

# Are young adults more conservative than parents?

Are young adult Catholics more conservative or "orthodox" than the baby-boomer generation before them?

It depends on whom you ask.

Colleen Carroll, a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter who spent a year interviewing approximately 600 young adults for her book, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Loyola Press), argues yes. According to Carroll, young adults are rejecting an "everything goes" spirituality, aligning themselves with the demanding God of their grandparents and participating in traditional devotions, such as the rosary. Like the growing Protestant evangelical movement that relies on the Bible for moral direction about daily dilemmas, orthodox Catholics go straight to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for all answers.

A former theology professor of mine at St. Mary's College in South Bend, Ind., confirms Carroll's findings.

"Students today are more rigid in their faith," he explained to me over coffee the other day. In teaching a one-credit course on Catholic identity, he found the students more interested in the moral code of the church and in eucharistic adoration than in a discussion of the sacraments or Catholic social teaching.

It makes sense that a growing number of young Catholics prefer a black-



Therese J. Borchard

## Our Turn

and-white approach to faith, uncomfortable with raising questions that land in the gray. This same generation woke up to horrifying headlines as they were forming their belief systems and embracing a set of attitudes toward their religion.

But plenty of sociologists, youth ministers and Catholic thinkers disagree with Carroll's assessment of Gen-Xers.

James B. Davidson, sociologist at Purdue University, claims that Carroll has identified a trend among some 20- and 30-somethings, but that according to his research this conservatism is not typical of their generation.

Mike Hayes, the associate director of Paulist Young Adult Ministries, writes in a review of Carroll's book, "In my experience as a young adult minister, I have found that young adults report that a simple checklist of rights and wrongs is exactly what they find unchallenging about the church."

Hayes agrees with Carroll that young adults are grasping for "communities that speak to a sense of mystery,

a strong sense of morality and a belief in absolute truth," however they are looking for a new tradition that is neither black nor white.

In their book, *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame Press), four researchers found enough conflicting responses among young adults to make it impossible to categorize them neatly into one group.

This has been my experience as well.

I know that young adults crave some of the traditional devotions that their grandparents treasured. My book, *Our Catholic Devotions*, was a surprising hit among the younger generation who wanted an explanation of the rosary, Stations of the Cross and some other popular devotions.

At the same time, when delivering a talk to this age group on the topic of romantic relationships, most were not interested in details of the church's stance on cohabitation, premarital sex or contraception. They wanted practical advice on how to make a marriage work.

Perhaps young adults are more like every generation before them, with as many approaches to faith as personalities in a family, eluding all kinds of stereotypes and demanding as many sizes as the church has to offer.

Therese J. Borchard is a columnist for Catholic News Service.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

several reasons to avoid premarital sex, but I can't think of a better reason than it jeopardizes our immortal souls!

Christina VanLieshout  
Cadyville Road  
Livonia

## Not yet time

To the editor:

Every time I read Father McBrien's column in the *Catholic Courier* my feathers get ruffled. Father McBrien's essay regarding "Pope John Paul's resignation would be an act of love" is the final straw. Our Holy Father was chosen by Mary, the Holy Mother of God. She protects him with her mantle and her loving arms. Our Pope suffers much for the Church and when John Paul's mission is completed, God will tell him when to resign. I do not believe that God would leave His Church in chaos without a leader.

Patricia A. Borucki  
Meadow Drive  
Spencerport

## Prices don't reflect effort

To the editor:

The article "Workers ride for equal civil rights" in the Oct. 2 issue of the *Catholic Courier* is the most promising event concerning the injustice toward our migrant workers. When I buy a beautiful head of lettuce for \$1.00-\$1.79 and ponder how that represents so much toil by some person, I know that the price should be higher. When that happens, I hope the farm workers will receive a fair percent of the increase in cost.

Many of my neighbors are dairy farmers and they do not receive an amount which would be fair for all their effort and expense.

It's time to right the wrongs which have been the migrant workers' plight for too long.

Anita F. McGee  
John Green Road  
Dundee

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Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

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