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Living our faith above ground

by Kate Childs Graham

When I was in college, I went to Eucharistic adoration every week. Hundreds of Catholic University students would flood into every crevice of a darkened Caldwell Chapel. We knelt together in silent prayer before the monstrance. The "most pious" of us refrained from using kneelers. We sang praise and worship songs. We listened intently to a reading and reflection from the campus priest. We sat in more silence. Some folded their hands, others turned their palms up and others raised their hands in the air. Some cried. Some journaled. Some worried. Some slept. Some prayed the rosary. Finally, we sang a beautiful, harmonized rendition of "Salve Regina" and adjourned to a social event outside the chapel walls.

I loved the darkness of adoration. I loved the quiet. I loved the mystery. I loved that feeling of piety and holiness. I loved the common secret. I loved the sadness.

One day, my friend June and I started to discuss, and debate, the concept of adoration. I defended it passionately until she said this:

"Jesus said to take and eat, not take and adore."

After that, I went to adoration only a few more times. I began to understand how insular it all felt, and how comfortable it felt to be that insular. I noticed how it was, partially, a place to "see and be seen," a place to prove your piety. I saw how Wednesday adoration was more packed and more anticipated than any of the Sunday Masses. And I suddenly I understood what June -- and Jesus -- were talking about.

I wanted my faith to be out in the open. I wanted to live in the light. I wanted to take and eat, to taste and see. For me, adoration wasn't the way to do that.

I haven't and don't intend to advocate against adoration because I understand that that is how some people choose to live out their faith. However, when I first learned about the emerging Catholic

Underground movement, I have to admit that I had a visceral reaction, stemming from my experience with adoration.

From the Catholic Underground Web site: <http://www.catholicunderground.net/>

Catholic Underground is a cultural apostolate of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. It is a direct response to a call that began with Pope John Paul II, and is continued by Pope Benedict XVI. JP II said that because the Gospel lives in conversation with culture, we must be fearless in crossing the cultural threshold of the communication and information revolution now taking place. The first part of the evening is Eucharistic adoration, and begins with Vespers (Evening Prayer). This is the universal prayer of the Church - prayed by the Catholics throughout the world in every time zone and in every language. After Vespers, there is a time of simple praise. This provides a window for each person to personally encounter Jesus Christ. The beauty of the darkened Church illuminated by candles helps us enter the mystery of our Lord's presence in the Eucharist. The holy hour ends with solemn Benediction. The second part showcases Catholic artists. Here we experience the "new evangelization". The Underground includes music, poetry, visual art, dancers, film, drama, etc. We end our evening as we began. With the prayer of the Church. Compline (Night Prayer) is simple and beautiful. It concludes with a hymn to Our Lady, Daughter Zion. Mother of the New Jerusalem.

At face value, the Catholic Underground is a concept I can get down with. The idea that the Gospel lives in conversation with culture is beautiful and fairly progressive. Here's my question: Can we live in conversation with culture while sitting in the silence of a dark church? Can we do this while insulating ourselves from the ideas and concepts that permeate the rest of the world? Or is just comfortable?

Even the phrase "Catholic Underground" causes me a fair deal of unrest. Throughout history, people have fought and died so that we can live our faith and our lives out in the open. Some people are still fighting for that right. Why do we want to go back underground when there is so much to do above ground?

Like I said before, my intention is not to advocate against adoration or the Catholic Underground, rather to start a conversation. So, what do you think?

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[Kate Childs Graham writes for ReligionDispatches.org and YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com. She also serves on the Women's Ordination Conference board of directors and the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.]

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