with a faith community. This may be only for a weekend retreat, or it could extend further to regular attendance at a parish, but either way, young adults cannot help but know that there are others who struggle as they do and who are searching for something worth their commitment.

Teaching

Many institutions of higher learning today seem to be more focused on job training than on a well-rounded liberal-arts education. This is not too shocking, given the attitudes of some undergraduate students. It is not uncommon to hear students utter some

As effective as campus-ministry programs are at many schools, they are often limited to those who show up at their doorstep.

variation of this sentence: "If it is not going to be on the test, help me get into med school, or get me a job in a major accounting firm, what's the point?" In a recent article, Tad Dunne, a former Jesuit, points out that Christian-based colleges for years graduated women and men who viewed their professions as much more than venues for money making. Dunne writes, "Besides mastering professional skills and learning Christian doctrines, they had absorbed a view of life dominated by an expectation of self-sacrifice, symbolized by a sacramental aesthetics, and lived out in a discipline of humility and compliance."⁴⁵ This may be an overly nostalgic yarn,

⁴⁵Tad Dunne, "College and the Christian Vision," *Logos*, Fall 2001, 122.

but it is the case that many higher-education institutions have become much more specialized in the past quarter century, and core curricula, focused largely on the humanities (especially theology and philosophy), have been slowly whittled away. Dunne laments this change, primarily because he sees within Christianity a strong tradition of academic learning integrated with a religious formation. It is a tradition that, in his view, is not tapped enough by Christian (and Catholic, Jesuit) higher education.

The late Arthur McGovern, S.J., who was faithfully committed to Jesuit higher education, and was a former member of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, echoed similar sentiments in this periodical over fifteen years ago.

Most students come to us with very pragmatic goals in mind. They want a solid education which will prepare them for successful careers. We have to acknowledge such goals and help students to fulfill them. But the Society of Jesus would hardly have undertaken the apostolate of education simply to enable students to achieve "worldly goals." We have always sought to imbue students with a faith life and values that transcend goals of money and success. . . . We would like to send forth graduates concerned about the society and world in which they live, desirous of eliminating hunger and conflict in the world, seeking to end racial and sexual discrimination, and wanting to share their faith with others. . . .

On our part, an education which leads in these directions will include specific attention to courses in ethics and theology and courses which challenge students to confront contemporary social issues.⁴⁶

The plan McGovern suggests is just as important today as when he first wrote it. More than ever, ministers in the Church have to help young adults understand why their faith is relevant. It is not simply a matter of private devotion, as important as this may be. Faith is learned, loved, and lived. As McGovern suggests, making the faith mission oriented does have the benefit of making its relevance more obvious. Christianity is

Sitting at desks in classrooms of Jesuit schools are students who are, for the most part, not well informed about their faith, but who have a passion to volunteer and help their fellow human beings.

⁴⁶ Arthur F. McGovern, S.J. "Jesuit Education and Jesuit Spirituality," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 20, no. 4 (September 1988): 28.

more than a series of rules about sexuality, which is a characterization of the faith I have heard from many young adults. It is a characterization steeped in ignorance of the faith, but also a perspective that showcases how some young adults fail to find the relevance of the Catholic faith. By teaching theology and philosophy and other humanities, as well as the sciences, we seek God's greater glory as our goal, together as faculty and students. There is no academic discipline that is bereft of the possibility of finding God.

I would like to propose two ways that Jesuit education could better minister to young adults.

Basic faith formation. Given the lack of knowledge many young-adult Catholics have about their faith, couldn't Jesuit education find new, creative and exciting ways to do faith formation? This plan would certainly include bolstering campus-ministry programs, but this is not sufficient. As effective as campus-ministry programs are at many schools, they are often limited to those who show up at their doorstep. Faith formation, in some form, should be integrated into the classroom curricula. How is this done? Tad Dunne provides a few ideas:

Courses in physics, chemistry, biology, and botany should assume an attitude of wonderment over the marvels of their subject matters. Courses in anthropology, psychology, and sociology should take seriously the phenomenon that humans can act against their better judgment. Art, sculpture, and poetry courses should emphasize how aesthetics is meant to evoke a sense of the mysterious "plus" in all reality that cannot be put into concepts and words, including tragic works that reveal the horrors we are capable of. It should be explored in an architecture school that believes that all shared space should give life and mobilize the spirit. More directly, courses in the philosophy of science, theology of history, and foundational theology should explicitly help students form a Christian vision that makes sense of all other courses. Courses on God and the Trinity should spell out how the mission of God's Word in our history is mediated by the community of Christians, and is matched at every point by the mission of the Spirit in our hearts welcoming the Word.⁴⁷

I would never want to imply that this is not already being done. As a product of Jesuit higher education, I was lucky to take classes with some amazing professors, lay and Jesuit, who opened

⁴⁷ Dunne, "College and the Christian Vision," 129.

my eyes to faith from perspectives I had not previously considered. But could we, by examining core curricula and asking the question, "What do our students need from us?" initiate a more intensive and combined effort? If my assessment of young-adult Catholics in the first half of this essay holds any connection with reality at all, then sitting at desks in classrooms of Jesuit schools are students who are, for the most part, not well informed about their faith, but who have a passion to volunteer and help their fellow human beings. We cannot lose the Jesuit education focus on justice, but perhaps we need to be better at expanding that to the *faith* that does justice. As Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach stated in his address entitled "Faith and Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," students at Jesuit schools are involved in a wide variety of justice activities, and that is a vital part of what their education should be about. He goes on to say that this is necessary, but not sufficient. "This does not make the university a training camp for social activists. Rather, the students need close involvement with the poor and the marginal now, in order to learn about reality and become adults of solidarity in the future."⁴⁸ Part of that "reality" is that, as Christians, we (students, faculty, and staff) are called to follow Christ in the world today. Our work for justice should flow from our faith in hope and redemption, which then, after reflection, draws us back into the work for justice.

The students sitting in classrooms at Jesuit schools are immersed in a popular culture that tries, in its worst moments, to lay claim to their imaginations, forming them to tie their self-worth in with what they buy, wear, listen to, and so forth. Perhaps we need to help them critique this culture and uncover just how they are affected by it.⁴⁹ Many students in Jesuit schools are hungry for

But all students, not just those who volunteer for service trips, should experience the mission focus of Jesuit education.

⁴⁸ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "Faith and Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 33, no. 1 (January 2001): 24.

⁴⁹ One book that quite cogently addresses the issue of consumerism through the lens of Ignatian Spirituality is Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are with What We Buy* (Chicago: Sheed and Ward, 2003).

meaning, but are suspicious of any institutions that attempt to offer them meaning. This is a tricky tension because Jesuit schools are certainly institutional and part of “the system” many students rebel against. Timothy Muldoon suggests that, in this context, Ignatius’s First Principle and Foundation can be of service. Muldoon writes, “It is a disarmingly simple proposition: We are created to praise, glorify and serve God, and by this means to achieve our eternal destiny. Such a suggestion cuts to the heart of our longing for truth and offers a simple recommendation: Live as though this first principle and foundation were true.”⁵⁰

In this same article, Muldoon offers an anecdote about teaching an introductory philosophy class and lobbing out the Principle and Foundation as a possible answer to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” The students in his class began frantically writing down his words, fascinated that such a simple sentence could contain such richness. Muldoon offers his analysis of what happened in that classroom:

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

The Jesuit tradition contains many tools that, if creatively adapted for contemporary times, can be very effective in teaching young adults about issues of faith, justice, spirituality, and meaning.

Students at Jesuit schools have a vocation. With the help of some generous grants from the Lilly foundation, a few Jesuit universities have been able to bolster their efforts at connecting their students’ faith with their choice of career. This is a natural fit for Jesuit schools, which have proclaimed as their goal creating men and women for others. All Jesuit schools should invite their students to reflect on their future profession as a calling rather than as a mere means to accumulate material goods. We should also not assume that students at Jesuit schools understand what “men and women for others” means. Young adults at Jesuit colleges and universities

⁵⁰ Timothy Muldoon, “Why Young Adults Need Ignatian Spirituality,” *America* 184, no. 6 (2001): 10.

may think it is one more logo vying for their attention and tuition dollars.⁵¹ The meaning behind the words has to be real for them if we are going to be true to our mission as educators of whole persons.

Jesuit schools need to be overt about the mission focus of the education they offer. A Jesuit education is not just for self-improvement, but also rather to prepare young adults to direct their hearts and minds to improving the condition of the world. During a time when young adults are grappling for some sense of meaning in their lives, highlighting the mission aspect of their education may be exactly what they need to get excited about their future. Young adults want to know that their future lives are going to mean something and, as I discussed earlier in this essay, they are passionate about helping their fellow human beings. They need some help discerning how they can funnel that passion for service to their profession, so that they see the connection. Many campus-ministry programs at Jesuit schools offer opportunities for service, and some of these experiences have been life changing for students. But all students, not just those who volunteer for service trips, should experience the mission focus of Jesuit education. If service is seen as "extracurricular," then we slowly lose the distinctive character of Jesuit education.

Tad Dunne poses an interesting suggestion about how to build up a culture of mission-focused education at an institution. He writes as follows:

If a Christian college wants a mission statement, let it be written by those people who depend on scholarship and science for wisdom—the laborers in the city, the poor in the slums, the leaders of the community, the representatives of service corporations and industry, and any others within the ministerial sights of its sponsoring religious body. These are the people to whom the college "missions" the students. This would help convey the ideal that attending school on *this* campus is for the spiritual and material good of the commonweal, not merely for the career of the student or faculty member. To be effective, students should not first *read* the mission; they should *hear* it firsthand from men and women in the communities they will eventually serve.⁵²

⁵¹ For a constructive dialog regarding "branding" the Jesuit name, see *Conversations in Jesuit Higher Education*, no. 25 (Spring 2004).

⁵² Dunne, "College and the Christian Vision," 130.

As Dunne observes, if a mission is not real to the students, if they do not see everything they do as connected with a mission, then the mission has no teeth, and it will not capture anyone's imagination. Another benefit of a mission-focused education is that it gives students a sense that they are part of a project that transcends them, and that they are contributing their talents to something that really matters to both them and others. I truly believe young adults are hungry for this sense of mission and identity, and Jesuit institutions are well poised to help them discover it.

VI. A Few Suggestions

I hope that this essay entices my brother Jesuits and our colleagues to consider how we can better serve the young-adult population in the United States, especially those who pass through our schools, retreat houses, and parishes. Needless to say, I do not have a panacea that will draw this population back to the Church, or to consider the importance of a prayer life. I can, however, offer a few suggestions as starting points, along with a few focus questions.

- ▶ **Develop more retreats and opportunities for spiritual direction.** The Charis program developed by the Chicago Province is an excellent model and could be expanded. Young adults are hungry for good spirituality that is simultaneously challenging and satisfying. They also desire help with making important decisions in their lives. The Society of Jesus should use the Exercises to address the needs of modern young adults—this is a gift we can give to the Church. Charis addresses these concerns by adapting the Exercises and “packaging” their ministry in a way that is non-threatening to young adults.
- ▶ **Build bridges with graduates of Jesuit schools.** How many young adults in the United States, aged twenty-two to twenty-three, are graduates of Jesuit high schools and universities? Our first job is to find the answer to this question! Once we have accomplished this, could we develop a way to connect with these graduates and offer them continuing spiritual development? We are blessed with amazing spiritual resources, but could we be more effective in our outreach to students after they graduate?

- ▶ **Develop creative ways to teach college students about their faith.** There is an urgent need to pass on the Catholic faith to modern young adults, but this cannot be done the way it has been done in the past. Is there a uniquely "Jesuit" way to make the Catholic faith alive and exciting to young adults today? The answer to this question will require us to think creatively and to consider using methods that may not have previously been attempted. One suggestion from someone with little experience in higher education: What about building on the idea that God is found in *all* things by offering a first-year-of-college student seminar on the Catholic contribution to art, history, science, music, literature, and so on?
- ▶ **Utilize the Internet better.** Type the word "Catholic" into the Google web browser and you will find there are over fifteen *million* Websites that come up. Many of these sites are helpful and contain credible information about the Church, the Catholic faith, and even the Society of Jesus. But others are quite poor, and potentially harmful. The Society of Jesus may want to consider having a stronger presence in cyberspace. We may not even have to go outside our ranks to do this. There are many young Jesuits with the expertise and passion to help discover new uses for the Internet in ministry. We could use the Internet to keep connected with our alums, to advertise retreats, and to link to some of the important Catholic Websites that are now receiving hundreds or thousands of hits per day. (*Sacred Space*, the Creighton University site, and *Busted Halo*, for example.)
- ▶ **More CLC groups on Jesuit university campuses.** Thomas Rausch, S.J., wrote an excellent article in the Spring 2004 issue of *STUDIES* about Christian Life Communities for modern Jesuit-university students. What really piqued my interest was a sentence toward the end of this essay. "The fact that CLC combines community, spirituality, and mission should be attractive to many Jesuits today."⁵³ I give a resounding Amen! to this statement. This is what college students are looking for, a sense of community, a spirituality that is practical and can be lived, and a sense of purpose. Students are trying to see if and how their faith and their religious experience connect with their daily life. Christian

⁵³Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., "Christian Life Communities for Jesuit University Students?" *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

Life Communities are helpful because they allow college students to talk about their experiences, but in the context of a community. In this way, a student's experience is not canonized as the only truth possible, but it is accepted and respected in a safe milieu.

Conclusion

I grew up less than a mile from the novitiate for the Detroit and Chicago Provinces, and my parish church was located right across the street. It was not uncommon for novices occasionally to get involved with ministry at our parish, which is how I met Bill, an eighteen-year-old novice from Ohio. Bill was energetic, fun to be with, and bursting with excitement about being a Jesuit. Every week I looked forward to our Sunday evening youth-group meeting, when I would be able to hang out with Bill and listen to his stories about life in the Society. One particular time, as I listened to Bill talk about his hospital experiment, something inside me cried out, "That's exactly what I want to do!" I reflected on this experience over and over again for nine years before I finally entered the Society.

The passion and apostolic fervor that I witnessed in Bill excited me. It made me desire to give my life in service to God as a Jesuit. This means, to me, living out my faith in Christ in the world, and continually finding new ways to adapt the Gospel message for modern times. Part of my apostolic life since entering the Society has been devoted to being with young adults as they wrestle with questions about their faith, and trying to communicate to them that same excitement I felt when I talked to Bill. I continue to feel that excitement, and it impels me to encourage my brother Jesuits to consider how we can most effectively engage young adults as ministers. I hope this essay has both conveyed some of the fervor I feel for ministry to young adults, and has served as a catalyst for further thought and discussion.



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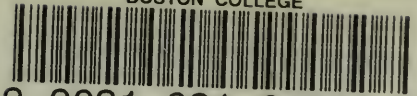
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