

Catholic Activism Today

Individual Transformation and the Struggle for Social Justice

MAUREEN K. DAY

Instructor's Guide

Uncovers why Catholic organizations fail to foster civic activism

The American Catholic Church boasts a long history of teaching and activism on issues of social justice. In the face of declining religious and community involvement in the twenty-first century, many modern-day Catholic groups aspire to revive the faith as well as their connections to the larger world. Yet while thousands attend weekly meetings designed to instill religiosity and a commitment to civic engagement, these programs often fail to achieve their more large-scale goals.

In *Catholic Activism Today*, Maureen K. Day sheds light on the impediments to successfully enacting social change. She argues that popular organizations such as JustFaith Ministries have embraced an approach to civic engagement that focuses on mobilizing Catholics as individuals rather than as collectives. There is reason to think this approach is effective—these organizations experience robust participation in their programs and garner reports of having had a transformative effect on their participants' lives. Yet, Day shows that this approach encourages participants to make personal lifestyle changes rather than contend with structural social inequalities, thus failing to make real inroads in the pursuit of social justice. Moreover, the focus on the individual serves to undermine the institutional authority of the Catholic Church itself, shifting American Catholics' perceptions of the Church from a hierarchy that controls the laity to one that simply influences it as they pursue their individual paths.

Drawing on three years of interview, survey, and participant observation data, *Catholic Activism Today* offers a compelling new take on contemporary dynamics of Catholic civic engagement and its potential effect on the Church at large.

Catholic Activism Today

Individual Transformation
and the Struggle for Social Justice

MAUREEN K. DAY



320 pages | Cloth | 978-1-4798-5133-1

Religion

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction — 2-3

Chapter 1 — 4-5

Chapter 2 — 6-7

Chapter 3 — 8-9

Chapter 4 — 10-11

Chapter 5 — 12-13

Chapter 6 — 14-16

Chapter 7 — 17-18

Conclusion — 19-20

INTRODUCTION

The Introduction opens with a vignette from a small Catholic parish in the San Francisco Bay Area. Readers meet Jack Jezreel, a lively and engaging speaker, who tells them about the conversion of John Newton, a slave trader who became an abolitionist and composer of “Amazing Grace.” Jezreel contends that the world outside their church sanctuary also has religious meaning and is in need of healing. This part of the book introduces JustFaith Ministries (JFM) as a national organization that designs curricula for churches to form small groups to learn about peace and justice issues. JFM hopes that as these people learn about and encounter poverty, they will be transformed by this knowledge and experience, seeking to make a difference in their world.

JFM provides an example of the “discipleship style,” the style of public Catholicism most visible today. There are four characteristics of this discipleship style. First, it has a personalist character, attracting Catholics who are more likely to volunteer (than join a civic organization) and find opportunities that are personally significant. Second, individual-level engagement, like volunteering, points Catholics to individual-level solutions, rather than becoming involved in justice-oriented change. Third, this personalism assumes a locus of moral authority rooted in the individual; Catholics place a greater weight on their own discernment and grant less moral authority to the magisterium. Finally, personalism encourages a more integrated approach; instead of bracketing their faith as one sphere of their lives, discipleship-style organizations help participants make their faith the foundation of their lives and put that faith into the world both personally and socially. These four characteristics and their implications for understanding American Catholic civic engagement are central to this book. The methods (61 interviews, 53 of those returned surveys, and 270+ hours of participant observation), demographics and order of the book are outlined, as well.

NB: It may be of interest, especially for service learning courses, to read this book alongside implementing either the JusticeWalking college program or a JustMatters module. This way students can discuss their service, other life experiences or simply their experience of JFM in the context of this book.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is some of the social or governmental pushback that an organization seeking to bring religious values into public life might face? What are some of the assets and liabilities in having religious believers more intentionally bringing their faith to public life? To what extent do you feel that religion should be a part of American public life?

2. [Before asking the following questions, personalism should be contrasted with individualism for students, with individualism being more self-focused and personalism as incorporating both individualist and communal elements. See discussion on the socially embedded individual in Chapter 3 for more on this.] The discipleship style is rooted very deeply in *personalism*; this, as we will see more clearly in the next chapter is a less communal way of engaging public life than Catholics did previously, but it is much more individually meaningful. What are some of the social changes that disrupted this more collectivist Catholic community? How have these changes affected other social arenas beyond Catholicism?

Lesson Plan A

Do an internet search for “Parable of the Lifesaving Station”; you will find both text-based and video versions. This was written by Episcopal priest, Dr. Theodore O. Wedel in 1953. Early in their meetings, JustFaith participants watch a video recording of Jack Jezreel recounting this story to them. Before students see the video/read the text of this parable, have them share their various ideas of what the primary missions of churches in the US are. Perhaps also parse out what they think *should* be the mission of churches compared to what missions are actually animating today’s churches. After going over the parable, discuss Jezreel’s understanding of the primary mission of churches. Also discuss his own thoughts as to whether they are successful in meeting their mission and his assessments of most of those who attend churches. Ask them to consider churches as a whole, with a crude little lifesaving station on one end of a spectrum and the exclusive club on the other end; where do you think most churches fall?

Lesson Plan B

In advance of this class, have the students attend a religious worship service. Ask them not only to pay attention during formal worship, but also to take note of any ways the congregation attends to the needs of the local community (help them to say where they might find these, maybe in a bulletin, perhaps there are flyers or other notices in a lobby; going with a friend who is familiar with that congregation would aid this endeavor). How many congregations offer such services for members? For non-members? For those that have services, what are the sorts of services that are being offered? Have them explore what sorts of populations are being served as well as those which are not being served. Also identify the strategies that the congregations are using to address these needs. I’m sure you will find that there are more efforts at meeting basic needs in an immediate way than there are congregations that do advocacy or structural work. Discuss why this might be and the ramifications.

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1*JustFaith Ministries and the Discipleship Style: A Sociohistorical Context*

This chapter begins with a brief biography of the founder of JFM, Jack Jezreel, and chronicles its beginning and development, showing the ways a small parish program spread across the nation. Important in its initial expansion is the role of important and well-known organizations within the Catholic world, especially Catholic Charities, as well as the tight organizational structures of the Catholic Church that provided regional gatekeepers who helped with promotion. JFM did not have the same early success in the Protestant world, due to the absence of these structures as well as membership struggles within many mainline denominations. However, although the organization enjoyed early success, it has struggled with enrollment more recently.

After describing the struggles and success of JFM, the chapter transitions into a sociohistorical overview of American Catholic civic engagement, drawing particularly on the frame of “styles” offered by David J. O’Brien in *Public Catholicism*. O’Brien identified three styles of public Catholicism: the republican style (1750-1820), exemplified by parish lay trustee boards; the immigrant style (1820-1920), typified by the Catholic school attached to an ethnic parish; and the immigrant style (1920-1960), epitomized by Catholic Worker houses. These styles emerged from responses to changes in the wider American landscape. Although these styles are not confined to their particular era, due to these broader social changes there are dominant styles in any given era. A summary of these three styles in addition to today’s discipleship style can be found on pages 39-40. This discussion situates JFM and the discipleship style within a historical context of Catholic civic engagement.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Although these styles are observed within the history of Catholic public engagement, these styles can also be seen in other traditions in different eras, including today. Where do you see traits of the republican, immigrant, evangelical and discipleship styles of engagement in non-Catholic traditions? What are some of the theological and social factors that contribute to these different groups’ choice of style?
2. There are undoubtedly other styles that religious groups have taken when engaging American public life and public life beyond the United States. Describe events or traditions that reveal a style that is different from the four styles discussed here. What are some of the socio-historical or theological factors that explain why a religion or religious organization adopted that style?

Lesson Plan A

Ask the students to come up with a list of 15-20 social problems; these can be local, national or international. Have a brief discussion as to which ONE issue they can collectively agree is a significant issue. Divide the class into four groups and assign either republican, immigrant, evangelical or discipleship to each of them, so that each of these styles will be represented by one group. Ask them to discuss in their small group how their particular style would respond to the primary issue the class identified. Also ask them to consider what other issues from the list their particular style might gravitate to (e.g., what other issue might a republican style choose to champion?), which issues the group might be indifferent to, and other issues that their style might avoid or simply not see. After the groups have discussed this, have them report back to the class what their group came up with.

Additional questions: (After a group has shared, to the rest of the class) Why do you think this style responded in this way to our shared issue (or, what underlying logic encourages this sort of response)? (To the whole class) What are the characteristics of this style that attract participants to some issues while they show indifference or aversion to others.

(After all groups have shared) Are there issues we did not get on our list that, as we think through the perspective of the particular styles, that might be compelling to a particular style?

When do you see each of these styles of public religion? Do you find any of them more personally compelling or characteristic of your own understanding of faith and society?

Lesson Plan B

Have students read excerpts of Catholic documents on different issues. Some examples include *Testem Benevolentiae* (1899 on Americanism), *Rerum Novarum* (1891 on the right to unionize), *Decree Against Communism* (1949) and *The Challenge of Peace* (1983 on war); you might want to consider writings from the *Catholic Worker* or other unofficial writings, too. Have them consider the ways the social context of American Catholicism shaped these documents as well as their reception. Are there public figures or organizations today that operate out of one of these four styles? How effective, compelling and well-received are these?

CHAPTER 2

The Culture of Catholic Civic Engagement: Catholicity and Core Values

Chapter Two discusses the culture of JFM, outlining the Catholicity of JFM and the five core values of the organization. JFM has had to navigate two events in its history that threatened to place it outside of Catholicism. The first was Jezreel's history as a speaker for the fairly controversial Call to Action and the other was the disclosure that a Catholic deacon on JFM's board had become involved in a womanpriest church. These events and simply their promotion of Catholic social teaching has invited criticism from politically conservative Catholics; this section also discusses the history of dissent from Catholic social teaching among conservative American Catholics as well as a series of articles written against JFM. The controversy that JFM has provoked from some and the way the organization responds illuminates the contested and highly sensitive nature of Catholic identity given the US political landscape.

This chapter also introduces the five core values of JFM—transformation, Christ-centeredness, community, justice, and compassion—and the way these animate both JFM and contemporary Catholic outreach more broadly. Transformation is about reprioritizing the beliefs and practices of the participants so that they shift more of their time and concern to ameliorating social problems. From the Latin “to suffer with,” compassion among discipleship groups is not about feeling pity or being altruistic; it means feeling some of the suffering of another. Community helps participants to undergo this transformation into a more compassionate person (and joyfully maintain this, rather than burning out) as well as helps them to identify communities to which they can bring their new values. JFM understands justice as living in “right relationship,” that is individuals with one another, groups with other groups as well as individuals and groups with God; justice also indicates for JFM that their outreach must go beyond charity to include structural change. Christ-centeredness puts the focus of members of discipleship communities on a particular understanding of Jesus; as there are multiple ways of understanding Jesus, discipleship communities emphasize particular aspects, creating coherence within their group. These five core values will form the basis of the following chapters. The white and middle-class make-up of JFM participants is also briefly discussed.

CHAPTER 2

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were some of the issues at stake for JFM when these institutional issues came to light and their Catholicity was questioned? Given your own understanding of Catholicism (however deep or cursory that might be), how serious were these navigations? How strong are Block's criticisms of JFM? How does the diversity of Catholicism (and therefore Catholic identity), both serve and undermine organizations seeking to claim a Catholic identity?
2. For students who have been involved in some sort of community service or service learning experience (in religious or secular contexts), first, how did you like volunteering (explore the motives behind their volunteering)? Next, to what extent were these five core values a part of that experience? Would an emphasis on any of these have made the experience a more beneficial one (either for yourself or for the people benefitting from your service)? Would any of these values have undermined the project or your participation? How do shared values affect your participation in any sort of group?

Lesson Plan A

Ask students to consider what the core values of their university are. Once these are established, ask them when any of these seemed like they were called into question (e.g., in some sort of controversy or transition). Who was engaged in the discussion (e.g., was it completely internal or did it involve outsiders)? How was it resolved (including what was gained and lost)?

Lesson Plan B

Put the students into five groups. Assign each group to be one of the five core values. Have them talk about how they are related to each of the other four values in as much detail as they are able (e.g., the Christ-centered group might want to cite Bible passages that connect to each of the four values; the community group might not only want to name flourishing communities that exemplify these values, but also cite examples that illustrate that those acting as disconnected individuals do not do as well in these). Once the groups have done this, ask if there were any values that were harder to connect for some. Note that the JFM grads find these five values to be fairly seamless in their integration. Discuss why there might be some dissonance in the room for some values (or if there is not, what it means that there is such integration).

CHAPTER 3

From Private Belief to Public Call: Transforming American Catholics

Chapter 3 focuses on transformation. Many American Catholics who are civically engaged: 1) seek involvement that occurs less in groups (like relief societies) and more often as individual volunteers and 2) want this volunteering to have religious significance. Discipleship groups facilitate a transformation that compels them to get involved as well as provides them with a religious way of perceiving their commitments. Discipleship groups take the form of the ripple group, that is, a group that strives to effect social change through the concerted transformation of individual actors. There is also a discussion of the self as a socially embedded individual.

The chapter examines the five ways Catholics describe the sorts of transformation they experienced as a result of JustFaith. The religion-centering motif means putting one's religious beliefs first, making these the foundation of their commitments; this motif was universal among the grads. Political transformation is either the expanding of political knowledge or a shift in one's political commitments; for JustFaith grads, this sort of shift means making poverty and related issues more central in their political imagination. Religio-political transformation means seeing the religious significance within one's extant political positions. The intensification motifs could describe the deepening of already-held beliefs or the ability to connect other issues to their primary issue, such as to see the relationship between climate change (a previously disconnected issue) to poverty (the primary issue). Motivational transformation describes an increased desire to put one's beliefs into action.

The final portion of the chapter looks at the effects of these transformations on the grads and their wider social worlds. Cognitive personal transformation is the change in a person's attitudes and beliefs. Practical personal transformation is the change in people's practices and behaviors. Social transformation refers to the various changes these personal transformations help effect in individuals' wider world. The survey data—comparing JustFaith grads, new participants and either Catholics or Protestants nationally—reveal that grads have beliefs that reflect that of the JustFaith program as do many of the new participants among the Catholics. There is a greater shift in beliefs among the Protestants, but Catholics demonstrate substantial changes among attitudes concerning poverty and political identity. Looking at practical personal transformation, there is more of a transition among these three groups regardless of denomination, with Americans generally the least active, new participants somewhat more active and grads being the most active. Social transformation is explored at the level of the congregations through the changes in ministry offerings advertised in the weekly bulletin before JustFaith and after it has run for three years (chart on p. 97).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This chapter centers on transformation. Have you ever been involved in a program, church or other group that tried to offer you a space that would facilitate personal and/or social transformation? What was the format or strategies the group took to instigate this transformation? Did you see any fruits? How long was this transformation sustained? After reading this chapter, could your group have done things more effectively?
2. Day puts forth a notion of the self as a socially embedded individual. First, how does the human person as both communal and individual square with your own understanding? Second, what are the five transformation motifs that the grads describe? Describe how these transformation motifs make normative claims on both individuals and larger social systems (such as states and denominations/congregations).
3. In looking at the section covering cognitive personal transformation, practical personal transformation and social transformation, how could discipleship groups ensure that their influence is felt beyond their congregations?

Lesson Plan A

Have the class list a variety of problems families, communities, or individuals face and then narrow these down to a total of three issues. Break the students into four groups; these will each represent support groups, social movements, cultural movements and ripple groups. Have them discuss what sort of strategies their respective group or movement would take in addressing this social problem (they may find that their particular strategy would not be able to effectively respond to a particular issue, and that is worth discussing, of course). Have the groups share their responses to each of their issues and discuss the merits and liabilities to each of these strategies.

Lesson Plan B

Have this chapter also assigned alongside religious social movement literature (e.g., C. Melissa Snarr's *All You That Labor*, Christian Smith's *Resisting Reagan*, Ziad Munson's *The Making of Pro-life Activists*, or Sharon Erikson Nepstad's *Catholic Social Activism*) and religious small groups (e.g., Lynne Gerber's *Seeking the Straight and Narrow*, Tanya Erzen's *Straight to Jesus*, or Robert Wuthnow's *Sharing the Journey*). Discuss the ways strategies, emotions, resources and more are similar and different among religious social movements, support groups and/or ripple groups (Note: Discussion on the underlying religious beliefs and values would be more developed after reading Chapter Four; you can come back to this literature and this question then).

CHAPTER 4

Christ-Centered Discipleship: A Theology of Pragmatic Reverence

Chapter 4 investigates grads' religious beliefs that create a "theology of pragmatic reverence" that helps them to bring their religion to everyday life. It begins by noting the importance of the Second Vatican Council in laying the ground for a theology of pragmatic reverence, especially in its providing a theology of the laity and developing available ecclesiologies. This theology of pragmatic reverence manifests in three themes: the biblical and theological, Catholic social teaching, and reappropriating religious artifacts into daily life. These three themes offer participants a lens that makes life more spiritually significant and morally compelling.

The biblical focuses on love of God and neighbor, with grads citing this as the central message of the Gospels. Grads believe that love of neighbor is made more concrete through inclusivity and assuring others' material well-being. The theological piece is a belief that the transcendent exists in the immanent—or that God is in one's everyday life—particularly as mystery, humanity in partnership with God, vocation, miracles, and prayer.

Catholic social teaching also provides cultural tools for the grads to make religious sense of their everyday lives with, particularly the life and dignity of the human person (including conscience), solidarity, subsidiarity, the preferential option for the poor, and structural sin. These tools are also either antidotes to or a recognition of political theorist Iris Marion Young's "five faces of oppression," that is, five distinct manifestations of oppression: powerlessness, exploitation, cultural imperialism, marginalization, and violence.

Only grads who had theological training, such as clergy or RCIA instructors, were able to reappropriate religious artifacts into everyday life. The most commonly reappropriated elements were the Eucharist, the crucifixion and resurrection, and the incarnation. These elements typically only carry other-worldly significance for many Catholics, but for grads these can provide an other-worldly significance to matters of this world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Many people associate religious values with conservative values, but these grads are drawing upon religious teachings that support social transformation in the face of poverty and related issues. Are you familiar with these teachings? To what extent do you see yourself or others drawing upon religious resources when discussing poverty, immigration, climate change, prison reform or others? Are these compelling?
2. How does a person's image of God, Jesus, religious truth, and so on shape their understanding of themselves and the human person more broadly? What are some of the unquestioned assumptions underlying these grads' moral universe? How do your own assumptions (religious or otherwise) of the human person, the right/good, purpose, moral living and others shape the political issues you prioritize and the "good society" you envision?

Lesson Plan A

In addition to this chapter, have the students read Sharon Nepstad's *Catholic Social Activism*. Using this book and other titles that examine religious activism (see Chapter 3's "Lesson Plan B" for suggestions), explore the religious values that underlie those who are civically engaged. In what ways are their religious cultural tools similar to and different from one another? Are there groups that would work particularly well with these grads or some that would have less of an affinity? What are the strengths and limits to using religious teachings to foment social change?

Lesson Plan B

Ask students to prepare for class by bringing religious teachings that support more conservative political positions, especially those that contradict the positions of the grads. Briefly go around the room and have each student share the quote/general idea and the source/context. What do they make of these contradictions? For example, ask if there are more accurate and less accurate ways to interpret a religious text or is it just up to the reader? Ask if they think most people use their religious beliefs to arrive at political positions or if they begin with political convictions and then look for religious justification (cite Jezreel's concern with the latter on p. 173). Where do their own political beliefs arise from (e.g., parents, friends, social media, religion, experience)? Do they have any bias (for or against) when it comes to religion?

CHAPTER 5

Transforming Community: Gathering and Sending American Catholics

Previous styles were unable to be both American and Catholic in the public sphere, resulting in the “dilemma of resistance,” that is, how to be in the world enough to change it, but removed enough so that you are not negatively changed in the process. This chapter examines the discipleship community as well as the other communities that the grads are a part of.

There are three types of communities that “gather” (i.e., form) them: family, congregation and discipleship community. Family may either help or hinder their discipleship values whereas they attended a congregation that they felt upheld the commitments of their discipleship group. Parishes and congregations provide challenging sermons, identity and (for Catholics) sacraments that inspire them in their engagement. The discipleship community provides three mutually-reinforcing “formation opportunities” in intimacy, personal growth and outreach. Intimacy allows for deep and vulnerable sharing. This also paves the way for personal growth, as intimacy allows members to both support and challenge one another. Outreach is privileged and promoted within the discipleship community and “sends” (i.e., expects them to act upon) grads to communities.

The communities of sending most often mentioned by the grads are those of civil society (political is explored more in the following chapter), their workplace, and ministry. The grads perceive civil society in the United States as greedy in the everyday, but capable of great generosity; they assume more knowledge of an issue would change the perspective of many. Like family, work can be a help or a hindrance in actualizing one’s spirituality: Those in helping professions and/or those whose work benefits a low-income population feel like their work is religiously meaningful; those who are in more profit-driven careers experience dissonance in their workplace. Their ministry work with marginalized populations is characterized by an acceptance of the diversity among their ministries and that service is fundamental to Christian living. They reconcile the dilemma of resistance by privileging the communities that gather them—allowing these to act upon them—and then go out and act upon the communities to which they are sent. However, this arrangement is in direct conflict with the value of solidarity. They resolve this by distinguishing between the *world* (less moral) and entering into solidarity with the *person* in need (moral). JFM intentionally fosters relationships between grads and the individuals at their ministry sites through strategies of immersion (visiting a site and interacting as peers rather than serving) and reciprocity (emphasizing that both individuals in the relationship give and receive).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Given this chapter, what distinguishes a “community” from a “group” for you? What are some of the communities you have been/are a part of? What were the obligations and gifts that came with your belonging? To what extent do your communities shape who you are? To what extent do you shape them?
2. Sometimes community can be romanticized. As Chapter 2 mentioned, community can be immoral, like a white supremacist group. When has community been a negative part of individual or social life? What are the sorts of checks and balances we can be aware of to ensure that the communities in our lives (both personal and social) are contributing in prosocial ways?

Lesson Plan A

Before class, have students do some reading on the role of social capital, social networks, relationships or other literature on the importance and effects of interpersonal ties as is appropriate to the context of your class. Some titles include Kai Erikson’s *Everything in Its Path*, Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, Mario Small’s *Villa Victoria*, Eric Klinenberg’s *Heat Wave*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s *American Grace* (especially Ch. 13). Using some of this literature, outline the importance of bonding (close relationships among similar people, like families) and bridging social capital (often weaker relationships that connect disparate groups; we often call these “networks” colloquially) in a brief lecture. Next, download the following resource: https://www.academia.edu/22596811/How_Social_Capital_Affects_Resource_Sharing

This provides instructions for an in-class activity that illustrates the ways social capital affects resource sharing. This is especially relevant to Chapter 5 in that it allows students to see the ways people are more likely to share resources with those they consider to be part of their community.

Lesson Plan B

Watch a Youtube video (20 minutes), “Henry [sic] Nouwen,” on his experience of L’Arche and the principles that guide it at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWm-wgaDuRU>

Begin discussion by identifying the core beliefs of L’Arche. You may, of course, substitute another video on another organization (e.g., Catholic Workers, Opus Dei, etc.) if this is more helpful. Discuss the ways community is formed here as well as the ways ideas like “gathering” and “sending” are a part of it. Also ask students, will a community founded on religious principles look different from communities founded on secular values? What might be similar and different among each of these types of communities?

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 6*The State, the Market, and Poverty: Seeking Justice*

The sixth chapter begins by outlining some of the conflicts Catholics face in navigating the American political system, namely that Catholic teachings do not easily map onto a red/blue dichotomy. Grads see the state as an entity that is well-suited to make structural changes and are strong believers in a participatory democracy. However, they also believe that their government is characterized by many bad policies, a commitment to party over the common good, an inability to change the minds and hearts of people, and a staunch militarism used to benefit the wealthy.

JustFaith helps participants see the ways that poverty is connected to other issues and this chapter explores issue intersection through the example of abortion. JFM places abortion (and other issues) within a “moral context,” that is, the issue is situated within a larger political and religious frame. Moral contexts do three things: 1) frame the issue as structural, 2) connect the issue to other issues and 3) demonstrate the issue’s relevance in a consistent ethic of life. First, abortion is seen as a social concern by grads’ desire to understand and respond to the social forces that lead to unplanned pregnancies and provide better material support to women and children after birth. Second, grads connect the issue to others, with racism and genocide as the example in the text. Third, grads grapple with the dearth of candidates who support life from conception to death, making it difficult to choose a candidate who is truly pro-life according to the grads’ standards.

The second half of the chapter explores JFM and grads’ feelings toward the market. They have serious criticisms of the market, noting the economic disparity in the US and between countries and the repercussions this disparity can have on low-income groups. When parsing their critiques into those of production or consumption, grads are much more vociferous on the latter, another remnant of their more individualist perspective. Their primary concerns with a culture driven by consumption is that it creates greedy people, that it is taxing on our environment, that it is a challenge not to participate in it and that it makes life unduly complicated. The grads practice simple living as a way of mitigating against a consumptive culture.

Grads face the “dilemma of efficacy,” the question of whether to downsize and live and work alongside marginalized populations (i.e., downward mobility) or to remain in a position of economic and social power and to use one’s influence to shape society into something more just (i.e., reform and generosity). Reform is about changing their workplace and world through their professional skills and generosity means giving large portions of their money and time to those in need. But practices as ambiguous as simple living and generosity leave the grads unsure as to whether or not they are being selfless enough. Grads typically choose reform and generosity over downward mobility.

The “dilemma of volunteerism” is the tendency of grads, despite their encouragement in JustFaith to pursue strategies of both justice and charity, to favor works of charity. Grads understand the practical limits of charity and know that sometimes structural change is needed, which directs them to the necessity of justice. A major obstacle to a more robust understanding of justice is their individualist notion of structure, which they understand as an aggregate of individuals. This makes them conceive of structural change as a matter of changing the minds and hearts of many.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the relationship of charity and justice in today’s American landscape? Consider the questions Day raises on p. 199: What about the countless civic associations that engage only in charity and in no justice? Are these actually even doing charity, or are they doing “something else,” such as easing their volunteers’ consciences? Can we say that they are exercising true charity when they numb the effects of social problems without any efforts at reform?
2. These grads, and Americans more broadly, tend to consider social problems through a more micro-level lens. How could more deliberate work with moral contexts do this? Have students come up with a list of social problems so that there are enough for each group of 4-5 to have their own issue. Have them develop both a way of seeing their issue as a micro-level problem and also have them situate it in a “moral context.” In a moral context, they should 1) frame the issue as structural, 2) connect the issue to other issues and 3) demonstrate the issue’s relevance in a consistent ethic of life. Have groups share with one another and discuss how these moral contexts might lead to more macro-level strategies.

Lesson Plan A

This would be a great week to have a guest speaker come in. There are several speakers who would probably be very excited to come and give a talk to your students, including: 1) a faith-based community organizer, 2) a diocesan- or parish-based social justice/outreach coordinator, 3) someone working in a Catholic Worker or Catholic Charity office or 4) a local JustFaith facilitator. These would probably all enjoy discussing their work with young adults and, I would bet, be happy to do this without a stipend if this is not in your budget. Ask them to come prepared to 1) describe what they do, 2) the role that their faith plays in this, 3) what the biggest challenges of their work include, 4) how partnering with non-religious agencies works compared to religious partnering (interfaith work would also be relevant for the book), 5) their understanding of what it means to be a faithful Catholic/Christian and a faithful citizen and 6) anything else you think your students would appreciate.

Lesson Plan B

Looking first at religion and politics, Robert Putnam and David Campbell's *American Grace* (especially Chs. 11 and 12) offer a great overview. If the class is focused especially on Catholicism, I would add Konieczny, Camosy and Bruce's edited collection *Polarization in the US Catholic Church*. These books will provide more background for the following questions: Could a religious vocabulary that discussed progressive concerns shift red/blue polarization into a shared discussion of the common good? Where would a Christian Left find partnership with progressive secular or non-Christian groups? How would that look different from Christian-only activism? Could there be partnership with conservative religious organizations on particular issues or concerns? Would there need to be differences there?

CHAPTER 7

Compassion: Knowledge through Stories

JustFaith provides participants knowledge as facts (which reinforce their commitments) and experiences (which are capable of changing their commitments). Experiences emphasize the moral and affective qualities of an event and participants have opportunities for direct and/or indirect experience in JFM programs.

Story is the main genre of knowledge that JFM uses in its programs. Stories present facts or an event alongside a particular affective frame for understanding those facts. In a story the frame and the facts are so intertwined that the listener typically rejects both facts and frame if rejecting the frame. Storytelling strengthens affective bonds and facilitates transformation. There are tacit parameters for storytelling in JustFaith: one can struggle, but not despair; one can share amazing accomplishments, but be humble; and the more difficult the challenge one poses, the more abstract it should be. These parameters also highlight the importance of dialogue and discernment in the small group process. Dialogue and discernment help the perspective of the group to achieve a greater level of consensus even while accommodating diversity.

Stories are an especially resonant genre of knowledge due to the personalist mores of contemporary US culture. Personalism takes the individualist tendencies of contemporary American life and redirects them in a prosocial way, evoking compassion from the grads who encounter situations of suffering. This personalism also manifests in their use of “family” as they describe their care for others. An expansive notion of family means knowing that the concerns and well-being of others are as important as one’s own; this expands “family” and is more abstract. An analogous notion of family makes connections to particular people who are suffering with those in one’s life; this is more affective. The chapter concludes by noting the challenge and opportunity the Church faces in the discipleship style: that the magisterium must now dialogue and persuade Catholics rather than simply promulgate and anticipate obedience. However, if done with care, this new posture grants the Church a wider audience as an important voice in American public life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you care about? What are some of the things that we as a society care about? How did you come to care about the things that you do?
2. When have you changed your mind on a topic? Did it have more to do with new facts or because of a new experience that provided a different perspective or frame to understand the facts? How does the impact of stories affect the way you might shape the views or positions of others? Can you think of times you rejected someone's story?
3. What groups are you a part of that include storytelling (even if done informally, like among friends and family)? What sorts of functions does storytelling serve?

Lesson Plan A

One of the grads' most treasured books from the JustFaith curriculum was Greg Boyle's *Tattoos on the Heart*. Have the students read the whole of this before class. As part of their reading assignment, tell them to pay attention to both the ways Boyle tells stories as well as the way he evokes compassion or other emotions from his reader. What were some of the more transforming, eye-opening or moving stories for them? How does he frame an event to see it through a religious lens? How are stories a more effective way to change a person's perception of a situation? What are the limits to storytelling, or, why are facts still important?

Lesson Plan B

Consider an issue that would be of interest to your students (I will use homelessness as an example). Find two sources that describe homelessness in your area or state. The first source should be mainly statistics on homelessness. The second source should be a personal article that describes or is written by a person experiencing homelessness, complete with the details of the trials and triumphs of his or her daily life. It should include affective pieces so that it reads more as a "story" than as "news." Have your students discuss what is most compelling about each of the pieces as well as what the limits to each of these are.

CONCLUSION

The book concludes by reviewing the four key characteristics of a Catholic style of civic engagement: individual engagement, individual-level solutions, individual locus of moral authority, and integrating faith and society. Individual engagement has two drawbacks: it weakens the potential for justice-oriented efforts and it cannot mobilize the same sorts of resources and efforts that bloc efforts can. This also points Catholics to individual-level solutions, missing opportunities for structural change. The emphasis on the individual also intensifies the internal moral authority experienced among discipleship Catholics, changing the ways the Catholic hierarchy might more effectively interact with the laity. Finally, by better integrating faith and public life, discipleship Catholics model a way for creating a more robust Catholic identity for a pluralist and non-sectarian society.

The Conclusion finishes by noting several unanswered questions and “loose ends.” The changing demographics, especially a more ethnically diverse American Catholicism, may affect the staying power of this discipleship style; this style may resonate with important elements in Latinx Catholic theology and may, therefore, persist. Another lingering question is whether this discipleship style is uniquely Catholic. These personalist tendencies stem from social shifts that affect populations beyond Catholicism; discovering the ways a personalist style affects non-Catholic and even secular groups could be fruitful. Looking at the level of the individual, two final observations are made. One is that Christians might understand their faith through what Robert Wuthnow calls a “theology of faithful presence.” The second is that although volunteering may not make significant social changes in the way the volunteer directly intends, it does increase the sense of hope and goodness in people and society.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Given the assets and liabilities of the discipleship style, does the ways that Day suggests that we might mitigate the liabilities make sense? Is this a style that can make a difference in the contemporary United States?
2. What about the loose ends identified? Does this seem like a style that is broader than Catholicism? Have you seen elements of this style in non-Catholic contexts? What about the increasing ethnic diversity of Catholicism; will this shape the discipleship style?
3. Is it, as Day seems to argue in the final paragraph of the book, enough to change people and increase a sense of general goodwill? Or do these discipleship groups need to have measurable impacts on our world? What is the importance of affective change, such as increased goodwill, social trust and others?

Lesson Plan A

The author would love to meet with your class if their schedule allows. Let her know in advance what the students would like to discuss and she's happy to join you and your class via video conferencing. You can reach her via email: maureenday@fst.edu.

Lesson Plan B

Have this book culminate in a research project in which students learn about (ideally through participation in) a faith-based group trying to make an impact in their world. Have students structure their paper on this group around the five core values (some of these may need to be adapted; Christ-centeredness, for example, does not make sense in an Islamic context). Are there other important values particular to the group that they are studying? What are the positive lessons this sixth (or more) value can bring to the wider society? Have them present their papers to the class. This might be a good project for students to collaborate on, too.