

# John Leonard Young, MD, MTh, CSC: Philosopher, Priest, and Forensic Psychiatrist

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It is a habit I have, and I cannot even recall exactly when it started. But I realized it recently when I walked into a Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest. I immediately thought of John Young and rapidly formulated a number of matters I would have liked to discuss with him right then about what I was observing. Both men and women who entered the Church in the middle of the afternoon approached icons and other sculptures and started praying. Once finished, they leaned over, kissed the objects and made the Sign of the Cross. I had previously seen members of faith groups demonstrate reverential behavior toward those they classified as saints and patriarchs of their faiths. But I had never observed such frequent use of the kiss in any church I had visited, and certainly not from men. So I wanted to know what John Young would think of it all, what hypothetical explanations he might advance to help me in my formulations. John was my reference source in matters of religious protocol and ritual.

He and I met at Yale University either in the late 1970s or early 1980s. I joined the faculty there in 1977. But John had been a postdoctoral fellow in the department of psychiatry from 1977 through 1981 and had remained to complete a fellowship in forensic psychiatry in 1982. He then joined the department as an assistant professor of psychiatry and



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stayed in that post between 1982 and 1988. I believe it was first a common interest in cultural psychiatry

that drew us together, although it was more precisely an interest in psychiatry and religion. And I was surprised, most pleasantly so, to learn that John had earned a master's degree in theology at Notre Dame University in 1970 and had been ordained as a Catholic priest in 1971 at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at Notre Dame. All of this had taken place before he embarked on his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in medicine and before he'd earned a master's degree in chemistry.

Our first jointly authored paper, with colleague Dorothy Smith, was "An Analysis of the Therapeutic Elements in a Black Church Service," which was published in 1985. It marked the beginning of a collaboration in the department of psychiatry that has continued for 30 years. This partnership has had two clearly identifiable strands: the first has been this interest in psychiatry and religion; the second has had forensic psychiatry as its theme. From time to time, we have even succeeded in melding the two strands and have produced publications covering this area of cross-disciplinary thinking. The first example was a paper entitled "Psychiatric Consultation in Catholic Annulment Proceedings." We followed that with "Experts in Church Courts: A Role Not Sacred," and "Understanding Due Discretion of Judgment in Catholic Marriage Courts." This exploration of the forensic consultant's roles in annulment courts took full advantage of John's special expertise. We had agreed that it would be especially useful for us to meet Catholic canon lawyers who were engaged in this specialized work, as well as forensic psychiatrists who testified in such cases. The latter activity took us to the home of Francis Braceland, who at the time was editing the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in addition to participating regularly in the hearings of Catholic annulment courts. Braceland, with all his distinctive fame and prestige, received us with so much grace and simple kindness that John and I have never forgotten the encounter.

We were there to talk about matters that occupied Catholic annulment courts, particularly this notion of competency to marry. John was interested in grasping what factors, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, were considered impediments to this unique and specific form of competency. I was struck by John's facility with these complicated concepts. I recognized two fundamental truths about him: first, he had obtained his bachelor's degree in philosophy and had clearly sharpened this interest and expertise

in philosophy and ethics while he was in seminary. He was also a Catholic priest and he was serious about this side of his life.

John was born in 1943 in Indiana, the first of Jay Alfred and Anne Elizabeth Neff Young's 12 children. She was a Methodist, but converted to Catholicism shortly after the marriage. Her husband was a committed Catholic who regularly attended mass several times a week. Anne seems to have been a natural artist. She painted and played violin and piano, but obviously always left enough time to take care of her children. She cooked, baked, and made clothes for them, attending to them with the sort of commitment that in my mind always deserves the status of sainthood. It was she, I finally understood after several years, who had taught John to bake bread. He occasionally brought his bread to my house as a special gift on his periodic visits.

John's father earned a PhD in chemistry and spent much of his life as a college professor before going into consulting as a forensic chemist. His connection to the Catholic faith was strong for a man of science. And I was surprised to learn that he had published a text that in John's terms purported to show how the goodness and power of God were illustrated in nature. His father was also a lector in his parish church. Religion was at the center of the family's life, and it was easy to understand that John served on the church altar from the time he was about 10 years old. He also attended Catholic schools directed by nuns and excelled academically. Debating took precedence over sports, and piano lessons were a fixture in his growing up. Eventually, he and the piano would part company, and he made up for it by playing the clarinet in his high school band.

Those early years seemed to progress comfortably enough. His peers and teachers saw him as poised and bright. He was physically healthy and displayed a natural penchant for science. He was an astute participant in science fairs and once won the privilege of competing at the national level. He enjoyed being a member of the school's debating team. It seems natural that he would end up as president of his high school graduating class and that he would attend college. College professor father and attentive artist mother had seen to that. It was obviously reinforced by his outstanding school record. When the time came, he opted for the life of a seminarian, a postulant for the Catholic priesthood. His choice was the seminary at Stonehill College, located in Easton,

Massachusetts, where he majored in philosophy. However, by the end of his first year in college, his mother was dead, the victim of a cerebral hemorrhage. He was only 19 years old then, and he found it a hard blow to take.

Some would say that his God had been preparing him to deal with this disruption, this unforeseeable loss of a mother who was only 41 years of age at the time of her passing. In becoming a priest, it is customary to decide whether one would choose the life of a diocesan priest or become a member of one of the many priestly orders available to young postulants. After consulting a number of mentors, John chose to join the *Congregatio a Sancta Cruce* (the Congregation of Holy Cross). This group was formed around 1837 in a small suburb of Le Mans, France by Basile Moreau. It is said that he decided to form a brotherhood that served the Catholic faithful. The years following the French Revolution had been a time of much upheaval in France that had left many Catholic churches in ruins and the clergy in disarray, with many of the faithful hungry for the sacraments. Moreau and his followers, both lay brothers and clergy, filled that void by meeting the religious needs of the people in a variety of contexts. Moreau sent members of his group on overseas missions to different countries, including the United States. One important development was their establishment of Notre Dame University and other institutions. John became a member of this group, likely instinctively seeing in it the image of the Holy Family. He was assured that the order would help him construct what cultural geographers these days call a therapeutic space. The order would provide crucial sustenance to support his spiritual and secular needs throughout his lifetime.

Regardless of how one looked at it, the mother's death was a serious source of disruption for the family. She died at the end of June 1962, and John stayed home that summer grieving his loss. But he returned to college in the fall to start his second year. His father seemed to formulate his own plan to confront the loneliness and the task of raising the children who remained at home. By August of that year, he married a woman who bore him another two children, in addition to bringing her own four from a previous marriage to create a new family constellation. That has led over the years to the sacred ritual of the annual family reunion that brings together over 50 family members. His father died in 2011

at the age of 91, and his step-mother continues as family matriarch at 89.

In 1962, John was concentrating on establishing his place as a young adult. He was identifiable on his college campus by the black cassock of the seminarian and his enrollment in courses of Latin, ancient Greek, and philosophy. There was, too, the occasional admonition that the young seminarians should avoid excessive fraternization with the other "lay students." His choice of this pathway and the connection to this group had come about in the usual inquiry and search that characterize the traditional senior year of high school. It started with discussions directed by mentors who asked the expected but often disorienting question of what he wanted to do. One option was to become a lay brother, a non-ordained religious. But he dispensed with that choice. The option of becoming a priest prompted him to contemplate his unworthiness. His mentors foreclosed that discussion by noting with some emphasis, "We are all unworthy." The suggestion of joining the Jesuits, often seen by others as "the shock troops of the Pope," was disconcerting; it left him cold. That was not John's idea of a family. And so when one adviser talked to him about the Congregation of Holy Cross and described it as "one big, happy family," John liked the metaphor and quickly made up his mind.

After his college sophomore year, he went to the Holy Cross Novitiate at Notre Dame, a special seminary where postulants spend 12 months engrossed in the study of Catholic ritual and traditions, as well as Church history, before returning to their home colleges to complete the remaining two years. On graduation in 1966, he was invited to spend a year at Notre Dame University to study science, as someone had noticed his weak science background. Then followed another three years of studying theology and chemistry, eventually leading to a master's in theology and one in chemistry. He finally enrolled in a doctoral program in chemistry at Notre Dame. But he then applied and gained admission to Stanford, where he studied medicine and also completed writing the thesis, which was the final requirement for the master's in chemistry from Notre Dame. From Stanford it was on to Yale in 1977 for graduate training in general and forensic psychiatry. His ordination to the diaconate had taken place in 1970 and to the priesthood on April 24, 1971. He said that the day of ordination to the priesthood is one that all priests remember.

## Biography

Once he completed his fellowship training in forensic psychiatry, John's professional development followed the pattern of the clinician, teacher, and writer who was tightly linked to an academic medical community. Over the years, he directed clinical units at Yale and at Connecticut's Whiting Forensic Institute. He became very active in the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL) and served on the AAPL leadership council and its Public Relations Committee, By-Laws Committee, Ethics Committee, and Program Committee. He also left his mark on the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the International Academy of Forensic Psychotherapy. With his interest and experience in ethics, he has served on ethics committees of hospitals, organizations such as AAPL, and the American Psychiatric Association's Connecticut District Branch. He has published over 50 peer-reviewed papers and commentaries and has presented numerous academic papers at meetings here and abroad. In 2004, he attained the rank of Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine.

Those who know John Young appreciate his natural affinity for some special areas of forensic work, such as forensic psychotherapy. There, he has perhaps found more kindred spirits in Europe than at home. I still encounter forensic staff who remember his deep interest in finding ways to alleviate stress in staff members who work in the unusual clinical forensic environment. He has displayed a sharp sense of what forensic ideas mean in the daily lives of people, real people, not just in the discourse of intellectuals. A powerful example of that appeared in his commentary on a case concerning the behavior of a clergy pastor who was accused of divulging matters, to the male spouse, that a woman had related to the pastor. The injustice of the pastor's behavior assaulted John's view of the sacred charge that all therapists, secular or spiritual, have to protect those who seek their help.

When we had sat down to discuss competency to marry, I realized how profoundly ignorant I was about what marriage meant in the eyes of my faith group. Indeed, when I think of how much commentary there is currently about same-sex marriage, I'm embarrassed to note how little serious talk there is coming from faith-group leaders about what marriage means. Yes, everyone clearly takes the opportunity to state a position for or against same-sex marriage, but few commentators base their point of view on a rigorous understanding of the commitments

that marriage may mean for them and their particularized religious faiths.

John Young built a platform on forensic matters that encroached on psychiatry and religion. In addition to the work on Catholic annulment courts, he wrote about the forensic implications of regulating pastoral counseling, evaluating coercive persuasion used in the evaluation of cults, clergy counselors and confidentiality, and the profoundly vexing problem of clergy malpractice. The topics were unusual and intriguing, and they took him into discussions that cemented our friendship and deepened our scholarly interactions.

Outside these collegial interactions, John and I lived our lives in markedly different ways. We would meet periodically for lunch or dinner. Occasionally we went to the theater or attended a concert together. I would talk about my weekend soccer matches or my latest annoying administrative problem at the medical school. He would tell me about the most recent communion service he had led or the sermon he had preached and its central theme. Sometimes I would hear about his trip to a weekend religious retreat. We had our own unique way of approaching these mutually enriching encounters.

We always took care first of all to sort out what we would eat. John approached his food with the gravity of a gourmet. He analyzed the menu with discipline and a seasoned finesse. Yes, he was analytic about it. I believe I noticed him first do it years ago when we ordered dinner together at a psychiatry meeting in Austria. I eventually grasped the essential points of this restaurant behavior. He intended to eat whatever he ordered, to savor every morsel, and to use the requisite time to do so, with studied patience. Every action was practiced and conveyed thanks for what he had before him.

There was a sense of contentment that permeated much of what he said. He talked about everybody with a deep, thoughtful respect. He let me know in many different ways that he could excuse and forgive what others around him did. I have always believed that this manner of finding good everywhere and this extensive forbearance in the face of other's falling short came about from having to think long about all that had been done in the name of Christianity.

We forensic psychiatrists love to talk swiftly and pugnaciously about respect for others. But John Young taught me in his indelibly quiet and unhurried way that the task is to treat others in ways that you see coming back to yourself. It is about having

unlimited compassion for others and thinking unceasingly about whether you have enhanced the dignity of the individual opposite you in the latest interaction. John played this out in ethics committee meetings that we have both attended over many years. What class and style he has always had! And dignity! I can see him now, walking away from me after a seminar meeting or a conversation we have just finished. Slightly bent over at the shoulders, black beret in place, and then slowly getting into the small Honda that he has driven for years. Only I would know that he is a clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University, an accomplished forensic specialist, a Catholic priest, and one of the most dignified men I have ever met.

In assessing this life that he has lived as physician, priest, and forensic specialist, he talks of his experi-

ences as being fulfilling. He uses his own genre of language to say that his work as a forensic psychiatrist has been colored by his contact with the Gospel. Each discipline has helped him see special connections to the other. He veers off on a relevant tangent to tell me about his recent activity with a group of Benedictine Sisters. He officiates at their morning mass twice a month, as they need an ordained priest to officiate at their ritual. He is proud to describe coming away from the service feeling renewed, blessed, and privileged. Before I can respond, he adds that over the years he has been "grateful for our connection." Then he goes off describing the seven prayers of the day that are said and sung at the Abbey of Regina Laudis (Queen of Praise). I had known of matins, vespers, and compline that are practiced in my church. I was ignorant of the others.