

“CREDE UT INTELLEGAS”

ENGAGING MILLENNIALS IN FAITH AND BELIEF

Every so often, I test my hypothesis that people under 25 years of age often exhibit a lack of appreciable interest in history and tradition. Don't misunderstand me— I enjoy interacting with young adults, but increasingly find myself losing touch with their worldview. I recently stopped by a Starbucks to purchase some coffee, paying with a Starbucks card that I acquired eight years ago. Unable to resist, I asked, “Do you recognize the black and white photo on my card?” They typically answer, “No,” with a blank facial expression that cries, “Should I?” I reply, “It is only available in one place on the country...” Still, no response! “It is the **very first** Starbucks store at **Seattle's Pike Place Market**,” I triumphantly announce. Last week, the barista said, “Cool...I did not know that.” Usually, it is more akin to “Thanks for sharing...would you like your coffee ground or whole?” Sorry, but I am just curious if they display any sense of history of the very company for which they work.

The term “**millennial**” is generally understood to refer to those born between 1981 and 1996. Thus, all are of legal drinking age, while the oldest among the cohort were born while I was finishing high school. In other words, definitely not of my generation! A recent **Pew Research Center** study outlines the growth of the religiously unaffiliated. It is quite revealing. While surveys a generation ago indicated that fewer than 1 in 10 people considered themselves to be unaffiliated, most recent studies indicate fully that 23% now describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular.” The trends all point downward and this ought to be a major concern. Among millennials, those with a “low level of religious commitment” has grown from 19% to 29% in just the past seven years.

The problem of belief has created a growing divide in our nation in part due to the increase of the “nones.” This nomenclature refers to those who, when surveyed about their religious status, checked the box marked “nothing in particular” next to the question. That number came in at 16%. In that survey noted above, the “Christian share” in the United States dropped from 78.4% to 70.6% in the same seven-year period. That's a rapid drop. So why is this the case? Are people still interested in the search for truth, for God? Yes, they are, and I was **thrilled with the turnout for Christmas Mass** this year, clearly up from a year ago. I do not consider myself to be a “glass half-empty” kind of guy. If anything, I am a realist and look at the religious and ecclesial landscape critically.

In 1670 A.D., the eminent philosopher and mathematician **Blaise Pascal** wrote: “True fear is joined to hope, because it is born of faith and because men hope in the God in whom they believe. False fear is joined to despair, because men fear the God in whom they have no belief. The former fear to lose Him; the latter **fear to find Him**.” (*Pensees* # 262). Is that what is going on today? People are *afraid* to find Him? Though the root of faith is not intellectual, one of its fruits is. The best definition I have encountered of theology is “Faith seeking understanding” (Latin: *fides quaerens intellectum*). It dominated the study of theology for a millennium. So, if young adults struggle with understanding things related to faith, they are in good company. There is no shame in seeking; in fact it is encouraged. As St. Augustine wrote centuries ago (*Tractates on John's Gospel*, 29, 6): “If you do not understand, I say, believe. For understanding is the reward of Faith. Therefore, do not seek to understand so that you may believe, but **believe that you may understand**” (*Crede ut intellegas*).

In other words, faith in Jesus is a work of Jesus, but the Lord makes use of our own intellect. **Christ works in us, but not without us**. In short— we all have our part to play. Yes, we can “google” our questions and have an answer in 0.45 seconds. But faith does not, nor ought to work like that. We need to have “skin in the game,” so to speak. For a brilliant man like Augustine, who knew first-hand the reality of searching for God for many years, he offered advice because he understood the pain that accompanied his searching. He is advising his readers not to try to understand with a view to faith, but to believe with a view to greater understanding. Here, we can most definitely help by engaging their intellects in an atmosphere that is equally engaging.

While still composing this column, out of the blue I received an e-mail from a millennial who had discovered our website. While she was not exactly sure why, she said that she was drawn to explore her faith, even though her friends do not understand and she has hasn't thought of religion in ages. She wrote that religion “seems to have become a lost tradition among my generation.” As you might imagine, I was thrilled to respond and invited

her to our upcoming **Theology on Tap** series. The TOT program seeks to engage young adults by means of timely topics. This winter it begins on Wednesday, January 18 at O’Gara’s Restaurant on Snelling Ave. I truly hope she comes, and I hope you pass the word along to all the “20-somethings” you know.

- The Saint Paul Seminary is hosting a Prayer Vigil for Hope, Healing and Mercy. All are invited, especially those dealing with the tragic aftermath of abortion. Sponsored by **Project Rachel**, it takes place on Saturday evening, January 21, beginning with a 7:00 p.m. Mass celebrated by Archbishop Hebda and continuing until 11:00 p.m.
- My, how flying has changed. I am just old enough to recall when flying was an “event,” for which people dressed up. An attendant would lift a sticker from the giant seat map and place it on your boarding pass. Passenger screening only began in 1973. Now, it’s more akin to a cramped bus ride. The frequency with which passengers are removed from flights is also quite alarming. Just last week, a Delta flight to Los Angeles returned to MSP after an hour due to an unruly couple in their 30’s.
- While under the international radar, Islamist Fulani herdsmen are committing massive violence against **Christians in Nigeria**. Bishop Joseph Bagobiri of Kafanchan related that since September, there have been “53 villages burned down, 808 people murdered and 57 wounded, 1,422 houses and 16 churches destroyed.” The bishop did not know from where came the AK-47’s used.
- I think that 2017 is going to be an interesting year. We will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Fatima on May 13, mark the 100th anniversary of the U.S. entry into WWI, witness a total solar eclipse on August 21 and mark 500 years since Martin Luther’s posting of the 95 Theses in October.
- Attendance at papal events in Rome totaled 3.9 million in 2016, up 700,000 from 2015. This includes all Masses, General Audiences, the Sunday Angelus, etc. The Jubilee Year of Mercy events comprised 450,000 of that total. In Pope Francis’ first year in 2013, 6 million pilgrims attended such events.
- This week is **National Migration Week**. Let us pray for all who have been forced to leave their homeland due to persecution, that they may find a better life and that peace will return to their lands.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector