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NEW SCHOLARS

STUDENTS: OBJECT AND SUBJECT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

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Introduction

The new evangelization has become an essential missionary dimension of the Catholic Church today, particularly in the rapidly changing context of the contemporary world, where values, both secular and religious, once considered essential, continue to lose their former role in society. Much of this changeover is caused by the advancement of means of communication. In particular, these changes have had an impact on the younger generation. University students, who are exposed to the latest developments in modern technology, on whom peer pressure is most influential, and who further need to establish an identity for themselves through experimentation, form a

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particularly sensitive subculture within society and are most susceptible to the influence of changes in society.

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into four chapters and includes a general introduction and conclusion. These four chapters are divided into two parts. The first part deals with the present context of Kerala and its student population. The second part of this thesis deals with the faith formation of students in the light of the New Evangelization.

The first chapter deals with the general context of Kerala and contains an analysis of the situation. This chapter elaborately studies the social, cultural, political, and religious context of Kerala. The family structure is described in detail in order to shed light on the background of the students. A study of the multireligious context of Kerala will also find a place in this section. This will shed light on the principal religions in Kerala and the relationships among the religions. Among the religions found in Kerala, we mainly deal with Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. This provides us with useful information to understand the present context of their faith and their attitude towards us. Since the study addresses the needs of students, this section also expounds on the educational system followed in Kerala. In this section, we need to understand the context of university education, the different categories of studies, and their effects on students' lives, as well as new influences like social media.

The second chapter deals with challenges in the present context of faith formation for university students. At the beginning of this chapter, we deal with the general understanding of university students in Kerala. This chapter also explains the ministries addressing this age group. Further, we elaborately study the socio-cultural, economic, and technological changes that are affecting the students, in order to understand young people today and the pastoral challenges of the New Evangelization and faith formation. The influence of social media will be looked into. There will also be a discussion on students who have deep internal wounds and undergo immense suffering yet cannot share it with anyone. This understanding of the context will ensure that the Church's pastoral response to the students is more relevant. As the situation of the students is understood in greater detail, the need for a New Evangelisation for students will emerge from this chapter.

The third chapter deals with the exigencies of the New Evangelization in the faith formation of students. The origin and role

of the New Evangelization will be dealt with in the first part of this chapter. This section explains the documents and teachings of the last three Popes with regard to the New Evangelization and the faith formation of youth students. After this, we see the role of the New Evangelization in students' faith formation, together with the importance of faith formation itself. We also look into the integral faith formation of youth students, which can take place through New Evangelization. All these studies will help identify the problems and also look into some possible solutions that can be implemented. Hence, the role of the students as both objects and subjects of the New Evangelisation is looked into. We make use of *Christus Vivit* and teachings on New Evangelization to identify remedies that will help increase the faith of the youth students, converting them into fearless and joy-filled missionaries of Jesus.

The fourth chapter studies the various pastoral proposals for redesigning the faith formation of youth students. The faith formation of youth students through pastoral accompaniment will help address their problems and loneliness. Animators who have a semi-official position in the Church can be seen as playing a vital role in the lives of youth students, through the ongoing formation that they impart. The quality of the animators also plays a crucial role in forming youth people. Faith formation as explained in this section can be imparted to the young generation through a variety of methods such as small groups and one-to-one evangelization. This strategy of faith formation through the New Evangelization should help the young students to have a renewed passion for the faith and a new vision of the Church. It should help them discover their charisms and vocations, thereby allowing them to become good missionaries. The pastoral methodology for awakening this sense of purpose in youth is outlined in the last part of the chapter.

Novelty and Originality of the Thesis

On World Youth Day in 2003, Pope St John Paul II said that "Humanity is in urgent need of the witness of free and courageous young people who dare to go against the tide and proclaim with vigour and enthusiasm their personal faith in God, Lord and Saviour."¹ The novelty of this research is that it aims to answer this call of the Pope by focusing on transforming every Catholic student according to his or

¹ John Paul II, Holy Father's Message for the 18th World Youth Day, *Behold Your Mother*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 36th Year, (1785) n. 12-19, 13th April 2003, 6-7.

her capacity, into an instrument for the New Evangelization in his or her own life situations. Evangelization and faith formation through small groups, or even one-to-one, are more effective in the context of this age group. Through the New Evangelization in the faith formation of the students, they should be able to evangelize themselves and others. Today, with the breakdown of certain traditional modes of transmission of the faith, the awareness of the importance of faith formation through the New Evangelization for the future of the Church and Society has become clearer and stronger than before. The future mission of the church depends on how this younger generation grows up. At present, the Church's role is to carry out the New Evangelization for its own students, making them good missionaries to proclaim the word of God to the world and to give witness to the people with whom they interact daily.

The presence of the Gospel seems to be fading from social and cultural life today. The message of the Bible, to "remember your creator in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1), seems almost out of focus today. The majority of students give up the quest for God, at the very beginning of their college life. Thus, the Christian faith becomes something nominal, and Christ is not a living presence in the youth for whom this period of life is so vibrant and energetic. Christian students live their lives as though Christ were completely absent, or even an inconvenience.

This thesis proposes that this loss of the living presence of Christ makes today's Kerala students, who belong to the age group of 18-25, a fitting object for what the Church has been promoting as the "New Evangelization." Having been evangelized, they in turn can become evangelizers, or subjects of the New Evangelization. The New Evangelization invites the students to refresh their memories of the Christian faith, to encounter Christ anew, and to relive and enkindle basic truths they have learnt in their childhood. It is an attempt to capitalize on the natural qualities of this stage of life, in order to form them, enlighten them, and encourage them to take up their role as protagonists in the realm of faith again. It is an exhortation of the Church not to remain merely as hearers of the Catholic faith, but to bear witness to their faith in Christ, the Church and the Sacraments, and to develop their spiritual vision, to see the suffering face of Jesus, in the needy and suffering.

The research is focused on *Students: Object and Subject of the New Evangelization, a Theological-Pastoral Perspective in the Context of Kerala*. The New Evangelization is the latest proposed tool in modern times to

support and guide the proclamation and teaching of the Gospel in various contexts in which the Church finds herself today, especially in the faith formation of students. "The new forms of activities of the New Evangelization can lead to a rediscovery of the joy of believing and a rekindling of enthusiasm in communicating the faith."² Therefore, in the context of the Church in Kerala, this study attempts to find relevant paradigms that the New Evangelization may offer to rediscover and deepen the Christian faith of youth students.

This study should therefore help us to find solutions for how young Catholic students in Kerala can grow in faith in a multicultural environment. What challenges exist for faith formation? Why do some youth hide their Christian faith in front of people of other religions? How can we make them good missionaries?

Conclusion

To summarise the message of this thesis, therefore, I would state that this thesis aims to analyse and suggest how a pastoral situation could be created that would give the young students a challenging invitation to become fearless and joy-filled missionaries of Jesus. New Evangelization and faith formation mean a daily *imitatio Christi*, which is a consistent following of Christ, being caught up intimately in Christ. The students are not only called to be consistent as disciples of Christ but should also embark on a process of continuous faith formation through their witness among students. St. Paul sums up his life in the words: "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain" (Phil 1:21). "A true *imitatio Christi* enables a missionary to be an authentic witness of Christ in the world today, forgetting self and living for others, especially the youth, the poor, sick and marginalized."³ It makes every student into another Christ, a living template of the Gospel.

² Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, n. 9.

³ J. H. Kroeger, *Exploring Mission with Saint Paul*, 12.