Catholicism Remixed: Catholic Prayer and the Making of Millennial Catholic Subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

Catholicism Remixed: Catholic Prayer and the Making of Millennial Catholic Subjectivity

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This dissertation is an ethnographic study of contemporary lay Catholic missionaries who evangelize on college campuses in the U.S. With a case study of missionaries who work for Disciples in Relationship Evangelizing Catholic Together (DIRECT, a pseudonym), I study the relationship between young adult Catholic prayer and Catholic subjectivity in contemporary American religious life. DIRECT hires recent college graduates to spend at least two years evangelizing on college campuses around the country. These missionaries invite college students into “dynamically orthodox Catholicism”—a way of being Catholic that is loyal to the Vatican, committed to a personal relationship with Jesus, and well-versed in American popular culture.

These millennial-generation Catholics embody and promote a post-Vatican II Catholicism that interweaves distinctly Catholic prayer forms like the rosary and the Mass with the methods of twentieth-century evangelical Protestants and the anxieties of contemporary middle-class young adulthood. They claim and propose Catholicism as uniquely able to overcome the perceived threats of secularism, relativism, and modernity. With a predominantly white, well-educated, and middle-class population, a carefully policed relationship with evangelical Protestants, and a savvy social media presence, DIRECT missionaries work to make Catholicism appealing to American college students.

This dissertation intervenes in three bodies of literature: the academic study of prayer, American Catholic studies, and young adult religious identity. This work engages a burgeoning field of scholars studying prayer in its multiplicity. Prayer is the intersubjective practices
whereby Catholic subjectivities were made, gendered, and challenged. As a contribution to the study of U.S. Catholicism, this dissertation argues that prayer forms like devotions to saints and Adoration and lectio divina are reimagined by missionaries into a millennial-generation Catholicism that is proudly distinct from, yet extremely conversant with, its twenty-first century American landscape. Finally, this work complicates sociologists’ claims about the nature of unencumbered young adults choosing religious identity. This research demonstrates that families, friends, and prayers inform and complicate the contours of millennials’ Catholic identity.

This dissertation studies how prayer lives, shaped by social and historical contingencies, inform, shape, and redefine young adult Catholic subjectivities in—and for—the twenty-first century United States.
Acknowledgments

The twenty-first century missionaries in my research spend their days acting on an instinctual sense that personal relationships and friendships are what make us accountable, keep us tethered to something more than ourselves, and connect us to a world beyond what we can imagine. I share that instinct and this dissertation reflects many layers of relationships.

I am not sure how to convey the depth of my gratitude to the missionaries whose lives and stories and relationships unfold in the following pages. I am serious when I describe them as smart, astute, funny, and caring individuals. I am grateful to have fallen into their world, if only for a while. Even if I have gotten parts of this wrong or they disagree with some of my claims, I hope I have done no harm. One of the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation interprets prayer as a set of intersubjective practices that are constantly shaping and re-shaping the subjectivity of those praying. I, too, have been reworked by my time among their prayers and community practices. I hope the missionaries I came to know best understand that the ways that I have been re-shaped cannot be conveyed in academic text. Thank you.

My dissertation committee members, Dr. Robert Orsi, Dr. Sylvester Johnson, Dr. Sarah Taylor, and Dr. Cristina Traina, proved thoughtful and productive readers, even when this document was far too long. Thank you for your guidance and encouragement. This research was supported by a Northwestern University Research Grants Committee Graduate Research Grant.

I never thought of my dissertation as a solitary project, but it never felt more like a group project than when I rallied a crew of colleagues to help me with a serious round of edits. Thank you, Anndrea, Ariel, Candace, Jen, and Steph. Brian even copy-edited more than once. Thank you. The remaining errors are of course mine. Even long-distance, Brian’s support and encouragement in our writing group (of two!) was invaluable to me in the last months of writing.
Anyone who has tried to do academic work while raising a child understands the long list of debts accrued. I can only note a few here. Abby’s skills as a babysitter freed me to conduct large portions of this ethnographic work. Sarah was her excellent back-up. Brian stepped in without having to be asked. Thank you. Several graduate students in Religious Studies somehow managed to find time to babysit. I am grateful.

My mom came when called more than once and always in the nick of time. My dad made that possible. Thank you.

I have found there to be both incredible challenge and amazing gift in the never-quitewithin-balancing work of academia and motherhood. My daughter has not escaped bearing the weight of both of these. She seems able to do so with all the grace and wit and many, many words a four-year-old can muster. Of the many privileges of my life, raising you, Bug, is by far the best.
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Introduction

It had been fifteen years since I had stepped foot near a Catholic confessional. But two months into my ethnographic research of contemporary young adult Catholics, I was standing in line with nearly six thousand men and women in their early twenties, waiting to go to Confession. We were in a resort in Walt Disney World for a five-day Catholic conference called SEEK2013. This was the biennial gathering of the Catholic organization at the center of my field research, Disciples in Relationship Evangelizing Together (DIRECT).¹

In the same space where we had earlier in the day been cheering loudly for the names of the schools represented and dancing to popular songs, the lights were now low; the music melodic and reflective. In the front of the room, an image of a crucified Jesus filled a massive screen. A spotlight was trained on a large monstrance, which shimmered gold in the light. Before and after they went to Confession, conference attendees knelt on the floor in Adoration. The line I was following into Confession zigged and zagged around the room, like a line for a popular roller coaster at one of the adjacent Disney theme parks. I counted at least one hundred priests sitting in neatly paired conference center chairs as they heard confession after confession for more than four hours.

I was in line near Mia, one of the four Catholic missionaries hired by DIRECT and assigned to evangelize college students at Northwestern University for the academic year. Three years ago she had grudgingly agreed to attend her first DIRECT conference during her senior year of college. Despite her hesitancy, Mia loved the conference. It had been “aahhhhmaaazing,” she said, to be surrounded by so many “cool Catholic people,” and to realize that it “wasn’t lame

¹ Disciples in Relationship Evangelizing Catholics Together (DIRECT) is a pseudonym, per my written agreement with the organization’s executives. Names of all missionaries are also pseudonyms.
to be Catholic.” Nearby, Mia’s team leader, Daniel, and his new fiancée were also waiting in the slow-moving line. Though much calmer in temperament than Mia, he shared her high expectations for this conference. Back on campus he had told me, “If we can just get students to sign up, we know SEEK will have a big impact on them.” He was especially confident that the experience of Confession would be transformative for students.

DIRECT was founded in 1997 with the goal of doing just that; transforming college students by “reintroduce[ing] Christ and His Church on college and university campuses.” The organization hired recent college graduates as “missionaries” whose mission fields were U.S. college campuses. Missionaries committed to spend two years evangelizing through leading Bible studies and one-on-one mentorship. They hosted Men’s Nights and Women’s Nights. They threw “root beer keggers” to welcome freshmen to campus and brought Capri Suns to sorority parties. Though DIRECT’s methods imitated several contemporary evangelical Protestant models, DIRECT was the only Catholic organization of this type in the U.S. in 2012.

DIRECT was on the cusp of celebrating fifteen years of collegiate evangelization when I began my fieldwork in the fall of 2012. The organization had grown from four missionaries on two campuses in 1998 to forty missionaries on ten campuses in the mid-2000s to over 300 missionaries on seventy-four campuses in 2012. Several months after I officially ended my fieldwork in January 2014, DIRECT executives announced having met their “big, audacious goal” of placing missionaries on one hundred campuses for the 2014-2015 academic year.

DIRECT’s more enduring, daily goal of cultivating “dynamically orthodox” Catholics on campuses across the country was harder to quantify. Officially, dynamic orthodoxy meant

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2 Field notes, October 18, 2012.
“unlocking the life-giving power of the sacraments, so that Jesus Christ may radiate through our thoughts, words, and deeds.” Orthodoxy referred to DIRECT’s strict interpretations of Catholic teachings in documents like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and papal encyclicals. All missionaries take an oath of fidelity to the Vatican when they begin their tenure with DIRECT. “Dynamic” referred to DIRECT’s relationship with mainstream American, middle-class culture and contemporary college life. Jacob, DIRECT’s public relations director, told me that the connotations of being orthodox are being “stiff, formal, conservative, intellectual.” Indeed, DIRECT missionaries are “orthodox,” he said, because they faithfully follow the teachings of the Vatican. But, Jacob insisted, they are not “stuffy or uptight.” Being “dynamic” was to be responsive to Jesus; he said, “Our faith should change and change us.”

In practice, embodying a dynamically orthodox Catholicism meant that missionaries worked to make Mass attendance attractive by handing out free Chipotle burritos after Sunday evening Mass. They modeled how to have fun at a college party without being drunk. Missionaries used friendships to invite college students to prayer and to Bible studies. They framed Catholic teachings on topics like same-sex marriage and the male-only priesthood as correctives to their social contexts. Catholicism looked cool when missionaries tweeted about Adoration and wore rosaries as jewelry. Though they were conversant in some of the same Marian devotions that Michael Cuneo ascribed to Traditionalist Catholics in his book, *Smoke of Satan,* they are not Traditionalist Catholics. Nor are they of the same generation as the conservative Catholics in Mary Jo Weaver’s and Scott Appleby’s *Being Right,* though the history

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6 Jacob, in discussion with author, November 8, 2012.
Missionaries had a more outward-looking, millennial iteration of a postconciliar Catholicism. This was not their grandparents’ Catholicism. This was a Catholicism being reshaped, remixed, and re-presented for millennials on college campuses.

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of DIRECT’s Catholic missionaries. It is a study of the relationship between young adult Catholic prayer and Catholic subjectivity in contemporary American religious life. These millennial-generation Catholics developed relationships with saints, adored Jesus, performed “complementary” gender roles, and were hip to U.S. popular culture. The ways they prayed and embodied prayer forms were shaped by and attempted to improve their religious and social milieu. These missionaries—most of them white and well-educated—promoted a postconciliar Catholicism that interwove distinctly Catholic prayer forms with the methods of twentieth-century evangelical Protestants and the anxieties of contemporary middle-class young adulthood. They claimed and proposed Catholicism as uniquely able to overcome perceived threats of secularism, relativism, and modernity. This is a study of how prayer lives shaped by social and historical contingencies in turn informed, shaped, and (re-) defined young adult Catholic subjectivities in—and for—the twenty-first century U.S.

Mia and Daniel were two of the missionaries in my fieldwork. In this introduction I describe their experiences in and around DIRECT in order to illustrate the religious, social, and educational contexts of the young adults who became DIRECT missionaries in 2012-14. Their experiences in, and concerns about, contemporary college culture elucidate how missionaries evangelized and prayed. Mia and Daniel’s Catholic worldview also makes evident several

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8 Mary Jo Weaver and Scott Appleby, eds., Being Right: Conservative Catholics in American (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).
components of a Catholic subculture that surrounded and shaped the missionaries in my fieldwork. Finally, this introduction summarizes the contributions this project makes to the study of prayer, contemporary U.S. Catholicism, and young adult religious identity. I conclude with a description of my ethnographic methods and a summary of the chapters.

Missionaries’ Prayers

In mid-October 2012 I joined the team of four missionaries for the first of many hours I would spend sitting quietly in this chapel in front of a transubstantiated host. I learned quickly that prayer was a centerpiece of missionary life. They prayed for an hour at nine o’clock most mornings after saying a rosary together at 8:30 a.m. They attended daily Mass at 4:30 p.m. on campus. Several missionaries had phone alarms set for three o’clock in the afternoon to remind them to pray the Angelus or the Divine Mercy Chaplet. On Thursday mornings at 4 a.m., they met at a particular location on campus and prayed a “Power Hour” for a particular intention, such as sobriety at a fraternity house. Every time I was with missionaries at nine o’clock in the evening, someone’s phone alarm went off, and we paused to pray a “Hail Mary” for “purity on campus.” Missionaries prayed “Grace” before each meal regardless of the setting and improvised free-form prayers before each Bible study. They talked with saints, interacted with Jesus through scripture readings, and planned everything from exercise to social events around Mass schedules. Prayer was pressed onto their daily schedules and missionaries set aside specific prayer times.

Prayers piled on top of other prayers in the lives of DIRECT missionaries. I was tempted to think that they were always praying; that prayer was an almost unconscious experience of being in constant communication with God. While it is true that the missionaries in my research tried to live with attentiveness to God’s presence in daily life, interpreting prayer as an all-the-
time event flattens out the nuances of their many particular prayer practices. I learned this while watching Mia pray her daily Holy Hours. She moved her body very precisely, in ways that signaled a special kind of reverence that she reserved for being in the presence of Jesus in Adoration. Her usual carefree demeanor was replaced with an attentive kneeling on the floor. Prayer was a specific mode into which Mia shifted. She took on a prayer disposition, embodied particular comportments, and expected to “work on” her relationship with Jesus in this time.

Amid this performance, missionaries’ prayer experiences tended to be mostly mundane. They did not usually fit the profile of “religious geniuses,” famously described by William James as those who pray with an “an acute fever.”9 By and large, missionaries’ prayers were what James called “dull habit.”10 But rather than dull, the habit of prayer was deemed virtuous. Missionaries praised the ability to keep praying without feelings of “acute fever.” These millennials did not pray by accident (though they described prayer as full of surprises).

These prayers were prescribed by, and reflected, the social contexts of missionaries. The study of prayer must be critically attuned to the historical, cultural, and religious milieu that surrounded these praying bodies and minds and personalities. DIRECT missionaries and their prayer practices were shaped by the twenty-first century U.S. college culture, their generational status as millennials, and their middle-class childhoods. They were also embedded in a Catholic subculture that expected missionaries to pray with saints, follow canon law, and date chastely, as well as be attractive to college students.

#mishlife: Twenty-First Century Missionaries

10 Ibid.
Mia was the first missionary I met in my research. She had just started her third year with DIRECT when we met in the student center on campus. I noticed her bright pink shoulder bag and her broad smile. She was carrying a Red Bull and wearing a plastic rosary around her wrist, which she later told me had been blessed in Rome. Throughout this first conversation, she used words like “baller” and “ridic” to describe the “awesome-sauce” of DIRECT’s mission on college campuses. Mia loved being a missionary and told me she was “born to do this” work. Indeed, Mia had a charisma that drew students to her. Over the course of my research, I watched female college students gravitate to her and clamor for her attention. They began to imitate her prayer habits and to move their bodies in Mass as she did.

Mia told me that she had always been a most-Sundays-Mass-going Catholic, but also “partied [her] face off” in college and did not think much about Jesus outside of Mass. That began to change one evening while she was studying abroad in college. Sitting atop a church roof, alone and thinking about her life, she heard God say to her, “What are you doing here?” She was sure it was God’s voice, but not sure what He meant. Back on campus, she broke up with her boyfriend and moved out of her party house. She found a DIRECT Bible study and joined it. She surprised herself by registering for and actually attending DIRECT’s 2010 conference. Alongside thousands young Catholics, she “met Jesus” and what she meant when she said, “I am Catholic,” shifted. Mia explained that being Catholic moved from the periphery of her life to the center. This was what God had been asking her, she was confident. He wanted to know, “Why aren’t you living life focused on me?” As a way of keeping her life focused on God, she accepted the job of DIRECT missionary.¹¹

Mia was an exemplary DIRECT hire because she understood college party culture and

was willing to talk to anyone about her “personal relationship with Jesus.” She was what the
leaders of DIRECT and DIRECT Human Resources called “F.A.C.T.,” “Faithful, Available,
Contagious, and Teachable.”\(^\text{12}\) Mia, like other ideal missionaries, countered the stereotype of
“dorky Newman Center kids” and embodied a “not lame” Catholic aesthetic.

Mia’s team leader, Daniel, was also a “F.A.C.T.” missionary, but for different reasons. Daniel
exuded a confidence that always made him seem older to me than his twenty-three years.
He was a graduate of Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, a small Catholic college where
DIRECT first piloted its program in 1998. He loved sports so much that his strategy involved
trying to evangelize the first guy he saw at Mass wearing sweatpants.\(^\text{13}\) Daniel often wore a
baseball cap and khaki pants with a t-shirt that advertised a DIRECT program, including
DIRECTSports that focused on reaching out to college athletes, and DIRECTGreek that
evangelized members of fraternities and sororities. His charisma was quieter than Mia’s, but
capable of drawing “guys” to his Bible studies. Between his second and third years with
DIRECT, he became part of the roughly thirty percent of missionaries who were married.

When we first met one-on-one, Daniel spent the first two or three minutes of our meeting
looking around, spotting what he thought were familiar faces and waving to a few students he
recognized. As his attention turned to our conversation, I learned that Daniel was a die-hard
Kansas City Royals fan. He also grew up going to Catholic youth conferences at Franciscan
University of Steubenville each summer. He credited his “solid Catholic” childhood to his
“really great parents.”\(^\text{14}\) Unlike Mia’s, his conversion story did not involve hearing God’s voice.
He did not have a dramatic “St. Paul experience,” he shrugged, “and that’s okay.” Instead, he

\(^{12}\) Field notes, June 14, 2013.
\(^{13}\) Daniel, in discussion with author, May 9, 2013.
\(^{14}\) Daniel, interview by author, May 9, 2013.
told me, when he went to college he slowly realized he “had to make Catholicism his own.”
There have been “lots of little moments, but nothing where I have been knocked off my horse.”
Rather, he described himself as having consistently encountered Jesus in scripture and come to
realize the “truth of our faith, you know?” He became a missionary to share that realization. “I’m
not being a missionary to be cool or something. This is about my personal relationship with Jesus
Christ. This is about the continual reencountering of Christ. And I want to share that.”

Daniel and Mia illustrate the broader community of DIRECT missionaries in 2012-2014.
Their conversion stories shaped how and why they decided to become missionaries. They were
smart, attractive, and strong leaders on their campuses. They loved Jesus and being Catholic.
They felt called by God to evangelize college students.

Twenty-First century College Campuses

The story of DIRECT in 2012-14 is also the story of U.S. college campuses in these
years. DIRECT relied heavily on the shared cultural capital of its missionaries who were, by
design, recent graduates of four-year U.S. undergraduate institutions. I met missionaries with
college degrees in business, advertising, theology, history, and elementary education, to name
just a handful. They graduated from colleges across the country, though the well-established
programs at Benedictine College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the University of Illinois
produced the largest numbers of missionaries. Missionaries had very different kinds of college
experiences. For example, Daniel attended a small Catholic liberal arts college, while Mia had
graduated from Colorado State University, a large public university. Mia laughed at the
memories, “I was the party girl…I knew how to throw a wicked New Year’s Eve party!”

Missionaries’ experiences in—or fears about—college party scenes informed their

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16 Mia, in discussion with author, October 18, 2012.
educational and social contexts. Many had participated, like Mia. But even if they lacked personal experience, most missionaries spent time discussing it in the formal training they received from DIRECT and in the informal training that happened between missionary friends. Partying is both a well-mythologized and real part of contemporary college culture. In their qualitative sociological study of a group of first-year women attending a large public university, Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton defined excessive alcohol consumption, participation in Greek life, and hook up culture as the “party pathway” through college. This all-encompassing college experience, they argued, valued social life over academic performance and good parties over good grades.\(^{17}\) This party pathway was reflected in Mia’s college experience and informed how she imagined students’ lives on the campuses where she evangelized.

The two components of this party pathway that most worried DIRECT missionaries were “binge drinking” and “hooking up.” The National Institute of Health officially defines “binge drinking” as four drinks for women and five drinks for men in the space of two hours. In September 2014 they found that just over forty percent of college students participated in binge drinking.\(^{18}\) Statistics like this one confirmed missionaries’ fears. Missionaries’ own experiences created a sense of urgency in helping students to “break free” of the culture of excessive partying and to turn to Jesus and “His Church” instead. When Mia told students her story of leaving the collegiate party scene in favor of a relationship with Jesus, she relied on her own experience to encourage students who might be stuck in the culture of binge drinking on campus.

Mia also had a lot to say about her experiences of, and ideas about, women hooking up in


college. Though the term has wide cache, “hooking up” tends to refer to spending the night with somebody without intention of dating or developing a relationship. During a “Women’s Night” with female students, Mia guffawed the practices of hooking up. She told a group of young college women about her own experiences with boyfriends in college. She presented herself as conversant in college culture. But, she explained in the wizened tone of an older sorority sister, hooking up was really about trying to fill a Jesus-sized void. That void could not be filled by sex, nor boyfriends, nor hooking up. Only Jesus could fill it, she insisted. In this assertion, she was echoing more formal DIRECT publications. The DIRECT-authored Bible study designed for use by sorority and fraternity students countered the perceived value of hooking up with the real value of chastity. The authors, two women who were in in sororities, explained, “Living in the plan that God had for sex and marriage [is where] we achieve the heights of pleasure, which is what hook-ups are after, but will never be able to achieve.” Missionaries offered Jesus and Catholicism as alternatives to what they deemed to be unhealthy sexual promiscuity

Hooking up in college, as Armstrong and Hamilton described it in 2012, had become “a normalized and institutionalized activity” of campus life. Kathleen Bogle, in Hooking Up: Sex, Dating and Relationships on Campus, defined the practice as “a nationwide phenomenon that has largely replaced traditional dating on college campuses.” In 2010 Paula England reported that close to seventy percent of college students reported having hooked up “at least once by their senior year.” England contended that hooking up had been “built into notions of what the

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19 Field notes, November 29, 2012.
college experience should be.”

College as a place and time wherein hooking up was approved of (however implicitly) weighed heavily on the minds and in the prayers of missionaries.

DIRECT was simultaneously afraid of, encouraged by, and chastened by contemporary college culture. Missionaries were fluent in college campus culture because they were still so close to it. Dangers of binge drinking and hook-up culture were confirmed by their own experiences and what they saw among their students. They used their own stories of triumph to encourage students to find what Mia might have called a “Catholic pathway” through college.

Middle-Class Millennials

Mia and Daniel, like many other missionaries, grew up in middle-class Catholic families with two parents and two or three siblings. While the category of “middle class” in the U.S. is an ambiguous category, my ethnographic interviews and observations suggest that missionaries tended to fit this classification. Though scholars understand that social class is about much more than financial income, the numbers do matter. Sociologist William D’Antonio’s long-term study of contemporary American Catholics, which has been conducted every five years since 1987, has tracked a steady move of increasing percentages of non-Hispanic Catholics into what they the American middle class. In the October 2011 survey, 47% of non-Hispanic millennial Catholics (born 1980-1993) fit this category by earned more than $75,000 a year in annual income (16% reported $75,000-$99,000 and 31% reported more than $100,000 a year).

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22 Armstrong and Hamilton, Paying for the Party, 86.
24 William D’Antonio, Michele Dillon, and Mary L. Gautier, American Catholics in Transition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 142. Notable here is that I am not referencing Hispanics in this data. This is a huge gap in the DIRECT missionary demographic, of which DIRECT is acutely aware. Though there are efforts within DIRECT to change this, the number of Hispanic missionaries was less than 10% in 2012. This does not reflect the larger millennial Catholic population, which D’ Antonio’s puts at 45% of millennial Catholics.
In addition to this general trend toward middle-class income levels of contemporary, non-Hispanic Catholics, social class also references attitudes about education, cultural tastes, and professional skills.\textsuperscript{25} By describing missionaries as “middle-class,” I am drawing on Armstrong and Hamilton’s eight characteristics of social class, which include both parents’ educational attainment and occupations, whether or not a missionary worked while in college, took out loans to pay for college, and attended an in-state college, as well as the nature of missionaries’ family structure.\textsuperscript{26} While I did not as systematically gather all of this demographic information about missionaries’ family income or educational attainment, I learned much of it about many of the missionaries in my research through qualitative interviews. Using these categories, Mia and Daniel’s characteristics were between what Armstrong and Hamilton define as “upper-middle” and “middle” class. Mia’s parents were still married and both of had college degrees (three characteristics of both the upper-middle and middle classes). Her mother was a homemaker (upper class). Her father was in management with a car-sales company (middle class). She worked during college and did not take out loans to attend her in-state, public school (all middle-class characteristics). Likewise, Daniel’s parents were married and both graduated from college. His mother was a teacher and his father a professional (middle-class characteristics). He did not have a job in college and was grateful not to have had to take out loans to attend in-state private college (middle-class characteristics). While acknowledging the ambiguity of the label, the language of “middle class” throughout this dissertation references these social traits.

In addition to these financial and social characteristics, I detail in the first chapter how missionaries did not struggle to fundraise at least $2,000 per month from their home networks.

\textsuperscript{25} Armstrong and Hamilton, \textit{Paying for the Party}, 263.
\textsuperscript{26} Armstrong and Hamilton, \textit{Paying for the Party}, 32. The sociologists developed a five-part classification system, based on these eight characteristics: Upper, Upper-middle, Middle, Lower-Middle, Working. They report that 36% of the women in their study were members of the “upper-middle class” and 13% of the “middle class.”
and local parishes. Daniel grew up in a suburban parish in Kansas, and Mia in a wealthy parish in Colorado. Both shrugged when I asked them about fundraising at their parishes. It was work, but not difficult. Daniel had networked with his parents’ business friends and Mia said her parish was “very generous” and she raised almost all of her salary from just one parish talk.

Missionaries were also members of the millennial generation, born between 1982 and 1997 (Mia in 1987, Daniel in 1988). Demographer Paul Taylor characterized this generation as “liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful, confident, and broke.”

Illustrating the protean nature of their middle-class status, Taylor argued that millennials were on track to have a lower standard of living and less net income than their parents. High rates of student debt and the Great Recession of the last decade have conspired to set millennials amid significant economic challenges. When he graduated and took a job with DIRECT in 2011, Daniel was among only sixty-three percent of adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine who were employed. He joined the lowest labor force participation since the mid-twentieth century.

Missionaries were hired by DIRECT. This was a job and they reported taxes and counted in the labor force. But they also raised their own salaries, which meant that Daniel turned to family and friends to fundraise. He asked his parents, his friends’ parents, and members of his hometown parish to fund his missionary work and pay his salary. Thus, missionaries’ position vis-à-vis the slow economy of 2012 was a bit ambiguous, since most missionaries relied on family members (among others) for financial support of their mission work.

Missionaries confirmed Taylor’s characterizations of millennials as somewhat “coddled” and affected by the lackluster economy. But Daniel (and all missionaries) confounded Taylor’s

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data on religious identity of millennials, which emphasized a rise in the “nones” category of religious identity among adults under thirty. In 2012, “one-fifth of the U.S. public—and a third of adults under 30—were religiously unaffiliated.” Millennials are not joining religious communities, and they are choosing to leave religious communities. They check “none of the above” on surveys of religious affiliation. DIRECT missionaries were choosing the opposite. They were proud to check the “Catholic” box.

The economic, social, and educational world of DIRECT missionaries was coddled and entitled, but also straddled with a poor economy and dreary job prospects. Being hired as DIRECT missionaries provided opportunities that were scarce in the secular job market of 2012. If they could do the fundraising (and all I met could), they made decent salaries for recent college graduates. They had autonomy in their daily work, and young people moved up the ranks of the fast-growing organization. I can count on one hand the number of DIRECT staff I met over thirty. By the time they were twenty-four years old, missionaries could be managers in an economy where many of their college-educated peers had moved home to look for less-than entry-level work.

#directislegit: DIRECT’s Twenty-first century Catholic Subculture

In addition to their place in the contemporary U.S. college culture and broader social landscape of the country, DIRECT missionaries were also participants in and promulgators of a particular Catholic subculture. The more fieldwork I did, the more I realized I was not studying

30 Taylor, The Next America, 127.
31 Ibid.
an anomalous group of Catholics. DIRECT was part of a subculture in U.S. Catholicism that was recasting Catholicism as relevant in the twenty-first century and attractive to millennials.

In his foundational study on the nature of “subculture,” Dick Hebdge argues that a subculture emerges as acts of resistance to a dominant culture. These acts rely on and subvert material available in a particular historical moment. He argues, “Each subcultural ‘instance’ represents a ‘solution’ to a specific set of circumstances, to particular problems and contradictions.”33 The Catholic subculture around DIRECT emerged in response to problems identified in two dominant cultures. On one hand, this subculture countered the norms of U.S. college campus life by constructing a community of Catholics who practiced regular Mass attendance and sobriety and chastity as “solutions” to hooking up and binge drinking. DIRECT’s subculture offered a “Catholic pathway” through college. On the other hand, this subculture also resisted what they derisively called “cultural Catholicism,” which was interpreted as watered-down Catholicism. In response, the DIRECT subculture used words like “all in” and “committed” to describe their Catholic identity. As representatives of this subculture’s social media slowly took over my Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds, I identified five characteristics. This subculture (1) privileged Catholicism above all else, (2) had savvy in popular culture and social media, (3) tried to teach others how to live by strict interpretation of Catholic teachings, (4) developed its own publication outlets, and (5) cultivated an aesthetic of a cool religious community.

This subculture was savvy in youth culture and in the cultural expectations of millennials. For example, Chris Stefanick (who appears as the emcee of SEEK2013 in chapter five) was an attractive, well-educated Catholic motivational speaker in his thirties. He spoke in sound bites

peppered with “dude” and “legit.” He made the complex theological concepts like the Transubstantiation sound uncomplicated with phrases like “it’s so simple, guys” and “don’t complicate this” and “one word sums this up.” Stefanick’s messages made clear that Catholicism was different than Protestantism and embodied a different (better) vision for human life than mainstream U.S. culture. Stefanick celebrated Catholicism as the Truth. This kind of jubilant Catholic exceptionalism embedded an unarticulated tension. Stefanick and the broader subculture were trying to not only raise the boundaries between Catholics and others but also make Catholicism feel open and inviting to potential new members.

Less concerned about the boundaries of the subculture and more concerned with embodying a hip aesthetic for contemporary Catholicism, was one of the subculture’s most popular singer-songwriters, Matt Maher. Missionaries loved his music, but they especially loved that he was one of very few Catholics in the Christian Contemporary Music circuit, a musical genre dominated by evangelical Protestants. Maher and his band looked and sounded like a Catholic version of the mainstream rock band, Mumford & Sons. They wore thick-rimmed glasses, tight jeans, and button-down shirts. Maher was acceptably awkward in self-presentation, which endear him to the young women of this subculture. Maher reflected how this subculture was influenced by its broader cultural context, even as he presented a Catholic alternative.

The subculture also had a network of publishing houses, which shaped the intellectual milieu of its members. TAN Books published several of the books missionaries read during Holy Hour. Founded in 1967, TAN self-described as a “response to the rapid decline of faith and morals in society and the Church,” after the Second Vatican Council. In 2013 TAN Books seemed to be single-handedly keeping preconciliar books in circulation. The company prided

34 Field notes, January 2-6, 2013.
themselves on being “publishers you can trust with your faith.” This language was defensive and aggressive. There was a right way to be Catholic, and TAN Books taught it. TAN Books sourced many titles that DIRECT sold online, at national gatherings, and to missionaries.

While TAN Books populated the DIRECT bookstore, Ignatius Press supplied DIRECT with many of the videos that missionaries watched about saints at their staff trainings. A former student of Joseph Ratzinger’s, Joseph Fessio, SJ, founded Ignatius Press in 1978. Fessio studied the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar under the guidance of the future Pope Benedict XVI and was involved in the founding of Ave Maria University (where DIRECT moved its summer training to in the summer of 2013). Fessio described the publishing house in ideological language: “our objective is to support the teachings of the Church.” TAN Books and Ignatius Press reflected and taught the defensive theological landscape that surrounded DIRECT.

In addition to these two publishing houses, Dynamic Catholic Institute began distributing the subculture’s literature in 2009. Dynamic Catholic illustrates a shift in approach and aesthetic in this subculture’s materials. While Dynamic Catholic shared these other publishers’ anxieties about what they saw as a lack of fervor among U.S. Catholics, Dynamic Catholic was less defensive, more upbeat, and more focused on beauty and self-improvement. The implicit

36 A sampling of titles that TAN republished and I saw in DIRECT includes The Soul of the Apostolate, the much-read St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s The Story of a Soul and St. Louis de Montfort’s instructions on how to consecrate oneself to Mary, True Devotion to Mary.
message of their institute was that good things in contemporary life could be made better with Catholicism. Matthew Kelly (who appears in chapter five as a keynote speaker at SEEK2013) was a successful business consultant who founded the organization with the aim of “re-energizing the Catholic Church in America by developing world-class resources that inspire people to rediscover the genius of Catholicism.” Two of Kelly’s books, Rediscover Catholicism (2002) and The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic (2012), were popular among missionaries.

This subculture was also inflected with a political ideology that was informed by adherence to particular Catholic teachings on “life issues.” The Sisters of Life illustrate both the nature of this subculture’s nuns and the kind of politics that coursed through this world. Founded in 1991, the Sisters of Life helped women to bring their crisis pregnancies to term by providing them with shelter and food and offering adoption services. The Sisters of Life wore full blue habits as they worked to counter what they described as a “culture of death” in the U.S. The sisters’ habit was also a resistance to dominant Catholic culture, where the majority of women religious do not wear habits. Members of the Sisters of Life attended DIRECT trainings and conferences, and were much beloved by missionaries. In 2015 the sisters partnered with DIRECT to launch the “Life App,” a smart phone app designed to provide alternative answers to common concerns by women in crisis considering an abortion and directions to the nearest Catholic adoption agency. This subculture tried to have a Catholic influence on U.S. public life.

Finally, the subculture had a dynamic online media presence. When DIRECT launched their newly redesigned website in the fall of 2012 along with a new system for online donations,
regular blog posts, Facebook page, Twitter account, and YouTube videos; they joined the
subculture’s prolific and fast-growing online presence. Stefanick’s weekly “Real Life Catholic”
videos and Kelly’s Dynamic Catholic blog posts are just two examples of the videos, tweets, and
Instagram posts that members of this subculture used to be attractive to, and communicate with,
millennials. Part of what made this subculture attractive was that it did not outright reject its
cultural context, but tried to use what they deemed the good parts of it in order to promote
Catholicism. Their social media was a prime example of how the maintained this balance.

Despite the triumphant tone of these five components, I could sometimes hear fear
simmering just below the surface of DIRECT missionaries and executives. Mia laughed too hard
at the Women’s Night focused on teaching complementary gender roles. The DIRECT president
seemed to over-sell missionaries’ impact on what he called “the culture.” They seemed to be
afraid of something. It was, I think, born out of being a subculture. Subcultures, Hebdge points
out, express “a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate
positions and second-class lives.”43 Despite the bombastic attitude Mia brought to campus and
Daniel’s clear-headed commitment to Catholicism and Jesus, they were still members of a
subculture. It was a precarious position to be in and from which to evangelize college students.

Contributions

These descriptions of missionaries’ social-cultural-historical moment and their Catholic
subculture lay the groundwork of this dissertation’s interventions in the study of prayer, U.S.
Catholic history, and young adult Catholic identity. Missionaries were not only evangelizing at
the intersection of contemporary college life and a post-Vatican II Catholicism. They were

43 Hebdge, Subculture, 132.
praying there, too. The focus of this dissertation is how and why and what sort of implications their prayer practices and formations had for how they become Catholics.

**Study of Prayer**

This project emerged from set of questions I have had for several years about the phenomenology of prayer and how and why people pray in the contemporary world. I wanted to understand what, if any, was the relationship between prayer practices and other parts of life, like how they related to friends, what kind of work they deemed valuable, and how they oriented their days with prayer as part of it. DIRECT missionaries have provided a rich site to begin answering these questions not only because they prayed a lot (they did!) but also because they were intentionally engaged in pedagogy of prayer. They were both being taught how to pray by DIRECT, and they were teaching college students how to pray. This made missionaries more articulate about what prayer was and how to do it. Prayer was never just about the practices of Holy Hour or Mass or mental prayer; it was entangled with becoming a kind of Catholic they felt called by God to become.

This dissertation enters the academic study of prayer that has emerged within Religious Studies in the last five years. Invigorated by the Social Scientific Study of Religion’s “New Directions in the Study of Prayer,” scholars of religion have created a new fervor of academic conversations about how, why, and when prayer happens. The timely crossover success of T.M. Luhrmann’s *When God Talks Back* has also encouraged the study of prayer as a way of studying religious life, practice, and experience. This is not to suggest that the study of prayer is new to the study of religion. Prayer—and its related worlds of “religious experience,” “ritual,”

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and “practice”—has queried academic curiosities for generations. Marcel Mauss in his unfinished dissertation, *On Prayer*, published in 1909, claimed that prayer is “one of the central phenomena of religious life.” That Mauss’ influential work remained unfinished suggests the ambiguity of prayer in scholars’ understanding of what prayer is, why it is, what is happening in prayer, how it matters, and where prayer unfolds.

Despite the longue durée of these questions, the study of prayer remains paradoxically everywhere yet elusive in the study of religion. The work practitioners do when they close their eyes, kneel before a host, or attribute event attendance to God’s will raises vexing questions in theorizing religious practice. Grappling with these challenges, the study of prayer has developed five interpretative lenses. These are: prayer as discipline; prayer as social construction; prayer as mental experience; prayer as practical response to the world; and prayer as relationship. As this dissertation unfolds onto (and into) DIRECT missionaries’ prayer practices, I analyze prayer through these lenses. For example, the daily Holy Hours of more than 400 missionaries was certainly a form of disciplining their dispositions. Kneeling on the floor, staying awake for a quiet hour at nine o’clock in the morning, and listening for God while journaling or in Adoration required discipline of bodies and imaginations. Additionally, their prayer was a socially

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constructed communal experience. Missionaries prayed together in a way that strived to have each person develop conversations with Jesus. DIRECT missionaries often described prayer as “time with God,” and reported the conversations they had with saints. In these ways, prayer was a mental practice that relied on cognition and imagination. The prayers of DIRECT missionaries were also pragmatic. Missionaries’ testimonies often recounted how their prayer forms had helped them through difficult times in their lives or created an opportunity to evangelize a particularly challenging student. In this context prayer was about “relationships between heaven and earth” as missionaries developed friendships with saints, prayed to Mary as a role model, and invited Jesus to teach them how to sacrifice for the sake of evangelization.

There was also abundance in missionaries’ prayer. Scholar of religion Robert Orsi’s challenge to think “abundantly” about religious history challenges the study of religion to stretch our methods in order to appreciate the immaterial materiality of religion; that which cannot be observed through the social-scientist-trained eye. Orsi proposes that we might need to reengage with “the holy” because it might hold intellectual space for the *something* of religious experience. I take Orsi to be arguing that from within the particular social worlds of people at prayer, something else is also operating. Scholars must attend to it. That “something else” often caught me by surprise. During my fieldwork, I would be laughing with Daniel about a silly YouTube video after Holy Hour or on a run chatting about boyfriends with another missionary named Alexandra. And then something on their bodies would catch my attention—a crucifix or a scapular or a tattooed prayer—and it would remind me that they did these daily activities attuned to this “something else” of their prayer lives. Missionaries felt called by God to do this work and

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felt encouraged by Jesus in the ups and downs of evangelizing on college campuses. Understanding their multifaceted prayer formations has proven crucial to developing a nuanced picture of these contemporary Catholics.

Luhrmann’s work on prayer was animated by a similar query: “How does God become real for people?”\(^5\) She discovered what DIRECT missionaries know well, that “a committed belief in God was more like learning to do something than to think something.”\(^5\) My dissertation extends Luhrmann’s emphasis on prayer as an ongoing process by insisting that prayer was a doing. Daniel told me that praying Holy Hour every day and attending daily Mass kept him accountable to his relationship with Jesus. Prayer involved doing practices, day in and day out.

Prayers by DIRECT missionaries certainly were, as Luhrmann describes prayer, “the act of talking with God.” Missionaries had to develop “mental muscles [which] work on the boundary between thought and perception, between what is attributed to the mind…and what exists in the world.”\(^5\) But their prayer was also more than mental and emotional exercise. Particular bodily comportments, Catholic sacraments and rituals, and the study of papal encyclicals also constituted their prayer forms. DIRECT missionaries were careful to bow before receiving Communion and intentionally knelt on the floor at Mass. Missionaries were just as likely to bring the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or a book about St. Gemma Galgani to Holy Hours, as they were to bring a journal or Bible. The easy movement with which missionaries traversed between mediated and unmediated, sacramentally-formed and personally-developed prayer expands academic interpretations of prayer practices in the contemporary U.S.

### Prayer and Subjectivity Formation

\(^{51}\) Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, xi.  
\(^{52}\) Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, xxi.  
In this dissertation I study prayer as a practice of subjectivity formation. Prayer involved the bodily disciplines, relationships with saints, the work of gendered prayer formations, and the cultivation of a community of “dynamically orthodox” Catholics. Prayer is intricately bound into the social and historical worlds that give rise to it, yet it can evade our discursive frameworks. Dichotomies proliferate in the language scholars use to talk about prayer: communal-individual; public-private; rote-spontaneous; belief-practice. By studying prayer as a practice of subject formation, my research constructs a path through these impasses in the scholarship on prayer. I theorize prayer as a set of practices and formations, embedded with fears and hopes, whereby the devout constantly cross boundaries as they work on themselves and their polysemous relationships.

I use the language of “subjectivity” because it describes the dynamic nature of Catholic selves being cultivated in, by, and through DIRECT missionaries. Philosopher Nick Mansfield has summarized subjectivity as interrelated selves who depend on relationships between others, ideas, and social worlds. “Self” does not capture the “sense of the social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the word ‘subject;’ the way our immediate daily life is always already caught up in complex political, social, and philosophical—that is, shared—concerns.”54 I follow Mansfield in turning to subjectivity in order to more fully describe and analyze the complex relationships among self, others, and God that were pressed into missionaries’ daily prayer practices. To describe the subjectivity formation of missionaries in 2012-14 on college campuses in the U.S. is to describe the selves who participated the historical-cultural moment of my fieldwork. But it is also to be constantly cognizant that those selves were reliant on their social worlds, past experiences, communal expectations, fears about the future, and hopes for

their lives. Even the interior life of a person—that intimate imagination where missionaries experienced, for example, conversations with Jesus or support from Mary—was influenced by the surrounding culture. Subjectivity is, Mansfield posits, “not a separate and isolated entity;” it is the relational entity under formation by the relationships of daily life.

I am drawing on several theories of subjectivity in order to build on this understanding of subjectivity as a “self always implicated with others.” I engage some of the subject-formation questions of this dissertation through Judith Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself*. In that work she describes selves as “malleable and replicable,” and in a continuous process of being “done and undone” through narrative exchange with one another. Because of the social construction at work in our subjectivity, she argues, we are ultimately unable to fully know ourselves. There is no “I” apart from social norms, matrices, and frameworks that are constructed before us and always exceed us, even as we rely on them to describe our “I.” Social others participate in defining how and who we are in the world. For example, missionaries all had unique conversion stories, but their testimonies—the way they told the stories to others—all followed a similar structure and drew from a similar range of narrative options. The stories missionaries tell about themselves are implicated in a story that began before they entered into it, and even the terms they use to describe their stories were defined before they learned to use them.

While Butler’s description of subjectivity rushes to the shared construction of the “I,” anthropologist Michael Jackson’s theory of subjectivity pauses longer on the tension of experiencing oneself as alone and private all the while recognizing oneself as made by the surrounding world. When Mia and Daniel chatted about their prayer after Holy Hour, they

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illustrated what Jackson has called the “social life of stories.” But, Jackson wonders, what of that lingering feeling of separateness that, for example, Mia remembered experiencing in the beginning of her conversion experience? What about the individual work of prayer, alone, in a chapel? Telling stories about those experiences, Jackson suggests, “makes it possible to overcome our separateness, to find common ground.”

Subjectivity, as Jackson uses the term, highlights the tension between the sense we have of an interior life with the recognition of the way the world acts on us. Furthermore, he insists that subjectivity (and I follow in my use of the term) is a contingent project that relies on relationships both human and extra-human. In this sense, subjectivity is more verb than noun.

My use of subjectivity also draws on Constance Furey’s urge that scholars of religion be cognizant that the religious subject “does not stand alone in a crowd.” Daniel, for example, did not make the decision to be an “all in Catholic” as an isolated individual. He grew up in a Catholic family and attended Catholic high school and Catholic college. His religious subjectivity was being shaped by his experiences of God, by the telling of that account, and by the Catholic friendships and Catholic familial relationships that surrounded him. I take subjectivity to be attentive to these relationships, which were part of daily life, not abstract or idealized. Philosopher Adriana Cavarero roots her thinking about subjectivity in the “fact that human beings live together…Their community is involved with a problem of acting and living together that cannot refrain from taking the other into consideration.” Her description attends to the reality of complicated relationships in daily life more than Jackson and Butler’s. As I read

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and apply Cavarero in this dissertation, relationships are not nebulous ideas circulating in the realm of social construction. Rather, relationships were the tangible work missionaries had to do everyday with one another, with Jesus, and with the saints. Cavarero’s work insists that this relationality always participates in making of religious subjectivities.

Taken together, these approaches construct my understanding of subjectivity as a theory indebted to the relationality of humans and to the complex ways those relationships constituted how DIRECT missionaries prayed and were becoming in the world.

Post-Vatican II U.S. Catholicism

DIRECT missionaries evangelized in a very particular moment of U.S. Catholic history. Missionaries were the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Depression-era Catholics who survived the changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The historiography of American Catholicism has tended to be ideologically committed to a particular interpretation of Vatican II. Jay Dolan’s *The American Catholic Experience* casts the council as a triumphant telos of twentieth-century American Catholicism. His history has winners and losers: the rightful heirs of American Catholicism are the descendants of Liturgical Reformist Virgil Michel and members of the Christian Family Movement. Movements to revive Latin Mass or Marian devotions are Dolan’s losers.  

In similar tones, James O’Toole’s more recent history, *The Faithful* also embraces a change-oriented Vatican II as the interpretive lens for all of U.S. Catholic history. His celebratory reading of *Lumen Gentium*’s metaphor of the Church as “People of God” as replacing the “Mystical Body of Christ” metaphor claims the history of U.S. Catholicism as a story of the triumph of the laity. James McCartin’s history of American

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Catholic prayer is less explicit in his triumphal interpretation of Vatican II, but nonetheless committed to Vatican II as the mechanism that “matured” Catholic prayer from devotionalism and saints into interior, quiet prayer.\textsuperscript{63} None of these versions account for the prayer practices of DIRECT missionaries, but would instead read DIRECT missionaries as ahistorical young people without precedent or “rearguards” trying to reclaim a bygone era.

Cast out of the frameworks of postconciliar Catholicism, DIRECT missionaries developed their own narrative of Vatican II. Missionaries interpreted the council as a story of continuity and making teachings relevant in a new context rather than a story of rupture and change. They participated in the council’s charge that lay Catholics read the Bible more frequently. They applauded conciliar liturgical changes and Mass in the vernacular. They read \textit{Gaudium et Spes} and proudly talked about their participation in a lay movement. Insofar as part of this dissertation is a history of contemporary American Catholicism, I write DIRECT missionaries into the history of Vatican II.

Certainly, DIRECT was much more ideologically committed to so-called “conservative” Church teaching than, for example, the so-called “progressive” lay Catholic group Call to Action, which had been advocating for women priests for decades. On one hand, Robert Wuthnow’s influential argument about the “restructuring of American religion” is confirmed by positioning DIRECT’s politics within divisions within contemporary Catholicism.\textsuperscript{64} On issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and opposition to Barack Obama’s administration’s affordable health care mandate, DIRECT missionaries had more in common with conservative Protestants than the plain-clothed Sr. Joan Chittester, OSB, who advocated for universal health care at a

recent Call to Action conference. But the Wuthnow thesis occludes the ways in which members of DIRECT acted very much like the Catholics with whom they disagreed politically. DIRECT founders read the same conciliar documents that the leaders of Call to Action did. *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* animated both kinds of Catholics’ understanding of lay leadership in the Church. They both decided which political issues were most important and culled from Catholic teaching to back their positions. Reading the Bible and developing hermeneutical tools for understanding the New Testament were important in both Catholic worlds. Like Call to Action, DIRECT also made choices about liturgical forms in ways that would not have been possible before the council. The contemporary Catholic world cannot be divided between pro- and anti-Vatican II.

In addition to recasting and expanding scholars’ understanding of the reception of the council in the U.S., this dissertation studies a new generation of Catholics whose imaginations and prayers have been shaped by a different set of Catholic experiences. One part of that centers on the papacy of John Paul II (1978-2005). DIRECT missionaries have often been called members of the “JPII generation.” While the term is strictly descriptive of any Catholic born after Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was elected Pope John Paul II in 1978, the “JPII generation” has become an ideological description of millennial Catholics who have also been labeled “conservative,” “orthodox,” or members of the ecumenical “new faithful.”

Social historian Urszula Okulska traced the first use of the label “JPII generation” to the 1997 World Youth Day in Paris where the popular pope described young people as the “hope for the world.”

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within the collective imagination of DIRECT missionaries, the origins of the label are Pope
John Paul II’s visit to Denver in 1993 for World Youth Day. There, he told Catholic young
people (with the founder of DIRECT in the crowd, though he is too old to be counted among the
“JPII generation”), “I am confident that you have grasped the scale of the challenge that lies
before you, and that you will have the wisdom and courage to meet that challenge. So much
depends on you.” DIRECT missionaries interpreted his statement as a papal call to
evangelization.

Young Adult Catholic Identity

This dissertation is also a study of millennial Catholics at a particular stage of life. Most
were twenty-two to twenty-four and single, though a significant portion of them were married.
The older among them had children. Though some developed a career within DIRECT, most
moved on to another career after their two-year term as a missionary. In 2012 the average length
of a missionary’s tenure was three years. They were in a transitional time of life, which
psychologist Jeffrey Arnett has theorized as “emerging adulthood.” This is a stage of human
development for young adults, roughly between ages eighteen and thirty, that is situated between
leaving one’s childhood home and later stages of marriage, parenthood, and occupational
stability. Arnett describes this stage as a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and
possibilities. That missionaries are emerging adults is reflected in missionaries’ anxieties
during Holy Hour and their sometimes-frantic efforts to discern their vocation.

Sociologist Christian Smith and his colleagues in the 2010 National Study on Youth and

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67 “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II, 8th World Youth Day,” The Holy See, August 15, 1993,
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19930815_gmg-
denver_en.html (italics in original).
68 Jeffrey Arnett, Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties (New York:
Oxford University Press, 2006).
Religion argue that “emerging adulthood” has particular implications for American religious life. Among this population, “a small minority” of emerging adults “counter trends [of declining religious faith and participation] by increasing in religious faith and practice” during this phase of life. What Smith calls the “Committed Traditionalist” constitutes approximately fifteen percent of his study’s population and includes DIRECT missionaries.\(^6^9\) Smith later extrapolated Catholics from that data and proposed slightly different categorizations of contemporary young adult Catholic identity. He had to propose a theoretical category of “devout” Catholics, which characterized Catholics who attend Mass regularly, articulate Catholic doctrine, believe most Catholic teachings, and plan to keep being Catholic in the future.\(^7^0\) While most DIRECT missionaries I met would fit squarely into this category, Smith’s team was unable to identify anyone in their study who did.

Smith assumes that the ways young adults choose Catholic identity reflects their absorption of what he calls American values of “individual autonomy” and “freedom from authorities.”\(^7^1\) My work complicates sociologists’ suggestions that young adults make unencumbered choices about their religious identities. Rather, being Catholic was informed by families, friends, experiences in DIRECT Bible studies, and prayer, to just begin the list. Smith does nuance his claims in the Catholics-only study, pointing out the ways family traditions, religious experiences, and internalization of Catholic beliefs as teenagers affect how and whether


\(^7^0\) Christian Smith et al., *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91.

\(^7^1\) Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 80-81, 288.
emerging adults identify as Catholic. My research still complicates those claims. The emerging adults in my ethnography also chose to be Catholic and to be actively in formation as Catholics because they felt God calling them to do so. Daniel, for example, discerned his commitment to Catholicism through prayer and in conversation with other Catholics. Daniel decided to be an “all-in Catholic” (what Smith would call “devout”) when he was in college. He attended daily Mass more frequently, participated in Bible studies, and prayed more often. The religious identity of millennials was not only the effect of social context. There was also a reciprocal relationship between prayer and young adults’ religious identities.

This dissertation studies an emergent culture within American Catholicism. Andrew Greeley famously described the “Catholic imagination” as imbued with the real presence and a sacramental understanding that God is present in material objects. While DIRECT missionaries share Greeley’s Catholic exceptionalism, their Catholicism has a different social texture. These white, middle-class Catholics with college degrees have not been primarily shaped by the so-called “Catholic ghetto,” the experience of immigrant parents and grandparents, nor Catholic school uniforms. Instead, their Catholic imaginations have been shaped by attending public school with students from a wide variety of religious traditions, by Catholics in positions of political power in the U.S., and by the sexual abuse crisis. The pontificate of John Paul II, the long reverberations of (and nostalgia about) Vatican II, and Catholics’ move into the middle class constitute these missionaries’ prayer landscapes. This Catholic imagination writes in hashtags and sans serif fonts about traditional Eucharistic devotions, St. Gemma, and the Virgin Mary. This Catholic imagination grew not out of the immigrant experience, but out of a sense that the modern world was lacking, and the suspicion that they were—as the title of the

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72 Smith et al., *Young Catholic America*, 164-178.
autobiography of DIRECT’s founder insists—*Made for More*. This shift in Catholic imagination requires the new thick description and analysis that I provide in this dissertation.

**Methods**

For fourteen consecutive months, between 2012 and early 2014, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and participant-observation methods at more than twenty DIRECT-hosted events with the missionaries on my campus. These ranged from a weekly women’s Bible study group to monthly Women’s Nights. I attended daily Holy Hours three to four times a week for seven months, a weekly faith-sharing group, and Mass regularly with missionaries. I participated in numerous casual gatherings with missionaries, such as informal lunches, weekend trips to the city, service projects, and training runs. I also visited missionary teams on six other campuses, where I spent two to four days participant-observing their daily routines and interviewing missionaries. With two campus groups, I went on a “Spiritual Boot Camp” retreat, which was a weekend-long introduction to Catholic charismatic prayer. I also attended a student leaders’ training retreat with one campus. I conducted participant-observation at three national DIRECT events, including their five-day biennial conference called SEEK2013, with 6,200 college students in January 2013; a five-day training over the summer in June 2013; and their five-day “Leadership Summit” with 2,000 “student missionaries” in January 2014. Following standard practice for ethnographic work, I took notes as the various events allowed and wrote field notes as soon as possible after my observations.\(^74\)

In addition to participant-observation, I conducted sixty-three semi-structured, open-ended interviews with fifty-four missionaries, including multiple interviews with local

missionaries. I also interviewed ten missionary alumni. My interview methods were conversational and interviews lasted about seventy-five to ninety minutes, though a handful stretched to over two hours and several were closer to an hour in duration. I always asked questions about prayer practices, how they decided to become a missionary, and their pre-missionary lives. I also analyzed materials produced by DIRECT, including Bible studies, newsletters, books, videos, blogs, and Twitter and Facebook feeds. All informed my understanding DIRECT’s training methods and how they taught missionaries how to pray, evangelize, and understand Catholic catechesis. Through these methods, my ethnographic study of the prayer of an emergent culture of millennial Catholics in the U.S. offers a richly textured analysis of the relationship between prayer and Catholic subjectivities.

Because this research was classified a case study, it fell outside the official purview of Northwestern University’s Institutional Review Board. Nonetheless, I followed protocols of informed consent in conducting interviews. I received written approval to do this research from executives within DIRECT. I was always upfront about my role as a researcher with missionaries and students with whom I interacted more casually.

**Researcher Positionality**

I had known about DIRECT for several years before I began my research. A childhood friend had been a missionary for five years in the mid-2000s. Following DIRECT convention, she fundraised her salary for those five years. She relied primarily on monthly donations from her family members and members of the parish where we both grew up and attended grade school. Her missionary work was the topic of many dinner-table conversations among my family members. From this perspective then, DIRECT has been in the Catholic air I have been breathing
for over a decade. From another perspective, DIRECT was new to me in 2012. In the fall, DIRECT expanded to my campus. There is still a sticky note on my old computer that marks the moment I imagined it as a possible research focus, “Whoa. Study DIRECT!!”

I grew up in a Catholic world in small-town South Dakota. I can remember missing one Sunday Mass, ever. I was sick and I watched a community-access televised Mass from my parents’ bed. My mom taught me how to defend Marian devotion to Protestants (“We don’t worship Mary, we venerate her”), but it was not very pressing because I did not really know any Protestants until I graduated from Catholic grade school and enrolled in the public junior high school. We had Advent wreaths at home and received gifts on the anniversary of our baptismal dates. We went to Confession before Christmas and Easter, and before the start of the school year. My grandparents gave us rosaries as gifts, and I knew that St. Patrick and St. Valentine were saints, not just days of candy. I was active in my parish youth group as a teenager and one of the religious sisters in town asked me several times if I ever considered the religious life.

A professor once told me that my Catholic childhood was a “remnant” and that my experience of a postconciliar Catholicism that was concerned with the boundaries between Catholics and Protestants, recruiting teenagers to religious life, and devotions to saints was an outlier. To be accused of being a remnant forced me to ask questions about the nature of the Catholic world that shaped me. Of course, he might be right and my experience is not normative (whose is?). But it is also true that to think in terms of remnants elides prayer formations, cultural fissures, and historical surprises. This dissertation studies those prayers, fissures, and surprises in contemporary U.S. Catholic life through the lens of DIRECT missionaries.
Ethnography of Prayer

Before I attended the SEEK2013 conference that begins this introduction, I had been attending Holy Hour and Women’s Nights and I had been getting to know the missionaries on campus for two months. But SEEK2013 was my baptism-by-fire into participant-observation research. As I stood in the Confession line and inched closer to the confessional space, I debated about what to do: go to Confession or not? It seemed to me that it was one thing to participate in and observe the Masses and Adoration sessions, and even to attend missionaries’ daily hour of quiet prayer on campus. Listening to apologetics classes and conference speakers on Catholic dating practices all seemed to fit nicely into the tidy parameters of my publically accessible ethnographic method. But it seemed another thing to wait in this line, prepare to sit down across from a priest, list my sins, and then receive a penance before receiving sacramental absolution for my transgressions. The experience forced me to decide what kind of ethnographer I wanted to be, and how I would study Catholic prayer. I went to Confession.75

I was never under any pretense that I would somehow avoid the so-called ethnographic “observer effect.” I understood and expected that my presence would affect what I was able to learn in my participant-observations. And it did. Daniel and I often chatted about my research and he offered me critiques and suggestions on early drafts of the title. Mia introduced me to the students she worked with as “Kate, the grad student researching DIRECT.” This was expected as a normal course of ethnography.76

What did surprise me, however, was the effect that my research methods had on me. In order to go to Confession, even as an ethnographer, it seemed I had to come up with something

75 Field notes, January 4, 2013.
to say to the priest. I had to think about areas of my life where I had hurt others and I had to remember the words of the “Act of Contrition,” prayer. I was assigned a penance: a handful of “Hail Mary’s” and an “Our Father.” When I emerged from the sacrament, I had lost track of my interlocutors. I knelt down among a few other post-Confession lingerers who were journaling and whispering with one another. I recited the prayers and then gathered my things to join the thousands of attendees filling the conference center lobby and hallways. The attitude was jubilant, and I was reminded of how my sister and I used to happily skip home after Confession in August. We were relieved to be done with the sacramental duty for the season, but also savoring our freshly scrubbed souls. As I watched a dance party erupt near me, I thought about the stress the college students in my classrooms always seemed to be under. They worried about good grades and dating and if they would get into the right sorority. I thought about the young student at Northwestern whose recent death was being attributed to binge drinking. I thought about the sagging job market, and how many of these students would move back home after they graduated. I thought about depression and anxiety that plague college students. Perhaps, I found myself wondering, an excessively abundant soul-scrubbing mediated by the sacramental real presence of Jesus, and a priest willing to say a version of “it’s okay; keep trying,” was just what we all needed. My ethnographic research illustrates a feedback loop between the missionaries and their prayer practices, such that their prayers were also always making them. As a participant-observer of their prayer, I am not so sure I always avoided being implicated in that feedback loop myself.

As I stood in line mulling the sins of my adulthood, waiting to participate in a sacrament that I once knew well, I promised myself that I would not write about this experience. Yet, that ethnographic experience has intruded as I have tried to suture my researcher subjectivity into this
dissertation. My participation in Confession—which included a conversation with the bishop of Winona, Minnesota (my confessor!) about my research—drew me into the presences of the Catholic sacrament. Implicit in my worry about participating in Confession was the question of what was “really” happening during a Catholic sacrament. The missionaries I talked to about Confession understood themselves as in communication with Jesus, via the priest listening and absolving them in persona Christi. Even if they did not understand it; even if they were enacting the hopeful subjunctive of ritual performance.\textsuperscript{77} Robert Orsi has asked how scholars of religion ought to approach the “really real” of religious practice. “The problem,” Orsi argues, “is that we have no idea what to make of the bonds between humans and the spirits really present to them within the limits of our critical theories.”\textsuperscript{78}

This was a challenge I worked to attune myself to through my ethnographic methods. When I was doing fieldwork, I often reminded myself to be open-minded and take a deep breath before passing any kind of judgment. To myself, I called my ethnographic disposition “porous” and I used that idea to make myself listen, interact, and ask questions rather than assume I understood what was happening in front of me or in missionaries’ stories. Adopting this kind of ethnographic disposition reminded me to listen generously (rather than skeptically) when Mia, for example, talked about how close she felt to St. Gemma or when Daniel talked about his personal relationship with Jesus. These figures were not simply placeholders for other meanings. They were real figures with whom the missionaries interacted. I worked to make my ethnographic methods think with these presences, rather than ignore them or assign them to the range of social forces acting on missionaries.


There were several moments when my ethnography of prayer made me nervous because I realized that I was risking being affected by the phenomena and people in my work. This is the case, of course, in most ethnography. But, here, my nervousness came from the possibility that the “really real” of religious experience might spill out of its nice containers of academic discourse and shape my academic experience of missionaries. Going to Confession (which I eventually did three times in the course of my fieldwork) alongside missionaries was as uncomfortable as I remembered it being. Recounting my misdeeds to a priest made me feel vulnerable to the sacrament. Likewise, it was disconcerting to hear Mia talk about the sacrifice she was willing to endure for the sake of other people’s souls. She told me that because Jesus had suffered and died so gloriously and terribly, she felt called to sacrifice for the gospel on campus. This kind of prayer unsettled my expectations for how women ought to thrive. That unsettledness has proven to be a productive place from which to begin thinking with prayer experiences.

My ethnographic disposition also drew me into the prayer lives of missionaries. As I read and analyzed and coded my field notes, I began to notice that my notes sometimes seem haunted by what I seemed only partially able to describe at the time. Questions about my own relationship to missionaries’ relationships with God seemed to lurk just outside the frame of my field notes. Missionaries’ relationships with saints pressed into my interactions with Mia and Daniel. I was cognizant of Mia’s dynamic prayer life with Jesus as I listened to her joke about how much Red Bull and goldfish crackers she consumed. When I talked with Daniel about his wedding plans, I was aware that he expected a sacramentally informed change of soul on that day. These presences participated in my interactions with missionaries.

My ethnographic attitude of porous attentiveness was my researcher disposition in the field and the mood I have tried to maintain as I have written about the many and varied presences
of missionaries’ prayers. If ethnography is, as Clifford Geertz has described it, “deep hanging out,” my ethnography of prayer might be called “porous hanging out.” This dissertation reflects my efforts to write with attentiveness to the many contours of missionaries’ prayers.

**Chapter Outline**

The following five chapters analyze the ways that Catholic prayer, social location, and young adult subjectivity interacted in the lives of DIRECT missionaries. The first chapter, “The Making of Twenty-first century Catholic Evangelization,” describes the history of DIRECT, and the confluences of U.S. Catholic and religious life that made it possible for DIRECT to emerge in 1997, on the campus of Benedictine College in rural Kansas. The chapter situates DIRECT’s evangelization at the confluence of postconciliar shifts in Catholic prayer, efforts to reclaim Catholic exceptionalism on Catholic and secular campuses, Catholics’ conflicted interactions with evangelical Protestants, and the reliability of income from a Catholic middle class.

The second chapter, “Praying Holy Hour and Millennial Missionary Subjectivity,” uses missionaries’ daily Holy Hour as a case study in how particular prayer practices shaped recent college graduates into Catholic missionaries. Holy Hour was constituted by a dynamic set of formations, emotions, and bodily comportments that interacted with each missionary’s historical, social location.

Chapter three, “‘Be Saints!’ Missionaries’ Devotionalism and the Making of Catholic Subjectivities,” focuses this study of prayer on the intersubjective formations of Catholic missionaries through devotions to saints. Mia’s relationship with St. Gemma Galgani shapes my larger questions about twenty-first century saints devotion. How and why did missionaries come to care about particular saints? Why did they tell each other to “be saints!”? In this chapter, I use
Judith Butler’s theory of subjectivity and ethical action with Michael Jackson’s thinking about storytelling and intersubjectivity in order to analyze how relationships and friendships with saints that were nurtured in the inventive practices of prayer, surrounded by other missionaries, and informed by their social contingencies, cultivated contemporary Catholic subjectivities.

The fourth chapter turns explicitly to the ways prayer was gendered by and for missionaries. “‘Feminine Genius’ and ‘Authentic Masculinity:’ Becoming Catholic Gendered Subjectivities” constructs three frameworks—multiple submissions, gendered prayer, and complementary virtue—in order describe and analyze the cultivation of intertwined gendered subjectivities of men and women in DIRECT.

In the final chapter, “Dynamically Orthodox Catholicism: Technologies of Millennial Catholic Group Formation,” the SEEK2013 becomes my lens onto the kind of collective Catholic formation that DIRECT both promoted and enacted. I propose that the prayer practices at a large, national gathering—daily Mass, devotion to saints, Latin prayer, and Adoration with Confession—were “technologies of group formation.” Prayer worked on communities, created shared identity, and trained those praying in an aesthetic that appealed to emerging adults and is savvy in American youth culture, but not subsumed by it. Missionaries used Catholicism’s sacramental imagination to make contemporary American Catholicism attractive to twenty-first century youth culture and to cultivate a community of dynamically orthodox Catholics.
Chapter 1. The Making of Twenty-First Century Catholic Evangelization

How many of us have had a family member or loved one drift away from the Catholic Church? These losses tug at our hearts…. More incoming freshmen list their religion as Roman Catholicism than any other religion. Despite the large number of Catholics entering universities, almost every family can tell stories of how their well-educated, well-informed sons and daughters are no longer practicing the Faith…. DIRECT is going to raise up a holy army, ready and able to communicate the challenges of the Gospel in charity and in truth, with no compromise.¹

—Curtis Martin, Founder, Disciples in Relationship Evangelizing Catholics Together (DIRECT)

Curtis Martin was a guest on the popular Catholic talk show *Mother Angelica Live* in February 1997. A video clip of the episode shows Martin as a young man in his thirties, sporting a thin beard and gesturing expressively as he described the dire situation of Catholics on college campuses. He and vocal Catholic convert Scott Hahn wondered aloud about the lack of a Catholic version of Campus Crusade for Christ. Why, they wanted to know, were Catholic young people being left to fend for themselves in the secular environments of colleges and universities? Answering their own query with a solution, Martin announced plans to found an organization that would “reintroduce Christ and His Catholic Church on college and university campuses.”²

The studio audience gave thunderous applause. Disciples in Relationship Evangelizing Catholics Together (DIRECT) was officially launched.³

The confluence of five tributaries of twentieth-century U.S. Catholic history made possible the emergence of DIRECT in 1997. Logistically and ideologically, the founding of DIRECT is part of the story of Catholics United for the Faith, a lay-led organization founded in

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1968 with the intent to “defend” Catholic teaching. As president of that organization in 1997, Martin initiated DIRECT as one of its programs. Less overtly, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the 1970s and 1980s informs the history of DIRECT. Though explicitly not charismatic in form, DIRECT’s unique blend of prayer, evangelization, and Catholic sacraments was made possible by shifts in Catholic prayer and relationships with Protestants during the renewal. Martin’s focus on college students reflects a larger Catholic anxiety about exactly what was special about Catholics, Catholicism, and Catholic higher education in the 1990s. DIRECT was born in a collegiate environment that embraced Pope John Paul II’s insistence that Catholic colleges look particularly Catholic, as outlined in his apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990). In addition to preserving Catholicism on Catholic campuses, DIRECT’s emergence in the 1990s also relied on efforts to preserve young adult Catholic identity on secular campuses. Newman Centers that had been doing so for more than fifty years often provided DIRECT with local infrastructure on campus.

DIRECT’s evangelization techniques were shaped by the evangelical Protestantism that Martin and other Catholics encountered on public college campuses in the 1980s and 1990s. DIRECT learned, and often duplicated, many of its tools and methods from Campus Crusade for Christ and other like-minded organizations. But DIRECT was not evangelical Protestantism painted Catholic. Rather, DIRECT’s approach interwove evangelical Protestant methods with Catholic theologies of mission in articulating a Catholic evangelization called “incarnational evangelization.” The founding of DIRECT is also inflected by the emergent confidence of a financially secure Catholic population in the U.S. and the influence of the prosperity gospel in American culture in the twenty-first century. Throughout this chapter, the forward-moving

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metaphor of “tributaries” insists that DIRECT is part of an unfolding contemporary history of American Catholicism. DIRECT is not a reclamation project of a bygone era. DIRECT emerged in late twentieth century Catholicism in the U.S. and relies on, in sometimes unexpected and ambiguous ways, the history of postconciliar Catholicism it inherited in the 1990s and on the cultural-historical moment of the broader American religious landscape on which it emerged.

**Founding DIRECT**

When Martin appeared on *Mother Angelia Live*, he had been the president of Catholics United for the Faith for two years. He appealed to that base to rally support for DIRECT:

> For too long, the Catholic Church has been hemorrhaging, losing so many of the best and brightest of her children. Nowhere have these losses been more dramatic than on the campuses of colleges throughout this country. The triple threat of secularism, as it is presented in the classroom; hedonism, as it is presented on the campus; and Protestantism, as it is presented by our evangelical brothers and sisters, has proven to be a gauntlet through which few college-aged Catholics have been capable of passing.⁵

This language is both defensive and aggressive. College-attending Catholics were being “persecuted” by their American environment of “secularism, hedonism, and Protestantism.” Students were untrained warriors in a battle they did not even know they were supposed to be fighting. Martin envisioned DIRECT as training (“equipping”) college students to be aggressively Catholic. They could do so by striving to live according to strict interpretations of the Vatican’s teachings, loving and obeying the Pope, leading lives of virtue as defined by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or as modeled by a saint, participating in the sacraments regularly, applying Catholic teachings to daily life, and generously sharing one’s life with others.

Martin modeled DIRECT’s program on the evangelical Protestant Campus Crusade for Christ and the methods it had employed since 1951. Martin proposed hiring recent college

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⁵ Martin, “Finding our Direction.”
graduates as “missionaries” who would raise their own salaries from their home parishes and other Catholic networks. These missionaries would organize same-gendered Bible studies and offer one-on-one mentorship to college students. They would gather student leaders for large-group gatherings (the “Upper Room”) and organize community-building events as alternatives to college parties, such as Karaoke nights at the Newman Center, “crafternoons” at missionaries’ apartments, and “epic” Ping-Pong tournaments after Mass.

Together with a handful of college students, Martin piloted the DIRECT program at Benedictine College in small-town Kansas in spring 1998. Edward Sri, an acquaintance of Martin’s from graduate school at Franciscan University of Steubenville, had been an assistant professor of theology at Benedictine since the previous fall. Sri laughed when he told me how he got “roped into” piloting DIRECT on campus. Having seen the Mother Angelica Live announcement about DIRECT, he gathered a group of Benedictine students to meet with Martin. After Martin explained his idea of evangelizing on college campuses, the students were “so excited” that they wanted to start DIRECT the next semester. Martin said he could not really help because he lived in Ohio, “but Professor Sri is right here!” Sri chuckled remembering initially being overwhelmed by the prospect but described it as one of the “greatest blessings” of his life.6 Sri recruited students to participate, including James Woodlow, who said Sri,

basically pulled me into his office and gave me this sheet of paper that had [DIRECT] on the top of it and said, “Hey, would you like to be part of this organization? We’re just starting it; it’s called [DIRECT]. And our purpose is to, you know, bring others to Christ, and we use small group Bible studies…” And in my head, I kind of thought, Okay. Sure, I guess. But, you know, it was all on paper.7

Woodlow, Sri, and a few other students started Bible studies on campus and developed the early forms of the friendship-based “incarnational evangelization.” Sri remembers it as a “blessed”

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7 James Woodlow, interview by author, June 12, 2013, transcript.
time. Recalling how “mainstream” students joined Bible studies and started receiving the sacraments more regularly, he sighed contentedly at the memory, “I was seeing the fruits right in front of my eyes.”8 Thirty students participated in the first DIRECT conference at Benedictine that spring. By the summer of 1998, Martin and Sri, buoyed by publicity from the television appearance and financial support garnered through the Catholics United for the Faith network, had recruited four full-time missionaries to evangelize at Benedictine College and University of Northern Colorado.

The first New Staff Training was held in a run-down house in Steubenville, Ohio during the hot summer of 1998. The leaders were, in Woodlow’s words, “big Catholic names” in conservative 1990s American Catholicism. Catholic biblical scholars Scott Hahn, Jeff Cavins, and Stacy Mitch all trained the new missionaries. Woodlow laughed, recounting how they had used Little Tyke chalkboards in lessons about the Bible, evangelization, catechesis, and prayer. Fifteen years later, he still remembers, “going through catechesis, going through Vatican II documents, going through evangelization…. prayer…a lot of intercessory prayer.”9 In particular, the group studied John Paul II’s Redemptoris Missio (1990), the papal encyclical on the “urgency of missionary activity.” Published on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, the pope urged the Church to “renew her missionary commitment” and insisted it was the duty of all “believer[s] in Christ…to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”10 Nervous yet confident that their “missionary zeal” was an important part of implementing Pope John Paul II’s urgency, these four missionaries officially launched DIRECT on campus in fall 1998.

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8 Sri, interview by author.
9 Woodlow, interview by author.
Meanwhile, Martin was still the president of Catholics United for the Faith and DIRECT was one of its programs. Catholics United for the Faith was founded in 1968, in the wake of what the founder described as the American Catholic “revolt” against *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Pius VI’s 1968 re-affirmation of the Catholic prohibition on artificial birth control. Members worked to “support, defend, and advance the efforts of the Teaching Church in accord with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.” Lay Catholics joined local chapters and policed their parishes for “liturgical irregularities.” Historian James Hitchcock once declared Catholics United for the Faith “the single most important conservative organization in the United States.” As the president of Catholics United for the Faith from 1995 to 1999, Martin held a position of power within a particular community of U.S. Catholics. This base of conservative lay activists provided DIRECT with its initial support, in forms financial, organizational, and spiritual. For two years, DIRECT functioned as an arm of Catholics United for the Faith; the group’s magazine, *Lay Witness*, printed a regular “DIRECT Update.

In October 1999, Martin announced his departure from Catholics United for the Faith and his focus shifted leading DIRECT. The demands of both organizations were, he wrote, becoming “too much.” Martin explained, “The needs of DIRECT will only increase as we continue to reach our goal in placing missionaries on every campus in America.” Martin had become friends with Archbishop Charles Chaput during World Youth Day in 1993, and Chaput invited DIRECT to operate out of his diocese in Denver. Martin accepted for the 1999-2000 academic year and moved operations to an office suite in Greeley, Colorado. Although DIRECT maintained its

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13 Martin, “From the President: Spiritual Multiplication,” *Lay Witness* (October 1999), 3. As of 2014, Curtis Martin and Scott Hahn were both members of Catholics United for the Faith’s Advisory Board.
institutional and financial ties to Catholics United for the Faith, the group became increasingly independent. The two organizations were separated administratively at the end of 1999, and *Lay Witness* published its final “DIRECT Update” in December 2000.\(^\text{14}\)

In early June 2013, DIRECT convened its fifteenth New Staff Training. Over four hundred new and returning missionaries gathered with executives, teachers, trainers, and nationally recognized Catholic speakers on the campus of Ave Maria University, outside of Naples, Florida. As in 1998, the five weeks of training were designed as “one-part boot camp, one-part grad school, and one-part retreat.”\(^\text{15}\) But Little Tyke chalkboards had been replaced by state-of-the art classrooms on Ave Maria’s campus. DIRECT trained 208 new missionaries that summer, bringing the total number of on-campus missionaries to 434 on eighty-seven campuses and one “digital campus.”

When I visited training for a week, missionaries wore “business casual,” as per the training guidelines. Despite southern Florida’s June heat, most women wore dresses or skirts that went past their knees, and those in sundresses with thin straps layered t-shirts underneath. Most of the men I saw wore polo shirts and khaki pants. It was a fit and trim group.\(^\text{16}\) They were also a predominantly white group, though I spotted four or five Latino missionaries sitting together in Mass. Most missionaries appeared to be in their early- and mid-twenties. They were millennial Catholics by birthdate and “JPII generation” Catholics by ideology. As Woodlow had been fifteen years before, they seemed to be nervous but confident that DIRECT was teaching them


\(^{16}\) Jack Hoppes, interview by author, January 3, 2013, transcript. Hoppes told me that DIRECT intentionally hire attractive young adults because DIRECT makes Catholicism appealing through the attractiveness (physical, intellectually, spiritually) of their missionaries.
Postconciliar and Charismatic Catholic Prayer

There are 60 million Catholics in the U.S. What would happen if those 60 million lived with radical newness and freshness that comes from Jesus Christ? But you gotta get inspired! ... Maybe you haven’t met Christ as deeply or profoundly as he wants to meet you. It is only through that encounter that inspiration can spring forth.

—Terrance, Seventh-year missionary

The hagiographic origin tale of DIRECT is an oft-repeated “crush DIRECT story,” which uses dramatic tones that make the founders of DIRECT seem like early Church fathers and the pace of DIRECT’s growth divinely inspired. I first heard this story from Terrance, the long-time team leader of the large DIRECT program at the University of Illinois. He told it to a group of about thirty students who were being trained as new “student missionaries.” The story began when Martin “cast the vision” of the organization during a papal audience with Pope John Paul II in 1998. The pontiff told Martin, “Be Soldiers.” Feeling approved by papal authority, Martin expanded DIRECT’s program onto campuses in Colorado and Nebraska. Martin and Sri wrote Bible studies (often the night before!) and attracted increasing numbers of students to participate. In 1999, they planned a conference for missionaries and student leaders, “and it totally failed,” Terrance said, shaking his head. Attendance was low and participation lackluster. Everyone was “feeling really bummed.” But, Terrance narrated, Martin rallied, “‘Let’s pray,’ and he began, ‘Lord, if this is not your will, crush DIRECT. Just crush it, Lord.’” Terrance paused for dramatic affect, then smiled. “I’m happy to say DIRECT serves seventy-four campuses with 360 full-time

missionaries, and we are growing at a rate of fifteen to twenty percent each year.”

The changing prayer practices of American Catholic life after the Second Vatican Council informed Martin’s “crush DIRECT” prayer. DIRECT’s tributaries reflect the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which re-introduced Catholics to a language of evangelization, taught them to expect emotional experiences of prayer, and put them into prayer-based relationships with Protestants. The history of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the U.S., as participants and historians usually tell it, began in 1967. Curious about the nature of Pentecostal prayer, a small group of students and faculty at Duquesne University engaged in conversations and established a reading group with some local Pentecostals. In February 1968, the Catholics went on a retreat weekend together. While there, most participants experienced what they came to call a “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” They spoke in tongues, “rested in the Spirit,” and experienced the gifts of laughter and tears. As the retreatants shared their experiences, this “Catholic Pentecostalism” spread to college campuses at Notre Dame and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal swept across the country from college campuses to parishes. Lay Catholics met weekly in prayer groups and regularly experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The groups were often extra-parochial and sometimes ecumenical. As it had been at the start, the renewal remained a predominantly middle-

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19 Field notes, April 19, 2013.
class, suburban, and well-educated movement with lay leadership. Their gatherings involved “Praise and Worship” songs, a style of music that blended popular rhythms with biblical lyrics. Participants laid hands on one another as they prayed for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing for themselves and loved ones. Reports of healings filled the pages of charismatic newsletters that sprang up around the country and in collections of essays quickly published and distributed through prayer group networks. Priests were often involved as participants. In order to introduce fellow Catholics to charismatic prayer and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, members adapted Protestants’ “Life in the Spirit Seminar” to include an emphasis on Christ’s real presence, Adoration, and Confession. In church halls around the country, many were “slain in the spirit” or spoke in tongues. Prophecies were received and interpreted. An estimated three million American Catholics participated in some type of Catholic charismatic activity in these decades.

Participation in charismatic prayer groups waned in the 1990s, but the renewal left a mark on the prayer capacities and imaginations of U.S. Catholics. Institutionally, the renewal imprinted Franciscan University of Steubenville, where Martin had earned his Masters degrees in Theology and Scott Hahn taught biblical studies. This Catholic college was founded in 1947 by the Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular as a part of the postwar boom of Catholic higher education. Many of its first students were commuter students and benefactors of the post-World War II G.I. Bill that helped servicemen earn college degrees. As that boom simmered in the 1960s and early 1970s, the school struggled to remain solvent in the 1960s and early 1970s. Desperate, the university’s trustees appointed Fr. Michael Scanlon as the school’s president in

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1973. “Fr. Mike” was a well-known charismatic healer in the charismatic renewal.\textsuperscript{24} Scanlon proposed a course corrective for the college, predicated on what he called “a spiritual transformation.”\textsuperscript{25} By “spiritual,” Scanlon meant charismatic Catholic prayer. The college began recruiting the children of renewal members as students. Faculty and staff turned over as those unhappy with the change in emphasis from Catholic commuter campus to charismatic education center left the institution. Scanlon urged departments to hire as their replacements Catholic staff and faculty who were supportive of his vision for spiritual transformation on campus.

Under Scanlon’s directive, Steubenville began to host national charismatic prayer gatherings. The university began to offer increasingly well-attended charismatic retreats for high school students, which many DIRECT missionaries I met had attended. In 1987, five years before Martin enrolled as a graduate student on campus, Scanlon proudly reported,

About 90% of our resident students are baptized in the Spirit by the end of any given school year...Young men and women at the college are attracted to this experience by the witness of the lives of the people they see around them. Peer pressure works in the opposite direction than at most schools—toward the Lord rather than away from him, toward a stronger, not weaker, Christian commitment, toward maturity in Christ and away from the foolishness of the world.\textsuperscript{26}

With this understanding of the kind of Catholic higher education offered, Franciscan was one of the first colleges in the U.S. to commit to implementing the 1989 Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity called for in the Church’s New Code of Canon Law. This law dictated that Catholic colleges adhere to the teachings and moral prescriptions of the Vatican. It mandated that all theology professors on Catholic campuses take an “Oath of Fidelity” to the Vatican. By the time Martin arrived on campus to earn a Masters degree in Theology in the early 1990s, Franciscan

\textsuperscript{24} Sheridan, Sean, “Canon 812: The Role of the University in its Implementation at Franciscan University of Steubenville,” Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 2007.
\textsuperscript{26} Michael Scanlon, Let the Fire Fall (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1986), 166.
had gone from a foundering college to a center of Catholic charismatic prayer-infused education.

In addition to shaping the Catholic theological education of DIRECT’s founder, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal also drew Catholics and Protestants into a praying relationship. As Scanlon reluctantly summarized: “I…had to admit that Protestants did some things better than Catholics did. They read and studied the Bible more…and often had a closer personal relationship with the Lord.”27 The renewal taught Catholics to pray across denominational boundaries and to learn from Protestants. Through their encounters with Pentecostalism, Catholics learned to develop a “personal relationship with Jesus” and to interact with Jesus as a brother, a confidant, and a buddy.

Despite an ethos of cooperation and crossing religious boundaries in the first two decades of the renewal, the movement’s later history is one of raising boundaries between Catholics and Protestants. By the mid-1980s, anxieties about learning from and praying with Protestants seeped into the movement. How to make sure charismatic prayer was not Protestant hung over participants. Lay and clergy charismatic Catholics constantly asserted that they were indeed Catholic.28 This push-pull relationship—Catholics eager to learn from but afraid to look too much like Protestants—reverberates in DIRECT’s crosscurrents. Catholic charismatics in the 1980s still drew inspiration from their Protestant encounters but increasingly insisted on being triumphantly Catholic. As one prayer group participant described it, “A little group of [Pentecostal] Protestants have shown us what it really means to be Catholic.”29

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charismatic renewal, post-Vatican II lay Catholics incorporated Pentecostal prayer into their understanding of what it meant to be “really Catholic.”

Charismatic prayer as Catholic practice also cultivated a Catholic expectation of and appreciation for the laity’s emotional experience of prayer. Historians of American Catholicism have summarized the renewal as filling a “piety void” in the wake of changes in prayer practices after Vatican II.30 While this “piety void” assumes too much rupture between pre- and postconciliar prayer, charismatic prayer did mark out newly inventive practices in the imaginations of Catholics praying. Charismatic prayer involved what anthropologist Thomas Csordas described as “performative language” that maintained a tension-filled matrix of spontaneity and control. Members of prayer groups learned to create situations that facilitated the unplanned yet expected tongues, prophecies, and tears from the Holy Spirit.31 This emphasis on emotional prayer experiences is not unique to the charismatic renewal, but it became prominent in this postconciliar prayer form.

The charismatic renewal also shaped an American Catholic language of evangelization. Charismatic Catholics were unusual among twentieth-century American Catholics in their desire to share accounts of their religious experiences. They loved telling their stories about how the Holy Spirit acted in prayer group meetings. Participants developed a rich language of testimonies and conversion narratives to do so effectively. Like many DIRECT missionaries I met, charismatic Catholics often described themselves as “converts.” This did not mean they had ever been non-Catholic. Rather this choice of self-description indicated that they had experienced “a transformation of one’s self concurrent with a transformation of one’s central meaning system….

31 Csordas, Language, Charisma, and Creativity, 257-64.
a whole new way of experiencing the world and oneself.”32 One primary implication of this kind of experience was a desire—what DIRECT called “zeal”—to tell others about it.33 Catholics learning how to articulate and comfortably share testimonies of religious experiences was important for the making of DIRECT. The hiring process for DIRECT missionaries involved a three-day long “Interview Weekend.” During the first evening of this weekend, potential missionaries gave their testimonies of how they came to have personal relationships with Jesus. Most missionaries I interviewed told me well-practiced versions of their conversion stories. At a DIRECT workshop on how to give a testimony, we learned not only the four parts of an effective conversion story but also how to use the story to invite others into a relationship with Jesus.34 Bound into this emphasis on conversion and storytelling is also an impulse to create what psychologist Dan McAdams has called “redemptive stories” that “affirm hope for the future.”35 DIRECT’s well-practiced strategy of inviting others into Catholicism through one’s own personal story of conversion and experience of God in prayer is an optimistic inheritance of the charismatic renewal as it was practiced in the broader U.S. atmosphere.

Historians assume that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal fell out of popularity by the 1990s. Indeed, the number of white participants has been in steady decline over the last twenty years.36 But smaller prayer groups continue to meet in suburban parishes around the country. During some exploratory fieldwork in 2012, I met several active members of the renewal. When I asked them if they had ever heard of DIRECT, many told me they contributed financially to the organization’s missionaries. The link between the renewal and DIRECT became more explicit in

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32 McGuire, Pentecostal Catholics, 49.
34 Field notes, June 13, 2013.
36 Csordas, The Sacred Self, 18.
October 2012 when Pope Benedict XVI gathered the world’s bishops for the “Synod on the New Evangelization.” Curtis Martin and long-time Catholic Charismatic Renewal leader Ralph Martin (no relation) were the only two lay American observers.

The “crush DIRECT” prayer reflects the inheritance of charismatic prayer in the formation of DIRECT. Martin still prays a version of his “crush prayer” and continues to receive confirmation in prayer that DIRECT is enacting God’s will.37 I heard the “crush prayer” several times, from different missionaries and executives, each with a slightly different emphasis. Such repetition underscores the importance of retelling stories of prayer and conversion in the lineage of DIRECT. These stories were invitations to members of the renewal and to DIRECT missionaries. Terrance told the story to welcome students into leadership with DIRECT on campus. I also heard it at a national training event, narrated as confirmation that God wanted DIRECT to survive and continue enacting Martin’s vision of Catholic evangelization.

Catholic Higher Education

When Blessed John Paul II called *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* ‘a sort of magna carta,’ he no doubt envisioned a scenario in which a Catholic college could use his Constitution on Higher Education to help reaffirm its identity, clarify its mission, and renew its question to be come a truly great Catholic college. There is perhaps no better example of the successful application of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* than Benedictine College.38

—Catholic Identity at Benedictine College: Ten-Year Review of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in America, 2011

We’re the fullness of the Catholic faith!39

—Daniel, Benedictine College alumnus, Second-year Missionary

Daniel was a proud member of the Benedictine College class of 2011. Not long after I

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first met him, Daniel and I chatted about his college in Atchison, Kansas. He told me that Benedictine had really changed before he was a student. Before, “it had no Catholic identity, really.” But, thanks to changes that Daniel attributed to the theology department and DIRECT’s work on campus, “it has a ton [of Catholic identity].” Feigning nonchalance, he said that it used to be: “Everything goes. But that’s not right. No, there is a right and a wrong. There is orthodoxy.” Being reoriented to orthodoxy, Daniel said, “made Benedictine really Catholic.”

Ten years before Daniel enrolled as a freshman at Benedictine College, Edward Sri had received a one-year appointment in the theology department. What began as a short-term arrangement in 1997 lasted more than a decade. At the time of Sri’s appointment, Benedictine was foundering. Enrollment had plateaued at 740 students and there was a “rampant binge drinking and a significant hook-up culture.” A “lackluster” campus ministry saw a “meager” twelve students trickle into daily Mass.

These statistics reflected a larger trend in post-Vatican II Catholic higher education in the U.S. In her history of Catholic higher education, Alice Gallin, O.S.U. points out that by the 1960s, small Catholic colleges around the country were experiencing a decline in personnel, students, and finances. Before this era, questions about the religious identity and character of a Catholic campus had been moot, primarily because Catholic religious orders ran the institutions and Catholics enrolled as students. After Vatican II, Catholic orders of priests and nuns increasingly left the leadership of these institutions in lay hands, and non-Catholic faculty slowly became the majority. Growing numbers of non-Catholic students matriculated in these liberal

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40 Daniel, in discussion with author, October, 17, 2012.
42 Sri, interview by author; Burger, “Reaching the Heart of College Students.” 1-2.
arts colleges. These uneasy demographic transitions were complicated by a lack of surety about what made a Catholic college Catholic as universities worked to keep pace with secular standards of higher education. Some Catholic administrators, laity, faculty, and members of religious orders running colleges wondered: “What is Catholic about Catholic higher education? Is it different from the courses and programs offered by the state university down the road, which now probably has a religious studies department and a Catholic student center?” Historian Philip Gleason summarized the angst, “The crisis is not that Catholic educators do not want their institutions to remain Catholic, but they are no longer sure what remaining Catholic means.”

Catholic colleges like Benedictine were founded as extensions of preconciliar Catholic communities. Religious orders of men and women established them “as a form of direct apostolic service to the Catholic community.” Offering higher education to Catholics was an expression of vocation and a recruitment tool. At its founding in 1858, Benedictine College was the all-male St. Benedict’s College. The German Benedictine monks of St. Benedict’s Abbey began educating local Catholic men and fully incorporated the college in 1868. Nearby Benedictine sisters founded Mt. St. Scholastica Academy for women in 1863 and began offering bachelor’s degrees for women in 1932. Like many gender-segregated Catholic campuses, the two schools merged into the co-educational Benedictine College in 1971. The monastic communities remained “sponsors” of the college, but a lay-run Board of Trustees managed the school. Benedictine College previously defined its Catholicism by virtue of being owned and operated

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46 Gleason, Contending with Modernity, 320. Certainly some of the impulse for this anxiety was the Second Vatican Council. But it was also shifts in the nature of what counted as Catholic in a rearranged religious landscape.  
47 Steinfels, A People Adrift, 110-11.  
by members of the Benedictine communities, and the vast majority of its students identified as Catholic. By 1997, those things were no longer true.

Formal discussions about the Catholic nature and future of Catholic universities began in 1949, when the International Federation of Catholic Universities started facilitating international dialogue about Catholic higher education. These conversations about the identity of Catholic higher education surged after the release of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965. The promulgators of this document warned against “forms of modern atheism,” which they deemed “especially [present] in the education of youth.” Catholics were urged to be aware of the “fight against religion” by governments and educators.  

Interpreting *Gaudium et Spes* fueled existing debates in the U.S. over how to be Catholic as well as part of the Western academy. Debate crested in June 1967 when a group of twenty-six faculty, lay board members, and presidents of Catholic colleges, along with top officers from the Jesuits and the Congregation of the Holy Cross and two bishops, met in Land O’ Lakes, Wisconsin to discuss how Catholic colleges ought to situate themselves in the contemporary academic landscape. In their “Land O’ Lakes” statement, the authors of “The Nature of the Contemporary University” set themselves to the task of answering, “What is the nature and role of the contemporary Catholic University?” The opening lines reflect the tensions between papal authority and academic freedom:

> The Catholic University today must be a university in the full modern sense of the word, with a strong commitment to and concern for academic excellence. To perform its teaching and research functions effectively the Catholic university must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical,

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external to the academic community itself. To say this is simply to assert that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are essential conditions of life and growth and indeed of survival for Catholic universities as for all universities.\textsuperscript{51}

From this perspective, the goals of academic freedom were not in conflict with the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges. But those goals were in conflict with papal authority. Gleason described this statement as the American Catholic academy’s “declaration of independence from the hierarchy.”\textsuperscript{52} The Vatican did not accept notice. In 1990, after years of debating drafts, Pope John Paul II promulgated, “On Catholic Universities,” called \textit{Ex Corde Ecclesiae} (“From the Heart of the Church”). The apostolic constitution deemed that “every Catholic University, as \textit{Catholic}, must have” four essential characteristics:

1. a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such; 2. a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research; 3. fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church; 4. an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life.”\textsuperscript{53}

\textit{Ex Corde Ecclesiae} articulated a clear boundary around Catholic education. Using this four-part definition, the Vatican could delineate between Catholic and non-Catholic universities.

Moreover, it reflected an assertion of papal authority over higher education, which proved especially troublesome for the U.S. Catholic academe and American bishops.

The demands of \textit{Ex Corde} set the U.S. bishops to meetings with Catholic universities and faculty members in order to develop norms for implementing this protocol in the U.S. They submitted a first draft to Vatican officials in 1996, but it was rejected. Reviewers objected to the bishops’ dialogical and consultation-based proposals for implementation. They also asked the


\textsuperscript{52} Gleason, \textit{Contending with Modernity}, 316.

bishops to address more explicitly the mandatum from the 1983 Revised Code of Canon Law, which regulated the nature of theological education offered by Catholic colleges. This mandatum has become the most well known Vatican directive on Catholic higher education, though it is not technically part of the 1990 apostolic constitution. The 1983 mandatum required that members of theology departments in Catholic universities “teach...within the full communion of the Catholic Church” and insisted upon “the professor's commitment and responsibility to teach authentic Catholic doctrine and to refrain from putting forth as Catholic teaching anything contrary to the Church's magisterium.”

The mandatum aimed “to bring colleges and universities under the authority of local bishops and ultimately the Vatican.” After several revisions, the Vatican eventually accepted the bishops’ plan for implementing the norms of the mandatum and Ex Corde. Effective May 3, 2001, both became the official guides of Catholic higher education in the U.S. National media outlets opined the collapse of academic freedom in America’s Catholic colleges: “‘Catholic Colleges See Peril in Vatican Push for Control’” (Boston Globe) and “‘Catholic Campuses Face a Showdown on Ties to Church’” (New York Times). Despite journalistic fears, most Catholic colleges ignored the norms and the bishops did not object.

But not Benedictine College. Benedictine was among a handful of colleges to embrace the bishops’ norms and define their Catholic identity by their adherence to Ex Corde. Others included Martin’s graduate alma mater, Franciscan University of Steubenville, and Christendom College in Virginia, the alma mater of one of the first female missionaries.

55 Steinfels, A People Adrift, 144.
56 Ibid.
57 Steinfels, A People Adrift, 154.
celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the implementation of the norms. In their report to the bishops, “Catholic Identity at Benedictine College: Ten-Year Review of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in America,” administrators exuberantly wrote, “Over the last two decades, we have not only experienced objective proofs of success, but undeniable signs of God’s blessing.”

Authors of the report credited the ongoing implementation of *Ex Corde* with a steady rise in enrollment, an increase in the number of theology majors, and significant growth in the number of students at daily Mass. Eighty percent of Benedictine’s students identified as Catholic, an average of 400 students attended daily Mass, and Eucharistic Adoration was available twelve hours a day on campus. All faculty and staff were trained on the *mandatum*, and theology faculty took an “Oath of Fidelity” to the Catholic Church. Benedictine’s response to the search for twenty-first century Catholic specialness was to follow Vatican guidelines very closely. This desire to clarify what exactly and uniquely counts as Catholic identity flows through the tributaries of DIRECT.

There was a mutually supportive relationship between DIRECT’s evangelization efforts and Benedictine’s *Catholic* identities. Benedictine was where missionaries first began to work out what it meant to be and how to promote dynamically orthodox Catholicism to what Sri called “mainstream” college students. DIRECT used Benedictine’s commitment to *Ex Corde* to define what was special about Catholic identity. For example, missionaries take the same Oath of Fidelity that the *mandatum* requires of theology faculty at Catholic institutions. In 2011, Martin affirmed Benedictine’s efforts to implement the norms of *Ex Corde*, “Benedictine is about the only place in the country…where the flag was planted in the 1980s and people said, ‘We stand

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59 “Catholic Identity at Benedictine College: Ten-Year Review of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in America,” 5.
60 Burger, “Reaching the Heart of College Students,” 1.
with Jesus Christ.’”

As Benedictine’s DIRECT program grew from a pilot program into what I heard described as a “DIRECT factory,” DIRECT grew nationally. For the 2012-2013 academic year, Daniel estimated that thirty-five missionaries had graduated from Benedictine. Many worked on campuses, but Benedictine graduates also dominated DIRECT administration and upper-level management. The Dean of Students at Benedictine reported to me that DIRECT was the largest single employer of their students in 2013. By sheer numbers, Benedictine has influenced the shape and directions of DIRECT. Benedictine has also been shaped by DIRECT’s presence on campus. Sri attributed the campus’ “spiritual renewal” in part to missionaries starting Bible studies, inviting students to Mass, asking for perpetual adoration, and making Catholicism attractive to a wide population on campus. A shared longing for Catholic specialness animated this mutual relationship between exceptional Catholic education and DIRECT.

**Catholics on Secular Campuses**

[Millennials] want us to faithfully, frankly, and fully represent the teaching of the Church….They expect (and, in justice, deserve) authentic Catholic teaching, whole and entire from us…They are looking for true communion—a communion centered on a real, personal relationship with the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus….St. John’s Catholic Newman Center exists to radiate Jesus Christ in all things by encouraging those who live, worship, and work within this community to serve others and to strive toward the highest ideals of Christian spiritual, moral, and intellectual development as lived and taught in the rich tradition of the Catholic Church.

—Monsignor Stuart Swetland, Director St. John’s Catholic Newman Center, University of Illinois, 1997-2006

And then someone introduced me to the Newman Center at the University of Illinois. …[And] there was a DIRECT missionary who was like, “Do you want to join a Catholic

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63 Daniel, in discussion with author, April 11, 2013.

64 Woodlow, interview by author.

65 Monsignor Stuart Swetland, *Questions College Students Ask…About God, Faith, and the Church* (Champaign, IL: The Institute of Catholic Thought, 2006), viii.
Bible study?” and I’m like, “What?! I didn’t know Catholics read the Bible. This is perfect, everything I’ve been looking for.”

—Mary Clare, University of Illinois alumna, Fourth-year missionary

Mary Clare smiled warmly when I asked her if she was planning to commit to another year as a DIRECT missionary. “Yup, I’m called to this,” she replied. We were drinking coffee in an Einstein’s Bagels near the commuter campus in Indiana where Mary Clare spent her days doing incarnational evangelization, which she called “sharing life” with students. She told me she grew up in a “very small, German Catholic town” in rural Illinois. Everyone in town, everyone, she emphasized, was Catholic. The closest Protestant church was in the next town over. But her dad was a “very big nonconformist and adventurer” who did not really “fit the mold” of the town, she said, smiling again. He sent her to an evangelical Christian sports camp when she was eight years old. It was “my worst nightmare,” Mary Clare said. “I was just a really, really shy kid.” Despite her anxiety, Mary Clare remembered being “in awe of these counselors, who were just on fire for their faith…and just talking about their relationship with God…and it was all…news to me.” Mary Clare went back every summer until she was eighteen. Her religious sensibilities became bifurcated by seasons: evangelical Protestant in summer, Catholic during the school year.

I would go to the Catholic Church, and I’d just be frustrated there. Everybody there was bumps on a log, and they were all there because their parents made them. And they were all going through the Confirmation because their parents made them. Yeah, so I had a hard time reconciling those two. My mom would always tell me to marry someone who is Catholic, and I would tell her, “I’m going to marry someone who knows God.”

Despite this frustration, she said, it “never felt like it was Sunday” unless she went to Mass.

Growing up Catholic had folded the liturgical life of Catholicism into her sense of time. Driven by an inchoate understanding of Catholicism’s importance to her and by respect for her parents,
she focused her college search on small, Catholic colleges. Her interest in the nearby University of Illinois was piqued when she heard about its Newman Center, where DIRECT has had a strong presence since 1999. On a campus visit, she met DIRECT missionaries. She explained: “I was so attracted to the missionaries. Because they were just like these camp counselors—talking about their personal relationship with Christ. Just really joyful, attractive young people who were really into their faith.” Enrolled as a student, she joined a DIRECT Bible study, became a DIRECT student leader, and has been a missionary since she graduated.

For the majority of Catholic college students in the U.S. who attend non-Catholic universities, Newman Centers have worked to resist anti-Catholicism and offer Catholic sacramental life and community. Contemporary Newman Centers began as “Catholic clubs” in the late nineteenth century. The first was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which has housed a DIRECT team since 2005. Timothy Harrington was an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin when he formed its first Catholic club in 1883. He and several other Catholic students and faculty met regularly to discuss theology, invite speakers, and garner financial support from Catholics in Madison. When Harrington moved to the University of Pennsylvania as a medical student in 1893, he started another Catholic club. He called it a “Newman Club” after John Cardinal Newman. Harrington was, at the time, especially enamored of the cardinal’s Apologia Pro Vita Sua, wherein Newman describes his conversion to Catholicism while a student at secular Oxford. Over the next twenty years, “Catholic clubs” under various titles and hierarchical structures emerged on public and non-Catholic universities around the country. The “Newman Movement” received official recognition from U.S. bishops

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68 Ibid.
in 1941, and in 1962, the “National Newman Apostolate” was officially mandated to do what it had been doing unofficially for sixty years, to “perform the work of the Catholic Church in the secular campus community.” This history of Newman Centers protecting Catholics in secular environments is one of the tributaries of DIRECT. Newman Centers gave DIRECT its entry point and infrastructure on public and non-Catholic private campuses.

The first Catholic club at the University of Illinois was organized in 1902. Members named it the “Spalding Guild” in honor of Bishop John Lancaster Spalding (then of the Diocese of Peoria). The mission statement described the goals as both religious and social: “‘The religious motive was…to be the main purpose, [although] the social side could not well be forgotten.’” The club reorganized as a residential Newman Hall in 1928. The director, Monsignor Swetland, invited a DIRECT team to campus in 1999. When I visited in April 2013, it was not only one of DIRECT’s oldest but had grown to be one of its largest programs.

Although DIRECT developed in the small, Catholic college environment of Benedictine College, DIRECT’s “bread and butter” eventually became large, state universities. Martin told a radio audience in 2011: “About ninety percent of DIRECT schools are state schools. That’s where God led us.” DIRECT works best, Martin explained, in places where Catholics make up a significant portion of the population but are not reached by traditional Newman Center methods. Martin’s numbers gloss the actual statistics. During the 2012-2013 academic year, DIRECT had teams on seventy-three campuses. Forty-nine were public schools, fourteen were private, non-Catholic schools, and ten of them were Catholic campuses. Seventy percent of the campuses where DIRECT worked are state schools, while eighty-six percent are not Catholic.

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72 Heuertz, “DIRECT Founder Calls Students to the New Evangelization.”
DIRECT’s relationship with Newman Centers has varied in quality and structure, though it has never gone to a campus where the chaplain has not invited it. The bishop must also approve its presence in a diocese. DIRECT describes itself as the “hands and feet” of Newman centers. “What makes DIRECT different is that it’s a lay outreach,” Martin explained. “They go out onto to campus to meet students in libraries, athletic fields, and everywhere, to draw them back to the Newman Center.” In the larger DIRECT programs—like Mary Clare’s, at the University of Illinois—the relationship tended to play out as envisioned. Swetland bragged with a “father’s pride” about the twelve graduates who became missionaries. The chaplain at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Catholic Center was also very active in supporting its fast-growing DIRECT program. Since DIRECT arrived in 2005, he has joined the missionaries in their daily Holy Hour. The chaplain at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Newman Center credited part of the need to build a Catholic dorm on campus in 2014 to the vibrant Catholic life that DIRECT missionaries started bringing to campus in 1999.

These success stories belie the tense relationship between DIRECT teams and Newman center staff that sometimes developed, especially in newer DIRECT programs. Newman centers commit to having missionaries on campus for two years, which in 2012 required an initial investment of $100,000 ($50,000 each year). One regional director told me that sometimes a ministry staff mistakenly thinks that they are getting four campus ministers for $50,000 a year.

77 Field notes, April 23, 2013.
And that’s just not the case. He explained that they are getting four young people who will go out on campus and bring students into Catholic sacramental life at the Newman Center. When DIRECT expanded to the O’Meara Catholic Center on campus in fall 2012, the chaplain, Fr. Paul, had invited the program and solicited a donor for the first two years of its work on campus. For that first year, there was unresolved discord between long-time center staff and DIRECT missionaries, and between some students and missionaries. When Fr. Paul was reassigned to the seminary at the end of the 2012 school year, missionaries wondered how long DIRECT would stay. Fr. Koopa arrived as the new chaplain that summer and was handed the reins of a Catholic student center and a DIRECT team. Six months into his term, Fr. Koopa addressed the discord. During a homily in February 2014, he urged the congregation to stop saying, “I am O’Meara” or “I am DIRECT.” His call for unity reflects the division that had grown between the Catholic center staff and DIRECT missionaries.

Campus ministries and Newman Centers have asked DIRECT to leave campuses. In other cases, DIRECT has decided it is not a “good fit” a specific campus. The missionaries at another campus I visited had a particularly precarious relationship with their Newman Center staff. The discord was so irresolvable that the missionaries left campus for the summer, unsure if a DIRECT team would return in the fall. The chaplain was rumored among missionaries to have dis-recommended one of the missionaries for advancement within DIRECT, purportedly because of his work to promote Marian devotion among men on campus.80

Throughout the twentieth century, Catholics have invested financially in keeping Catholic students at non-Catholic and public institutions involved in Catholic sacramental life through Newman centers. The history and infrastructure of these centers provided scaffolding

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79 Mitch, in discussion with author, October 30, 2013.
80 Rainey, interview by author, May 14, 2013, transcript.
upon which DIRECT could build. However, DIRECT sees itself as training Catholics to do more than this. DIRECT embodies an aggressive Catholicism, out on campus inviting students into the sacraments and into the Catholic community. During what felt like a motivational speech, Martin remind his missionary audience that DIRECT is not trying to create “day care for big kids.” He charged them to be out on campus, reaching students “where they are.”

Millennial Catholics and Evangelical Protestantism

Discipleship is more than being friends—more than hanging out. It is building into someone so that you are taking her somewhere. Where are you taking her? Toward becoming a Christ-centered laborer. That is our mission—to develop disciples into Christ-centered laborers who will walk with Christ and serve Him for a lifetime.

Someone who can walk, communicate, and multiply their faith.

—Campus Crusade for Christ, “A Primer on Discipleship”

I think what touched me spiritually was the Bible Study that I got into. So I ended up getting into a Protestant Bible Study, with Campus Crusade—or, actually Navigators…[I]t was really my first experience of being with other Christian men who were fired up about their faith…of being with other Christian brothers who were really on-fire about their faith and really wanted to learn…[T]hat community and that seeking and love for God…really touched me in a new way, in a deeper way.

—Jeremy, First-year Missionary

Jeremy was a missionary on DIRECT’s inaugural “Digital Campus” team. In this capacity, he mentored students from non-DIRECT campuses around the country. Jeremy regularly lit up the DIRECT YouTube channel with funny videos like “Real Men of Jesus,” (where he played an over-zealous evangelist in a spoof on a Budweiser commercial) and “The

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84 “Real Men of Jesus,” DIRECTNational YouTube Channel, posted January 6, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/user/DIRECTNational
Meat Police: The Lenten Authorities” (where he played “Officer Angus,” chasing down people caught eating meat on Fridays in Lent). During our Skype interview, Jeremy told me that when he was a student at the University of Cincinnati, he was a member of an evangelical Protestant Bible study. He preferred this group to the Catholic ones because the Newman Center was doing what he called “goofy things.” When I asked him what he meant, he described the way the liturgist had them change the “Our Father” to “Our Father and Mother.” He also felt the Newman Center campus ministers were more concerned with social justice and providing social service opportunities than encouraging Catholic sacramental life. Jeremy shrugged nonchalantly and said he just “gained more out of the Protestant group.” While he never wavered in his confidence that Catholicism was the “true religion,” his personal relationship with Jesus was “sparked” in his Protestant Bible study in a way that it was not at the Newman Center.  

Academic and popular commenters on contemporary Catholic life have labeled young adults like Jeremy as “evangelical Catholic.” While “far from the majority, their small number often includes the most intellectually gifted. These students want meat. They love the Pope. They are pro-life. They do service trips during breaks and gravitate toward ‘service’ upon graduation.” Theologian William Portier posits that these millennials reflect a “larger Christian reconfiguration, a striking evangelical-Catholic confluence of national import.” In Portier’s estimation, evangelical Catholics have absorbed an evangelical Protestant culture in the U.S.

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86 Jeremy, interview with author.
87 William Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics.” Communio 31 (Spring 2004), 37. In recent years, the Catholic Theological Society has had an internal debate over which word should be the adjective. A permanent section of their annual meeting is titled, “Evangelical Catholics and Catholic Evangelicals.” See also Robert Webber’s The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002) and Tom Rausch, ed., Catholics and Evangelicals: Do they Share a Common Future? (New York: Paulist Press, 2000).
88 Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics.” 38. Portier is referencing the organization of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” in 1994, the topic of Rausch’s book. Notably, George Weigel was one of the signatories, and Ralph Martin one of the endorsers.
They are a predictable outgrowth of the dissipation of the “Catholic ghetto” and Catholics living in and engaging with a religiously diverse environment.\textsuperscript{89}

Portier popularized “evangelical Catholic” as a label for this segment of millennial Catholics, but the first use of the term appeared in 1983, used by historian David O’Brien. He classified Isaac Hecker (1819-1888) and the order of Paulist priests that Hecker founded as “evangelical Catholics” because their mission was to “engage with culture and to ‘make America Catholic.’”\textsuperscript{90} Addressing a group of Catholics in St. Louis in 1863, Hecker taught: “‘Every Catholic, whatever may be his station in life, is called to cooperate in the work [of evangelization]. Wherever you see a Catholic true to his religion, where you see a Catholic setting his face against the reigning vices of his time, there you will find a missionary.’”\textsuperscript{91} O’Brien reasoned that Hecker’s “confidence in the American people, and his deep personal commitment to the Roman Catholic church combined to form a uniquely American, and therefore necessarily evangelical, understanding of faith, church, and mission.”\textsuperscript{92} The definition of “evangelical” at work in O’Brien’s adjective was double. O’Brien’s “evangelical” assumed an evangelicalism as constitutive of American identity. O’Brien also used the label to describe Hecker’s description of a biblical call to all Christians (Catholics included) to be “preaching the Gospel and restoring faith.”\textsuperscript{93} In this second valence, to be Christian and following Jesus’ Gospel was necessarily to be evangelical. Portier and O’Brien used “evangelical Catholic” to describe a missionary impulse among Catholics to make Catholicism more attractive to a mainstream American—and often Protestant—sensibility.

\textsuperscript{89} Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” 51, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{91} O’Brien, “An Evangelical Imperative,” 114. From Hecker’s 1863 “St. Louis Lecture.”
\textsuperscript{92} O’Brien, “An Evangelical Imperative,” 95.
\textsuperscript{93} O’Brien, “An Evangelical Imperative,” 106.
Using the same label to mean something quite different, Catholic commentator George Weigel defined “evangelical Catholicism” as “an expression of the four fundamental realities of Christian ecclesial life—unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity—as mediated through the Catholic Church.”

Weigel’s larger, historical argument is that both “progressive, liberal” and “traditional, conservative” Catholics are mired in “Counter-Reformation Catholicism.” The “deep reform” that he argues as slowly underway began with Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903). Reform, or as Weigel wrote, “evangelical Catholicism,” has been “quietly, steadily, and doggedly setting about creating the conditions for a new Catholic engagement with modern cultural, political, economic, and social life.”

This version of Catholicism, Weigel argued, will replace the divided Catholic landscape with a Catholicism focused on relationships with Jesus, papal authority, and the sacraments. A long-time supporter of DIRECT, Weigel included the organization on a short list of groups participating in and making evangelical Catholicism.

These three uses of the label “evangelical Catholic” raise the question of how to understand evangelical Protestantism(s) in the history of DIRECT. Are DIRECT missionaries pseudo-evangelical Protestants? Are they, as Portier might argue, a predictable outcome of the collapse of the “Catholic ghetto” and increased interactions with evangelical Protestants? Are

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95 Weigel, Evangelical Catholicism, 13.
96 Weigel, Evangelical Catholicism, 56-87.
98 On the trouble of defining “evangelical” and “evangelical Protestantism,” in particular, I appreciate Molly Worthen’s efforts to cut through firm definitions in favor of a set of questions. In Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority on American Evangelicalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), she proposes that “Three elemental concerns unite them: How to repair the fracture between spiritual and rational knowledge; how to assure salvation and a true relationship with God; and how to resolve the tension between the demands of personal belief and the constraints of a secularized public square” (4). To be evangelical, then, is to be concerned with the implications of one’s relationship with God for social relations. “If American evangelicals do not share a single mind, they do share an imagination: one grounded in a substrate of basic questions about the relationship of faint and experience to human reason, and the direction of the modern world” (11).
they, as O’Brien might argue, the convergence of an American evangelical Protestantism and an evangelical impulse in Catholicism? Or are they, as Weigel might argue, the fulfillment of Catholic history that reincorporates Protestants back into the fullness of Catholicism?

Certainly evangelical Protestantism is an influential tributary in DIRECT. Martin’s own relationship with Jesus began when he was a student and involved in Campus Crusade for Christ. In 1980, he was a transfer student at Louisiana State University. Two thousand miles from his hometown of Ventura, California, he was homesick and lonely when he opened the Bible his Catholic mother had made him pack. He absentmindedly flipped to Luke 6:46, where Jesus says to his disciples, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command?” As he read, Martin experienced God saying, “Curtis, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say?” When I heard Martin tell a version of this story to a group of college students, he emphasized this moment with a long pause before saying, “I literally dropped the Bible on the desk. It was such a foundational turning point.” At dinner that evening, a missionary with Campus Crusade for Christ approached him and asked if he ever read the Bible. Stunned by what he interpreted as providential timing, Martin nodded and accepted the missionary’s invitation to play golf. Martin eventually joined one of the group’s Bible studies. These new friends, he wrote in his autobiography, taught him “how to talk to God as I would a trusted friend… I discovered the wisdom and power of God’s inspired word, the Scriptures, and I developed a heart for others… my greatest desire was to grow in my faith—a desire I pray I will carry with me to my grave.” Evangelical Protestants, not Catholics at the Newman Center on campus, taught him how to have a relationship with Christ. He told the audience it was “life-changing.” Happily not

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100 Curtis Martin, Made for More (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2008), 103.
Catholic, Martin grudgingly acquiesced to his mother’s request that he attend a Catholic retreat on campus. During Adoration on that retreat, Martin had what he called an “existential crisis” about the Catholic teaching that Jesus is really present in the consecrated host. He later wrote that he realized on that retreat: “There is really no middle ground. Either Jesus is present in the Eucharist, and therefore all Christians can and ought to pray to him, or Jesus is not in the Eucharist and it is merely bread, in which case praying to the Eucharist would be a foolish form of idolatry.” He knew, without a doubt, that he was in front of the real body and blood of Christ. Over the next few months, he returned to Catholicism.

Martin understood quite personally the value of the models and methods of evangelical Protestants. But he always put them in conversation with Catholic sacraments and theology. It is not enough to interpret DIRECT as a Catholic version of Campus Crusade nor is it the case that DIRECT was an inevitable outgrowth of either American Catholic history or the history of Catholics in the U.S. Rather I describe DIRECT missionaries as “evangelical Catholics” in recognition of this style of Catholic evangelization that has been constituted by the interweaving of evangelical Protestant methods and Catholic theology of mission and evangelization.

Drawing on a fear of and respect for evangelical Protestants, DIRECT appropriated evangelical methods and marked them Catholic. Missionaries did this by making their evangelizing methods dependent on particularly Catholic forms of prayer involving Adoration, devotion to saints, and Marian novenas. Mary Clare’s explanation of the triumphant relationship between Catholics and Protestants is illustrative: “I have a great love for our Protestant brothers and sisters…[A] lot of what we have and what we do are from what we’ve learned from

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101 Martin, Made for More, 111.
102 Martin, “Still on a Mission.”
Protestant organizations.”

But, she added, she prayed daily for the conversion of her Protestant peers. DIRECT missionaries assumed they could improve and expand Catholic capacities with evangelical Protestant methods. In so doing, DIRECT missionaries argued implicitly that evangelical Protestant methods are made *better* used as Catholic evangelization.

One of the foundational ways DIRECT adapted Campus Crusade for Christ’s techniques was in its use of the same tripartite strategy of evangelization, “Win, Build, Send.” Campus Crusade for Christ literature explains the method as stages of development; “We believe we will be most effective at winning students to Christ, building them into true followers of Christ, and sending them to launch movements everywhere.”

DIRECT uses similar overtures to describe its version of the Win, Build, Send strategy. Its annual reports explain that missionaries work to “win” students over by “drawing [them] into a relationship with Christ and the Church” through friendship. They “build” students with “knowledge of faith and teach them to practice virtue” through Bible studies, one-on-one mentorship (called discipleship), and prayer. Students are then “sent” to “win others to relationship with Christ and His Church.”

This language of “winning students” reflects Campus Crusade’s Cold War origins. When Bill Bright founded the organization in 1951, he imagined his missionaries as warriors in a battle of Christianity against Communism. Twenty-five years later, he updated the name of the threat from Communism to “humanism,” which he demonized with the same militaristic language:

“[M]any great universities are supported by Christians who send their children to schools where they are literally attacked philosophically and theologically by atheistic or agnostic

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103 Mary Clare, interview by author.
professors…[Higher] education…now embraces the “religion” of secular humanism.”

The threats of secularism and anti-Christian academics frightened and motivated Bright. Campus Crusade for Christ imagined as the antidote drawing students into a strong Christian community by making it attractive and compelling. Martin agreed.

Both organizations do this through what they call “discipleship.” Discipleship is a process of one-on-one mentoring that is central to Campus Crusade’s work on campuses—though in history of Campus Crusade, John Turner points out that Bill Bright originally adopted the method from Campus Navigators, a like-minded organization of evangelical Protestants founded in 1958. The handbook for evangelical Protestant missionaries defines discipleship as a strategic friendship that is about “building into someone so that you are taking [them]…toward becoming a Christ-centered laborer.” Explaining how DIRECT defines and practices discipleship, Mary Clare described the day-to-day nature of her discipleship relationships. It means, she told me, “investing in people…living life together.” Through discipleship, she tried to be an example to students of what following Jesus looks like. She explained:

It takes really living life with someone to make this actual change in their life…So everything is an opportunity to teach. So whether I go to the grocery store or I’m working out or whatever I’m doing, it’s an opportunity for them to witness my life and for me to bring someone along with me…because I should be living this transformed way of life.

Formally, students and missionaries met once a week for an hour of discipleship. During these meetings, they prayed, checked in about their evangelizing efforts, and clarified any questions.

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107 Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, 204.
108 Martin, “Finding our DIRECTion.”
109 Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012). DIRECT is not alone among American Catholics in their discovery of discipleship. Weddell’s book was required reading for the missionaries in my region. There, she argues that discipleship is a necessary model for reinvigorating Catholic parishes.
110 Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, 60.
111 “A Primer on Discipleship,” 2.
112 Mary Clare, interview by author.
about Catholic teaching. Informally, discipleship was a carefully maintained friendship, which
required missionaries to see themselves as “living life together” and “hanging out” with
students.\textsuperscript{113} When I asked missionaries about their favorite discipleships, I heard stories of
missionaries training for “Tough Mudders” with students, doing Jillian Michaels’ workout DVDs
every morning for a month, baking cookies, going grocery shopping, and lots of coffee dates.

In both the Catholic and Protestant contexts, discipleship reflected a literal interpretation
of Jesus’ ministry as detailed in the synoptic gospels. The authors of Matthew, Mark, and Luke
all record Jesus sending out seventy-two disciples to tell other nations about him. They report
back to him about their travels. As one DIRECT missionary explained to me, the seventy-two
learned from the twelve who learned from the three—Peter, James, and John—who learned from
the one, Jesus. “He’s the model here,” she said. Jesus is “who we’re all learning from.”\textsuperscript{114}

These Catholic missionaries were winning over students and using discipleship to build
their relationships with Christ so that they could be sent out to evangelize others. This certainly
reflects evangelical Protestantism as a tributary of DIRECT. But to map DIRECT as a Catholic
Campus Crusade ignores an entire history of Catholic missionary work and theology. DIRECT
missionaries situated themselves in this Catholic lineage by choosing St. Ignatius of Loyola as
one of their patron saints. They imagined themselves as contemporary iterations of Ignatius’
Jesuits sent out to dangerous lands. I often heard missionaries quote Ignatius, encouraging one
another to “Go light the world on fire!” The sixteenth-century un-Christianized mission field of
the twenty-first century was the college campus. Missionaries also regularly invoked St. Thérèse
of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries. Missionaries told me that she modeled how to follow

\textsuperscript{113} “How to Disciple,” DIRECTEquip, accessed February 8, 2015,
\textsuperscript{114} Field notes, July 3, 2014.
God’s will for one’s life because she had so wanted to be a missionary but accepted what she understood as God’s call for her life to remain in a cloister in France, praying for missionaries.

In addition to inserting these saints’ histories into their collective identities, missionaries also implemented a Catholic theology of mission and evangelization. They were conversant in John Paul II’s Redemptoris Missio, where John Paul II urged readers to use the language and the culture of others to evangelize. As they had in 1998, DIRECT missionaries in 2012 interpreted this to mean that in order to reach college students, they needed to be on college campuses where college students were and doing what college students do. I often heard missionaries reference Pope Benedict XVI’s call for the “New Evangelization,” in which the pontiff encouraged Catholics in the West to re-propose Catholicism “to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization.”

Undergirding this language of Catholic evangelization was Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theology of mission. DIRECT missionaries encountered his theology in the writings of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. This theology indirectly but importantly influenced DIRECT’s missionary practices. Balthasar (1905-88) was a Swiss-born scholar of German language and culture who joined the Jesuits in 1928. He left the order in 1950 to found a “secular institute” of lay people committed to living the regulations of religious life while engaged in secular work, though he received recognition as a diocesan priest in Switzerland in 1956. In 1972, Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger co-founded the conservative-leaning journal Communio. Pope John Paul II appointed Balthasar a cardinal, and Ratzinger gave the homily at Balthasar’s funeral in 1988.

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117 Oakes, Pattern of Redemption, 163-65.
Balthasar’s theology of mission insisted that Christianity required evangelization. One of his contributions to Pope John Paul II’s—and later Benedict XVI’s—“New Evangelization” was his insistence that “the dynamism of the Christian kerygma [the preaching of salvation through Jesus] is inherently an outward moving one: it explodes outward by virtue of the dynamism of the Holy spirit, who calls on Christians to go out and preach to all nations, baptizing them.”[118] Balthasar told Catholics not to hide from the world, but to convert it.

[T]he role of the Church in the world is not to be a kind of alternative society, shut off and enclosed, a community or society preoccupied with its own internal affairs, a spiritual ‘society of the perfect’ that exists side by side with the secular order. The whole justification for her existence lies in her communicating to the rest of mankind the universally valid truths concerning God’s liberating and redeeming work.[119]

For Balthasar, Christians’ individual experiences of prayer must move them into the world, to engage others and to invite them into the Catholic community.[120] Balthasar envisioned Christians as able to offer a Christian counter-narrative to cultural norms. Balthasar acknowledged that this was not easy, but that hardship made it worthwhile. “It will be objected that such a program of action demands the character of a saint,” he admitted. “This may well be; but from the very beginning, Christian living has always been most credible, where at the very least it has shown a few faint signs of true holiness.”[121] True Christians must accept the challenge.

In a move that at once appropriated Protestant discipleship as Catholic practice, glossed Balthasar’s theology as a theology of discipleship, and utilized an old fault line between Catholics and Protestants, DIRECT called its evangelization “incarnational evangelization.” DIRECT materials define this as “offering the gift of your time and presence to talk about

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[118] Oakes, Pattern of Redemption, 152.
[120] Oakes, Pattern of Redemption, 152.
matters of faith.” One recent DIRECT alumna explained it in even more physical terms:

Jesus used his body and used his apostles to proclaim the gospel. And so it’s important for us to share the gospel in a very incarnational way. So, like, face-to-face, one-on-one with people. One of the basic principles of incarnational evangelization is that it’s through the love of in our life, it’s through the one-on-one, and through building a relationship with people that they get to meet Christ. In those relationships, we’re always drawing them deeper into the sacraments, into Scripture, and to the Liturgy.

Missionaries imagined themselves acting not only in imitation of Jesus’ ministerial methods but as being drawn into the life of Christ through Jesus’ real presence. Like Balthasar, missionaries understood “the incarnation [as] the ground for the possibility not only of creation but…also [as] the basis for all other dramas in world history.” For DIRECT missionaries, that drama consisted of sharing their lives with college students.

As they implemented DIRECT’s program on twenty-first-century college campuses, missionaries trafficked between Catholic theologies and evangelical Protestant strategies. Their evangelizing methods came straight out of Campus Crusade for Christ’s methods of collegiate evangelization. DIRECT missionaries imitated evangelicals, all the while inviting college students into a relationship with Jesus and the True Church, Catholicism.

This section began with Jeremy’s Catholic experience in an evangelical Protestant Bible study on a public college campus. Jeremy sought out a kind of Catholicism that he could not find at his “goofy” Newman Center. He found part of it among evangelical Protestants, with whom he experienced Christian community and from whom he learned to have a dynamic relationship with God. Never distant from his understanding of Catholicism as True, he sutured these experiences to his Catholic practices. The tributaries of DIRECT illustrate a similarly complex

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123 Jaime, interview by author, March 20, 2013, transcript.
124 Oakes, Pattern of Redemption, 220.
relationship between Catholics and evangelical Protestants. On one hand, DIRECT shared with Campus Crusade a fear that “secular” campuses will lead Catholics away from their religious community. On the other hand, the presence of evangelical Protestants on college campuses made DIRECT nervous. Even as the group described its amiable relationship with its “Protestant brothers and sisters,” DIRECT shared in the desire for Catholic specialness that drove Benedictine College’s adoption of Ex Corde and coursed through the undercurrents of the later years of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. DIRECT improved Campus Crusade for Christ’s methods with an emphasis on the real presence, the pope and Mass, Latin prayer, Mary and the saints. DIRECT’s missionaries were “evangelical Catholics” insofar as that label references a sometimes-precariously interwoven evangelical Protestantism and Catholic theology put in service to forming themselves and others as dynamically orthodox Catholics.

“We’re First-World Missionaries”

My life is a pledge drive!  
—Jenna, First-year Missionary

Just because I’m a missionary doesn’t mean I have to be dirt poor!  
—Noah, Fourth-year Missionary

Jenna was fresh from a whirlwind conversion experience when she began her first year as a missionary in fall 2012. On the cusp of graduating from a large state school in Texas, she had begun her senior year of college with plans to launch a career in advertising. She told me how unruly God was in her life, smiling and laughing as she said her plans were interrupted when “I really heard God’s voice on my heart for the first time. He said to me, ‘I want more for you.’”

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125 Field notes, March 6, 2013.
126 Noah, in discussion with author, April 4, 2013.
It was the middle of her senior year. Slowly she began to interpret that “more” as a call from God to be a DIRECT missionary.

One of the first things Jenna learned at New Staff Training was how to fundraise her entire salary, a process DIRECT called “Mission Partner Development.” If missionaries did not reach a minimum amount, they were not allowed to work on campus and were sent home until they had met their fundraising quotas. “Mission partners” usually included parishioners from missionaries’ home parishes, extended family members, friends, and friends’ parents. First-year missionaries like Jenna spent a large portion of summer training making initial contacts for their fundraising. They spent the next six to eight weeks in their hometowns, praying for and meeting with potential mission partners. Among the DIRECT missionaries I met, I encountered a huge range in attitudes toward raising their own salaries. A first-year missionary beamed, “I love fundraising—I love it!” and reported that every person she asked to do so had joined her support team.128 Another missionary admitted to me that she was not sure how she was going to raise the $800 per month more that she needed to raise in order to be back on campus the following year.129 Though I spoke with a handful of missionaries who worried about meeting their fundraising goals, I did not meet or even hear rumor of a missionary who had been sent home to raise funds. Missionaries fundraised at least $24,000 a year. Many missionaries raised more, though first-year missionaries’ salaries were capped at $2,500 per month. Career missionaries bought houses, raised families, and tithed while “on support.”

In this respect, DIRECT illustrates John Turner’s claim that “Campus Crusade’s innovative and successful fundraising initiatives, such as requiring staff to raise their own

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128 Delilah, interview by author, April 8, 2013, transcript; Field notes, April 20, 2013.
129 Field notes, April 20, 2013.
support, [has] inspired many imitators.”¹³⁰ The core principle of Campus Crusade’s fundraising was to “persuade evangelical donors that the fulfillment of the Great Commission required money and that Crusade’s evangelistic strategies were a cost-effective means of spreading the gospel.”¹³¹ DIRECT explicitly imitated this fundraising strategy. The organization used the same electronic database system that Campus Crusade developed, and both organizations have been trained by Steve Shadrach’s “Support Raising Boot Camps.”

In 2013, DIRECT distributed its *MPD Handbook* along with Steve Shadrach’s most recent fundraising manual, *The God Ask: A Fresh Biblical Approach to Personal Support Raising*. Shadrach, an evangelical Protestant minister, has been living “on support” since the mid-1980s. Curtis Martin endorsed Shadrach’s book, describing it as “a deeply biblical and powerfully convincing call for those who are sent into mission to never go alone….We will be fully equipped when we have the prayers and full financial support we need to share the gospel.”¹³² The logic of “the God Ask” is triangulated. The two bottom angles are “ministry worker” (DIRECT missionary) and “potential supporter” (mission partner). The top of the triangle is God. An arrow from the ministry worker points to God and says, “Ask for provision.” An arrow from the potential supporter points to God and says, “Ask where to invest.” An arrow from the ministry worker to the potential supporter says, “Invitation to invest.”¹³³ A second-year missionary from rural North Dakota unpacked this for me by emphasizing that he tried to think of all of the money as God’s, “When we ask our mission partners to give, we ask them to give to God, so that they’re giving directly to God, and God is giving us the resources to do this work on

¹³¹ Ibid.
Missionaries were to be responsible stewards of their salaries by thanking mission partners promptly, writing quarterly newsletters, and manage their finances well.

Significantly, DIRECT’s fundraising instructions begin not with the logistics of how to raise enough money but by “casting the vision” of raising one’s own salary. DIRECT’s *MPD Handbook* teaches missionaries that the work of raising their own salaries is a spiritual practice. It is part of how God expects Christians to work in the world: “This is God’s plan. If there were a better way, Jesus and St. Paul would have found it!” Fundraising is so much more than having enough money for clothes and food and coffee dates on campus. The first pages of the handbook are a novena to St. Joseph and the DIRECT development prayer:

> We realize that this important ministry of development can be both fulfilling and challenging. Help us to learn that development isn’t “fundraising,” but rather the way to involve people in DIRECT…Our goal in development is to build a sense of spiritual bonding, community, friendship and commitment. A result of achieving our goal will be financial support. Help me to overcome the notion that development is simply “asking for money.” Help me and others realize that development actually brings people close to you, dear Lord…Let me learn that development is not a win-lose situation, that development is really a process of bringing Christ to people and people to Christ…Let this ministry of development be successful by blessing us and giving us the courage to tell the story of Catholicism with boldness, conviction, commitment and love.

Fundraising was also evangelization focused on “bringing Christ to people and people to Christ.” It was about training oneself to be “vulnerable, in order to serve others.” Missionaries should sacrifice pride, as Christ did. New missionaries were taught to pray over the names of potential mission partners. They took their budgets into their Holy Hours, and they prayed before going to an “face-to-face” appointment with a family friend or grade-school teacher. Fundraising was a performance of trusting God. This prayer instructed missionaries to approach raising their salary

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134 Joel, interview by author, April 23, 2013, transcript.
135 Noah, interview by author, April 4, 2013, transcript.
137 *MPD FY11 Handbook*, 1. This prayer was written by Petrus Development, a Catholic organization that trains Catholic ministries in higher education on how to do sustainable fundraising.
with an expectant attitude toward God’s generosity.

This prayerful and confident attitude toward money reflects the influence of the prosperity gospel in American religious life in the emergence of DIRECT. In her history of the American prosperity gospel, Kate Bowler details the rise of the practices of prayer bringing about financial abundance. She posits four markers of the “prosperity gospel:”

1. It conceives of faith as an activator; a power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns the spoken word into reality.
2. The movement depicts faith as palpably demonstrated in wealth and health. It can be measured in both the wallet (one’s personal wealth) and in the body (one’s personal health), making material reality the measure of the success of immaterial faith.
3. The movement expects faith to be marked by victory. Believers trust that culture holds no political, social, or economic impediment to faith, and no circumstance can stop believers from living in total victory here on earth.

In her account, Catholics encountered these ideas most explicitly during the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. But by the end of the twentieth century, she argues, the prosperity gospel had “lost its sectarian flavor” and become a “new style of piety” reflected more broadly in ubiquitous American cultural idioms like “abundant life’ and ‘I’m blessed.’” While the prosperity gospel has been understood as having poor, working-class Americans as its audience, Bowler argues this particularity has receded in recent years. The sensibilities of the prosperity gospel were in the religious air missionaries and their mission partners breathed. To hear Catholic missionaries in 2013 describe their fundraising as “very blessed” or tell me that God has “just given me the funds I’ve needed” and “God has blessed me so much with [fundraising], that I can’t complain too much.

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139 Bowler, Blessed, 68-74.
140 Bowler, Blessed, 236.
141 Linda, interview by author, April 4, 2013, transcript.
142 Thai, interview by author, April 5, 2013, transcript.
about it”¹⁴³ is to hear resonances of prosperity pastors like Reverend Kirbyjon Caldwell shouting, “‘God has promised you power, abundance, and good success…God’s provisions are for His children.’”¹⁴⁴ Caldwell provides a particularly useful indication of the intersection between DIRECT fundraising and the prosperity gospel. His messages to a largely white congregation have tended to avoid the promises of instantaneous wealth that are part of other prosperity gospel pastors’ messages. Instead Caldwell “promised readers a sure path to God-given prosperity and the miracles wrought by the divine ‘multiplication process’ of tithing.”¹⁴⁵ This version of the prosperity gospel de-emphasizes that immediate wealth is to be gained from prayer yet maintains that there are physical manifestations to be reaped by having faith. A similar emphasis on the slow, tedious work of praying and fundraising was part of DIRECT’s fundraising strategy. Mission partner development required prayer and the hard work of asking people for money. Missionaries were taught to be confident that God would bless their commitment. Being able to raise enough money for one’s tenure with DIRECT was interpreted as “proof” that God was indeed calling you to this work.¹⁴⁶ Missionaries had an easy relationship with money because it was spiritual cache. The money was God’s; they were conduits of it.

This is not to suggest that missionaries explicitly practiced the prosperity gospel but to point out the ways that their fundraising and their prayers about fundraising were inflected by the historical and contemporary religious-cultural milieu around them. DIRECT missionaries have been influenced by the profusion of the prosperity gospel in late twentieth-century American religious life. They participated in an optimistic, trust-in-God relationship with money that came of age at the same time the organization was growing in size. DIRECT appropriated this

¹⁴³ Caitlin, interview by author, April 22, 2013, transcript.
¹⁴⁴ Bowler, Blessed, 123.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ Mitch, in discussion with author, October 30, 2012.
approach—perhaps unconsciously—in its personal finances.

But, Bowler points out, the optimism and faith in the individual that pervaded the prosperity gospel has often been undercut by a constant concern about money. This was true for missionaries’ relationships with their personal fundraising, too. As much as she appreciated the work of fundraising, one missionary told me she was relieved not to have to fundraise her salary in her post-DIRECT job. Another missionary told me her fundraising had become a divisive issue between her and her parents, who expected her to pay back the salary she asked of their neighbors once she ended her tenure as a missionary.\footnote{147 Jackie, interview by author, April 5, 2013, transcript.} One disgruntled missionary alumnus, Dylan, had spent five years on DIRECT staff and told me that he always felt like there was just too much emphasis on fundraising. He scoffed at the correlation he thought DIRECT made too starkly between asking for money and bringing people into the Church, “It is not that fundraising equates evangelization!”\footnote{148 Dylan, interview by author, August 22, 2013, transcript.} Dylan’s sneer reflected his larger concern about the time-consuming nature of fundraising. Raising their salaries was not the work of reaching out to students, talking about Jesus, and creating a Catholic presence on campus. Missionaries were pragmatic about this, and tried to frame fundraising as that which invited others allowed others to participate in the mission. But it always threatened to fall out of balance.

Jenna grew up in one of the highest-grossing parishes in her home diocese in Texas. Despite her parents’ lack of enthusiasm about Jenna having to fundraise her salary from their friends and colleagues, it had not been challenging for her to raise money from that Catholic network. In her last month on campus, Jenna appealed to members of our faith-sharing group, inviting us to become mission partners. One afternoon in May, she made a “God Ask” of me, too. We sat on well-worn couches in the Catholic center, and she explained to me both the high
stakes of my participation on her support team and the real implications of my financial contribution: “I could not physically be living here without the financial support of my mission partners… They are directly helping further the mission of the Church… It’s a way of incorporating everyone into this mission.”149 Embedded in Jenna’s “ask” was an unarticulated assumption about the ability of people in her life to contribute financially to her salary. At summer training, missionaries were given a “memory jogger” and instructed to “‘Name-storm’ a list of 200+ people” from all areas of life, from family members to grade-school teachers to apartment managers. “Do not pre-judge,” the handbook demanded, “who can give and who cannot give.”150 The lead trainer taught new missionaries never to start with an ask that is less than 100 dollars. Jenna explained had found people could be surprisingly willing to give. She shrugged, telling me that if she starts at 100 dollars, then whatever they counter back with will “probably be great.”151 Jenna’s relative ease fundraising her salary highlights the fact that most DIRECT missionaries were born into relatively privileged middle-class Catholic families.

One of the tributaries of DIRECT is the emergence of a notable portion of Catholics with enough financial stability to set aside income consistently to make tax-deductible donations to support nonprofit organizations like DIRECT. Sociologists demonstrate that Catholics’ income levels increased throughout the twentieth century, “achieving parity with Protestants by mid-century.”152 Data from longitudinal studies demonstrate that Catholics have experienced a steady increase since the 1980s. In 2005, 37% of Catholics reported incomes of more than $75,000.153

149 Jenna, interview by author, May 18, 2013, transcript.
150 MPD FY11 Handbook, 12
151 Jenna, interview by author.
By 2011, almost half of non-Hispanic millennials reported incomes over $75,000. In 2001, as DIRECT missionaries were just beginning to do mission partner development, the data demonstrated that “Catholics are now well above the national average in educational achievement, occupational status, and family income.”

While DIRECT’s ability to fundraise from individuals and local parishes reflected this move of a significant portion of Catholics into some financial stability, it was also paired with a long history of Catholic philanthropy. Even when the majority of Catholics in the U.S. were working-class immigrants, many Catholics donated their labor or money to build and expand their parishes’ infrastructures. While Catholics of previous generations denoted money to building churches and providing social services, DIRECT missionaries and funders reflect a social class of more affluent Catholics who are willing to support less tangible projects, like evangelizing college students. As an organization reliant on individual fundraisers, DIRECT depends on Catholics attaining a certain level of comfort and ownership in a social class that can afford to spend around 100 dollars each month supporting missionaries in the first world. DIRECT’s fast-growing size was contingent on Catholics having sufficient access to donatable income. The emergence of financially stable Catholic communities, upon which missionaries like Jenna relied on for their financial livelihood, reflects one of the inheritances of DIRECT.

In addition to the upward mobility of the American Catholic population that enabled DIRECT to fundraise salaries and expand as quickly as it has, DIRECT fundraising assumes that missionaries are entitled by God to material abundance. DIRECT’s MPD Handbook reminds missionaries that they “live in the first world—with first-world financial needs and

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155 D’Antonio et al., American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment, 4.
responsibilities… We approach MPD with a mentality of abundance, not one of scarcity, for we know that God will provide for all our needs.”

Early in my research, I asked a team leader named Tabitha if she ever had qualms about spending her neighbors’ or parents’ or friends’ money on her smartphone bill or a new scarf. She did not skip a beat before saying, “We’re first-world missionaries.” She explained that they needed to have the tools to help them relate to the students in her mission field, smartphones, hip clothes, and new scarves included. In these ways, DIRECT missionaries position themselves as able to “meet people where they are.”

“First-world missionaries” cultivated consumption habits in a way that helped them to be perceived as in-step with middle-class millennial culture on college campuses and to increase their appeal to twenty-first-century college students. A missionary assigned to reach out to sororities told me that when she first went to evangelize at a sorority house, she made sure to put on her “cutest top” and took care to re-apply her make up. Jenna told me that they needed cars to be able to drive students places and enough money to rent apartments near campus.

DIRECT’s insistence that missionaries “meet people where they are” bears resemblance to the solidarity tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, which provides Catholics with a lexicon for talking about physical poverty and inequality, its causes, and modes of response. First articulated by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Nevarum* (1891) and further developed by the succeeding popes, Catholic social doctrine details the problem of wealth disparity in the contemporary age and the Church’s responsibility for the physically poor. Leo XIII urged:

> The Church is [not] so preoccupied with the spiritual concerns of her children as to neglect their temporal and earthly interests. Her desire is that the poor, for example, should rise above poverty and wretchedness, and better their condition in life; and for this

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157 Burger, “Reaching the Heart of College Students,” 5.
158 Field notes, April 4, 2013.
she makes a strong endeavor.\(^{160}\)

Poverty in this encyclical refers to material realities. More recently, the U.S. Bishops have summarized this teaching as “solidarity,” which they define as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good…to the good…of each individual.”\(^{161}\) Solidarity—being with the poor—challenges Catholics to meet material needs of all.

Among missionaries, poverty was discussed in spiritual terms. Tabitha told me she felt called to respond to a spiritual poverty on a college campus. At the end of her two years as a missionary, she explained that she felt more called than ever to evangelize because: “Every single person on this planet… all of it is them searching for Jesus Christ. And I have this, I have this answer. I have this cure. And I need to tell them about it.”\(^{162}\) This is the language of poverty in Catholic social doctrine with a categorical shift to describe individuals’ spiritual lives. When DIRECT missionaries invoke “solidarity” through the language of “meeting students where they are,” they mean drinking coffee on a Monday afternoon, attending a football game on campus, or passing out Chipotle burritos after the nine o’clock Mass on Sunday nights.\(^{163}\) When missionaries invoked “the poor,” they were aware of physically impoverished parts of the world, and many have traveled to a corner of it with DIRECT Missions trips.\(^{164}\) But even in encounters with the physically poor, that physical poverty was translated into spiritual terms. When Alexandra returned from leading a Missions trip to Alaska, I asked her if she connected the trip to the daily life of missionaries and college students on campus. She explained that she helps

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\(^{162}\) Tabitha, interview by author, April 30, 2013, transcript.

\(^{163}\) Kaden, interview by author, April 3, 2013, transcript.

\(^{164}\) FOCUS Missions began with a trip to Peru in 2004. In 2013-14, they sent fifteen spring- and twenty-one summer-break trips, ranging in length from a week to six weeks, to impoverished areas of the world and U.S.
them make the translation between the poverty of rural Alaska and the poverty of students.

You encounter Jesus in the poor. Because, I mean, He’s so close to the poor. And, like, you just encounter Him and, like, come to…know and love Him. And love His people more. And then you translate to the spiritual poverty on campus. And then it’s like, oh my gosh! This person is dying. The same way that that person was dying because they didn’t have enough food to eat, like, this person is dying because they don’t know Jesus….I need to bring the word of God to them.165

This reinterpretation of “solidarity” reflects the work of “first-world missionaries” to emphasize the spiritual poverty of college students. The force of this discourse both de-emphasizes physical poverty and shifts the meanings of “poor” in Catholic Social Teaching into metaphor. This illustrates the priorities of the social class that made DIRECT’s first-world mission possible.

Conclusion

The five tributaries that converge in the founding of DIRECT reflect a series of historical, cultural, and religious developments in late-twentieth-century U.S. Catholicism. DIRECT missionaries evangelize college students at the confluence of postconciliar shifts in Catholic prayer, efforts to reclaim Catholic exceptionalism in both Catholic higher education and on secular college campuses, Catholics’ conflicted interactions with evangelical Protestants, and the profuse influence of the American prosperity gospel on an emergent Catholic middle class.

In addition to describing the inheritances of DIRECT’s Catholic evangelization, this chapter has outlined several of the methods and rationales of DIRECT. Though these mechanisms importantly illustrate a confluence of Catholic theology and evangelical Protestant methods, how missionaries pray also informs and shapes their work on college campuses. The next two chapters explicitly analyze the relationships between prayer practices and the subject formation of these missionaries. As Balthasar obliquely taught DIRECT, the first act of

165 Alexandra, interview by author, May 6, 2013, transcript.
evangelization must always be “contemplative…prayerful gaze upon the form of Christ.” Missionaries told me that without regular prayer lives and time spent in Adoration, they felt unable to evangelize effectively on campuses. As DIRECT’s multiple tributaries shaped missionaries’ methods, missionaries’ prayers shape them as millennial Catholic missionaries.

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Chapter 2. Praying Holy Hour and Millennial Missionary Subjectivity

You talk to God about college students for an hour, and for the rest of the day you talk to college students about God.

—DIRECT Training Manual

When they first told me at training that we’d be praying a Holy Hour every single day, in the morning at training, I said, ‘Okay, I will be taking nap for an hour every morning!’ It’s just so hard to stay awake! But that silence is so important. That’s how we get to know Jesus. It’s like any other relationship; you have to spend time with them. You wouldn’t have a good marriage or a good relationship if you didn’t spend time together.

—Alexandra, Third-year Missionary

When I arrived at the Catholic chapel on Northwestern’s campus at nine o’clock in the morning, the heater was working hard to warm up the large, quiet space. Two men and two women, all recent college graduates, were also arriving for daily Holy Hour. Mia, Jenna, and Allen genuflected before kneeling in their pews. I mimicked them and knelt a few pews behind Mia, the twenty-four-year-old party-girl-turned-Catholic missionary who had invited me. Both Mia and Jenna eschewed the kneelers and knelt on the floor. Allen yawned and blinked his way into a pew. Daniel, the team leader, prepared to expose the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. With a blend of familiarity, reverence, and sense of purpose, he placed a large host in a modest monstrance, genuflected, and then knelt down in front of the altar with his back to us. He led us in a Latin hymn that I did not recognize that morning, but would memorize over the course of my fieldwork, “O Salutoris Hostia.” After a few minutes of kneeling in quiet, Daniel found a place in the pews. On their own accord, each missionary sat back in their pews, studied the monstrance, pulled out Bibles, iPhones or journals, and prayed a Holy Hour.

When recent a college graduate committed to spend two years as a DIRECT missionary,

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2 Alexandra, in discussion with author, June 19, 2013.
he or she also committed to praying a Holy Hour each day. This was one hour dedicated to quiet time in prayer, usually spent in front of a consecrated host in a chapel with the other members of their missionary team. One missionary described it as a form of requisite generosity. “To tithe ten percent of our time,” she told me, “is to give an hour.” Another joked that Holy Hour was her “contractually obligated” prayer. Though I heard occasional stories of lackluster participation, the missionaries I met were consistent in their practice. Long-time missionaries and alumni described Holy Hour as part of what made missionary life difficult, but also formative.

Throughout my ethnography, I was regularly surprised by the diversity I observed within Holy Hour practices. Some missionaries spent the entire hour kneeling, while others sat very still in the pew, and others seemed to struggle to stay awake no matter how they moved their bodies. Sometimes missionaries smiled for most of the hour, and sometimes they grimaced. Missionaries rarely did the exact same thing two days in a row, though they did develop a general routine of prayer. I saw occasional tears. Holy Hour, I slowly learned, involved a set of prayer practices that formed (and re-formed) each missionary’s body, imagination, and will. It was also an intersubjective practice by means of which missionaries worked on themselves and were worked on by their DIRECT community and their ever-developing relationship with Jesus. The practices of Holy Hour were the making of what I call “missionary subjectivities.”

Subjectivity, as I am using it in this dissertation (and as I described more fully in the introduction), is the dynamic process of interrelated selves whose situatedness in the world depends on relationships with others, ideas, and social worlds. As Judith Butler has described the experience of intersubjectivity, “we’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing

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3 Jackie, interview by author, April 5, 2013, transcript.
4 Field notes, April 20, 2013.
something.” Missionary subjectivity, as I posit it in this chapter, is the co-constitutive, ongoing cultivation of young adults who were trying to “make disciples of all nations” through DIRECT’s incarnational evangelization. Young adults became missionaries by their ongoing training from DIRECT, the day-to-day influence of co-missionaries, and through their practices of prayer.

I use the language of “subjectivity” (rather than selves) because it attends to the ongoing, never-static, always-interrelatedness of the formation of missionaries. “Subjectivity” embeds a dynamism and a way of talking about the ever-in-process nature of missionary prayer. This term also keeps me cognizant of the multiple relationships at work in prayer. Becoming missionaries was an interdependent process. Millennial-generation Catholics learned to be missionaries from one another, from their interpretations of God’s will, and from DIRECT’s instructions on how to evangelize. To become a missionary was not just to learn how to do a job. To become a missionary was also to commit to shape oneself and to allow oneself to be shaped into the kind of subjectivity that understood evangelization—and its related demands of personal prayer life, dynamic relationships with saints and Jesus, and physical-emotional suffering—as central. This missionary subjectivity formation was a ceaseless process.

This chapter examines how young adults became missionaries in and through daily Holy Hour. This was not easy and missionaries often discussed the challenges. Through practicing embodied prayer forms that involved physical suffering, developing prayer imaginations that established and maintained relationships with divine beings, and cultivating evangelizing wills that were oriented to God’s will for daily life, millennial Catholics were becoming missionaries.

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DIRECT’s Holy Hour: An Overview

Mia was the first of many missionaries to explain to me the importance of Holy Hour. When I first met her, the team had just finished a grueling “Fall Outreach.” DIRECT teaches missionaries that within seventy-two hours of setting foot on campus, most college students have met the network of friends that they will have throughout college and into their careers. Worried and motivated by what they understood as the vulnerability of students in those first hours on campus, DIRECT teams made themselves part of the world students encountered. They attended all sorts of events, slept very little, talked to as many students as possible, drank a lot of coffee, and collected phone numbers. I asked Mia how she kept from burning out. She smiled and shrugged, “Prayer. Jesus fills me up. You can’t give what you don’t have.” Really? I asked, “You never feel emptied out by all the giving?” “No way,” she shook her head. “Because He’s [Jesus] with me, doing it. He fills me up. That’s why Mass and Holy Hours are so important.”

Holy Hour was how Mia met Jesus and was filled with the sustenance to evangelize on campus.

When missionaries entered quiet chapels to spend an hour in prayer, they were participating in a history of Holy Hour devotions that dates to the visions of a young, middle-class woman in seventeenth-century France. Margaret Mary Alocouque (1647-1690) had a series of visions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in late 1673 and early 1674. The first visions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had occurred sixty years before hers, by St. Francis de Sales in 1611. Not long after his vision, De Sales founded the Visitation order, which Alocouque joined 1671. She told her biographer that Jesus instructed her in how to perform the Holy Hour devotion. Calling her “my slave” and “well-beloved disciple of My Sacred Heart,” Christ instructed her to spend an hour each Thursday night meditating on the suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane,

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To rise between eleven o’clock and midnight on the night between Thursday and Friday of every week, and to prostrate for an hour with her face to the ground, in expiation of the sins of men, and to console His Heart for that general deception, to which the weakness of the apostles in the Garden of Olives had been only a slight prelude.”

Following Jesus’ instructions, often against her Superior’s wishes, Alocoque would lie prostrate with her arms stretched out in a cross for an hour. There, one hagiographer wrote, “the Lord made her ineffably participate in the sorrows of her agony.”

This practice of weekly “Eucharistic Holy Hour” spread through monastic communities in France. By 1890, one of Alocoque’s biographers (and advocate of her canonization) claimed that the practice had gained popularity, especially among women, “In every region, also, are found Christians—wives, mothers, young girls, priests and virgins consecrated to God—who rise in the night between Thursday and Friday, who come to watch with Him to weep with Him, and sometimes even to impress on their flesh the sacred marks of His Passion.”

Eucharistic Holy Hour emerged alongside other Eucharistic devotions in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Missionary priests from France and Italy brought these devotions to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1917, a Jesuit named Fr. Francis Donnelly celebrated an increase in Holy Hour practice in the U.S. Donnelly instructed that a Holy Hour ought to include practices of “meditation, reflection, vocal prayer, and hymns,” though he insisted there was “no fixed way of practicing the devotion.” Twenty-five years later, Fr. Declan Carroll, in An Hour of Adoration is the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament, prescribed

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10 Bougaud, The Life of St. Margaret Mary Alocoque, 198; Charles Daniel, SJ., History of Blessed Margaret-Mary, A Religious of the Visitation of Saint-Mary (New York, NY, P O'Shea Publisher,1867), 158.
11 Bougaud, The Life of St. Margaret Mary Alocoque, 178.
a stricter structure for Holy Hour, which included a schedule of recited prayer, Gospel readings, Psalms, and “pause for contemplation” after each fifteen-minute segment.¹⁴

Never as popular as other lay Eucharistic devotions, such as First Friday, Holy Hour remained one of the devotion practices that declined in use in the U.S. after the Second Vatican Council. Since the 1990s, the practice has experienced a renaissance in the Catholic subculture surrounding DIRECT. For example, Mother Theresa of Calcutta told her sisters to pray two Holy Hours a day when things became busy. TAN Books republished Donnelly’s instructions for Holy Hour. Members of DIRECT’s social media network cheered when Pope Francis called on all Catholics to pray a Holy Hour with the intention that they ask God to stop the U.S. from taking military action against Syria in June 2013.

While most missionaries agreed with Donnelly’s assessment that Holy Hour need not have an overly scripted structure each day, they did tend to adopt regular routines of daily prayer. Five practices generally constituted a “good” Holy Hour: Adoration, lectio divina, mental prayer, intercessory prayer, and spiritual reading. According to Mia, Adoration was time for “hanging out with Jesus.” Another missionary, Alexandra once enthused, “We are truly in His presence in Adoration. Body, mind, soul and divinity, you know? He humbled Himself to let us hang out with Him.” Adoration facilitated a “hang-out” session with the real presence of Jesus.¹⁵

Missionaries spent anywhere from five to twenty minutes kneeling in Adoration (often kneeling directly on the floor), and then sat back in their pews where they turned to breviaries or Bibles in order to pray lectio divina. They selected passages from the Bible based either on the daily Mass readings or on divine intervention, via “Bible roulette.” “Lectio,” in missionary

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shorthand, was reading the Bible with the intention of hearing God’s voice through scripture. This lasted for about twenty minutes and ideally transitioned into “mental prayer.” In this “conversation with God,” missionaries talked and then listened for God’s voice. In the hierarchy of DIRECT prayer forms, mental prayer was second only to the Mass, which was considered “prayer perfected.” Missionaries reported that mental prayer most clearly sustained their relationship with God. Thirty minutes is a “prime amount of time,” for mental prayer, Jenna explained to me, because it “give[s] Him the chance” to speak.

When mental prayer felt exhausted (and exhausting), missionaries turned to two other, slightly more structured, prayer forms. Intercessory Prayer, which Jenna described as “prayer intentions for what’s going on with friends, family, mission partners, students, anything like that,” was missionaries’ prayer for others. Kelly, a missionary to athletes at a large university, took out her iPad mini and showed me her lists of every female athlete on campus. She prayed for the members of each team once a week. Intercessory prayer was where missionaries considered what people in (and near) their lives needed and then asked God to provide it. It was also a way in which missionaries prepared to act as God instructed them in the daily task of evangelization on campus. After intercessions, many missionaries concluded their Holy Hour with spiritual reading. Linda sighed as she reported on this part of her routine to me, “and then some spiritual reading, depending…” Linda’s ellipse here indicated that she turned to spiritual reading only as a last resort. If mental prayer and lectio had been “good,” there would be no time for spiritual reading. Turning to a book was an admission of exhaustion at prayer. Despite

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16 Field notes, March 14, 2013.
17 Ibid.
18 Jenna, interview by author, February 7, 2013, transcript.
19 Kelly, interview by author, April 23, 2013, transcript.
20 Linda, interview by author, April 4, 2013, transcript; Kelly, interview by author, April 23, 2013, transcript.
sharing this resignation, Jenna found value in spiritual reading because it helped her “to be well-rounded and soaking up virtue and a good worldview.”\(^\text{21}\)

Holy Hour ended when the most senior male missionary on the team decided the hour was over, approached the altar, removed the host from the tabernacle, and led the team in “\textit{Tantum Ergo.}” Missionaries slowly left the chapel and gravitated into the common area, where they chatted with one another about how their prayer had gone and their plans for the day.

\section*{Bodies at Prayer}

\begin{quote}
Why aren’t we down on our knees every time we go to Mass, sobbing?\(^\text{22}\)
—Mia, Third-year Missionary
\end{quote}

I genuflected, knelt, and sat behind Mia during many Holy Hours during my fieldwork. I watched her use her bedazzled iPhone to find the daily readings in the \textit{Laudate} app and open DIRECT’s “Acts 2:47” mobile app to pray for the students she mentored and met on campus. Some days, she flipped through her large Bible with gold-rimmed pages. Other days, she flipped through some “spiritual reading,” something by her beloved St. Gemma Galgani or a simple apologetic text by Chris Stefanick. I recorded all of this, but my field notes primarily describe how carefully her body moved during the hour. She knelt on both knees and bowed her head to the floor before entering the pew. Then she swung her large shoulder bag into the pew and knelt on the floor, foregoing the kneelers. If she arrived late from oversleeping (she often did), and Daniel was already at the altar exposing the host, she dropped to her knees at the entrance of the chapel, letting the door swing shut behind her. When she did settle into her pew, she sat very still. Her arms were crossed in front of her as she looked toward the monstrance and the huge statue of Jesus that hung over the altar. She fell asleep some mornings. Every once in a while,

\(^\text{21}\) Field notes, January 13, 2013.
\(^\text{22}\) Field notes, July 24, 2013.
she knelt for most of the hour. Sometimes her body slumped over the pew. When she needed to leave what she described as her “conversation with Jesus” to use a tissue or the restroom, she carefully stepped out of the pew, knelt on both knees and bowed her head to the floor, again. She stood up and took a few steps backwards before turning around to walk out of the chapel. A few times, she blew a kiss toward the altar, a good-bye gesture to Jesus.

Scholarship on prayer emphasizes the mental act of conversation or imaginative interaction of prayer. Missionaries certainly did talk with God and “pay attention to internal mental experiences,” as anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann describes the prayer of some evangelical Protestants. Missionaries’ Holy Hour practices did require what Luhrmann calls “mental muscles” and situated missionaries “on the boundary between thought and perception, between what is attributed to the mind…and what exists in the world.” But, DIRECT prayer, like Catholic prayer more generally, was much more than mental and emotional exercise. Particular bodily comportments constituted and complicated missionaries’ prayer. They bowed before receiving Communion, genuflected to the ground before the real presence, and knelt on the bare floor in Holy Hour. A study of prayer that describes this practice as primarily a mental relationship with God does not attend to the fullness and embodiment of prayer.

At the same time, to describe bodies as praying is not to describe prayer as primarily submission to a disciplining force, as anthropologist Talal Asad implies. Mia and her co-floor-kneeling missionaries were certainly distant descendants of the medieval monks in Asad’s genealogy, who were certainly distant descendants of the medieval monks in Asad’s

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hierarchy) by lying prostrate on cold floors. Mia’s descriptions of her prayer life also emphasized her emotional and imaginative engagement with the suffering of Christ. In this context, Adoration was not just mental (Luhrmann) nor was it only the disciplining of missionaries’ bodies (Asad). Prayer happened in, through, and on Catholic bodies. Embodied prayer was a dynamic interplay between mind, emotions, and body during Holy Hour.

The suffering of Christ was at the center of the aesthetic of Holy Hour. St. Mary Margaret Alocoque’s devotion, embodied by lying prostrate, was meant to inspire within the devout an experience of and desire for sharing in the “suffer[ing] with Christ” in the agony of the Garden. This emphasis on pain reflects that the practice gained prominence in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century France. The push for Alocoque’s canonization took place between 1864 and 1920. During these fifty years of French Catholic history, several advocates appealed to the Vatican for approval of the Holy Hour devotion. The Archconfraternity of the Holy Hour was founded by a French priest in 1829, and received canonical approval in 1911. Likewise, “The Holy Perpetual Hour of Gethsemane” was formed in Toulouse, France in 1885 and was formally approved as a devotion by the Vatican in 1907. In 1909, the Holy Hour devotion received indulgences from Pope Pius X.

Eucharistic Holy Hour participates in what theologian Brenna Moore has described as “the suffering-centered imaginaire” at the center of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century French Catholicism. Moore argues that those who “suffered vicariously” with Christ were able to “imaginatively enter into the experience of the suffering Christ in a way that sits unpredictably and uneasily with the everyday reality of history.” Physical suffering was not to be avoided, but
embraced as a site of potential “inner experience of intimacy with God.”

This nineteenth-century French emphasis on suffering was pressed into the tradition of Holy Hour by the advocates of Alocoque’s canonization and the formal approval of Holy Hour devotionalism. That suffering aesthetic was made manifest in the twenty-first century U.S. as millennial missionaries comported their bodies in prayer in a way that allowed them to suffer physically.

One example of the suffering body at prayer was Mia’s discipline of kneeling on the floor. I once asked Mia why she knelt on the floor instead of the kneeler during Holy Hour (and sometimes during Mass, too, if she had space in the pew to do so). She laughed and then explained that she started doing it as a “little extra penance” during her five weeks at New Staff Training as a new missionary and had continued the discipline since. Though it was strongly enforced through communal expectation and missionary peer pressure, kneeling in this way was not forced upon or required of Mia. Choosing to kneel and deny herself the comfort of padded kneelers attuned Mia’s prayer to Jesus’ suffering.

But kneeling on the carpeted floor in a well-heated chapel after eating breakfast and drinking a Red Bull seems an incomparable kind of suffering. Like the “micropractices of disciplines” that anthropologist Rebecca Lester described among recently cloistered young nuns, Mia and her co-missionaries were enacting a suffering that was “much subtler, more nuanced than rigorous fasting, wearing of hair shirts, or painful flagellation” practices of prayer. I call them “micro-sufferings.” These little sacrifice of comforts focused missionaries’ attention to” the body’s location and movement in space, bodily expressions of the attitude of self, manipulation of desires for spiritual ends.” The “little penances” or “micro-sufferings” that missionaries put on

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their bodies attuned them to discomfort as a mode of prayer and evangelization.  

At DIRECT’s New Staff Training, I watched the majority of three hundred missionaries kneel on the stone floor of the oratory. As I imitated them, I thought about a missionary who had told me about the temptation to kneel in order to catch the eye of a male missionary. She laughed at herself for trying to kneel to look more holy to missionary men,

And just…[kneeling on the floor] doesn’t make you more holy. It’s about your relationship with Jesus, you know. If your knees are hurting, well, you either need to intentionally offer that up or, like, start sitting down because you’re being distracted so much you’re not even paying attention to Jesus! Therefore, you’re not praying and you’re thinking about your knees, which is yourself. It’s not about you!

Kneeling—prayer felt and experienced in the knees—was meant to help missionaries both participate (however mildly) in and be cognizant of the magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice.

There was also tactical purpose to DIRECT’s kneeling. The sore knees and stiff backs of this embodied prayer were intended to cultivate missionaries’ willingness to suffer as necessary for the sake of evangelization. Praying with an awareness of Christ’s suffering raised the stakes of their work. Challenges on campus seemed small, Mia sighed, when set in relief against Christ’s crucifixion. Mia echoed several missionaries when she explained that since Jesus had died for the sake of all souls, the least she could do was suffer potential embarrassment by talking about Jesus on campus.

This sensory attunement to Christ’s suffering demanded a response from missionaries. So they knelt in preparation for what Jenna once described as a “dying to self” in reaching out to students. Jenna and others did not suffer physical death as Jesus or the martyrs did, but

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27 Rebecca Lester, *Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 36.
28 Jackie, interview by author, April 5, 2013, transcript.
30 Field notes, April 24, 2013.
nonetheless, suffered a death of pride, selfishness, and arrogance (to list a few examples that I heard). Alexandra told me that she often thought of Holy Hour in the chapel as “training” for being “out there” and she gestured to campus. Giving an example, she told me she preferred to be in bed at ten o’clock at night, but that is when the club Lacrosse team on campus started practice. Because she felt called by God to evangelize these athletes, she stayed up late to play on the team in hopes that it might lead to conversations about faith. She described it as making a choice “to sacrifice my comfort for others’ conversion.”31 Her sacrifice of kneelers in the chapel prepared her to be able and willing to sacrifice beyond the chapel. The body’s involvement in micro-sufferings prepared missionaries’ minds and hearts to take risks on campus.

These physical micro-sufferings also seemed to make their work on campus feel more significant and more real. Missionaries struggled to quantify the value of their work. Jenna said that one of the hardest things for her about being a missionary was figuring out how to measure her success. She laughed at her Type A tendencies, joking about how great it would be to be able put a checkmark next to “convert campus.”32 Linking their suffering to the suffering of Christ legitimized their work on campus. Pain in prayer could be a measure of success in their mission-field and a measure of self-cultivation as evangelists. Kneeling was a pedagogy that cultivated attentiveness to and relationship with Christ’s suffering. This was the process of learning to embody missionary zeal.

In her ethnography of women in the Egyptian Piety Movement, anthropologist Saba Mahmood demonstrates how the women’s bodily performances of piety contributed to the making of pious Muslim women. She describes how “the outward behavior of the body

32 Jenna, interview by author, February 7, 2013, transcript.
constructs both the potentiality and the means through which interiority is realized.” Bodily comportment was the manifestation of interior life. Like these Muslim women, Mia’s bodily comportment shaped her interior life. But this was a multi-directional formation. Mia also knelt as a physical manifestation of her interior awareness of Christ’s suffering. Her interiority shaped her outward comportment. During the hours I spent watching missionaries’ bodies at prayer, I slowly realized that their bodies were not just kneeling to imitate Jesus’ pain, but they were also responding physically to an awareness of Christ’s suffering. DIRECT’s cosmology emphasized that Jesus had suffered and died for each individual. As Alexandra once explained, Jesus died for each individual even, those “the least deserving of His love, of His dying on the cross.” That was why, she said, there is “no greater act of love than to kneel before Jesus in Adoration.” Their bodies performed their awe at the amount of suffering they understood Jesus to have endured for each one of them. I watched Mia kneel on the floor, put her head in her hands, and then slump her entire body over the pew in front of her. Jenna sat on the floor with her knees pulled closely into her chest as close to the altar and Jesus’ real presence as possible. For most of Lent, Alexandra’s face made pained expressions as she stared at the monstrance. Awareness of the magnitude of Christ’s bodily suffering demanded bodily responses from missionaries.

Adoration in Holy Hour was an interaction between the mental and physical faculties of missionaries. Bodies enacting micro-suffering by kneeling on the floor cultivated an awareness of Christ’s suffering within missionaries. This pain prepared them to suffer in other ways as they tried to invite students to join them in becoming dynamically orthodox Catholics. This devotional attunement also demanded that bodies suffer in response. Missionaries knelt in

34 Field notes, March 7, 2013.
Adoration because they were overwhelmed by what Jesus had done for each one of them.

The aesthetics of embodied prayer infused missionary subjectivity with a self-sacrificial ethos of incarnational evangelization.

**Prayer Imaginations**

Can God communicate through imagination?...Of course He can use our imaginations! It’s part of who we are! —Justin, Sixth-year Missionary

Meredith was fast-talking, funny, first-year missionary who told me that she often struggled to stay focused during Holy Hour. When I asked about her prayer life, Meredith was eager to tell me about how much she likes to use her imagination in praying with the Bible. She described the redundancy of the process as enlightening, “I’m reading through it and I’m putting myself in the scene, and I kept re-imagining the house, re-imagining it all.” Then, suddenly she would realize something new about the Bible passage. Ultimately, Meredith said, imaginative prayer “helps you to visualize Christ’s life better, which helps you get to know Him better.”

Meredith came to know Jesus better by relying on and cultivating what I call her “prayer imagination.” As I am developing the term, prayer imagination is the faculty missionaries developed and used as a way of experiencing Jesus in prayer. They pictured how Jesus looked, envisioned conversations with Jesus, and pretended what it would be like to go for a walk with Jesus. These things made Jesus feel more real. “Imagination” references the scholar of Chinese religions, Robert Campany’s, nuanced description of the French imaginaire. This was the “nonmaterial, imaginative world” and the “cosmologies and ideologies underlying the practices

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35 Field notes, June 13, 2013.
36 Meredith, interview by author, March 13, 2013, transcript.
of seekers” and “the hoped-for goals of those practices and…the bodies of stories told.”

Missionaries had to draw on multiple sources in order to cultivate their prayer imaginations. Meredith expected to experience relationship with Jesus as she read the Bible because she learned to do so from DIRECT and from other missionaries. Prayer imaginations were shaped by individual practices, social expectations, communal performances, and DIRECT’s prescriptions for performing prayers. Philosopher Charles Taylor has suggested that humans exist in a “social imaginary” that depends on “common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy,” that depend on shared “images, stories, and legends.” For missionaries, this collected social imaginary included friends, family members, and fellow missionaries, Bible passages and the Catholic lectionary, as well as extra-human figures like Jesus.

It is not enough to say that Holy Hour facilitated a complex relationship between missionaries and Jesus (of course it did). This section is about how, why, and with what sorts of wherewithal that relationship developed. As this relationship developed, what happened when the ideals of that relationship conflicted with social realities? Prayer imaginations worked on (sometimes creating, sometimes resolving) the tensions in missionaries’ lives, which were always enmeshed between prayer and non-prayer and between the individual missionary and their social context. Lectio divina and mental prayer were prayers of imagination that worked to make Jesus more real, more tangible, more recognizable, and more experiential.

Lectio Divina

Near the end of our first conversation, Daniel challenged me to start praying lectio divina regularly. He hardly knew me, but was nonetheless confident that it would be good for my

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relationship with Christ. Many months later, one the DIRECT Blog team published a downloadable cheat sheet for praying lectio divina. With a reference to prayer as a dance, he called it the “Lectio 3-Step: An Easy Illustrated Guide to Praying Lectio Divina.” The three steps reflected DIRECT’s ability to turn even complex prayer forms into easily digestible instructions: “1. Eyes to See; 2. Ears to Hear; 3. Grace to Change.”

39 DIRECT missionaries loved lectio.

Lectio divina—divine reading—has a long history in the monastic traditions of Catholicism, which reverberated through missionaries’ Holy Hour practices. The Rule of Benedict (completed around 530) instructed monks in the practice of reading Scriptures slowly, repetitively, and in a way that would “represent…the person’s heartfelt response to God’s word.”

40 When Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), systematized lectio instruction for his Benedictine monks, he described the sixth century version of the “Lectio 3-Step” as, read, meditate, respond. After those steps, monks were to conclude prayer with time to “rest in God.”

41 Though long-practiced by Benedictine monastics, lectio divina did not become a popular form of prayer among the Catholic laity until the late twentieth century. The first widely accessible introduction to the practice was John Leclerq, OSB’s The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, first published in French in 1957 and translated into English in 1961. When the documents of the Second Vatican Council encouraged the laity to read the Bible without the formal guidance of the clergy, lay interest in lectio began rose. 42 Articles and instructional books became increasingly available in the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, the number of books that

40 Raymond Studzinski, OSB, Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2009), 125.
taught the laity how to pray lectio had multiplied exponentially.\textsuperscript{43} In 2005, enthusiasm about lay lectio practice was so strong that Pope Benedict XVI promised that a renewal of the practice of lectio divina would bring about a “new springtime” in the church.\textsuperscript{44}

Leclerq’s instructions taught that lectio was a prayer practice infused by awareness of and participation in the life of Christ,

Christian reading of Scripture is not primarily an intellectual exercise resulting from the correct use of a scientific method. It is essentially an experience of Christ, in the Spirit. Within this experience, there is, of course, room for method, science, and use of instrument sod work and study, the knowledge of philology, archeology and history. But these alone will never result in lectio, a Christian reading, a reading in the Spirit, a reading of Christ and in Christ, with Christ and of Christ.\textsuperscript{45}

Reading the biblical stories taught readers of Jesus’ life and instructed them in how Jesus had moved in his world. Lectio was a method of experiencing and praying with Christ.

Within DIRECT, “lectio” was a wide-ranging prayer form. It echoed LeClerq’s instructions that practitioners were to be “reading of…in…and with Christ.” But their form was not nearly as strictly Benedictine as LeClerq’s. The version of lectio divina that I learned in DIRECT was a complex, and sometimes convoluted, blend of the Benedictine lectio with Ignatian imaginative meditation, in which the devout imagine themselves as actors or observers in biblical narratives. Raymond Studzinski, OSB clarified the differences between Ignatian and Benedictine readings of the Bible: “For the ancient monastics…[lectio] was quite different from the imaginative exercises later associated with the meditation of Ignatius Loyola, still this

meditation did shape the imagination of monastics by implanting in them sacred images.\textsuperscript{46}

This distinction between imaginative exercises (Ignatian) and meditation on biblical images and words (Benedictine) fell flat among most missionaries because \textit{lectio} served pedagogical purposes for missionaries introducing themselves and students to the “person of Jesus.” I asked several missionaries if there was a difference. One first-year missionary named Jeremy shrugged off my query and explained that prayer “is simply that conversation with God. And so both \textit{lectio divina} and Ignatian prayer should ultimately lead you to have that conversation…. [they are both] ways to get me to that mental prayer, which is that conversation.”\textsuperscript{47} Rather than parse these nuances, DIRECT’s \textit{lectio} practices collapsed Benedictine and Ignatian methods under the larger rubric of praying with scripture. \textit{Lectio} helped missionaries establish an intersubjective and imaginative relationship with the “person of Jesus.”

I was taught how to pray \textit{lectio} six separate times during my ethnographic fieldwork: twice at national trainings, once in a small group, and three times in one-on-one settings with individual missionaries. My first one-on-one \textit{lectio} lesson was from Daniel. On a crisp day in early November, we met in the entry of the Catholic center on campus. Daniel brought the unofficial DIRECT guide to teaching \textit{lectio}, Timothy Gallagher, OMV’s \textit{Introduction to Ignatian Prayer} (which alone illustrates the integrative nature of the missionaries’ understanding of \textit{lectio}), warmly referred to by the color of its cover as “the pink book.” Daniel told me I could buy the book on Amazon (which I did, but I learned later I could have bought it through the online DIRECT bookstore). Daniel opened the pink book to Gallagher’s two-page reflection on the eighth chapter of Matthew’s gospel, where the disciples grow anxious while Jesus sleeps through a storm. As he fell into what sounded like a well-practiced presentation, Daniel taught

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\textsuperscript{46} Studzinski, \textit{Reading to Live}, 124. \\
\textsuperscript{47} Jeremy, interview by author, March 21, 2013.
\end{flushright}
me that *lectio* is about “getting into” the story and taking what you need to move forward in your life. He outlined three steps of the practice. First, read through the story one time, to “get a sense” for it. Pay attention to which words jump out. What would it feel to be in the storm? What are my storms? I nodded my understanding. Okay, he continued, so after you’ve read the passage once, you read it a second time and put yourself into the story. You picture yourself in the story and see how it relates to your life. And then read it a third time, this time thinking about how to come to some resolution. Ask yourself, “What is the fruit of this story for me? Think about what the take-away is and how you can live that out in your life.” He sat back in the pew and his voice shifted into a self-reflective tone. He told me that this method of prayer “has born a lot of fruit” in his life. By “fruit,” he clarified at my prodding, he meant, “seeing change in your life because of what you’ve identified in prayer.” Daniel’s missionary subjectivity developed at the intersection of reading the Bible as a form of prayer, his daily life, and the work he did to develop a long-term relationship with Jesus.

Several months later, Jenna gave me another one-on-one lesson on how to pray *lectio divina*. We met up on a dark, rainy-turning-snowy late afternoon in February. She had her Bible with her and I noticed that it was stuffed with prayer cards and notecards. She had written on many pages with a pen and a highlighter. Though we didn’t use it, she also brought the pink book. Jenna swiftly summarized the same three-part instructions Daniel had outlined and then sat back. Unprompted by me, she reflected on reading the Bible, “The Bible’s good…It’s a good place to start because it’s, you know, God’s voice…If you’re trying to have a relationship with God, you might as well start with what He has to say.” She told me she had recently had an “oh wow” moment in *lectio*, while reading Hebrews 12:14. She flipped to the passage in her Bible

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49 Jenna, in discussion with author, March 14, 2013.
and read aloud, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Smiling, she explained her experience of lectio,

And, so, yeah, if I have an “oh, wow” moment, then I’m just like oh! And I’ll sit there and be like, “that’s deep.” And what exactly goes through my brain? I don’t really know. But it’s like—sometimes I’m just like, “that’s really cool. How can I strive for holiness? Because without that, I can’t see God. And it’s like—strive for peace with everyone, like, everyone.” So different parts will kind of stick out, but I’ll kind of think about that phrase. And it most likely leads me to a question, somehow, like, “Okay, God, what do you want me to do with this?” or “How do I live this out?” or, like something along those lines of, like, “Okay, I’ve thought about it. Now, it’s your turn.”

I asked, “God’s turn?” And she nodded. “Yeah. So then, like, I’m just like, what do you want me to do about this? And then I just sit there. And that’s the rest of my thirty minutes. Sitting there and, like, because it’s that conversation starter. I’ve read it. I’ve talked, and then it’s my turn to shut-up and let Him talk back to me.”

As they prayed lectio, missionaries listened for God’s voice, not as an auditory experience (only once did I hear a missionary describe an auditory experience of prayer), but as an embodied hearing. Missionaries located this “hearing” in their minds and hearts as a thought and feeling. At the same time, Jenna explained, hearing God was also an experience of something that seemed to be outside her,

So, I personally, have never, like, heard a booming male voice say anything to me….But, I definitely have been in prayer where, like, this idea just pops into my head. And I’m like, huh? I would have never thought of that before. And that’s when I’m like: that’s the Holy Spirit. That’s definitely nothing that I could have come up with on my own.

Many missionaries echoed this sensibility, explaining that they knew a thought or feeling was from God if it seemed like something they would never have thought of on their own. This was facilitated, in particular ways, through lectio divina, through the Bible as a conduit of God’s voice. Jenna regularly reported on how God had spoken through the daily readings that morning.

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50 Jenna, interview by author, February 7, 2013, transcript.
51 Ibid.
in Holy Hour. As they practiced the skills of *lectio*, missionaries came to *expect* conversations with God. This expectation reflected that developing their prayer imaginations was an intersubjective process, among missionaries, but also between missionaries and God.

My third instruction in *lectio*, with Alexandra, illustrated that this prayer practice was both an individual form, but also always set in a communal and relational context. She used the teaching opportunity to invite me to pray *lectio* with her. Alexandra and I sat close to one another in the quiet chapel with the pink book, whispering. She struck an instructional attitude as she taught. “Put yourself in the presence of Christ; remember who is there.” She nodded to the altar and the crucifix and then pointed to her heart, “and here. Put your internal self in the presence of Christ” and remember “why we’re here.” We fell silent for a few moments and both looked at the life-size Jesus on the cross that hung over the altar.

Alexandra told me to put myself in the story and encouraged me to use my imagination and my mind to get into the passage. “Jesus was like us in all things but sin,” she reminded me. “Jesus had an imagination and a mind and emotions…so it’s good to use them.” She read aloud the same passage from the Gospel of Matthew that Daniel had. Alexandra opened the pink book and read the reflection, which again told me to be amazed by Jesus’ power and to talk with Jesus about how “he can calm the storms in my life, in my heart…”52 Alexandra read it very, very slowly. Then she suggested that we just sit quietly for a while and “just have some time to talk with Him.” After about ten minutes, Alexandra turned to me and said that she likes to thank God for this time with Jesus, so we said an “Our Father.”

We left the chapel and sat in the couches of the Catholic student center to discuss. Alexandra smiled softly, “*Lectio* is how I pray with the Scriptures. This is God talking to me.”

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asked her how she knows it is God and she laughed loudly before telling me that she spends a lot of time trying to figure that out! “It takes time,” she said, “practice.” Then she used her marathon training as a metaphor, “You can’t just go out there and run fifteen miles today…I’ve been working up to this for a while. And that’s how prayer is too.” She paused and explained that, sometimes, when she is “running around with my head cut off…a Bible passage comes to mind. And that is God talking,” she said. Lectio was the practice of learning to hear God. It was an effort to hear and imagine the ineffable, unseen, and yet permeating presence. Historian Paul Griffiths described lectio as prayer done “for the purpose of altering the course of the readers’ cognitive, affective and active lives by the ingestion, digestion, rumination, and restatement of what has been read.” The role of the imagination in lectio, then, was to draw in multiple sources of information in an effort to hear God.

Pope Gregory’s instructions on lectio also emphasized memorization. To memorize biblical passages, he taught, was to imprint the Word of God on one’s being. While missionaries did not emphasize this same memorization practice, Alexandra’s interpretation of lectio suggests that divine reading was supposed to leave an imprint on her imagination; it was supposed to imprint on her daily tasks as a missionary. But this did not always happen, and Alexandra explained that that was part of the reason for the daily practice of lectio. Failure was part of prayer life, she shrugged. The real challenge was to keep trying amid the failure.

These three instructions on lectio illustrate three interrelated ways that lectio helped missionaries develop a relationship with Jesus. Daniel’s methodical instruction exemplified that

54 Paul Griffiths, Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 54.
55 Studzinski, Reading to Live, 141.
56 Alexandra, in discussion with author, February 21, 2013.
lectio taught missionaries how to see Jesus in mundane life. Jenna’s exuberant instructions and stories of lectio illustrated how the practice taught her to hear God in the intersubjectivity of prayer. Alexandra’s practical instructions emphasized lectio as building a relationship with God that could interrupt and influence her daily life. Missionaries’ lectio was the practice of making Jesus feel more real. This was the disciplining of their imaginations to hear and recognize God.

**Mental Prayer**

If I was only talking to you and I never let you have a chance to talk to me, we wouldn’t really be friends. That’s a fact. And so that’s how my prayer life was when I was younger. And, like, at the beginning of my college. I’d be like, “I need to pray today. ‘K. Good morning. This is what’s going on, like, I need help with this and this, thank you for this, this, this, and this. ‘K bye!’ And He’s kind of like, ‘Ep—ep—ep! Have a good day; love you—!’” I didn’t really know what He wanted of me, because I didn’t really give Him a chance to talk to me.57

—Jenna, First-year Missionary

When Jenna taught a small group of college women how to do mental prayer, she began by instructing them to imagine a conversation: “Remember not to just talk the whole time…Give God space to talk back to you.” She urged her audience to try to pray mentally for at least ten minutes each day, “But! If that ten minutes is up and you’re still going, don’t stop. You wouldn’t interrupt a good conversation with a girlfriend just because the ten minutes is up.” This could be both challenging and exhilarating. Jenna said she occasionally had trouble getting to ten minutes. Sometimes, she just sat in Holy Hour thinking, “Nine more minutes!” In those times, she laughed ruefully, “I can only think, ‘God, give me the grace to not fall asleep. Don’t fall asleep!’” And that’s okay; “Sometimes prayer is like that.” But, she smiled, sometimes prayer is “awesome.” She told us about a recent experience of praying about love during Holy Hour, where she had “heard a voice, not super-male-like, but a voice that said, ‘If you’re going to love me, then love me and let me love you.’” She was “blown away.” This message from God reminded her to let

57 Jenna, interview by author, February 7, 2013, transcript.
other people help her, “and to just let God love me.” In the space of quiet chapels, missionaries talked to God and God responded.

To learn mental prayer was to learn the art of conversation with the extra-human. More than once, I heard missionaries describe mental prayer by quoting St. Teresa of Avila’s description of prayer as “nothing else than an intimate friendship, a frequent heart-to-heart conversation with Him by whom we know ourselves to be loved.” Likewise, in an instruction manual for young adults in sodalities in 1945, Francis LeBuffe, SJ defined mental prayer as the “lifting of the mind and heart to God by means of thought.” He encouraged young adults to “chat with God, using our own words. We should talk to God just as we feel.” Sixty years later, one of the DIRECT co-founders described mental prayer as a conversation wherein one should talk, but also “sit back and listen…receiving God’s word into our souls.” Mental prayer was the practice of learning to experience a reciprocal relationship with God.

Mental prayer as relationship was descriptive, but also prescriptive. Missionaries used their experiences in social relationships to in order to learn how to practice mental prayer well. For example, Jenna explained to me that she knew she had built a “real relationship,” with God when she was able to get mad in prayer. She explained,

He’s God; yeah, he already knows. But you admitting to Him? Like, that’s a real relationship; like you, you know, you have to tell your significant other what’s going on or they won’t know. So it’s like, just being totally honest and being like, “God, I’m super-scared to take this job. I don’t know where I’m going to be living; my parents don’t want me to do it; I feel really alone.”…And just being blunt with Him.

58 Field notes, March 14, 2013.
60 Francis LeBuffe, SJ, Let’s Try Mental Prayer (St. Louis, MO: The Queen’s Work, 1945), 13. See also Bede Frost’s The Art of Mental Prayer (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow), 1988.
61 LeBuffe, Let’s Try Mental Prayer, 10, (emphasis in original).
63 Jenna, interview by author, February 7, 2013, transcript.
Being “real” with God required that Jenna be “totally honest,” just like she was in her human-human relationships. In particular, her romantic relationships instructed her in how to have a “real” relationship with God. But the metaphor of “relationship” was not so straightforward or simple as missionaries sometimes seemed to want it to be. The metaphor unfolded in multiple directions in and around mental prayer involving missionaries’ social lives and imaginations.

The precision of missionaries’ relationships with heavenly figures most often situated Jesus as lover/boyfriend/husband and God as Father. For better or for worse, the relationship a missionary had with their earthly father prescribed how they experienced their relationship with God, their heavenly father. Julian, the director of DIRECT’s Spiritual Impact Boot Camps, described his father as a self-sacrificing role model who gave up his own comfort for the sake of his eight children.⁶⁴ He said, “That’s the image I have when I hear of God as Heavenly Father. If my earthly father loves me so much, how much more [does] God?”⁶⁵ While Julian’s experience may be the ideal, it was the exception, especially among female missionaries.

Alexandra was particularly frank about the difficulties that her unsettling relationship with her biological father posed for her ability to internalize God as loving Father. During our Bible study, Alexandra introduced the image of God the Father by teaching us that God keeps His promises throughout human history. The proof of God’s love for humans and each individual, the Bible study demonstrated, was in the big and small ways Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promises.⁶⁶ She paused, seeming to debate how to go forward. Then Alexandra

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⁶⁴ “Spiritual Impact Boot Camps” were introductions to Catholic charismatic prayer. Julian gave this metaphor during a two-day retreat aimed at introducing college students to the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁵ Field notes, April 13, 2014.

admitted that the image of God as Father did not work that well for her. Her own model of a father involved strict rules, and, she said, “When there are fights, it’s yelling and hitting.” Because “that’s not awesome,” she taught herself to imagine her friend Sadie’s father as her own. Sadie and her father often downhill skied together. Whenever Sadie stood at the top of the mountain, terrified, she knew that if she just followed her father, it would be okay. Alexandra’s voice cracked and her eyes welled up as she described this contrasting image of fatherhood. Alexandra turned to her social network of like-minded Catholics in order to understand the metaphor of God as Father. At the same time, not having an experience of a loving Father motivated her desire to imagine God as loving father.

In his studies of imaginative play, D.W. Winnicott theorized that children use imaginary friends, transitional objects, and the rich landscape of their imaginations to “enable himself or herself to postulate the existence of the self.” Humans, Winnicott argued, rely on this “exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation.” Imagination in this description facilitates the emergence of the subject in relation to others. Mental prayer facilitated a similar creativity in subject formation. As they practiced mental prayer, missionaries drew their less-than-ideal social lives into prayer imaginations and worked on (or, as missionaries would say, allowed God to work on) them there. As Alexandra waded through the disappointments of her “not awesome” biological father, she imagined herself in Sadie’s ski boots and wondered what her own childhood might have been like with a different kind of father. During Lent, her spiritual director suggested that she spend some part her daily mental prayer imagining herself interacting with child Jesus. After a couple weeks of this practice she was exuberant to explain that this helped her be able to trust a father figure, as Jesus had trusted His. She relied on her prayer imagination

to correct for her father’s shortcomings.

In addition to fathers who did not live up to missionaries’ ideals, the fact that many missionaries were children of divorced parents also complicated the father-daughter relationship metaphor that missionaries were expected (by DIRECT and other missionaries) to build and work on in prayer. Mona was a brand-new missionary when I met her in February. She had joined a campus team in January after completing her student teaching during the fall semester. She had a calm presence and spoke softly and confidently when she told me that her parents had divorced during her first year of college. She felt like the residue of that broken relationship affected her capacities to imagine, and thus relate to, God as father.

I think just, like, all the hurt from my relationship with my dad. When I first started to dig into my prayer life, like, it was really hard to associate God with a Father figure. And that wound. So…[my priest] told me…Mary reflects the Son. She’s the moon, where you can look at her and love at her and adore her forever. And God’s the son. So she does nothing but point you back to the Son. And once I heard that, I, like, just felt the love of Mary. And kind of just pictured myself sitting in her arms and letting her love me.68

In “letting herself be loved” during prayer, Mona tried to correct for what she felt missing from her experience of her parents. Divine relationships offered salve to human relationships.

The parent-child relationship was just one layer of the relationships implicated in, and shaped through, mental prayer. As Jenna illustrated above, missionaries often turned to romantic relationships in order to describe prayer. Mental prayer required the same kinds of commitment, vulnerability and attention. I asked Mia at what point the seemingly benign romantic relationship metaphor collapses. When does having a boyfriend fail to teach you how to have a relationship with Jesus? She nodded and said that she struggles with that metaphor a lot. She paused and took a deep breath and told me that her dad cheated on her mom when Mia was in middle school. Mia sighed, “I don’t want to be like that, but I am.” Mia internalized her father’s cheating, and then

68 Mona, interview by author, February 12, 2013, transcript.
also blamed her own cheating on her lack of relationship with Jesus at the time. She explained that she had been looking for love from men when she should have been looking for Jesus. With her current boyfriend, she was learning was how to balance her romantic relationship and her prayer relationship with Jesus. She used her dating skills to instruct her in how to be in relationship with Jesus and she used her relationship with Jesus to teach her how to be a faithful girlfriend. Jesus corrected in her what her social relationships had corrupted.

These experiences in and of prayer imaginations (shaped by the social worlds surrounding missionaries) embedded the failure of human love. Humans fail each other; lovers cheat on one another; boyfriends change their minds; girlfriends grow disinterested. But God’s love, to missionaries’ delight and insistence, never failed. Mia was confident and comforted that she could always turn to God no matter what happened with her relationship with her boyfriend. This offered the challenge to love like God, and the assurance that God was better at love than any human ever could be.

Relationships developed in mental prayer relied heavily on and interacted with missionaries’ social lives. Jenna’s efforts to talk to God as a “real” friend, Mona and Alexandra’s images of God as Father, and Mia’s entangled romantic relationship with Jesus and her boyfriend exemplified this. These also illustrate a trouble bound into imagining prayer as relationship. At its core is an unarticulated (or, at least, under-articulated) ideal image of friend, father, and lover. This forced missionaries to move between their experience of fatherhood or romance and an amorphous ideal of prayer. Mental prayer was where missionaries most creatively and directly (not without occasional tears during Holy Hour) responded to and corrected for their social lives.

Prayer imaginations were shaped by layers of relationships—between God and

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missionary, between missionaries and Jesus, among God and family members, and among missionaries. With lectio practices, missionaries imagined themselves into stories of Jesus’ life as a way of experiencing Jesus’ presence. In mental prayer, missionaries looked to their social worlds for instruction on relating with God. Developing prayer imaginations was one way that missionaries navigated this intricate web of relationships. Knowing, depending on, and communicating with the “person of Jesus” compelled their missionary zeal.

**Evangelizing Wills**

It doesn’t matter how much success you have. If it’s not God’s will, does it really matter?  
—Linda, Second-year Missionary

With their Holy Hour practices, missionaries practiced bending their will and having their will bent toward an interpretation of God’s will as calling them to incarnational evangelization. The “will” in missionary thinking was the “faculty by which a person decides on and initiates action.” Drawing on Scholastic thinking, missionaries understood the “will” as the part of human beings that determined action. The will was malleable and required training in order to internalize and act in accord with God’s will.

**Spiritual Reading**

The thoughts developed in this book have helped us, ourselves, to fight against an excessive exteriorization through good works. May they help others, also, to escape such mishap, and lead the stream of their courageous action into better channels. May they show that we must never leave the God of works, for the works of God, and that St. Paul’s “Woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16) does not entitle us to forget: “What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?” (Matt 26:26).

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70 Linda, interview by author, April 4, 2013, transcript.
71 Field notes, March 14, 2013.
Spiritual reading was one of the practices that shaped missionaries’ will in a way that helped them act as evangelizers on campus. This practice involved meditation upon reading materials other than scripture. It was distinguished from ordinary reading because, as one devotional instruction described it, spiritual reading could “console us in sorrow, deepen our joy, prompt a transformation, aid growth in reflection, and orient our whole being toward the Divine. It is the kind of reading…that nourishes the life of the spirit.”

Spiritual reading focused prayer on both the content of a text and a disposition toward a text. As historian Richard Kieckhefer has pointed out, women’s monastic communities dedicated to spiritual reading flourished in the fifteenth century. Interest in spiritual reading surged among a broader population of the American Catholic laity during the twentieth century.

Aiding this interest, Monsignor William Doheny published a long list of books that could be used in spiritual reading in 1950. He divided his list of more than two hundred books into three tiers. He instructed novice spiritual readers toward group one, which were “books which are more or less fundamental for the spiritual life…They would likewise be the books which beginners would use in order to form themselves in the practice of solid virtue and in the understanding of the principles of the spiritual life.”

Spiritual reading is a prayer practice in which the devout developed their minds, wills, and intellects. Jenna explained spiritual reading

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Jean-Baptiste Chautard, OCSO, *The Soul of the Apostolate: The Interior Life of Grace as the Key to Saving Souls*


as “something that helps you have a conversation with God.” In choosing a book for Holy Hour, she made sure to select something that was not easy to read, but something that would challenge her, “some[thing],” she explained, “that I really have to think about, not just, uh, this is a fun Jesus book.”

There were unstated assumptions about the kinds of books that helped missionaries have a conversation with Christ. For example, Fulton Sheen’s Life of Christ was popular as was Thomas à Kempis’ The Imitation of Christ. I never saw Dorothy Day’s A Long Loneliness or Thomas Merton’s The Seven Storey Mountain. Orthodoxy by G.K. Chesterton was read, as was Louis De Montfort’s instructions on making a Marian consecration, True Devotion to Mary, and its updated version for the twenty-first century, Thirty-Three Days to Morning Glory. I did not see copies of Benedict’s The Rule, though Daniel’s daily routine included the Opus Dei-advocated guide to the daily Examen, In conversation with God: Meditations for Each Day of the Year, by Francis Fernandez. Daniel also touted Jose Maria Escriva’s The Way. The latter also made it onto a list of “what we’re reading” in the DIRECT Alumni newsletter. When Allen gave a student several books to read over a school break, they were treatises by C.S. Lewis not poems by Dan Berrigan or easy essays by Peter Maurin. From more contemporary authors, Jenna came out of Holy Hour one morning excited about Helen Alvaré’s Breaking Through: Catholic Women Speak for Themselves. She was reading the essays collected by one of the lawyers of the U.S. Bishops’ suit against the Health and Human Services Mandate, not Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex. Noah could not say enough about the power of reading Matthew Kelly’s Rediscover Catholicism in Holy Hour and I saw Jackie reading Christopher West’s interpretation of Pope John Paul II’s theology, Theology of the Body for Beginners.

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77 Field notes, March 14, 2013.
78 Jenna, interview by author, May 8, 2013, transcript.
The Soul of the Apostolate by Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard had a consistent presence among missionaries’ Holy Hour. When I admitted to a second-year missionary named Brent that I had purchased the book, but not yet read it, he echoed the advice I heard from several missionaries: “So good. You need to read it.” I eventually did, in the quiet of daily Holy Hour, during the last two months of my field research. Allen had read it the winter before, but was re-reading it that fall. A debate between missionaries over the book’s utility as a handbook for missionary activity unfolded in my Facebook newsfeed. As I began to write this chapter, I found a note I had scribbled in the margins, “This guy is all over DIRECT!!” Missionaries read in prayer as a practice of sustaining their relationship with God. Chautard helps them accomplish that. His book was one example of how spiritual reading formed their wills in an understanding of God’s will for their evangelization.

Chautard (1858-1935) was a French Cistercian abbot at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1905, France’s Third Republic (1870-1940) passed a law on the separation of Church and state, which laid the foundation of the contemporary French secular state. During laicization, the Catholic Church lost its secular role in state management. The Church’s response, from Chautard’s perspective, focused too much on activity for the sake of activity in the form of building new schools, Catholic orphanages and social centers, and new hospitals. “As if the Church of God were built exclusively of bricks and mortar!” When it was first published as a pamphlet in 1907, The Soul of the Apostolate warned against this “excessive exteriorization through good works.” Published as a full book in 1915, the text included an Appendix, “Ten Aids to Mental Prayer.” A decade after his death, Chautard’s fellow Benedictines at Gethsemane

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79 Brent, interview by author, February 22, 2013, transcript.
80 Chautard, The Soul of the Apostolate, xi.
81 Chautard, The Soul of the Apostolate, 7.

Chautard’s book is at once a description of the importance of a prayer life and an instruction on how to cultivate one. Chautard was arguing against his contemporaries’ interpretation of Catholic Action. While Catholic Action was not formally promulgated as “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy” until Pope Pius XI’s Non abbiamo bisogno in 1931, lay Catholics (especially in Italy, but also across Europe) had begun to assert their roles in developing church institutions like hospitals and schools by the early twentieth century. Chautard shared the Catholic Action’s interest in encouraging the laity to participate in the life of the church. But, he argued, brick and mortar projects could not be at the heart of Catholic Action. He insisted that “the life of action ought to flow from the contemplative life, to interpret and extend it.” For Chautard the “true apostle” was able to develop a “union of the two lives, contemplative and active.” He insisted that the “entire success of the [Catholic Action] apostolate depends on one thing: an interior life centered on the Blessed Eucharist.” Chautard was troubled by what he might have called in contemporary parlance, the potential for “burn out” among well-intentioned Catholics. He suspected these practitioners would burn out if they were not sustained by their prayer life. Chautard envisioned a Catholic Action that recognized that “[t]he interior life is the condition on which the fruitfulness of active works depends.”

When Brent exclaimed to me about how great this book was, he was reading Chautard as

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83 Chautard, The Soul of the Apostolate, 52.
84 Chautard, The Soul of the Apostolate, 183.
a reminder that the success of DIRECT could not be only defined as the number of students
they counted at Bible studies, but also had to include the interior life of the missionaries. The
book, he said, helped him understand the importance of prayer in evangelization. In a tone that
seemed worried about his co-missionaries, he explained how burn out happens within DIRECT.

You’re so wrapped into the good works you could be doing on campus and the good
things, you forget that it’s all His. And, so, you’re too much of a channel and you leave
nothing for yourself. And then you really can wear out. So what you want to do is be
more of a reservoir. And you want to allow yourself to be filled by Christ, to be filled by
Jesus Christ, and then have people come and drink at that reservoir, and be filled
themselves. And it’s giving them Him.86

When Brent read “Catholic Action” in Chautard, he was not thinking about social service
projects; Brent was thinking about evangelization on campus. When Chautard criticized an over-
emphasis on brick and mortar projects, Brent read him as critical of missionaries counting
students, organizing too many events, or being in too many groups. Brent insisted, as he
imagined Chautard would, that these things distracted from a consistent prayer life. Diversions
such as these would not only burn missionaries out, but also make them ineffective evangelists.

This interpretation of The Soul of the Apostolate echoed in conversations with
missionaries, usually unreferenced. Chautard was in the air DIRECT missionaries both inhaled
and exhaled. Chautard told his readers, as the executive director of DIRECT told his new
missionaries, “First of all, pray.”87 When a member of the DIRECT executive team told me to
read Soul of the Apostolate, he said it would teach me “about the need to keep prayer alive” in
the mission.88 “Religious readers,” as Historian Paul Griffiths describes those who do spiritual
reading, “do not read in isolation, either synchronically or diachronically. Their practices
presuppose and engage with those who have already done what they are doing….And they

86 Brent, interview by author, February 22, 2013, transcript.
87 Chautard, The Soul of the Apostolate. 113.
are…responsive to a community of those now doing what they are also doing.” A similar intersubjectivity was also at work in missionaries’ spiritual reading. When they read Chautard, as hundreds of missionaries before them had, these young adult Catholics were striving to become missionaries as their predecessors had strived. By the time missionaries entered this DIRECT world, it was already formed by fifteen years of people reading Chautard as their guide for how to evangelize. As a result, these missionaries were already part of a concentrated Chautardian network by the time they read *The Soul of the Apostolate*. This Chautardian culture allowed this book to shape their will toward a prayer-infused vision of evangelization.

**Intercessory Prayer**

I had known Julie, the director of DIRECT’s alumni relations, for almost a year when she pulled her “Spiritual Multiplication Depth Chart” out of her prayer journal and showed it to me. It was an unlined three-by-five index card whose corners had become soft from repeated touching. The oils of her hands had smeared the twenty or so names she had written in pencil. On the card, Julie had assigned each name to a particular column, based on where she felt they were along their “journey with Christ.” Every day she prayed for each of them specifically. I asked Julie why she needed to pray with such specificity. She shrugged at first, and then said, “there’s power in praying for someone by name…God has their names written…in His heart.” The “depth chart” was a method of making intercessory prayer specific and accountable and a way to develop a theology that understood God as working in the minutia of daily life.

There were two interwoven movements of intercessory prayer in DIRECT Holy Hour. Praying with “spiritual depth charts” was one of them and this was how missionaries asked God

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90 Julie, interview by author, January 4, 2014, transcript. In January 2013, the depth chart went mobile in the form of “Acts2:47” (The title references a quintessential missionary passage from the Acts of the Apostles—“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”). Many missionaries I met still preferred the notecard.
for specific things for specific people. In the second form, missionaries asked God to attune them to “divine appointments,” which they understood as God guiding their evangelizing actions on campus. The former empowered missionaries to call on God to act. The latter put them at the mercy of God’s will.

The language of “intercessory” describes an intermediary, a go-between. In the history of Catholic intercessory prayer—petitions—practitioners have asked the saints or Mary to intercede on their behalf before God. In a missionary’s version of intercessory prayer, the missionaries were the intercessors. They identified what people needed and asked God for it. They prayed that their friends would have a “conversion of heart,” that a chance encounter would change someone’s relationship with the Church, or that a conversation in Bible study would be transformative. If spiritual reading was the work of trying to orient one’s will toward evangelization, intercessory prayer was the work of discerning God’s specific instructions for their evangelization efforts. With this prayer, missionaries trafficked between yearning to know God’s will, forming their wills, and interceding for their loved ones.

Despite much emphasis on intercessory prayer as I interviewed missionaries and attended trainings, there was some ambivalence about this practice. When Jenna and I first met to discuss prayer, she scoffed at her pre-conversion prayer forms because it had been only intercessory prayer. She rebuffed her younger self for only going to God in prayer to ask for things. Intercessory prayer as a primary prayer practice was to be outgrown. Likewise, Maeve, a first-year missionary, had dreaded a daily Holy Hour because she did not understand “this whole prayer thing.” DIRECT teaches new missionaries that “all evangelization starts with prayer” and

was finally learning what that meant, and it did not mean intercessory prayer.

I remember having those thoughts of just, like how? How does [evangelization] all start with prayer? I don’t get it because I only thought—I was thinking intercessory prayer. Like, I can only pray for other people for so long! How is that going to develop my relationship with God? I don’t get it! I didn’t realize that there was, like, this unity in prayer that happens. And this, like, this intimacy…More of like a being with God. And, like, this becoming more of yourself through being with Him. 

Maeve’s claims of “unity” with God and “becoming more [herself] through being with Him” summarize her feeling like she was, indeed, doing God’s will. There was, it seemed to me, a wishful hopefulness in descriptions like Maeve’s. She was describing to me how she imagined her prayer life to be and the ideal to which she set herself (and her will) each morning. In that idealization and longing for unity with God and God’s will, intercessory prayer occupied a mutable role in the prayer life of missionaries. It was both to be grown out of and into. It required both humility and audacity, action and submission.

I was officially trained on how to do intercessory prayer with the spiritual depth chart at a national training with two thousand “student missionaries.” Nigel, a senior missionary who offered the training, explained that the chart had five categories: beginning disciple, growing disciple, disciple, disciple maker, launched disciple. Missionaries were to chart students along this trajectory. He carefully emphasized that the idea behind the categorizations was that knowing where students were could help missionaries to know how to pray for them with specificity. The depth charts focused missionaries’ intercessions and gave them a tool for asking God to do specific things for specific people.

Caitlin was a third-year missionary on a large state university campus who really valued “praying with the depth chart.” She said it helped her to know how to pray pointedly and with

92 Maeve, interview by author, April 22, 2013, transcript.
much detail for students on campus. But she did take care to assure me that the prayer required her to not to judge people as she decided where to place them on the chart.

So you write them down and it’s…not meant to box someone in or judge where somebody’s at or anything like that, but it’s for your own sake to know, okay, I’m praying for this person everyday, but I also need to know where they’re at. So [they’re] in this stage where they actually don’t know who Jesus is. They actually grew up and they were in the Church, and they had a Catholic education, or don’t know who Jesus is, I need to show them who he is, or I need to tell them who he is.94

Caitlin’s caution revealed a tension that threatened to undermine the work of this kind of prayer. Despite her insistence that this prayer was nonjudgmental, the act of putting someone on the chart demanded that Caitlin make a decision, a judgment, about the nature of a student’s spiritual life, about their relationship with Jesus. Missionaries had to assume they had an idea about what was best for the people in their lives in order to enact this form of prayer. The spiritual depth charts encouraged missionaries to act in the lives of others, through prayer.

This practice of intercessory prayer was interwoven with a second, more receptive tone of relating with God. Missionaries asked God to reveal “divine appointments” to them, so that they would know how to invite others to be closer to God. This was the complicated work of interpreting their lives in a way that positioned God as agentic in the minutia of their daily lives. Caitlin explained this to me as a way of seeing her evangelization work as a series of “divine appointments:” “[Y]ou walk up to a stranger and see that God is working in their life, and that is not a chance encounter…it’s a divine appointment.”95 Caitlin told a story that I heard echoed from several missionaries. When she was in her first year as a missionary, she had a “tugging on [her] heart” that she should go to talk to a particular woman at the bus stop. She initially resisted what she called “God putting that on her heart,” but then eventually felt like she had to invite this

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94 Caitlin, interview by author, April 22, 2013, transcript.
95 Ibid.
woman to Mass. Caitlin smiled in awe when she said that the woman came back to Mass after many years of not going and is now a devout Catholic. Missionaries were constantly balancing a tension between prayer as something they did and prayer as a practice of collapse in front of God, able to do nothing other than submit to God’s will. Intercessory prayer made missionaries attuned to the divine appointments in their daily lives and emphasized God’s agency over missionaries’ evangelization.

Susan, a sixth-year on-campus missionary, distinguished intercessory prayer from mental prayer. She said, “Intercessory prayer is not personal relationship prayer. This is about asking God for things, asking God to help with people.” And then she cheered us on, “Don’t be afraid…you are God’s sons and daughters of God.” Likewise, Anita, a missionary who worked with students in fraternities and sororities, urged us to pray for “big things:”

Don’t underestimate the power of intercessory prayer. It can be a great service. Don’t be afraid to ask God big. Don’t be too little in prayer. He’s God, he can do anything. So, don’t just pray, “Let me start a Bible study,” but pray big; like, “Please help me start a Bible study with ten people and find two disciples.” Or maybe it’s about an illness. You can pray, “Lord, if it’s your will, heal my grandma.” And if it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t mean God is small. Our prayers should open us to graces.  

The audacity of intercessory prayer—to ask “big things” of God—was rooted in that filial relationship, which was nurtured in daily Holy Hour. Intercessory prayer certainly depended on the personal relationship missionaries had with God. Missionaries asked God for things as they did their parents. Missionaries were encouraged to make “big asks,” but always with the submissive caveat, “Lord, if it’s your will.” When I asked Jenna why she had to ask an all-knowing God for things that He must already know she (or her friends or family or students) needed, she explained it as part of building a “real relationship”—being vulnerable to the other person in the relationship. At once, missionaries must actively pray for people in their lives, but

96 Field notes, June 13, 2013.
ultimately collapse into inaction and recognition that God does all.

Taken together, these two interwoven practices of intercessory prayer worked on missionaries’ wills by teaching them how to turn to God for daily guidance in evangelization and in making “big asks.” In response, missionaries interpreted (often after the fact, in recounting the experience to another missionary) God to demand that missionaries participate in God’s will by enacting “divine appointments” and “chance meetings.” Implicit here was a particular image of God. This was a God who acted very specifically in time and place, in the lives of missionaries and on campus. This was a God involved in the specifics of daily life, active in the decisions, and committed to giving missionaries multiple chances to understand God’s will.

Conclusion

Rainey, a first-year missionary, told me that if she skips her daily Holy Hour, she definitely notices. She laughed self-consciously and clarified, it’s not like I’m a drug addict; “there’s just this little bit of peace that’s lacking, or I do feel a little bit more drained that day.” She explained that when she does Holy Hour well, “It’s cool….I’ll have conversations with students…and I’ll essentially be able to share with them the fruits of my Holy Hour.”

One interpretation of daily Holy Hour might argue that these practices reflected the indoctrination of young adults by DIRECT. They prayed in the ways that the organization taught them, read the books DIRECT expected them to read, and moved their bodies in the ways that other DIRECT missionaries did. I have tried to avoid this interpretation because it locates missionary subjectivity as somewhere outside these young adults. What is both fascinating and difficult about missionary Holy Hour is that missionaries seemed to want what DIRECT wanted.

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97 Rainey, interview by author, January 30, 2013, transcript.
them to want. They were co-participants in the development of their subjectivity. This was God’s will and they were praying their way into becoming a missionary.

Another interpretation of these descriptions of missionaries’ daily prayer postulates that this was part of a larger narrative about mission work that missionaries had to tell themselves (and me). The work of going out on campus among strangers and being rejected by countless students every day, all while fundraising a salary and living hundreds of miles away from home, was hard and difficult to sustain. As I read and reread the confidence and surety in these missionaries’ descriptions of their Holy Hour prayers, I began to wonder if they had to present a rather seamless image of prayer and evangelization in order to keep going. DIRECT told them that missionary work demanded disciplined prayer lives. Veteran missionaries told new missionaries that, in order to have enough to give on campus, they needed to cultivate their own inner life of prayer. There was a way in which these sorts of instructions precluded other options. It might not be possible, I wondered, to doubt the system too much and still go out on campus everyday. The missionary subjectivity, then, was a necessary formation.

In their prayer formations, missionaries crossed multiple binaries of prayer. They moved between the interior and exterior experiences of embodied prayer. Their external bodies shaped their interiority and then that interior experience shaped bodily comportment of prayer. So too, missionaries trafficked between individual and social prayer formations. Prayer practices, even the ones they did alone quietly in Holy Hour, were also always cultivating missionaries within a community. Holy Hour moved missionaries between active and passive prayer forms. God trained missionaries to listen and be at the ready to respond. At the same time, missionaries asked God to act in the lives of others. Missionary subjectivities were cultivated in these boundary-crossing prayer formations.
Chapter 3. “Be Saints!” Missionaries’ Devotionalism and the Making of Catholic Subjectivities

We are made for sainthood!¹


Our lives are storied. Were it not for stories, our lives would be unimaginable. Stories make it possible for us to overcome our separateness, to find common ground and common cause.²

— Michael Jackson, Politics of Storytelling

After Holy Hour one morning in early November, Mia was holding a book with a picture of a young woman dressed in black on the back cover. The woman’s pale face looked tired. Her eyes looked up, outside the frame of the photo, and her hands were folded in her lap. When I asked Mia about the book, she smiled with characteristic enthusiasm and told me it was about St. Gemma Galgani.³ She prefaced her quick narrative sketch of Gemma’s biography with a gleeful, “Gemma is my girl!”⁴ After Mia turned twenty-five the following month, she declared it her “St. Gemma year!”⁵

Gemma was Mia’s age when she died of tuberculosis after a short life full of physical suffering and weekly experiences of the stigmata. Born in 1878, she was the only daughter of a middle-class and “deeply Christian” family in Lucca, Italy. Gemma worried that her four brothers were “not devout” and she often offered little sacrifices for their souls, a practice Mia adopted for her three “worldly” brothers. Gemma felt called to be a Passionist nun but never joined the order due to illness (or perhaps God’s will. Gemma herself was undecided on this). She nonetheless wore a Passionist pin as an outward marker of her inner calling. Gemma also

¹ Field notes, March 14, 2013.
⁴ Mia, in discussion with author, November 6, 2012.
⁵ Field notes, April 11, 2013.
reported in her diary that she prayed the daily rhythm of Passionist prayers, including a weekly Holy Hour and devotional practices of caring for Jesus during his Passion. The young woman was bedridden for most of her life and her hagiographers lauded this perpetual suffering as a sacrifice for the redemption of sinners. Mia read regularly from and prayed with Gemma’s diary, which recorded vivid descriptions of the young woman’s conversations with Jesus. Perhaps what was most endeared Mia to Gemma was that the saint wrote often of her frustrations in prayer. Like Mia, Gemma struggled to stay awake and focused during her Holy Hours.⁶

Mia met Gemma at DIRECT’s New Staff Training. During the five-week-long summer crash course in Catholic evangelization and catechesis, all missionaries were assigned to gender-segregated small groups, which they called a “college.” Each college was placed under the patronage of a saint and Mia was assigned to the “College of St. Gemma.” Participating in a long history of Catholic names cultivating devotional practices, missionaries learned about Gemma’s life, prayed for her intercession in their lives and in the lives of their friends. Mia read Gemma’s diary and “got to know” the saint and her college-mates as they watched movies about Gemma.

From one perspective, Gemma was a stigmatic whose diary is a gory account of redemptive suffering in the name of (and sometimes at the hand of) Jesus. Gemma appeared incongruous with Mia, the bright-eyed, exuberant young woman with a pink shoulder bag standing in front of me. Likewise, Mia appeared incongruous with the cult of Gemma that grew up among some working class Northern Italian-American immigrants to the U.S. in the 1940s and 1950s.⁷ From Mia’s perspective, Gemma was a middle-class young woman who shared her

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struggles to pray and desires to love Jesus. I happened to ask Mia how she was doing on April 11 and she shouted, “Fantastic! It’s the feast day of St. Gemma!” Mia felt connected to Gemma, to the stories of the saint’s life, and to the kind of prayer life Gemma cultivated.

Mia’s intimacy with Gemma was one example of many I heard of missionaries’ multivalent relationships with saints. The communion of saints was thriving in DIRECT missionary life. Biographical details of saints punctuated my daily conversations with missionaries. DIRECT’s Facebook feed celebrated the feast day of St. Joseph, St. Philip Neri, and St. Gianna. I saw several missionaries wearing St. Anne and St. Joan of Arc medallions around their necks. Missionaries enjoyed telling stories about having seen and prayed with relics of St Francis Xavier and Mary Magdalene. Books about and by saints—St. Faustina, St. Gemma, St. Padre Pio—were scattered around the apartments I visited and shoved into purses and backpacks. Several missionary families have named their daughters Gemma and sons John Paul. At formal trainings, I heard presentations about Blessed Chiara Luce’s intercessions and learned how to pray novenas to saints. When missionaries described ideal Catholics and their Catholic role models, they described saints.

Scholars of U.S. Catholicism have tended to dismiss this dizzying array of practices involved in devotions to saints by marking the practices anti-modern, declaring these prayers incompatible with practitioners’ human flourishing, or treating the saints as quaint remnants of a bygone era. In these interpretations, devotionalism is evidence of a religious stranger. But

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8 Field notes, April 11, 2013.
9 For examples of scholarship that dismisses devotionalism as anti-modern remnant of preconciliar Catholic prayer, Jay Dolan, The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Doubleday, 1985); James O’Toole, The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). In softer tones, but ultimately equally dismissive of the devout, other others have characterized devotionalism as the quaint trinkets of the past. For example, Charles Morris, American Catholics: The Saints and Sinners who Built American Most Powerful Church (New York: Random House, 1997);
throughout my ethnography, saints were not remnants of the past nor were they opposed to flourishing in the modern world. Contemporary, millennial-generation Catholics cultivated intricate and dense relationships with particular saints as intersubjective formations.

Mia’s relationship with Gemma drives this chapter’s analysis of the nature of contemporary devotionalism and how millennial-generation Catholics interacted with and were shaped by saints. The previous chapter examined the practices of daily Holy Hour and described how prayer practices were part of how young adult Catholics were becoming missionaries. This chapter turns my study of millennial Catholic prayer practices and subjectivity to these saints devotions. How did missionaries like Mia develop their Catholic subjectivity vis-à-vis saints like Gemma? Three interwoven sub-questions investigate this: Who were the saints, for missionaries? How did missionaries interact with saints? What were the implications for missionaries?

Peter Brown long ago suggested that to study the cult of the saints is to study the interaction between humans and extra-humans. Saints, he wrote, are “dead human beings” who facilitate the “joining of Heaven and Earth.” One of the premises of this chapter is that the way missionaries talked about and narrated the lives of the saints made the joining real. Missionaries encountered the saints in the telling (and re-telling) of saints’ biographies in various settings and with changing emphases in different contexts. This chapter builds on Robert Orsi’s description of devotionalism as “the extensive repertoire of things and practices by which Catholics interacted with the supernatural, which they took to be present to them in the circumstances of


their everyday lives.”¹² Telling stories about the saints drew saints into missionaries’ lives.

Missionary devotionalism involved the practices of regular narrating about, with, and to the saints. This narrating of saints took place between missionaries, between missionaries and their favorite saints, and among missionaries and DIRECT’s formal trainings. These multiple layers of storytelling illustrate an ongoing process of what Michael Jackson has called the constant “strategizing and boundary-crossing between humans and extra-humans.”¹³ Devotion to saints was part of the intersubjective formation of Catholic missionaries. It was not enough for missionaries to feel connected to saints’ biographies and to ask for saints’ intercessions. Because this relationship was a vulnerable one, where missionaries were made vulnerable and susceptible to the saints, the saints made demands on how the missionaries acted in the world.

Narrating the Saints

Stories have a habit of generating stories. They come to nest, one inside the other, like Chinese boxes, each a window into an others’ world.¹⁴

—Michael Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling*

Noah was in his third year as a missionary and in his second as the leader of a team at a state university in small-town Indiana. He was tall and lanky with curly hair and a jovial, approachable demeanor. Noah laughed when he told me how much he had resisted becoming a missionary and how happy he was that God had persisted in calling him to join DIRECT. As we outlined the schedule of my visit, Noah picked up a statue from the middle of the table and wiped it off. I took a guess, based on the tuft of hair around the statue’s head and the name of the Newman Center, and asked if it was St. Francis. Noah shook his head no, “It’s Padre Pio. You

can tell because of the gloves.” I had not noticed the statue’s half-gloves; gloves that actually looked like the ones Noah was wearing on a crisp spring day. Noah explained, “He had the stigmata, you know, and he was embarrassed because it would bleed all over the place and he didn’t like that, so he wore gloves.” I ask Nick why Padre Pio was important to him, and Noah shrugged, “I think he’s been stalking me for parts of my life. He’s one of my guys.”

Formal Catholic theology defines saints as “holy people” who are in heaven. They (usually) existed in historical time, caused miracles after their death, and work as intercessors for humans. They are, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines, “pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers.” Despite this formal definition, saints have historically been unruly sites of Catholic prayer practices. Even when the Vatican has tried to “clean up” the communion of saints by removing those without proof of historical existence, the saints persist. For example, the devotion to St. Christopher as the patron saint of safe travel continues to thrive despite his unverifiable historical record. During the procedure of declaring a “dead human being” a saint, Vatican representatives ask people who knew the potential saint to attest to their holiness and to lobby for their sanctification. Politics often surround who is named a saint, such as the recent decision to canonize both Popes John Paul II and John XXIII in 2014. The narratives and social matrices surrounding saints complicate who and how and why the saints come to exist. Their biographies are told over and over again, for different reasons and to make different points. Saints are made malleable by devotees’ stories.

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15 Noah, in discussion with author, April 3, 2013.
Within DIRECT, saints were made real to and for missionaries by narration, by an “endless nesting of stories,” by formal DIRECT instruction. Biographies of saints were woven into the job. DIRECT asked all of their missionaries to develop personal devotions with saints. The organization made biographies and diaries of the saints easily available. Missionaries heard stories about saints through formal DIRECT channels. All of the engaged-to-be-married women at training were in the same college and under the patronage of St. Anne, Mary’s mother. Missionaries who evangelized athletes were assigned to the college of the physically adept St. Joan of Arc. The feast day of a patron saint of missionaries, St. Thérèse, October 2, was a day of celebration on staff. I often heard missionaries bond over having been assigned to the same saint at New Staff Training. Even when missionaries were not particularly drawn to a saint, they cultivated a relationship. Sally, a missionary with DIRECT’s Digital Campus, was initially disappointed that she was assigned to St. Scholastica, a saint with whom she was not familiar. Nonetheless, she dutifully prayed to the saint, studied the biography of St. Scholastica and told other missionaries about Scholastica’s relationship with her more well-known brother Benedict. Through these narrative practices, she developed her own story of Scholastica:

[T]hat summer of having her as our patron, I felt very close to her in, like—the one story that there is about her is that she prayed very hard that her and her brother, Benedict, would be able to, like, stay up all night talking. She was enjoying their conversation. And then this storm came and they stayed up all night. Like, so she prayed that he would somehow be able to stay. So whenever I think of, like, stuff like that, I kind of like, always ask for her intercession…She’s just really awesome.  

Sally came to know and appreciate Scholastica through putting the saint’s biography in conversation with her own life. She refracted her personal biography through Scholastica’s. The saints became historically contextualized role models and trans-historical figures whose holy

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17 Sally, interview by author, March 4, 2013, transcript. The relationship between saint and missionary at New Staff Training is gender-specific. Male missionaries’ colleges are under the patronage of male saints; female missionaries’ colleges are under the patronage of female saints.
lives had implications for contemporary life.

Missionaries also learned about saints from one another and through less formal channels. They loved to tell each other stories about saints and introduce a fellow missionary to new information about the life of a saint. The saints became part of missionaries’ daily lives in the casual chitchat between missionaries. For example, Mia reminded Jenna to take risks in her evangelization on campus by referencing the missionary life of St. Francis Xavier. Allen reminded his teammates that even St. Paul failed sometimes. An overflowing of saints’ biographies settled in the DIRECT world and moved missionaries between their daily lives and saint-inspired ideals. Missionaries worked with students, interacted with Newman Center staff, and prayed in the chapel imbued with an awareness of particular saints’ biographies. The sacrifices saints made, famous quotes from a saint, and saints’ suffering all populated missionaries’ daily conversations.

While I encountered many saints among missionaries, there were four “good ones” whose biographies I heard referenced most consistently. Female missionaries, especially, enjoyed telling stories about Saints Faustina Kowalska, Gemma Galgani, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Blessed Chiara Luce. Notably, all four saints died young, which seemed to be part of their appeal. They were perpetually the same age as missionaries. Faustina was the oldest when she died at thirty-three, Chiara the youngest at eighteen, Gemma was twenty-five, and Thérèse twenty-four. These young women were not martyrs. They died of painful, long-suffering diseases, including tuberculosis and cancer.18 They were ill for extended stretches of their short lives and missionaries often told stories of how much these saints had suffered without

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18 “The good ones” in this chapter are all women because my conversations were so heavily weighted by women’s perspective. DIRECT’s strict gender roles meant, in general, women missionaries relate with female saints and male missionaries with male saints. Daniel and his relationship with Blessed Maria Taigi is an exception.
complaint. Significantly, for these self-described “JPII generation” Catholics, each of these saints had links to the papacy of John Paul II. He canonized Faustina and Gemma. He began the process for Chiara, and elevated St. Thérèse’s status to “Doctor of the Church” (she had been canonized in 1925 by Pope Pius XI). Because they understood Pope John Paul II as their generation’s pope and as the evangelizing pope, missionaries gravitated to things he affected.

Missionaries talked about devotionalism as direct interaction with these extra-human figures. But these holy men and women were always also being accessed through many layers of human mediation. Gemma, for example, wrote her autobiography because she was directed to do so by her spiritual director. Northern Italian immigrants brought Gemma—as statue and story—to America. English-language publications about Gemma soared in the U.S. in the 1940s, as the cause for her canonization worked its way through the Vatican’s process. Missionaries taught each other about Gemma and read the TAN Books’ republications of her autobiography and diary. When Mia encountered Gemma, it was through the lens of multiple Catholic communities that created the Gemma she came to know well. Mia continued the intersubjective narrative process of devotionalism by adding her own Gemma stories to the cacophony.

These many narratives and the piling on of stories among missionaries defined the saints in missionaries’ lives. Saints’ biographies, historical narratives, and the canonization processes implicated missionaries in a history and contemporary practice of Catholic devotionalism. Saints were defined by their historical biographies and then again by the stories of those who advocated for their cause of sainthood and then yet again by stories of devotees who asked the saint to intercede for them. The saints also contained infinitely unfinished narratives into which

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20 Google Ngram study of “Gemma Galgani,” shows a spike in the number of English-language publications about Gemma Galgani, in the U.S., from 1940 through 1945, accessed April 25, 2015, goo.gl/W8Cg6J.
missionaries placed themselves and continued narrating. When Mia encountered Gemma, she also encountered a short but dense history of DIRECT missionaries telling stories that they had read, heard, and experienced with and around Gemma. Mia entered that story and added to it.

**Accounting with the Saints**

After all, when one gives an account of oneself one is not merely relaying information through an indifferent medium. The account is an act—situated within a larger practice of acts—that one performs for, to, even on an other…and in the face of, the other and sometimes by virtue of the language provided by the other. This account does not have as its goal the establishment of a definitive narrative, but constitutes a linguistic and social occasion for self-transformation. \(^ {21}\)

—Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*

Being is a potentiality that waxes and wanes, is augmented or diminished, depending on how one acts and speaks in relation to others. \(^ {22}\)

—Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*

Mia had a loud personality that other missionaries described as “intense” and “off the hook.” She taught me more college-student slang than any other missionary and often shouted a rowdy, “Hey, giiirrrrl!” to students she knew on campus. She drank a lot of Red Bull and seemed to eat a steady diet of Goldfish crackers and candy. As we walked back to campus from a coffee shop one afternoon, Mia sounded like Gemma might have when she talked about prayer, “I love spending time with Jesus in the middle of the night!” Then she furrowed her brow and explained that she was having a vocational debate, one that resonated in Gemma’s biography, too. Mia was discerning whether God was calling her to marriage or to religious life. “And if I was going to be a nun,” she was clear, “I’d be a Passionist.” Mia felt drawn to their charism of being devoted to the Passion of Christ (she also liked that they wore full habits). Mia’s attraction to the Passionists reflected her relationship with Gemma, whose writings described her desire to

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join that order and depicted her devotion to Christ’s Passion:

If you knew... how Jesus is afflicted sometimes! Oh, it is almost too much to bear to see Him like that... I suffer very much at seeing Jesus in the midst of such sorrow... I offer my life to Thee, O my God—my life united to the life of Jesus, and my sufferings with His, only I ask Thee to grant me perfect sorrow for my sins!... Will that I should enter a Convent. Well, if You so desire, I am ready... Perhaps you prefer me to live in the world, alone, abandoned, and despised by all? I am prepared.  

Mia shared Gemma’s prayer-based experience of caring for an “afflicted” Jesus during his Passion. Mia told me about a “life-changing” and “intense” eight-day silent retreat during the previous summer, between her second and third years as a missionary. Mia’s usually loud and robust voice softened as she remembered the experience of praying with an image of Jesus in the chapel on the retreat. “So there I am, unplugged on this silent retreat, with all this time with Jesus.” During one of her first prayer session on the retreat, she visualized Jesus suffering in physical pain, alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. In her prayer, Mia experienced herself as there with him. He asked her to hold and comfort him. But, and here she squirmed at the memory while telling me, “He was all bloody and sort of gross, so I didn’t do it.” After that prayer session, she had a hard time really “getting into prayer” again. Her spiritual director on the retreat suggested she to return to that image of Jesus and do what Jesus asked. Back in the chapel, she re-imagined being with Jesus in the quiet, dark garden together. Again, he was bloody and again, he asked her to hold him. Mia did “and it was incredible. It was exactly what I was supposed to do!” For the rest of the week, she said, her prayer really “took off.” In a later experience on the same retreat, she reached out to Jesus on the cross, “There I am and Jesus is all bloody and I reach out my hands to hug him... and it was one of the most insane, intense

23 _The Saint Gemma Collection: Five Books_ (London: Catholic Way Publishing, 2013), 376. It is debated just how much of this is from Gemma and how much is from her spiritual director, a domineering Passionist priest who insisted that she write of her spiritual life. Bell and Mazzoni debate this as they contextualize Gemma’s writings; Orsi also wonders about this in “Two Aspects of One Life.” From what I could tell, Mia read these writings as having been written Gemma.
experiences of my life!"\textsuperscript{24}

In the epigraph of this section, Butler describes the ways that accounting of oneself to another requires dependence on the language of the other. Indeed, the “terms we use are not of our making—they are social in character...The norms by which I recognize another, or, indeed myself, are not mine alone.”\textsuperscript{25} In giving her account of her retreat experience, Mia relied on a language of devotion she learned through her devotion to Gemma. Mia also turned to Gemma’s descriptions of prayer in order to understand her own “insane, intense” experience on the retreat. The two young women were both overwhelmed by Jesus’ suffering and uncertain of how to respond. The saint provided the missionary with a lexicon for describing her experiences of prayer and discernment—not just to others, but also to herself. Gemma was not simply a backdrop against which Mia prayed. Gemma was a co-participant and co-creator of Mia’s prayer. As Mia and I chatted about her retreat, the conversation drifted toward St. Gemma. She winked and reminded me of what she had said a few months before, “Gemma chose me.” That’s how it works, she said, “You think you’re choosing the saints, but they choose you.”\textsuperscript{26}

Alexi agreed. Alexi was a third-year missionary when I met her. I was visiting her team on the campus of a small-town private college in southern Illinois. Since Alexi was one of only a handful of more reserved missionaries that I met during my fieldwork, I was especially surprised when she told me about her physically abusive childhood in the first five minutes of our interview. We ate pizza as she detailed her ongoing healing process, her debate about whether or not to invite her abusive father to her upcoming wedding and her still haunted guesses as to why he had not abused her sister. As the conversation turned to her prayer life, she told me that she

\textsuperscript{24} Mia, in discussion with author, March 21, 2013.
\textsuperscript{25} Butler, \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself}, 20, 24.
\textsuperscript{26} Field notes, November 6, 2012.
had been assigned to the College of St. Faustina her first year at New Staff Training, “so I really got to know her,” Alexi smiled slightly. “And then my second year—this never happens—it was Saint Faustina again…Then my third year I got Saint Faustina [again]! I felt like she was like stalking me.” Alexi responded to Faustina’s persistence by beginning a discipline of praying Faustina’s “Divine Mercy Chaplet.”

The chaplet was a popular prayer that I encountered often in my research. St. Faustina had multiple visions of Jesus instructing her to pray, “For the sake of His sorrowful Passion have mercy on us and on the whole world.” Alexi sighed as she explained her relationship with the chaplet, “I found comfort in it.” She put her pizza down as she said, “I just really know that I’m a sinner and…that I need to pray this everyday because I need all the mercy and grace I can get.” Alexi had begun to notice a difference in her prayer life since praying with Faustina, “I have a tendency to be very critical of myself, and so I think the Divine Mercy Chaplet helps me to remember God’s mercy.” Instructed by Faustina, Alexi was learning to receive God’s mercy.

St. Faustina was born Helenka Kowalska in 1905, one of eight children in a poor family in rural Poland. When she was nineteen years old in 1925, she joined the convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, in Warsaw. The religious sister who received her at the convent described the young woman as, “A skinny little thing, thin and poor looking, with not much expression, unpromising.” Faustina suffered bouts of illness, eventually

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27 Alexi, interview by author, December 5, 2013, transcript.
28 The full chaplet was rosary-based. Devout were instructed, through Faustina’s reported vision of Christ, to begin the rosary, but instead of the “Hail Mary,” they were to say this prayer on each of the Hail Mary beads, Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul: Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM) 1987, paragraph 476, notebook 1, 208. DIRECT passed out prayer cards with instructions on how to pray the chaplet at their national conference.
29 Alexi, interview by author.
diagnosed as tuberculosis, from which she died in 1938. Faustina’s vision, which became known as “Divine Mercy Jesus,” is depicted with Jesus holding one hand up in blessing and the other hand on his heart. Rays of red and blue light, representing blood and water, stream out of his heart. These rays were interpreted by missionaries who explained the image to me as offering divine mercy to all of humanity. The words, “Jesus, I trust in You,” from Faustina’s diary, were written at the bottom of most images I saw. Faustina’s diary, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, was part of many missionaries’ spiritual reading practice. Well-handled and marked-up copies of the book circulated among missionaries. One missionary told me she passed it out to as many students as possible on campus.\(^{32}\) The diary details Faustina’s vision of Jesus telling her: “Today I am sending you with My Mercy to the people of the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart.”\(^{33}\)

Other missionaries shared Alexi’s experience of being stalked by Faustina. Meredith, who was in her first year as a missionary with the Digital Campus when I interviewed her, was so eager to tell me the story of her first encounters with Faustina that she asked me for permission to do so during our interview. On her Interview Weekend with DIRECT, she ended up in the hospital with kidney stones. The missionary who accompanied her to the hospital taught Meredith the Divine Mercy Chaplet, which Meredith prayed “over and over and over again” for two pain-filled days. On the way from the hospital to the closing Mass of Interview Weekend, she was amazed to arrive for Mass at a shrine to Faustina. “It was just really, really cool,” Meredith said. She continued praying the chaplet at home, asking Faustina to guide her discernment about whether or not to become DIRECT missionary. Though she accepted the job offer when it came, Meredith remained uncertain about God’s call when she arrived at New Staff

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\(^{32}\) Sally, interview by author.

Training. That anxiety turned to certainty when she found out she had been assigned to the College of St. Faustina.\textsuperscript{34} Meredith’s story of Faustina depicted an intersubjective relationship between the saint and missionary. Faustina acted in Meredith’s life as she offered physical salve and vocational confirmation in response to Meredith’s prayers.

Alexi’s regular prayers of the Divine Mercy chaplet and Meredith’s discernment through Faustina drew them both into a relationship that was mediated by Faustina, but also involved other missionaries’ stories of Faustina and relied on the language of devotionalism that circulated among missionaries. As Butler argues, the only available narratives we have access to have been shaped by the world one enters into. The tension is that “narrative[s] begins \textit{in media res}, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story possible in language.”\textsuperscript{35} The narratives Alexi and Meredith could imagine using as they described their lives in relation to Faustina had been underway long before these millennial missionaries began telling their stories of divine mercy. At the same time, each missionary experienced Faustina as a unique encounter with a particular member of the communion of saints. Saints and devotionalism drew missionaries into a Catholic story that they were being shaped by, but to which they also contributed their own experiences. The act of telling these stories of their relationality with Faustina drew Alexi and Meredith into the ethos of DIRECT and into a particular enactment of Catholic prayer practices. Their accounts of encountering Faustina, as Butler articulates, began with themselves, but they “f[ou]nd that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacity for narration.”\textsuperscript{36} The stories that Meredith and Alexi told of their experiences with Faustina related an account of their individual relationship with the saint. But

\textsuperscript{34} Meredith, interview by author, March 13, 2013, transcript.
\textsuperscript{35} Butler, \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself}, 39.
\textsuperscript{36} Butler, \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself}, 7.
because the individual is not a solitary creation, their narratives about Faustina relied on and drew them into a larger set of narratives that were already in process when they met the saint.

In particular, the language of being stalked, chased, and chosen drew missionaries into a binding and already-in-action relationship with saints. Missionaries loved to tell these stories of being stalked. It seemed comforting to them, I realized, that there were heavenly beings guiding and informing their lives. Being aggressively sought after by a saint was understood as an endearing stalk. It implicated them in a larger story of Catholic devotionalism within DIRECT. This shared language of being sought out by a heavenly figure made them feel connected to other missionaries and to other Catholics.

But to be stalked or chased is, of course, to be pressed upon and harassed, violated by unwanted attention. Alexi would seem to have been especially sensitive to the danger of this metaphor because she grew up in an abusive household. Missionary devotionalism was, in this sense, inescapable. This is the disturbing counter implied in Butler’s descriptions of endlessly intersubjective accounting. If the story that we enter into is not of our making, what happens when that story is a destructive one? The missionary response to this potentially dark side of saints was to interpret the saints’ lives in ways that normalized and celebrated the excessiveness of saints’ abundant presences in missionaries’ lives. “Stalking” was not a creepy action, but an act of God’s care. Saints had to “chase” missionaries not because saints were overly aggressive, but because the saint cared so much.

In addition to this work to normalize saints’ behaviors, missionaries also seemed to make intentional choices in using the language of saints “stalking” and choosing.” There was a way in which these tools of narration helped Mia and Alexi and Noah and Meredith make their dynamic relationship with the saints feel more real. The force of these kinds of verbs seemed to allow
missionaries to make sense of their encounter with the saints. Saints participated in missionaries’ processes of becoming missionaries and Catholics and devotees, but it was an unexpected and surprising relationship. Mia encountered in Gemma a prayer life that illuminated her own. Alexi found in Faustina a message of mercy. Noah imagined Pio as a part of a team of guys who had his back. Meredith experienced confirmation of discernment with Faustina. For these young missionaries, the resonances were so strong and the missionaries were so unprepared for these saintly encounters that these missionaries experienced the saints as agentic forces in their lives.

Not all missionaries waited to be stalked or chosen by a saint. Not all saints were as aggressive as Gemma and Faustina and Pio. For other missionaries, the kind of narratives that they developed about saints depended less on shared experiences of Jesus and more on how the saints’ biographies prescribed particular Catholic behavior. For example, Daniel, the team leader on my campus, went looking for role models in his practice of devotionalism. Daniel had just bought an engagement ring for his girlfriend when we were chatting about saints. He reported that Blessed Maria Taigi was one of his new favorite “saints and blesseds.” Shrugging nonchalantly, he explained that she did not do anything so incredible, but she was a mom and a wife with nine kids. Reflecting his recent vocational discernment, he said that he was being drawn, lately, to the married saints and saints with kids. “Those are the kinds of role models I like…My head’s probably not going to get chopped off and springs of water spring forth…I hope I’d be ready for that if it happened tomorrow, but it’s not going to. So I have to do what I can with what I have.”

Daniel said that he recently learned about Blessed Maria Taigi and saw in her biography an example of doing what she could with what she had.

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37 Field notes, February 3, 2012.
When Daniel sought after a saint, he looked for a moral exemplar of Catholic familyhood. As he described his emerging relationship with Blessed Maria, Daniel articulated a set of prescriptions for daily action that he was working to adopt as his own. It was not enough, though, for him to have a list of what it meant to be a good, Catholic husband. He sought out a relationship with a saint who could help him do so. The way he came to understand her instructions for his life were contingent on structures of Catholic expectations that surrounded him as an engaged-to-be-married missionary within DIRECT. These expectations were, at once, outside of himself and descriptive of his own desires.

When missionaries told stories of the saints, they were also describing the norms of ethical behavior they were trying to embody. The biographies of saints could become textbooks for how to be a good person. Alexandra was a third-year missionary who often offered me fragments of saints’ biographies during our casual conversations. She extended them to me as prescriptions for my life. While we were running together one Saturday morning, I was complaining to her about a colleague and she advised me to “St.-Thérèse-her!” Alexandra explained that when St. Thérèse did not like someone, she would spend a lot of extra time with that person, “because, she figured, Jesus was in them, too!” To “St.-Thérèse-her” meant that I should spend more time with the very person who I did not want to see. The biographies of saints were on the tips of missionaries’ tongues, and they encoded instructions for modern, daily life. Alexandra did not begin her advice to me with what she had done in a similar situation; she began with what St. Thérèse had done. The saints’ lives carried the weight of ethical exemplars.

Butler argues that our norms of ethical behavior are never completely our own because

38 Alexandra, in discussion with author, May 18, 2013.
“the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life.”

This temporal incongruity was especially poignant between missionaries and saints. When Alexandra told me “St.-Thérèse-her,” she was lifting behavioral norms from nineteenth-century French monastic life into twenty-first century graduate school life in the U.S. Daniel was drawing on the biography of a late-eighteenth century Italian mother to learn how to be a contemporary family man. Despite the interruption and discontinuity, Alexandra and Daniel turned to these saints as role models. Part of what soothed the interruption between biographies was missionaries never relied only on the saints’ biographies in understanding them as ethical exemplars. Daniel and Alexandra had both heard many stories of both of these saints from other missionaries. These accounts worked to bridge the gap between missionary and saint.

To pray to particular members of the communion of saints who had particular biographical narratives and around whom particular stories tended to coalesce required that missionaries tried to participate in the norms of behavior defined by the biographies of these saints. Norms, in this sense of ethical prescription, defined the limits of their subjectivity formation. Butler insists that “[T]here is no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take.” Daniel was sure he would never be asked to make a martyr’s choice. So rather than cultivating a devotional relationship with a martyr, he looked to Blessed Maria’s biography as a set of “codes, prescriptions” that defined the “aesthetics of the self that maintain[ed] a critical relation to existing norms.” The saints’ biographies—with their dramatic death stories, sacrifices, and adventurous, pious relationships with God—defined norms

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42 Ibid.
that prescribed how Catholic missionaries ought to try to behave. These holy men and women participated in the horizon of who and how missionaries were becoming subjectivities.

These relationships were entered into and sustained by the multiple modes of communication—prayer forms—which missionaries practiced with saints. Sally, the third-year missionary who told me how hard she had to work to have a relationship with St. Scholastica, loved praying with Faustina. She talked at length about their free-form communication:

I feel, like, when there are things that they speak about in their lives, or in their writings, that you just feel, like, oh my gosh, that’s exactly—that is exactly what I’m going through right now. Another one of my favorites is St. Faustina. She and I are just like best buds. I just love her! Because she has this message of—she perpetuated the message of God’s unfathomable divine mercy to the world. And was the reason for this beautiful painting and “Jesus, I trust in you” stuff. And I feel like, having been on a college campus, so I got a hold of St. Faustina’s diary, like, my first year on staff. So I started reading it and I felt very very drawn to everything that she was saying…I just feel very, very drawn to her and just, her message. I connect with that message.43

As Mia did with Gemma, Sally experienced Faustina as a well-known friend. She had a casual relationship that she nurtured with easy conversation.

But not all prayer-speech between missionary and saint was as casual and unscripted as Sally’s was with Faustina. Kelly was a missionary who evangelized athletes on a Big 10 campus. When I asked her about her favorite saints, she pulled out her iPad mini and marched me through her weekly devotions with many saints. Scrolling through her list, she paused on one:

I prayed to St. Pius for my memory, because a couple months ago, I realized that I have a terrible memory. And, like, there are times when I still really forget my stuff. But, in general, I’ve just found that—not only has it not been a problem, but, like, I recognize when I normally would have forgotten something and he’s just assisted me…. Literally, my memory used to be awful!! Yeah, it has though; it’s been amazing!

There were others in her repertoire. She prayed to Mary Magdalene for forgiveness, St. Thomas for intellect, St. Raphael for “consistency in moods,” St. Peter for “organization and

43 Sally, interview by author.
decisiveness,” and St. Joseph for her future husband. She prayed to St. Philomena for her sister.  

When missionaries prayed with saints, they were not simply asking for things (though, they did that, too). Prayer—and, here, I refer to the wide range of interactions between missionaries and saints—was the practice of missionaries’ subjectivity formation in relationship with the saints. In prayer, missionaries accounted of themselves to the saints. Kelly admitted to Pius that she had a bad memory. Daniel reported to Blessed Maria that he was nervous about balancing the demands of Catholic marriage and missionary life. Alexi recounted her insecurities and fears to Faustina. Telling stories of themselves to the saints affected missionaries.

But it also seemed to affect the saint, too. The saints were drawn into the lives of missionaries through this intersubjective accounting. Butler describes the work of accounting for oneself as a kind of storytelling that also “acts on [the other] in some way. And this telling is also doing something to me, acting on me, in ways that I may well not understand as I go.”  

Humans are, endlessly being “constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond and before us.” When missionaries prayed with saints, when they narrated themselves to a heavenly other, the saints responded. Kelly swore to me that after she did her novena to Pius, she really could remember students’ names better. Sally’s tone was quiet and reflective when she told me how Faustina helped her experience God’s merciful forgiveness after years of drunken partying and sexual promiscuity in college. Alexandra had done her own fair share of St.-Thérèse-ing co-workers and felt confident the saint had helped. Their narratives with friends, family, and fellow missionaries affected both missionary and saint.

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44 Kelly, interview by author, April 23, 2013, transcript.
As missionaries prayed with saints, they moved between their millennial-generation hopes and anxieties and the saints’ biographies. Praying with the saints instructed missionaries on how to be a particular kind of Catholic subject. Some came to understand themselves as stalked and chased by saints. Others found ways to seek out saints whose biographies could instruct their own. It was an intentional process, one where missionaries expected their prayers with particular saints to affect their daily actions, norms, expectations, and ways of being Catholic in the twenty-first century. The process, like all narrative processes, made missionaries vulnerable to the demands of their interlocutors, including the saints. This vulnerability before the saints made ethical demands on missionaries. They were urged to become saints themselves.

Ethical Demands of the Saints

Be Saints, it’s worth it!47
—Laine Cooley, DIRECT Family Liaison and DIRECT National Conference Speaker

To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession.48
—Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself

Mia and I had finished Holy Hour and were headed to coffee (for me) and Red Bull (for Mia, always) at the start of Spring Break. The long winter had finally given way to spring and we walked outside as she waxed enthusiastic about her decision to continue with DIRECT for another year. Mia said she loved being a missionary because it was about “becoming saints.” I had been hearing missionaries say that for months and reading it all over DIRECT publications

48 Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself, 26.
and social media, but could not figure out what was meant by “be a saint.” I seized the opportunity to ask Mia. She smiled and explained that it is about virtue. That’s what we missionaries do, she said, “We teach people how to live with virtue and encourage them to do it…[It is about] building virtue, learning to be saints…living with virtue.” Saints are our models for virtue, she reasoned, so we should emulate them and try to become saints, too.49

Two months later, the newly elected Pope Francis announced that he would be declaring the sainthood of both Popes John XXIII and John Paul II. As a part of DIRECT’s ongoing efforts to teach about special Catholic things, DIRECT’s Director of Curriculum (and Laine Coopley’s husband) outlined the seven ways great Catholics have become saints. “The path to sainthood never goes: They have a commitment to holiness. They have a vision to change the world. Everything goes great. They die happily.” Instead, Keith Coopley wrote,

1. Parents/family are against your vocation. 2. Your superiors are against you. 3. Your fellow brothers, sisters, priests or spouse are against you. 4. If it isn’t your superiors or brothers, it is those who you lead. 5. There is the common route of having a deadly illness, usually at a young age. 6. Of course, martyrdom is a common route. 7. Then, there are those who go through unbelievable obstacles—both spiritual and physical.50

Though written in a light-hearted tone, the post illustrates that the DIRECT theology of saints was imbued with an ethos of suffering. Thus, when missionaries told one another to “be saints” they were also telling each other to prepare for hardships, sacrifices, and ostracization.

These two examples—Mia’s understanding of saints as models of virtue and DIRECT’s laudatory description of the painful path of official sainthood—make explicit the dual nature of the charge to “be saints!” DIRECT missionaries received training from a speaker who urged them to pray that God “wreck” their lives because it would lead them to sainthood. He urged

them to pray, “God, I give you permission to remove anything in my life that’s keeping me from sainthood….That’s a dangerous prayer and ooooh! It hurts,” he shook his head in awe and then smiled assurance to the audience, “but it’s a beautiful kind of hurt.” This is both the ethos and ethic of missionaries’ devotional practices. The saints were, at once, fixed and malleable. They were both holy others deemed exceptionally virtuous for how they acted in history and they were intersubjective, imitable others whose narrated biographies were constantly being re-told and re-interpreted and re-worked in different ways in particular missionaries’ lives.

This section’s opening epigraph—Laine’s urge to “Be saints!”—marked the most consistent usage of this phrase. She had an increasingly strong presence within DIRECT and signed every blog post and every email with it. Each chastity talk and discussion about Catholic womanhood that she led ended with the breezy directive. But she was not alone. Conversations between missionaries also encouraged one another to become saints. Facebook posts urged friends to “be saints.” Missionaries occasionally tweeted “#besaints.” When they told one another to “be a saint!” missionaries were encouraging a desire to become who God intended, to imitate the saints’ biographies, and to make oneself into an “all in Catholic.”

When I asked Alexandra what Laine meant when she told everyone to “be saints,” Alexandra chuckled knowingly at my confusion and then explained that it required a shift in my thinking about the nature of saints. I needed, she said, “to understand idea of being a saint, rather than just looking up to them.” We were having a lazy lunch and had been chitchatting about how a good attitude affects the way we go about our daily lives, so she used that to illustrate. She told me that one way to think about becoming a saint was to challenge myself to become “St.

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Katherine Dugan, known for being positive.”

In doing so, Alexandra was relying on a particular interpretation of sainthood to instruct me in striving toward becoming the ideal version of myself that she imagined God calling me to become. This assumption that all humans are meant to become saints draws heavily on unacknowledged references to Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theology of saints. As I detailed in the first chapter, the mid-twentieth-century Swiss theologian had significant influence on the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Balthasar’s ideas filtered, seemingly unconsciously, into the assortment of theological ideas that undergirded DIRECT’s formal articulations of Catholic teachings and theology of evangelization. This was also the case on the topic of saints. In his 1954 biography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Balthasar proposed that the primary purpose of being Catholic was “becoming a saint.” This, he insisted, was the “obligatory vocation” that all Catholics had to achieving “subjective and personal sanctity.” The structure of the Church, Balthasar argued, existed to make saints. The way one became a saint, he insisted, was by fulfilling their “mission” from God. Becoming a saint was not constrained by an individual’s “arbitrary disposition,” Balthasar cautioned. Rather, becoming a saint was a process of becoming, toward a specific telos that was defined by the infinite imagination of God, not the finite imagination of humans. Balthasar asserted, “For each Christian, God has an Idea which fixes his place within the membership of the Church; this Idea is unique and personal, embodying for each his appropriate sanctity…The Christian’s supreme aim is to transform his life into this Idea of himself secreted in God.”

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52 Alexandra, in discussion with author, June 18, 2013.
54 Balthasar, Thérèse of Lisieux, xii-xiii. (capital in original). A similar imperative comes from Marie Commins’ Be A Saint in Spite of Yourself (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956). Written not long after Balthasar’s theological treatise, this reflection on fourteen saints begins with a preface from Fr. Patrick O’Connor of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C: “We are deeply impressed with the fact that, no
of saints and sainthood, to become the Idea that has been ordained and prescribed by God.

Missionaries promoted this universal call to sainthood with an attitude of expectant humility. DIRECT founder Curtis Martin told six thousand attendees at SEEK2013, “It isn’t just a possibility that we can become saints, it’s likely—because THAT is what we are made for.” A fifth-year on-campus missionary described her work as the process of watching college students recognize the possibility of their own sainthood through Catholicism. “When I meet them they’re like nominally Catholic...When they realize they are made to be saints it’s so cool to see.”

“Pray,” another missionary urged a small group of students, because that is the “first step to sainthood,” and “we are all called to be saints.” Becoming a saint was not about becoming Gemma or Faustina or Maria Taigi (though their models and moral examples were instructive). Rather, in becoming saints, Gemma and Faustina had become the women they were intended by God’s Idea to become.

Missionaries’ relationships with saints were often burdened by the struggle to correctly discern who and what and how God’s Idea was for them. Over coffee during her first six weeks on campus, Heidi told me that she had been very uncertain about whether or not God was really calling her to be a missionary. In hopes of feeling “a sense of peace” that would confirm this for her, she prayed a novena to St. Thérèse, “the Little Flower” and patron saint of missionaries.

To Thérèse, Heidi defined specific terms of her discernment. If Heidi saw white roses during her three-day-long Interview Weekend, that meant Thérèse was telling her “yes,” be a missionary;

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55 Twitter, January 6, 2013, Quoting Curtis Martin at SEEK2013, January 6, 2013.
57 Field notes, April 20, 2013.
red roses meant “no.” By setting the terms in this way, Heidi offered an extra challenge to Thérèse if the answer was to be “yes” since her Interview Weekend was over Valentine’s Day, which meant there was a much higher likelihood that Heidi would see red roses. Nonetheless, Thérèse overcame the barrier. Heidi told me that by lunch on the second day, she had been feeling “more and more” that God was calling her to be a missionary. When she walked out of the restaurant, she saw a huge bunch of white roses. “I was stunned,” she said with eyes wide in astonishment, even six months later. Heidi nodded as she told me the story, “She [St. Thérèse] seized the moment! I was ready to hear it!” Heidi accepted the missionary job offer a few days later, assured that she was enacting God’s Idea for how she was intended to become St. Heidi.

By the time I interviewed Heidi, I was over a year into my field research and stories like hers with Thérèse had become both commonplace and confusing to me. Heidi struck me as passive in the account, and it was a passivity that did not square with the smart, careful, over-achieving twenty-two-year-old woman who sat in front of me. I could not help but wonder if Heidi was just repeating what she thought she should tell me or was just replicating a way of talking about saints that had been modeled for her by other DIRECT missionaries. I sighed and wrote the field notes. Months later, I re-read this story, but through the lens of Butler’s urge that we recognize the limited and susceptible nature of humans. To be in a relationship with an other is to be both vulnerable and receptive to them. In this shared vulnerability, Butler argues, we become ethically response-able to one another. Heidi’s story, I realized, was not a question of her agency. Rather, she had described for me the ways she made herself susceptible to the saint’s imperatives for her life. Through her novena, her anxious discernment-based conversations with the saint, and talking with others about St. Thérèse, Heidi became vulnerable to this other. Part of

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59 Heidi, in discussion with author.
what Heidi had given me in this interview was an account of her susceptibility to the saint.

Heidi and other missionaries made themselves vulnerable to various (and always particular) saints by refusing to make self-preservation “the essence of the human” because, as Butler argues, if “one were successful from walling oneself off from injury, one would become inhuman.”

Vulnerability and limitedness are not cause for inaction or collapse into despair. Rather, this kind of susceptibility with the other constitutes the cause for action. Susceptibility, as Butler characterizes it, is an experience that is “unwilled, unchosen, that is a condition of our responsiveness to others, even a condition of our responsibility for them.”

In becoming susceptible to a saint, as Heidi became to Thérèse, young adults risked being asked to do something like commit to two or more years doing missionary work on a college campus of DIRECT’s choosing or talk to an intimidating student about Jesus. In this way, saints made claims on the missionaries. Thérèse instructed Heidi to become a missionary. As missionaries became vulnerable to saints, they took up the response-abilities of sainthood as dictated by saints.

In addition to the sacrifice that was demanded of missionaries by being instructed to “become a saint,” to embody God’s Idea for them, the vulnerability that missionaries cultivated in their relationships with the saints also made more daily claims on missionaries’ behavior. One of Alexandra’s favorite saints, Blessed Chiara Luce, was not technically a saint yet. For six months after Chiara’s feast day in October, a picture of this young Italian woman adorned Alexandra’s Facebook cover photo with the accompanying quote: “At this point I have nothing left, but I still have my heart and with that I can always love.” During one of our weekly faith-sharing group gatherings, the discussion guide asked us to share our role models in faith. The other young adults talked about friends or parents or priests, but Alexandra said that one of her

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favorite Catholic role models was Blessed Chiara Luce. I was not alone in not knowing this name, so Alexandra gave a quick summary of the recently beautified Italian woman who was born in 1971 and died in 1990 of bone cancer. “She’s a saint of our generation,” Alexandra beamed. When Chiara was sick and dying from cancer, her face was ravaged by the illness. Even then, Alexandra exclaimed, “She [Chiara] still had these eyes of joy, and the people would go into her hospital room and come out refreshed and joyful, because of her presence…She suffered beautifully.” Alexandra, having recently left the mission field and entered the secular workforce, said she hoped to be able to suffer in that way, in her daily tasks at her new, often tedious, office job. Alexandra prayed that she might have a disposition that helped her accept quotidian toil without complaint, as Chiara had uncomplainingly accepted much worse.

Becoming St. Alexandra meant that she was called upon to identify and fulfill God’s Idea for her sanctity, but there was no singular, fixed way to do that. Thus, figuring out when she had aligned her life choices with this Idea and when she needed a course corrective for her life required that she be in conversation with members of the communion of saints. While any saints’ life could offer instruction for living well, Alexandra explained, if a person found themselves drawn to a particular saint, that saint was understood as particularly capable of demonstrating a path of sanctity. Because Alexandra felt so personally drawn to Chiara, she took quite seriously how the young blessed’s life could instruct her own. She creatively looked for ways to translate Chiara’s virtues into her own life.

As Alexandra narrated Chiara’s biography of beautiful suffering to our group, part of what she did was remind herself of the relationship she had with Chiara. To tell a story about oneself is to be affected by the act of telling it. Alexandra’s account urged her to try to keep practicing

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62 Field notes, October 15, 2013.
imitating the biography of Chiara. This was an ongoing process of discipline. In fact, the reason Alexandra had to reference her desire to suffer more beautifully in her new job was that she was not enjoying the work. Despite three months on a desperate search to find employment after leaving DIRECT staff, she sometimes had a hard time feeling grateful for landing what had appeared to be a dream job. Failing to “suffer beautifully,” she returned to Chiara’s biography to be inspired to try again. This was a endless cycle of a devotionalism that charged the devout to “be saints.” Imitation was the always-present, never-achievable, always-in-process work of subjectivity formation in relationship with saints.

For Balthasar and DIRECT missionaries, becoming saints was interwoven with becoming Catholics. Thai was a particularly articulate and poised missionary from rural Illinois who made this connection for me. It was a cool April morning when we met at a Newman Center in small-town Indiana, where he was finishing up his two-year tenure with DIRECT. He sat straight up in his chair and spoke concisely and thoughtfully about his work as a DIRECT missionary, his charismatic prayer life and his recent realization that he had the gift of healing, and his discernment to leave DIRECT in order to join the priesthood. When I transcribed his interview, there was a notable lack of “ums” and “likes.” I asked him what he thought it meant to be Catholic, and he gave me an account of how his Catholicism bound him to becoming a saint:

I’m striving to be a saint…You can be Catholic simply by virtue of your Baptism, but not really practicing it. But in it’s deepest sense, you want to be—you want to imitate Christ in everything that you do. And, go all in. And that’s, like, that’s my Catholicism. Furthering a relationship with Him; trying to be a saint.63

To be an “all in Catholic” is to “be a saint.” Thai imagined centuries of saints having “go[ne] all in” and “really practice [Catholicism].” Thai inserted himself into a history of Catholicism constituted by saints, past and present.

63 Thai, interview by author, March 5, 2013, transcript.
Later that day, Thai’s teammate, Jackie, even more closely tied together being Catholic and becoming a saint. She was clear, “[B]eing Catholic is...the truth. And I know it’s my path to sainthood. And because of this [Catholicism], I have the opportunity to be a saint.”

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To be a saint was to be a good Catholic, an “all in Catholic,” the kind of Catholic who was willing to sacrifice in order to become a missionary. Implicit in missionaries telling one another to “be saints” was an interpretation of Catholic identity that was defined by, among other things, self-sacrificing evangelization and strict adherence to Vatican teachings (even the “hard ones,” Thai said, referencing the bans on same-sex marriage and artificial birth control). After his two years as a missionary, Thai entered the seminary with an order of missionary priests who travel around instructing parishes in Church teaching. Jackie was partially ostracized from her family because of her fundraising efforts as a missionary.

The stakes of this apparently simple two-word greeting were high. It meant that missionaries had to figure out who and what God was calling them to be. They had to know the biographies of the saints and figure out how to imitate them in their twenty-first century cultural context. They had to align their religious practices with what it meant to be an “all-in” Catholic. Despite (perhaps because of) the difficulty of these charges, missionaries valued this of becoming saints. This willingness was based in the vulnerability they cultivated in their devotions and relationships with saints. “Be saints!” was a charge they heard from their friends, fellow missionaries, and also from the saints. Missionaries experienced this call through their devotional practices as a part of their ongoing formation of Catholic subjectivity.

64 Jackie, interview by author, March 5, 2013, transcript. This is also an oblique reference to Balthasar: “Just as the subjective sanctity of its members is the aim of the institutional Church, similarly, the Church is the only place where this aim can be realized” (Balthasar, Thérèse of Lisieux, xi).
Conclusion

It is impossible to conceptualize one’s experience except in and through a relation with others.65

—Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*

As I began writing this chapter, I asked Mia if I could borrow her copy of *The Life of St. Gemma Galgani*. She was happy to and even offered to give me a copy because she had three of them. I laughed in appreciation, but it also reminded me of the density and redundancy of saints, stories about saints, and saints’ narratives in this world. Being a missionary was constantly being shot through with stories and narratives about the saints.

Missionaries worked on themselves—and were worked on—through the relationships they cultivated with particular saints. Through the stories they heard and told, missionaries were chosen by saints and responded to saints. Missionaries and saints’ biographies became intertwined as missionaries narrated both kinds of biographies. Missionaries were both pursued by saints and did the pursuing. They communicated with the saints in prayer forms that shaped missionaries and which missionaries shaped. The particular saints involved in DIRECT lives reflected ideological commitments and biographical experiences of the kinds of Catholics they aimed to become. Saints were, at once, instructors, moral exemplars, community-builders, stalkers, friends, “my girl,” and “one of my guys.” The saints have always been malleable figures on the cluttered landscape of Catholic prayers and devotions. This mutability in who and how the saints were allowed missionaries to interact with (and pick and choose from) saints’ biographies as missionaries imitated saints’ lives and became millennial-generation saints.

In the history of Catholic devotionalism, Mia’s dynamic relationship with Gemma, Sally’s emotive experiences with Faustina, and Kelly’s expectant novenas to St. Pius are the

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65 Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling*, 144.
domain of these missionaries’ grandmothers and European ethnic immigrant ancestors.

Prayer cards and rote prayer and saints were supposed to have slipped away into the quaintness of Catholic memory after the Second Vatican Council. Some scholarship on American Catholicism has caricatured contemporary devotionalism as “rearguard actions” of the defeated party. Robert Orsi has insisted that this was never such a tidy break, as historians have liked to imagine. Rather, perhaps, there was a “trauma” in the implementation of Vatican II. Anxiously modern Catholics in the immediate postconciliar era were embarrassed by remnants of saints and other devotional practices that seemed not to be “characteristically modern.” The saints were “askew” from quiet reflection and white, open spaces, and nature-based spirituality. To embrace the change—the fresh-smelling air and clean lines of aggiornamento—of the post-conciliar era meant sweeping the embarrassment of gaudy emotions and excessive images of saints into church basements or city dumps in order to move forward with a clean, neutral-smelling, sans-serif religiosity. Holy cards were shoved into old prayer books and tucked away in basements. Sepia-toned images of beheaded saints and gloriously bloody stories of martyrdom were cordoned off into the recesses of collective memory. If anyone referenced saints, it was without reference to the bawdy stigmata of Gemma’s diary or Faustina’s extended fasts or Chiara’s suffering through cancer. Rather, it was in the acceptably modern style of feminist theologians who imagined the communion of saints as a support team for Catholics on earth.

But the saints and their surpluses have never been so easy to hide away—or, as missionaries would say, to hide from. St. Pius pops up in Google searches about memory skills.

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Cards with St. Faustina’s “Divine Mercy” image appear in a prayer card in the back of a church. TAN Books republishes St. Gemma’s biography as an e-book. In missionaries accounting of the saints is also an updated history of devotionalism in post-Vatican II, contemporary American Catholicism. Devotionalism has not disappeared nor has it calcified into something static. Rather, saints persist in the intersubjective worlds and experiences of millennial missionaries. Their interpretations of the lives of the saints, and that of the community of devout, shaped and re-shaped devotional practices.

Missionary devotionalism was the cultivation of Catholic subjects, who were “all in” and striving for their own sainthood. Praying with the saints was expected to impact their definition and performance of ethical behavior and how they became Catholics. In missionary devotions, saints joined in the cacophonies of others in their lives. Saints were constituted by the historical accounts of saints’ lives, their biographers and autobiographies which were passed through informal missionary accounts, DIRECT’s formal narration of contemporary Catholic devotions, and missionaries’ own stories of experiences with the saints. Missionaries’ devotionalism drew them into a Catholic story that was already underway, gave them language with which they could narrate their experiences, and cultivated these millennials as saints-in-the-making.
Chapter 4. “Feminine Genius” and “Authentic Masculinity:” Becoming Catholic Gendered Subjectivities

Pray with me. Lord, each one of us has a special mission in life. You’ve given us the amazing gift of being a woman. May we see that and recognize that for what it is. May we love that call, Lord; may we embrace it. May we find out exactly what it is that you desire from us, as women. Give us the courage to live out our feminine genius, Lord. To live lives that are authentic. Lives that help us to find that joy. We thank you so much…for the gift of your love…For teaching us how to love. In your name, we pray.¹

—Laine Coopley, “Seeking the Truth about Womanhood,”
Women’s Session, SEEK2013

Make a steady foundation through prayer;
Ask God for forgiveness in Confession;
Never fear Satan, find strength in the Lord;
Ultimately, it’s about holiness;
Prayer to change the world.²

—“MAN UP” Prayer cards distributed by Simon Pickler, “Esto Vir! Reclaiming our Culture through Authentic Masculinity,”
Men’s Session, DIRECT National Conference 2011

Simon and Susan, two veteran DIRECT missionaries, were the emcees for the biennial “Battle of the Sexes” at DIRECT’s national conference in January 2013. As Simon and Susan pumped up the crowd, I sat with roughly 3,500 women in a large conference room while the 2,500 men convened in a slightly smaller ballroom upstairs. A simulcast screen made communication between the two rooms possible. On the third and final day of the battle, Simon called DIRECT founder, Curtis Martin, to the men’s stage. Susan called his wife, Michaelann, to the women’s stage. Susan asked Curtis questions about hair-dos, Disney princesses, and blow dryers. As he answered each of them correctly, Simon poked fun of his knowledge and the audience laughed and cheered for the correct answers. Simon asked Michaelann questions about James Bond, sports, and hunting knives. Susan did not poke fun, but did encourage laughter by

reminding the audience that Michaelann has seven boys, eight if you count Curtis.

This Battle of the Sexes illustrates several assumptions of essential differences between men and women that informed the social, historical, and prayer lives of DIRECT missionaries. Women were expected to know about blow dryers and princesses, and it was funny when Curtis was able to answer questions on those topics. Men were expected to know about sports and hunting, and Michaelann thwarted expectations of gender norms for women by knowing the answers. Beneath these light-hearted differences was an entire system of Catholic gender essentialism and sharply defined expectations for men and women. How and why missionaries’ lives were shaped by these prescriptions is the ethnographic data of this chapter. Their gendered and Catholic subjectivities were shaped by the Catholic theology gender essentialism, gendered prayer practices, and a complementary performance of virtue among millennials.

Studying feminine genius and authentic masculinity together, as I do here, makes it possible to see the interrelated nature of male and female subjectivities being cultivated by missionaries. Held side-by-side, the gendered subjectivities look like pieces of a puzzle trying to fit into each other, rather than a binary between agency and oppression. There is no feminine genius without authentic masculinity and no authentic masculinity without feminine genius.

In this chapter, I develop three interpretive lenses to describe the ways missionaries were becoming feminine geniuses and authentically masculine: multiple submissions, gendered prayer, and complementary virtue. “Multiple submissions” examines the multi-directional submissions at work on missionaries’ lives. Women submitted to men and men submitted to women. They were all trying to submit to God. Though men and women did so in different ways and with different attunements, “multiple submissions” posits submission as formation of gendered subjectivities for both men and women. “Gendered prayer” proposes that there were
some prayer forms that tended to align with men’s essential characteristics and others with how women were made by God, essentially. The work of performing those prayers acted not just as facilitation between God and missionary but also shaped the missionary in becoming their God-prescribed gender formation. “Complementary virtues” insists that the prescribed gender norms for men and women were interdependent. How men performed virtue depended on how women performed virtue, which depended on how men performed virtue. The circularity reflects the intersubjectivity of virtue formation for their Catholic woman- and manhood.

Multiple Submissions: Articulating Catholic Gender Prescriptions

During one of the first meetings of the graduate women’s DIRECT Bible study I was in, we studied the Genesis story where Eve eats the apple from the serpent and then gives the apple to Adam. The leader, Alexandra, encouraged us to read this story through DIRECT’s Catholic gender norms. “Eve’s sin,” she said, “is grasping at any solution offered.” Adam’s sin was that he “did not stand up for Eve;” he did not protect her from the serpent.³ Original sin was man and woman’s failure to enact their biologically defined gender roles.

This interpretation of original sin sets the tone and the high stakes of missionaries’ gender prescriptions. Women were taught to be emotionally intelligent and balanced, prepared to lead by allowing men to take charge. Men were taught to be virtuous leaders, prepared to protect women. Through a fusion of Pope John Paul II’s theology, gender essentialism, frustrations with U.S. cultural norms, and DIRECT articulated the ideals of “feminine genius” and “authentic masculinity” within communities of Catholic men and women.

The Feminine Genius

³ Field notes, April 15, 2013.
The Church gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine “genius” which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God…she gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness.

—Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*

There’s a reason women go to the bathroom in groups: that’s how God made them.


Laine Coopley took a deep breath before beginning her talk at the first Women’s Session of SEEK2013. She told more than three thousand women in their early twenties that she had been asked to “just explain…what it means to be a woman.” She laughed and shook her head at the impossibility of the task. Smiling, she explained that she had been thinking about it for “more than a decade,” so what she did know was that there were no easy answers to the question.

Laine was a young mother of three children and had been a voted “most likely to become a motivational speaker” when she graduated from Benedictine College in 2005. Laine and her husband had been a “Catholic missionary family” for almost ten years when she took the stage in early 2013 and began to describe the “feminine genius.” The ideal of womanhood, Laine explained, came from the creation story of God making man and woman. Genesis describes woman as Adam’s “helper.” Feigning disgust, she exclaimed, “Really, God?…You made woman to be man’s helper?! Like, I’m a special helper who doesn’t really have a job, but you give them a job to make them feel validated?”

Laine shook her head as the crowd laughed. She dropped the act and explained to the well-educated crowd of young women how Pope John Paul II had helped her appreciate what it meant to be a “helper.” She read from his 1995 “Letter to Women:”

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6 This is DIRECT’S national conference, held every odd year.

The creation of woman is marked from the outset by the principle of help. A help which is not one-sided, but mutual...God chose two unique genders to complement; different strengths, different gifts that help us to become more fully human...It is thus my hope, dear sisters, that you will reflect carefully on what it means to speak of the ‘genius of women,’ not only in order to be able to see in this phrase a specific part of God's plan which needs to be accepted and appreciated, but also in order to let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole as well as in the life of the church.  

She looked up from the text and out at the audience. “Your uniqueness as a woman is so good that JP2 calls it a genius, ‘The feminine genius.’ Isn’t that awesome!? By virtue of being a woman, you have a genius about you.” This feminine genius referenced a set of characteristics Laine called “feminine intuition.” Women were naturally endowed with abilities to be emotional, relational, and astute at recognizing what needed to be done. These were innate qualities that allowed women to “see and recognize the needs of the people around us.” These qualities were timeless, she said, and rooted in how God made women, essentially. She explained:

What makes a tree doesn’t change. The nature of woman makes her who she is. What changes is the time and culture in which she lives, but her essence of the nature of a woman today is the same today as a woman crossing the prairie...her purpose doesn’t change. So, to understand what it is to be a woman requires that we look to the unchanging. To why we were created, to God’s intention for us.

Laine’s description of this “feminine genius” relied on a biological determination of male and female gender roles, which conflated the social constructivist distinction between sex and gender. Laine assumed that God gives particularly sexed body and that body determines gender norms. As Jenna explained it, “We are created in God’s image—[our body] reveals God to us.”

9 Coopley, “Seeking the Truth about Womanhood.”
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Mairtin Mac an Ghaill and Chris Haywood, *Gender, Culture, and Society: Contemporary Femininities and Masculinities*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 20-21. This scholarship on this is wide-ranging, and particularly important to the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. DIRECT anthropology rejects this distinction.
13 Jenna, interview by author, May 8, 2013, transcript.
At work in this description was the theory of “gender essentialism.” This understanding of the relationship between culture and gender argues that the “characteristics of persons are significantly influenced by biological factors.” Biology, not culture, determines gender. Though there have been occasional efforts to rescue the ideas of gender essentialism since the 1970s, Catholic feminist theology has generally denigrated the concept as a recycled “separate but equal” argument designed to keep Catholic women out of the priesthood and men in charge of a powerful hierarchy.

Despite these dismissals, Laine’s endorsement of an essential womanhood that was distinctive from men’s essential manhood seemed to offer a corrective salve to an unrest I heard from women missionaries. There was a sense among the missionaries I came to know that worldly expectations for women had failed them. Mia told me that her business major in college prepared her to be a “baller” business woman, but she had felt empty and exhausted in her efforts to compete with men in the business world. Tabitha said she had followed the world’s instructions in dating and she was left feeling empty and used by men. Alexandra had often felt herself grasping to solve a problem that was not hers because the “world” asked this of her. Laine offered Mia, Tabitha, and Alexandra an alternative Catholic narrative to a contemporary cultural expectation that women were the same as men and ought to act in the same ways as men. These women seemed to sigh in relief when they talked about not having to compete with men.

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15 Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1968); Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1992); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983), Margaret Farley, RSM, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006). This literature is expansive. Full review of it is outside this chapter’s scope. These titles reference four efforts by Catholic feminist theologians to reposition women in Catholic anthropology. To my knowledge, DIRECT missionaries were unfamiliar with this literature and may have applauded the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s June 2012 criticism of Farley’s *Just Love*. 
and talked about being feminine geniuses in appreciative tones.¹⁶

At the same time, female DIRECT missionaries readily acknowledged that they have benefited from cultural women’s movements like suffrage, women’s access to education and increasingly equal pay. In 2013, middle-class, well-educated American women in their twenties, including DIRECT missionaries, were still enacting the longue durée of the “New Woman” who emerged at the start of the twentieth century with the suffrage movement. New Women were more educated, married later, and had fewer children than their predecessors.¹⁷ Alexandra regularly reminded me that the gender prescriptions in DIRECT allowed for possibility that these secular ideals of womanhood could be fine, but cautioned that those ideals would be fundamentally unsatisfying if they were used to make women the same as men.

Laine clarified this delicate balance during the question and answer period of her talk. A student asked Laine what she thought about feminism. She paused for several beats:

I would consider myself a feminist in the sense that I am pro-woman. But I am pro-authentic woman, not some cheap spin-off version of a woman…I am very passionate about the idea that, as women, we need to understand who we are. To make that a goal of ours…[I’m] a feminist in the sense of true feminism.¹⁸

Laine’s “true feminism” was a twenty-first century reinterpretation of the cult of “True Womanhood.” In the early twentieth century, True Womanhood challenged the ideals of the suffragettes’ ideal of the “New Woman.” Historian Betty DeBerg described four primary characteristics of True Womanhood: “dichotomy between home and economic world;” “home as woman’s proper sphere;” “moral superiority of woman;” “idealization of her function as

¹⁶ Field notes, January 31, 2013.
¹⁸ Coopley, “Seeking the Truth About Womanhood.”
mother.” 19 In Laine’s version of this ideology, the spheres between men and women were not necessarily meant to be separate, but the way women and men were expected to work within the public and private spheres was to be different. Laine’s “true feminism” claimed not to care where women worked, only that how they worked be as women. She clarified:

You don’t have to be this super-sensitive woman who is great at baking and sewing and just is content with staying home and taking care of your fifteen children. God calls some women to do that, and some women have great joy in that. And that’s a beautiful thing, but I know women who express their femininity in all sorts of different ways. It’s about understanding, at the root, what is God calling us to and how do we live that well. And then expressing that in the way that you, in particular, were created. 20

Laine’s implicit definition of “untrue” (secular) feminism was what sociologist Orit Avishai has called the “image of the secular Other.” 21 As a counter to this image, Laine urged women to recognize and embrace that “the world needs our feminine touch.” 22

As Laine concluded her talk, heads around the room nodded and some woman scribbled notes in their notebooks. This collective nodding did not mean that all of these women agreed or were convinced of the value of feminine genius in their lives. My three roommates for the week happened to be undergraduate women from Harvard, two of who were pre-medical students. They talked late into one night about whether or not this idea of feminine genius could square with them being doctors and otherwise successful career women. They wondered if it was okay to delay motherhood and to send their kids to daycare. 23 More publicly, a missionary named Meredith posted a sardonic blog post titled “Hidden Traumas of Catholic Womanhood,” which poked fun at the tensions between being a young, college-educated woman in 2014 who is committed to DIRECT’s vision of gendered Catholic subjectivity. The list of twenty-five gif-

20 Cooley, “Seeking the Truth about Womanhood.”
22 Coole, “Seeking the Truth about Womanhood.”
23 Field notes, January 3, 2013.
accented traumas included, “Being asked how you feel about the oppressive male hierarchy in the church” to which Meredith replied with a gif-shrug, “I wouldn’t know. I’m not familiar with the sensation,” and “Attempting to stay afloat on a pleather kneeler while wearing nylons” with Meredith responding, “Ok, grab with the elbows, dig your toes into the carpet, don’t scrunch your face—come on, feminine genius, you’ve got this!”24 Within DIRECT, the post went viral. There was an acute awareness that “feminine genius” was in uneasy tension with mainstream cultural expectations of women.

Part of what Laine was urging women to do was to submit to what she understood as God’s vision (rather than the world’s vision) for how they should be woman. This meant they had to discipline themselves in paying attention to their feminine intuition and practice enacting their feminine genius. To be a female DIRECT missionary was to be worked on by a community of women also striving to articulate and embody feminine genius. Gendered subjectivities were cultivated through friendships with other women and in a community of like-minded women. Their women’s nights and women’s Bible studies built a community of women all trying to submit to God’s vision of feminine genius. I often heard women talk and joke and encourage one another’s feminine intuition. Yet these celebrations were often undergirded by a tone that made me think they were trying to internalize the idea by sheer practice of saying unfamiliar words, as if feminine intuition was something to be learned more by force of habit than intellectual assent.

One evening, Mia and Jenna laughed about how “stressed out” and “über-busy” she had been a few weeks ago. Mia laughed and told me how messy and disorganized she was normally but even more so when she was too busy. “A few weeks ago, things were just a disaster…I came home one afternoon and found a note from Jenna saying that she had cleaned her room for her,

as a way to help out.” That was feminine intuition in action, Mia said, because Jenna “saw what needed to be done and did it.”25 She and Jenna high-fived. Feminine intuition was an innate skill set with which women had been endowed with by God, naturally and as an essential part of being a woman. But they had to recognize it and practice enacting it.

As they sorted out how to become feminine geniuses in daily life, the Virgin Mary emerged as the perfect(ed) model. Mary’s submission to God was a regular reference point for missionaries trying to enact feminine genius. Jenna explained to me that Mary was “the perfect example of being submissive to God’s will.” Mary’s example for all women was especially evident to Jenna in the Gospel story of the wedding of Cana,

That’s like the perfect example of…feminine intuition. [Mary] saw that there was a need that needed to be filled. She didn’t want these people to be embarrassed that they didn’t have wine at their wedding. So she looks at her son and is like, “You need to do something about this.” And he’s like, “Why?” and so then he’s like, “Well, okay. You’re my mom.” and goes and is about to do it and the servants come out to her and she’s just like, “Do everything he tells you to do.” That’s…being submissive.26

Mary’s feminine intuition modeled for how to see a need and sense what needed to be done. In Jenna’s exegesis, Mary recognized that the problem of the empty barrels was not hers to solve. Mary submitted to God’s image of how to be a woman by calling on a man to act.

Mary provided women a role model of submissive leadership as an enactment of feminine genius. Missionaries worked to both enact at teach others how to do that. It was a frigidly cold evening in January when I joined the DIRECT team for a Women’s Night that Mia and Jenna called, “Pearls and Shoulder Pads.” The topic was women’s leadership. Despite the “and” in the title of the event, it was really an evening of “or,” wherein the missionaries juxtaposed women wearing pearl earrings with women wearing shoulder pads. The two options

26 Jenna, interview by author, March 8, 2013, transcript.
juxtaposed a stereotyped working woman of the 1980s, trying so hard to be like men she made her shoulders appear like men’s, with a woman who enacted her God-given femininity through wearing pearls. Demonstrating their preference, Mia donned a large necklace of faux pearls tied around her neck with a bright yellow ribbon and Jenna wore two smaller sets of pearls wrapped around her wrist. Appropriately feminine chocolate and strawberries with hummus and carrots were spread out as snacks. Six undergraduate women sat on worn couches and chatted about their homework and other meetings they had later that night. One woman wore a t-shirt with the letters of her sorority across the front. One woman arrived late and out of breath, having run from a group project meeting that she had organized.

Mia began the evening with a talk that reproduced Laine’s description of feminine genius, feminine intuition, and Pope John Paul II’s descriptions of men and women’s complementarity. Then she explained what this meant for women’s leadership. Men are, she said, “hard-wired to get things done.” And women are called to “nurture that” in men. I saw a couple quizzical looks from the college women in the room as Mia explained further, “You have to let them do it, even if they don’t do it the way you wanted them to. Be humble and let them…Even if you can do it better and faster than them, let them do it.”27

Jenna jumped in by exclaiming, “You’re at Northwestern! You’re a leader! You’re going to do stuff!” Jenna calmed her voice down and lowered it as she challenged the women to recognize that “real” women’s leadership means being “humble” and being willing to “submit” to men. She explained, “We’re intended to work together. But, at the same time, letting men use their strength and their physical leadership.”28 She smiled and told them, “You might have to let them [men] fail and then be there to support them.” She admitted that this was particularly hard

27 Field notes, January 31, 2013.
28 Ibid.
for her, but she was learning that men stepped in to act if she stepped back and “allowed” that to happen. Men and women do not have the same strengths, she said, “We have a complementary relationship.”29 During an interview a few weeks later, Jenna further explained that her feminine intuition allows her to see what needs to get done, and that complements men’s “hard-wiring” for action. She said that the goal is to “affirm a man’s masculinity by letting him lead you, while at the same time being supportive and still kind of leading that way.”30 Women “let” men lead them and “allowed” themselves to be led. This vision of submissive leadership depended on piety and submission to God for guidance. Jenna said she was learning as a missionary that this style of submissive leadership as the kind of relationship between men and women that God intended.

Jenna and Mia’s model of feminine genius challenged young, articulate, smart women accustomed to assuming formal leadership roles as the head of clubs and on-campus organization to submit to men. This was hard, even for the missionaries. Jenna had graduated from a magnet high school for leadership and liked to take charge of groups. She acknowledged her own trouble with this thinking about leadership. It was hard for her to do group projects because she liked to be in charge of the final product. She had lots of ideas about how things ought to be done and had to temper her impulse to be the boss. As a new missionary, one lesson of the year was, “I don’t have to always give my two cents!”31 She shrugged, “I don’t fully understand what it looks like to be 100% submissive, either. But it’s one of those things—if you pray about it, God’ll give you an opportunity to do it.”32 As a DIRECT missionary, she was being challenged to cultivate a submissive subjectivity. Mia and Jenna participated in a religious world that demanded multiple

29 Ibid.
30 Jenna, interview by author, March 8, 2013, transcript.
31 Field notes, January 30, 2013.
32 Jenna, interview by author, March 8, 2013, transcript.
kinds of submission and obedience, between men and women and among humans and God.

“Submission” was a multivalent word for Jenna and Mia. Missionaries’ gendered subjectivity formations emerged not in spite of submission, but through it. Submission was a mode of human flourishing. It was a way in which women missionaries were becoming, as Laine taught, “fully human.” Submission here was multi-directive. It was not women passively participating in their husband’s controlling directives, but neither is this women forcing men to act in particular ways through a façade of submission. When missionaries looked for ways to teach themselves to “not always give their two cents,” they were practicing becoming Catholic women. They were both constituted by and constituting their feminine genius through the multiple acts of submission to men and to God. They embraced gender essentialism and articulated a way of being a modern woman that could not be defined by shoulder pads or acting like men. They were trying to embody God’s vision for their womanhood. Feminine genius constructed an alternative vision for Catholic women.

The prescriptions of feminine genius was not always easy and they were intentionally maligned with some contemporary gender norms. The “hidden traumas of Catholic womanhood” were funny not (only) because they were snarky but because they illustrated the tension in which these women lived and moved. Yet, female missionaries were flourishing. They were interesting, funny, smart, well-educated and articulate. They joked with men and with each other about their

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**Notes**

feminine genius and they were self-aware enough to be able to tease one another about their feminine intuition. They submitted to men, to God, and to their community of like-minded women and discovered (sometimes to their own surprise, often to mine) they were thriving there.

As DIRECT missionaries submitted to male leadership in professional, personal, and prayer lives, they expected a reciprocal submission from men. Feminine genius was intertwined with the submission of authentic masculinity.

**Authentic Masculinity**

The world you and I live in…does not need nice men. It does not need handsome men. It doesn’t even need just good men. The world that you have been born into, and that Christ has chosen you to live in, needs great men. And nothing short of that will do.”


When Jonathan Reyes described the characteristics of an “authentic man” in front of 2,500 male missionaries and students, he contrasted men with boys. While boys look for comfort, he said, “Men do the hard, difficult good.” A boy is commitment-avoidant, while a man “wants to commit his life to something.” Boys see women as objects, while men recognize women as “something to be respected, honored, and protected.” A boy allows his emotions to rule his life, but a man “is governed by the Truth…no matter how he feels.”

Reyes situated his description of authentic masculinity in the context of what he described as a crisis of manhood in the twenty-first century. Too many men, he insisted, were behaving like boys. Reyes was not alone in using alarmist tones. Sociologist Michael Kimmel’s 2010 study of “manhood” observed a “male malaise” among contemporary men, which he blames on socio-economic changes and men’s lack of adroit responsiveness. His study suggests

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35 Reyes, “What Shall I Do?”
that rapid shifts in gender roles in the last century created a culture of men “increasingly
anxious in an economic and political arena that erodes their ability to be breadwinners, and
confused by new demands about emotional responsiveness and involved fatherhood.” Male
malaise, Kimmel suggests, was the result of a lack of clear expectations for men.

If women can both bring home the bacon and fry it up in the pan, what does that say
about men, who have been sitting impatiently at the head of the table waiting for their
dinner to be served on time?…The consequences…are especially important for young
men, searching for ways to be men.37

While Kimmel’s descriptions of “male malaise” sometimes sounds like a plea for white, middle
class men, I follow Sociologist Rhys Williams’ efforts to maintain a sympathetic attitude. At a
large gathering of Promise Keepers, Williams noted that the conference was “overwhelmingly
made up of ordinary men trying to figure out their place in a changing society, where work roles,
family relations, and personal identity are all in flux.”38 A similar sense of the ordinariness of
men in DIRECT struck me, too, as I listened to audio recordings and YouTube videos of the
men’s sessions and chatted with male missionaries about their work with men on college
campuses. The question that plagued men in Kimmel’s and William’s studies reverberated in my
conversations and Reyes’s talk, “Could men be true men if women were no longer true
women?”39 If women have moved into all sphere, how were men to behave? What were men’s
roles in personal relationships, professional settings, and in casual gatherings? How should men
perform maleness in dating relationships? These questions of how to be men loomed in
DIRECT’s efforts to define and articulate authentic masculinity.

DIRECT leaders and missionaries articulated “authentic masculinity” in response to this

36 Michael Kimmel, Misframing Masculinity: The Politics of Contemporary Masculinities (New Brunswick, NJ:
Rutgers University Press, 2010), 2.
37 Kimmel, Misframing Masculinity, 3.
38 Rhys Williams, “Promise Keepers: A Comment on Religion and Social Movements,” in Promise Keepers and the
39 DeBerg, UnGodly Women, 38.
malaise. Missionaries walked a careful balance between becoming a “guy’s guy,” being able to submit to God and to the needs of the women in their lives, while also becoming a servant leader who can “sharpen other men.” The characteristics covered three primary areas of manliness: Catholic reinterpretation of the “art of manliness,” athleticism, and time spent with other men.

Catholic male missionaries were buttressed in their articulation and cultivation of authentic masculinity by a secular response to men’s role confusion in modern American life. Brent McKay’s The Art of Manliness: Classic Skills and Manners for the Modern Man (a blog that began in 2007 and became a series of printed books starting in 2009) was a resource for male missionaries, who often shared the site’s Facebook posts and re-tweeted McKay’s instructions on how to do manly things in a manly way. McKay described his project as creating a collection of alternatives for men “who believe there’s more to being a man than expensive clothes and the hot babe of the month…The end goal is to create a synergy of tradition and modernity that offers men a way forward and signposts on how to live an excellent, flourishing life.” McKay was in his thirties and assumed that his grandfather’s generation understood manliness. Thus, the website and book used images from the middle of the twentieth century to teach men how to “prevent razor burn,” how to “make introductions like a gentleman,” along with “four bulletproof ways to prevent running injuries” and how to be a “father with intentionality,” Black- and-white or sepia-tone pictures of men dressed in postwar styles

40 A persistent reference to a line from Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Interestingly, this is a translation from the NIV Bible, not on the list of approved Catholic translations. The USCCB’s translation is gender neutral, “Iron is sharpened by iron; one person sharpens another.”
instructed male members of the millennial generation in how to embody “manly characteristics,” such as being a man who “looks out for and is loyal to his friends and family. Does the right thing, even when it’s not convenient…has a confident swagger but isn’t a jerk…and embraces instead of shirks responsibility.” The parallels between these descriptions of manliness with Reyes’ are striking. That McKay’s book and website became a touchstone for performing Catholic masculinity illustrates the widely ranging sources missionaries used to articulate authentic masculinity.

Kaden was a missionary at a large commuter school who first told me about *The Art of Manliness*. Mia described Kaden as “a guy’s guy.” Kaden told me that McKay’s website was one of the tools he liked to use when he worked with men on campus. He told me that he saw a Catholic theology undergirding McKay’s instructions on how do things like ask a woman on a date and how to care for a sick friend, “You’re called to serve others, which is what Christ taught…[At] the last [men’s night, we discussed] the way to own up to your mistakes. And it’s a super-hard thing, especially for guys to do; to admit fault.” When Kaden used *The Art of Manliness* at Men’s Night, he taught the men that they have to “own up to mistakes” and “admit fault” as a part of a submission to God’s vision for men. He encouraged the guys to learn how to do these things through regular participation in Mass, Confession, and daily prayer.

Authentic masculinity was always carefully asserted as occupying a strength position. In

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43 Not unlike DIRECT’s persistent nostalgia (see chapter 3) for the pre-Vatican II Catholic ghetto, there was a pervasive idealizing of the authors’ grandparent’s generation, the “Greatest Generation” who had fought in World War II. “We seek to uncover how to live with grandpa’s swagger, virtue, and know-how in the present age by wedding the best of the past to the best of the present” (http://www.artofmanliness.com/about-2/)


this way, the language countered a fear that being too religious or too Catholic challenged one’s manliness. When Allen and Daniel organized a Men’s Night on campus, they illustrated the announcement with a fist holding a rosary. Manly men, the message communicated, prayed the rosary. Sports metaphors also proliferated among men trying to be authentically masculine. Daniel told me how he used “dudes’” commitment to working out as a challenge to pray. When he taught “guys to pray:”

[T]hey’ll say to me, ‘Ah, you know, I’ve tried that church thing; that Catholic thing doesn’t work for me.’ I’ll say, ‘But, dude, that’s like giving it one hour a week. How often do you work out?’ They’ll say more than that. So I challenge them to think about their relationship with Christ being like their workouts.”

Being Catholic, having a prayer life, Daniel explained to the college men he mentored, was like working out. Both required discipline, perseverance, and commitment. Both required men to challenge themselves to be really male.

Male missionaries also talked about and defined authentic masculinity in relationship with one another as men. DIRECT’s director of Public Relations told me that “strong male friendships” are an important part of what DIRECT does. When I asked why, he explained, “Being a man is bestowed by other men.” DIRECT’s “The Truth About the Sexes: Men’s Edition” Bible study taught that authentic masculinity “can grow through spending time with other men, specifically those who call you to something deeper and more radical.” Authentic men relied on other men for community, accountability and role modeling in order to practice the disciplines of authentic masculinity.

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47 Daniel, in discussion with author, November 27, 2013.
49 Jacob, in discussion with author, November 22, 2012.
Josh was a non-traditional first-year missionary who had taught high school for two years and earned a masters degree before beginning his two years as a DIRECT missionary. He was especially appreciative of, if surprised by, this community of men.

At training—it’s all about men! And how to be a man! Everything is about how to be a virtuous man. We need more men to lead, and all this kind of thing. You need to be a leader…I never had encountered anything like that…women can call men to a higher form of themselves, but only a man can teach a man how to be a man. So a woman couldn’t teach a man how to be a man…only a man can teach a man how to be a man.\[51\]

Men were encouraged to be men together as a community of accountability that could encourage other men to live up to the expectation of authentic masculinity.

Despite the tenor of confidence that pervaded the way men talked about becoming authentically masculine with other men, the masculinity of these homosocial groups was also lined with ambivalence. Cultivation of this close community of men who worked to be emotionally vulnerable with one another could sometimes threaten to be too close. Men were simultaneously taught to share intimately with their “brothers in Christ” and to live out a Catholic masculinity in a way that affirmed strong male leadership by athletic, physically strong and active men. In their Bible study groups and discipleship pairs, men were expected to share struggles with pornography, sexual impurity, worries about dating skills, and hopes for their careers. They learned to hug one another at New Staff Training and talked about their “brothers in Christ.” But missionaries walked a careful balance between being vulnerable and emotional, without being too emotional (because that was part of the feminine genius). In his talk, “The Genius of Man,” Fr. Mark de Battista—the former national chaplain of DIRECT—told the men in his audience to remember, “Emotions are a sign of manhood. Christ wept at the sight of Lazarus…We cry as well, and it’s part of our humanity. To ignore our emotional life is to ignore

\[51\] Josh, interview by author, April 8, 2013, transcript.
something that enables us to love with compassion and with tenderness.” He told them to “be aware of your emotional life; see it as blessing from God.” But in the next breath, he also told them that if they are crying too much, there might be something wrong with them and they should come talk to him. This is the tightrope of men learning to be men with emotional lives, which they practiced with other men, in their small-group Bible studies.

Part of what men had to encourage in one another was how to embody virtue. Matt Fradd’s “Man Talk” challenged young men to act in virtue as a way to express their authentic masculinity. Fradd was in his early thirties and a national chastity speaker and anti-pornography activist. During his talk to the same crowd of college-aged men that Reyes had addressed the day before, Fradd urged the men to listen to how God was calling them to act. “Who you desire to be in your heart of hearts is who God is calling you to be?” He asked, “In other words, God’s demands do not deflate your manliness…What kind of man do you want to be? What kind of men do you respect? How do you want to be remembered when you’re dead?” Fradd said he wanted to be remembered as someone like St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Catholic priest killed at Auschwitz. Fradd explained how the Nazis had allowed a Jewish man with a family to live when Kolbe offered to trade places with him. Kolbe and ten other men were sent to starve to death. “That’s the kind of guy I want to be… I want to live in a way that I give my life for other people, for my wife, for my children, for my friends, for strangers.” Fradd framed “authentic masculinity” in terms of actions. A man must fight for “the faith,” defend women’s dignity, maintain physical chastity, ask women on dates, develop positive male friendships, and participate in the Catholic sacraments regularly. DIRECT co-founder, Edward Sri, challenged

52 Battista, “The Genius of Man.”
the men to be men of action, “Here’s the question for your life: ‘When you face obstacles and challenges, how do you respond?’…[M]en with virtue, roll up their sleeves and work hard.” Men’s character, Sri insisted, was defined by how they acted. If “relational” and “emotional” defined women’s essential nature, “action” and “physical” defined men’s essential nature.

One contrast (or complement, as missionaries would say) between feminine genius and authentic masculinity is the location of action. Women’s feminine intuition was defined by how women ought to respond to situations. Men authentic masculine virtue was defined by how they acted on situations. Furthermore, virtuous action was put into practice through different attunements to leadership. A woman’s leadership was to be informed by her submission to men and to “allowing” men to lead. Correspondingly men’s authentic masculinity expected them to “step up” and “take on” the leadership roles women needed them to assume.

When male missionaries taught male students how to be authentically masculine leaders, they turned to the Genesis account of the “Expulsion from Eden.” As Alexandra had explained to my women’s Bible study, when Adam ate the apple from Eve he failed in his male leadership skills both as the head of his marriage and in failing to protect Eve. DIRECT’s Bible study, Christ-like Leadership for Men, explained,

Man is to lead by [protecting] everything God entrusted to his care—including his bride, Eve. This is what ‘his dominion,’ his authority over the realm, means. He is a king, but not of the tyrannical variety. Rather, he is a servant-king, ruling in order that every subject in his kingdom may flourish.

DIRECT described this leadership style as “servant-kings,” (they used that interchangeably with the more formally recognized label of “servant-leadership”). When men talked about becoming servant-leaders, they meant leading with “humility and suffering.” Being a servant-leader meant

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putting others’ needs first and being willing to sacrifice for the needs of others.\textsuperscript{56} This was in contrast to the image of a leader who expected to be praised for doing the right thing.

DIRECT male missionaries knew this was hard and they tried to practice this. Self-control was especially necessary in authentic masculine servant-leadership. Sri described this as a high-stakes challenge that men were called to. He explained:

We are called to live out a great moral and virtuous life...All of us are called to imitate Christ...we’re called to be good men, to be good husbands, men, friends, good sons of God. But if we don’t have the basic skills down, of the virtuous life, we’re not going to be able to implement what Christ is calling us to.\textsuperscript{57}

Sri told college-aged men in the audience that the college years were not years to “blow off” or just party through. Rather, they were the “practice field” of authentic masculinity and servant leadership. It took practice, he said, learning to be a leader in Christ’s image. Leadership was not about power or control, nor was it about glory. It was the hard work to guide and serve, as Christ did. Leadership required, Sri said, the practice of submission.

In this model of servant-leadership, there was what sociologist John Bartkowski has described in his studies of Promise Keepers a style of “neopatriarchal masculinity” that existed in an “uneasy tension between patriarchal convictions and egalitarian sensibilities.”\textsuperscript{58} A similar tension pervaded DIRECT’s instructions for about male leadership. These missionaries grew up and were coming of age in a culture where women were assumed their equal. Women have begun to outpace men in college attendance. In 2013, 57% of college students were women.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} Pat Lancioni, “Launched into Leadership,” (presentation, Student Leadership Summit 2014, Dallas, Texas, January 3-7, 2014).
\textsuperscript{57} Sri, “Will you be the Hero of your Life?”
\textsuperscript{58} Bartkowski, Remaking the Godly Marriage, Remaking the Godly Marriage: Gender Negotiations in Evangelical Families, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 159. Bartkowski describes the servant leadership style of the men in his study of evangelical Protestant couples. It mirrors Sri’s descriptions.
\textsuperscript{59} Claudia Buchmann and Thomas A. Diprete, The Rise of Women: The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What it Means for American Schools (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), 1. They cite a 2012 study: “Women are also more likely than men to persist in college, obtain degrees, and enroll in graduate school.” While
DIRECT always had more women apply to be missionaries than they could hire, while they struggled to find the minimum number of men to meet the demands of their campus commitments. The executives and mid-level directors of DIRECT remained a men’s-only leadership group, but the campus teams were not. While women filled fewer formal leadership roles within DIRECT, plenty of male missionaries could expect to be on missionary teams led by women. In the 2012-13 academic year, twenty-six teams (35% of 74 teams; three of those were two-women teams without men on them) were led by female team leaders. In 2013-14, thirty-four teams were led by women (40% of 83; two of those were two-women teams). DIRECT hired its first woman into the mid-level management position in 2013. Servant-leadership taught men to act and take the lead but also with an attitude of submission to God and servitude toward women, regardless of the formal leadership position.

When a missionary asked Fr. Mark de Battista for recommendations for readings about exemplary Catholic leaders, he said that he could really only think of one source, “The gospels! Read the life of Christ!” If Mary was the model for submissive feminine leadership, Christ modeled authentic masculine servant leadership. Jesus knew the art of manliness. He had a community of accountability in the disciples and he knew how to be vulnerable (but not too vulnerable) with his emotions. He was not lazy and did not submit to the whims of his passions. Instead, Jesus modeled what DIRECT expected of men, “Now is the time to take action. Now is the time for leadership.”

The articulations missionaries made about how to be men and women interwove Pope women’s and men’s wages remain unequal, “the gender wage gap has shrunk to roughly half the size it was in 1978, when the ratio of women’s earnings to men’s earnings was only 0.61…In 2010, the ratio was .81,” 1-3. Battista, “The Genius of Man.” DIRECT, Christ-like Leadership for Men, Leader’s Guide, 52.
John Paul II’s gender complementary, Catholic theology of virtues, and American anxieties about changed (and changing) gender expectations. In my fieldwork and interviews, the question of agency—defined as liberal freedom to act on one’s own autonomous accord and “seek[ing] to locate the political and moral autonomy of the subject in the face of power”—was mute. In this missionary world, both feminine genius women and authentically masculine men required “multiple submissions,” to another, to God, and to an accountability community. Mary and Jesus modeled how to perform these submissions and missionaries articulated their subjectivities as formations of submission. Thus, not only do the liberal—illiberal and agentic—non-agentic binaries not work as analytical categories for interpreting missionaries’ actions, they have very little descriptive power in these missionaries’ lives. Missionaries’ pressing gender formations centered not on agency versus submission but on subjectivity formation qua submission. Gendered subjectivities were ongoing processes that happened in relationship with other men and women, with God, and in tension-filled relation with the broader culture.

Both sets of prescriptions relied on a gender essentialism that understood God as having dictated gender roles through biology. Feminine genius celebrated and then tempered women’s “natural” abilities to nurture and be emotional. DIRECT’s authentic masculinity asserted men’s physical and active “nature.” They learned accountability and vulnerability in homosocial settings that were punctuated with Catholic sacraments. Men learned to be servant-leaders who submitted to, rather than ruled over, the communities around him.

Multiple submissions participated in the making of what Sarah Bracke has called a “pious

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modern.” As many before her, Bracke argues that modernity and religion—often framed as oppositional—are co-determinative and co-created. Religious actors do not stand outside of the modern world; they participate in making it. In order to step out of the trap caused by a binary of modernity and religion, Bracke urges scholars to study “the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear…that animate acting subjects, as well as the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those notions of affect, thought and so on.” The ensemble of missionaries’ gendered subjectivities began with a disappointment with “the world’s” definition of how men and women ought to exist. Missionaries experienced these expectations as unfulfilling. Feminine genius and authentic masculinity were intentional antidotes to the modern world. The practices of multiple submissions formed how missionaries moved in the modern world, not outside of it, as Catholic men and women.

**Gendered Prayer: Becoming Catholic Men and Women**

I thank you for each one. For the mission you put in our hearts. Make us men and women of prayer, to bring about conversions. The tidal wave of people we know are tens of hundreds. Transform the world through our efforts. Help us be saints.

—Nigel, Tenth-year Missionary, SLS14, Prayer Training

Missionary prayer involved things. Bibles, spiritual depth charts, smartphone apps, pens and highlighters, books, rosaries, prayer cards, to name just a few. Throughout my fieldwork, I catalogued which missionaries had which things and how often they brought them to Holy Hour. Mia usually had her Bible and little card that listed the mysteries of the rosary on it. Daniel always had a small red book and a three- by-five index card. Allen did not carry much but often

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pulled a rosary out of his backpack. Jenna only forgot her prayer journal one time that I saw her at Holy Hour. She laughed at her forgetfulness and said it really threw her prayer off that morning. These things, the things they carried into prayer and the things that facilitated prayer with missionaries, were gendered.

The words missionaries used in Holy Hour or as an opening prayer of Bible study articulated their desires and hopes and fears as prayer. But the forms of prayer also cultivated missionaries’ subjectivities. As I construct and analyze it here, “gendered prayer” describes the prayers that men and women relied on in order to be succored in their essential gender qualities. Prayer journals cultivated feminine genius as daily examinations of conscience cultivated authentic masculinity. For women, journaling was a conversation with God made tactile in the words of God. Men, on the other hand, prayed a daily examinations of conscience in order to be guided men in God-informed reformations. It was also a strategic prayer that formed men’s virtue and daily action. Journaling made women’s prayer tactile while the examination made men’s prayer do-able.

**Prayer Journals: Becoming Feminine Geniuses**

I see where my heart moves. And write about those things. I mean, I think that that’s another big way that Christ responds to me, is through that journaling. Sometimes I will start out thinking that one thing is what’s going on, or what’s on my heart. And then as I start to journal, it will like—I don’t know [pause]—things will come out that weren’t even on my mind, but help me to, kind of like, put things together, you know?67

—Tabitha, Second-year Missionary

Tabitha was a second-year missionary who had graduated from the scruffy and fast-growing DIRECT program on a commuter campus in Indiana. She told me her conversion story in quiet, confident tones. She grew up in a large, Catholic family with what she called “faithful parents,” in rural Indiana. They never missed Sunday Mass. But when she went away to college,

67 Tabitha, interview by author, February 12, 2013, transcript.
she just stopped going to Mass. “Lazy,” she shrugged at her younger self. But during her sophomore year, she slowly started going to Mass more and more regularly. She met DIRECT missionaries there and started attended their events when her friends did. It was “strictly social,” she said. Even when she became a missionary, Tabitha laughed softly, she mostly did it because she wanted to be like one of the missionaries on campus, Mary Clare. When I interviewed Tabitha in the last month of her two years as a missionary, she talked effusively about how much her prayer life had grown in the last two years.

I learned how to pray as a missionary. I think that I really, I developed my real personal relationship with Christ as a missionary…At first everything is fun and exciting. And you’re infatuated and it’s great. But, then…prayer [can be] really dry, and I’m not feeling it for like a month at a time…That’s why I love journaling, because I’ll go back and read reflections from when things were really well. And relive that…[good prayer] experience.68

Tabitha was able to recognize growth in her prayer by reading the prayers she had written down months before. Her prayer journal served not just as tool of prayer but also as confirmation of God’s presence in prayer. Tabitha admitted that she struggled to know the distinction between God’s voice and her own. “[I]s any of this God?” she used to wondered, “Or is this just my subconscious, like, coming out? Is giving myself time in the quiet [necessary]? Could I come to these same realizations sitting in a counselor’s office and saying my stream of consciousness?”69

Writing her prayers as conversations with God taught her how to recognize which voice was God’s and which voice was her own. During the hours she spent quietly performing her daily Holy Hour, she paid attention to where her “heart move[d],” and then she wrote about those things, allowing God to guide her writing, “Sometimes…as I start to journal, it will like—I don’t

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68 Tabitha, interview by author, April 30, 2013, transcript.
69 Tabitha, interview by author, February 12, 2013, transcript.
know…things will come out that weren’t even on my mind.” The unexpectedness of the words confirmed they were God’s. Christ spoke through her writing in ways that surprised her. Writing prayer confirmed God’s presence, and the act turned God’s voice into readable words.

Tabitha and other journaling female missionaries joined a larger community of Christians keeping prayer journals and using them as a tool of discerning when God was speaking. In her study of evangelical Protestant prayer formations, T.M. Luhrmann described how Vineyard church communities use journals similarly—as one mechanism “to help you hear God talk back.” But more than simply hearing God, missionaries’ prayer journals provided a mechanism of making the voice of God into a material object. God’s words were on the page, to the surprise and instruction of missionaries.

Tabitha told me that in her experience as a missionary, “A lot of the women… really love journaling… [It’s] a little more relational and emotion-based.” One of the challenges women faced in enacting their feminine genius was to learn when emotions could be trusted and when they were not reliable. For example, a missionary named Jackie talked about how hard it could be to not feel things during prayer. She attributed that to Satan, “[When] I don’t feel like I’m doing anything… that could just be Satan, he’s just a jerk. He doesn’t want you to pay attention to prayer!” While women missionaries considered emotionality a gift of feminine genius, these emotions had to be carefully modulated and continuously monitored. Emotions could be untrustworthy. And they were especially complicated in prayer, where the experience of “consolation” was a much sought-after warm feeling that confirmed God’s presence through emotions. During “desolation,” missionaries struggled to be confident in God’s presence because

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70 Ibid.
72 Jackie, interview by author, April 5, 2013, transcript.
they could not feel God. Writing out their prayer was one way journaling kept women’s emotions aligned with feminine genius.

Tabitha admitted that her prayer during her two years with DIRECT had not been easy prayer, and the growth in her prayer life had not been enjoyable. She told me that she had experienced a lot of “suffering in Christ” and “distance from him” during her daily Holy Hour. Journaling kept Tabitha aware of the reality of Christ, rather than at the whims of what prayer “felt” like. The journal made Christ’s presence more real. She really liked to be able to go back and read through her prayer journal several months later because it allowed her to see where Christ was guiding her, even when she had not felt it in the moment. Prayer journals facilitated an emotional interaction with God that was appropriately moderate. Journaling tempered the overly emotional desire for dramatic feelings.

In addition to their emotions, a natural propensity for relationships was another gift of the feminine genius. Tabitha suggested that women tended to be “more into journaling” because it relied on the natural skills women had for being relational—talking, being emotionally invested in another, initiating and maintaining relationships. Women thought of themselves as instinctually able to know when someone needed something. But the challenge was to know when to allow others (usually men) to respond. In journaling, women practiced the patience required of this relational virtue. They learned to be patient with God, to wait for Him to speak. Tabitha learned and trained her feminine intuition during journaling sessions with, and to, God. Relationship with Christ was practice for relationship with others. The reverse was also true, as journaling drew on women’s capacities for relationality and used them to develop a healthy relationship with God.

73 Tabitha, interview by author, February 12, 2013, transcript.
Journaling was also important for Tabitha’s prayers of discernment. Her prayer journal helped her know where God was calling her, thus helping her submit to God’s will. I interviewed her about a month before DIRECT’s soft deadline (March 19) for deciding whether she would continue as a missionary for a third year. She described herself as really unsure as she debated whether or not to leave staff. When there were “big things going on,” like this, Tabitha said, “typically, I journal about them…. [I’m], like, ‘Okay, God, this is where I’m at.’” And then she journaled as she tried to listen for God’s will to be clear about “next year and where I should go and what I should do.”

Especially amidst big questions, re-reading her past prayer journal entries showed how God was speaking to her. God’s presence in the journal tempered her unruly emotions in the journal. Tabitha explained:

[T]hat’s another reason I like journaling, is seeing over time, over the course of a few months, the way that He leads me and, [I can see] what things are constant and what things continue to run through, and what things are, like, ‘God, today I think I should be a teacher. I really really think that.’ And the next day, ‘I don’t want to teach—I hate that. That sounds terrible!’ …[T]hose up and down, all over the place things, they kind of come and go. But, what are the constant threads that stay throughout and that keep.”

Her own journaling voice was inconsistent. God’s voice was a “constant thread” that could cut through her daily angst. Tabitha’s journal became a record of her understanding of God and herself in relation to God. The daily task of deciding what to do with her life threatened to put her on an emotional rollercoaster but journaling put that discernment under God’s instruction and her journal both recorded and allowed her to see that. This was the co-construction of the feminine subject wherein journaling allowed missionaries and God to work together to articulate and enact a plan for the big picture of life.

Anthropologist Sylvia Frisk reminds scholars that the logic of some religious women’s

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
actions usually can “not be understood solely with reference to arguments for gender equality or resistance to male authority. The logic…had more to do with women’s fundamental desire to submit to God’s will.” Women’s actions cannot, Frisk insists, be defined (primarily, only) by their political or social impact. Journaling was a place whereby these female missionaries tried to know God’s will and then discovered how to submit themselves to it.

This submission was not only for the large decisions life life’s path, as for Tabitha. Journaling, for other female missionaries, focused on the daily submission to God’s will. Jackie was a third-year missionary on a small-town campus whose journaling practices reflected this process of learned submission through writing prayer. Jackie had a spunky attitude about her past self. She still loved journaling when I met her, but told me that journaling had been even more important when she first started praying in college. She told me, “I started with journaling…I would write things I was thankful for or praying for. And I was like, it was so amazing, I’m just so much more peaceful throughout the day, giving time to the Lord.” Journaling taught her to put her daily life under the guidance of God, to be cognizant of God, and submit her will to God. Journaling cultivated female missionaries’ capacity for prayer, an awareness of God’s presence and God’s will for their life.

Prayer could be tedious, and missionaries often complained about having to force themselves to pray or being unable to concentrate when they were trying to pray. The challenge of paying attention to prayer was a persistent theme and journaling was a regular way that women responded to it. Meredith, the first-year missionary who blogged about the traumas of Catholic womanhood, told me that she struggled with ADHD, which made her daily Holy Hour feel particularly laborious. She always brought her journal with her and used it to help keep her

mind on God. She explained her prayer routine to me, “I ask God to put me in a spirit of prayer…. Eventually I get to a place where I either journal about what I got from prayer or just, what I want to say to God…Journaling works so much better for me…because I don’t get distracted as easily when I’m journaling.”77 Journaling was an act of discipline that kept Meredith focused on prayer and on the relationship she was trying to cultivate with God.

I ran into Meredith at New Staff Training one evening, outside the one and only pub (Queen Mary Pub) in Ave Maria, Florida. She was headed from an evening Holy Hour in the Oratory to her dorm room before joining the Karaoke night. Despite the inconvenient walk across campus, she wanted to put her prayer journal in her room. She laughed a little about why she had to do so, “Don’t want to leave that around anywhere!”78 Prayer journals are a tangible record of prayer. They were the inner life made visible, readable, and potentially public.

Anthropologist James Bielo has wondered what happens “when prayers become things.” When people write prayers on post-it notes at the Holy Land Experience theme park, he contends, they seem to be “making prayer into a thing as, in part, a matter of efficacy” because the power of prayer is somehow intensified in the act of writing it down. Writing prayer was “material acts of re-creation…[P]roducing prayer as a thing is part of producing sacred memory.”79 As female missionaries wrote their prayers, they produced a record of their relationship with God. Though far less public than post-it notes at a theme park, journaling created a physical manifestation of the inner life. Once a prayer has been written down, it can be seen by others, quoted to another (or read back to oneself), and potentially abused by a careless observer. In a sarcastic blog post, Meredith listed fifty things Catholics never say. One of them

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77 Meredith, interview by author, March 13, 2013, transcript.
78 Meredith, in discussion with author, June 13, 2013.
emphasized the private, yet public nature of prayer journals, “Please. Read my prayer journal. Preferably over my shoulder.”

There was a risk associated with writing one’s prayers. Not all missionaries were as confident as Meredith and Tabitha were about the synergy between journaling and prayer. Jenna was more ambivalent and told me that she would love to journal for the entire Holy Hour, but she was not sure that would be “prudent.” She worried that she would just be writing and writing rather than praying. So she made herself sit quietly in mental prayer for at least the first half hour of the Holy Hour before she could pick up her journal. Because of this concern, Jenna tended to use her journal more as a record of what God said to her during her mental prayer than as a conversation tool. She described her desire to capture God’s communication. “[N]ew things are revealed to me, like, sometimes it’s just like a whirlwind of all these crazy ideas come in like five minutes, where I’m like, I have to write this down before I forget it! And so then, that’s where my prayer journal comes in—like, okay, this is what God said to me today, blah, blah, blah, blah. The ideas, and it leads to this. I basically just like write down what happens in prayer, so I don’t forget it.”

Journals were both tactile experiences and remnants of prayer. Prayer journals depended on and built upon women’s innate tendencies of emotionality and relationality. They facilitated submission to God’s will. Prayer journals mirrored the community of accountability women relied on to articulate their feminine genius. But the accountability here was to God. The prayer journal, like women’s natural emotional and relational capacities, required careful self-regulation in the prayers of feminine genius.

Daily Examinations of Conscience: Becoming Authentically Masculine

81 Jenna, interview with author, February 7, 2013, transcript.
As I watched Jenna journal during daily Holy Hour on campus, I also watched her teammate Allen sit so still that I was not always sure when he was awake or asleep. His facial expressions ranged from thoughtful to worried. When he did move his body, he twirled his short, curly hair in his fingers or played with his beard. Most days, he carried a little red *Handbook of Prayer* in his backpack and would pull it out around the middle of the hour. He liked to pray the brief, daily examination of conscience in that book. It was a prayer form that shaped his authentic masculinity by using and building on his naturally active and physical natures.

Allen was a serious young man and, in contrast to his loud teammates, Mia and Daniel, quite reserved. He often posted quotes from C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton on his Facebook feed and liked to use brainy-sounding apologetics as his evangelization strategy. It was perhaps this intellectual bent that prompted the director of the Catholic center to tell me that he thought Allen was probably the most well-suited for this campus that catered to high-achieving students. Allen described himself as having grown up in a “good Catholic family” in Nebraska. But, like Tabitha, became “lazy” about attending Mass regularly when he started college at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, one of the “DIRECT factories.” Despite skipping Mass most Sundays, he described his younger self as still desiring a relationship with God. Searching, he joined three different evangelical Protestant Bible studies during his sophomore year, one with Campus Navigators and two with Campus Crusade for Christ. These Christians, he noticed, “had joy and peace in the way that they talked about religion and their faith that I didn’t see in Catholicism.” He wondered, “How can Catholicism be true if it doesn’t lead to things like peace and joy?” During his junior year, he stumbled into a New Testament course offered at the Newman Center by the DIRECT team leader. They studied the work of “good people like Tim

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82 Field notes, December 11, 2012.
Gray and Jeff Cavins” and, Allen said, it “won” him back to Catholicism.\(^83\)

Allen was predictably thoughtful when I asked him about his prayer routine. He told me that he had recently learned about the examination of conscience in the *Handbook of Prayers*.\(^84\) Daniel had recommended it to him. Allen explained, “I started using that, and that’s been…really helpful, just helping me think about my daily activities and my daily structure of my life, just, in a more strategic way.”\(^85\)

The examination of conscience that Allen referenced, and Daniel also told me about, was a series of questions,

Did I often consider that God is my Father? Did I offer him my work? Did I make good use of my time? Did I pray slowly and with attention? Did I try to make life pleasant for other people? Did I criticize anyone? Was I forgiving? Did I pray and offer some sacrifices for the Church, for the pope, and for those around me? Did I allow myself to be carried away by sensuality? By pride?\(^86\)

The guide then instructs the person praying to “Make a specific resolution for tomorrow: To stay away from certain temptations; to avoid some specific faults; to Exert special effort to practice some virtue; to take advantage of occasions for improvement.”\(^87\) In this daily examination of conscience, men accounted for the previous day’s actions and committed to change for the next day. This was the cultivation of authentic masculinity that relied on a vision of men as shaped by God’s will (not the world’s), on authentic male leadership as submissive action, and on the idea of men of virtue, capable of doing hard things.

Allen talked about his prayer life as an experience of his mind and conscience. He contrasted his prayer life with Mia’s exuberantly emotional conversations with Christ, saying:

I’d say—more often than not, it’s *not* that kind of emotional thing…[I]t’s very reflective…[I]t’s an examination of conscience; like, actually using my conscience. Um,
and trying to hear God speak through that—places where I feel like I wasn’t living up
to, maybe my own standards for myself. Or maybe I wasn’t living up to, you know, some
virtue that I was trying to practice. Or maybe I let somebody down. Just trying to think
through those situations and asking for God to help me to progress in that direction. I
would say it’s a lot more about reflecting on my conscience.\textsuperscript{88}

Allen framed his examination of conscience as rational, in contrast to more emotive prayer. He
told me that he spent much of his first year as a missionary developing a more “strategic” prayer
life. He was trying to learn how to focus his prayer on being an effective actor in his daily life.

Male missionaries were taught that they could train themselves—and be trained—to act
virtuously. Authentic masculinity meant \textit{doing} the right thing, even if it was the hard thing
\textit{(especially} if it was the hard thing). When Allen talked about a “virtue” that he was “trying to
practice,” he echoed Sri’s insistence that men must learn to control their mental, physical, and
emotional lives in order to live up to the God-given call to be authentically masculine. Allen’s
examination of conscience practiced the struggle to evaluate the successes and failures of his
efforts. The daily examination of conscience was the making of authentic masculinity through
careful self-reflection, guided by God. Allen’s critical self-analysis was more than him alone
thinking about things he did well and wanted to work on. He began each examination by praying,
“God to help me to progress.” This was prayer as virtue formation. It required habitual practice
so that he could consistently choose to do the right thing. In prayer, Allen tried to become a
rational partner with God. To examine one’s conscience was to train oneself in being a man who
can make hard decisions and lead in difficult situations. This was an act of manly prayer.

In addition to training virtue, this prayer practice helped male missionaries commit to
particular actions, everyday. Daniel said he almost always began his Holy Hour with an
examination of conscience. “It’s good because it’s hard,” he smiled a bit ruefully. “It’s like

\textsuperscript{88} Allen, interview by author, May 7, 2013, transcript.
looking at the parts of you [that] you don’t like and want to pretend are not there. But it’s so
good to be aware of what’s really going on your life.” Daniel had been doing a daily examination
of conscience for several years, so it had become part routine and part habituated disposition. “If
you’re doing an examination really regularly and you think to yourself, man, I was really
judgmental during that conversation or I didn’t treat that person with charity or I was too lazy,
then you can make a daily resolution to work on that.” These daily resolutions were tangible
take-aways from daily prayer aimed at correcting shortcomings examined in prayer.

The action-oriented nature of Daniel’s daily prayer form illustrated how male
missionaries worked to become servant-leaders who put other people’s needs first. Authentically
masculine men were expected to lead with clear action. These examinations turned prayer into
action points and virtuous to-do lists. Daniel’s daily resolutions from prayer ranged from treating
his siblings better, to not being “judgey” toward someone around the Catholic Center, to
committing to having a conversation with his disciple, to deciding who God was calling him to
reach out to after Mass on Sunday evening. Prayer was learning how to act as authentically
masculine missionaries.

Daniel’s to-do list contrasted with how women interacted to-do lists in their prayer
journals. Jenna echoed several women when she told me that she would write out her to-do list
and then turn the page of her journal to begin recording her conversation with God. Jackie wrote
down the things she had to do that day to get them out of her head, because they were distracting
her from focusing on God in her journaling. Men’s to-do lists were the result of good prayer
while women’s to-do lists were distractions from good prayer.

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90 Daniel, interview by author, May 9, 2013, transcript.
91 Jackie, interview by author, April 5, 2013, transcript.
In addition to forming men’s outward performance of virtue, the examination of conscience also shaped men’s internal disposition. Daniel was confident that his prayer was doing good work to shape his conscience, “I can tell if something is not legit. I think I have a pretty well-formed conscience at this point.” Like women’s emotional moderation, male missionaries’ consciences were works in progress. The work to examine it each day taught male missionaries how to be in the world by giving them an increasingly strong set of tools with which to act. Daniel described this as a kind of conversion, which he took to mean a series of small, daily changes. This was God working on him with quiet overtures. “My own story,” he said, happened “because of my conscience…It’s just kind of beautiful how it works.” A troubled conscience was a sign of sin, while a converted conscience guided men toward God. A well-formed conscience shaped men’s abilities to counter “the worldly” expectations of lazy men or men incapable of leading women. In order to become an authentically masculine in the face of pornography, video-game-induced laziness, and religious “nones,” male missionaries formed their consciences in prayer. This was also formation through self-interrogation.

Praying a daily examination of conscience was how men worked on their daily errors and created God-informed action plans about how to be more virtuous, to submit more fully to the needs of others and the will of God, and to be shaped in an ability to know (importantly, not to feel) right from wrong. In a world that told men to “trust yourself” or to follow the dictums of cultural influences, male missionaries upheld their conscience as their well-formed guide. This was the practice of men and God working together to create right judgment in men. It was the work of authentic masculinity.

92 Daniel, in discussion with author, April 11, 2013.
93 Daniel, interview by author, May 9, 2013, transcript.
Prayer was, in important (though, not exclusive) ways, gendered according to the gender essentialism of the missionary worldview. Prayer forms, not just the content of prayer, cultivated the subject formation of men and women. The examination of conscience affirmed and developed men’s essential qualities of action and physical strength. Prayer journals relied on and strengthened women’s essential qualities of emotion and relationality. Missionaries not only thought and prayed about becoming men and women, but the very form of their prayer also made them into Catholic men and women.

Authentic masculinity and feminine genius emphasized the role of virtue in enacting (and embodying) Catholic manhood and womanhood. When DIRECT missionaries were taught about virtue, the lessons were sometimes boiled down to the three virtues they deemed most critical (and most under threat) to the college years. “The Big Three,” as they were known throughout DIRECT, were chastity, sobriety, and excellence. And the greatest of these was chastity.

**Complementary Virtue: Performing Gendered Catholic Chastity**

Chastity is about so much more than simply not having sex before marriage. Chastity is about loving the way God has called us to love...Before our actions can truly reflect chastity, we have to purify our hearts and minds.\(^{94}\)

> —Christ-like Leadership for Women Bible Study

Chastity is the power to love others in the right way.\(^{95}\)

> —Christ-like Leadership for Men Bible Study

DIRECT’s gender-specific Bible studies, *Christ-like Leadership for Men* and *Christ-like Leadership for Women* introduced missionaries and students to the virtues of excellence, sobriety, and chastity, though calling them “Bible studies” was a bit misleading. Gender-segregated small groups met once a week to discuss a topic, sometimes related to a passage from

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\(^{95}\) DIRECT, *Christ-like Leadership for Men*, 15.
the Bible, sometimes to a teaching from the *Catechism* or a papal encyclical. The goal of these Bible studies/small groups was to “help participants see themselves as leaders on campus, seeking to imitate the leadership of Jesus Christ” and to “give participants a vision for leadership” that teaches them how to be “leaders by example through their moral authority.”

Designed as a complementary set, each of the men’s and women’s versions devoted one week to sobriety and one week to excellence. These were almost duplicates of each other. But the two weeks both studies spent on chastity varied in definition and in prescription. Chastity, for women, was framed in terms of emotions and modesty. Women were told to “guard your hearts,” which meant to not become emotionally invested too quickly in a relationship with a man. Women were instructed to dress appropriately, in order to “protect ourselves and our brothers in Christ.” Men were taught how to control their physical desires for pornography, lust, and masturbation. Men were also expected to protect the emotions of women by leading romantic relationships. These differences in teaching the virtue of chastity mapped onto the gifts of feminine genius and authentic masculinity, but also focused on the challenges that could also be wrought by abusing God’s gifts: women’s chastity challenges were emotional and men’s were physical. Women were charged with care taking and managing their emotions. Men were expected to take action and manage physical and visual desires.

**Women’s “Emotional Chastity”**

> [Emotional Chastity is a] discipline of mind. Just as we can sexually fantasize about a person in our mind we can emotionally fantasize about a person as well. The best way to describe this is “mental stalking.” It’s that game we can play where we think and daydream about a person almost incessantly. We picture what it would be like to date

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99 Two notable exceptions from my fieldwork. Josh talked about the importance of men having emotional chastity. Michelle talked about men needing to put their shirts back on to help a girl out in her physical chastity challenges.
them, check out our names together as a couple and even mentally plan our wedding. It seems harmless, but when we do this we turn a person into an object by using them for the emotional high we get from the imaginary relationship we have with them. Mentally using a person…is always in direct contrast with loving a person.¹⁰⁰

—Laine Cooley, “What is Emotional Chastity?” DIRECT Blog

Laine first learned the term “emotional chastity” when she was a student at Benedictine College in a seminar with Edward Sri almost ten years prior. The class studied John Paul II’s Love and Responsibility, the pontiff’s treatise on human relationships, which he wrote when he was a priest in Poland. John Paul II declared that love must be “an affirmation of the person or else it is not love at all.” He carefully delineated between “sensual” (physical) attraction and “sentimental” (emotional) attraction and real love.¹⁰¹ The latter he deemed unreliable:

It shows a characteristic ambivalence; it seeks to be near the beloved person, seeks proximity and expressions of tenderness, yet it is remote from the beloved in that it does not depend for its life on that person’s true value, but on those values to which the subject clings as to its ideal. This is why sentimental love is very often a cause of disillusionment.¹⁰²

When the pope wrote of “disillusionment,” female missionaries read this through the lens of their own dating histories. Managing right romantic relationships was a real challenge for many women missionaries in my fieldwork. Maeve shook her head when as she told me how she had tried to lead all of her dating relationships in college. Alexandra struggled to not imagine her wedding with a man she had been dating for a month. Jenna was relieved to be on the dating fast required of all first-year missionaries because she felt relieved to be unable to think dating. Mia seemed pleasantly surprised to have found a chaste dating relationship where she did not feel like she had to change herself for her boyfriend. These women had been hurt by unchaste dating relationships and were helped by the guidelines of “emotional chastity.”

¹⁰² Wojtyla, Love and Responsibility, 113.
At a Women’s Night focused on dating, Mia and Jenna introduced a small group of women to the idea of “emotional chastity.” Mia began the evening by joking with the college students about their essential emotionality, “Now, who here has cried over a Hallmark commercial?” She looked around the room several of the college women smiled sheepishly. “I know I have!” She laughed hard and said that this emotion is good, but women have to be careful with it. Mia’s voice assumed a slight preacher tone as she instructed, “Ladies, these emotional tendencies can get us into trouble. Big trouble!” Women get themselves into “emotional marriages.” As Mia explained what she meant, the women giggled knowingly, “We’ve just met the guy and in our minds we are already shopping for the wedding dress and picking out baby names!” After she laughed, Mia cautioned about its negative effects. What that does, ladies, is it “fills up Jesus’ space inside of us with an emotional marriage. We don’t need emotional marriages, we need more Jesus.” Despite the breezy ending to her talk, she and other missionaries understood how hard this was. Resisting this tendency toward emotional marriages was the work of forming oneself in the virtue of chastity.

DIRECT missionaries tossed around the term “virtue” often and lightly. When I pushed, a handful of missionaries made vague references to Catechism of the Catholic Church’s definition of virtue as balance, as the middle ground between extremes. But, more than this, they seemed to use it to want to use it as a catch-all description of living life according to their understanding of God’s will. And that included emotional chastity.

I was regularly struck by the challenge women took on in performing this virtue. During

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103 Field notes, November 29, 2014.
104 DIRECT, Christ-like Leadership for Men, 6; DIRECT, Christ-like Leadership for Women, 5. Both gender-specific Bible studies cited the Catechism of the Catholic Church’s definition: “A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions (CCC 1803).”
my fieldwork, I was especially privy to how Alexandra walked the tightrope of emotional chastity. She was honest about her occasional struggles to internalize the DIRECT vision of dating and marriage as a prescription of being a woman. Though she had come to terms with it by the time we met, Alexandra said she used to feel excluded by Laine’s attention to married women and women with kids because it seemed set up an expectation that to be a true woman required being married and having kids. Alexandra struggled to understand how she could be a “true woman” within DIRECT, without a child, without a husband, without a serious boyfriend. While Alexandra felt “like 99% sure” she was called to marriage and kids, she thought she would work outside the house, at least a part-time. In part, she laughed, because she was usually attracted to “do-gooders” who would never make much money.105

When she started seriously dating a member of our faith-sharing group, Neal, she was quite actively trying to hold on to two different ideals of womanhood and dating. Even if there were ways that the DIRECT model of married life did not fit her exactly, she was very committed to physical and emotional chastity outlined by DIRECT, as well as to “allowing Neal to lead” the relationship. Chastity as “no sex” was only the basest interpretation. Dating required both an enactment of feminine genius and the discipline of emotional chastity.

As they dated, she struggled to keep her emotional life concerning Neal in check. She wanted to be married, but took care not to get herself into an “emotional marriage” by doing things like deleting her Pinterest wedding board and not imagining the names of their children. She wanted to spend as much time as possible with Neal, but she was careful not to loose friendships and other relationships for the sake of time with Neal. They drew up rules that she had learned from other missionaries, like, “nothing good happens after eleven p.m.” They tried,

105 Alexandra, in discussion with author, May 18, 2013.
sometimes unsuccessfully, to leave each other’s apartments by eleven o’clock each night.
Alexandra also began a masters’ in higher education degree, and began a new career path.

Several months later, Alexandra and I had lunch on a sunny day that marked nearly a year since Neal had initiated dating. She told me she was so ready to get married to Neal! But he was in no rush, she said, which made her both happy (that he was being careful) and frustrated (she was ready). A couple weeks earlier, she had given him explicit instructions about wedding rings, so she was waiting for his move. In what I interpreted as her continued disposition of emotional chastity, she told me she was not even sure he was going to propose. I asked her if she would ever propose. Alexandra shook her head, absolutely not. She looked glumly at her meal. It was hard, this emotional chastity that charged strong-willed women to “allow” men to lead.

Women’s chastity was not only emotional. DIRECT female missionaries were “saving themselves for marriage” (often enough after having participated in the hook-up culture of college and then committing to a “second virginity” post-conversion). In addition to carefully modulating their emotions and imaginations around dating and marriage, women were taught to dress modestly as a performance of their chastity. During a training I attended on women’s physical virtue, the missionary leading the workshop quipped, “Modest is hottest!”106 Women’s need to wear modest dress assumed women had a responsibility for how men looked at women. *Christ-like Leadership for Women* introduced modesty as a part of the virtue of chastity by encouraging women to think about men’s responses to their bodies. The small-group discussion question asked, “In terms of modesty, do you think that the way you dress affects others around you? If yes, how?” This was a leading question, and the list of potential answers in the Leaders’ Guide asserted that modesty was the responsibility women ought to take for men’s physical

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106 Field notes, June 12, 2013.
chastity. “Men are very visual,” the guide explained, “If we are dressing to attract that kind of attention, we will get it! But we may be harming our brothers in Christ in the process.”¹⁰⁷ Women were responsible for their own emotional chastity and part of men’s physical chastity.

This was the performance of what I am calling “complementary virtue.” By dressing modestly, women positioned themselves as helpers in men’s work on their chastity. Men and women’s performances of virtue were implicated in and dependent on the opposite gender. At the same time, they also needed women-only communities of accountability, in which women helped each other police the boundaries of chastity.

While I was Christmas tree watching with Alexandra and Jenna in Macy’s one weekend in Advent, we rode an escalator past some clothing advertisements that featured brooding and scantily clad men. Jenna remarked, “Wow, they are attractive!” Alexandra responded in a playful motherly tone that was only partially in jest, “Guard your heart, Jenna; guard your heart!”¹⁰⁸ One of the ways DIRECT women performed emotional (and physical) chastity was within a tight feedback loop that defined and reinforced the cultivation of feminine genius through virtuous management of emotions. They protected one another’s emotionally chastity and affirmed each other’s feminine intuition.

This community of female accountability was also fostered through DIRECT’s weekly Bible studies. When I talked with missionaries about their experiences in these small-group Bible studies, they talked much more about the community of women that developed there than the Bible. Jenna laughed about how little time they sometimes spent actually reading the Bible in Bible study. One of the highlights of her first year as a missionary was the “incredible women” in her Bible study. She said that they were “rock stars” and was so happy that they had a

community of accountability, especially in chastity. She explained:

We’ve been talking about…chastity…and…the conviction that they have to…keep their bodies pure, and keep their minds pure. Although some of these things, like emotional chastity…might be a new concepts to them…Daydreaming about boys can hurt your heart. And they’re like, ‘Oh, that makes sense!’ They talk about their friends and are like, ‘I should help her and do this.’…They are just sssooo passionate about it…So, that’s where I’m like, ‘Wow, you have this community of women. You’re not alone in this. You already know each other and you know that you’re set on these values.’ And that’s where I’m like, ‘Wow, you have this community of women. You’re not alone in this. You already know each other and you know that you’re set on these values.’ And that’s where I’m like, ‘Wow, you have this community of women. You’re not alone in this. You already know each other and you know that you’re set on these values.’ And that’s what…fellowship of the body of Christ is for.\footnote{Jenna, interview by author, February 7, 2013, transcript.}

Integral to this cultivation of female chastity was community of accountability. Bible studies and Women’s Nights, along with women’s virtue formation at staff training and the mandated same-sex living arrangements, taught women how to be women with other women. Alexandra laughed about how “girly” she was \textit{not} and how much her roommates—Mia and Jenna—were teaching her about being feminine. They introduced her to make-up and affirmed her switch from carrying a backpack to carrying a shoulder bag. Alexandra and Jenna both talked about how important strong female role models were for their dating lives and Mia’s significant relationship was instructive for both single women. Mia demonstrated how to draw physical boundaries and how to have difficult conversations. Missionaries appreciated being able to learn from other women how to be feminine geniuses.

But this emphasis on embodying feminine intuition and living out their feminine genius always threatened to be a little too much surveillance, too much detailed attention to the performance of a particular way of being a woman. I interviewed a rather disgruntled former missionary who wondered aloud if DIRECT missionaries ended up emphasizing too \textit{much} performance. After he left DIRECT staff, he worked at a Newman Center where there was a DIRECT team. He was sometimes worried by conversations with female missionaries.

I remember talking to a few—particularly females—who were like, “I feel like I have to
be perfect.” They had just joined staff and they’d be, “I just feel like I have to be perfect, like these other women” and talking about gender roles and da, da, da, da. And like; Okay. I believe gender is a real thing. But, um, at certain times—and I don’t know if it’s still the case—but there is this hyper-emphasis and I think a deep-seated anxiety about getting the roles right.\textsuperscript{110}

“Getting the roles right” was especially pressing in learning and performing emotional chastity.

Within their missionary community, Women’s Nights, and Bible studies on campus, women learned and performed a worldview that configured intimate relationships and friendships in particular ways, expected certain things of interpersonal relations, and maintained an interior world of accountability for emotional chastity.

Men’s Physical Chastity

We know inherently what constitutes authentic masculinity and we know what does not…[W]hen I say, “What kind of man do you want to be”? I’m willing to bet anything you didn’t say to yourself, “I want to be the kind of guy who creeps away from his wife late at night to get his fix from his laptop because I want to look at porn.”…Who you desire to be in your heart of hearts is who God is calling you to be. In other words, God’s demands do not deflate your manliness.\textsuperscript{111}


To be authentically masculine demanded chastity. As feminine chastity did, masculine chastity had a capacious definition. It included “freedom” from the “sexual sins” of masturbation, pornography, fornication, emotional promiscuity, and lustful looks/thoughts, not to even mention premarital sex.\textsuperscript{112} Male chastity also required that men lead in dating relationships. Just as women had to dress in order to help men avoid lustful thoughts, men had to take charge of dating in order to help women avoid “emotional marriages.” This was the mutual performance of complementary virtue.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} Dylan, interview by author, August 8, 2013, transcript.
\textsuperscript{111} Fradd, “The Man Talk.”
\textsuperscript{112} DIRECT, \textit{Christ-like Leadership for Men}, 24-5.
\textsuperscript{113} The world of male chastity was, more than other parts of authentic masculinity, opaque to me. My access to it was through much more formal channels, like the recordings and YouTube videos from conferences (which
The titles of the two chastity chapters in DIRECT’s *Christ-like Leadership for Men* Bible study emphasized the freedom, self-control, and physical strength of chastity. They were titled “Stronger Than Death” and “Chastity: The Freedom to Love.” These chapters taught men that pornography and lust made slaves of men, arguing, “Lust is love deformed and mangled.”

DIRECT promised that “breaking the[se] bonds” would lead to freedom from these chains of contemporary U.S. male culture. It was not, DIRECT argued, that chastity was the feminization of men; chastity was the strong and manly choice.

DIRECT’s formal prescriptions for men’s chastity included alarmist discussions of pornography and its deleterious affects on men, women, and relationships. Drawing on what they defined as essential qualities of men, DIRECT missionaries told one another that pornography was the corruption of their essentially visual nature. Laine Coopley how:

> There are some differences between men and women…What I am saying is that we have been created with unique gifts. When we deny these gifts, it can become very confusing, because we’re trying to communicate in these ways that don’t make sense. There’s trouble: the devil knows about these differences. He likes to attack there. What does he tempt you with? He tempts you with physical images—pornography.

Pornography was God’s gift of physical beauty and sexual intimacy corrupted. Moreover, men who used pornography had become slaves to a large pornography industry in the U.S. In his description of authentic masculinity, a long-time missionary named Simon listed the 2012 statistics on the pornography industry: $3,075 spent on internet porn every second; every second, over 28,000 users viewing internet porn; every 39 minutes, new porn video created. He paused and then continued reading from his notes, “The porn industry has larger revenues than

missionaries listened to and referenced in conversations). I had a handful of interview-based conversations with men about chastity and pornography, but I did not have the kind of casual access to men’s chastity that I did to women’s.

115 Coopley, “Why Do Women do That?”
Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Apple, eBay, Yahoo, and Netflix combined.”

DIRECT male missionaries were not alone in their concern about easy and prevalent access to pornography in the U.S. In fact, debates over pornography date to at least the 1870s, when religious leaders in the nineteenth century worried “that pornographic representations cause people to commit acts of violence.” In early 2014, the evangelical Protestant organization, Covenant Eyes produced a study that summarized statistics about pornography use. They cited a 2009 study wherein “64% of college men and 18% of college women spend time online for Internet sex every week” and “51% of male students and 32% of female students first viewed pornography before their teenage years (twelve and younger).” Secular observers have also worried about pornography. Kimmel reported in 1990 that pornography was at an all-time high in terms of ease of access and amount of it produced, and that was before the Internet made pornography exponentially easier to access. In her 2005 journalistic account of heterosexual men and pornography, Pamela Paul argued, “Pornography cuts across all swathes of society.” Through qualitative interviews with hundreds of heterosexual men, she contends, “porn has burst out of the container that civilized society once placed it in…[P]ornography…has wended its way into our daily lives, playing a more central role than ever before.”

DIRECT male missionaries emphasized individual practices of virtue in attaining and

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116 Pickler, “Esto Vir.”
117 Grebowicz, Why Internet Porn Matters, 120-123; 9. She argues that what makes the debates about pornography different in the twenty-first century is that they have become subsumed under debates about free speech and access. In her account, she argues that the real issue of Internet pornography is in its social meaning, which serves to protect a mainstream heterosexuality (120-123). DIRECT’s concerns tend to reflect the concerns of the 1870s, which worried “that pornographic representations cause people to commit acts of violence.”
121 Paul, Pornified, 262.
maintaining chastity. In his talk to men, “Esto Vir,” Simon outlined three steps to tackle lust:
(1) “Get a consistent prayer life, men.” (2) “Men, we gotta get good friends,” and (3) “Have the heart of a servant. Serve our women. Look them in their eyes; you know what I’m talking about.”

Chastity was a virtue to be built up by daily practice, in prayer, community, and in care-taking relationships with women.

The Christ-like Leadership for Men promised men that, despite the difficulty of overcoming pornography, lust, and impure thoughts, “God does not call us to the impossible. Because chastity is His will for every man, He is sure to give us every grace we need to walk in it.”

To be a chaste man was to submit one’s desires to God’s plans for manliness.

The virtues and habits of men’s chastity also involved prescriptions for how they interacted with women. Men were expected to be attentive to the emotional needs of women, to help them in their emotional chastity. Laine coached the men on this: “Don’t be a flirt,” she instructed. “Women who dress immodestly don’t help you, do they? Men who are incessant flirts do not help us… I want to challenge you to DTR… Define the relationship; sit down and have a conversation, define your intentions… That’s your job. That’s an awesome job.”

Embedded in the task of “DTRing,” was the expectation that men take charge of romantic relationships. Being clear, up-front, and ending a culture of “hanging out” instead of “dating” were important in the performance of both DTR and male chastity. Laine was firm about this, “If you are dragging her along, without any intention of doing anything with that relationship, you are going to burn her and she is going to get a hard heart, and it’s going to hurt. You have to be careful.”

Josh, the missionary who appreciated learning how to be a man from other men, told me

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122 Pickler, “Esto Vir.”
124 Cooley, “Why Do Women Do That?”
125 Ibid.
about his efforts to DTR with a young woman he would marry two years later.

Men are supposed to pursue, and it was obvious to me and it was obvious to her that we had Chemistry…I met up with her once, and said…‘Look. Yeah, it’s obvious that there is more than a friendship kind of desire going on right here…I can’t pursue you [because of the dating fast]. But I can tell you right now that I didn’t want you to feel like I was leading you on or flirting with you.’ So you make it obvious that you like someone and then you act on it. Otherwise, you’re just playing with their emotions.¹²⁶

Josh took responsibility for both his and his girlfriend’s emotions. DTRing established him as the servant-leader of the relationship. Chastity was the virtue whereby men practiced how to “love others in the right way.”¹²⁷ Part of that rightly ordered love involved clearly defined boundaries and expectations in romantic relationships. Chastity involved the full-bodied practices of negotiating gender roles, managing dating dynamics, and maintaining self-control.

Keeping oneself accountable to these prescriptions for chaste masculinity required a community of accountability. I have touched on the importance of a homosocial community for male missionaries as they articulated the hows and whys and right performance of authentic masculinity more generally, but that accountability also required men’s honesty about struggles with chastity. Christ-like Leadership for Men fostered this. The study’s second week on chastity focused on pornography and other “sexual sins” that defined an unchaste life. The leader’s guide gave “special preparation” for the week, which assumed that the discussion would be difficult:

More than any other chapter in this series, this one will provide the opportunity for the men to be vulnerable and honest with each other…As the leader, you should spend about two hours praying over the material…More than likely things are going to get uncomfortable at some point.¹²⁸

Absent from this week’s guide were the kinds of discussion questions that were strategically placed in other parts of the study to encourage conversation. The author of the study explained

¹²⁶ Josh, interview by author, April 8, 2013, transcript.
¹²⁷ DIRECT, Christ-like Leadership for Men, 23.
the choice as an intentional one that aimed to help missionaries to “tailor the discussion to your group’s level of openness.” Beneath this is the assumption that men will be hesitant to talk openly about these struggles.

Michael Kimmel’s collected essays by men about pornography joined DIRECT men in this. Almost twenty-five years ago, he was trying to break open what Kimmel called a “deafening silence” among men on the topic.

It is a silence born of confusion about the role of pornography in our lives, and a more general confusion about how we experience our sexualities, a confusion that remains fixed in place because of our inability to talk frankly and openly with other men about our sexualities, and that is compounded by a paralyzing fear that whatever we say about something as volatile as pornography will reveal us to be less than ‘real men.’ Men are frightened to raise the subject, inarticulate when we try.

This same sense of shame percolated in male missionaries’ accounts of their former addictions to pornography. During our second interview, Kaden took a deep breath before he told me about his addiction to pornography while he was in college and the ways Marian devotion helped him overcome it. Allen described overcoming what he called an “all-consuming addiction” to pornography and masturbation as the pivot in his conversion experience. Both gave me well-rehearsed versions of their struggles that ended in their triumph as “real men” because they were no longer enslaved by pornography. At the end of his “Man Talk,” Fradd challenged his all-male audience to figure out ways to be positively peer pressured in chastity. He told the men, “We need to surround ourselves by holy men and…good peer pressure!”

Despite this rhetoric, when DIRECT worked to break through the silence Kimmel describes, it was pierced by the monologue of the Bible study, rather than a dialogue of questions. Missionaries seemed to want to open up a space for men to engage in conversation,

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130 Kimmel, Men Confront Pornography, 3.
131 Fradd, “The Man Talk.”
but seemed somewhat unwilling or unable to facilitate the dialogue, officially. Chastity was hard, and required good peer pressure, vulnerability and honesty.

This combination of women allowing themselves to be led by men, closely monitoring their emotional landscapes, and dressing so as not to arouse men, with men controlling their physical desires, anticipating women’s emotions, and celebrating manliness sounds like a potent reenactment of the kind of True Womanhood married to Muscular Christianity and grounded in gender essentialism that contemporary feminist scholars have been resisting for fifty years. Indeed, learning about missionaries’ gender prescriptions were the most difficult ethnographic moments for me and most challenged my ethnographic commitment to being intentionally porous in and to the complexly layered worlds of DIRECT missionaries. Eventually, though, I realized I was having conversations with women who were describing to me how their articulations of feminine genius were teaching them to respect themselves and to expect the men around them to respect them. I listened to men describe their careful efforts to attend to women’s needs and I had to admit that I could appreciate these prescriptions. Chastity taught women to value themselves and their bodies, to expect men to treat them well, and to pay attention to the real challenges of intimate, romantic relationships. Chastity taught men to attend to the women in their lives and to keep their imaginations aligned with reality.

What I found troubling, I realized—and what I suspect liberal feminist ideology finds troubling here—was that gender essentialism defined the performance of chastity. Men seemed destined to be tempted by pornography (women, yes, but not so much) and in need of increased emotional maturity. Women seemed doomed to emotional instability (men, again, yes, but not so much) and not interested in physical intimacy. Men and women both seemed overly scripted by
biology and unable to ever be equal partners.

But that was the point: they were inserting themselves into a complementary relationship, \textit{not} one defined by “equality.” And \textit{that}, I realized rankled my “secular progressive” sensibilities.\textsuperscript{132} Gender complementarity, as it has been described by Catholic theology, papal encyclicals, and musings by celibate men, speaks in tones of “separate but equal.” Yet, this emphasis on complementarity is the key to understanding the relationship between emotionally chaste femininity and physically chaste masculinity. Many times, missionaries used this language of men and women “complementing” one another. It was a sometimes realized and sometimes unrealized reference to John Paul II’s theology of women. The pope’s \textit{Letter to Women} speaks of the relationship between men and women as one where, “Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary.

Womanhood expresses the ‘human’ as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way.”\textsuperscript{133} Women and men are biologically scripted for reciprocal relationships.

Men and women’s chastity were complementary virtue. These virtues were cultivated in multiple locations, including men’s physical lives, women’s emotional lives, and like-minded communities of accountability. Complementary virtue implicated men and women in the cultivation and performance of one another’s Catholic chastity.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Missionaries worked and prayed to be the feminine geniuses and authentically masculine men they were taught by DIRECT to be, felt called by God to become, and challenged by their community to embody. I have described their gender essentialist vision of Catholic femininity

\textsuperscript{132} Mahmood, \textit{Politics of Piety}, 37.
\textsuperscript{133} John Paul II, \textit{Letter to Women}, Line 7.
and Catholic masculinity by developing three interwoven analytical tools for understanding how missionaries articulated, cultivated, and performed their gendered subjectivities.

“Multiple submissions” is my proposal for thinking through and past an agency-submission binary of women’s (and men’s) religious action. Asking where and how female missionaries claimed agency in their male-dominated religious tradition ignores that submission was forming their subjectivity. Following their interpretation of the Virgin Mary as role model, female missionaries “allowed” men to lead them. They submitted to God’s will through prayer and to men through their habits of submissive leadership and relationships. But this was not a submission that existed on one far end of the feminist binary, opposed to agency. This was submission that taught women how to be fully human. Complementing this submission, men emulated Jesus with the performance of servant-leadership for the women in their lives by sacrificing their own needs for others. Missionaries’ multiple submissions were to each other, to God and to the larger community of DIRECT.

Missionaries cultivated homosocial communities of responsibility, where they were challenged to live up to the expectations of each set of gender prescriptions. This was a multidirectional submission that men and women strived to achieve, despite, and sometimes because of, the ways it countered cultural expectations of men’s and women’s behaviors. Multiple submissions was responded to both male and female malaise in the twenty-first century by proposing a Catholic alternative of gendered subjectivity.

“Gendered prayer” is my proposal for understanding how prayer forms participated in the cultivation of gendered subjectivities. Prayer can never be understood simply through its content or through the words people pray. It was the forms and movements of missionaries’ prayers that developed shaped their authentic masculinity or feminine genius. Female missionaries trained
their essentially emotional and relational nature through prayer journals, while male missionaries trained their essentially active and physical nature through daily examinations of conscience. Both prayer forms moved the immaterial conversations with God into tactile objects of prayer, but in ways that trained male and female missionaries according to their Catholic man- and womanhood. While female missionaries turned to prayer journals to manage their emotional life, men’s examinations of conscience created a to-do list that relied on men’s natural tendency for physical action and then trained it by orienting that tendency toward God’s will.

Finally, “complementary virtue” is my proposal for interpreting missionaries’ work to live their sexual lives according to how they understood God’s plan for sexuality. Missionaries’ efforts to be virtuous were attempts to train their bodies and emotions. Performing chastity meant much, much more than not having premarital sex. It meant, for women, being “emotionally chaste” and keeping themselves out of “emotional marriages.” Women had to dress modestly in order to manage their own emotional lives and to help men manage their physical desires. Chastity meant, for men, not using pornography or thinking lustful thoughts or acting out masturbation. It meant learning how to “DTR” with women and take the lead in romantic relationships. “Complementary virtue” insists that the challenges and virtue of chastity were interrelated. It was never the case that chastity was only about men or only about women. Men and women were dependent upon each other for enacting this vision of the virtue of male and female chastity.

With these three frameworks, this chapter has described and analyzed the gendering of missionaries within (and by) DIRECT. With the previous two, it has described the intersubjective formation of missionaries, which relied on prayer in a wide variety of forms, meanings, and performances.
Chapter 5. Making Dynamically Orthodox Catholicism: Technologies of Millennial Catholic Group Formation

Seek what moves you. —SEEK2013 Program Guide

‘Your charism is cool.’¹ —Fr. O’Hara, to DIRECT missionaries

It’s an exciting time in America’s history to be Catholic…Wherever you are on the spectrum of faith, or not even on the spectrum—an atheist, an agnostic, spiritual but not religious—there’s a place for you [at SEEK2013]...We’re inviting people to seek the truth, to have a dialogue with people and ask questions.² —Jacob Rodriguez, DIRECT National Director of Marketing and Communications

Just days after marking the start of the New Year 2013, more than 6,100 college students and DIRECT missionaries convened at the Swan and Dolphin Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. The group gathered for the SEEK2013 conference to “‘ask, seek and knock’ to discover who we are, where we’re going and what motivates us.”³ The five-day, biennial conference was designed as part Catholic retreat, part Catholic catechesis, and part big Catholic bash. The program guide began, “Party On.”⁴ Thousands of millennial Catholics attended daily Mass, listened to Catholic motivational and catechetical speakers, learned to swing dance, prayed in Adoration on their knees, took part in Confession, and attended a rock concert with a Catholic version of the mainstream rock band, Mumford & Sons.

When my shuttle bus from the airport pulled into the resort, missionaries and students were wearing neon green shirts that said “I wear my sunglasses at night” as they greeted new arrivals. We were directed to registration and told how to find our room reservations. I wound

¹ Field notes, January 4, 2013.
my way through the crowd until I found the long line for people with last names starting with “D.” I chatted with two young women from the huge DIRECT program at Benedictine College. Their contingent was so large (around 250 students) that these two women had just met each other while waiting in this line. Huge groups of students arrived by the busload from long-established and large DIRECT programs, like at University of Illinois (almost 150 students) and North Dakota State University (over 115 students). I was attending with the four missionaries and six undergraduate students from my campus.

Checked in, I sat down on the edge of an indoor fountain and pulled the conference schedule out of my new SEEK2013 cinch sack. Each morning began at nine o’clock, with a daily Mass. Then we were broken into gender-segregated groups of men and women, in which we spent an hour learning how to be “feminine geniuses” and “authentically masculine” men. During the afternoons, millennial Catholics attended any range of “impact sessions” designed to teach them about Catholic apologetics, chastity in dating, Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body, Catholic morality, and pro-life politics. Each evening had a keynote speaker and a fun event, like swing dancing on the second night and a music concert on the last night. The five days of prayer and instruction were carefully organized to build into an evening of Adoration and Confession on the penultimate night.

In her final report on the conference, the director of SEEK2013 summarized the event as having promoted DIRECT as an emergent “cultural movement.”5 SEEK2013, she told DIRECT executives, had helped solidify DIRECT as an effort capable of changing the foundational assumptions and operating goals of a larger community, the community of dynamically orthodox Catholics in and around DIRECT. The ethnographic inquiry of this chapter explores how the

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prayer practices and techniques of SEEK2013 were designed to teach six thousand millennials how to become “dynamically orthodox” Catholics. The practices of the conference ushered attendees into a collective (and clearly bounded) Catholic identity.

SEEK2013 was a marketing campaign for Catholicism and DIRECT. It was an effort to “win” students over to Catholicism and make Catholics look attractive to “mainstream” college students. From selling hipster sunglasses with DIRECT printed on them to the interactive conference smartphone app, missionaries and DIRECT organizers shaped the aesthetic of the conference in a way that made a hard sell for Catholicism. But to describe SEEK2013 primarily as a marketing campaign undercuts its larger—and more difficult—project of cultivating a way of being Catholic that was in (what they understood to be) strict alignment with Vatican teachings and attractive to a large group of primarily white, middle class college students. Making Catholicism attractive to this demographic could have taken any number of other forms, like social justice activism, service projects, a “Jesus loves you” festival or a Catholic theological training camp. Instead, SEEK2013 used particularly and exceptionally Catholic prayer forms, teachings, and imaginations to cultivate a collective Catholic identity of young adults. This identity was a “dynamically orthodox” Catholicism. As I more fully outline in the introduction of this dissertation, this Catholicism was committed to weekly Mass attendance, opposed to artificial birth control, and trying to practice gender complementarity, all the while being savvy in contemporary youth culture and a personal relationship with Jesus. The prayer practices at SEEK2013 instructed millennial Catholic attendees in these performances, dispositions, and habits of “dynamically orthodox” Catholics.

The historiography of American Catholicism has long worked on a binary of “liberal” and “conservative” Catholicism. While my work challenges the effectiveness of this binary as an
analytic tool, missionaries themselves challenged it too. As one executive exclaimed, “We’re not liberal or conservative; we’re orthodox!”6 Caitlin, a fourth-year missionary in Wisconsin, explained that they work hard to reach out to students. To be a dynamically orthodox Catholic, she explained, was to interpret Catholic teaching in the context of contemporary college culture’s dating relationships and secular philosophy classes. “But, orthodoxy doesn’t change. I mean, it is orthodox.”7 During my months of fieldwork, I watched missionaries and DIRECT national use Twitter hashtags and Duck Dynasty in a way that made missionaries seem attractive to college students. They made traditional Catholic prayer cool and normal by wearing rosaries as bracelets and getting tattoos that referenced their favorite saint. They trafficked regularly between “How I Met Your Mother” and Thomistic theology, March Madness and Confession. They imagined themselves enacting the Great Commission as described in the Gospel of Matthew when they frequented coffee shops with college students. DIRECT’s collective formation drew on their cultural contexts while articulating communal Catholic identity.

Technologies of Group Formation

The prayer formations and conversations about prayer in and around SEEK2013 were what I call “technologies of group formation,” which cultivated a way of being Catholic in the contemporary world. With this term, I am trying to move between tendencies in the academic studies of prayer to categorize prayer forms as either public or private. My term builds on the work anthropologist Niloofar Haeri has done in studying Muslim women performing salāt in their homes, alone. Her study widens the language of ritual studies from an emphasis on the

7 Caitlin, interview by author, April 22, 2013, transcript.
public to include the private, inner lives of women. Haeri’s understanding of ritual insists that even the seemingly private actions of prayer are both private and public. Certainly, women performing daily *salāt* in their bedrooms are alone, but they are also participating in a long-structured and socially bound prayer practice. They chat about it with other women who also perform that prayer, at the same time, in *their* bedrooms. They learn, Haeri describes, how to improve their prayer practices by discussing it with other women. They form a community around their individual practices.

A similar movement between public and private prayer was reflected in the prayer lives of DIRECT missionaries, which were broadcast at SEEK2013. While missionaries often appeared to be praying alone, it was always an intersubjective process. They received regular instruction on how to pray from DIRECT-sponsored literature and DIRECT-approved spiritual reading. Even the prayer acts that appeared to be individual performances—journaling with Jesus or praying the rosary—were often performed in a shared physical space, reported to others, and analyzed in conversations. Their apparently inner, intimate experiences of God never remained solely private. Prayer forms often collapsed a distinction between the private and the communal performances of prayer.

As the title suggests, “technologies of group formation” implies Michel Foucault’s understandings of the ways individuals were worked on (and worked on themselves) in religious discipline. He famously argued that “technologies of the self” are the processes which:

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity,

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wisdom, perfection, or immortality.\(^9\)

Subjectivity, Foucault argued near the end of his life, was something historically constituted, through practices.\(^10\) These practices were, Foucault wrote, “not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.”\(^11\) SEEK2013’s prayer practices were technologies not just of the individual self but also of a communal identity.

These technologies were also a doing of prayer and formation. These prayers worked at the intersection of religious experience and religious identity. Bodies, minds, souls, imaginations, desires, and nostalgia were necessarily implicated in these formations. To describe these prayers as “technologies,” in this Foucauldian sense, implies passivity, a way in which the person or group under formation is in perpetual state of receptivity. While missionaries praying at SEEK2013 certainly worked to be recipients of both God’s actions and DIRECT’s instructions, attendees were not non-agentic. Rather, they were acting in submission to the formations. Talal Asad famously argued that pain, in medieval Christian rituals, was part of the penance performed by monks. They underwent physical pain as a “choice about the condition of one’s soul…The important part [of penance] was not the threat by the priest of bodily pain…. but the subject’s will in admitting guilt, on which depended his submission to pain in this world as something positive.”\(^12\) Asad interprets this pain as the work of submission; it was how medieval men became Catholic monks. I follow Asad’s concern about a tendency in the study of religion to focus too narrowly on the autonomous agent’s capacities. In doing so, we limit our ability to see

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\(^11\) Kelly, “Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of the Self,” 517.

the density of practice being performed by practitioners.

Technologies of group formation were ways of praying that worked to shape SEEK2013 attendees’ Catholic subjectivities. This was also the articulation of a collective identity of becoming Catholics. Missionaries relied on the history of these prayer forms and the contemporary cultural moment in (and on) which they were performed. These formations were the doing and instructing of prayer practices and disciplines that expected individuals’ expressions of Catholicism to become dynamic orthodoxy.

**Savvy Mass, Mass Savvy**

A Mass like that…it’s a “once-in-a-while experience, and it was just perfect.”

—Jack Hoppes, DIRECT Executive, on SEEK2013’s Closing Mass

I followed the sea of thousands of missionaries and college students moving slowly toward the opening Mass. As we approached the doors, a missionary was waving a sign telling us to be quiet because Mass has already begun. The sign was both ineffective and untrue. Inside the ballroom, it was not immediately clear whether I was at a college football game or the opening Mass for a Catholic conference. Students waved school flags and insignia. Others danced to a popular Philip Philips song being covered by a band of DIRECT missionaries. I watched missionaries who had not seen each other since New Staff Training hug each other enthusiastically. I saw a young missionary family with a baby in an Ergo carrier and a toddler in a jogging stroller. What it meant to be Catholic in this room, as I had learned in my previous months of fieldwork, meant being “on fire for the faith” and “open to the Lord’s plan for my life” and “striving for sainthood” and “loving the Church.”

But, I learned as the week went on,

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14 DIRECT, SEEK2013 Program Guide.
it also meant being conversant in popular culture, comfortable with loud music, and able to
talk about things like dating and sex and relationships and “YOLO” and Facebook alongside
Catholic apologetics, Mass, and the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The stage at the front of the room was set up in imitation of a Romanesque Catholic
church. A massive altar with a huge monstrance filled the stage. Three screens had a panoramic
image of the inside of the ruins of a church, evoking a feeling of early Christianity. As the
DIRECT band shifted from a cover of “Gone, Gone, Gone” to an instrumental call to reflection,
the members of the crowd took the cue and shifted into performing the Mass. Though the space
remained technically the same, participants’ dispositions shifted as the conference center went
from being a rock concert venue to a place of Catholic worship. The space seemed to become
what J.Z. Smith has called a “place of clarification where men and gods are held to be
transparent to one another”15 as we stood to begin Mass. I counted eighty-four priests in the
opening processional in front of Denver’s Archbishop Aquila, who presided over the Mass. I
listened to thousands of voices recite the same prayers they had said hundreds of times, kneel in
the same moments they always did in the ritual, and enthusiastically exchange hugs and
handshakes during the Sign of Peace. It took twenty minutes for the group to return to the quiet
mood of Eucharistic preparation. The music was a blend of traditional lieders and contemporary
hymns. I learned much later that a long-time missionary had composed the Eucharistic prayer
melodies specifically for the five Masses of the conference.16 Even with almost one hundred
Eucharistic Ministers, the Communion lines moved slowly because most people bowed before
they received and some genuflected. I saw a handful of students receive by mouth. Despite these

15 J.Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual” in Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1982), 54.
16 Field notes, January 5, 2013.
markers of Traditional Catholicism, I only saw three women wearing veils over their hair. When we returned to our seats, we knelt on the conference room floor. Heads all around me were bowed and eyes were closed. Mass ended with a recessional “Joy to the World” in honor of the Christmas liturgical season. Later that evening, the #SEEK2013 Twitter account buzzed “#6000Catholics” and “#GodisGreat.”

The Masses at SEEK2013 followed the same ritual conventions and norms as Catholic Masses did at Newman Centers all over the country. We responded, “Amen” and “Lord, hear our prayer” and recited the Nicene Creed in all the same parts of the ritual. Bodies stood and sat as they had in other Masses, in other times. But within that repetition there was also malleability.

The Mass is, as Haeri says of the salāt prayers in her ethnography, never “simply repetition.” Ritual acts and repetitive prayer are practices whereby the devout interact with God. Haeri points out that, “repetition as practice offers the possibility of creativity—the possibility of undermining the rigidity and formality that form imposes.” When ritual is “enacted by different groups of people throughout their lifetimes under different social and political conditions,” the formal conventions of the ritual may not change very much, but the meaning, function, and relationship with God shifts. The repetition of Mass—in 2013, by 6000 young adults—was the cultivation of a particular moment of collective Catholicism.

SEEK2013’s Masses—which involved “repetition as practice”—modeled for college students how to participate fully in both American cultural norms and Catholic Mass. The choices that liturgical planners made in these Masses demonstrated their fluency in youth and young adult American culture. Participants enacted a Mass that was capable of being talked

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17 Field notes, January 2, 2013.
about in Twitter hashtags, and intended to appeal to millennials’ musical preferences. At the same time, attendees also enacted the long tradition of Catholic liturgy wherein Catholic Mass marked out the boundary between Catholics and others. Mass was a ritual of a particular community. SEEK2013’s daily Masses balanced commitments to both Catholic tradition and U.S. culture in a way that I came to think of as “acceptably counter-cultural.” These Masses taught “SEEKers” to move confidently in both worlds. The emphasis on the Mass challenged those young adults who were claiming to be religious “nones” and “spiritual but not religious.” But this challenge was not so forceful that it could be dismissed as out of step with the norms of middle-class millennial life. The presence of both worlds in the formal ritual validated college students’ experiences and challenged them to a more engaged kind of Catholicism.

In addition to the piously normal aesthetic of these daily Masses, the homily at the opening Mass illustrated DIRECT’s attempts to appeal to, and then challenge, millennials’ college-campus norms. Fr. Scott Kallal, AVI, a founding member of an order of priests called the Apostles of the Interior Life and graduate of the large DIRECT program at the University of Illinois, gave the homily.\(^{20}\) The priest seemed young and nervous as he stood in front of the huge crowd. He began in starts and stops, with “ums” and “likes,” but warmed up as he talked about his experience as a student at a DIRECT national conference in New Orleans several years before. He described himself as having had little interest in “making the most of the experience” and he “blew off” most of the conference. One night he was strolling around the streets of New Orleans with a beer in his hand and saw a student in his Bible study walking toward him.

Overwhelmed with the shame of providing a poor role model, Fr. Scott decided to participate in

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\(^{20}\) “About,” Apostles of Life Homepage, accessed September 18, 2014, http://www.apostlesofil.com/about/prayer-life. This is an order of priests and nuns who work with college students to discern their vocation through spiritual direction. They work on college campuses in the U.S., often overlapping with DIRECT missionary teams.
the remainder of the conference. Fr. Scott paused and looked out over the sea of college students. He challenged them to “get involved,” to “not be a wallflower,” and to “step outside your normal comfort place.” Getting involved with SEEK2013, he promised, would be transformative.21

This homily seemed oriented to the millennials in the room who wanted to be Catholic, but also wanted to party and were feeling unsure of their position at this conference. Fr. Scott’s message worked to assure attendees that they were part of something bigger than themselves and that that they were among fellow sinners. This Catholic community, his mood suggested, understood the challenges of being Catholic and in college.

Fr. Scott’s homily also attended to the concerns that missionaries had about the culture that surrounded college students on campus. As I detailed in the introduction of this dissertation, concerns about students hooking up and binge drinking preoccupied many missionaries. But they were also sensitive to the less visual troubles of college students. Terrance, a missionary in his seventh year with DIRECT, told me I would be surprised by how much pain and hurt the students on campus were experiencing. One of the things he was learning during his long tenure as a missionary was that college students were struggling. Depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, divorced parents, and bad dating experiences just topped the long list. He shrugged and said that knowing all of that is out there kept him motivated to share Jesus’ love with as many students as possible. Bringing them to SEEK2013, encouraging them to experience God’s love and a Catholic community, was part of his strategy.

The force of that Catholic community was made evident to me at the end of this opening Mass. After the six thousand attendees had received Communion, having responded “Amen” to

21 Field notes, January 12, 2013.
the Eucharistic Minister’s “Corpus Christi,” most people were kneeling on the hard conference room floor. As the priests took their seats, a group of students in the back of the huge room began praying, “St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil….” I had never heard this prayer before. I listened as a third of the room seemed to join in the prayer. I asked Jenna about it the next day and she explained that around a century before, a pope had a vision of a generation under attack. He had a vision that St. Michael’s prayer would protect them, if it was prayed after Communion. Jenna told me that Curtis Martin had been “all about it” at the previous year’s student leadership conference. He had urged students then to pray it at the conclusion of every Mass. She shrugged and guessed that the students in the back of the room were remembering that.22

The history of this prayer is more complicated and more political and more illustrative of a particular interpretation of Catholic community than Jenna reported to me. The prayer to St. Michael the Archangel is among a set of “Leonine Prayers” initiated by Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) at the end of the nineteenth century. He wrote this prayer after having had a vision of St. Michael casting the devil out of Russia, where the church was in schism, and out of Italy, where the church was under political attack. Pope Leo dictated that the prayer be said after all Low Masses, but the practice did not take hold immediately. In 1930, Pope Pius XI reintroduced the prayer by including it among several others that were to be prayed after Low Mass for the salvation of Russia and all countries under Communist control. All of these prayers were suppressed by the Second Vatican Council’s instructions on the New Mass. But, in 1994, Pope John Paul II began encouraging private use of the St. Michael prayer, saying, “Although this prayer is no longer recited at the end of Mass, I ask everyone not to forget it and to recite it to

obtain help in the battle against forces of darkness and against the spirit of this world.”

Thus, when students at SEEK2013—members of the “JPII generation”—prayed this prayer, they were drawing on the instructions of their much-loved pope and asserting a vision of Catholicism as meaningful in a broader cultural context.

In addition, this prayer illustrates the force of the community in modeling how to be dynamically orthodox. SEEK2013 liturgists did not include the prayer in the conference program. It was not part of the very detailed instructions on how to participate in the Mass. The presider of the opening Mass, Archbishop Aquila, did not lead the congregation in it. Rather, the prayer began in the back of the room, by students and missionaries who were part of this community of dynamically orthodox Catholics. The prayer continued all week, at the end of each Mass. An increasing percentage of the attendees participated in it as the conference went on. This was the performance and instruction of a collective identity by the corporate body.

J.Z. Smith has described ritual as a “means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the ways things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things.” In these Masses of SEEK2013, participants performed the way young adult Catholics ought to be and their ideals of a dynamically orthodox Catholic community. The Mass modeled how to be savvy in cultural expectations for millennials, while practicing not being subsumed by them. The Mass was well versed in the challenges of college campus life, and shaped by a desire for distinctively Catholic prayer. SEEK2013 attendees arrived in Orlando having been lifted out of the environments of their college campus lives and dropped into a Mass with thousands of other college students who


24 Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual,” 63.
were also struggling to develop an alternative Catholic route through college. SEEK2013’s Masses modeled a Catholicism that was acceptably counter-cultural in aesthetic, instruction, and *esprit de corps*.

In addition to a performance and embodiment of Smith’s “ought” of religious ritual, SEEK2013 daily Masses were also pedagogical. As they enacted the ritual, participants were instructed and formed in how to become dynamically orthodox Catholics by the leaders of DIRECT and by DIRECT missionaries. When one of the executives told me about how they planned their Masses, he said they decided to have the closing Mass of the conference be a “high Mass” with some Gregorian chant and smatterings of Latin because so many students have never experienced it. This was a chance, he said, to expose them to a particular form of the ritual.

This kind of instructional capacity of the Mass has a long history. The Catholic liturgy has long been a platform for training Catholics to be better Catholics, or the right kind of Catholics. For example, an editorial in 1931 insisted that the Mass healed “the divorce between the theory and practice of religion,” and suggested that “the liturgy [is] the catechism, the theology of the people, and it remains today the most striking, most widespread, most popular, and most easily understood witness of our faith.”25 Enacting the Mass is not simply a movement of communal expression; it is also instruction on how to be Catholic.

That the SEEK2013 Masses were pedagogical participates in the history of the liturgical movement of the twentieth century. In his history, theologian Keith Pecklers points out, “From the very beginning, leaders of the liturgical movement argued that liturgy, well-celebrated, was the best and most fundamental form of adult education which the Church could offer American

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Catholics.” The founder of the American Liturgical Movement, Virgil Michel, insisted, “the liturgy itself held its own power to form and even instruct the Christian community in the Mystical Body.” The real challenge, as Michel saw it, was to find a way to retrieve the “formative, instructional power of the liturgy.” The daily Masses at SEEK2013 struck an instructional tone for participants by pairing an enthusiastic game-day aesthetic with Catholic piety, by presenting a priest with a past experience in the collegiate party scene, and by praying alongside peers who modeled dynamically orthodox Catholicism.

“There is,” Haeri concludes her essay, “in a repeated act, a trace, a memory, but at the same time, each iteration of the act is open.” SEEK2013’s daily Masses attuned participants to their Catholic heritage and opened a way for college students to be both culturally millennial and devotionally Catholic. Informed by the aesthetics of piety performed by a party-pathway crowd, a young priest with a rambunctious past, and fellow students modeling the in-group language of this Catholicism, this prayer form cultivated a group identity of dynamically orthodox Catholics.

SEEKing…and Finding: Marking Catholicism Millennial

Don’t go it alone; let’s seek together.

—SEEK2013 Promotional Materials

We’re all seeking something, aren’t we? The tragedy is we often have an ‘ask, seek, knock’ crisis because we ask, seek, knock in all the wrong places…Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John were, ‘What do you seek? What are you looking for?’ Those words cut through 2,000 years of history and they cut us right here and now…Of course, he knew the answer to the question he was asking: You, Lord. We’re looking for you…We’re here to seek God.

—Chris Stefanick, SEEK2013 Emcee

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26 Pecklers, The Unread Vision, 190.
29 Field notes, January 2, 2013.
The 50,000-square-foot Pacific Hall was near capacity for the opening session of SEEK2013, which followed the opening Mass. Loud music pumped up the crowd. Students from established DIRECT programs were wearing matching shirts they had produced for the conference. Life-sized cardboard cutouts of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II bobbed around the crowd. Some people stood on their chairs, dancing to the music. A timer flashed on the large screen. As the countdown reached ten seconds, the crowd began to chant, “Ten! Nine! Eight!” As attendees screamed, “Zero!” the screen went black and the lights in the ballroom dimmed for several seconds. When the lights came back up, the same screen that had been the church backdrop for Mass was now divided into three partitions. The words of the conference’s biblical theme, Matthew 7:7, were scrawled, in faux graffiti, on the image of a brick wall: “Ask, and it will be given to you” across the first partition. “Seek, and you will find” across the second, and “Knock, and it will be opened to you” across the third. The conference emcee, Chris Stefanick, appeared on the stage, and the crowd went wild with applause. Stefanick was in his mid-thirties, fit, and attractive. A commenter on his Twitter page compared his physical appearance to actor Ryan Gosling. He had scruff on his face and wore a tight-fitting t-shirt and jeans. He flexed his muscles as the screens displayed pictures of his six children, which he referenced as symbols of his Catholic masculinity. Stefanick welcomed attendees and urged them to participate fully in the weekend. He asked them to be willing to let God work in their hearts. Stefanick affirmed their seeking and their desire to ask questions. Then he made sure they knew the telos of their questions, “We’re here to seek God.” To that end, twenty-one speakers gave keynote addresses each evening and “impact sessions” each afternoon that trained attendees in how to answer their questions through apologetics, Catholic theology, and Catholic morality.

In this section I propose that the theological formation and apologetics during these
Impact sessions constituted a kind of prayer practice for members of this community. In addition to the ways that prayer was a capacious, creative activity that worked with (and in) historical and intersubjective moments, the intellect—human’s capacity for thought and mental activity—was also implicated in the prayer practices of DIRECT Catholics. Missionaries taught students that the intellect was to be formed by a relationship with Jesus. When I attended Keith Coopley’s impact session on how to be an “everyday apologist,” he explained that apologetics demanded having the courage and generosity to gently teach and correct misconceptions about Catholicism. But it was not enough, he cautioned, to know the right defense of Catholic doctrine. An apologist was to live as a witness to Catholic life. Coopley defined being a witness as having a regular prayer life mediated by Catholic sacraments and a strong relationship with Jesus. The work of explaining and defending Catholicism was this kind of prayer formation.

I also watched many missionaries bring books on theology and apologetics into Holy Hour, into their daily time set apart as prayer. These kinds of texts were part of missionaries’ “spiritual reading” repertoire. Mia read Chris Stefanick’s Relativism (a seventy-seven-page booklet on how to swiftly defeat relativism). Allen read G.K. Chesterton’s Orthodoxy during Holy Hour. Jackie was reading Christopher West’s Theology of the Body for Beginners when I visited her campus. Prayer trained and relied on bodies, emotions, imaginations, and minds. Knowing “good theology” better equipped missionaries to have a dynamic relationship with God.30 This theological formation qua prayer was also the making of a community with like-minded theological ideas.

SEEK2013 speakers and trainers seemed to know their audience. DIRECT missionaries and college students were, with very few exceptions, in what psychologist Jeffrey Arnett has

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30 When Allen used the term, “good theology,” he meant work by Peter Kreeft and G.K. Chesterton, and biblical scholarship by Jeff Cavins and Timothy Gray.
described as a stage of life called “emerging adulthood,” which he positions roughly between 18 and 25 years of age. As I wrote in the introduction to this dissertation, this is a transitional stage of life. Arnett posits religion as an important site of identity formation during this stage of life. Twenty-somethings were deciding for themselves how their religious practices would look:

To simply accept what their parents have taught them about religion and carry on the same religious tradition as their parents would represent a kind of failure, an abdication of their responsibility to think for themselves, become independent from their parents, and decide on their own beliefs. Quite consciously and deliberately, they seek to form a set of beliefs about religious questions that will be distinctly their own.\footnote{Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 177.}

The optimism of Arnett’s theory is muted by Christian Smith’s study of youth and religion, where he observed that “transience, confusion, anxiety, self-obsession, [and]…emotional damage” hover in this time of life.\footnote{Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2009), 282-94; Robert Wuthnow’s After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty-and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Wuthnow argues that the religiosity of Americans in their 20s and 30s is defined by “spiritual tinkering,” wherein they make choices about their faith. Christian Smith’s multi-year National Young Adults in Religion study is still unfolding. Souls in Transition studies the majority of the DIRECT missionary demographic, 22-30 year olds.} In affirming emerging adulthood’s self-focused seeking, organizers of SEEK2013 recognized the ambivalent malleability of the stage of attendees.

Stefanick and other SEEK2013 speakers encouraged the process of asking questions, even though asking big questions led many millennial emerging adults to reject religion. The confident pedagogy of SEEK2013’s training in apologetics aimed to change how millennials answered these questions. This was a counter to the increasing number of millennials who counted themselves as outside religious communities, as the “nones.”\footnote{Paul Taylor, The Next America, The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown. (Philadelphia: PublicAffairs, 2014), 127.} Stefanick’s description of attendees “seeking together” encouraged SEEK2013 Catholics to, like their non-SEEK2013 peers, ask questions about the meaning of life, the existence of God, the Church’s attitude on...
relativism and artificial birth control. But Stefanick and others carefully oriented these young Catholics toward Catholic answers. Apologetics-prayer informed dynamically orthodox Catholics by ask-answering how to live virtuously and how to counter relativism.

Matthew Kelly gave the opening night keynote at SEEK2013. His talk, “The Best Way to Live,” set a tone for the conference that encouraged attendees to ask questions and then orient their answers finding a Truth (capital T) based in Catholic teachings. Kelly, who I have introduced as a part of the DIRECT subculture, was the founder of Dynamic Catholic Institute and the author of Rediscover Catholicism. The native Australian was the business-formal counter to Stefanick’s casual jeans and t-shirt. The two men had been classmates and friends in their graduate program in theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville. When Kelly sauntered on stage, he was clearly comfortable in front of a large audience. He wore a suit and tie and his thick accent made him, according to my conference roommates, sound more dignified and impressive. As he spoke, the same college students who had been shouting and cheering less than ten minutes before were quiet. Near me, a handful of iPads recorded the talk and I saw several women taking notes in the conference smartphone app.

Kelly suggested that a crucial question to all cultures is, “How is the best way to live?” His three-pronged answer began by explaining that God had an incredible dream for everyone, “to be the best version of yourself.” This best version of yourself was from God. The second principle of how to live was with virtue. He explained, “Two patient people will have a better relationship than two impatient people.” And third, he told the group, was to live with self-control. “This will determine your self. The best way to live is to delay gratification.” He paused and stepped back with a nod before pointing out that most people, Christians and non-Christians alike, can agree that those are good principles to guide life. He shook his head and said that those
three principles are so hard. He smiled and assured the audience that they were in luck because the Church provides two sacramental tools to help live out these principles: “Jesus and Confession.” The questions facing emerging adults may be complicated, but the answers, Kelly insisted, could be found in being exceptionally Catholic.35

This assertion of Catholicism’s special capacity to answer life’s big questions was also a theme throughout SEEK2013’s afternoon impact sessions. The topics of these forty-five minute sessions tried to strike a balance between affirming emerging adults’ natural inclination toward “serious self-reflection, for thinking about what kind of life [they] want[ed] to live and what [their] Plan should be,”36 and providing Catholic answers to their questions. Topics ranged from dating to pre-marital sex to discipleship to defending Marian devotion.

There was a sense of bombastic confidence in Catholic teaching that wound through the impact sessions and apologetics trainings that I heard at SEEK2013. Chris Stefanick’s well-attended impact session about “relativism” was one example. His session, “Facing the Greatest Problem of our Time: Relativism” easily attracted more than five hundred attendees. With a self-assured swagger and an over-the-top demeanor, the former inner-city youth minister took over the stage and set a tone of incredulity at “relativism” as he assumed it was being promulgated on college campuses. His opening PowerPoint slide asked, “Why are Catholics so close-minded?” He quickly flipped to the next slide, “And why that’s okay.” The crowd laughed, and Stefanick spent the next forty minutes arguing that relativism was an illogical philosophy that cuts God out of daily life and “makes morality into a matter of personal taste.” People talk about “God, for me,” he said with a furrowed brow, which keeps God in the human brain and makes God not an

36 Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 181.
objective truth. Relativism, he argued, defeats itself because “you cannot be a relativist about relativism!” He told them to be comfortable not being a relativist on campus. “It is okay to say someone is wrong about God…It doesn’t mean you don’t love them or like them.”

In addition to offering Catholic correction to what were seen as errors of contemporary college culture, these impact sessions also reinterpreted college-student idioms in the context of Catholic theology. One particularly catchy, and millennial-minded, session was called “YOLO” (“You Only Live Once,” from the 2012 hit rap song by Drake). A missionary named Miles gave the talk. Miles had been an on-campus missionary for many years before moving into middle management with DIRECT. His reputation among the missionaries I knew was that he was both “hilarious” and a “very solid” mentor. Miles began his impact session by asking students to pause and really think about YOLO. “YOLO can become a way of doing something maybe you shouldn’t, because you only live once. Or do you? That’s the question.” Miles insisted that the answer was not so simple as YOLO. He argued that if we have a sense of what is right and wrong, if we sense that “None of us ever lives up to what we should do,” we must ask from where that sense comes. Miles told them it comes from God, and God’s plan for them, “He [God] formed you in the womb to respond to the world and the world to respond to you. God has a purpose and a plan for your life. He desires to draw you into it.”

By thinking with YOLO, Miles situated himself and his Catholicism as conversant in college-student idioms and contemporary popular culture. Other millennials may shrug and absolve themselves of poor choices with a casual, “YOLO!” But Catholics, he argued, do not only live once. Catholics have eternal life to consider. This life was God’s plan for them. That, Miles’ talk promised, was the

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purpose and the meaning for which they were made.

SEEK2013 speakers taught apologetics and Catholic theology in a way that tried to speak fluent millennial and emerging adult, and then oriented their questions to a triumphant Catholic worldview. This was seeking bound by Catholic doctrine. Theological formation was a prayer form that shaped the Catholic intellect and Catholic conscience of emerging adults. It was training in the “right” and dynamically orthodox Catholic answers.

SEEK2013’s prayers also cultivated an aesthetic of Catholicism intended to be attractive to millennials. Devotion to what I call a “hipster saint” modeled how to live in the space between being conversant in millennial norms and living in attunement to Catholic answers.

**Under the Patronage of a Hipster Saint**

“To live without faith, without a heritage to defend, without battling constantly for truth, is not to love but to ‘get along;’ we must never just ‘get along.’”

—Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, Patron Saint of DIRECT Conference 2013

“Pier Giorgio. Meh. #catholicsneversay.”

—Meredith, First-year Missionary, Twitter

After Matthew Kelly’s keynote address, Stefanick returned to the stage. The evening closed with him drawing our attention to the patron saint of the conference: Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. The large screens around the ballroom flashed to an image of an attractive young man perched atop a snowy mountain, smoking a pipe and leaning on a ski. Stefanick urged the attendees to “get to know this guy” during the rest of the conference.

“Blessed Pier,” as Stefanick and many missionaries affectionately referred to him, had lived in early twentieth century Italy. Biographers and hagiographers use words like

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39 DIRECT, SEEK2013 Program, 3.
40 Meredith, Twitter, June 18, 2014.
“handsome,” “wild spirit” and “prankster” to describe the young man who does not fit a stereotyped image of saints. In celebrating Pier as the saint of young, cool Catholics, DIRECT seemed to be trying to counter an image of saints as described in the introduction to Butler’s classic *Lives of the Saints* as “the most perfect maxims of the gospel reduced to practice.”

The DIRECT imagination of Blessed Pier challenged this description of saints as “perfect maxims in practice” by emphasizing the rowdiness of Pier’s sainthood. Pier Giorgio was born in 1901 in Turin, Italy. His sister described Pier as having struggled through school because he much preferred to smoke a pipe and ski than study. His father was the editor-in-chief of Turin’s newspaper, *La Stampa*, and his mother was a painter. According to Pier’s sister, neither parent was “devoutly Catholic.” They did have some financial means, in which Pier seemed to take no personal interest. Instead, his hagiographers point out in admiring tones, he gave away money to the poor and joined the Catholic Student Federation and Catholic Action in 1919, right before Mussolini suppressed them. Biographers suspect he contracted polio from the poor of Turin. He died in 1925 from that disease when he was twenty-four. In a quiet tone, Stefanick told the six thousand young adults to “be saints;” to be like Pier.

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Blessed Pier was omnipresent at SEEK2013. DIRECT distributed Blessed Pier prayer cards with the image of Pier skiing and smoking his pipe in the orientation cinch sacks, with a prayer for young adults written by DIRECT staff (see Figure 1). The program guide included a biography of the saint who climbed mountains, and the SEEK2013 smartphone app had an e-version of the prayer card that linked to other Internet resources about Blessed Pier, including ways to pray intentions and novenas for his full canonization. His sister’s biography of him was for sale at the conference bookstore.

Pier was well positioned as the poster saint of dynamically orthodox Catholicism. As DIRECT interpreted him, he challenged both Catholic and societal expectations of sainthood. The devotional biographies at SEEK2013 described the many ways Pier’s life challenged stereotypes all around him: he was not the son his secular parents expected, nor was he the contemplative many Catholics expect in a man officially on the Vatican’s path to sainthood. With devout glee, the conference program concluded, “The man Pope John Paul II beatified on May 20, 1990…was a pipe-smoking prankster, daredevil, and lover of God. It is hard to imagine that God did not approve.” This was a saint that SEEK2013 admired because, like them, he did not fulfill stuffy expectations of how devout Catholics act, nor did he succumb to early twentieth century Italian cultural expectations for young, abrasive masculinity. He would have been an ideal DIRECT missionary because he modeled culturally savvy Catholicism. Devotion to Blessed Pier, as a public and collective prayer of SEEK2013 attendees, cultivated an aesthetic of religious identity that modeled intentionality in being Catholic and demonstrated a Catholicism that challenged cultural norms for young, middle-class adults. Pier chose to actively practice his Catholicism as a young adult and his decision upset cultural and familial expectations for his life.

DIRECT, SEEK2013 Program, 3.
At the same time, his continued pipe smoking, beer-drinking habits post-conversion upset religious expectations of what a saints’ life ought to look like. Devotion to this hipster almost-saint instructed SEEK2013 attendees on how to be the Catholic that God was calling them to be, despite conflicting messages from cultural and religious worlds.

If Blessed Pier had given a talk at SEEK2013, he probably would have begun where most speakers that I heard did, with his conversion story. Like many missionaries, Pier grew up in what was often described as families who were “Catholic in name only.” Mass attendance was occasional or even regular, but “a personal relationship with Christ” was missing. Pier was a student at the Royal Polytechnic Institute of Turin when he experienced God during Adoration, and it changed his life.

Conversion stories of this formula had a prominent place at SEEK2013. Even though missionaries’ own stories rarely involved radical transformations of life, they did love hearing and retelling more dramatic stories of conversion. One example from SEEK2013 was the keynote address by Leah Darrow. On the closing night of the conference, Darrow recounted a depressing tale of drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and her rise to temporary fame as a contestant on “America’s Next Top Model.” She summarized her “misguided seeking” in the modeling industry along the theme of the conference, “when I would seek, I would seek the world.” She hit bottom while modeling an “immodest outfit” and experienced a vision of Jesus being disappointed in her. In that moment, Darrow smiled ruefully, she said, “I knew God was calling me to something greater and better…I don’t want to seek this [world] anymore. I want to be a good person, faithful and obedient to God.” She walked off of the photo shoot and found her way into a confessional at a nearby Catholic church, called her father, and went home. Over the next
five years, she developed a career as a Catholic chastity speaker. Her conversion story modeled a contemporary example of *choosing* to be Catholic, as Blessed Pier had.

To choose, in the SEEK2013 context, was to commit, to recommit, to intensify, to decide to be “all in.” This was saints-inspired dynamically orthodox Catholic identity as corrective to what missionaries perceived as a complacent non-dynamic and “cultural Catholicism.” “Cultural Catholicism” was code among missionaries for Catholics who do not go to Mass regularly or voted for a pro-choice candidate or disagree with the Church’s teaching on a male-only priesthood. Alexandra told me that this kind of apathetic Catholicism fails Catholics because “they don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus.” Brent was a second-year missionary who was especially frustrated by apathy in Catholic identity after two years on a campus in Chicago. “Chicago’s a tough environment,” he said. “[T]here’s a lot of Catholics, but, they are non-practicing Catholics… a lot of them are apathetic.” Cultural Catholics have not committed in the way Brent did when he was twenty-one-years old, partying, sleeping with his girlfriend, and vaguely suspicious of the Catholics at his Newman Center. Cultural Catholicism frustrated missionaries, who drew individual strength and group inspiration from their *choosing* to be Catholics. By proliferating conversion stories, SEEK2013 taught college students to make this choice, in imitation of Blessed Pier.

Like his missionaries, Curtis Martin wanted to see many more Blessed Pier-inspired Catholics in the U.S. Drawing on recent statistics gathered by Kelly’s Dynamic Catholic Institute, he told a group of SEEK2013 attendees that there are eighty million Catholics in the U.S., but only twenty-three percent go to Mass on some Sundays. Only fifteen percent go to

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44 Leah Darrow, “Made for More: The World Promises Comfort, but We were Made for Greatness,” (presentation, SEEK2013 Conference, Orlando FL, January 2-6, 2013). Field notes, January 6, 2013.
46 Brent, interview by author, February 22, 2013, transcript.
Mass every Sunday, he said with eyebrows raised. Seven percent of Catholics do eighty percent of the giving and volunteering at churches. His voice grew incredulous as he reported that three and a half percent of Catholics believe the church on tough issues, like birth control and marriage. That three and a half percent, he said, are “all in.” Blessed Pier was a “3.5% Catholic.” Martin paused before saying, “I don’t want to double the number of Catholics; I want to double the number of the 3.5% of Catholics. You are invited to come do that.” The role model of the saint urged SEEK2013 participants to become “all in” Catholics.

Being Catholic, for Blessed Pier, was not the easy decision, nor was it something he did without careful consideration. Like DIRECT’s dynamically orthodox Catholicism, Pier’s Catholicism was intentionally maintained and the boundaries carefully policed. By placing their large national conference—the largest in their history to that point—under Blessed Pier’s patronage and then telling attendees to be like him, DIRECT used devotionalism to cultivate an expectation of dynamically orthodox Catholicism. This collective devotionalism to Blessed Pier articulated an ideal of Catholics who countered American cultural norms of relativism and YOLO and also American Catholic norms of “cultural Catholicism.”

Devotion to Blessed Pier also modeled a Catholic identity that challenged contemporary cultural expectations. Blessed Pier’s status in life could have been a relatively easy one, based on his family’s aristocratic social class and educational attainment. Instead Pier Giorgio was drawn, through his commitment to Catholicism, to serve the poor. He gave people living on the street money and occasionally handed out his own clothing. He was fond of saying, “Charity is not enough: we need social reform.” These actions were informed by his reading of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which he loved chatting about over a pipe with his friends.

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While I did not ever hear much conversation about Catholicism’s teaching on structural social reform, DIRECT missionaries and speakers did imitate Pier’s stance against cultural norms when they offered Catholic alternatives to contemporary dating norms, for example. Matt Fradd was a twenty-nine-year-old self-described Catholic apologist. He was an attractive young man, with three kids, a soft Australian accent, and serious critiques about the contemporary U.S. dating practices. In his talk to women, “You Were Made for What you Desire (Women Only),” he began with his conversion story. Like Blessed Pier, he had taken a circuitous route into loving Catholicism. After several years of atheism and disgust with Catholicism, he agreed to go to appease his mother’s wishes and travel to Rome for the 2000 World Youth Day. Expecting to take a raucous trip to Europe, he found his “heart was changed” by the experience of being around so many young Catholics. He came to adore Pope John Paul II, especially the collected teachings on the relationships between men and women, the pope’s “Theology of the Body.” Fradd drew on that collection of teachings as he challenged contemporary dating habits on college campuses. He told approximately 2,500 young adult women to break up with men using pornography. Fradd also insisted on traditional gender roles in dating, explaining that, “It’s not right for women to pursue men.” The group laughed loudly (if a bit nervously) when he told them to expect more from men, “When someone is trying to woo you, they should at least buy you a hot beverage.”

Fradd, like Blessed Pier, was an attractive Catholic with a backstory. He chose to be Catholic and let that shape the rest of his life, even as it put him at odds with the mainstream. As

Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* gave Pier a language that helped him challenge societal expectations, John Paul II’s “Theology of the Body” provided Fradd with a language he could use to challenge women to act differently in dating. Both insisted that Catholic teachings could satisfy parts of contemporary life that their cultural norms could not.

Making Catholicism physically, emotionally, and intellectually attractive through these national conferences was a long-time strategy of these gatherings. For several missionaries I interviewed, DIRECT’s national conferences demonstrated that Catholicism could be cool. Brent was one example. He told me that being surrounded by fellow millennials who were “on fire for the faith” at the 2008 DIRECT conference had been transformative. He had been somewhat active at the Newman Center, but it was a bifurcated life. He partied on the weekends and was in what he called an “unchaste relationship” with his girlfriend. The Newman Center seemed lame. People there were, he said, “mouth-breathers who look like Amish people. Like, that was my perception of practicing Catholics. Not interested.” He saw an alternative at the conference.

I went there and I saw real college students really just, like, still sinners, but still striving after Christ. And then, yeah, the talks, learning more. And then being in Adoration and understanding for the first time, like, really—I knew, intellectually, Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist, but understanding something more there. Something clicked.\(^50\)

Part of what “clicked” for Brent was seeing Catholics who were appealing to him. He saw young adults who seemed attractive and relevant doing Catholic prayer. SEEK2013, under the patronage of a “cool” saint, demonstrated a version of Catholicism and Catholic practice that was “not lame.” The intentionally countered an image of Catholics as stodgy, too rule-bound, and irrelevant “mouth-breathers.”

Blessed Pier’s patronage set a cool, attractive tone that both constructed and instructed the group identity of Catholics at SEEK2013. The cultivation of a group formation of

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\(^{50}\) Brent, interview by author, February 22, 2013, transcript.
dynamically orthodox Catholics required the carefully cultivated aesthetic of Catholics choosing to be Catholic, but in a way that did not necessarily conform to religious and cultural norms. They must be savvy in what it means to be a millennial conversant in YOLO and other aspects of emerging adult culture, but not collapsed into compliance with these norms. They chose Catholic Truth against a cultural expectation of relativism and “cultural Catholicism.” This is a Catholicism whose carefully chosen identity features were modeled by a patron saint.

*Dona Nobis Pacem: Catholic Memory, Catholic Present, Catholic Community*

_Agnus Dei, qui tolis peccata mundi, Miserere nobis,  
Agnus Dei, qui tolis peccata mundi, Miserere nobis.  
Agnus Dei, qui tolis peccata mundi, Dona nobis pacem._

—SEEK2013 “Guide to the Mass”

It would be a good idea to know Latin if you are Catholic and if you do anything involved with DIRECT. 

—Twitter, 6/1/2014

Latin prayers punctuated the landscape of communal prayers at SEEK2013. Latin popped up without fanfare and without much instruction for a generation of Catholics who grew up saying Mass in English. At each of the four daily Masses during the conference, we sang “*Kyrie Eleison*” instead of “Lord, Have Mercy;” the Eucharistic Ministers said, “*Corpus Christi*” instead of “Body of Christ” and we responded to the Eucharistic prayer with “*Agnus Dei*” instead of “Lamb of God.” During Adoration, we sang, “*O Salutaris Hostia*” and closed in Benediction with “*Tantum ergo Sacramentum.*” The program guide listed parts of the New Translation for the Mass in Latin, and I spotted several missionaries holding prayer cards and prayer books written, at least in part, in Latin. Latin had a subtle presence, appearing just often enough for me to not forget about it but never so much that I felt overwhelmed by the foreign tongue.

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52 Twitter, June 1, 2014.
DIRECT missionaries did not seek out parishes with Latin Mass. They were not trying to reclaim a “a lost Golden Age of authentic Catholicism.” The missionaries I met told me they preferred Mass in English because it allowed them to engage more directly with the prayers. The place of Latin in contemporary U.S. Catholicism has been characterized as a lightening rod on an already polarized landscape. When Pope Benedict XVI, in 2007, issued a *moto proprio* that reduced restrictions on Latin Mass, it was widely received as a win for the Catholic right. DIRECT missionaries, though, seemed atonal to debates over the appropriateness of Latin Mass. These were the debates of another generation. Instead, praying in Latin in small, easy moments was one way missionaries negotiated their inheritance of postconciliar Catholicism while also making Catholicism seem exclusive and special to millennials. Praying in Latin every once in awhile, in acceptably alternative moments, allowed missionaries to perform a Catholicism that was indebted to its past and uniquely contemporary and modern.

Theses moments of Latin prayer delinked DIRECT missionaries from what they perceived as their generation’s apathetic Catholicism and linked them into a very particular Catholic community of contemporary Catholic missionaries. Missionaries at SEEK2013 performed the Catholic past by making Latin present. Alexandra, for example, was under no illusions about how much she appreciated postconciliar Catholicism and the vernacular liturgy. She loved Mass in English, understood that Vatican II’s emphasis on increasing roles for the laity was what allowed her to be a Eucharistic minister and lector at Mass. She characterized her personal relationship with Jesus Christ as a unique marker of a contemporary Catholicism. And yet, there was a part of her that could not let go of an idealized and imagined Catholicism of the

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54 Field notes, January 13, 2013.
1950s. She imagined a world where the liturgical calendar established rhythms of the year, neighbors went to Confession on Saturday evening before going to the movies, and everyone memorized Latin prayers.\(^5\)^5 Alexandra had a rich nostalgic imagination of Catholicism that filtered into her decision to get married in a Gothic-style church and with “Ave Maria” as the processional. Latin prayers embodied that imagination. Latin, in quiet corners of twenty-first century Catholicism, was one of the preconciliar mediums that moved missionaries between past and present, ideal and real, nostalgia and experience.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia as a “preoccupation with tradition and interpretation of tradition as age-old ritual, which was born out of anxiety about the vanquishing past.”\(^5\)^6 Nostalgia, in this sense, is the work people do to re-member a past they never experienced. Anxiety over a sense of having lost a past inspires not a rescue of that past (always impossible) but a reinterpretation of the past in the present.

In the DIRECT prayer imagination, Latin marked a Catholic idealization of preconciliar Catholicism. Missionaries appreciated that, in some ways, the Second Vatican Council marked a break in Catholic time: saints’ days lost their import, Confession lost its place in the Catholic sacramental imagination, and the passage of an hour-long Mass was marked in English not Latin. Latin had once helped mark the boundary between Catholics and Americans.\(^5\)^7 Missionaries worried that Catholicism, Catholic practice, and Catholics were not as distinct as they once were and perhaps ought to be. Latin allowed missionaries to link their contemporary lives into Catholic history. They prayed through Catholic time and space when they used the words their

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\(^5\)^5 Field notes, June 13, 2013.
grandparents had. Latin gave history to their collective Catholic identity.

Latin’s assumed and unobtrusive presence at SEEK2013 also signaled the texture of this collective dynamic orthodoxy by marking a boundary around the community of DIRECT Catholics. This distinguished them not just from non-Catholics, but also from non-dynamically orthodox Catholics. It was not enough, in this context, to say “I’m Catholic.” What that meant needed to be backed up, among many other things, by praying occasionally and confidently in Latin. Learning to pray in Latin crafted the particular in-group language of these millennial Catholics. One morning after Holy Hour, Mia was chatting with a student about the Latin hymns during Holy Hour. The student was amazed that Mia knew all the words. Mia laughed acknowledged how “proud” she had felt when she “finally” memorized the Latin hymns at prayer! She smiled and said that it took her a long time to learn them, “and now I’ve got it!” Mia had to carefully teach herself the Latin because it was not part of her generational Catholic childhood. She had only started learning some of it as a missionary. The student nodded and said that she was working on it. Mia smiled and encouraged her to continue. As she did so, Mia welcomed the student into a community that spoke in a particular language of prayer.

Latin prayer among missionaries created a shared language of community that not only indicated who was in, but also made that community slightly exclusive and superior. Part of the appeal, as I listened to missionaries use it, was that Latin was thought of as special. Experienced missionaries warmly welcomed new missionaries into their fold and expected them to learn Latin prayer. Praying in Latin at SEEK2013 performed a dynamically orthodox Catholicism that drew on the history of Catholic prayer while also crafting an in-group language for contemporary young adults.

58 Field notes, October 16, 2013.
Communal Habits of Adoration and Confession

We had been told earlier in the week, “Don’t leave here without making a life-changing Confession.” I ended up going to Confession after about an hour in Adoration, with 6,000 other people, which is quite an experience. —SEEK2013 Student Attendee, on SEEK The Experience

The emotional high point of SEEK2013 was the four-hour Adoration and Confession session on the penultimate night in Orlando. As we settled into the ballroom for the evening, there was a sense of anticipation in the air, though the mood was more serious than it had been the two previous evenings. The keynote speaker was Fr. Michael Keating, a professor of Catholic Studies at St. Thomas University in Minnesota, who also taught theology classes to missionaries at their summer training. His theologically dense talk had a deceptively simple title, “Seek and You Will Find.” Unsmiling, he began without fanfare, “We feel ourselves lonely…which is the echo of our exile” and it is because “we are all desiring the Infinite One.” Just like the paralytic in Mark’s gospel, he said, “Something in us is twisted.” And that “something,” he said, “makes us not yearn for God.” But, tonight, he encouraged, “You have a chance to go to Confession,” which is the place where “fallen humanity and Christ meet.”

Humans, he explained, come to the confessional aware of contrition and sorrow. Christ comes eagerly and with joy. Confession “is one of the things God loves to do.” Keating looked out at the audience and smiled only very slightly, before closing, “Our destiny is to dance with the living God.” The crowd stood in applause.

After Keating left the stage, the ballroom was quickly transformed from a conference

center into a Catholic worship space. The stage donned a huge tabernacle. The images behind the altar changed from the graffiti-style SEEK2013 to a stark image of Christ crucified on the cross. Stefanick took the stage with a solemn voice that contrasted to his previously jocular attitude. He brought his six kids on stage. Explaining how much he loves them, he promised that that love was just a tiny piece of how much God loves each person in the room. Stefanick encouraged everyone to go to Confession, because it is not just an encounter with God, he instructed, but also a release from the burden of sin. He said that some people hang onto their sins until they are eighty years old. “Let that [sin] go,” he urged. He let a long pause linger over the somber ballroom and then explained where to go for the line for Confession. Hundreds of students moved into the line that snaked slowly around the entirety of the conference room.

Stefanick stepped off the stage, and the band began to play quiet instrumentals as a long Eucharistic Procession of priests made its way from the Adoration chapel to the front of the conference room. The group sang the “O Salutaris Hostia” several times. I knelt on the floor with 6,000 college students singing this Latin hymn and tried to take in the scene. Two women near me journaled and wiped their eyes with tissues. I followed one of the students from my campus into the confessional line. We joined thousands of students and missionaries waiting in a line. As we moved closer to the hundreds of priests hearing confession, the line entered an adjacent room. Soft music played over the speakers, which muffled the sound of nearby confessions. Boxes of tissues had been strategically placed all around the room and I saw many students in tears during or after their Confession. It was past midnight when the Adoration ended four hours later with the Benediction, “Tantum Ergo Sacramentum.” The band began to play upbeat music and students’ moods shifted. They laughed and danced around the formerly somber room and then spread throughout the resort. The next morning, a veteran missionary announced
that the priests had heard over five thousand Confessions. As attendees cheered, the official conference hashtag #seek2013 erupted in celebratory #praisegod and #5000confessions.

Confession and Adoration appear to be individual practices of Catholic prayer. In Confession, there is only the praying supplicant and the priest. In Adoration, the experience of Christ’s presence happens in one person’s mind and body. But this was also a communal experience. Individual penitents were surrounded by 6,000 others. There was certainly peer pressure to go to Confession (even I felt it). After the event, the importance of Adoration and Confession was heightened as stories about the night were told and re-told and analyzed. My roommates talked late into the night about their experiences, sharing stories of relief and joy that seemed mingled with wondering about what this all meant for their lives back on campus. Over lunch, I chatted with two missionaries who were so pleased that students from their campus had decided to go to Confession. One missionary tweeted on the bus ride back to their campus, “Sharing testimonies on the bus from #seek2013 and almost all of them revolve around #confession and the #Eucharist! #Jesuswins #beautiful.”

But after all the anticipation of, and the tears during, Adoration and Confession, the prayer lives of these dynamically orthodox Catholics were expected to shift into the daily routine of relationships with God. Maggie was a first-year missionary who first explained to me the relationship between dramatic experiences of God at SEEK2013 and a daily prayer life. I was asking her how she linked the conference back to campus life, to working with students. She referenced her own life, and told me that God used to have to work by shouting to her heart. But now, she smiled, “God doesn’t move in my life like that anymore. He knows He’s got me; I don’t need the big emotional shows anymore. When God moves in my life now, it’s more like

62 Twitter, January 6, 2013.
tectonic plate movements.” The heightened emotional experience of the penultimate night of SEEK2013 was in service to this kind of habitual relationship with God. This was the practice of this collective group identity: Catholics who prayed regularly because they had experienced God as real. Emotional experiences animated a commitment (or recommitment) to being Catholic, but the daily-ness of prayer was the larger goal of these technologies of group formation. In the daily prayer practices of Holy Hour, rosary, and Mass on campus, there was a general lack of emphasis on these dramatic experiences. SEEK2013’s Adoration and Confession aimed to create a community of Catholics enacting these habits.

A second-year missionary named Linda echoed what many told me about the importance of following up with students about their prayer lives once they returned home from the conference. Her work with one young woman, post-SEEK2013, was focused on,

> Trying to help keep her accountable for the resolutions that she made during SEEK. And then checking up on her and asking her how they’re going. [And if] she needs help with something. And definitely just encouraging continuous prayer and reading, or listening to the talks from the SEEK Conference. [E]specially the prayer life, [I encourage] at least twenty minutes of prayer a day. A chunk of twenty-minute prayer.

Missionaries really wanted their students to have an experience of Adoration and Confession that was “transformative,” “game-changer,” and “just amaze-balls.” But they also expected that experience to be sustained in a community of like-minded Catholics at home. Linda set herself as an accountability partner to make that happen.

The formation of this on-campus community was crucial to the maintenance of the group formation that began at SEEK2013. A missionary named Rainey told me that she works hard to make sure students are connected to the Catholic community on campus. She was enthusiastic about the impact of SEEK2013 on students, saying, “I guarantee hundreds of those people hadn’t

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63 Maggie, in discussion with author, April 19, 2013.
64 Linda, interview by author, April 4, 2013, transcript.
been to Confession in years, you know.” She wanted to help students integrate their experience with their lives on campus.

A lot of them came back and they were just more excited about their faith…For some of them, there was just a lot that went on in their hearts, I could tell…I was talking to this girl who said she had never thought about there being so many young adult Catholics out there! And I was like, “What are you talking about? You and the Newman Center are not the only young adult Catholics out there!”…[T]he best thing that they can do is…connect with other Catholics. Not that you should only be in Catholic places or stick to it all the time. You have to build up your faith so that you can go out and be a Christian anywhere. That’s the hope…And part of that is being a community.⁶⁵

This shared SEEK2013 experience of God’s forgiveness and the amazement at Jesus’ love bound these Catholics together. They developed a shared language of the importance of especially Catholic practices such as Confession and Adoration in being a contemporary Catholic. The experience became a reference point for missionaries’ conversion stories, and a “game-changer” in students’ lives. This Adoration and Confession welcomed SEEK2013 attendees into a community of a group formed, and being formed, as dynamically orthodox Catholics. They had practiced the Latin prayers, absorbed Blessed Pier’s example, and learned how to answer their questions. And they did so among 6,000 other young adults who were also participating in the Catholic sacraments. This built them into a community whose rhythms relied on Catholic prayer.

Conclusion

“I want to work at the intersection of the sacred and the secular. I don’t think you have to choose.”⁶⁶

—Jacob Rodriguez, DIRECT National Director of Marketing and Communications

Ten months after students and missionaries had “life-changing” experiences at SEEK2013, DIRECT released a reality television mini-series that followed five students at the

⁶⁵ Rainey, interview by author, January 30, 2013, transcript.
⁶⁶ Jacob Rodriguez, in discussion with author, November 8, 2012.
conference. SEEK the Experience ran for three nights in October 2013 on a Catholic television channel (the same station where Curtis Martin and Scott Hahn announced the founding of DIRECT in 1997). The opening sequence of the show was a ninety-second montage of SEEK2013’s aesthetic. As kettledrums kept beat in the background, the camera zoomed in on two college-aged women smiling and laughing with one another. A musician swung her hair while playing the electric guitar. Then the camera centered on the image that had been displayed during Adoration, a crucifix with the bloodied body of Jesus. Next to this crucifix Virgin Mary held a chalice to catch the blood from his side wound. The camera and the music paused there for a moment and then cut to students swing dancing and a time-lapsed set of scenes over Disney World. The camera panned over thousands of students in a conference room listening to headlined speakers—Leah Darrow, Chris Stefanick, Curtis Martin. The music slowed as the camera settled on students kneeling during Mass, with a crowd of priests co-celebrating at the altar. The music resumed a quick tempo and words flashed on the screen: “5 Students,” “Witness the journeys of 5 college students,” “As they SEEK the experience.” B-roll footage of priests carrying the monstrance played as the words continued, “As they struggle with self-discovery,” “And as they encounter a powerful renewal.” The sequence concluded with a glowing “SEEK” imprinted on the screen for several beats.

These aesthetics of SEEK the Experience illustrated the savvy of dynamically orthodox Catholicism. Catholicism looked as contemporary as reality television, as exciting as a music concert, and as relevant as popular culture. At the same time, the Catholic symbols were explicit and DIRECT’s production choices emphasized the Mass, the Crucifix, the Real Presence, and statues of the Virgin Mary. SEEK2013 images were juxtaposed to project the image of a culturally savvy, attractively and dynamically orthodox way of being Catholic. The SEEK2013
aesthetic used Catholic prayer practices to cultivate a group formation.

SEEK2013 prayer formations, in this intentionally communal context of 6,000 young Catholics asking questions, building relationships (both human and extra-human), and experiencing God together, were technologies of group formation. This was how DIRECT taught, modeled, and extended an invitation to enact Catholic subjectivity in the twenty-first century. Dynamically orthodox Catholics were formed in the movement between public and private prayer formations, group and individual prayer practices. At SEEK2013, the daily Masses enacted and modeled a community of dynamically orthodox Catholics during the Mass in a way that also taught participants how to become dynamically orthodox. The apologetics and theology of the speakers and impact sessions encouraged these emerging adults to ask questions and to seek Catholic answers. Devotion to a hip, young, acceptably counter-cultural saint modeled how to negotiate cultural and religious norms. Latin prayer marked the boundaries of this community, and Adoration with Confession expected a shared, dramatic experience of God that became a daily relationship with one another and God.

This chapter’s contribution to the study of prayer illustrates that prayer is intimately both individual and corporate, often simultaneously. SEEK2013 was both the presentation of and cultivation in this corporate identity for attendees. The technologies of group formation of SEEK2013 shaped a collective Catholic identity, one that looked cool and attractive. These particular prayer forms shaped the content of, performance in, and training for a dynamically orthodox Catholic group.
Conclusion

I arrived at St. Albert the Great’s Parish about twenty minutes before Alexandra and Neal’s wedding Mass was scheduled to begin. I had officially ended my fieldwork ten months prior, but Alexandra and I had become friends. We still met up for lunch regularly, and I still participated occasionally in the faith-sharing group where we had spent nearly every Wednesday evening together for a over year.

The Gothic grandeur of St. Albert’s was in stark contrast to the Catholic chapel on campus where Alexandra had spent most mornings in Holy Hour when she was a missionary. I had attended Mass at St. Albert’s with Alexandra a handful of times during my fieldwork, but I took a closer look while I waited for the ceremony to begin. All along the nave, huge stained glass windows depicted various saints. An intricate set of statues and woodwork hung behind the altar. To the left of the altar was a shrine to Mary. To the right, a shrine to St. Joseph. Centered prominently behind the altar was a large crucifix, bearing a crucified Jesus with a crown of thorns and a gash in his side. I knew Alexandra adored this space, and it seemed to be because exuded a triumphantly Catholic identity. She had told me once, “[S]o many of the churches around here have been so gutted, it’s so sad; it’s so nice to be at St. A’s and have it be so gorgeous.”¹ As she and Neal were deciding to get married, they decided to forego the chapel on campus, despite being active members of the congregation and regular attendees at the liturgy, because it was not as “gorgeous.” But neither was it gutted. The Catholic chapel on campus was characteristic of postconciliar architecture that aimed to facilitate “more verbal participation from congregations.”² Designed and built in the 1970s, it had an open format with a simple altar

¹ Alexandra, in discussion with author, May 18, 2013.
and lightly stained-glass windows that depicted scenes around campus. A resurrected Jesus hung on a cross behind the altar. The Stations of the Cross were depicted in small, neo-modern paintings and there were no statues of saints. The only Marian imagery was a mid-sized painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

I found a seat on the bride’s side and flipped through the program. A passage from Pope Saint John Paul II printed on the front read, “The family has the mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love.” I looked around and spotted members of the DIRECT community. Daniel and his wife Willow were there, with their missionary teammate, Heidi. Tabitha was a few rows behind me. Jenna had been handing out programs when I arrived. Mia and another former missionary teammate of Alexandra’s were busy performing their duties as bridesmaids.

A member of our faith-sharing group began playing his violin and the bridal party processed down the aisle. Alexandra appeared at the back of the church and we all stood up as a rendition of “Ave Maria” accompanied the bride and her father toward the altar. During the ceremony, Neal and Alexandra held hands and walked over to the statue of Mary and knelt for a moment. I thought about how Alexandra had painstakingly managed her feminine genius while waiting for Neal to propose. I remembered how carefully they had policed the physical intimacy of their relationship in order to maintain chaste dating and engagement. I imagined that Alexandra was especially ready to move in with Neal because she had been living on a friend’s couch, in adherence to the prohibition of premarital cohabitation. Just a few weeks before, the couple had completed their classes in “NFP,” natural family planning. Their teacher had been a former missionary. Within DIRECT, marriage was talked about in terms of the sacramental transformation of souls. The stakes of discerning whom to marry, and when, were quite high since souls hung in the balance. Alexandra and Neal had read Catholic books on marriage
together. They formally invited God to guide them in deciding whether to wed. In
discernment, they had both prayed rosaries and novenas.

As I participated in the sacrament of Alexandra and Neal’s marriage, I was cognizant of
the sheer numbers of transitions that happen for these middle-class emerging adults. When I met
Alexandra she was a third-year missionary who fundraised her salary from family, friends, and
her parents’ business friends. She had often seemed insecure about her dating skills, but
nonetheless confident in her discernment that God was calling her to marriage. That somewhat
angst-ridden version of Alexandra had grown into the confident, self-possessed woman I was
watching walk down the aisle toward Neal. She had become a young professional, comfortably
employed in higher education. Her soon-to-be husband shared her love of the Catholic subculture
around DIRECT. She was looking forward to babies and life as a Catholic wife and mother. I
sometimes thought that Alexandra might think this was all just too good to be true. The smile on
her face that Saturday afternoon suggested today might be one of those times. Later that night, I
checked Facebook for pictures and Alexandra had already changed her last name. This was how
missionaries, I realized, settled into post-missionary life.

This wedding illustrates several themes that I have explored in this dissertation. Theirs
was a wedding within the Catholic subculture of which DIRECT was a part. The contours of that
subculture were not fixed, but the boundaries between them and others were very carefully
policed. The style of churches, the vigor of Catholic discipline, and the practices of sacraments
were just some of the ways missionaries managed these boundaries.

Alexandra and Neal’s ceremony also reflected the intersection of prayer practices and
complementary gender prescriptions. Their prayers with Mary during the Mass marked out their
idealization of Mary as the embodiment of feminine genius. Across the aisle from Mary,
Joseph’s statue represented Neal’s complementary authentic masculinity. The liturgical readings, from Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, encouraged Alexandra’s efforts to shape her feminine disposition into one that allowed Neal become the spiritual guide of their family. This was difficult. Enacting prayer practices involved the work of bending their wills and emotions to the dispositions of essentialized and complementary gender performances.

As I have studied and written about missionaries’ prayer lives throughout this dissertation, I have relied on what I have described as a porous ethnographic disposition. My choice of this ethnographic mood has allowed me to approach the actions I saw, prayers I heard, and conversations I had from multiple angles. For example, Neal and Alexandra kneeling and praying before Mary’s statue acknowledged their own gendered ideals. It also participated in the coded prescriptions of their Catholic subculture. Involving statues and saints in their ritual of marriage reflected the intersubjectivity of their dynamically orthodox Catholicism. Marian devotion and the invocation of Pope Saint John Paul II indicated the ways particular heavenly beings were drawn as participants into this marriage. Mary was such an important part of their lives together that they took some of their professional wedding photos at a small Marian grotto. Alexandra loved that she and Neal prayed the rosary together. When missionaries imagined their community of Catholics, it included the saints, Mary, and Jesus. These figures, these divine others, participated in how the missionaries moved in daily life. They made ethical demands on Neal and Alexandra, and shaped how the couple embodied and enacted Catholic subjectivity.

My ethnographic porosity also attuned me to the role of prayer in and as subject formation. I interpret subjectivity as a marker of the multiple others in the making of humans and human experience. These young adults’ prayer practices drew them into a process of becoming Catholic missionaries, able to enact “incarnational evangelization.” DIRECT, as an institution,
assigned certain expectations for how and when and what DIRECT missionaries would pray. There were Holy Hours and saints and, Dom Chautard and Matthew Kelly. The choices shaped missionaries’ experiences of Catholicism and instructed them in becoming a dynamically orthodox Catholic community.

In several places in this dissertation, I draw on theories of narrative and subjectivity from Judith Butler, Michael Jackson, and Adriana Cavarero in order to suggest that the saints (and other extra-human figures) participated in the intersubjective formation of missionaries. The stories missionaries told about saints illustrated the force these extra-human beings had as stalking lovers, friends, mentors, and role models. There was always collectivity in these prayers. Prayers were intersubjective practices by which missionaries came to understand themselves as Catholics capable of “be[ing] saints!” and part of this larger community of Catholics.

Missionaries enacted, embodied, and discussed these prayer practices during a particular stage of life. The malleability of their emerging adulthood meant they were in transition, no longer under the daily influence of parents. But they were also not quite fully independent. The transitive nature of missionaries’ lives was illustrated in their moves to new campuses each fall, their very recent departure from their parents’ homes, and their anxious efforts to discern God’s call for their life during Holy Hours. This transitional stage of life was also reflected in the way they evangelized with rather clear answers and simple messages. Long after I conducted my final ethnographic interview, I began to wonder if their urge for simple, clear explanations of complex Catholic theology might be a response to these many transitions of emerging adulthood. The certainty that missionaries found in the DIRECT apologetics and prayer forms offered stability amid a time of change and multiple unknowns. The mutability of their lives seems to have made missionaries more receptive to the rigorous demands of becoming dynamically orthodox.
Alexandra and Neal’s wedding also reflected the ways missionaries continued to develop a community of acceptably counter-cultural Catholics. The musicians for their wedding Mass were members of the small-faith sharing group and former DIRECT missionaries overfilled one of the guest tables. Alexandra built herself into a Catholic community after she left DIRECT. In some ways, she and Neal were translating the “Catholic pathway” through college into her post-missionary life. Missionaries liked to have fun. But it was a fun that incorporated the rhythms of Catholic prayer and liturgical life into mainstream middle-class life in the U.S. Alexandra very carefully examined the liturgical calendar in choosing a wedding date. The wedding reception had alcohol consumed in moderation. We sang the Latin words to “Ave Maria,” but also danced to Taylor Swift’s “Shake it Off” and Matt Maher’s “Amen.” This was, it seemed, a dynamically orthodox Catholic adulthood.

There were, of course, other directions where my fieldwork could have led, and some of those routes not taken point to future research on prayer and millennial Catholics in the U.S. Though I interviewed ten missionary alumni, and had several conversations with the director of Alumni Relations, this dissertation has only skimmed over the surface of what happens within these missionaries’ Catholic subjectivities and in their prayer lives when they leave DIRECT and no longer have the community-enforced habits of daily Holy Hours, Mass, and rosaries as a part of their job requirements. How do they pray when they are no longer surrounded by the daily friendships and accountability of fellow missionaries? How do they reconcile their time as a DIRECT missionary with post-missionary parish life? What happens when all those babies and toddlers I saw in the arms of young missionaries become teenagers? How will these missionaries pass on “the faith” to not just college students, but their own children?
One missionary alumna was quite articulate about her struggle to transition from being a full-time missionary to being a full-time mother. Oakley was a warm and inviting woman in her early thirties. She had dark hair, an easy smile, and a calm charisma that paired nicely with her engrossing style of story telling. She had been an on-campus missionary for four years and then worked in the DIRECT headquarters for another three years in the mid-2000s. When I met her in January 2013, she was becoming an outspoken advocate for how to translate the methods and ideals of “incarnational evangelization” into communities and parishes. Back on staff part-time, she was piloting a “parish missionary” model. But, she sighed, it had been a hard-fought path of self-discovery and prayer to get to that point. She told me that she spent the first two years after she left staff completely burned out.

I remember feeling like, “Ugh, finally. I don’t have to talk to people after Mass.” Like, I’m not in this bubble anymore. People don’t know who I am. They’re not watching me. They don’t care what I’m doing …I’m thinking, “This is freedom! Nobody knows me, there’s no accountability.” And…after Mass, I didn’t want to meet people. Oakley closed off the evangelizing zeal that used to drive her. By the time she officially left DIRECT, she was married, had one son, and was pregnant with a second. She said that her prayer life had waned and her relationship with “the Lord” felt shallow. When I interviewed her in February 2013, she described having felt a sense of quiet desperation the previous February. Looking back, she saw that she had been “dying without a mission, and without community.”

Oakley and her husband were fighting all the time, she felt distant from all the things that mattered to her, and she no longer prayed. Slowly, Oakley began to realize they were “in a pit.” She asked a member of the Apostles of Life to come bless their house. She returned to reading the Bible, and “through Scripture,” she said, “God was like, ‘Okay, you need to be out in

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3 Oakley, interview by author, February 6, 2013, transcript.
4 Oakley, interview by author.
community, Oakley.” She and her family started meeting other families after Mass and found a local Catholic community. Sitting at the park one afternoon with her kids, it dawned on Oakley that these “other moms needed community” and they needed to “hear about Jesus.” She had discovered a new mission-field of stay-at-home moms. Oakley gathered some women she was beginning to know in her parish and they applied DIRECT’s strategies and materials to start a moms’ Bible study and one-on-one discipleship relationships with several women in town. Over the next year, she and DIRECT’s Alumni coordinator developed a Bible study, called “Revive!,” specifically for use in parishes and among alumni. By January 2014, Oakley was one of three former missionaries who had re-joined DIRECT staff as “parish missionaries,” working to formally translating DIRECT on campus to DIRECT in parishes.

Oakley, though, seems to be an exception. Several of the missionary alumni I interviewed shared Oakley’s experience of burnout and exhaustion after leaving staff, but not her rediscovered zeal. One woman spent a significant portion of our interview apologizing to me about how little prayer and evangelization she was doing now that she was a mom and just focused on her family.⁵ Alumni’s prayer practices necessarily looked and felt differently than they did on campus, but in what ways and how? Which saints move to the forefront, once they have long-passed the glorious age of Gemma’s twenty-five years? Parenting in the twenty-first century can be an isolating project, and it seems the community prayer was crucial in the in the ongoing formation of missionary subjectivity. How will these missionaries maintain—or shift—in the nature of their subject-formation as parents?

These questions also suggest the many shortcomings of my work as a study of prayer in contemporary Roman Catholicism, more broadly. I have spent this dissertation studying and

⁵ Janice, interview by author, June 20, 2013, transcript.
describing the very particular practices of Catholic prayer of millennial-generation members of a U.S. Catholic subculture in 2012-14. While one of the important arguments of this work has been that subjectivity formation is implicated in prayer practices, I have left unstudied the prayer practices of Catholics in the pews. What are the subjectivity formation implications for Catholics like those in Jerome Baggett’s *Sense of the Faithful*, who work forty-hour-a-week jobs and raise kids and are focused on paying off debts and saving for college tuition? I have argued that DIRECT missionaries’ prayers were mundane and intentionally habitual. Yet, part of what they did in prayer was cast themselves as the main characters in a high-stakes story of converting the world. What does that story look like with a different set of stakes?

My work here has also joins a cacophony of scholarship on religious actors whose prayer practices challenge, in some ways, contemporary expectations of modern, interiorized prayer. But the surprisingly persistent prayer forms of devotions to saints and Eucharistic Adoration among these millennial missionaries are only part of the story of prayer among contemporary Catholics. What of the quiet, interiorized prayer practices and formation of un-dynamically orthodox Catholics? How do the prayer experiences of the Catholics like those in, for example, Michele Dillon’s *Catholic Identity*, who advocate for women priests and Catholic acceptance of same-sex marriages, form their Catholic subjectivities?

This research points to the need for more attention for studies of generational shifts within American Catholicism. This requires more attention to the diversity of millennial-generation of Catholics in my study, and, more broadly, to the kind of Catholic imagination that has been shaped not by experiences of preconciliar Catholicism and habited nuns with rulers, but

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by Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Blessed Chiara Luce, the sexual abuse crisis, public
schools and Newman Centers, and reading the Bible.

As I was writing this dissertation, Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke (formerly of the
Archdiocese of St. Louis) announced the movement of the “New Emangelization.” Founded in
January 2015, the goal is “to draw Catholic Men to Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church.”8 This
was a response to the same kind of worries that Laine had about contemporary feminism.
Cardinal Burke described “the man crisis” wrought by the “radical feminist movement,”9 which
was evidenced by “casual Catholic men” who do not pray regularly, do not attend Mass
regularly, and who do not prioritize their Catholicism over other parts of their lives.10 This effort
to reassert strong, manly men within Catholicism is part, I suspect, of the larger Catholic
subculture around DIRECT. The intersection of masculinity studies and religion is ripe for
investigating why this effort is emerging, why white, middle class men are feeling threatened by
women, and what it is about contemporary Catholicism that is facilitating this kind of anxiety.

Finally, this research opens into further methodological questions of studying religious
practices, in the contemporary U.S. What kinds of lenses and theoretical tools do we need to
improve in order to study prayer? Part of the debate that I outlined in the first chapter, over what
label best applies to DIRECT missionaries is a debate about how to categorize contemporary
religious practice. Two former evangelical Protestants anecdotally told me that DIRECT
missionaries are “just like” the evangelical Protestants with whom they grew up. A couple of
Catholics who advocate for women’s ordination have frowned at my research, telling me that

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8 “About the New Emangelization,” *The New Emangelization*, accessed February 23, 2015,
DIRECT missionaries embody everything that is wrong with young adults in contemporary Catholicism. The questions opened by my research are both methodological and ethical ones about scholarly dispositions in studying worlds that challenge our own deeply held assumptions. I was challenged, I realized, by my encounter with the familiar religious Other in my fieldwork. I both knew and did not know DIRECT. I had to train myself to be on alert when my assumptions and expectations began to over-crowd my observations. I worked to see the “familiar in the strange, and the strange in the familiar.” It was a challenge to meet the Other on their territory.

As I have presented parts of this research at academic conferences and workshops, there has been occasional laughter about the practices I describe throughout this dissertation. But that laughter, I think, makes it too easy to dismiss DIRECT missionaries as too much, too religious, too earnest, too young, too Catholic, too bombastic. In researching and in writing, I have tried to be both critical and porous, while being attuned to how missionaries are thriving.

Alexandra and Neal’s wedding and reception was really fun. I had a great time with their friends and families, and the DIRECT missionaries in attendance. I enjoyed watching Alexandra look so happy. I was reminded that this was not a dour group. DIRECT was an upbeat, shiny group of young adults trying to be dynamically orthodox within a broader American Catholic culture that did not always appreciate their efforts. They were Catholics attuned to redemptive suffering and saints in a U.S. culture that did not seem to know what to do with their rosaries, gender norms, and love of the Mass. DIRECT missionaries danced to Taylor Swift, participated in the sacramental life of Catholicism, and prayed at the intersection of these expectations.
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