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# Review of C. Smith et al., Young Catholic America

Michele M. Dillon
*University of New Hampshire, Durham*, Michele.Dillon@unh.edu

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man, Cristina Lafont, and Maeve Cooke question the applicability of Habermas's model to real contexts and challenges of political conflict resolution on national public stages and on the global international level.

The volume concludes with a wide-ranging reply by Habermas, which appears to point forward to a complex book manuscript on which he is currently at work. How persuasive is this reply? Prima facie, at least one core problem seems to arise with it. Largely Habermas answers his critics by invoking an idea of long-term cognitive steps in processes of societal "learning," such that when seen from the perspective of several centuries or perhaps even millennia of change, the various clashes of religiosity and secularity that so frequently seem to rend apart the social structure may not be as irresolvable as they can often appear at close range. Habermas is clear that this response can rely on no kind of crypto-Hegelian grand scheme of logicoprogressive development through history. But if such a scheme is ruled out, exactly what other kind of encompassing understanding is Habermas left with on this grand scale? The suspicion is that Habermas entertains a rather vague yet confident view that, looking into the future, all these conflicts will somehow, in the long run, work themselves out and "come out in the wash."

*Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church*. By Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. x+326. $29.95.

Michele Dillon
*University of New Hampshire*

Christian Smith et al.'s engaging book presents findings from his National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). The data come from the third wave conducted in 2007–8, when the participants were 18–23 years old; they were first interviewed in 2002–03 (13–17), and many were reinterviewed in 2005. The book's focus is the young Catholics in the sample, those in the early phase of emergent adulthood. Smith and coauthors write in a confident and accessible manner and present detailed statistical data. The opening chapters (the introduction and chap. 1) of *Young Catholic America* present an historical overview of changes in American society and in Catholicism since the 1950s. Among the societal changes are the growth of education, delayed marriage, economic restructuring, twentysomethings' material dependence on parents, birth control pills, material prosperity, and somewhat surprising, "the influence of postmodern theory" (p. 6). The Catholic changes include assimilation, upward mobility, Vatican II (1962–65), and decline in vocations. Of particular salience, the parents of the young Catholics studied were the first generation of youth (born in the 1950s



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and early 1960s) to grow up as Vatican II changes were taking hold (p. 24). Smith et al. alert readers early on to the fact that, as a result of their experiences amid a changing Church and society, many of these parents "were not particularly well-educated in Catholic teachings and were poorly formed in Catholic faith and life" (p. 26). While the authors emphasize that they are not "blaming or villainizing" the emerging adults' parents (p. 27), the book's findings and interpretive narrative accent their critical role in the (mostly failed) intergenerational transmission of faith and religious identity (e.g., pp. 76–88; see also chap. 5, which analyzes diverse pathways to emerging adulthood religiosity). Another pathway, limited but substantially better than parents in nurturing Catholic identity, is Catholic education (analyzed in chap. 7).

The authors present a detailed profile of Catholic demography, beliefs, and practices from the 1970s to 2000s (chap. 2). They show much stability on several religious variables across this interval, with the exception of a significant decline in attendance at Mass among 18–25-year-olds (p. 34). Relative stability notwithstanding, including stability in the transition from teenage to emerging adulthood years (see chap. 5), Smith et al. argue that today's young Catholics "are not exhibiting a particularly vibrant, robust faith and identity" (p. 59). They illustrate this with a detailed analysis of intracohort differences among young Catholics, whom they divide into five categories reflecting their degree of connection to Catholicism (chap. 3): completely, mostly, moderately, nominally, and family Catholic. "Family Catholics" report a family connection to Catholicism but do not identify as Catholic or attend Mass (p. 62). The completely Catholic are likely to hold traditional faith beliefs (e.g., in a personal God; p. 67), but they and the mostly and moderately Catholic have similar levels of weekly Mass attendance (p. 65). "A majority of all types . . . believes it is acceptable to pick and choose religious beliefs without affirming the teachings of a religious faith as a whole" (p. 68). To the authors' surprise, the "Completely Catholic group . . . is the most likely to affirm this view (64%), while Nominal Catholics are the least likely (53 percent)" (p. 68).

The authors' surprise, I would suggest, derives from an overly narrow interpretation of Catholicism and of identity. Religious faith or identity does not come in a prepackaged checklist. Given that Catholicism values faith, reason, and experience, the "completely Catholic" respondents might be considered serious Catholics, who use their interpretive reason and experience to discern what is core and what is less relevant in enacting a commitment to Catholicism amid the vicissitudes of emerging adulthood. By elevating the singular authority of official church teaching on, for example, sexual matters, Smith et al. do not allow for the lived messiness of Catholic identity. This issue is underscored when the authors outline the impoverished nature of young Catholics' faith based on personal reinterviews with



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41 of wave 1 Catholics (chap. 4). Here, the authors introduce a six-category typology (p. 91): apostates (n = 7), switchers (n = 5), estranged (n = 11), nominal (n = 6), engaged (n = 12), devout (n = 0). Unlike Jae, an apostate who may seem "a bit of a loser" (p. 93), or Mindy, a "very mascara-ed" switcher (pp. 98–102), or Cassandra, a "pretty-scattered" and pot-smoking nominal (pp.105–7), Tommy is an engaged Catholic. He is articulate about his faith, attends weekly Mass, and even believes in transubstantiation. His Catholicism is not devout, however, because he disagrees with celibacy and with "the Church's teachings on sex before marriage and homosexuality" (pp. 111–12). Hence, Tommy does not have "the entire religious 'package' that qualified" as devout (p. 111).

Smith et al. provide an excursus on the types of variables (e.g., self-identification, Mass attendance, Catholic ancestry, parental/spousal Catholicism) that in combination are necessary to measure "who actually is a Catholic" (pp. 126–54). As they correctly point out, "*the methods by which scholars include and exclude respondents from their Catholic category can have a significant impact on their substantive findings*" (p. 154; italics in original). It is also true, however, that how one defines the identity "package" affects the findings. Some theologians and sociologists would argue that any "package" of Catholic identity would need to include devotion to Mary, commitment to Church teachings on social justice, and evidence of an analogical imagination. Why should obedience to the hierarchy on sexuality be privileged? Indeed, the many ways of being Catholic are not solely a methodological dilemma; it is inherent in the doctrinal pluralism within Catholicism as a living tradition. The contrasting emphases in, for example, the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI and Francis and John XXIII reflect this differentiation.

Another feature of the book is life course "outcome" data (chap. 6). Here, Smith et al. use a threefold typology of Catholics: practicing, sporadic, and disengaged. Practicing Catholics report more purposefulness (p. 216) and socioemotional support (p. 214) and less engagement in sexual intercourse (p. 225). Nonetheless, they are not better protected than the sporadic or disengaged against feelings of depression or meaningless (p. 214); they are all more or less equally happy with their physical appearance (p. 213) and are similar in feelings of gratitude, control, and self-empowerment (pp. 217–18). Never-married practicing and sporadic Catholic females report higher rates of pregnancy than the disengaged, and there are no differences with respect to having had an abortion (pp. 226–27). Smith at al. argue that overall, the practicing Catholics are having more positive experiences and outcomes (p. 230). In my reading, the mixed outcome findings point to the complicated nature of religious identity, however operationalized, in everyday life. In closing, there is a lot of interesting material in this study. The book will animate discussion among students, scholars, and others inter-



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ested in Catholicism, religion more generally, American culture, and the life course, as well as among Catholic church planners and educators.

*Faith on the Avenue: Religion on a City Street*. By Katie Day. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xvi+247. $29.95.

R. Stephen Warner
*University of Illinois at Chicago*

Taking brilliant advantage of her location at a Lutheran seminary in Philadelphia, Katie Day surveyed organized religion in America's fifth-largest city from 2004 to 2011. Her purpose was to assess what religious institutions contribute to the life of the city. The research required a great deal of time and hard work on the part of Day and her student associates. They identified all the congregations—defined as groups that meet regularly for religious or spiritual purposes—located on one city thoroughfare, conducted key-informant interviews in the half that were willing to respond, and conducted close-up ethnographic observations and interviews in a smaller, intentional sample of congregations, 13 of which are identified by name in the book. The result is *Faith on the Avenue*.

Inspired by Eli Anderson's *Code of the Street* (Norton, 2000) to conduct her survey along Germantown Avenue, Day comes up with an especially wide-ranging portrait of religion in the city. The Avenue (as it is called throughout the book) winds nine miles from Chestnut Hill, a "suburb within the city" (p. 214) on the northwest, to the inner-city neighborhood of Kensington, near the Delaware River, on the southeast, on the way passing through the "second-hungriest congressional district in the United States" (p. 112). Along the avenue at the close of the study period were 83 congregations ranging from old (17th century) to new (seven founded since 2000); rich to poor; those with acres of greenery and those fronting the sidewalk; megachurches to those composed of a few families; predominantly white, African-American, Puerto Rican, and racially heterogeneous; and Protestant, Muslim, and other in religious identity. (The last Catholic church on the Avenue closed just before the study began, and the nearby Jewish congregations were off the Avenue and hence ineligible for the survey.) Notwithstanding the predominantly Protestant affiliation of most of the congregations, the religious institutions included in the study provide ample material for the theoretical purpose at hand.

Day's study is informed by the religious ecology perspective of Nancy Eiesland (*A Particular Place: Urban Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb* [Rutgers University Press, 2000]) and Lowell Livezey (*Public Religion and Urban Transformation: Faith in the City* [New York University Press, 2000]), with the work of Robert Sampson, Omar McRob-



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