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Twelve SPIRITUAL TYPES

The Spirituality of Collegians Today: Much More than the Labels of Liberal or Conservative

By Michael Galligan-Stierle

With more than 18 million university students currently enrolled in approximately 4,000 U.S. institutions of higher learning, it is very encouraging that the spiritual interests of these students are being researched in depth. We can now document that which many of us have observed: students today thirst for spiritual growth in record numbers, but do so in different ways than those of us who teach them. For example, while they are very interested in spiritual issues, for this generation “spirituality” does not equate to “religion.”

Today’s students are part of the generational cohort identified as *millennials*. They were born between 1982-2001. As the *Beloit College Student Mindset List* documents annually, these students grew up in a very different world than ours. The *Mindset List* helps us remember this demographic reality each year in a playful, yet very informative, manner.

One area of significant difference across the generations is the fact that collegians have a hunger for integrating their spiritual journey with their academic learning. For many of us in the academy, this can be very challenging to understand, let alone implement a methodology to reach this end. How are faculty and staff to respond to this collegiate thirst for spiritual growth given the diversity of faith traditions, or no faith tradition? How are we to integrate this dimension into our courses when most of us have little or no training in this integrative methodology, let alone a sophisticated understanding of spiritual content? And most importantly, how do we factor in our Jesuit universities’ preferential option for a Catholic and Jesuit worldview in this way of teaching?

While this article does not intend to answer all these questions, it will suggest a paradigm for understanding

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Statue of Saint Ignatius, Xavier University.

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collegiate spirituality today. This will provide us with some descriptive language to identify and understand the spirituality of today's students more fully.

Catholic Millennials Today

Catholic young adults today are spiritually diverse. They are neither monolithic in their Catholic outlook nor similar to previous generations in their expressions of the

faith. It is not uncommon to identify the spirituality of these young adult Catholics with the traditional politically charged labels of *liberal* and *conservative*. These descriptors are inadequate, and more often than not pejorative and inaccurate. Since Catholic young adults express their Catholic faith in a multitude of spiritual ways, it is important to accurately identify these *expressions*.

It should be noted that the generational young adult impulse to emphasize one spiritual path over another is systemic to the Christian faith; for example, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul each emphasize a different expression of Jesus' message in their writings. This variety continues over the centuries as various spiritual paths have been warmly embraced within the Catholic community through a range of religious disciplines and methodologies: Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite, Mercy, and Ignatian to mention but a few.

Today, millennials advance this insight and passion of various spiritual paths in unique ways. In an effort to recognize this reality, I have identified twelve spiritual categories embraced by young adults today (see chart). This identification of twelve "types" is not exhaustive and some types slightly overlap others. Articulation of twelve types is not meant to constrain the spiritual or religious outlook of the young adult today, but rather help to clarify various paths of

Catholic incarnation in this new generation. While some individuals may exhibit one dominant spiritual "type," many individuals express themselves through multiple spiritual "categories." Some who have heard me speak on this subject have suggested that these twelve categories apply to young adults of various faith traditions, as well as Catholics of all ages, not just millennials.

To identify the broad tendencies in each of the twelve expressions of being a Catholic young adult, the

Structured	Energetic	Socially Aware	Present
The Church Apologist	The Church Evangelical	The Church in Service	The Church on Sunday
The Church Devotional	The Church Communal	The Church Prophetic	The Church Cultural
The Church Sacramental	The Church Creative	The Church All-Inclusive	The Church Eclipsed

twelve categories have been organized into four subsets entitled: *structured*, *energetic*, *socially aware*, and *present*. A short explanation of the twelve categories follows.

Church Apologists seek an intellectual understanding of the Catholic faith. Apologists desire to learn the faith in depth, and therefore spend much time studying the tenets of the Catholic faith in detail. Their prayer methods usually include ancient memorized prayers which they strongly advocate. They bring an ability to articulate the faith to fellow Catholics as well as to non-believers, and a keen ability to identify and understand church doctrine. Sometimes the apologist can over-intellectualize Catholicism, become very defensive justifying the Catholic faith, or lack tolerance by advancing excessive absolutes.

Church Devotionals are active in faith primarily through silent, personal prayer. They are especially drawn to Christ's presence where words are unnecessary for prayer, and they often have a strong devotion to Our Lady. They bring a powerful presence of prayer into the worshipping community, and they are often engaged in intercessory prayer for others in the church. Sometimes *Church Devotionals* can be hesitant to share their faith with others, tend to minimize the need to "dress-up" worship with "extras," and may need to learn the rich difference between individual prayer and communal prayer, especially regarding the celebration of the Eucharist.

Church Sacramentals love to attend Mass on Sunday and frequently attend weekday Mass. They bring a deep reverence to Christ's presence in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. They may volunteer as a liturgical minister, a sacristan, or a liturgy committee member. A few are willing to assist in adorning the church for various liturgical seasons. Some see the Eucharist as the sole expression of faith, while others may over-emphasize the liturgical ritual of the Catholic faith.

Church Evangelicals believe that a personal relationship with Christ and first hand knowledge of scripture is

central to being Catholic. They bring a strong commitment to witnessing their faith to others. Often times *Praise and Worship Music* is an enjoyable way to pray. Sometimes these believers become impatient with those who have little regard for scripture, and some may inappropriately focus on the individual over the communal dimensions of Catholicism.

Church Communals are eager to be connected with other young adults. They are often drawn to Church in search of friends with similar values, potential partners, or group activities. Some *Communals* have engaging personalities that can attract others to become involved in church activities, while others feel safe in developing their social skills within the context of the church community. Sometimes these young adults only become involved in church activities if they have a social component and many find prayer and faith exploration difficult unless it is connected to a social event. Some are drawn to mega-churches where young adults are engaged socially and spiritual growth is connected to small group sharing.

Church Creatives are young adults who are active in the faith community through drama, music, and art. These individuals are often culturally-literate, innovative, and engaging in presenting the faith. They are very adept at exploring and expressing the gospel message through cultural means and are eager to share these gifts with the community. Sometimes these individuals overlook the reverential aspect of worship (e.g., acting as if the altar is a stage and the congregation an audience), and some may only participate in activities of the faith community when their artistic gift is needed.

Church in Service is the group of young adults who directly serve those in need. They are strong advocates and witnesses of Catholic Social Teaching through direct service activities. Many work tirelessly serving the marginalized members of society and often energize others to get involved. They are attentive and committed to the social implications of the gospel. Some of this type may

RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS

Knowing young adults today is much more than the twelve paths described above. To sharpen one's pastoral care and understanding, a few resources are strongly recommended: Sharon Daloz Parks's text provides an in-depth understanding of the spiritual and psychological processes of young adults: *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (Jossey-Bass, 2000). The annual review of the *Beloit College Mindset List* is humorous, but I highly recommend it as it is always instructive (<http://www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/mindset>). A few recent books can be helpful as well: Colleen Carroll's, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Loyola, 2002), Christian Smith's, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: 2005), Robert Wuthnow's, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, 2007), and Dean Hoge, et al.'s, *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in a Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, 2001). A research project that is very instructional regarding the gulf between the millennials' desire for spiritual integration within the classroom and faculty caution for such integration are these two studies: *Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose and Spirituality and the Professoriate: A National Study of Faculty Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors*. (www.spirituality.ucla.edu).

emphasize the temporal over the spiritual, and others may minimize or disregard an active liturgical life. A few may lose sight of the importance of self-care when serving others.

Church Prophetics strive to reform unjust systems affecting the poor or disadvantaged. Seeking structural change, they are often active in campus peace fellowships, advocacy groups, and labor conflicts. They can have a deep understanding of domestic and international political/socio-economic conditions, as well as

Catholic Social Teaching. Often they will point out church failings as well as societal flaws. They tend to be passionate about their cause, as well as compassionate towards those affected by injustice. Some may become overly-critical or cynical, lose sight of the religious dimension of their call, and/or become so engaged in the conversation that little time is actually devoted to changing the structure or caring for the marginalized.

Church All-Inclusive is the group of young adults who see religion as a confining category for one's spiritual life. Often they have been exposed to other religions through friendship, a university level course, time in the armed services, or a significant book. Members of this group possess a reverence for all of God's creation, and often are committed to being a good person and "loving" others. Many *Church All-Inclusives* are welcoming of newcomers often seeking to expand the world view of the church membership. Their social awareness manifests itself in defending those outside the Catholic faith. They are open to various denominational practices and prayer experiences regardless of denominational or creedal differences between religions, and they bring a variety of new ideas to the Catholic community. Some may not be able to articulate clearly or convincingly Catholic beliefs or liturgical practices, often emphasizing one's individual spiritual-search over the value of Catholic "truth" or Catholic community values.

The Church on Sunday is that committed group of young adults who regularly participate in the liturgy on Sunday, but for various reasons do not participate in other church activities. This group finds community elsewhere. Many identify busyness, disinterest, lack of church peers, or a significant negative experience as the primary reason for a Sunday-only attitude. Some have an obligation-mentality toward Mass attendance and see no reason why their Catholicism needs to be something more. Finding ways to more fully engage the *Church on Sunday* constituency will add talented individuals currently untapped by the church community.

Church Culturals were baptized as infants and belong to families who identify as Catholic and celebrate major Catholic holidays. Many are familiar with certain traditions of the faith, and the sacraments received in their Catholic upbringing, but rarely attend Mass or other church activities. These individuals are more abundant where religion is connected to political, national or ethnic identity. Some may decorate their living space with devotional materials. Some only possess a nominal understanding of the Church, their Christian calling, or an adult faith. For some, saints are invoked more often than God when there is a prayer request.



Celebrating mass at Regis University.

The Church Eclipsed are those Catholic young adults who were baptized Catholic and who may or may not have grown up Catholic, but now, for all practical purposes are distant from Catholicism. Many were born into a family where religious practice was not encouraged, and some have been angered or disappointed by the Church. Many have chosen not to be engaged and are apathetic toward the Catholic community or any religious denomination, while others have found a new spiritual home in another community of faith. This is the largest group of young adult Catholics. In some ways, they mirror the Jews at Jesus' time identified as "the people of the land."

By using these twelve descriptive categories, the Catholic higher education community can enrich its current basic identification of young adult Catholics as either *liberal* or *conservative*, and replace it with a descriptive language of faith. Now, instead of identifying a young adult as *conservative*, one might say he/she is "apologetic and service minded." Or instead of being labeled a *liberal*, a young adult may be identified as "prophetic, creative and sacramental." By listening, observing, and asking young adults to identify their "dominant spiritual passions," an affirming language of young adult spirituality can emerge. By verbalizing a neutral or positive tone with each of the twelve descriptors, the Catholic higher education community can become more "young adult friendly."

While the twelve categories of millennials offer a tangible way to understand collegians today, in *Deus*

Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI reminds all of us about the basics of our faith: God loved us first, we are invited to love God and love neighbor, and we are all called to invite others into a love affair with God. This is based on the two great commandments...*you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole might* (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5) and...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18b). Our Catholic educational agenda could not be clearer. Proclaiming these simple truths in word and deed to young adults is a primary goal of a Catholic university setting.

Recently, I had the opportunity to walk through one of the 28 Jesuit campuses. There were small banners attached to the many light poles that framed the sidewalks throughout the grounds. Each banner captured a "theme" of the Jesuit/Ignatian world view of Catholic higher education: *Finding God in All Things*, *Magis*, *Faith that Does Justice*, *Eloquentia Perfecta*, and *Cura Personalis* to name a few. Then I thought about the many faculty members who served on the campus and wondered how each faculty member might rank order these "themes" if invited to select one or the other that best captured their spiritual "way of proceeding." I realized that it is not just students who can be given the limiting descriptor of "liberal" or "conservative;" faculty can also be confined in this way. I hope the twelve descriptors listed above might help the conversation to proceed with more civility and a deeper appreciation of the complexity of the spiritual reality within which we all find ourselves immersed. ■