

## **Ministering to Youth Today**

**Konrad Noronha SJ**

Center for Safeguarding and Human Formation (CSHF),  
De Nobili College, Pune

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### **Abstract**

Today's youth needs to be accompanied in their circumstances. The Catholic Church sees the young as one of its greatest resources because they bring a new dynamism and a fresh approach to life, are open to new possibilities and ideas and are willing to try out new solutions. There are various challenges that youth are facing today, and the Catholic youth can overcome them through education, employment and a positive attitude towards religion. Catechism of youth must aim at giving them an orientation to the communitarian aspect of life by emphasizing the strength and the joy of living together.

*Keywords:* Youth, Human Formation, Catechism

### **Introduction**

The youth today need a church that accompanies them in all circumstances and is welcoming. They look for a church that is patient and forgiving when they fail, guiding them in their life choices and helping them grow into mature and responsible Christian adulthood. They deeply desire a church that is personal, loving, and relevant. They aspire to a vision of a just, fraternal, humane, and sharing society (Arimpoor, 1982). Therefore, ministering to young people requires a comprehensive effort by the Catholic Church to serve these broad needs (Diocesan Youth Centre, 1995). The Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) of John Paul II officially expressed the importance of the Church's deep concern for caring for the youth.

Through the exhortation, Pope John Paul II reveals to the youth and the vast multitude of children and young people Jesus' message, the plan of God revealed, the call he addresses to each person, and the kingdom that he wishes to establish in this world (John Paul II, 1979, no.35).

The Catholic Church sees the young as one of its greatest resources because they bring a new dynamism and a fresh approach to life, are open to new possibilities and ideas and are willing to try out new solutions. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN)*, no 72, Pope Paul VI suggested that the Church devotes its attention to young people as they were making their presence felt in society (Dillon, 2012).

The Church has recognized youth work as part and parcel of its ministry in the world. The belief that each young person carries the germ of God's new life and that God loves the young should be the foundation of youth work (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). Much has happened recently in the Church that compels one to consider different approaches to youth ministry. This was also expressed in *Christifideles Laici (CL)* of Pope John Paul II. In this post-synodal exhortation, he wished that the youth be given particular attention. The exhortation mentioned that youth show exceptional potential and are a great challenge for the Church's future. It stated that the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself, and that youthfulness resulted from Christ's spirit (John Paul II, 1989, no.46). The life of young people with new values and new criteria for a living has changed profoundly along with society and the Church. As pastoral activities constantly change, new praxis must be applied (Mullick, 2010).

### **Youth defined**

The term youth refers to individuals who are between the age group of 15 to 24 ("Youth," para 2). It is a period of maturing biologically and psychologically, assimilating culture, and preparing to take their place in society by attending to a life choice and a life plan (Luke, 1985). Complex socio-cultural and institutional realities frequently make the young belong to different social, cultural, and religious groups (Vallabaraj, 2003).

### **The Characteristics of youth**

Young wants to be accepted, understood, loved, exalted, and heard (Vukich & Vandegriff, 2002). One of the main characteristics of youth has always been to a protest, dissent, challenge, question, and strive

for a perfect world. Young people will not accept the truths of faith merely because their elders have accepted them. They want to discuss and understand issues relating to their faith (Morissette, 1980). They take nothing for granted and call everything into question (Panackal, 1992). Behind their brazen and careless facades is a search for answers to questions that touch their existence (Kattikaran & Vettickathadam, 1978). In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente (TMA)*, Pope John Paul II makes a special appeal to the youth of our times. He mentions that Christ expects great things from young people since they are the world's future and the Church belongs to the younger generation (John Paul II, 1999, no.58).

### **Needs of youth**

Some of these needs are more lasting than others, some more intense, and some more recent. These needs arise with different intensities, change their balance from time to time, and disappear or reappear according to the person's life experience and the incentives available to them. If there is a proper meeting of these needs, it helps young people become more responsible, secure, and reliable. In contrast, the failure to meet these needs may cause frustration, insecurity, and social instability. According to Warren (1978):

Youth have a need to be accepting and accepted for who they are; for proper affirmation; to belong to a group where they can experience fellowship and fun; to express themselves; to find the importance of their individual selves; a place to be and belong; an outlet for physical and emotional energy; to have someone who can be trustful; to have a solid and a stable influence; to help others and be of service to peoples; to experience and to understand their faith correctly; to express themselves to God but don't know how; to understand family, peers, sexuality; opportunities to grow and develop into mature humans (p. 139).

### **Situations and Challenges Facing Youth**

In today's world, the lives of the young present a wide range of educational, family, employment, health, and faith experiences that depart in significant ways from those of earlier generations. They present new challenges. Some of these challenges are:

**Self-Identity.** Self-image is the core of a person's personality. The young today are constantly engaged in a struggle for their self-identity. Many fail in this struggle as they hear too many criticisms from others,

resulting in inferiority complexes. They often compare themselves with others based on intelligence, talents, abilities, physical appearance, achievements, or personal qualities. Because of this comparison, they can consider themselves useless if they don't measure up. Some long for freedom and independence from the regulated regime of family life and end up rebelling and fighting against their parents (Meares, 1973). There are still others who, because they worry about their changing moods, inability to handle bodily changes, and sadness at having lost the security of childhood, suffer from a sexual identity crisis and lack of precise goal setting in life (Jose, 1993).

**Materialistic Culture.** Youth today are increasingly trapped in the vicious circle of materialism and consumerism, forcing them to keep pace in a fast-changing world. Many Indian youths, mainly from the middle classes in urban areas, are swept along the tide of a fast-growing consumer and materialistic culture, including mass hysteria, hero-worship, and blindness to reality (Vincent, 1993).

**Mass Media.** The media plays a significant role in the life of young people. Consequently, today's youth are well informed about what is going on in their locality, city, country, and other parts of the world. Although new technology has opened up a new world, young people tend to misuse them and develop unhealthy attitudes (Andrew, 1993).

**Career.** For many young people, choosing a job is the first complex adult decision they are called to face. School and college often do not prepare them for work-life challenges. The competition and focus on a career can make them immune to contemporary issues. Consequently, it could be inferred that they can become indifferent and complacent to the growing problems in society (Suna, 2001).

**Unemployment.** Today's youth are caught in the race for jobs and success in a world little concerned with values and morality. A whole category of youth is occupied in menial jobs with little hope of sustaining themselves or their families. There is also a growing number of youths in our towns and cities who are unemployed, marginalized, and consequently at high risk of being trapped by communalism and crime. What they need is hope ("Final Statement of 4th Asian Youth Day," 2006).

**Victims of Abuse.** Many young people are also victims of sexual abuse, oppression, and violence. Because of the social stigma attached and the inability to cope with such situations, they remain silent and resigned

to their situation (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). Hence, they suffer from guilt, inferiority complexes, depression, and lack of self-confidence.

**Power/Control.** Young people do manifest the desire to dominate and control. When this desire reaches an extreme, controversies arise, gangs are formed, and there is a constant struggle to maintain their one-up position. Sometimes, they look for affiliations with political parties, politicians, and ministers to enjoy the power and prestige that comes with political clout. There is also a rising consciousness regarding the mutuality and equality of dignity and rights of man and woman, gender awareness, and sensitivity to women's empowerment ("Final Statement of 4th Asian Youth Day," 2006).

**The Problem of Intimacy.** Relationships can cause a great deal of tension among young people. There is a constant mention of rifts between parents and children and a continuous search among young people for a genuine understanding of their body and sex. Movies make a habit of projecting scenes that stimulate the sexual impulses of young people. This gives rise to masturbation and pre-marital sexual relationships. Thus, building healthy relationships is a problem facing youth (Jose, 1993).

**Lack of Aim in Life.** The lack of an aim in life is another significant problem confronting young people. Today there is a degradation of moral values; the dominant factors in society are power, money, and influence. Many young people today have lost the sense of right and wrong. They go after pleasures, enjoyments and are selfish and self-centered in their behavior. Since the Church is built on the identity of Jesus, it is necessary to look at the development of His identity to understand the growth of the Church today. This is especially pertinent for today's youth (Pickard, 2012).

### **The Youth Context of India**

India has often been described as the subcontinent of the young (Vallabaraj, 2003). Ours is a land of varied cultures, religious beliefs, and economic distinctions, and that is why Pope John Paul II said that young people were also the heirs to ancient cultures, religions, and traditions (Ecclesia in Asia, 6). In India's complex economic, political, socio-cultural multi-faith context, youth search for wealth, health, peace, happiness, liberation, and fullness (Vallabaraj, 2003). The aim of God's mission has always been uniting all things in God as new creations so that God may be all in all (Eph 4:6).

**Catholic Youth.** Catholic youth are only a microscopic minority of the youth of India. As such, they largely reflect the general characteristics of the youth of this country (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). They are no different in facing the challenges that youth at large face. Like all other youth, catholic youth yearn to play a decisive role in every sphere of life and have become conscious of their identity and of the tremendous power they possess.

**Education.** The Church can boast of a nationwide network of schools, colleges, and professional institutions; however, the number of Catholic youth who take advantage of higher and professional education opportunities is few. The reasons could vary from lack of proper guidance and ambition to pursue high goals to lack financial stability (Rosario, 2010).

**Employment.** A small section of Catholic youth from the higher classes and cities are equipped with the necessary skills and the benefits of the current process of economic liberalization. Youth in the cities have the luxury of choice, yet a whole group of working youth have menial jobs. The majority of the youth who live in villages and rural areas have no option but to manage with the limited income from the less productive agricultural land and are mostly caught up in poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. They constantly struggle to assert their self-identity and claim their share of the benefits of development (Vallabaraj, 2003).

**Attitude Towards Religion.** Today, a large proportion of our Catholic youth are so attracted by the materialistic and consumeristic culture that religion fails to attract their attention. Many youngsters look with suspicion and distrust at organized religion. They feel that religion is primarily a matter of personal conviction and commitment. Young people perceive the Church very differently and speak of it as an institution that suits older people, boring in its worship and outmoded in its norms. They practice their faith in a very superficial way, and only a few actively participate in the life of the Church (Rajan, 2004). Due to insufficient faith formation, many young people tend to become pious ritualists, and some even experience a certain kind of disenchantment with the institutional Church due to a feeling of not being wanted or recognized by church authorities who sometimes exhibit an authoritarian style of leadership (Vallabaraj, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

Personal religion plays a significant role in people's lives, including youth. Young people are going to form the backbone of the future Church. Hence the Church cannot neglect young people. She cannot accept youth only for their labor while leaving their needs and problems unaddressed. This would not augur well for the mission of the Church (Dhinakaran, 2010). Therefore, the Church today faces a tremendous challenge and must make adjustments as it learns to live in an unchurched modern culture. Youth ministry is a special ministry of the Church. Keeping this in mind, the Church needs to rise and become a significant and relevant voice and offer the outlets for finding meaning in this world (Rajan, 2002). The Church today needs to look at youth from a modern perspective. She needs to portray herself as a perfect example for youth to emulate and should be an instrument to uplift modern youth towards holistic growth.

Rather than just come across as a dispenser of grace through sacraments and right doctrines, the Church should work towards establishing an environment that would allow grace the space to move and grow towards an integrated and holistic Christian life (Warren, 1978). The Church can and should be the community where youth can grow, experiment, and experience the complexities of life within the freedom and love of the church community. They need the kind of love that always has a listening ear and the freedom that offers the space to grow and make mistakes without condemnation. What is needed is a church that has taken its ministry seriously to youth and has committed adult leaders who can see each young person as a unique human being created and loved by God (Holderness, 1981).

Catechism of youth must aim at giving them an orientation to the communitarian aspect of life by emphasizing the strength and the joy of living together. They must be made to understand that the Church exists as a community, and hence the members of the Church are called to live in communion with Christ and their fellow human beings (Choondal, 2012). Youth ministers must develop intimacy with youth and help them confide in the guidance of the Church by dealing with their problems with parental concern. The Church must include youth in the ministry of God as active participants. They must be empowered in the Church for it helps them develop their leadership skills and thus enhance their personality. Hence, the role of the Church is to turn young people into better persons with the sincere help of her social

institutions, youth animators, and youth ministry. This would play an important, vital and indispensable role in guiding and molding young people.

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