

Charismatic Renewal and Young Adults

by John Beaulieu

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Houston, We Have A Problem

“The United States Catholic Church has a young adult problem.” I cannot tell you how many times I have heard that statement over the past few years. Between 70 and 80% of young Catholics who are active in their faith at age 15 are inactive by age 28. They leave the Church for a non-denominational congregation (often with a Pentecostal style of worship) or they fall into the ever-expanding category of people who label themselves as a “none.”

That Is Your Problem, Not Mine

But I do not think it is fair to say the Church has a young adult problem. Young adults are not the problem. If anything, they are the great hope for the Church. The challenge for the Church is to present the fullness of the faith to young adults in a way that is transformative and transcendent and empowering for young people to live the faith. In that way, charismatic renewal is our great hope and holds the key to reclaiming lost generations. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can, in times of great relativism, materialism, and growing atheism, break through the great cloud of deceit and indifference and like a lighthouse, guide the young Church back into his loving arms.

Do You Even Know Me?

So much has been written about this current generation. They have been labeled as “Generation Y,” the “Mosaics” and the “iGen.” They have been described as narcissists, self-centered, entitled, hedonistic and lazy. We need to stop labeling young adults and start getting to know them. Many of the young adults I know struggle with self-identity, anxiety and depression. They are not hostile towards religion, they just have not seen a true living witness of a joyful disciple. They have become skeptical of institutions—especially religions. The sexual scandals of the Catholic Church, not to mention the throw-away attitude towards life and marriage that have been the hallmarks of their culture have left them questioning everything.

Redeemed, Restored, Renewed

Fortunately, I see many places in the Church today that are able to break through and reach young adults with the message of Christ’s love. The common factor in most of these ministries is that they lead young adults to baptism in the Holy Spirit. There are smaller parish-based ministries that sponsor Life in the Spirit events and prayer gatherings for young adults. In many areas these extend to diocesan-wide events that both engage and inspire young adults to live as joyful disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit. On the national level, ministries like NET, Life Teen and FOCUS are leading their missionaries to a deeper encounter with the Holy Spirit and sending them forth with his power and love to transform the lives of those they serve. These missionaries are impacting the lives of hundreds of thousands of other young Catholics each year. On the campus of Franciscan University where I work, hundreds of students go through a Born in the Spirit retreat each semester. This is part of the transformative experience of being a student at Franciscan and helps prepare the graduates we send forth to serve the Church in lay and religious vocations and ministries. The Holy Spirit is active and alive in the hearts of young Catholics and he is renewing and restoring the hearts and lives of young adults everywhere he is invited.

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A New Pentecost

There are a few things that are essential to reaching young adults with the message of renewal through the Holy Spirit. First we need to understand that the Holy Spirit will come in the way he sees fit for this new generation. Too many leaders in renewal are expecting the Holy Spirit to show up and do what he did twenty or thirty years ago. This will only limit and stifle what the Spirit wants to do today. Second, young adults need mentoring and accompaniment based on authentic love and relationship. Young adults will not really care how much we know until they know how much we care. Finally, we need to be empowering young adults for mission. Young adults want to make a difference. There has never been a bigger “difference maker” in the life of the Church than Pentecost. We need to pray for this to happen again for this generation.

Ask the Holy Spirit to Renew Your Hope

Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to trust the Holy Spirit with the task of renewing the Church today. Do not lose hope that the gift given on Pentecost and renewed in our time will continue his work in the hearts and lives of young Catholics. Support the work of those who bring renewal to young people and pray for their efforts.

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