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*Millennial Missionaries: How a Group of Young Catholics is
Trying to Make Catholicism Cool* by Katherine Dugan (review)

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International Journal of Evangelization and Catechetics, Volume 1,
Number 1, Winter 2020, pp. 123-127 (Review)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jec.2020.0007>

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generate stronger theological conversations among those who are to become its “students.” Another obvious absence in this text is that it does not include reflection or content related questions. Without these and other supplemental workbooks, this text would only be a good tool so long as the person who is using it has a sound intellectual formation and experience in teaching the faith to others.

Like the beginning of the text, Morgan and Munroe end the work with a mapping of resources as they offer their readers a guide on where they can go next in terms of deepening their understandings in relation to what the text has presented. The appendices located at the end of the text offer sound liturgical, scripture, and doctrinal resources for those who would like to pursue further study. Of important note is Munroe’s chart that offers “teaching points for fostering full, active, and conscious participation in the Mass” (662–666). Coupling this imaginative and practical chart with the rest of the text discloses the authors’ deep desire that their research and work will inspire the next generation of catechists. This work will certainly stir the laity to take up the Church’s intellectual tradition and use it as a director for the pursuit of contemplative action.

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Katherine Dugan. *Millennial Missionaries: How a Group of Young Catholics is Trying to Make Catholicism Cool*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2019. 240 pages. Hardback. \$34.95. ISBN: 9780190875961.

North American Catholics have seen a flood of in-house religious movements since the Second Vatican Council. Most have worked to actualize or expand visionary changes stemming from the Council’s decrees (“spirit of Vatican II”), or to reign in change along more conservative and traditionalist lines (“reform of the reform”). Since the 1990s, and as with other American religious institutions, the Catholic Church has also had to confront an accelerating departure of “nones” and “dones”—especially millennial ones. In addition, Catholicism currently finds itself confronted with a catastrophic loss of trust and a sea of public shame surrounding a sexual abuse/hierarchical malfeasance crisis. *Millennial Missionaries* is a perceptive analysis of a movement of committed young Catholics—the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS)—that arose within the context of the religious and cultural currents I have just described.

Founded in 1998 by Curtis Martin, FOCUS hires recent college graduates, most of whom are white, middle-class, media savvy and in their early 20s. Individuals commit for a period of two years to evangelize Catholic college students and draw them to a vital and culturally attractive (“dynamically orthodox”) Catholicism. FOCUS “missionaries” embrace an additional “spiritual task” of fund-raising their own salaries. Although some of the “holy army” roots of the movement lay in earlier conservative Catholic reaction against alleged excesses and distortions of Vatican II—notably the lay organization, Catholics United for the Faith—author Katherine Dugan rightly shows that the movement does not draft well along liberal/conservative lines. FOCUS is better assessed as a vibrant subculture of spiritually hybridized millennial generation Catholics committed to a distinct vision of prayer, chastity, Catholic morals and community. Focus “missionaries” are called to “be saints!”—“cool” ones.

The methodology of Dugan’s study is ethnographic. This includes formal and informal interviews, along with participant observation, notably the author’s presence at the SEEK2013 national gathering at Disney World’s Swan and Dolphin resort—the terminus point of her research for this book. Dugan’s chapters examine the history and development of FOCUS, its socialization processes, how the movement remixes traditional Catholic devotions, addresses issues of gender and romance, and how it cultivates among its “missionaries” a Catholic exceptionalism subculture. Revealing commentary by “missionaries” themselves peppers the narrative.

As Dugan demonstrates, FOCUS is both a social movement and a subculture amalgam of traditional/contemporary Catholicism. Her study also illustrates well how the pressing issues of one generation of American Catholics (e.g., Baby Boomers) are not necessarily those of another (millennials). FOCUS “missionaries” craft a serious faith with distinctly Catholic identity markers, notably ones accentuating a “hermeneutics of continuity” centered around traditional pre-Vatican II piety and devotionism (Holy Hour, Eucharistic Adoration, *Lectio Divina*), strict gender essentialism (men lead; women follow), strict adherence to papal teachings—especially those of Pope Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict—and the embrace of (sometimes obscure) saints, along with an oddly alluring cult of suffering. At the same time, the movement’s outreach ethos is one more commonly associated with twentieth-century evangelical Protestantism. At the personal level, the FOCUS emphasis is likewise on evangelical-like emotional experiences of prayer; immanence of, and “relationism” with Jesus; and sharing personal testimonies and conversion narratives.

Dugan is well aware how a movement like FOCUS emerged in reaction to postconciliar intra-church conflicts and to broader tensions surrounding the hegemonic influence of secularism and relativism. Other driving factors include the de-stabilization of Catholic identity; anxieties over failed inter-generational transmission of the faith; concern with the character and future of Catholic higher education, with the weakening of marital relations, along with the rejection of contemporary sexual ethics in general and campus “hook-up” culture in particular. In America’s broader culture wars context, FOCUS can also be seen as an attempt to enlist religion in the recovery of male authority in a feminist/postfeminist world.

Dugan draws critical attention to peer pressure issues, to the movement’s occasional tensions with the staffs of the long-established Newman movement on campuses, and to the implications of the FOCUS emphasis on Jesus and individual ethics at the cost of the centrality of Catholic social teachings and communalism. Reducing “the poor” to a “metaphoric” convenience hardly aligns with a praxis and structural understanding of Catholic social teachings.

Dugan’s study is richly descriptive and especially so in terms of the complexities of contemporary identity dynamics. She is particularly adept in showing how, within the FOCUS experience, traditional Catholic symbols and practices get re-appropriated and opened up for new possibilities in the Church’s self-understanding. The allure of Latin prayers, for example, functions not primarily as a conservative ideological marker, as much as a specifically Catholic cultural one, a way for FOCUS missionaries to “delink” from their porous cultural Catholic co-religionists and “nones” and signify a clear choice to be Catholic.

In light of this reviewer’s bias, the analytic cache of *Millennial Missionaries* could be enriched by social movement theory, along with comparative analysis provided by the numerous studies of America’s cultural binge with new religious movements between the 1960s and 1990s. The absence of these perspectives, however, in no way diminishes the insights inspiring Dugan’s study.

Millennial Missionaries leaves a number of sociological questions open—like the post-FOCUS future of its members in light of careers and the demands of middle-class life. Dugan clearly believes, however, that the movement’s influence in the contemporary Church is likely to exceed its actual numbers, especially in light of its more muscular form of Catholicity and episcopal connections. Several ecclesial questions also remain open.

Dugan is correct that FOCUS embraces the changes of Vatican II, but hardly in all respects. “Progressive books” on contemporary Catholic

theological currents are not part of the movement's reading staple. Emphasis on a "Catholic answer" to every question also evokes the pre-Vatican II era of triumphal Catholicism where the Church showed little interest in learning from the world. Scholars like Charles Taylor (*A Secular Age*) and others have argued that dialogue between religion and secular worldviews is an essential condition of belief in our time. If so, one wonders what dialogue means to those seemingly armed with singular convictions?

Perhaps a bigger ecclesial question raised by Dugan's study is why FOCUS participants opt for a preponderance of identity signifiers rooted in pre-Vatican II Catholic culture as a means of establishing a dynamic Catholic orthodoxy. These symbols and devotional patterns had a particular social structure and social world encoded in them, ones that are largely no longer with us. Without disparaging the wisdom of the past or the merits of rediscovering that wisdom and, put another way, with the exception of the FOCUS devotion to Pope Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict, what is it about contemporary Catholic culture that vital and distinctly *post*-Vatican II sources of identity seem obscure or difficult to find? Is this a failure of the "Catholic imagination"? Of postconciliar catechetics? Of a too rapidly de-constructed Catholic past minus a vigorous rebuilding of a postconciliar Catholic present? Is it a reactive cultural response to the leveling impulses of ecumenism and the American penchant for religious homogenizing? Or an example of a perennial youth-oriented drive for cultural transgressiveness, the urge to rebel against the dominant society or, in this case, to do "church" in large part the old way as a means of repudiating the new?

Concerned readers might also wonder: If contemporary Catholicism under the papacy of Pope Francis is moving in the direction of a more pastoral inclusive Church, one of "listening" and "accompaniment," and if the interpretive autonomy that scholars like Michele Dillon (*Postsecular Catholicism*) and others have explored is becoming a more ubiquitous feature of contemporary Catholic self-understanding, what does an ideologically fueled movement like FOCUS augur for the future? An ever more polarized Church? More zero-sum competition among Catholics? Nor is it clear what the changing demographics of contemporary Catholicism vis-à-vis the Hispanic realities of the Church mean for the future of a movement that remains currently overwhelming white and middle-class?

Millennial Missionaries is an important first book by a promising scholar. It should be essential reading for insight into millennial religiosity and for anyone involved in youth ministry, catechetics, or religious education—or the contemporary American religious landscape in gen-

eral and that of post-conciliar Catholicism in particular. As a detailed and insightful ethnographic contribution, Dugan's study is also a significant contribution that extends the contemporary understanding of young adult Catholic culture beyond quantitative data on which much of the social science research on this age cohort has been based. This, too, is decidedly "cool."

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