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From the Editor: Reaching the Millennial Soul

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From the Editor

Reaching the Millennial Soul

Among the faculty who have been teaching for a little over two generations, some look out over their classrooms and see, first of all, continuity. Having taught these students' parents, in their faces they see this young man's father's eyes and a young woman's mother's smile. True their parents would read twelve books a semester and these youths buckle at seven; but basically little has changed.

Other faculty perceive the effects of a steady deterioration of the culture, exemplified in the slovenly attire, the hoods and backwards hats, the lateness and laziness, the illiteracy and ignorance drummed in by the boom box beat, the media babble, and the entertainment-dominated culture of distraction.

Then there is another: faculty sense that being young today is more difficult than it was 20 years ago, they feel an affection for young people — though it is strained by their readiness to tune out the larger world and text their "friends" even during class and church. My Jesuit novice master taught us that our students were to be perceived as "gifts from God."

When the Seminar on Higher Education met a year ago to plan this issue we struggled with the terminology. When Walter Lippmann popularized the term stereotypes in *Public Opinion* (1922), he granted the usefulness of classifications, general terms that did tell us things about a subject that, it would seem, told us more than we knew before. So we say someone is an intellectual, a Harvard Man, or a product of Jesuit education. The problem with these terms, he says, is "the gullibility with which we employ them."

So the seminar experimented with phrases which both do and do not do justice to this generation. We remembered that the 1950s were the "silent generation," followed by the "60s" and the "ME" generations. Today we face the "Post-Vatican II," the "post-modern," "post-post-modern" and finally, the millennials, referring not to the thousand years of holiness in the book of Revelation, but to those who have come of age at the recent turn of the century. Why do we have to understand them? Because we have to teach them. And teaching, especially in a Jesuit college or university, is not just about imparting information from one head into another. It has to touch the soul, chip away at the electronic cocoon which sometimes seals off the pupil from the teacher and the eternal and practical wisdom the teacher is called and trained to share.

Our writers, drawn from several generations, approach the topic from many points of view — social, political, religious, economic and sexual. I recently asked a young man, Bobby Marcoux, a graduate of Regis High School in New

York and Middlebury College in Vermont, and who has recently returned from a long visit to China, if his generation considered itself "special." His reply paralleled the analyses in two of our student writers in this issue.

Our country has alternated between sending our most talented individuals into the private sector and public sector. I am very excited that it seems that the cycle is starting to switch back to having our most talented people [go] into government and the public sector. Many of my friends who have recently graduated from top universities are going into 'Teach for America' and working for the government instead of going to do "Financial Engineering" on Wall Street to make as much money as possible. I'm excited to be 24 years old during this time when the cycle is switching back to a focus on making a difference in the government.

The sexual profile that emerges from the interview with author Donna Freitas and one of the student essays is less positive. Consider its portrait of the hook-up culture, where casual, impersonal sex takes precedence to romance and love. In my recent theology class discussion of adultery in the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Decalogue VI*, in his series on the Ten Commandments, one young woman reported that her generation married not for love but for convenience. One dissenter suggested it was rather half and half. In the Jesuit colleges and universities where *Conversations* serves as a conversation starter in class and public forums on identity, the four articles — Freitas, Parmach, Riordan, and Place — on this theme will get them talking.



I thank photographer Mark Wyville and Saint Peter's alumnus Joe Galbo and students Frank DeMichele and Justin Roberts, editors of the *Pauw Wow*, the student paper, who helped design the cover and Frank, Joseph Skillender, Jr., Thomas Cleary, Paul Lazaro, Ludi Nsimba, and Peaches Dela Paz who played roles in the cover photos.

Corrections. In the fall issue, theologian William P. George, professor at Dominican University, who reviewed John C. Haughey's book, was erroneously identified as a Dominican priest. The chart with the article on the status of Catholic Studies should have included Holy Cross as offering both a major and minor in Catholic Studies. Also, the correct URL for the Xavier University Division of Mission and Identity is www.jesuitresource.org. ■

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