Spiritual Formation of Millennials: Mystagogy & Imagination

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Pew Research Center: “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious”

• Published November 2015
• Published reports from 2007 to 2015
• Rise of the Unaffiliated, the “Nones”
• 2007, 16% of the adult population
• 2015, 23% of the adult population
Characteristics of Millennials

• Older Millennials (b. 1981-1989)
• Younger Millennials (b. 1990-1996)
• “spiritual, not religious”
  – Skeptical of institutions that claim the truth
  – Truth not limited to a single source/religion
• Are Seekers: Many still believe in God
  – But have little *spiritual formation*
• Self-Understanding/Identity defined from within their communities/relationships
Characteristics Continued

- Inclusive and very Progressive
- Some attend Sunday liturgy on a regular basis, but do not claim denominational affiliation
- Some come from non-religious homes
  - No familiarity with organized religion or liturgy
- Many turn to religion as they grow older
  - (Sherry Weddell, Forming Intentional Disciples)
- How can my life be meaningful?
Context of Catechesis

• Secularism:
  – Denies any need for God in order to live humanly, it emphasizes self-sufficiency without reference to transcendent sources, values, or hopes
    • (Thomas Groome, Will There Be Faith?)
  – The “loss in the capacity to listen and understand the words of the Gospel as a living and life-giving message.” and,
  – “A mentality in which God is completely or partially left out of human consciousness.”
    • (Lineamenta, 2012 Synod of Bishops)
Goal of the New Evangelization

• Evangelization of the baptized
  – Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*

• To help a person form communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ
  – *(General Directory for Catechesis, no. 80)*

• Christian Spirituality: The search to integrate life through the transforming experience of encountering God in Christ. This experience animates and gives life meaning and direction.
  – *(Patrick J. Hartin, Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels)*
Spiritual Formation

• The New Evangelization
  – Target: the baptized

• To teach the “how” of Christianity as well as the “what”

• Emphasis on the Eucharist & Mystagogy
  – RCIA #244: “to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it a part of their lives.”
  – RCIA #245: “a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the message they have learned and their experience of the sacraments.”
Spiritual Reflection/Imagination

• Irenaeus of Lyon: “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking”
  – (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1075)

• Mystagogy as engaging the Imagination
  – (General Directory, no. 167)
  – (Groome, Will There Be Faith?)

• Orthopraxy: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*
  – (Kevin Irwin, Context and Text)
Spirituality & Imagination

• Ricoeur
  – The imagination has “the power of describing reality.”
  – Creative operation of “decontextualizing” scripture’s meaning and “recontextualizing it in today’s setting/experience.

• Example, MLK, speech the night before he died, “I’ve been to the mountaintop”
Paul Ricoeur: Scriptural Hermeneutic

*Figuring the Sacred*

- Scripture is “poetry”
- Poetry is discourse that *reveals* a particular way of being in the world
- Reader invited into the “world of the text”
  - the world imagined and developed within the text
  - The world of the text influences the imagination of the reader.
- Text challenges preconceptions and assumptions
Ricoeur Continued

• World of the text projects a different kind of world that can become real when we take it up and live it out

• The reader can envision him or herself differently and imagine another way of being
  – The text is not a proof text, but revelatory.
  – Texts speak to what it means to be human.
    • Not, “Am I happy?”, but
    • Is my life meaningful?
The World of Matthew

• Matthew 5:1-6:13
  – Beatitudes, 5:1-12
  – Teaching about the Law, 5:17-48
    • You have heard that it was said...but I say to you
  – Lord’s Prayer, 6:9-13
    • your kingdom come...on earth as in heaven
Matthew – 2

• Written 85-90 a.d., near Antioch in Syria
• Primarily Jewish-Christian
• Reflects tension within Judaism after destruction of Temple, 70 a.d.
  – Survival of Judaism
  – Authentic interpretation of Jewish tradition in post-Temple era.
• Gospel divided into 5 parts/books (Torah)
World of Beatitudes

• Beatitudes express Kingdom as relationships, to accompany others

• Jesus spoke Aramaic
  – *Malkuta* = mutual empowerment, vs.
  – Greek word *basileia*

• Emphasis on relationships, making this life more God-like
On Earth As In Heaven

• Christian life is about the here and now.
  – Not a future afterlife

• Resurrection begins in the life
  – Participation in Christ’s Paschal Mystery
  – Reordering of Creation from chaos of sin
  – Not to respond to sin with sin
World of Today

• Interpretation of the Christian Tradition
  – Who?
  – Why?

• What is starting point for discussion?
  – Real life experience? (graduality)
  – Church teaching?

• Orthodoxy vs Orthopraxy
  – What empowers deepening a relationship with God through Jesus?
Who is Jesus?

- West: Substitution for Sin (Anselm)
- East: Incarnation and deification of humanity
  - (Thomas Rausch, *Who Is Jesus?*)
- Jesus’ Mission: Proclaim the Kingdom of God
  - Miracles are manifestations of the Kingdom
  - Can’t separate his ministry from the Passion & Resurrection
  - Instead of “saved from,” we are “saved for living into fullness of life.”
    - (Groome)
Faith as Mystery

• Mystery:
  – Not understood as what we cannot explain
  – But, ongoing experience of God’s presence in the experiences of life
Eucharistic Texts

• Proclaimed in context of Eucharist
• Liturgy of the Word to Liturgy of the Eucharist
  – Word gives meaning to liturgy texts
    • (Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 24)
• World of the Beatitudes “intertextualized” into eucharistic text
  – World of scriptural text seen in eucharistic text
    • (Ricoeur & Goffredo Boselli, The Spiritual Meaning of the Liturgy)
Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs III:

- Originally composed in Italian, French & German in 1973 for Swiss Extraordinary Synod
- Four Eucharistic Prayers in One:
  - The Church on the Path to Unity
  - God Guides His Church Along the Way of Salvation
  - Jesus, the Way to the Father
  - Jesus, Who Went About Doing Good
Bibliography

• Benedict XVI. *The Sacrament of Charity: Sacramentum Caritatis.*


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Mystagogy and Spiritual Formation. But my purpose in writing this blog post is not just to lament the imperfections of the RCIA process in Catholicism but also to suggest that this fourfold process of formation applies not only to people joining the church for the first time but also to people who discern a call to become contemplative. We are evangelized in contemplation when we first recognize in our heart a call for something deeper, a yearning for God than words or ideas can satisfy. This stirring for something-more might come in response to a book we read, a conversation we have 13 quotes from Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit: Whereas discipline without discipleship leads to rigid formalism, disciplesh... The Bible is primarily a book not of information but of formation, not merely a book to be analyzed, scrutinized, and discussed but a sacred book to nurture us, to unify our hearts and minds, and to serve as a constant source of contemplation. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit.