A noble quest: cultivating Christian spirituality in Catholic adolescents and the usefulness of 12 pastoral practices

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The essay considers the process of cultivating Christian spirituality in Catholic adolescents. It will integrate and document official Catholic Church teachings on the subject and also unofficial scholarly reflections. The exposé briefly defines adolescent spirituality and situates the process of cultivating adolescent spirituality in Catholic youth ministry. The concentration of the inquiry is predominantly single-minded – addressing briefly – 12 Catholic spiritual virtues, traits, practices, and disciplines that cultivate adolescent spirituality in US Catholic young people.

Keywords: adolescents; spirituality; spiritual virtues and traits

Introduction

Cultivating Christian spirituality in Catholic adolescents is a noble quest. It is also not a new idea; it has been a process that parents, youth ministers, and pastors have been trying to capture and instill in young people for generations. As remarkable as it might seem there is a dearth of adolescent resources that have been published over the years that discuss teenage spirituality in particular. Adolescent spirituality, in Catholic circles, is usually glossed-over or lumped together with other Christian ministry categories such as catechesis, discipleship, or evangelization. However, in recent years there has been a resurgence of teenage spirituality around the world (Mehlman 2000; Wright 2000; Abbott-Chapman and Denholm 2001; Crawford and Rossiter 2004; Engebretson 2004, 2006; McQuillan 2004; Tacey 2004; Baker 2005; White 2005, 2008; Yaconelli 2005, 2006; Canales 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007; Purpura 2008).

From the beginning, it must be clearly stated that these 12 virtues/traits/practices/disciplines are both a synthesis of others’ research and the pastoral practice in the arena of Christian youth ministry. The virtues/trait/practices/disciplines are also a result of my own observations, praxis, and experience in Catholic youth ministry and their realisation and effectiveness in Catholic pastoral care. These spiritual practices have been implemented at various settings with variable degrees of success over the years. The effectiveness is based upon a youth minister’s knowledge of the particular spiritual practice and there level of familiarity, comfortableness, and creativity to engage adolescents in spiritual encounters.

Moreover, it is important to note that the reflections in this article are limited to a religious context and specifically a Christian context, and even more particularly with

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Catholic American teenagers’ quest for spirituality. Consequently this essay will not consider the spirituality of adolescents from another faith traditions or world religions despite their sacred relevance and/or the depth of their piety.

Furthermore, this author is well aware of Tacey’s (2004) findings on the emergence of contemporary spirituality in youth or as he has coined it – ‘the spirituality revolution’ – an all-inclusive, secular, broad, democratic, and non-hierarchical model of spirituality (30–46). Although this author does not disagree with Tacey’s assessment, this essay will not explore the spirituality in this new context as a form of personal religion that cultivates Catholic adolescent spirituality. This article has two goals in mind: (1) to address briefly the framework of Christian teenage spirituality in two sub-areas (a) describing adolescent spirituality and (b) situating it in the context of comprehensive Catholic youth ministry; and (2) to explore 12 spiritual virtues/traits/practices/disciplines that help to cultivate Christian spirituality in young people. While much more work needs to be done to fully understand adolescent spirituality and the process of which to cultivate and awaken spirituality in American Catholic teenagers, a helpful beginning will be to define spirituality and identify its proper place in Catholic youth ministry.

**A brief description of Christian adolescent spirituality**

Wright (2000) states, ‘spirituality is a notoriously difficult term to define … at the heart of spirituality is that which is both mysterious and dynamic’ (7). Adolescent spirituality is elusive and vibrant, and is caught in a healthy tension between the sacred and profane (Wright 2000; McQuillan 2004; Tacey 2004). Engebretson (2006) describes adolescent spirituality as having four components:

[Adolescent] spirituality is: (1) experience of the sacred other which is accompanied by feelings of wonder, joy, love, trust, and hope; (2) connectedness with responsibility for the self, other people, and the non-human world; (3) the illumination of lived experience with meaning and value; (4) the need for name and expression in either traditional or non-traditional ways. (330)

Even in the narrow discussion of Catholic teenage spirituality the definition is multifaceted and sophisticated. However, it is Engebretson’s (2006) first component that will be most beneficial to this essay because adolescents cannot find words to talk about God until they have had an experience of God about which to talk (331). Likewise, McQuillan (2004, 12) notes, that young people are particularly experiential in their spirituality. Enhancing Christian adolescent spirituality is an experience and exercise which requires some effort on the teenager’s behalf as well as the adult who facilitates the process (Canales 2005b; Wright 2000). Hence, the majority of this study will examine 12 pastoral practices that are strongly experiential and appeal to young people’s quest for spirituality.

**Adolescent spirituality in the context of comprehensive Catholic youth ministry**

One of the best arenas to bolster Catholic teenage spirituality that I have witnessed in my 25 years of working with adolescents is comprehensive youth ministry. Nurturing adolescent spirituality is one element of comprehensive youth ministry as defined in official US Catholic documents *A vision of youth ministry* (Department of [Catholic] Education 1976) and *Renewing the vision: A framework for Catholic youth ministry*
In the updated *Renewing the vision* (1997; henceforth RTV) the US Catholic Bishops state that there are three goals of comprehensive Catholic youth ministry:

- **Goal 1**: To *empower* young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today (9).
- **Goal 2**: To *draw* young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community (11).
- **Goal 3**: To *foster* the total person and spiritual growth of each young person (15).

Goal 3 is the most relevant to the enhancement of Catholic adolescent spirituality.

The term ‘comprehensive’ is extremely important for Catholic youth ministry in the United States because it describes the systematic and integrated approach to youth ministry outlined in RTV and the preferred approach for engaging in ministry with adolescents (Canales 2007, 59). Comprehensive youth ministry stresses the moral, spiritual, and faith, development of adolescents while incorporating young people into the mission and ministry of the Catholic Church. The quest for adolescent spirituality takes place on many different levels and in diverse ministry settings. The next section is the majority of the essay and concentrates on helping Catholic adolescents develop a keener sense of Christian spirituality.

### Twelve spiritual virtues/traits/practices/disciplines for cultivating Christian spirituality in Catholic young people

Cultivating adolescent spirituality is of major interest to the US Catholic Bishops (RTV, 20) and the 12 virtues/traits/practices/disciplines that will be identified in this section will help to accomplish that end. These 12 Catholic practices derive from both common pastoral praxis and from spiritual disciplines over the ages, but due to the parameters of this essay, they will only be briefly addressed. This section is informed by my own experiences and work in Catholic youth ministry spanning a 25-year period. Over the years I have witnessed thousands of adolescents and observed hundreds of hours of young people trying become more spiritually attuned to God, and there are several spiritual activities that help to encourage this process in young children. Moreover, over my 25 years of adolescent ministry experience I have found these 12 virtues/traits/practices/disciplines predominantly useful in strengthening spirituality in adolescents. Although none of these 12 virtues/traits/practices/disciplines are new to Christian spirituality, they offer the juvenile worker or youth minister a pragmatic perspective to employ in their work as well as offer a valuable synthesis of existing material. The 12 areas are designed to be integrated into the faith life of Catholic teenagers as pragmatic pastoral skills that enrich and enliven their faith journey seeking the Christian Triune God. The 12 virtues/practices/disciplines are listed alphabetically and not by any particular order/level of importance: (1) Bible time, (2) contemplation, (3) honesty, (4) introspection, (5) journaling, (6) meditation, (7) music, (8) prayer, (9) retreats, (10) Rosary, (11) spiritual direction, and (12) time usage.

### Bible time

‘From strength to strength’ is an ancient biblical axiom (Psalms 84:7) that means human beings are capable of progressing from one success to another higher level of
success. Growing in holiness or cultivating spirituality in adolescents resonates with the above adage. The author of Second Timothy comments on the merit of sacred scripture, ‘All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work’ (2 Timothy 3:16–17). There is no doubt that the Bible is the most treasured book within Christianity and there is no reservation about its positive impact on spirituality.

The discipline of reading the Bible is an excellent way for teenagers to increase their spirituality. The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry document (NFCYM 1986) maintains that scripture deepens and nourishes adolescent faith. The document reads, ‘The catechesis for each faith theme is grounded in Scripture. This [scriptural] catechesis fosters in adolescents a deepening knowledge and appreciation of the other Scriptures in the Church’s tradition and in their own lives’ (78). Adolescents can glean much spiritual wisdom and practical guidance from spending time in the word of God. Spending time in the Word of God allows young people the opportunity for personal prayer and for personal catechesis, both of which are excellent ways to enhance their spirituality.

Brueggemann (1997, 23) indicates that the Bible is best presented as an invitation and alternative for a juvenile to enjoy:

> The Bible provides [youth] with an alternative identity, an alternative way of understanding [themselves], an alternative way of relating to the world. [The sacred Scriptures] offer a radical and uncompromising challenge to [the] ordinary ways of self-understanding. [The word of God] invites [youth] to join in and to participate in the ongoing pilgrimage of those who live in the shattering of history, caring in ways which matter, secured by the covenanting God who is likewise on pilgrimage with [youth] in history.

Brueggemann provides compelling rationale for teenagers to be engaged with the Bible. Catholic teenagers could be encouraged to read and study the sacred scriptures at home with their family, at church in their youth ministry, at school in a Bible study, and alone during their personal devotional time.

**Contemplation**

‘Our lives are lived forward and understood backwards’ is a Christian sentiment attributed to nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), which helps to situate the intensity of contemplation. The Prophet Zechariah prophesied, ‘Not by power, not by might, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts’ (Zechariah 4:6), which implies that God works in the stillness and quietness of the human heart. Delio (2005) affirms, ‘Contemplation is a penetrating gaze that gets to the heart of reality. It is looking into the depths of things with the eyes of the heart and seeing them in their true relation to God’ (132). The spiritual discipline of contemplation involves self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-actualisation, which all lead toward total Christian transformation (Canales 2005b; Wright 2000). Contemplation is an experience of ‘being present’ to God or ‘being caught up’ with God. Shannon (1993) maintains that, ‘[spiritual] awareness, which is central to contemplation, is a very different experience from [introspection]: it tends always to be unitive; [contemplation] cannot be apart from God’ (209). Contemplative prayer exercises work well with adolescents and are gaining in popularity with youth (Shelton 1983; White 2005; Yaconelli 2006).
Contemplation also has elements of discernment associated with its practice. White (2005) maintains that youth ministries are poised to reclaim the Catholic practice of discernment because contemporary youth culture is in crisis (63). Integrating discernment and contemplation as an approach that strengthens adolescent spirituality involves the *totus persona* – heart, mind, soul, and body – and have the best chance to penetrate young people in an increasingly isolated culture (White 2005, 67, 88).

Yaconelli (2006) maintains that contemplative prayer with youth is an invitation for adolescent’s to enter into a more meaningful relationship with the Triune God. There are two ancient Catholic contemplative practices that can be adjusted to fit a youth ministry curricula: (1) *lectio divina*; and (2) centering prayer (Yaconelli 2006, 84–9). Canales (2004b) states that *lectio divina* has a fourfold formula, ‘The church has developed diverse non-liturgical prayer forms since ancient times: *lectio*, reading from the Bible; *meditatio*, applying the reading to one’s life; *oratio*, petitioning God for guidance, understanding, and wisdom; and *contemplatio*, contemplating the God-experience while in prayer’ (40). Keating (1993) comments, ‘Centering prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing one’s faculties to cooperate with this gift … it is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; it simply puts other kinds of prayer into a new and fuller perspective’ (139). Centering prayer in many respects is a simplified version of the *lectio divina* and it is not an end in itself, but a beginning because it enjoys less ‘study’ and ‘thinking’ about God and concentrates on resting or relaxing and ‘being’ in God’s holy presence (Keating 1993).

**Honesty**

‘Honesty is the best policy’ is a pithy phrase that parents train their children to use when telling the truth and there is much veracity to its content. The fourth gospel depicts Jesus of Nazareth as boldly proclaiming to his friends, ‘and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32). Although Jesus is concerned about discipleship in this pericope he does mention the fruit of being honest. Honesty, also known as truth-telling, is always important to one’s self-identity and self-discovery (Aden 2005, 1288). Honesty can save one much aggravation and heartache. In terms of developing adolescent spirituality, it is best to take a long hard look at one’s spiritual life and simply assess its ‘worth’ (Canales 2004a, C 1). In other words, in which direction is the adolescent heading in terms of their spiritual quest (Canales 2005a, 10–11)? Is the youth merely interested in fun and games, dating, and eating pizza, or is the teenager seriously interested in enhancing Christian spirituality and discipleship (Canales 2005a, 10–11)? Being honest with one’s self and with others is part of the metaphysical dimension of knowing, which leads to personal and communal insight.

Shelton (1983) states, ‘Because honesty is a critical aspect of [humanity] … [it should] be explored in various roles and relationships in the adolescent’s life’ (275). Practicing the virtue of honesty is also an excellent way to encourage youth in self-reflection. Youth ministers may want to concentrate on specific content-filled experiences, roles, and relationships, and reflect with adolescents on their propensity for honesty, caring, and sensitivity (Shelton 1983, 275). Honesty is a virtue that certainly can capture an indwelling integrity of a person.

Bernard J.F. Lonergan (1972) maintains that insight is reached through intellectual morality. Lonergan contends that seeking honesty is part of discerning God’s will and
is expressed in four categorical imperatives: (1) being attentive, (2) being intelligent, (3) being reasonable, and (4) being responsible (8–9). In Lonergan’s (1958) schema, Christians gain wisdom and insight from being honest, a spiritual practice known as ‘discernment’, which may include combinations of empiricism (honesty in experiences), idealism (honesty in concepts), and realism (honesty in judgments) (622–3). Honesty is an important virtue for cultivating spirituality in adolescent Christians because it is linked to a gospel value (Canales 2004a, C 1). Fostering honesty in Catholic adolescents is a worthwhile endeavor for three reasons: (a) it is character-building in youth and helps them to discern integrity; (b) it is a virtue laudable to promote and try to instill among adolescents; and (c) it helps the adult youth leaders’ who assess, evaluate, and facilitate youth programmes to raise the conscious of youth (Shelton 1983, 61).

**Introspection**

‘To know thyself is divine’ is a seventeenth-century English expression that captures the essence of introspection. The Apostle Paul informs the early Church, ‘You must lay aside your former life … acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking’ (Ephesians 4:22–3). Introspection can be a fresh and spiritual way of thinking for young Christians. The practice of personal introspection in its simplest form is merely assessing one’s life: sitting (or walking), thinking, pondering, and reflecting upon ways to continuously change one’s life for the good, with the assistance of God. Delio (2004) likens introspection to ‘ascending’ to God because it is a process by which Christians can go ‘inward to the core of who [they] are, [as] created them in the image of God’ (23–4).

One spiritual method of personal introspection which might aid adolescents’ in their quest for cultivating spirituality is the ‘Examination of Conscience.’ Zagano (2003) reports that there are five steps within the Examination that fosters Christian adolescents to become more spiritually attuned to God: (a) recall you are in the presence of God, (b) look at your day with gratitude, (c) ask help from the Holy Spirit, (d) review your day, and (e) reconcile and resolve (2–4). The Examination provides adolescents with a tangible and realistic blueprint to review their day or their week. Teaching adolescents to integrate introspection is a positive way that will allow them to examine their conscience and actions. The purpose of teenagers engaging in introspection is twofold: (a) trying to find God in all things and (b) working to gain freedom to cooperate with God’s will (Zagano 2003, 4). Therefore, enlivening spirituality in youth may require teenagers to integrate introspection into their lives. One expression for implementing introspection in the lives of Catholic youth is during the end of a weekly or monthly youth ministry gathering.

**Journaling**

‘The pen is mightier than the sword’ is a medieval proverb that resonates well with the pastoral practice and spiritual exercise of writing one’s thoughts or prayers as distinct from speaking them and praying them verbally. The Psalmist writes ‘[Because] my heart is stirred by a noble cause, as I sing my ode to my [God]; my tongue is the pen of a nimble scribe’ (Psalms 45:2). Writing down personal thoughts on paper in a diary-like fashion is an excellent pastoral evaluative tool that will allow a person to grow in spirituality.
Clarke (1991) holds that journaling can be either a simple or complex method for teenagers to enrich and expand their spirituality.

[Journaling] can be a reflection on one’s prayer, on one’s daily life, or both. In spite of some initial hesitation or resistance, most [young] people who are guided in the process of journaling find it beneficial. As one reflects in order to write, one taps into a deeper sub-conscious awareness and in the act of writing, releases this awareness and brings it to consciousness. (51)

Adolescents may find that regular journaling will help them to discover patterns of God working in their lives and can record these interactions, and thus, keep a diary of God’s promises. Journaling actively records a teenager’s thoughts, actions, events, personal happenings, feelings, inhibitions, excitements, stimulations, and the results of such experiences.

Parrott (2000) identifies five ways that journaling can fortify teenage spirituality:
(a) journaling intensifies adolescents’ awareness about their innermost feelings about themselves; (b) spiritual writing assists teenagers in reflecting about their day in terms of connecting spirituality through everyday tasks and choices; (c) a daily diary affords a relatively objective account for juvenile spirituality and spiritual changes within their life; (d) a spiritual log provides young people with an avenue to explore and examine their spiritual ‘trouble spots’ or ‘sticking points’ that may be hassling their spirituality instead of enhancing their spiritual awareness; and (e) a spiritual diary should empower youth to discern spiritual behavior patterns that discover and rediscover God’s unconditional love and mercy (p. 148). Journaling is a powerful tool for adolescents because it assists them in self-understanding and self-awareness, which is part of enriching youth spirituality.

Meditation
‘Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee’ is an ancient adage from Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) and it represents the goal of meditation. The Psalmist remarks, ‘Let the words of my mouth meet with your favor, keep the mediation of my heart before you’ (Psalms 19:15). The practice of meditation emphasises a return to the heart and is crucial for achieving or ‘advancing’ in spirituality, even for young people (Delio 2004, 58). Meditation with young people will be challenging because it is a more intense type of prayer, distinct from liturgical, rote, or spontaneous prayer forms, one that involves reflection and self-awareness (Freeman 1993, 649). Meditation is a more intense type of prayer, one that involves reflection, integrity, and self-awareness, requiring that teenagers have a strong self-identity (Freeman 1993, 650).

Techniques for involving adolescents in meditation could entail reflection on a single word or phrase such as ‘praise you God’, ‘I love you Lord’, or ‘God is great’, or reflection on a New Testament pericope or meditating on a cross/crucifix, or a religious icon. This technique is called ‘centering prayer’ because it focuses prayer in meditation (Canales 2004a, C 1). These practices should begin for small amounts of time, e.g., one-minute and increase to 5 to 10 minutes per day, and realistically young people should not be expected to pray more than adults.

Yaconelli (2005) comments that meditation is like ‘listening to crickets’ chirp because it requires the sensitivity to know that crickets can be heard and the maturity to quiet one’s self to listen to them chirp (35–6). Meditation with adolescents involves
listening, deepening one’s awareness of God, and attending to one’s experience of God. Meditation with adolescents aims, ‘in particular, [at] emphasizing the nearness of God, our relatedness to Christ, and the inspiration (in-spiriting) of the Holy Spirit empowering us for acts of mercy, justice, and peace in the world’ (Yaconelli 2005, 22). Meditation for Catholic teenagers could also be as simple as reciting a prayer over and over that focuses the mind and heart upon God, such as, the Hail Mary or the Glory Be.

**Music**

‘Singing is praying twice’, is the ancient adage attributed to Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), and is appropriate because music, song, and lyrics are so much a part of adolescent life and culture. The scripture passage ‘make a joyful noise to the Lord’ (Psalms 66:1; 89:16) reflects the understanding that music and song help to nurture spirituality. Music is an excellent vehicle for cultivating teenage spirituality. The US Catholic Bishops (NCCB 1997) state, ‘Music is a significant part of personal expression for young people and that desire carries over to their participation in liturgy’ (RTV, 46). All adolescents listen to a favorite musical style and genre. The crucial element for those trying to help develop spirituality in adolescents is to ‘tap into’ the musical styles, melodies, genres, and lyrics that capture the religious imagination of young people.

It is no great surprise that the average American adolescent listens to lots of music every day. Rice and Dolgin (2005) report, ‘One study, which examined the listening habits of 2,700 14 to 16 year olds; found that [teenagers] listened to music an average of 40 hours per week’ (324). Mueller (2007) reports, ‘Recent studies put the estimates at more than five hours a day’ (88). The following observation regarding the music habits of adolescents 8–18 year olds is below:

- 74% report listening to radio;
- 68% report listening to CD player or mp3;
- 99% of homes have CD/tape player;
- 20% view music via computer in their bedrooms; and
- 58% listen to music while doing homework (Mueller 2007, 89).

There is absolutely no doubt that music not only entertains young people, but influences them and may even educate them as well.

Smith (2005, 47) notes, ‘Between 20 and 29 percent of [adolescents] play religious music … and about one-third of teens report having listened to religious music outside of a concert … twenty percent of nonreligious teens, for instance, listen to religious music’. This suggests that Christian music is impacting US teenagers in significant numbers. Consequently, the importance of music for adolescent spirituality looms large because music has the potential to captivate young people as a spiritual medium.

Strommen and Hardel (2000, 166) are convinced that, ‘Music is more important to today’s young generation than it is to any other generation; songs that touch [adolescents] most are those that speak to their pain, their isolation, their experience’. Music has the power to transform and move teenagers to a deeper spirituality. The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry document (NFCYM 1997, 49) states, ‘The music of the young brings freshness and variety to our current musical genres and can infuse sacred music with energy and vitality’. Perhaps nothing inspires youth more
than music; and these findings point to the fact that music occupies a vast amount of adolescent’s time and is extremely relevant for youth culture.

**Prayer**

‘Pray always and in all ways’ is a slogan that has gained much attention in the past ten years within Christian circles and it speaks to the significance of prayer. The Apostle Paul gives the Church a mandate to pray, ‘Pray without ceasing’ (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and ‘with all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit’ (Ephesians 6:18). Christians pray because Jesus was a person of prayer and thus modeled prayer for the Christian community. The discipline of prayer helps teenagers integrate their faith life and spirituality and to express their spirituality (Engebretson 2004).

Albeit there are many prayer forms for adolescents to experience and which encourage spirituality; however, this subsection will discuss prayer laconically and generally. Prayer is language of the heart, and prayer in its simplest form is a human being communicating and interacting with God and God communicating and interacting with a human being (Canales 2004b, 39). Teaching young people to pray and offering a variety of prayer experiences (liturgical and non-liturgical; public and private; rote and spontaneous) empowers teenager’s spirituality and heightens their experience of prayer, and allows themselves to enter into a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Engebretson (2004, 276) observes, ‘Prayer is used to express spirituality, but more common is a capacity for reflection, particularly through challenging activities’. Prayer is an important dynamic of adolescent faith and fosters spiritual wholeness (White 2005, 141).

The NFCYM (1997, 46) document discusses the importance of fostering the discipline of prayer in young people. Youth ministry programmes which strengthen adolescent prayer also strengthen a juvenile’s relationship with God. The NFCYM (1997, 47) document further notes, ‘Teens need opportunities and encouragement to voice spontaneous prayers, sing in groups, and bring their ideas and issues to community prayer’. Providing an array of opportunities for adolescents to pray will allow them to encounter a ‘smorgasbord’ of meaningful spiritual activities. RTV (NCCB 1997, 44) addresses prayer and its impact upon a juvenile’s spirituality:

The ministry of prayer and worship celebrates and deepens young people’s relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it awakens their [spiritual] awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; it incorporates young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially [Sunday] Eucharist; it nurtures the personal prayer life of young people; and it fosters family rituals and prayer.

The US Catholic Bishops are clear that prayer is an essential component of effective Catholic youth ministry and it also strengthens spirituality in teenagers.

**Retreats**

‘Let go and let God’ is a popular Christian slogan that has appeared on T-shirts and bumper stickers, but it reminds young Christians that God orders human direction and Christians are called to accept that divine direction. The Gospel of Luke states, ‘Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus retreated from the Jordon and was led by the Spirit into the
Retreats are the spiritual practice of withdrawing from the usual rhythm and routine of daily life for the purpose of boosting adolescent’s interior life. Retreats are part of the Christian tradition and are paramount in youth spiritual development. ‘Weekend retreats are the spiritual backbone of a quality parish-based youth ministry. From my experience teenagers love to participate in weekend retreats and are enthusiastic and excited about them’ (Canales 2002, 31). Retreats are perhaps the greatest spiritual vehicle for juvenile workers to help cultivate spirituality.

Warren (1987, 133) refers to retreats as Christian experience programmes, ‘Most of the Christian experience programmes I know about encourage those who have been on one weekend to come back to others in one or another capacity’. The ultimate purpose of weekend retreats is to foster spirituality within the lives of young people as they encounter God. ‘A retreat increases the spirituality of a person, which enables them to come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of God and their personal relationship with God based upon their own experiences with God’ (Canales, 2002; 31). These weekend spiritual experiences and encounters with God come in a variety of formats and the names differ from diocese to diocese.

RTV (NCCB 1997, 26) discusses the importance of a solid retreat ministry: ‘Ministry with adolescents provides balance … [that] can be achieved throughout a year or a season of programming; even a single program or strategy can incorporate several of the ministry components, as in the case of a retreat program’. East (2004, 49) maintains that retreats serve as a medium for enhancing teenage spirituality. ‘Youth retreats have a unique ability to touch the hearts of young people … retreats have the power to change the lives of young people, calling them more deeply into discipleship’. Those working with youth in a Christian context recognise the enormous transformational power that weekend retreats offer to young people.

Rosary

The simple phrase attributed to Saint Pius X (1835–1914), ‘Of all prayers, the Rosary is the most beautiful and the richest in graces’, sums up the Catholic belief in Mary of Nazareth (ca. BCE 20 to 40 CE), the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. The Canticle of Mary (Luke 1:46–55) in the Christian Word of God indicates the role of Mary is significant to Christianity and is the scriptural basis of the Rosary (rosarium meaning ‘rose garden’). The spiritual discipline of praying the Rosary is a 1,000-year tradition and it is a form of personal meditation that is taught to Catholic toddlers through adulthood and is encouraged as a meditative, non-liturgical, and private prayer form by the Catholic Church (Pope Paul VI 1974; Pope John Paul II 1987, 2002; Catechism of the Catholic Church [USCCB 1997], nos. 2676–9, 2708).

Pope John Paul II (2002) states, ‘The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christo-centric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium’ (n. 1). There are four mysteries of the Rosary that are to be reflected upon by the person who is praying the Rosary. The Joyful Mysteries focus on the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, presentation of Jesus at the Jerusalem Temple, and finding the child Jesus in the Temple. The Luminous Mysteries focus on baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the wedding at Cana, Jesus’ first proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, and the institution of Sunday Eucharist. The Sorrowful Mysteries focus on the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus scourging at the pillar, the crowing of thorns, the
carrying of the cross, and Crucifixion. The Glorious Mysteries focus on the Resurrection, the Ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption of Mary, and heavenly Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Praying the Rosary as a reflective discipline incorporates the mysteries of Christ’s life and is relatively easy to learn. Catholic youth ministers will be able to incorporate without difficulty the Rosary as a legitimate prayer form and as a spiritual practice that can enrich Catholic spirituality in teenagers. The Rosary’s ultimate purpose is to bring young Catholics closer to God through introspection and reflection upon the life of Christ.

**Spiritual direction**

The pithy phrase ‘sometimes a-floatin’ and sometimes a-fishin’ sums up the nature of Christian spiritual direction with adolescents. The wisdom teacher in the Bible states, ‘Love to listen – you will gain much knowledge’ (Sirach 6:33), which entails that listening is a good disciple to engage in and can be beneficial. The spiritual practice of spiritual direction is an age-old practice that has taken place between pupils and spiritual guides who practice the art of holy listening. Barry and Connolly (1978, 7) state, ‘Spiritual direction, as we understand it then, is directly concerned with a person’s actual experience of [their] relationship with God’. Compatible with these insights are the views of Nemeck and Coombs (1993, 16) who maintain:

> Spiritual direction is a gift, and charism, the ministry of guiding a person in and through her/his … spiritual regeneration, deification, transformation. Spiritual direction is a God-willed contribution of one person to another’s process of spiritualization, interiorization, and sanctification.

The practice of spiritual direction is a wonderful pastoral tool to help a young person enrich their personal spirituality.

Baker (2005, 54) indicates that the art of holy listening with adolescents and evoking youth testimonies through holy listening is tantamount to spiritual direction and is a powerful pastoral tool. Current research on spiritual direction with adolescents is threefold: (1) a process which is guided by the Holy Spirit to take the lead in facilitating the direction exchange, (2) is concerned with ‘being in touch’ with the pneumatic characteristics that are in the heart, mind, soul, and body of the young person who seeks spiritual guidance, and (3) tries to create an ethos of holy listening (Gratton 1993, 915; Baker 2005, 54). Purpura (2008, 1) argues that spiritual direction with adolescents is a much urgent endeavor for the Christian:

> One of the greatest needs of our young people today is spiritual direction. Never before have I seen more young people seeking to better understand their faith, yet at the same time I have never sensed a greater lack of spiritual direction available to them.

This statement sounds all too familiar to those who minister to youth in the Catholic Church and is a real dichotomy in Catholic youth ministry: spiritual direction is needed, but there is a dearth of qualified spiritual directors (Purpura 2008).

Mehlman (2000, 1) observes that some spiritual direction encounters with young people is comparable to the image of ‘sitting in a boat with a fishing companion, bobbling about on the pond, moving according to the wind’s breath or gust – sometimes a-floatin’’. Other times spiritual direction with youth involves things like ‘asking for clarification, paraphrasing, raising my voice with hesitancy at the end of statements,
weaving together the threads with tentativeness to aid the directee’s reflection – go a-fishin’” (2). Spiritual direction with adolescents is holy listening and is significant to cultivating adolescent spirituality (Mehlman 2000; Baker 2005; Purpura 2008).

**Time usage**

‘Time, is on my side’ is a popular 1970s Rolling Stones song that effectively summarises an adolescent’s attitude concerning their life span. Typically young people feel invincible and that nothing bad will ever happen to them until it does happen (Lerner 2002, 96–7). The author of Ecclesiastes wisely observes, ‘There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens’ (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The use of time as a virtue/trait means that adolescents like adults must learn to live in harmony with time constraints and balance time with their activities, school work, relationships, part-time jobs, and spirituality. The use of time is a factor that must be managed effectively and efficiently if it is going to help cultivate spirituality in young Christians (McCarty 1994, 65). The reality is that US Christian teenagers are busy people and few are able, even if willing, to commit a block of time to develop their personal spirituality (Carotta 2002, 30). The lack of time can become a negative factor for adolescents encountering the Sacred.

Reynolds (2005) maintains that Catholic youth are engrossed with activities and are extremely busy despite their young age. ‘Many Catholic young people are victims of ‘option overload’: a byproduct of living in an affluent society with an overabundance of athletic, educational, entertainment, social, and religious opportunities, many of which are positive, healthy, and enjoyable’ (Reynolds 2005, 53). American Catholic youth, like the majority of adolescents from industrialised countries, have hectic lives and hunger for a break in the action, a bit of solitude, and much needed balance in their lives (Yaconelli 2005, 114). Time need not be a restrictive factor for young people. Perhaps a specific time may need to be scheduled by youth to empower themselves toward renewal. In a culture of busyness, one helpful aim of bolstering adolescent spirituality is to put young people not only in touch with God, but to allow them the time to be in communion with God.

**Summary of the 12 traits/practices/disciplines**

Ultimately, these 12 spiritual virtues/traits/practices/disciplines for developing adolescent spirituality – Bible time, contemplation, honesty, introspection, journaling, meditation, music, prayer, retreats, Rosary, spiritual direction, and time usage – are connected to a desired outcome to assist Adolescents’ in their noble quest for spirituality. Ideally these 12 virtues/traits/practices/disciplines help adolescents to develop a reasonable spirituality which moves young people closer toward Christian conversion, discipleship and the universal call to holiness that is disciplined, self-reflective, and experiences a deeper union with the Christian Triune God (Pope John Paul II 1999, 43–54).

**Conclusion**

Teilhard de Chardin (1960, 67) eloquently states, ‘We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience’. Cultivating spirituality in adolescents fosters the human experience and engages the teenage faith
journey. East (2004, 75) notes that enriching adolescent spirituality is a priority within Catholic ministry and spirituality is central to the events, gatherings, and strategies of a parish’s ministry with youth; prayer, faith formation, inspiration, and witness are essential to effective youth ministry. Catholic adolescents are spiritual people and deserve quality encounters that nurture their spirituality.

Cultivating spirituality in adolescents creates a process and ambiance which is characterised by broadening the spiritual horizons of young people and deepening their personal faith-life through a variety of activities and strategies. Developing adolescent spirituality should never be a leap of faith into the unknown, but a process that is calculated and enriching (McQuillan 2004). Encouraging Christian spirituality in Catholic adolescents is an approach that provides young people with opportunities for acknowledging, fostering, and celebrating adolescent identity and faith (Crawford and Rossiter 2004; Baker 2005).

Continual transformation is the ultimate goal of cultivating Christian spirituality in adolescents (Pope John Paul II 1999). Developing adolescent spirituality leads to transformation and is the goal of all Christians. Teenagers will increase their spirituality best through religious experiences (Wright 2000; McQuillan 2004; Canales 2005b; Engebretson 2006). Therefore, creating spiritual experiences for young people to encounter God and community is perhaps the finest way for teaching, learning, and experiencing adolescent spirituality. ‘Youth do not simply want to learn about God … youth want to feel God, experience God’s love, and enter into God’s presence’ (Canales 2005b, 73). In this way adolescent transformation will be reached through cultivating spirituality in teenagers. Ah, a noble quest indeed!

Notes on contributor


References


