

[*The New Faithful: Why Young Adults are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, Colleen Carroll, Loyola Press, 320 pages]

Gen X Goes to Church

By Ryan McMaken

IN THEIR WORK on the generation they call the "Millennials," Neil Howe and William Strauss have been predicting a shift to more subdued behavior among young people for a decade now. Their most recent book, *Millennials Rising*, describes how the youth that are now graduating from high school and entering higher education "are held to higher standards than adults apply to themselves ... they're a lot less violent, vulgar, and sexually charged than the teen culture older people are producing for them." While recent research on high-school graduates appears to back up these predictions, the Millennials may not, it turns out, be the ones on the cutting edge of these developments.

The Millennials' elders, the famed "Generation X" (so named by novelist Douglas Coupland) are exhibiting many of the same habits and social preferences. Unlike the Millennials, however, members of Generation X are generally regarded as "downcast" and "alienated" with little desire to make the most of lives that they believe have been stripped of meaning by their relentlessly materialistic Baby Boomer parents. At least, this is the story according to Coupland.

In her book, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, Colleen Carroll takes issue with this vision of Generation X and shows that it is the "Xers" who are actually at the front of this revolt against '60s-style permissiveness and are leading a new revival in Christian orthodoxy that has little use for the watered-down and liberal forms of religion espoused by their parents. While trying to appeal

to the younger generation by being what they perceive as "hip," it appears that all the purveyors of such Christianity have managed to gain from their young charges is contempt.

In composing this book, Carroll spent a year traveling to college campuses, charitable organizations, seminaries, and monasteries where Americans in their 20s and 30s are now a significant part of a religious revival. Evangelicals, Protestants, and Catholics are all included in her interviews and in her demographic studies, and no matter what denomination of Christianity she might be looking at, one thing is clear: the orthodox and "hardline" institutions are flourishing while the liberal and "progressive" ones are languishing.

Carroll believes this can be attributed to three strong motivations among young people: the desire to gain a sense of community, a rejection of the values of their parents, and an attraction to the uncompromising nature of orthodoxy—something they view as "authentic."

In noting the sociological evidence on Generation X, Carroll notes, "They are interested in spirituality, ignorant of tradition, and fearful of both commitment and abandonment." Much has been said about this generation's experiences with divorce and how it has affected its views of community and family. Many young people have reacted by vowing not to repeat the mistakes of their parents, although this has manifested itself both in better commitment to family and the unwillingness to commit at all. Within religious organizations, however, this impulse has taken shape as a new movement in religious obedience. According to both Protestant and Catholic leaders, young Christians "are attracted to tradition, coherence, and authenticity." They "feel strangely liberated by orthodoxy's demands of obedience and objective morality ... and they are captivated by groups that stress stability, commitment, and integration—the very values they found wanting in their splintered, mobile families and fragmented, impersonal communities."

These feelings have been identified by

many observers as the desire for "authenticity." "Weaned on Madison Avenue marketing," Carroll contends, "this audience knows when it is being pandered to, and it resists such manipulation violently." In some cases, this call to consumerism has driven Xers to abandon property altogether, joining strict religious orders. For example, two years ago, the order of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, which demands that all members abandon property and wear floor-length robes welcomed its largest group of new postulants in its entire 140-year history. Similar orders for men have also seen surges in applicants, and statistics indicate that "dioceses where bishops are considered orthodox ordain nearly five times as many priests as those run by liberal bishops."

Those who are not attracted to Eastern Orthodox or Catholic religious orders often pursue communal living conditions in non-coed houses devoted to prayer and community service. These communities of laymen of all denominations provide "fellowship" and mutual support for living in accordance with the demands of the orthodox Christian life. While less institutional than religious orders, they are no more lax in their demands about adherence to traditional Christian morality, and they are increasingly popular. Some of these organizations are devoted mostly to mutual moral support, and some emphasize service in evangelization and poverty relief. Whatever their emphasis, however, they are all centered on traditional Christian life, and while popular among the young, they do have their critics.

A constant theme in Carroll's book is the tension between the more liberal Christians of the Baby Boomer generation and their traditional juniors. More than once, middle-aged liberal faculty members at Catholic seminaries have expressed consternation that the incoming seminarians have more in common with the octogenarian priests than with themselves. Carroll notes that an increasing number of new seminarians around the country have little or no interest in challenging Church positions on the ordi-

nation of women or active homosexuals, much to the horror of the aging liberals. Fr. Zachary Hayes of Union Theological Seminary, for example, dismisses the new traditionalists as “right-wingers who want an escape from the world and validation of their extremist views.”

For all types of young Christians, though, there is a general distaste for what they believe they were taught by

it’s not like the faithful are in danger of being lured away by the novelty of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Such things are anything but novel to them. Most of the twenty and thirtysomethings she interviews have made significant changes in their lives and have not pursued religious orthodoxy as simply some kind of trendy pastime. Many have given up lucrative careers and prestigious posi-

discusses are the most educated and self-motivated. Politically charged issues like abortion, feminism, homeschooling, and the separation of church and state will look considerably different than they have for the last generation. Young orthodox Christians do not see the virtue in secularization that their elders see, and Christianity may come to be seen as an important part of public life.

YOUNG ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS DO NOT SEE THE VIRTUE IN SECULARIZATION THAT THEIR ELDERS SEE.

their parents’ generation. Repulsed by the sexual revolution and the divorce and illegitimate births that they attribute to the irresponsibility of the Baby Boomers, sexual attitudes among college students have been growing continually less permissive, while “covenant marriages” and “virginity pledges” have become increasingly popular. “A growing number of young evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics,” Carroll reports, “are embracing the concept of courtship—the conventional way of wooing that follows a strict protocol and aims toward marriage.” Professors at mainstream universities are surprised by how their students have approvingly “waxed poetic” about readings like Renaissance-era pieces recounting a woman who refused a kiss to “deliver to you a virginity whole and unblemished.” While in years past, such a tale would very likely produce mockery and scorn for the author in question, modern students take what can only be described as a romantic approach.

Carroll is not so naïve as to assume that everyone who claims to support virginity is living out such things. And, finding themselves unimpressed by the moral license that their forebears supposedly “fought for,” young people do not necessarily flock to orthodox Christianity. Many just find themselves cynical and isolated. Carroll recognizes that there are still significant threats to the long-term success of this religious revival, but she is optimistic. After all,

tions to “serve Christ.” In contrast, the pursuit of liberalized Christianity in the ’60s and ’70s demanded no sacrifice, and none was given.

Many traditional Catholics may find themselves left unconvinced by the liturgies preferred by young Catholics, who, while very traditional on theological matters, tend to mix evangelical elements into their attitudes and their worship styles. Some will be disturbed by the ecumenical spirit that pervades many of these youth movements, and it may be hard for many to believe that the conversions among the people Carroll describes are as deep as she describes them. Appropriately, though, those who will probably find Carroll’s arguments to be the most convincing are the very people about whom Carroll is writing. Gen X Christians like this reviewer will recognize in Carroll’s book cases and stories that sound startlingly similar to the “conversion stories” and pronouncements of religious zeal that they have heard numerous times from friends and associates. The contempt harbored for the alleged glories of the sexual revolution and the supposedly progressive religion of “hippie priests” will be nothing new to those who still cringe when they recall memories of pantsuit-clad nuns who seemed more interested in singing Joan Baez songs than in teaching the faith.

If Carroll is right, however, the implications for future generations of Americans will be numerous and significant. Many of the most fervent converts she

In the future the real challenge lies in passing on the faith of today’s increasingly orthodox generation to the next one. Less enamored with the prestige of professional careers, and anxious to not emulate their parents, many orthodox Christians vow to take a closer interest in the religious formation of their children. Many have committed to homeschooling, parochial schools, and more full-time parenting. While their parents read books like *I’m OK-You’re OK*, and valued the pop psychology of self-fulfillment, these current and future parents value sacrifice and commitment. Only time will tell how successful this strategy will be. If the Millennials are any indication, today’s high-school students are likely to follow a similar path as their Gen X predecessors, although it remains to be seen if their children will do the same. ■

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From Athens to Basra

For the last couple of issues, I've taken some time off in this column to write about fun things: cricket, bullfighting, pretty girls, Hemingway. Here in Europe, the "silly

season" is off and running, the time of year when people head for the beach and leave politics behind. The newspapers, especially in Britain, have to find interesting things to write about, so the transfer of an English soccer player from a Manchester club to a Spanish one becomes very big news. His wife, one Posh Spice—her professional name—is reported to be an unwelcome addition to Spanish footballers' wives' groups because she's a celebrity with an ego the size of John Podhoretz's and Ariel Sharon's combined. He is David Beckham, a good-looking young man who has a tendency to wear kaftans and dye his hair, things tough guys don't do in macho Latin countries. Victoria Beckham was part of a singing group, the Spice Girls. Her genius lies in her ability to get her name in the papers, not in her singing.

Sport, unlike politics, is never off the radar screen, especially during the summer. In ancient Greece, the spirit of competition and the sporting ideal acquired a central position in society for the first time in human history. (Blame the Greeks for that one too.) The ancient ones were smart fellows. They believed the cultivation of man's (not woman's, sorry) mental and intellectual abilities was in no way divorced from physical exercise; on the contrary, they mutually complemented each other. Sports like track-and-field and gymnastics were connected with the musical education of the young and with the entire development of the intellect. Religion, moreover, far from being opposed to this kind

of education, gave it an established position in the great panhellenic sanctuaries, where the athletic and musical contests were held under the gaze of the gods and thousands of spectators from all over the Greek world.

Enter the wise men: Socrates, Plato, Euripides, and Aristophanes. Sport is uncool, they claimed. The first to say it was Xenophanes of Kolophon in the late sixth century BC. He emphasized that the development of wisdom was much more important than strong arms and legs for the prosperity and order of the state. The great Euripides went even further: "There are ten thousand evils in Greece, but nothing is worse than the race of athletes." Ouch! Who am I, a poor little Greek boy, to argue with the greats, even though I've dedicated my life to sport—amateur sport, mind you?

AHMED CHALABI SHOULD BE IN JAIL; INSTEAD, WE ARE FINANCING HIM TO PLAY NAPOLEON OF THE DUNES.

No, the greats are right, developing one's mind has to be more important than developing one's deltoids, although I'd hate to say this in the company of surfers down California way. (Euripides who? You ripee dese trousers and you pay with your life ...) So, *gravitas* wins out.

Back to boring old Iraq, or "Eye-raq," as some American friends pronounce it. Let's face it. No matter which side you're on, Iraq is a mess—a far bigger mess than Afghanistan, and that's really say-

ing something. In strict military terms, the deaths of an American and British soldier every day is not significant. (Except to their families and loved ones, but who cares about families and loved ones when Mr. Neocon decides to send others to fight.) But guerilla campaigns are about politics, not battlefield victories. The Viet Cong lost the Tet Offensive but won the propaganda battle hands down. The purpose of Tet was to erode the will of the public back home in America, and it succeeded brilliantly. I was a hawk during that war and was right to be one. Not only was the domino theory correct, we also had a treaty with the sovereign state of South Vietnam. The brave men who fought that war—one the disgusting Bill Clinton dodged—received a belated appreciation from the American people. I was also a hawk during the first Gulf War, not because I had any love for the grotesque Kuwaiti and Saudi so-called royals—they are thieving, usurping camel-drivers and nothing more—but because Saddam had over-

run a sovereign country, as we have done recently.

The purpose of resistance in Iraq is progressively to disenchant us with a commitment to an alien society where our soldiers' sacrifice is unappreciated. I am not saying that Iraq is like Vietnam. At least not yet. But the administration's absence of a credible political strategy is undeniable. There is a vacuum in Iraq, and it's being filled by guerilla gunmen and Islamofascists grimly familiar in the