

DUGAN, Katherine. **Millennial missionaries**: how a group of young Catholics is trying to make Catholicism cool. New York (NY): Oxford University Press, 2019. 230 p.

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USA is a country where Christianity prevails: of more than four-fifths of religiously affiliated Americans, three-quarters are Christians; from these, approximately one-third is Catholic and two-thirds are Protestant (Pew Research Center, data 2010-2020). Even though the ensemble of the Christian denominations from Protestant tradition is much more relevant than Catholicism, Catholic presence is also quite important in America. A few remarkable analyses in the US sociology of Catholicism reflect this importance, written by Michele Dillon, William D'Antonio, or Tricia Bruce, among others. Yet, there is a lack of analyses on youth Catholicism, namely on college world. Probably the most significant analysis is 'Catholicism on campus: stability and change in Catholic student faith by college type' (2010), based on a national survey from the Higher Education Research Institute and written by CARA, a recognised US Catholic centre. Though, this analysis is limited to few indicators and has little discussion. Furthermore, there are only older studies, such as 'Religion on campus' (Conrad Cherry, Betty DeBerg, and Amanda Porterfield, 2001), made just in four universities, one Catholic.

The present book fills a gap in the study of Catholicism in US colleges. This is not a national study, with quantitative and extensive nature, that analyses religiosity of undergraduate students with Catholic affiliation, like CARA's. No,

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this is a qualitative and intensive study, of ethnographic nature, with participant observation and interviews. This is a study of a growing organisation inside US colleges that is changing their religious landscapes and their surroundings: FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). As explained in the introduction, because the author intended to understand the world internal to FOCUS, she studied only missionaries, who, although emerging adults, are no longer students. They are FOCUS' employees that are generally between twenty-two and twenty-five years old, white, and from middle-class, staying at FOCUS after their mission of three years or moving to other professions. So, it is not a study on college religiosity but on the active members (missionaries) of an important Catholic organisation inside US colleges. This book adapts the thesis of its author, Katherine Dugan, PhD in religious studies from Northwestern University (2015), who, from what this thesis/book shows, is a quite recent and refreshing talent for religious studies.

The author defines her guiding questions in page 4 of introduction: “How, why, and with what implications is this Catholic identity forged? How do millennials embody the habits of dynamically orthodox Catholicism? How do their Catholic practices shift the boundaries of Catholicism? Why do they look to Catholicism for alternatives to US cultural norms?” She answers these questions in six chapters. Chapter 1 traces the history of FOCUS and its roots, a few institutions and persons that gave its identity, structure, and methods: Catholics United for the Faith, from which came Curtin Martin, founder and CEO of FOCUS; the evangelical Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru); the beginnings at the Benedictine College; Catholic Charismatic Renewal, namely through the influence of the Franciscan University of Steubenville and its president, Father Scanlan; and Newman Centers (NC), the main apostolic organisations in US campuses when FOCUS appeared.

The next three chapters focus on prayer practices that shape missionaries' Catholic identity. Chapter 2 analyses the daily Holy Hour and its prayer types: the embodied prayer (adoration), the imagining prayers (*lectio divina* and mental prayer), and the evangelising prayers (intercessory prayer and mental reading). As Dugan refers in page 58, with these prayers “... millennials enact the mundane

work of trying to become twenty-first century Catholic missionaries.” Chapter 3 describes missionaries’ relationships with saints in three phases: the encounter, the interaction, and the efforts to reach them. In author’s words in page 84: “Devotion to saints shapes the nature of missionaries’ Catholic identities and makes demands on how the missionaries live.” Chapter 4 explains why and how missionaries work to inhabit their genders through two illustrative interpretive frameworks. The first (complementary submissions) describes a Catholic counterculture of gender norms: women submitting to men’s leadership while men submitting to women’s needs. The second (gendering prayer) describes how particular prayer practices shape gender performances: prayer journals train young women as essentially emotional and relational in nature while daily examinations of conscience discipline males’ active and physical nature.

Chapter 5 analyses their sexual ethics and dating culture which assert their proud, dynamically orthodox Catholic alternative to contemporary US cultural norms, as well as their pro-life politics and their position within US Catholicism. Dating fast, gendered chastity and dating, and the wish for big families are all aspects of this FOCUS culture described in this chapter. Chapter 6 describes the biggest FOCUS’ event (SEEK), in this case in 2013, where missionaries and college students gather to assist Mass, to hear apologetics, to be encouraged by the patronage of a hipster blessed, to pray in Latin, to adore, and to confess. These practices cultivate an identity and a community of dynamically orthodox Catholics who can navigate savvily in US millennial-generation culture. The concluding chapter describes the transitions of many former missionaries to Catholic life after FOCUS and their effects on families, parishes, and Catholic identity in the US.

This book describes and comprehends FOCUS culture through its missionaries. It is an orthodox Catholic culture, built upon papal, saints, and conservative documents, as well as the examples of great Catholic figures. Prayer, the relationship with God, Jesus, Mary, and the saints, is a central trait of FOCUS, which they inherited mainly from the charismatics and curiously from their main competitors (Cru), though with the ‘safe’ distances. They are normal young people, imbued in US millennial and Catholic cultures, but they surpass them,

since they try to live orthodoxly, almost in a pre-conciliar way, much influenced by NC, because they consider it the way to be saints and faithful to the Church. In short, FOCUS defies current secularisation and individualisation and is a vehicle for transforming and opposing this individualised millennial culture.

How did Dugan formally, theoretically, and methodologically defend her thesis? The book is very enjoyable of reading, with many interesting explanations throughout it. The chapters are useful to reach the proposed objectives, coherent between and within them, balanced, and all with conclusions, which is very helpful for readers. Though she considers herself in a different Catholic position of FOCUS, throughout the book there is not a single statement of criticism, only a clean and impartial narration, which is of course a very positive aspect of the book, mostly in religious and politics studies where impartiality is not always regarded. Yet, reading the book it seems that everything is good and happy in FOCUS. And what about the sad examples? It seems that the author only tells one side of the story. It may be understandable since Dugan had a few objectives that did not implicate a debate. Also, it could be interesting to study aspects like booze (How do they sublimate it? How do they avoid drinking?), triumphalism (Do they feel special?), and repentance (Do they forgive the others? Do they involve them?), among others.

When defending a thesis about millennial culture it could be useful to discourse about secularisation and individualisation. A few names like Karel Dobbelaere, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Grace Davie, David Martin, mainly the Americans Wade Roof or Nancy Ammerman, could be useful. Though explanations along the text are interesting and pertinent, it could have a theoretical introductory part, at least a sub-chapter which could be conjugated with a bigger methodological sub-chapter. In fact, the author does not show how she chose the places to observe/participate and what she visited, so there is a lack of methodological explanations in terms of sampling, which should not be absent.

In sum, this book is a very interesting study of a Catholic organisation (FOCUS), well developed and written. The only criticisms go to the lack of analysis of less positive aspects, of theoretical framework on

secularisation/individualisation, and of methodological explanations, which could reinforce the undeniable quality of this book.