

# CATHOLICS AFTER THE SCANDAL

## *A new study's major findings*

**James D. Davidson & Dean R. Hoge**

**T**wo recent and very different books—David Gibson's *The Coming Catholic Church* (HarperSan-Francisco) and David Carlin's *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America* (Sophia)—have described the church as a ship caught in a storm. The storm threatens the survival of the ship and the well-being of the people on it. To save the ship and their own lives, the people on board must carry out certain familiar tasks, but they also must find new ways of dealing with problems they had never anticipated. With any luck, the ship will make it, although it quite likely will have to undertake some short-term repairs and later some long-term structural changes.

In an effort to contribute to the ship's survival, the University of Notre Dame formed a multidisciplinary task force in 2002. The task force launched several initiatives, one of which was a national survey of the laity's understanding of, and responses to, issues facing the church. The team asked us to design the study, which was conducted last year. We focused on four topics. First, knowing of no other national study that has done so, we asked Catholics to rate the seriousness of twelve challenges facing the church today. Second, we wanted to extend a recent line of research on interpretations of the sexual-abuse scandal and how that problem has affected the attachment of Catholics to the church. Third, given the crucial role that leaders will play in helping the church through the current storm, we devised some new questions about the laity's perceptions of bishops and views of lay leadership. Finally, following up on some of our earlier research, we explored the extent to which Catholics still think of their church as special or whether they now think of it as "just another denomination." We then hired Princeton Survey Research Associates, whose staff interviewed a random sample of 1,119 self-identified American Catholics in September and October 2003. The results—which we summarize below—provide some indication of how ready laypeople are to pursue certain courses of action and how reluctant they are to consider others as they try to find their way in the aftermath of the sexual-abuse crisis.

The Notre Dame task force was especially interested in generational differences among Catholics. Members of the

task force wanted to know how older and younger generations of Catholics differ in their views. They also wanted to see if there are any differences between "post-Vatican II" Catholics, who are now in their thirties and early forties, and the emerging generation of "millennial" Catholics who are in their late teens and early twenties. To study possible differences, we identified four generations: pre-Vatican II Catholics (who were born in or before 1940 and were 63 years of age or older when we interviewed them); Vatican II Catholics (born 1941–1960, 43 to 62 years old at the time of our study); post-Vatican II Catholics (born 1961–1977, 26 to 42 years old); and millennial Catholics (born 1978–1985, 18 to 25 years old). Pre-Vatican II Catholics compose 17 percent of our sample, Vatican II Catholics 34 percent, post-Vatican II Catholics 36 percent, and millennials 13 percent.

The task force also wanted to document any differences among Catholics depending on the strength of their attachment to the church. As in previous research, Catholics who were registered in a parish were more religiously active in numerous ways than were nonregistered persons. Registered parishioners were more likely to attend Mass weekly, receive Communion, and participate in a variety of devotional activities. Therefore, status as a regular parishioner is important in its own right, but it also is an indicator of religious practice generally. Thus, we compare the attitudes and

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beliefs of Catholics who told us they were registered in a parish (60 percent of our sample) with those who said they were not or were not sure (40 percent).

## Problems facing the church: Sexual abuse is at the top

What do Catholics see as the most serious problems facing the church today? From our reading of the Catholic press, and our discussions with the Notre Dame task force, we identified twelve issues—some that we thought Catholics of all theological stripes might see as serious, some that seemed to be of special concern to “conservative” Catholics, and others that seemed to be troublesome for “liberals.” We asked respondents to rate each issue as being “a serious prob-

lem,” “somewhat of a problem,” or “not a problem” (see box).

Not surprisingly, the sexual-abuse scandal is seen as the main problem. Both the personal and institutional facets of the scandal are considered serious: “that some priests have sexually abused young people” (85 percent said it was serious), and “that some bishops have not done enough to stop priests from sexually abusing young people” (77 percent). Whether Catholics are in their sixties or in their twenties, and whether they are registered parishioners or not, they agree that the sexual-abuse crisis needs to be solved.

But the laity has other concerns as well. Sixty-two percent of Catholics said “the shortage of priests and sisters” is a serious problem. Generational differences were much more pronounced with respect to this question, with 78 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics being troubled by the shortage, compared to only 42 percent of millennials. Older Catholics, who grew up with an abundance of priests and sisters, are far more concerned about the lack of vocations than younger Catholics, who have grown up in the midst of the shortage and—by necessity—are creating new ways of being Catholic that are not as dependent on priests and sisters. Parishioner/nonparishioner differences also were large, with 68 percent of registered parishioners, but only 52 percent of other Catholics, seeing the shortage of priests and sisters as a problem.

Fourth on the list of concerns was that “young adults are not involved in the church as much as they should be,” with 53 percent of Catholics saying this is a serious problem. As expected, the oldest generations and registered parishioners were most concerned about the lack of participation in the church by young Catholics.

In the middle of the list were complaints that: “parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should” (49 percent); “there are too many men with a homosexual orientation in the priesthood” (42 percent); “the church’s teachings on sexual morality are out of touch with reality today” (40 percent); and “women are not involved enough in church decision making” (38 percent). Pre-Vatican II Catholics and nonparishioners were most concerned about the number of homosexual priests. Nonparishioners (51 percent) were also most likely to say the church’s sexual morality is out of touch with reality. Men and women gave identical answers to the question about women’s roles in the church.

At the bottom of the box are listed four issues that less than one-third of Catholics considered serious: “laypeople are not consulted enough in forming the church’s moral and social teachings” (31 percent); “laypeople no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Catholic faith” (30 percent); “there is poor religious education in parishes and Catholic schools” (27 percent); and “bishops and priests no longer hold Catholics accountable to church teachings” (25 percent). Although these problems are of major concern to some parents, theologians, and others in the church, the laity as a whole is not nearly as troubled by these issues as it is by several other problems. Generation and parishioner

### Most serious issues facing the church

**Question:** How much of a problem is each of these twelve items—a serious problem, somewhat of a problem, or not a problem? (*Figure indicates percentage of those saying “a serious problem.”*)

That some priests have sexually abused young people. ....	85
That some bishops have not done enough to stop priests from sexually abusing young people. ....	77
The shortage of priests and sisters. ....	62
That young adults are not as involved in the church as much as they should be. ....	53
That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should. ....	49
That there are too many men with a homosexual orientation in the priesthood. ....	42
That the church’s teachings on sexual morality are out of touch with reality today. ....	40
That women are not involved enough in church decision making. ....	38
That laypeople are not consulted enough in forming the church’s moral and social teachings. ....	31
That laypeople no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Catholic faith. ....	30
That there is poor religious education in parishes and Catholic schools. ....	27
That bishops and priests no longer hold Catholics accountable to church teachings. ....	25

status did not have much effect on these responses.

To be sure, Catholics believe the abuse scandal must be permanently resolved. But even if that were to happen tomorrow, laypeople think, the church would still face serious threats to its future. Chief among these are the clergy shortage and limited participation by young adults—both of which previous research has shown are regarded as serious problems. The laity's other concerns are an interesting mixture of liberal and conservative views. Some of the cultural problems that are of most concern to conservative Catholics are in the middle of the list (for example, the claim that there are too many homosexual priests), while others (the quality of religious education) are in the bottom tier. Likewise, some liberal issues (that women are not adequately included in decision making) resonate with many Catholics, while others (that laypeople are not consulted often enough) trouble fewer people.

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### **A source of shame & embarrassment**

How do Catholics interpret the abuse scandal, and how does it affect them? First of all, how many have heard of the scandal? Ninety-one percent said they have. Of those, 78 percent said they were "ashamed and embarrassed for my church." Seventy-two percent said "The failure of bishops to stop the abuse is a bigger problem than the abuse itself." Two-thirds believe that "the cases that have been reported to date are only the tip of the iceberg." Clearly, laypeople feel ashamed, hold clergy accountable, and fear that the problem is deeper than it appears.

Feelings of shame and embarrassment are widely shared by both registered parishioners and other Catholics. Pre-Vatican II Catholics are slightly more likely than younger Catholics to feel ashamed by the scandal (85 percent, versus 76 percent for the millennials and 74 percent for the post-Vatican II generation). Older Catholics also are least likely to think reported cases are just the tip of the iceberg (48 percent, versus 66 percent of the millennials and 74 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics). Thus, older Catholics are the most offended, but they seem to think the worst is over. Younger Catholics are not as sure.

When we asked laypeople about the bishops' handling of the scandal, fully 62 percent said the bishops "are covering up the facts." Only 20 percent said the bishops "are being open and honest." The rest are not sure or believe the situation involves some mixture of truth and cover-up. The bishops clearly have a credibility problem, especially among young and less active Catholics, but among older parishioners also. Reestablishing their credibility is a major challenge facing the bishops.

Two other items in the study indicate how Catholics perceive the media's role in the scandal. Sixty-nine percent indicated that "the media has prolonged the scandal by reporting the same stories over and over again." Fifty-six percent responded that "the media reports have been too anti-

Catholic." Catholics are more critical of the media for rehashing stories than for being biased against the Catholic Church, although both issues are of concern to a majority. Members of the pre-Vatican II generation are most likely to believe the media has prolonged the scandal and has been anti-Catholic. Registered parishioners believe this more than nonparishioners.

As has been shown in recent studies sponsored by FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities), the scandal has had little overall effect on laypeople's participation in the church. About eight out of ten Catholics report that the scandal has had no effect on their frequency of attendance at Mass, involvement in parish programs and activities, or financial contributions. Although 78 percent of American Catholics said it had "no effect" on their church attendance and 7 percent said their attendance had increased, 11 percent said it had decreased. When asked about the scandal's effect on their parish involvement, 80 percent said "no effect," 7 percent noted an increase, and 10 percent reported a decline. Eighty-one percent said their financial contributions had not changed, 6 percent reported an increase, and 12 percent reported a decrease. These findings are consistent with FADICA's data indicating that the net effect of the scandal has been only a slight reduction in religious participation and giving. The overall picture is one of stability, not decline, although there is more decline in some places, such as Boston. To our surprise, generational differences on the effects of the scandal turned out to be small, as were differences between registered parishioners and others.

Clearly, laypeople are disturbed by the behavior of priests who have abused children and especially by the way the bishops have handled the whole situation. Even among registered parishioners, and especially among young adults, there is considerable doubt that the bishops have been truthful about the scandal. Still, the scandal has adversely affected the participation of a small portion of Catholics. The good news is that a majority of Catholics are strongly committed to their faith—to the point that they remain loyal to the church even in the midst of what many consider to be the worst crisis in U.S. church history.

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### **Desire for more lay involvement**

In our experience, church leadership is a topic of very lively conversation whenever two or more Catholics are gathered together. The conversation usually revolves around questions about episcopal leadership and the role of the laity. How much confidence do Catholics have in their bishops? To what extent, and in what ways, do Catholics believe laypeople should occupy leadership roles in the church?

We asked our respondents if they could name their bishop. Those who said yes were then asked what the bishop's name was. Forty-one percent were able to provide a name. We cannot know if everyone actually got their bishop's name right; some probably gave the wrong name. But at least 41

## Expectations of a Leaf

All winter it hung  
from the twine of a branch,  
as if waiting for more than the wind's hard mallet

to strike it down; tip curled up, it assumed  
the shape of a bell, but made  
no sound.

It could not fold; its edges failed  
to create a dragon or ship.  
The ground did not rise in greeting; the grasses,

bent to a shower of snow, stayed put.  
And all those leaves, fallen already, kept hidden  
their wings, mysteriously grown

when they'd given up, sky-jumped and glided  
into the field, its soil loosely packed, composed  
of eternally crumbling ancient skins.

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Anne Coray

percent of Catholics could name someone they thought was their bishop. Not surprisingly, the older generation and registered parishioners were most able to come up with a name. Younger Catholics and nonparishioners had the greatest difficulty in doing so.

When asked how much they know about U.S. bishops and their activities, only 7 percent of the sample said "a great deal" and 24 percent said "some." Forty-three percent said they did not know very much, and 25 percent said they know "nothing" about the bishops. Among those who know "a great deal" or "some" about the bishops, 55 percent believe "most bishops" are "humble men of great personal faith," 53 percent say most bishops are "doing the best they can under difficult circumstances," and 46 percent think most bishops are "wise and competent leaders." Only about one-quarter accuse bishops of being "more interested in protecting bishops and priests than in working together with laypeople" (26 percent) or say that most bishops are "out of touch with laypeople" (26 percent).

Which of these most knowledgeable Catholics have the most favorable views of the bishops? The answer is pre-Vatican II Catholics and registered parishioners. For example, 62 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics (compared with only 41 percent of millennials) said bishops were doing their best and 54 percent (versus only 38 percent of millennials) considered them wise and competent leaders. On the item about bishops doing their best, 56 percent of the registered parishioners, compared with 42 percent of the nonparishioners,

agreed. On the other items, the differences between parishioners and nonparishioners were small.

These findings suggest three things. First, if two-thirds of Catholics know very little about the bishops in general, and only 41 percent can name their own bishop, it is reasonable to conclude that the bishops are not an important reference point in the faith life of most Catholics. Second, among those who know the most about the bishops, there is a considerable reservoir of good will. Pre-Vatican II Catholics and registered parishioners, especially, want to affirm the humility, faith, wisdom, and competence of the bishops, although some clearly find that difficult to do these days. Third, there is less support for bishops among young adults and nonparishioners—people whose links to the church are rather tenuous. We cannot tell if these groups are marginal because they are suspicious of bishops, or if they are suspicious because they are marginal. But one thing is sure: the bishops' severest critics are people thinly tethered to the church.

What about the question of lay leadership? According to Vatican II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (934–945), the clergy are the primary decision makers in the church, while laypeople are leaders in the world. Yet recent research suggests that laypeople now believe they also have a right to participate in decision making within the church, especially at the parish level. Our survey confirms this. A majority of Catholics (71 percent) believe that "when it comes to setting parish priorities, laypeople need to trust the pastor to make the right decision." At the same time, 83 percent believe laypeople "should have a right to participate in deciding how parish income is spent," and 73 percent say the laity "should have some say in who their parish priest will be." Laypeople do not distrust their pastors, but they want to take part in parish decisions.

What about church finances more broadly? Catholics want more information. For example, 77 percent said "the Catholic Church needs better financial reporting at all levels," and 81 percent said "church financial records should show how much money has been spent on settling lawsuits against church leaders." When we asked if "laypeople should withhold donations to the church until they have more voice in financial decisions," only 40 percent agreed with this form of protest.

Catholics in the older generation are the least likely to agree with these views. For example, 84 percent of millennials said the church needs better financial reporting, compared to 67 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics. Only 30 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics (compared with 59 percent of millennials) felt that withholding contributions was a good idea. Registered parishioners were no different from the nonregistered, except when asked if laypeople should withhold donations until they have more voice in financial decisions. There the nonregistered agree more readily (49 percent, versus 35 percent of registered Catholics).

In short, our study provides new data that show laypeople want to trust the bishops and their parish priests, who they believe are doing good jobs, especially under trying conditions. Yet, the laity's confidence has been shaken, as

indicated by the fact that only about half of laypeople see bishops in a positive light. The study also confirms other research showing that laypeople want open financial reporting, and that they believe the church would do better if the laity were at the table when church decisions are made.

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### Catholicism & other faiths: A boundary problem

The storm buffeting the church is not limited to internal problems. It also involves a boundary problem between Catholicism and other Christian denominations and other religions.

Both Vatican II and the *Catechism* state that the Catholic Church is "the one and only church of God" (*Catechism*, 817) and that "it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone...that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained." While maintaining that the Catholic Church has a greater share of religious truth than other faiths, the council and the *Catechism* (819) acknowledge that "many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church."

Some observers fear that U.S. Catholics no longer agree with this teaching. They argue that, as Catholics have emerged from the ghetto of the pre-Vatican II church, they have succumbed to America's postmodern or relativistic culture, which portrays all faiths as essentially equal and viable pathways

to the same God. In David Carlin's words, for example, Catholics now have a "denominational mentality" and believe that the Catholic Church is "just another denomination."

The Notre Dame survey points to a different interpretation. First, Catholics like being Catholic and are not very likely to leave the church for other religious groups. Eighty-one percent of Catholics said that "being Catholic is a very important part of who I am," and two-thirds said they "cannot imagine...being anything other than Catholic." Eighty-two percent said the "Catholic Church is very important to me personally," and 71 percent said they "would never leave the Catholic Church." These are vast majorities.

A majority of Catholics also embrace teachings that are distinctively Catholic. They indicated that the following teachings are "essential" to their vision of what the Catholic faith is about: the importance of charitable efforts toward helping the poor (82 percent); belief that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist (81 percent); devotion to Mary the Mother of God (72 percent); belief that God is present in a special way in the poor (71 percent); the obligation to attend Mass once a week (55 percent); and teachings that oppose abortion (51 percent). They also agreed that in Mass the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ (83 percent). Even more to the point, 63 percent said "there is something very special about being Catholic that you can't find in other religions," and 53 percent said "the Catholic religion contains a greater share of the truth than other religions do."



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There are, though, elements of what some might call relativism in responses to other questions in our survey. Eighty-six percent agreed that “if you believe in God, it doesn’t really matter which religion you belong to.” Seventy-six percent said “individuals should seek out religious truth for themselves and not automatically conform to the doctrines of any church.” Seventy-four percent said “the major world religions are equally good ways of finding ultimate truth.” Fifty-two percent said that they “could be just as happy in some other church—it wouldn’t have to be Catholic.” The same percentage said “the Catholic religion has no more spiritual truth than other major religions.”

In a purely literal sense, these findings are at odds with one another. But, in social psychological terms, they may not be. Catholics continue to believe in the distinctiveness of their church, but—as Nancy Ammerman reported in David D. Hall’s *Lived Religion in America*—they also have a great appreciation and acceptance of other faiths. They believe in being Catholic, but do not believe the Catholic Church is the only way to find God. They think there is something special about being Catholic, but also look for common ground with people in other religions. In short, they are trying hard to be both Catholic and ecumenical in a highly pluralistic world.

Catholics of the older generation are the most likely to endorse the *Catechism’s* view and least likely to believe that all faiths are equally true. For example, only 37 percent of the older-generation pre-Vatican II Catholics—compared with 52 to 57 percent of Catholics in other generations—said they could be just as happy in another church. While 75 to 80 percent in other generations said all major religions are equally good ways to ultimate truth, only 59 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics gave that response. The three youngest generations agreed with each other: there were no noteworthy differences among members of the Vatican II, post-Vatican II, and millennial generations on these issues. The only consistent generational differences were between the oldest pre-Vatican generation and all the others.

Registered parishioners clearly feel a stronger Catholic identity than nonparishioners. For example, 90 percent of the registered parishioners agreed that “the Catholic Church is very important to me personally,” versus 70 percent of the nonregistered. But on the questions about the validity of other faiths, differences between registered parishioners and others were small. The nonparishioners were slightly more affirming of the equal truth in other religions, but not much.

As Catholics strive to be both Catholic and respectful of other faiths, they encounter boundary issues that must be addressed. Laypeople need to better articulate how they balance being Catholic and being ecumenical. At the same time, theologians and other church leaders need to appreciate the sociological dimensions of this struggle, avoiding the temptation to simply write it off as a logical impossibility. Theologians and other church leaders need to clarify the church’s view of itself, its commitment to ecumenism, and the points at which relativism is problematic.

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## Conclusions

Will the church survive the storm? Will the people on board be all right? Being Christians, we are full of hope, but that is not the only reason to be optimistic. Our six key findings are also encouraging.

- Laypeople are making sensible judgments about the problems facing the church. Although other spiritual and institutional problems also must be addressed (see Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift*), laypeople put the highest priority on solving the sexual-abuse scandal, the decline in vocations, and the less-than-optimal participation by young adults. Restoring the bishops’ credibility, increasing vocations, and reaching out to young adults would build solidarity and boost the laity’s confidence that the church will not founder.

- As earlier research has suggested and these new data confirm, the laity sees the sexual-abuse scandal as a failure on the part of both priests and bishops, and believes that the media has distorted the situation somewhat. Still, for the most part, the laity has not let the scandal undermine its faith. Unfortunately for the church, those who seem to be having the hardest time with the scandal are those whose attachment to the church is most tenuous. The church needs to reassure all Catholics that the problem is being addressed openly and honestly, but it faces special challenges in gaining the confidence of marginal and inactive Catholics.

- Although most Catholics have only limited awareness of bishops’ activities, a majority believe they are men of faith, who are doing a good job under difficult circumstances. Only a minority imputes cynical motives or disparages bishops’ talents. Confidence in the bishops has been shaken by recent events, however, and clearly needs to be restored. Moreover, as has been shown in other studies, laypeople believe they too should be actively involved in church decisions. This belief is fueled by the self-confidence that comes with being the most talented and resourceful generation in the history of the church, and with a sense that the church would benefit from lay expertise and input.

- Contrary to some recent claims, Catholics still believe their church is special, but they also respect other faith traditions and look for common ground with them. Laypeople in general, and young adults in particular, are trying hard to be both Catholic and ecumenical in a highly pluralistic world where both religious and political leaders urge them to appreciate other religious traditions. As Catholics struggle to maintain this delicate balance, wise leaders would try to lend them a hand. One way to do that is to listen to what they have to say about the challenges they face. Another is to clarify the church’s view of itself, other faiths, and the ways in which a denominational mentality is problematic for Catholics.

- As earlier studies of Catholic generations have found, the biggest difference is between the pre-Vatican II generation and all other generations. Among other churchwatchers, Colleen Carroll (*The New Faithful*) has argued that young

Catholics are turning in a more traditional direction. We have found no evidence of such a trend in our previous studies, and the present survey indicates that youngest (“millennial”) Catholics are similar to—not markedly different from—the post-Vatican II generation.

• Finally, in previous research we have shown that the beliefs and attitudes of registered parishioners are considerably more in line with official church teachings than the views of nonparishioners. To this body of research we now add the finding that registered parishioners also are most supportive of the bishops and most attached to the church even in the aftermath of the abuse crisis.

## After the Scandal

### YOUNG CATHOLICS

*When labels don't fit*

**Cathleen Kaveny**

**I**n her book *The New Faithful*, Colleen Carroll asserts that young Catholics take a more conservative approach to matters of faith than their elders do. According to James Davidson and Dean Hoge, that assertion is not supported by the empirical data produced in their study and earlier studies they have conducted.

One could respond to this apparent contradiction by picking a “side” and sticking to it. So-called conservative Catholics might continue to cite Carroll, while so-called Catholic liberals might point to the Davidson/Hoge data. That response would be a shame, because it would forfeit a valuable opportunity to discuss the challenges involved in handing on the faith to the next generation.

Davidson and Hoge say that “millennial” Catholics (born between 1978 and 1985) are not markedly different from the post-Vatican II generation (born between 1961 and 1977). That leaves open the question of how different the attitudes of those who grew up after the Second Vatican Council are from those who grew up before or during it. In my view, that is the crucial dividing line. I am a post-Vatican II Catholic; my students are millennial Catholics; although different in some important ways, our respective experiences of growing up in the church have more in common with each other than either does with the experience of those whose faith formation took place in the pre-Vatican II church.

I see six basic differences between younger Catholics and earlier age cohorts. First, we learned early and well that we were children of the triune God, who loved us very much, and who was truly present to us in the sacraments. The specter of a vengeful, legalistic divine judge does not haunt us the way it seems to haunt some older Catholics. Second, we really didn't learn much doctrine. The emphasis in our

catechesis was on engaging our emotions, not on challenging our intellects. Third, the coherent Catholic culture of the pre-Vatican II church had broken up by the time we came along. We do not have the Catholic-in-our-bones sensibility that characterizes both liberals and conservatives of earlier generations. Fourth, the end of the Catholic ghetto means that most young Catholics do not feel a need to prove themselves to the outside world. Fifth, our earliest experiences of the church were marked by tumult and controversy, not by stability. The church itself seems much more fragile to us than it does to our elders. Sixth, and finally, the tensions between magisterial teaching and American culture have only grown with time. Consequently, negotiating one's dual identities as a young Catholic and a young American has also become more difficult.

What does all of this have to do with the use of the labels “liberal” and “conservative”? First, it puts them in their appropriate context. For example, older conservatives should not necessarily delight, and older liberals should not necessarily despair, if some Catholics in college or graduate school thirst for knowledge of the tradition, or enthusiastically pursue new uses for aspects of the tradition that were discarded in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Given their situation, it is understandable that young Catholics will seek to acquire the basic knowledge, even the basic lore, that their grandparents take for granted. Speaking from experience, it is deeply unsettling to find oneself unable to participate in the common prayers said at the wake of a beloved relative, simply because no one had thought it important to pass them on to the next generation. But such a thirst for knowledge about the tradition, for a tangible connection with one's communal past, does not necessarily mean that one is opposed ab initio to arguments made for its development, particularly if they are made in terms of values and virtues internal to the tradition itself. To put it bluntly, one can appreciate the value of the Latin Mass, devotions to the saints, and the penitential practice of fasting, even while viewing, with sympathy and admiration, John Noonan's arguments for the development of Catholic moral doctrine on both contraception and the death penalty.



*“Whew!—these are going to lead to a lot of compartmentalization.”*

BALOO

Second, their study suggests that we look beneath the ideological stances that divide a particular generation to find the common experiences that unite it. In teaching millennials at Notre Dame, for example, I have encountered many young students fitting Colleen Carroll's "new conservative" profile, and also many students who seem to be more open to the currents in contemporary culture. Despite their superficial differences, a certain subgroup of each category bears a worrisome resemblance to each other on certain points. At the risk of gross generalization, if not oversimplification, I will attempt to flesh out my worries.

Let me call one segment of the more liberal group the compartmentalizers. For them, the various segments of their life are neatly divided. "Faith" is relegated to the realm of campus ministry; it takes place in their dorm Masses, in their retreats, and in their social-justice projects. They try very hard to be good people, understood in general terms. They even try to live by some of the church's more well-known and difficult basic rules, sometimes not quite knowing why. They pray. God claims their piety, and their morality—but not their intellect. "Reason," in contrast, is the essential tool for dealing with their life in the classroom Monday through Friday (or more accurately, Thursday lunchtime). Each class is its own hermetically sealed intellectual universe; they try to figure out the rules of that universe in order to do well on the test, in order to graduate with honors, and in order to get a job that will make them successful in the eyes of the world.

Let me call the parallel segment of the more conservative group the defenders. They view themselves almost as members of a legal team, charged with safeguarding the interests of the faith in a culture perceived as hostile to it. Taking their cue from magisterial pronouncements, they are alert for any occasion when any proposition of official Catholic teaching (as clearly set forth in the *Catechism*) is questioned, let alone departed from or disparaged, whether it occurs in the classroom or in the dorm chapel. On such occasions, they spring to the church's defense, not with emotion or intimidation, but by calmly marshaling every argument available to them. They also try very hard to be good persons, but their notion of what counts as such is informed in detail by the intricacies of traditional Catholic moral teaching, canon law, and liturgical rubrics. For them, "reason" is an effective tool to be used in pinning down and defending the unambiguous claims of "faith."

What characteristics do the defenders and the compartmentalizers have in common? First, both groups are deeply affected by the dissonance they perceive between the broader culture and the Catholic faith; one group takes a "fight" mentality, while the other prefers "flight." Second, both groups perceive the church as fragile; the defenders spring to its aid, while the compartmentalizers refrain from impolitely agitating it.

The third common characteristic, in my view, is the most troubling. In different ways, both groups treat their intellects in an almost exclusively instrumental fashion. The com-

partmentalizers use intellect in order to achieve worldly success—good grades and good jobs. The defenders use intellect to protect the interests of the church. But intellect in the Catholic tradition is not merely a tool, it is a point of human contact with the divine. We can come to know God, not just propositions about God, through the activity of our intellectual life, and in coming to know God, become more like God.

In my view, the fundamental challenge we face in educating members of the next generation is helping them understand their own minds in a noninstrumental way. We can do this, by showing them how they can be fully intellectually engaged in the exploration of their faith. A crucial task, in my view, will be nurturing them in the confidence that the church, the tradition it passes on, and the God whom it proclaims, are strong, not weak. They are strong enough to deal with the difficulties and doubts that will inevitably arise in attempting to bring Catholicism and contemporary culture into an honest, open conversation. They are strong enough to deal with the questions, even the hard ones, allowing them to remain questions rather than too quickly silencing them with a pat response. The basic mode for catechesis, in my view, cannot be the detached certitude of the new *Catechism*, but the intellectually and existentially relentless encounter with God carried out by St. Augustine in the *Confessions*.

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## After the Scandal

### RIGHTING THE SHIP

*How the laity can help*

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**R. Scott Appleby**

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ere's a thought experiment with pastoral motives: let's interpret the Davidson-Hoge report in the most sobering direction possible and see where that leads us.

The clearest "finding" of the survey is the undeniably devastating fallout of the sexual-abuse scandal: 91 percent know of the crisis; more than three-quarters of the respondents rank either the actual sexual abuse or the bishops' mishandling of it as the church's biggest problem. Link this to the next largest concern, the shortage of priests and sisters, and note that it is felt particularly keenly by older cohorts, while younger Catholics "are creating new ways of being Catholic that are not as dependent on priests and sisters." Younger Catholics also tend to be less informed about and less confident in their bishops, and more negatively affected by the media indictment of the episcopacy. Factor in rising levels of relativism ("All major religions are equally good ways to ultimate truth") among all cohorts, save the pre-Vatican II generation.

Now comes the familiar murkiness. What is the appropriate role of the laity? The 2003 survey, confirming recent research, notes that laypeople believe they have a right to participate in church decisions, and many, especially the younger cohorts, want greater financial accountability from pastors and bishops. Yet a solid majority, 60 percent, is unwilling to withhold donations until reforms occur. Maybe there is both wisdom and compassion in that decision: the charitable work of the church must go on, lawsuits and scandals notwithstanding.

More telling, though, is the absence of evidence that a significant percentage of the laity see themselves as having (wanting?) real agency in reforming the church in ways that might respond to the major problems they have identified, including the dwindling number of clergy. Davidson and Hoge conclude that laypeople believe they have a great deal to contribute, and that the church “would benefit from their expertise and input.” Still, the nature of the desired lay contribution remains vague, especially if one judges the crisis to demand bold innovations that would represent some kind of break with the status quo ante.

Emphasizing and connecting these elements of the survey results suggest the following three-part hypothesis: First, Catholics are concerned about the church, recognize that it faces crises on several fronts, and want to assist in “the righting of the ship.” Second, they do not know how best to help, and have not been called clearly and forcefully to do so by the hierarchy or clergy. Third, the active members among the youngest generations of Catholics, like other members of their cohort, have not been educated or trained to think of the church primarily in institutional terms. Nor do they feel or understand that it is their responsibility to ensure the institutional viability of the church for succeeding generations. (To be fair, neither did their parents or grandparents: custodianship and entrepreneurial stewardship were the “job descriptions” for the clergy and religious, who were available in greater abundance.)

What does it mean, laity must ask, to practice responsible stewardship at a time when the church is struggling to sustain its vital institutional presence, extend its pastoral and social ministries to larger and larger circles of need, and regain its irreplaceable moral leadership in U.S. society? Millennials—and the rest of us—must become convinced that it is not enough to depend solely on the generous and dedicated but severely overworked clergy and religious. May vocations to the priesthood grow! But every sign under the sun flashes the “news” that priesthood and vowed religious life must now be accompanied by robust forms of lay commitment and accountability to and for the church.

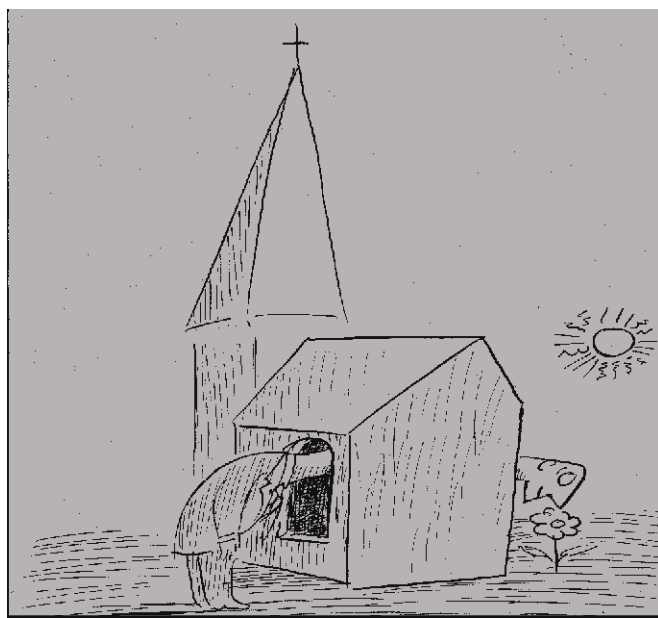
What forms of lay commitment are required? How shall laity step forward?

They have already done so. Part of the answer, in short, is found in the array of lay ministries that are integral to most thriving parishes. Essential as it has become to the life of the American church, though, the vocation of lay minister suffers from benign neglect.

To earlier generations, the priesthood was a clear choice among other “careers”; the church vigorously promoted it as such, devoting valuable resources and recruiters to the task of helping young men imagine themselves in the role of priest. That effort continues today, as it should. Yet it may not be sufficient to the enormous task we face in recovering from the sexual-abuse crisis and in sustaining even a significant portion of the ministries of pastoral care, social service, and intellectual mission that have enriched the life of Catholics and many other Americans for generations.

What path is available to willing millennials who do not feel called to the priesthood or traditional religious life, and who prefer to remain rooted in a parish rather than join a lay apostolic movement or organization? Despite the existence of a vast pool of potential candidates who answer to this description, the church is not presenting lay ministry as a splendid, absolutely essential vocation—different from but no less worthy than the ordained priesthood. It should. Millennials, too, are “called and gifted”; but the nature of the calling and the gifts they bring have yet to be discerned and cultivated with the kind of systematic, coordinated effort that characterized the halcyon era of recruitment to religious life. The calling to lay ministry and priesthood are different, yet both come from God and both are desperately needed.

So, too, are other forms of lay stewardship yet to be developed—or to be retrieved from the rich history of Catholic spirituality and ministry. Complementary but distinctive models of the church call forth complementary but distinctive forms of apostolic service and lay participation. Yet one fails to see a connection being drawn between the crises we confront, the untapped resources embodied in thousands of eager and talented but uncertain lay Catholics, and the rich plurality of institutional forms and theological images of the church that have enabled it to adapt to the particular needs of each era.



VALERRY

The crying need of our era is to renew the face of the institutional church, precisely in order to sustain and extend its remarkable, grace-filled service to the people of God in this country and beyond. May our bishops, pastors, religious, and lay leaders find the courage and self-confidence to welcome into their company Catholics who do not seem, at first glance, to fit the mold. Tell these willing but uncertain Catholics how they can help, make the assignment rich in possibility, prepare them to meet it, and turn them loose.

**R. Scott Appleby** is director of the Kroc Center for Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

## After the Scandal

### MANY TRUTHS?

#### *Coming to terms with pluralism*

**John C. Cavadini**

**D**avidson and Hoge describe a difference in attitude toward other religions among Catholics of different generations, with older Catholics more likely to identify Catholicism as the only true faith, and younger Catholics, especially those of the “millennial” generation, more likely to think of other religions as just as good as their own, at least for those who espouse them. This is not really surprising, and it certainly corresponds with my experience of undergraduates (even “conservative” ones) in theology classes. What is surprising, and perhaps more interesting, is the similarity, rather than the contrast, this shows between the millennial generation and other age cohorts, even the generation of pre-Vatican II Catholics. I have a tendency to see the specter of relativism lurking behind every seeming concession to modernity, yet Davidson and Hoge’s analysis shows that the openness of young Catholics to those of other faiths exists side by side with an attachment to, and even a deep affection for, the Catholic faith.

This widespread affection for the church exists despite the obvious difference in “feel” the young have for the church as an institution. It also exists despite the difference younger Catholics experience in the sense of connection to parish or diocese (partly accountable to the postponement of marriage and family), and despite the difference between younger and older Catholics in the degree of deference shown to church authority. This cross-generational affection for the church reveals an astonishing solidarity, a solidarity in love of the faith. It also represents a real intergenerational success story. Somehow the older generations have managed to hand on that which is most difficult to hand on to someone else: a love for something, a deep affection. This is all the more striking given the range of relations to the church

and to official church teaching among the generation who are the parents of the current millennials. It seems that somehow we have all agreed to agree on something essential, namely, that the Catholic faith handed on to us from the Apostles is the one thing precious beyond price that we are determined to preserve precisely *as* a precious thing. This has been accomplished despite all the odds, and despite the recent sexual-abuse scandal in the church itself. Could we not see in this legacy the work of God at large?

From this perspective, it is not really a puzzle that the younger generation can seem more open to other faiths and at the same time happy with their own. For one thing, our era is generally one in which pluralism has made the extension of the benefit of the doubt to the “other” a cultural default mode—outside fundamentalist circles. If it went no deeper than that, we would simply be left with the seeming inconsistency that Davidson and Hoge find among the young (attachment on the one hand, the feeling that other religions are “just as good” on the other). But maybe these two seemingly contradictory values are actually connected. Perhaps affection for one’s own faith—an appreciation for the benefits it brings both in times of joy and in times of trouble—makes it easier to recognize and thus respect the faith that others have. We could think of this as a kind of transitivity of affection for religious belief, in a way similar to what Cardinal Newman saw when he said “*cor ad cor loquitur*.”

I am not saying that Catholics do not have intergenerational work to do. Although Catholics at large do not, at least according to the survey, put “ignorance of church doctrine” high on the list of things to worry about, I wonder how long you can hand down an affection for something when the substance of that very thing becomes fuzzier and fuzzier. Also, how long can affection for the faith be passed on when it is increasingly disconnected from its intrinsic bond with church leadership and structure? If the millennials do not



BALOO

**A SIGN OF HOPE***Young, Catholic & curious***Mark L. Poorman**

seem much affected by the scandal in the church over sexual abuse, the study seems to indicate, it is because they never had much sense of being “led” in the first place by those whose leadership has now caused such a great sense of betrayal in older generations. Yet, if the survey’s description of the connection millennials feel to Catholicism is right, even these flawed leaders, along with the rest of us, must somehow have done something right. It would be good to figure out just what were the right things we did, lest we squander that capital. Presumably, it has something to do with the individual witness of family and friends. Perhaps it is, ironically, the absolute determination of so many Catholics to persist in communion with the church despite such a variety of differences and grievances. Perhaps that determination, like any sacrifice made on the altar of the heart, appeared invisible and feeble at the time, but was in the end, quite visible, if only through a glass darkly. Perhaps too it has proved to be strong in the same way that any determined love is visible and strong and, in the end, nourishing to the souls of others.

It would be interesting to find out who young people believe are the leaders in the church, at least for them. I take their reported admiration for Pope John Paul II as a clue. What they see in him is perhaps something that youth of any age and period admire: idealism and commitment, tempered with warmth. John Paul has the ability to state ideals forthrightly without closing off openness toward the “other,” regardless of the other’s religion or lack thereof. Like our millennial youth, John Paul seems to respect, as something sacred, religious faith and moral commitment wherever he finds it. He sees it as a basis for the building of what he calls the “civilization of love.” Without wanting to minimize the problems or real inconsistencies in the position of our younger brothers and sisters in Christ, are they not, in some sense, especially the children of this pope in this regard? In their abiding affection for Catholicism, coupled with an openness toward other faiths, could we not see an intuition, not of relativism, but of a religious alternative to the indifferentism of secular culture? In place of the secular ideals of “tolerance” or “respect for difference” simply as difference, is there among young Catholics a sense of love or charity founded on and in the Christian faith itself? On the one hand, charity makes no sense apart from the truth of the Catholic faith that proclaims the love revealed in the Incarnation as the absolute and final revelation. And yet it is that very charity that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7) and so, in its very absoluteness, intrinsically implies an openness as well. This means that the evangelization of our youth should be aimed, not at undoing the “inconsistency” that Davidson and Hoge point to, but at making articulate the inarticulate commitments that are implicitly folded in the “joy and hope” this very striking juxtaposition seems to embody.

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**A**s someone who has taught introductory theology and lived alongside undergraduates in residential campus ministry for more than eighteen years, I am deeply interested in Davidson and Hoge’s portrait of the generational differences among Catholics, particularly the distinctions noted between older and so-called “millennial” Catholics. In his *Commonweal* essay, “Ignorant Catholics” (April 9), my colleague John Cavadini underscored the need among millennial Catholics for basic theological literacy. That need often coincides with a deep spiritual hunger for meaning, purpose, and truth, which young people do not find offered in mass-media culture. The result is a sometimes uninformed but sincere openness to spiritual experiences of all kinds.

To meet the needs of this generation, an effective campus ministry must be developed, one that offers programs in Catholic spirituality—prayer and meditation, silent and “personal encounter” retreats, and social-justice advocacy—and also such widely divergent practices as adoration of the reserved Eucharist, evangelical prayer meetings, campus-wide Stations of the Cross, and discussions of Christian feminism. Some commentators worry that the conservative bent of some of these practices indicates millennials harbor a nostalgic longing for traditional Catholicism. But that is only one part of a complex story. As Davidson and Hoge point out, there is no statistical evidence supporting the idea that young Catholics are more traditional in outlook. In fact, the present generation of Catholic college students, for example, has an eclectic understanding and appreciation of a variety of liturgical “styles.” While they are intrigued and attracted to mystery and to the majesty of rubric, gesture, and ceremony, the more informal postconciliar liturgy still appeals to them. At Notre Dame, strong attendance holds both for casual residence-hall Masses and for the more formal Masses at the university basilica.

There is a certain naiveté about church authority among some millennials. Like many young people around the world, they exhibit an intense loyalty to Pope John Paul II. Even when they disagree with particular magisterial teachings, their respect and deference for the pope as a leader, pastor, and prophet remain strong. Despite the clerical sexual-abuse scandal, millennials also continue to demonstrate genuine affection for priests whom they know personally. That sense does not seem to extend to bishops, particularly those with reported roles in the scandal. One reason may be that most young people have no personal reference point from which

they can defend the bishops. As for the priest shortage, millennials approach it pragmatically. I regularly encounter students who recommend that the church broaden the pool from which it draws priests, and point to the relatively late requirement of clerical celibacy in church history as a starting point for discussion.

The students I encounter who identify themselves as Catholic often do so happily and gratefully. Yet even their identification is tempered. As already noted, many seem ignorant of the basic theological distinctions, including differences among Christian traditions and between Christianity and other religions. For example, even those who can name the sacraments often cannot articulate a sacramental theology—a central, distinguishing tenet of Catholic belief. Further, these students have assimilated the culture's strong emphasis on the necessity and virtue of tolerance. When they first encounter the *Catechism's* teaching that the Catholic Church is "the one and only church of God," many find themselves conflicted. Nonetheless, I can report anecdotally one way in which this age group has attempted to understand Catholic boundaries. In our class discussions of divorce and remarriage, I have noticed in recent years a strong interest in canon law. The students seem drawn to its clarity and concreteness, and there is no shortage of casuistic ques-

tions concerning its intricacies. Far from seeing canon law as a potential source of nitpicking, students appear to appreciate its distinctive place within Catholicism. At Notre Dame's law school, enrollment in the introductory canon law course has doubled in the past five years. The professor who conducts the course regularly denies special requests for admission from undergraduates. Perhaps this interest in Catholic legalism reflects the need for boundaries; it may also be rooted in our culture's regard for law as the arbiter of individual values, choices, and beliefs.

While it would be premature to draw authoritative conclusions from the Notre Dame survey, I am heartened by the portrait it presents of young Catholics. They are a sign of hope. Our goal must be to address the obvious spiritual hunger of millennials through creative initiatives that reflect Catholicism's universal character. In this regard, I think the labels "liberal" and "conservative" are counterproductive. Rather, teachers, ministers, and others need to capitalize on the openness, sincerity, and religious curiosity of these young people, helping them to be at home in a truly Catholic church. □

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## CELIBATES ON CELIBACY

**D**uring the last half-year, two church renewal organizations, Call to Action and FutureChurch, have conducted anonymous surveys of priests in fifty-three U.S. dioceses. Priests were asked: "Do you favor an open discussion of the mandatory-celibacy rule for diocesan priests?" Sixty-seven percent of respondents (2,589 of 3,846) said yes. The survey response rate was 27 percent.

Priests aged 41 to 70 most strongly favored open discussion, with 74 percent replying affirmatively. Priests over 71, retired, and religious-order priests also favored discussion by majorities of 61, 66, and 70 percent respectively. But among younger priests (ages 25 to 40), only 42 percent were in favor, while 54 percent were not.

More than 547 priest respondents made additional comments, many of which were poignant. A number were discouraged at the apparent inability of church leaders to make necessary changes so that Catholics could continue to have access to the Mass and the sacraments. An Oklahoma priest wrote: "How can our religious leaders prefer that thousands and millions of Catholics have no Sunday Eucharist than to have them attend a Eucharist celebrated by someone who

shared his bed legally with a loving spouse?" (Visit [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org) for results and comments by diocese.)

Survey results are consistent with a 2001 Lilly Endowment study by Catholic University professor Dean R. Hoge which found that 56 percent of all priests think celibacy should be a matter of personal choice.

Surveys of the laity consistently support optional celibacy. *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* by Professor Hoge and William V. D'Antonio (Alta Mira Press, 2001), cites surveys conducted in 1987, 1993, and 1999 that reported lay support for a married priesthood at 63, 72, and 71 percent respectively. Lay surveys in 1985 and 1993 also indicated support for ordaining women, at 50 and 64 percent respectively. The surveys are one part of an international campaign to raise the issue of the priest shortage at the International Synod on the Eucharist which will be held next year in Rome. Organizers are circulating petitions asking that discussion of mandatory celibacy and of women deacons be placed on the agenda. CHRISTINE SCHENK

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