

Poverty of Spirit within Party and Hookup Culture: Undergraduates' Engagement with Johann Metz

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In his work Poverty of Spirit, Johann Metz depicts Jesus Christ as embodying three aspects of poverty of spirit required to become fully human: (1) an affirmation of interdependence on God and others, (2) self-love (accepting human finitude and one's unique calling), and (3) love of neighbor as self. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of 150 students' reflections on poverty of spirit within the context of party and hookup culture, this article explores the challenges US undergraduates face in following Christ's path of full humanity. Undergraduates' own insights issue an urgent call to Catholic universities to respond proactively to the dehumanization, injustices, and forms of violence present in party and hookup culture. At stake is the integrity of Catholic higher education's mission to care for the whole person and form students into men and women "for others" who are committed to justice, solidarity, and the common good.

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IN his work *University Ethics*, James Keenan reflects on the lamentable irony that ethics faculty who prepare their students for a “panoply of complicated decisions” awaiting them in professional fields like business, medicine, and law rarely address the ethical issues that affect students' personal and social lives while they struggle to navigate their college experiences.¹

¹ James Keenan, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 98.

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In light of the moral challenges pervading American universities—rampant cheating, violations related to university athletics, treatment of adjunct faculty, sexually and racially themed parties, and predatory hazing by fraternities and sororities, to name a few—Keenan suggests that faculty would do well to “enter into the messiness of university ethics”² at their institutions and attend to these problems “in their classrooms, in their lectures, in their panels, their research, and their publications.”³ Providing the contours of a general action plan, he writes:

We need faculty to use their academic resources to discuss campus ethical challenges and to show, first, an awareness of these things happening; second, a reflective estimation of why they are problematic; and third, a strategy for the university community to address them effectively, responsibly, and transparently.⁴

As a theological ethicist fully committed to Keenan’s summons, I seek in my teaching and scholarship to connect the rich resources of theology and ethics to college students’ social reality and lived experiences. In the context of teaching Christian Sexual Ethics courses at two different Catholic universities over the last decade, I have focused my teaching and scholarship largely on issues related to moral and spiritual challenges arising within contemporary party and hookup culture. This has meant helping students hone their ability to reflect critically on their social reality, recognize and resist unjust social dynamics, and discern which priorities and choices will foster their holistic growth. Among significant obstacles to achieving these objectives with my millennial students, I have noticed widespread skepticism when it comes to religious authorities and educators on the topic of sexuality and relationships.⁵ Having been lectured too often and solicited too infrequently for their questions, experiences, and concerns, the majority of my students who grew up Christian (particularly Catholics) have expressed a combination of weariness and resentment concerning directives on what to think and how to behave sexually.

Recognizing that many students were responding to Christian teachings and theological texts on sexuality as sex-negative, judgmental, or simply irrelevant to

² *Ibid.*, 99.

³ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵ When, in 2009, I received a grant to organize a program on hookup culture for first-year college students, I asked my students for ideas. Their emphatic advice was the following: “The last thing you want to do is bring in an adult speaker. They will *not* listen to some adult.” Their counsel led me to collaborate with students at my university to create a video of college students sharing their honest perspectives about hookup culture, the relationship between hookups and sexual violence, and how to create a more just sexual culture.

their lives, I decided to alter the theological orientation of my class. My original approach had been to move from sociological analysis of hookup culture to theological readings on the purpose of sexuality and relationships. While I found that most students were meeting the academic course objectives of analyzing theological texts critically and recognizing unjust social and sexual norms, I was not convinced that this approach effectively inspired most students to become committed to resisting unjust dynamics in their own lives and making concrete changes that fostered their holistic growth. My revised approach was to move from hookup culture to exploring what Jesus reveals about becoming fully human and experiencing genuine fulfillment; then, I asked students to identify on their own terms challenges they encounter to becoming fully human and experiencing fulfillment in the context of their social reality on a college campus.

While many Catholic theologians offer powerful accounts of the Incarnation and Christology, I selected the theological vision of Johann Metz and assigned his spiritual classic, *Poverty of Spirit*, for several reasons. First, in just fifty-two pages, *Poverty of Spirit* succinctly captures the heart of Christian theological doctrines, offering readers a powerful account of God, the Incarnation, Christology, theological anthropology, the dynamics of sin, and salvation in a holistic manner. I hoped that Metz's imaginative, poetic, and evocative writing on these topics would engage my students on theological, spiritual, and ethical levels and would effectively draw them into meaningful discussions about the purpose of life and who they truly want to be. Second, I chose Metz because his theological critique of technical rationality in modern society and his account of Christ's way of being in the world is bold, prophetic, and profoundly countercultural. I suspected that Metz's emphasis on the ways in which we are tempted to flee our full humanity and uniqueness in favor of conformity with the status quo would resonate with and effectively challenge students to reexamine their social reality, values, priorities, and choices. Third, I believed that, regardless of whether undergraduates identify as religious or nonreligious, they would be attracted to the "realness" of Metz's theology and his grasp on our struggles to act justly in relationship with others, ourselves, and God. Across the spectrum of his writings, Metz captures our human capacity for both boundless love and unspeakable evil, and wrestles openly and honestly with God about the depth of human suffering in our world. Fourth, I chose Metz because his vision of becoming fully human does not depend on a framework of strict gender binaries or an essentialist "sexuality complementarity" framework.⁶

⁶ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §§27, 355, 371–72, 1700, 1704–6, 2331–34; Sacred Congregation for Catholic

In addition to fueling exclusionary or unjust relational dynamics, such approaches in my experience have alienated students and contributed to their skepticism that Christian theology can be a resource for truth and wisdom concerning sexuality, relationships, and fulfillment.

In what follows, I begin with Metz's account of Jesus Christ's way of becoming fully human through embracing poverty of spirit. Since attending to multiple dimensions of poverty of spirit is beyond the scope of one article,⁷ I limit my analysis to Metz's emphasis on loving God and loving neighbor as oneself. I then explore Metz's analysis of specific challenges that modernity poses to authentic neighbor-love. Next, drawing on my qualitative analysis of 150 of my students' reflections on full humanity within the context of party and hookup culture, I explore the challenges that many US undergraduates face trying to actualize neighbor-love in their daily lives. As we will see, there is coherence between Metz's theology, many students' analyses of their social reality, and a number of key insights from the Catholic tradition. Together, these consolidated voices not only challenge the adequacy of some adult commentators' neutral or even benign regard for hookup culture as a normative developmental process, but issue an urgent call to Catholic universities to respond proactively to the dehumanization, injustices, and forms of violence present in party and hookup culture. At stake is the integrity of Catholic higher education's mission to care for the whole person and form students into men and women "for others" who are committed to justice, solidarity, and the common good.

Becoming Fully Human through Poverty of Spirit

Drawing on Karl Rahner, Metz articulates his Catholic vision that all persons are confronted with a fundamental decision in life, and we realize our fullest potential and become fully human through a yes to God's

Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, November 1, 1983, §§4–5, 25, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19831101_sexual-education_en.html; John Paul II, *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 42–49, 457; Committee on Education, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1991), 8; Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, December 8, 1995, §10, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_08121995_human-sexuality_en.html.

⁷ For a fuller analysis of undergraduate reflections on multiple aspects of poverty of spirit, see my forthcoming book, *College Hookup Culture and Christian Ethics: The Lives and Longings of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

invitation to a life of communion with the divine and others. To explore more specifically what this free, repeated yes to God looks like in the complicated realm of human behavior, he reflects in *Poverty of Spirit* on what I regard as three crucial, interrelated aspects of full humanity embraced by Jesus as he undergoes three temptations in the desert: (1) Jesus' affirmation of his interdependence on God and others (resisting hyperindividualism), (2) self-love (accepting human finitude and his unique calling), and (3) love of neighbor as himself (letting go of egoism to encounter, honor, and care for others as distinct others).

Metz argues that by loving our neighbor as ourselves, we encounter the mysterious being of God and experience a taste of our life's purpose: a deep sense of interconnectedness and communion with God, self, and others.⁸ He also emphasizes that we express and mediate our love for God and grow in our relationship with God through our love of our neighbor:

God drew near to us as our brother and sister and our neighbor, as "one of these" (cf. Mt. 25:40–45). Our relationship with God is decided in our encounter with other human beings. . . . The only image of God is the face of our neighbor. . . . Every authentic religious act is directed toward the concreteness of God in our human neighbors and their world. There it finds its living fulfillment and its transcendent point of contact. . . . Love of neighbor, then, is not something different from love of God; it is merely the earthly side of the same coin.⁹

Metz's theological writings throughout his career suggest that neighbor-love, exemplified perfectly in the life and teachings of Jesus, involves three commitments: (1) letting go of one's false, ego-driven self, (2) becoming vulnerable and authentic in our relationships, and (3) pursuing justice in solidarity with our neighbors.

⁸ Metz's articulation of our God-given telos coheres with the Catholic tradition's affirmation that being created in God's image means that our life's purpose is loving communion with God and others. As Pope John Paul II writes, "Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, November 22, 1981, §11, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html. Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 32–33.

⁹ Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, trans. John Drury (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 161.

Letting Go of One's False, Ego-Driven Self

In his reflections on neighbor-love, Metz raises our self-awareness about the ease and regularity with which we tend to reduce other persons to our own limited and egoistic perspective. Consider his reflections when addressing the meaning and implications of encountering others in their full complexity:

In total self-abandonment and full commitment to another we become completely poor, and the depths of infinite mystery open up to us from within this other person. In this order, we come before God. If we commit ourselves to this person without reservation . . . our human encounter occurs within the horizon of un-ending mystery . . . This openness to others can be enjoyed only in the poverty of self-abandonment; egoism destroys it.¹⁰

Metz is explicit that neighbor-love entails treating others as ends in themselves, not as a means to our agenda.¹¹ He perceptively acknowledges how opening ourselves to the other's personality and reality can easily upset our own precarious sense of control and security, and how defense mechanisms often spring into action to help us avoid or deny what might threaten or simply inconvenience us. Because of our tendency to become wrapped up in our needs, desires, and insecurities about how others perceive us, we do not open our eyes fully to others, seeing instead "what we want to see" and keeping "the other person down" in order to bolster our self-esteem or

¹⁰ Ibid., 33–34. According to Metz, egoism and fear not only blind us to seeing others as they "really are," but make it much easier to treat others as objects for our own agenda. These insights reflect key Catholic understandings of the dynamics of sin and our tendency toward concupiscence. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§387, 398, 400, 1849–50; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, §§17, 44; Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, §§9, 57, 97.

¹¹ Such a claim coheres with the Catholic tradition's account of neighbor-love as involving the capacity to respect the personality and freedom of the other and relating to others in ways that affirm their good. Within this context, the purpose of sexuality is to express love and affirmation of one's partner as an end in him/herself. As the Pontifical Council for the Family affirms, "The person is thus capable of a higher kind of love than concupiscence, which only sees objects as a means to satisfy one's appetites; the person is capable rather of friendship and self-giving, with the capacity to recognize and love persons for themselves . . . One desires the good of the other because he or she is recognized as worthy of being loved." Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, §9. See also United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living: Guidelines for Curriculum Design and Publication* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008).

sense of superiority.¹² Given our tendencies toward egoism, Metz emphasizes that full commitment to another person without reservation is needed to transcend the dynamics of egoism and to love another in a fully human way.¹³

Becoming Vulnerable and Authentic in Our Relationships

Encountering our neighbor both near and far as a distinct “other” requires epistemic humility, curiosity, and the courage to be challenged and affected. In other words, we must be open to vulnerability and transformation. According to Metz, “every stirring of genuine love makes us poor.”¹⁴ This description is apt because we trade security for vulnerability each time we offer up our hearts to others:

We must be able to open up to the other person, to let that person’s distinctive personality unfold—even though it often frightens us or repels us Failing to risk the poverty of encounter, we indulge in a new form of self-assertion and pay a price for it: loneliness. Because we did not risk the poverty of openness (cf. Mt. 10:39), our lives are not graced with the warm fullness of human existence. We are left with only a shadow of our real self.¹⁵

As love shatters defense mechanisms that once maintained our illusions of security and control over self and other, our individual “I-self” shifts to an interdependent sense of self, and we are suddenly able to take into account others’ needs. Genuine love “dominates the whole human person, makes absolute claims upon us . . . and thus subverts all extra-human assurances of security. The true lover must be unprotected and give of himself or herself without reservation or question.”¹⁶ In this passage, Metz argues that love further requires the courage to become vulnerable and share our unique selves with others.¹⁷

¹² Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 44.

¹³ While Metz does not explicitly address sexuality and intimate relationships in *Poverty of Spirit*, he clearly emphasizes that love requires full commitment without reservation, supporting the Catholic tradition’s position that sexual expression in the context of a lifelong commitment enables us to experience, in a fully human way, the gifts of loving and being loved. See Pontifical Council of the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, §27.

¹⁴ Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷ Metz’s depiction of being vulnerable and sharing one’s authentic self coheres with the Catholic tradition’s affirmation that the purpose of sexuality is to offer oneself as a gift to one’s beloved. See Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World (Gaudium et Spes)*, December 7, 1965, §49, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§27, 371–72, 2331–34; Pontifical Council for the

Underlying our struggle to become fully human and give our authentic selves to others is a fundamental temptation to sacrifice our uniqueness in favour of the status quo in order to avoid harm and rejection, and to secure both social acceptance and a life of ease and convenience:

“Be like the rest of humanity,” whispers Satan, “Feed on bread, wealth and worldly prestige—like the rest of us.” It is a temptation put also to each of us: to renounce the poverty of our unique, mysterious personality, to do just what “everyone else” does.¹⁸

While choosing a life path of openness, vulnerability, and authenticity with others in no way guarantees a life spared from rejection and suffering, it enables us to experience love and genuine connection with others, which constitute our deepest source of joy.¹⁹

Pursuing Justice in Solidarity with Our Neighbors

Another essential component of neighbor-love is a spirituality of “liberated freedom” characterized by its commitment to solidarity and justice.²⁰

Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, §§9–12, 16; National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality for Christians* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1981), 14, 47; John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 50, 213–14.

¹⁸ Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 39.

¹⁹ The Catholic tradition likewise affirms that joy and fulfillment stem from our capacity to love and be loved. Pope Francis articulates this well: “True joy does not come from things or from possessing, no! It is born from the encounter, from the relationship with others, it is born from feeling accepted, understood and loved, and from accepting, from understanding and from loving; and this is not because of a passing fancy but because the other is a person. Joy is born from the gratuitousness of an encounter! It is hearing someone say, but not necessarily with words: ‘You are important to me.’ This is beautiful.” “Meeting with Seminarians and Novices: Address of Holy Father Francis,” Rome, July 6, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html.

²⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 93. Metz’s claim that love involves justice and solidarity on interpersonal, communal, and global levels affirms the increasing recognition present in the Catholic tradition that justice is an intrinsic component of love. Pope Benedict XVI writes: “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI’s words, ‘the minimum measure’ of it, an integral part of the love ‘in deed and in truth’ to which Saint John exhorts us.” Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, §6, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

Most fundamentally for Metz, meaningful engagement with the call for justice proceeds from the recognition that other persons' freedom to become fully human is just as sacred and important as one's own. Justice thus concretely means always treating the other as an end in him/herself and never as "an instrument of self-assertion." Justice involves the commitment to protect our neighbors' dignity and rights and foster their well-being and flourishing. Throughout his writings, Metz further develops and radicalizes Karl Rahner's insight that, given the complexity and interconnectedness of our global reality, love of neighbor moves far beyond the context of selected individuals in familiar circles: working for justice in solidarity with others must occur without regard for others' proximity and social location. Discipleship for Metz is thus unapologetically political. An intrinsic connection exists between faith and action: "It is of the very essence of Christian faith to be believed in such a way that is never just believed, but rather—in the messianic praxis of discipleship—enacted."²¹

Faith dictates that we be "willing to suffer others' suffering,"²² "defying apathy as well as hatred"²³ and bearing fruit as fully as possible "in an excessive, uncalculated partiality for the weak and the voiceless."²⁴ As John Downey notes, solidarity for Metz serves as a fundamental category of political theology that "responds in the real world" and "provides not just empathy or identity with the past but a chance to transform the future."²⁵

Metz's Analysis of the Challenges to Neighbor-Love in Modernity

In several of his works, Metz examines ways that the Enlightenment radically altered Western society's views about reality, rationality, the human subject, and persons' relationships with others and their communities. The implications of modern subjectivity are significant, he argues, and particularly the challenges that these changes pose to our capacity for poverty of spirit and neighbor-love. Metz affirms and makes central to his theological project the Enlightenment ideal of persons freely becoming responsible subjects who treat one another as ends in themselves.

²¹ Johann Baptist Metz, "Christians and Jews after Auschwitz," in *Love's Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz*, ed. John K. Downey (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 47.

²² *Ibid.*, 93.

²³ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁵ John Downey, "Can We Talk? Globalization, Human Rights, and Political Theology," in *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology*, ed. John K. Downey, Jürgen Manemann, and Steven T. Ostovich (Münster: Lit, 2007), 137.

However, he argues that the move to sever rationality from religious and philosophical traditions concerning the good life, along with the rise of modern capitalism, ironically resulted in a distorted form of “technical dominative” reason that directly subverts the Enlightenment ideal. Such instrumental reasoning reduces everything to a principle of exchange and encourages scientific and technological domination and control over nature (including humans) to maximize economic profit: “The model of domination has long since permeated everything; this revolution affects the whole societal construction of our reality, of our political and economic systems.”²⁶

Drawing on Frankfurt School critical theorists, Metz argues that the principle of exchange eventually became the sole principle and most trustworthy, rational authority governing political and social relations in trade, production, consumption, and so on. The exchange principle renders two kinds of interpersonal relationships normative and most “reasonable” in our society. The first is an exchange between equals:

This primary social practice in this regard is exchange, the context is the market, and thus the paradigmatic form of reason becomes the calculating reason that can assess and assign value in the market to different commodities, in relationship to quantifiable human needs. The paradigmatic relationship, the one that makes the most sense and in terms of which normative claims can be formulated and gotten across in society, is the relationship of equals who enter into contractual relationships of exchange in the market.²⁷

In this case of two equals, persons enter a contractual form of relationship in which both partners seek mutual benefit: “I support your interests; you support mine.”²⁸ The second normative relationship occurs when one person has more competence or power than the other. In this case, the “superior” individual subtly or not so subtly dominates the other and objectifies that person as a means to his or her own goals:

This principle of subjugation has long since permeated the psychic foundations of our total sociocultural life. It has become the secret regulating principle of all interpersonal relationships. . . . In this sense, we could and should speak, not only—and not even primarily—of a poisoning through unrestricted technical exploitation of the outer nature surrounding man [sic], but also of a poisoning of the inner nature of man himself.²⁹

²⁶ Metz, “Christians and Jews after Auschwitz,” 55.

²⁷ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁹ Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World* (New York, Crossroad, 1981), 35.

These two normative forms of relationship, argues Metz, sharply oppose the kinds of relationships affirmed in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Note that the Hebrew Bible and New Testament consist of narratives of persons being called to respond to God's love through love and solidarity with others. Love clearly defies the exchange principle, for by its very nature love endures even when personal sacrifice is required and/or where mutuality is not possible. Solidarity with those who are marginalized or oppressed by unjust social structures also makes little sense in a world where one is taught to prioritize egocentric interests related to competition, success, security, and so on. The exchange principle ultimately renders relationships based on agapic love and solidarity suspect, irrational, nonsensical, and undesirable.

Furthermore, Metz argues that rationality within the "world of exchange" in turn alters modern persons' conceptions and experiences of subjectivity. He points out that the Enlightenment subject was not intended to be inclusive of all persons. Immanuel Kant, for instance, presumed a male middle-class subject who was wealthy enough to own property and participate in the capitalist economy. This bourgeois social class, claims Metz, became the privileged elite class of modern society, defining normatively what it meant to be a subject functioning in society. Rather than viewing himself as interdependent person contributing to a larger whole (family, religious community, society), the modern male subject was formed and understood himself primarily as a subject

of domination and of need, in whose dominative knowledge there is hardly a trace of receptivity, and who begins to overpower everything. Nature and history, as well as this subject's sense of praxis, are almost exclusively oriented by models for controlling nature and satisfying needs, so that other ways in which one might behave as a subject, and other forms of praxis wither away, and, in any event, lose any normativity.³⁰

Metz laments again and again the incredible implications of society's near wholesale embrace of technical reason. The result is no less than "a graceless form of humanity, strictly oriented to property, competition, and success."³¹ He continually raises concern that liberal theology uncritically embraced the Enlightenment's bourgeois subject, which resulted in many Christian churches declaring faith without actually living it.

Metz's critique of Western Christianity is direct and relentless: having internalized secular culture's concept of modern reason and subjectivity, Christianity has failed to communicate that the commonly accepted

³⁰ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 43–44.

³¹ Metz, *The Emergent Church*, 53.

bourgeois conception of freedom, understood as the satisfaction of individual desires, is sharply and irreconcilably opposed to the Christian tradition's core values and understanding of freedom. Christian freedom, by contrast, is understood as the freedom to love and is a process of letting go of egoistic attachments that hinder our capacity to love fully God, others, and ourselves. According to Metz, a core task of Christianity is to communicate effectively why its vision of what it means to be human and experience a joyful, fulfilling life is more compelling and truthful than the bourgeois market narrative. But in an effort to be attractive and "relevant" to modern persons (for whom religion is merely one option among competing interests), many Christian churches uncritically adopted modern conceptions of rationality and subjectivity into their theology and practices. In doing so, Christianity became a social space that, in practice, prioritized (and continues to prioritize) bourgeois virtues over Christian virtues:

There is a widening split within the church between the messianic virtues of Christianity which are publicly proclaimed, prescribed, and believed in by the church (conversion and discipleship, love and acceptance of suffering) and the actual value-structures and goals of the bourgeois way of life (autonomy, property, stability, success). Underneath the priorities of the gospel, the priorities of the bourgeois life are being practiced . . . The bourgeois virtues of stability, competitive struggle, and achievement obscure and overlay the merely believed-in messianic virtues of conversion, selfless and unconditional love for the "least of the brethren," and active compassion—virtues which cannot be practiced within relationships of exchange or barter; virtues for which one gets literally nothing in return, like the love which does not insist on recompense; virtues like loyalty, gratitude, friendliness, and grief.³²

Students' analyses of their culture below strongly indicate that Metz's insights on technocratic rationality's impact on persons' subjectivity, relationships, and the prophetic capacity of Christian churches to inspire authentic discipleship are as relevant today as when his works were published. We will return to these themes after examining how students themselves perceive and criticize their college culture in light of the portrait of Jesus and vision of full humanity they discover in Metz.

Challenges to Neighbor-Love in College Culture

From 2012 to 2014, students in my sections of Christian Sexual Ethics studied and discussed college hookup culture before reading Metz's *Poverty*

³² Ibid., 4–6.

of *Spirit* and interpreting what Metz means by “poverty” and “fully human.” After we engaged Metz, I asked my college students to imagine a Second Coming in which Metz’s Jesus returns to our world as an African American twenty-year-old male transfer student at their university.³³ They meet and recognize Metz’s Jesus at a college party and imagine a conversation with him about becoming fully human and embracing poverty of spirit in the context of college party and hookup culture. My intention was, in Ignatian spiritual terms, to invite them into a “composition of place,” an encounter with Jesus in the context of a college party. Proceeding with this imaginative exercise, many students identified challenges to poverty of spirit that arise from living in the United States and college culture before they analyzed challenges specific to party culture. Many emphasized that diverse aspects of neighbor-love are absent not only in their “nightly” parties but also in their academic “day” lives.

I received approval from my university’s institutional review board to collect students’ papers from 2012 to 2014 for research, and subsequently engaged in qualitative analysis of 150 student reflections.³⁴ Since the aim of qualitative research is to identify and understand general patterns, themes, and constructs that emerge from learning in depth about a particular group’s experiences and perspectives, I have selected student quotations that best illustrate emerging themes.³⁵ Before examining students’ perspectives, it is important to include the following details about the participants in my study. The students in my sample all attended a private, Catholic midwestern university. This school has approximately 3,500 to 4,000

³³ Prior to reading *Poverty of Spirit*, students had engaged the work of Kelly Brown Douglas on the intersections between racism and sexuality. They had examined unjust racist stereotyping historically and in contemporary society. I chose to depict Metz’s Jesus as African American in hopes that students might reflect on the impact of racist dynamics on their capacity to embrace poverty of spirit. Only a few students mentioned the ethnicity of Metz’s Jesus in their reflections or acknowledged that white students might react differently toward Metz’s Jesus because of his race. For more analysis of undergraduate reflections on racist dynamics at college parties, see my forthcoming book, in footnote 7.

³⁴ I collected only the papers written by undergraduates who signed a consent form granting permission to use their written work anonymously for the purposes of teaching and research. In order to protect confidentiality and anonymity, I used pseudonyms. As necessary, I made slight edits to avoid awkwardness that occurred occasionally in students’ writing.

³⁵ I employed Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein’s grounded theory of qualitative analysis. See Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). Besides my own qualitative coding, I hired two students—one female and one male undergraduate—to code portions of the relevant text and identify repeated ideas and themes.

undergraduates and does not have fraternities or sororities. According to self-reports on the first day of class each semester, most students' motivation for taking the course was to satisfy two requirements: one in upper-level theology and one in gender studies. The course thus attracted a diverse set of majors from arts and sciences, social sciences, and business. Furthermore, students possessed a diverse range of beliefs and attitudes regarding sex, gender, relationships, religion, and ethics. My student sample, which reflected the broader student population of the university, was limited, however, in terms of ethnic, religious, and geographical diversity. Among my research sample, 66 percent were women, and 34 percent were men. As for ethnic diversity among the research sample, 92 percent were Caucasian, 2.7 percent African American, 3.3 percent Asian American, and 1.3 percent were international students. The majority of students from this institution were from midwestern states, and approximately 80 percent identified as Catholic or Protestant. The qualitative data and findings might have differed if my student sample had come from a different geographical area and were more ethnically and religiously diverse.³⁶

Egoism

One major theme in students' reflections was their peers' tendency toward egoism, which undermines their ability to empathize, care for others, and relate to others as ends in themselves. Most students singled out how cultural pressures to "be the best" and succeed financially and materially promote and normalize preoccupation with their own desires and interests:

- We all know we should love our neighbors, but we're placed in this environment where competition underlies most of what we do. We get this idea that we need to be ahead in everything to be set up for the best job and the best future, so we get mixed messages. Are our classmates our friends, or our rivals for future opportunities? We're being told to love our neighbor as ourself in the same cutthroat world where trust is so fragile. (Laura)
- The biggest issue college students have with fully embracing poverty of spirit is letting go of their own egos. This becomes especially difficult due to the social pressures to achieve and conform to a certain look or behaviors. It is very difficult to let go of these feelings when your social

³⁶ Since I did not gather data on the socioeconomic background of my students, this study cannot analyze how the dynamics of class affect students' theological reflections on party and hookup culture.

status is based on your skills or your friends. When we are constantly submerged in this culture and we see everybody else participating in it, it is hard to believe that everyone else is doing something wrong when it comes to finding fulfillment. (Evan)³⁷

Even service, which appears to be an obvious manifestation of neighbor-love, is often motivated by egoism and resumé-building in students' highly competitive society:

- In high school, there was a general trend towards treating volunteering like a homework task to be accomplished. In order to maintain good standing with the organization, I had to complete X hours of volunteering per semester. The primary reason that I and others volunteered wasn't to genuinely help others in an act of selflessness, but to build our resumé for college applications. (Christian)

Also a factor reducing students' ability to be present to others' needs are their hectic schedules. Students wrote, for example, about the implications of managing academics, extracurriculars, work, socializing, partying, and even their habit of multitasking—talking to friends while texting, tweeting, or checking Facebook:

- Look at the girls in that booth. None of them are looking at each other. They are so concerned with what is on their phones that they are denying themselves conversation with their friends. The relationships they have with each other go only skin deep. (Bella)

³⁷ When students perceive that intense competitive pressure to be the best and attain materialistic success fuel egoism and conformity as well as fears of becoming vulnerable and authentic, they are corroborating Metz's critique of modern subjectivity and the Catholic tradition's view of obstacles to neighbor-love in contemporary society. Pope Francis exhorts us to acknowledge the "profound human crisis" that is hidden by economic crisis and the idolatry of money in addition to the increasingly pervasive conception of human beings as exploited products. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, §55, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. Pope Francis concedes that "to be attracted by power, by grandeur, by appearances is tragically human," and yet insists that rejecting these idols is essential to a fulfilling life: "Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption." "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Częstochowa, July 28, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160728_omelia-polonia-czestochowa.html.

- A lot of us are so focused on getting good grades, doing well in our sporting competitions, and also having a social life that we forget that other people may need us to help them or just simply be there for them. I know that when I am stressed out, I am so focused on my own problems that thinking about someone else's is just simply overwhelming. If there is a silent cry for help, it is difficult to separate ourselves from our own struggles to even notice. (Annie)

Many students also associate lack of neighbor-love at college with the expectations created by popular culture that the college years represent the only time in life to be selfish:

- College years are often looked at as a time to be wild and self-indulgent. Society often encourages students to experiment and do what makes them happy. The idea of making ourselves happy makes us selfish and gives us a sense of control that makes it difficult to become fully human. We self-indulge, believe we are powerful, and think we will live forever. We try too hard to find and assert ourselves, and we worry too much about our own happiness. (Aubrey)
- I think that one of the biggest struggles college students have with living fully human lives is the emphasis on having fun and being wild in college. The stress of living up to that college stereotype is holding college students back from having healthy relationships. When we put so much emphasis on getting wild, we lose the ability to really communicate with other people to have healthy relationships. (Amy)

Given this construal of the college years, many undergraduates emphasize how normalized it is in their lives to use other people as a means to get what they want:

- Western culture puts too much emphasis on self. Most students tend to use others as stepping stones to get to their goals. They are so focused on their own achievement they don't care about others. They seek others not because they want to get to know them, but in hope of benefiting themselves. (Jackson)
- The hookup culture is based off of selfish wants. We want attention, affection, even sexual desire to hook up meaninglessly with another person. Based on Metz's description of being fully human, we are not embracing the act of becoming vulnerable or humbled through human experience. Instead, with the use of alcohol we are encouraging the displacement of vulnerability and treating others as means to our own ends. (John)

- Students are treating each other in a hookup as objects to be used for sexual pleasure and then tossed to the wayside. Many are only interacting with one another for this personal benefit, holding no respect—let alone love—towards the humanity and being of the other person. (Grace)³⁸

Risking Vulnerability

Vulnerability, as indicated earlier, has two relational directions, requiring not just an openness to the other's concrete reality but the risk of sharing our own unique selves without apology or deception. Students recognize that vulnerability like this makes possible genuine intimacy, love, acceptance, and joy, yet many remain ambivalent on account of its riskiness. Students emphasize that being authentic involves feeling and expressing a full range of emotions, which is culturally associated with weakness. Such "weakness" undermines their efforts to project a strong, successful image and creates shame, embarrassment, and loss of social status:

- When surrounded by a status-minded social environment where weakness is discouraged, it is extremely hard to accept that it is okay to be vulnerable with others when it comes to feelings and relationships. Revealing these things will negatively impact our social standing. (Evan)
- Emotions are seen as a weakness in society today, and kids have learned to play it cool. What they don't understand is that this has a crippling effect on their emotional well-being. As time goes on they simply can't make themselves vulnerable in intimate relationships with other people, which prevents them from becoming fully human. (Jack)

According to many male students, expressing emotions needed for intimacy is directly opposed to their expectations concerning masculinity:

- We undercut our emotions and sensations at every turn in order to fulfill society's promotion of masculinity. Men cannot allow themselves to openly experience the emotions that we have. We are allowed to

³⁸ Students' acknowledgment that popular culture celebrates college as the time to be selfish, sexually experiment, and enjoy hookups that are "no big deal" confirms the Catholic Church's concern that Western media and culture "largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure." Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, §16. See also National Committee on Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality for Christians*, 13; Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, §46.

experience anger, lust, and happiness—all on different levels. But when emotions such as sadness creep into view, we must stifle them before they are shown. (Aiden)

While we might assume that women experience greater permission to express emotions, since “being emotional” has been a traditional feminine characteristic, college women’s reflections reveal an increasing pressure to adopt the same stoic norms as men when it comes to expressing vulnerable emotions:

- As women have become slightly more accepted into the executive portion of the business world, emotions have become more of a problem. People have been affected by society to not foster their emotions. This affects hookup culture by making it an easy way for people to get what they need sexually and keep their usual method of not opening up and showing their emotions. (Zoey)

Students express that it is far easier to conform to hookup norms of being unattached, unemotional, and invulnerable than to risk loss of social status:

- Feelings bring the possibility of rejection and that is something everyone wants to avoid at all costs. If feelings are not involved, no one can get hurt. The biggest risk someone can take is to develop feelings and express them. With feelings and commitment thrown out the window and sexual expectations high, hookups are what students turn to. (Emma)
- One of the most negative effects of hookup culture is the significant amount of emotional detachment that is arising in young people. This is because we are socialized to not want a relationship and to be the “cool girl” or “the ultimate bro” by casualizing sex and not wanting anything to do with attachment. With this mentality being such a huge part of this culture, young people are not learning how important relationships are in your life and how to be completely vulnerable with someone. (Brooklyn)

Fears of vulnerability figure prominently in students’ analyses of why hookups rather than dating and committed relationships have become the norm on college campuses. Being open about who you are renders you vulnerable to being rejected, and experiencing embarrassment and shame from such exposure. It is far easier to take refuge in alcohol and partying than to take the risks that a genuine encounter brings:

- Most people are frightened of rejection and being rejected while drunk is a lot less threatening than putting yourself out there and asking a person out while sober. When sober, you don't have an easy excuse for denying responsibility for your actions. (Ethan)
- We run away from ourselves because we're scared of being vulnerable, and admitting that we are vulnerable. On top of that fear we all live in a place full of other people that are afraid of being vulnerable, and together we create a place where it's safe to run away. Instead of leaning into our emotions, we try to control them with alcohol and drugs. Instead of allowing someone to see all of who we are and falling deeply in love, we hook up and have random sex to fill the void. (Aubrey)
- Not many college students feel fulfilled during their college years when it comes to sexuality. There are far too many defenses, too many walls of isolation, too much "fakeness." People are afraid of being completely open to others. (Caleb)

Another dominant theme expressed among students was that they desired to fall in love with another person and be in a committed relationship but are held back by the fear of appearing needy or weak, and of getting hurt:

- Falling in true love is scary, and exciting, and something college kids want to do but are afraid of. Overcoming the obstacle of completely taking down your brick wall piece by piece and letting another being in is one of the greatest feats. (Aliyah)
- Genuine love requires a deep sense of vulnerability and commitment, which can be truly terrifying for a person my age because we are so afraid of getting hurt. Being vulnerable in a way that truly makes us feel safe requires a sense of security that would take time to build: it definitely could not happen drunkenly in a couple of hours. By choosing to consistently hook up with people drunkenly and randomly, we run from true love that could make us more fully human and bring us so much more satisfaction. We trick ourselves into thinking that this hooking up is somehow better for us, because it helps us gain experience, or satisfies us for a while, or because we have a sense of control over when, where, and how it happens. However, in the long run it leaves us feeling hollow and alone. (Aubrey)

Notably, students perceive that expressing any sign of vulnerability increases their chances of victimization and failure:

- We as humans like to feel safe, and being vulnerable without a promise of the person reciprocating that vulnerability is scary. We are taught from a young age to be safe in our interactions, not giving others enough leverage to overpower us if they so choose Vulnerability doesn't partner with the idea behind the American Dream. If you are making yourself vulnerable, you are not pushing to the top. To show weakness is to display the ways to beat you. If I tell someone that I am insecure about something, they have that back-pocket knowledge to throw in my face should they ever need to. My weakness is their weapon. We do not like losing. We do not like being bullied. We do not like to be victims and want to protect ourselves. We hide our vulnerabilities, masking them from the world. (Elise)

Lack of Justice in Party Culture

Readers may have noticed that explicit, sustained attention to justice—Metz's third component of neighbor-love—is absent in students' writing about *Poverty of Spirit* and their analyses of "poverty" and "full humanity" in college culture. This omission is not surprising, since Metz developed this theme of justice in his later writings. Based on closer inspection, however, I would suggest that students are actually writing about the theme of justice even though they are not using the term. After all, they reflect on the negative interpersonal consequences of egoism, acknowledge that hookups involve harmful use of others as a means to one's own end, and recognize how their desire to garner invulnerability by seeking power over others translates into harmful dynamics and forms of violence like sexual assault.

In conjunction with teaching Metz, I like to introduce Margaret Farley's account of sexual justice to provide students a contemporary vocabulary for naming the facets of a just neighbor-love. Because Metz's emphasis on relating to others as an end in themselves resonates well with Farley's work, I assigned sections of her book *Just Love*. My students and I discussed the seven norms she offers to discern whether sexual expression is just: no unjust harm, free consent, equality, mutuality, commitment, fruitfulness, and social justice.³⁹ Once students were familiar with these concepts, I asked them to submit reflections—completely anonymous except for identification of gender—on whether they thought a just hookup was possible. Out of 126 reflections, a minority of students (17.7 percent of women and 26.5 percent of men) responded that hookups could be just, but only if certain criteria were present. Two themes were dominant in their responses.

³⁹ Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

First, no unjust harm, free consent, equality, and mutuality were essential for a just hookup:

- Yes, if they treat each other as equals with respect, no pressure, feel comfortable and safe, feel more than just a physical connection, no harm, free consent, mutuality. (female)
- Yes, if mutuality is achieved and the hookup is not driven by lots of alcohol or social pressure and no harm is done. (male)

The four most commonly cited conditions for ensuring free consent were the following: (1) partners are sober or not “too intoxicated” to consent; (2) both partners communicate and mutually agree about what will happen sexually in the hookup; (3) both partners share the same expectation that no romantic relationship will result from the hookup; and (4) both partners are not motivated to hookup because of social pressure or pressure to please the other partner.

Second, many students expressed that lack of regret and positive feelings post-hookup for both partners indicate just treatment of self and others; experiencing no regrets and positive emotions after hooking up indicates that you are being true to yourself:

- As long as you are being true to yourself and the other person, then a hookup is fine. This idea, of course, is almost never present in a hookup because most hookups take place after overconsumption of alcohol has taken place, which negates the chances of you being true to yourself or the other person involved. (male)
- Yes, if you know 100 percent that both will feel good and happy afterwards. (male)

In contrast to those who affirmed the possibility of a just hookup, the majority of students (81.2 percent of women and 67.7 percent of men)⁴⁰ perceived that hookups in reality fail to be just. Four main reasons emerged in their responses. First, they doubted that mutual respect, equality, free consent, and mutuality could be present in a hookup, especially since most hookups occur between two drunk people.⁴¹ According to these students,

⁴⁰ The percentages of students do not equal 100 because 1 percent of women and 6 percent of men did not directly answer the question.

⁴¹ See Lindsay M. Orchowski, Nadine R. Mastroleo, and Brian Borsari, “Correlates of Alcohol-Related Regretted Sex among College Students,” *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 26, no. 4 (2012): 782–90; W. F. Flack et al., “Risk Factors and Consequences of Unwanted Sex among University Students: Hooking Up, Alcohol, and Stress

alcohol makes it impossible to tell whether the other person can meaningfully consent to the hookup, and being drunk often undermines decision making that coheres with one's comfort level, and leads to negative emotions post-hookup:

- It is highly unlikely that a drunken hookup could be considered equal and mutual. The fact that both I and the woman would be intoxicated makes it very difficult for us to truly articulate our motivations for the hookup. A casual hookup could potentially meet the definition of an equal and mutual sexual experience under the right circumstances, but once alcohol is thrown into the mix, it becomes extremely difficult to meet the definition. (male)

Second, students point out that hookup partners usually do not know each other well and lack emotional connection, which makes them less interested in or comfortable with sexual communication, equality, and mutuality:

- In hookups, there can be confusion and blurred lines when it comes to mutuality and equality and respect for each person's humanity in general. It is not common for hookup partners to really talk about what they want, what they need, and how they are feeling about the situation. (female)
- It is most likely to be non-mutual for the simple fact that neither party would most likely have a true connection to one another. (male)

A common theme among heterosexual women is that discomfort about communication combined with a desire to please their male partner frequently results in nonmutual hookups focused on satisfying men's sexual desires:

- It is very unlikely that a hookup would be mutual sex because often this occurs when people do not have the strongest feelings for each other but they just decided to go with it. This causes people to just go through the motions of sex which in our day and age is getting the guy to his finishing point and then it ends . . . not caring for the girl's pleasure. (female)

Third, echoing comments above on using others to get ahead, students argue that hookups are unjust because the very point of a hookup is to

Response," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22, no. 2 (2007): 139-57; Melina M. Bersamin et al. "Young Adults and Casual Sex: The Relevance of College Drinking Settings," *Journal of Sex Research* 49, nos. 2-3 (2012): 274.

prioritize and satisfy one's own agenda.⁴² The other person therefore undeniably becomes a means (whether for sexual satisfaction, a boost in self-esteem or ego, or increased social status), never an end in him/herself:

- When you engage in a drunken hookup it is generally about fulfilling your own sexual desire. (male)
- The man-to-man conversations that I've overheard about women at parties make it clear that men do not treat women as equals, but instead as devices that are to be used once and thrown away. (female)

Many women comment on how being immersed in this culture that privileges male sexual pleasure erodes women's self-esteem:

- When a person acts in a way that favors the other partner and in return makes them feel uncomfortable, it is detrimental to your sense of self and feeling of self-worth. If someone is repeatedly acting in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable just for the pleasure of another human being, it can eat away at them and make them feel like an object and not a human. The ultimate way someone can act unjustly, whether it is sexually or in day-to-day actions, is to be untrue to themselves. When someone is untrue to himself or herself, he or she is following the crowds, stereotypes, and trends pretending to be someone they are not. (female)
- Hookup culture does affect a person's ability to reach fulfillment because all that rejection really takes a toll on a person's self-esteem. For example, if a girl hooks up with multiple guys without receiving love or care from them, she will begin to feel like she doesn't deserve those things. I have literally seen this happen. Her self-worth stoops so low she thinks all she has to offer is her body. It is sad; I hate this culture. (female)

Fourth, many students (particularly women) also express that it is highly unlikely that equal, mutual sex will occur while hooking up because the party hookup culture is predicated on a fundamental inequality between the genders. The broader social pressure to conform to current masculine and feminine norms makes it easy to treat others and themselves unjustly:

⁴² Students' recognition that their peers can so easily use another person as an object during a hookup when they do not know the other person well and lack emotional attachment lends credence to the Catholic tradition's insight that love and commitment are needed to transcend selfishness and relate to one's partner as an end in him/herself.

- Mutuality and equality cannot survive in this culture that emphasizes such power imbalances between genders. Hookups are meant to be a one-time deal, and there is definitely no concern for the wholeness of the other person. (female)
- Women are embracing as well as internalizing their role as sex objects. If women are treating themselves as sex objects, they are selling themselves short of human beings. Until men and women can both be secure in their own sexuality without basing it solely on cultural expectations, sex and relationships will continue to have unjust characteristics. (female)

The assessment of most students that hookups lack equality, mutuality, and consent and are fundamentally about using another person is easily corroborated by many research studies. Research indicates, for example, that many women experience disrespect by hookup partners and perceive that their male partners treat them like sex objects to be used and discarded.⁴³ Also, many women report that nonmutual sex in hookups ranges from unfulfilling sexual experiences focused solely on male pleasure to sexual assault. In addition, research shows that sexual mutuality is expected in long-term, committed relationships but not hookups because of a sexual double standard in which men are praised for sexual promiscuity while women who pursue hookups are denigrated.

Does Engagement with Metz's Theology Effectively Foster Holistic Development?

Evidence of the pedagogical effectiveness of my revised pedagogical approach—juxtaposing Jesus' way of being ("fully human") with the successful college student's way of being—emerged through the quality and content of students' analysis as they reflected on challenges to neighbor-love. With respect to my first two pedagogical goals, students indeed honed their ability to reflect critically on their social reality, and they recognized and challenged popular culture's dominant construals of unjust norms related to success, sex, hookups, and relationships. In their written reflections, students consistently articulated ways that conformity to the US dominant cultural

⁴³ Lisa Wade, "Are Women Bad at Orgasms?," in *Gender, Sex, and Politics*, ed. Shira Tarrant (New York: Routledge, 2016), 227–58; L. Hamilton and E. A. Armstrong, "Gendered Sexuality in Young Adulthood: Double Binds and Flawed Options," *Gender & Society* 23, no. 5 (2009): 599; E. L. Paul and K. A. Hayes, "The Casualties of 'Casual' Sex: A Qualitative Exploration of the Phenomenology of College Students' Hookups," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 19, no. 5 (2002): 654–55; Caroline Heldman and Lisa Wade, "Hook-Up Culture: Setting a New Research Agenda," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 7, no. 4 (2010): 325–26.

narrative of success and social status exacts personal and relational costs, which include emotional constriction, fear of vulnerability, a lack of self-love, and the absence of authentic connection with others.

Given the complex and often intangible dimensions of my third pedagogical objective of fostering students' holistic development and growth, assessing my approach of contrasting dominant college norms with Jesus' full humanity is far more difficult. While a longitudinal research study is needed to assess this approach more adequately, four dominant themes in students' course evaluations and informal feedback indicate reasons for optimism.

First, students repeatedly expressed that they most valued the opportunity in this particular course to explore and reflect on the dynamics of hookup culture and what constitutes full humanity and fulfillment in their relationships and lives. Overall, students voiced their clear appreciation for course material that was relevant to their lives:

- I really enjoyed discussing full humanity and how we have to take that humanity into account in order to treat someone justly in sexual relationships.
- I found that the section on fulfillment and what it means to be happy to be a great "light bulb" moment. This section greatly affected how I want to discern my life.
- The content in this course was so applicable to life and I will use the information in the future. I honestly wish everyone could take this course because it would allow them to critically reflect on their lives and help discern their future.

Second, many students reported that the course enabled them to reflect critically on their faith and spirituality, values and priorities, and their sexuality and relationships. Motivation and ability to reflect critically on oneself is the first step to discerning the desires and concrete choices that will contribute to a fulfilling life:

- It pushed me as a college student to look at my life critically and think more about the choices I'm making and relationships I'm building.
- This course allowed me to think more in depth about my own spirituality and sexuality in regard to relationships.
- This course has made me evaluate my life more than any other that I've taken. It was an incredible experience.

- The course covered a lot of material and made us think critically about the nature of sexuality. Most of the readings were very relevant to our lives and the work made us critically think about our lives and personal ethics.

Third, many students also expressed that the course altered their views on hookup culture, relationships, priorities, and life:

- This course critically affected how I want to live my life.
- This course has changed the way I think and helped me to reconsider my value system. I now look at relationships and the hookup culture in a different light than I used to. It challenged my previous viewpoints concerning premarital sex, healthy relationships, and hookups.
- I will always approach my relationships in a different manner and work towards building just relationships because of this course.

Fourth, many students expressed that the course was life changing insofar as it fostered personal growth and enabled them to make positive changes in their relationships and lives:

- I learned a lot about myself. This course opened my eyes to a lot of things that are happening around me. It has allowed me to see what I want and need in my life and the things I do not want. This course has actually helped me to be happier. This course has made me rethink my relationships, and how I want them to be better, and how I can be better.
- The class allowed me to look at things from a different perspective. This deepened my relationships with other people and allowed me to take a step back from the fast-paced reality and actually think. It provided me with an opportunity to come to terms with who I am and how I want my relationships to work out.
- I learned so much that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I was able to reflect on my life now and improve it for the future. It helped me become a better person.

In addition to anonymous, formal course evaluations, students offered informal feedback through conversations and journal reflections about concrete changes they made in their lives after engaging Metz and Farley. Students most frequently reported the following changes: (1) ending relationships that were unjust, abusive, or otherwise unfulfilling, (2) relating to their romantic partner more justly and/or making concrete changes to make the relationship more fulfilling for both parties, and (3) going out of their comfort zone to ask someone out on a date. While one might dismiss such

reports as anecdotal, students consistently reported these changes every semester that my students read *Poverty of Spirit*. Although research on students postgraduation is needed to assess whether this approach of moving from analyzing hookup culture to Metz's Jesus as fully human fosters students' holistic development over the long term, feedback thus far suggests that many students perceive that this approach fosters both critical reflection and discernment about their lives, and holistic growth. Insofar as this approach does foster such growth in regard to sexuality and relationships, it affirms the Catholic tradition's claim that sexuality affects all dimensions of a person and needs to become integrated to foster holistic development.⁴⁴

Challenges to Catholic Universities

Among the important insights we receive from college students' reflections on their campus culture is the revelation that the same US cultural values and priorities students internalize to be academically and professionally successful (hyperindividualism, egoism, emotional stoicism, invulnerability, competition, success, and a power-over mentality) are values that go hand in hand with the flourishing of hookup culture. Understanding that a number of morally problematic aspects of students' "day" and "night" lives might be connected in this way, it is encouraging to recognize that a counter-cultural narrative such as that illuminated by Metz's portrait of Christ as fully human might be more potent than we imagined. As student feedback from informal conversations, journal entries, and anonymous course evaluations has indicated, *Poverty of Spirit* has opened many students' eyes to the possibilities of courageously embracing interdependence, authenticity, vulnerability, and love. If these indicators can be trusted, the exercise of juxtaposing Christ's openhearted "way of being" in the world to the typical college student's "way of being" might continue to inspire and empower students to make changes in their lives that foster greater joy and fulfillment.

What does this mean for those of us working in various areas of Catholic higher education? If we take seriously (1) Metz's sharp critique of Western Christianity's co-optation of bourgeois values following the Enlightenment, and (2) my college students' frank accounts of the egoism and dehumanization present in college culture, we are led ineluctably to questions about the

⁴⁴ As the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education states, "Sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person—body, emotions, and soul—and manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love." Sacred Congregation for the Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, §16; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§2332, 2337; Committee on Education, *Human Sexuality*, 9.

mission, identity, and effectiveness of our colleges and universities.⁴⁵ With their affirmation of the unity between faith and reason, Catholic colleges and universities seek to create learning environments where students are challenged not only to become proficient in their career paths but to grow holistically and deepen their commitments to neighbor-love, justice, solidarity, and the common good. To the extent that my students' descriptions of "day" and "night" self-sufficiency, competitive success, and invulnerability also describe other Catholic college campuses, we might consider this a common wake-up call. What does it mean for Catholic higher education when the values undergirding academic, professional, and social success at our institutions appear indistinguishable from the status quo at public universities and actually undermine students' capacity to follow Christ's way of being in the world?⁴⁶

To rephrase these concerns more explicitly in the language of Metz: above all, my students' engagement with a portrait of Jesus as a model for the fully human person challenges Catholic universities to reexamine whether they merely profess belief in neighbor-love and faith in Christ or whether they actually cultivate countercultural environments in which undergraduates are encouraged to contrast critically the dominant contemporary "technical-dominative" narrative of reason, subjectivity, freedom, success, and fulfillment with Christian and other religious narratives. Metz's challenge to Christian churches is just as relevant to Catholic universities:

Do we show real love, or do we just believe in love and under the cloak of belief in love remain the same egoists and conformists we have always been? Do we share the same sufferings of others, or do we just believe in the sharing, remaining under the cloak of belief in "sympathy" as apathetic as ever?⁴⁷

⁴⁵ While my students' engagement with Metz's model of Christ as fully human and vision of Christian discipleship are most likely insightful and relevant for all Christian colleges and universities, I focus on Catholic institutions in this article because Metz's theology is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. Christian university mission statements are also quite diverse. I cannot, for instance, presume all Christian universities aim to foster students' commitment to Catholic conceptions of solidarity, justice, and the common good.

⁴⁶ Research indicates that hookup culture is just as normative at Catholic and other religiously affiliated colleges and universities as it is at secular institutions. Protestant evangelical colleges may be the exception to this norm. See, for instance, Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁷ Metz, *The Emergent Church*, 3.

Are Catholic universities places where administrators, faculty, staff, and students are challenged to practice virtues that fall outside of the dominant relationships of exchange, barter, and domination? Metz's account of Jesus as fully human thus provides a powerful resource for measuring the integrity of Catholic higher education's mission to care for the whole person and form students into men and women "for others." An urgent need exists for honest dialogue among students, faculty, staff, and administrators at Catholic colleges and universities about how best to create a socially and sexually just campus culture that inspires and challenges all members to become more fully human and hence more genuinely fulfilled throughout their lives.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In my experience, many students have readily criticized the injustices of hookup culture and worked toward creating a more sexually just community when they were asked to contribute their ideas and talents. For instance, at a prior university where I worked, over two hundred students between 2009 and 2011 volunteered to be interviewed and share their honest perspectives on hookups, sexual violence, and sexual justice for a video that was shown to all first-year students from 2009 to 2011. When I sought to train students to watch and discuss this DVD with discussion groups of first-year students, sixty to ninety juniors and seniors each fall volunteered significant time and energy to become trained as "peer leaders for sexual justice."