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O'Malley's "God questions" (Book Review)

Deborah R. Hunt
Lancaster Bible College

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God questions,

by William J. O'Malley, SJ. New York: Paulist Press, 2015. 137 pp. \$15.95.
ISBN 9780809149360

*Reviewed by Deborah R. Hunt, Associate Library Director,
Lancaster Bible College, Lancaster, PA*

Written from a Catholic perspective, the purpose of *God Questions* is to challenge adults to reflect honestly on their faith and to give parents and teachers tools to use to discuss the important questions of faith and belief with the teens in their lives. There needs to be “an engagement not only of differently formed minds, but of differently influenced souls, values, and sensitivities” (p. 8). “Simple common sense ought to tell parents and teachers that before you present theology, that is, faith seeking understanding, we can't proceed until the audience is ready to be converted” (p. 59).

Today's teens have a very different life outlook due to various cultural factors. One, the amount of time spent in front of the TV teacher, “who makes the important – love, sex, and death – trivial, and the trivial – abdominals, hair, and complexions – important” (p. 3). Two, they are “being deprived of being deprived” (p. 21). They “can become so used to being pampered that they never learn gratitude” (p. 20). Three, “the conviction that children should never be upset and the insistence that everybody get a present – even at someone else's birthday party – is debilitating, as is the idea that everyone in a race must get a medal which renders the race meaningless” (p. 24). Adolescents need respect more than they need praise, “respect, you deserve; meaningful praise you have to work for!” (p. 24).

So, how does a parent or teacher ignite and nurture a teen's understanding of God? One practical suggestion is to draw on the teen's “experience of trusting people in order to enlighten their understanding of how God ‘proves’ himself” (p. 88). Think about the steps of trust required for someone to become your best friend. Another powerful tool is to confront death. “Christianity is all about death – and resurrection” (p. 98). By leaving teens un-confronted with death denies them “the enriching human attitudes that ownership of death allows: the awareness of how precious time is and how lucky we are to be here at all; how important it is to tell people we love them and how crippling it is to nurse grudges” (p. 99). Begin with questions about what God is like for them and don't hesitate to tell them what God is like for you (p. 130). Ask yourself and them, “what difference should being a Christian make in your everyday life, in making choices – for instance, choosing a career, investing money, using free time?” (p. 137).

God Questions achieves its purpose at an introductory level. It gives good advice and insights into a very challenging subject. I feel that parents would finish the book wanting more tools to help them, especially in the form of practical suggestions and real-life examples.

**Got Religion? How Churches, Mosques and Synagogues Can Bring
Young People Back,**

by N. S. Riley, West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014.

154 pp. \$15.95. ISBN 9781599474977

Review by Amy Bessin, Instructional Services Librarian, Asbury University, Wilmore, KY

How do we draw young, unattached adults to our religious gatherings and how do we keep them coming back? This is the question that Naomi Schaefer Riley addresses in her book, *Got Religion?* Riley is a columnist for the *New York Post* (and former *Wall Street Journal* editor) who has published several books on religion, higher education, and culture. In the preface, Riley shares her own experience and frustration with drawing young people to her synagogue, setting the stage for the remaining chapters. Each chapter is a case review of one religious institution, detailing that institution's successes and challenges with outreach to young people. The chosen institutions span a number of religions and are geographically spread across the United States. The diversity in the types of institutions highlighted and in the approaches to reaching young people provides a detailed snapshot of the tension between this age group and religious institutions.

Riley does not provide significant analysis about each situation within each chapter. Instead the chapters are written from a more objective perspective relying on the gathered data and comments from those interviewed related to each institution. Riley offers her own overview and perspective at the end of the book in the concluding chapter. The chapters are concise and compelling, although a mention in the introduction of how the book would be laid out might have been beneficial. This book would be appropriate for anyone interested in case studies on religious outreach to young adults.