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RELIGION IN TODAY'S YOUTH'S LIVES

Today's youth is exposed to a world of various distractions that can steal the significance of the greater, more important things in life – religion is one of them, if not the most essential. Religion has traditionally been a prominent aspect of personal and social identity. Socially, it stands for a set of beliefs, values, and practices forming an ultimate framework of meaning and order, binding people into one community rather than another. Individually, religion locates a person within a social context, conferring a sense of belonging, a way to understand the self in relation to the world, and a purpose to life [3, p. 7].

Nowadays, our generation may be characterized by many distractions from reality. All this belittles our knowledge in religious life, and takes away from us even the last hope for any improvement in it. Observing today's youngsters, it can be proven that religion is not as practised and celebrated by this generation, with the lack of role models, a technological effect, and supporting statistics that witness the discontinuation of many of our past religious traditions [5].

Role models can have a very large effect on generations before them. These days, the older generation is not able to lead the youth as they used to, having no opportunity to serve as role models, thus, making our generation not only lose faith in itself, but in one another, and the future ahead of them.

As a result, the young reject faith and change their attitude towards life following in adults' footsteps, adopting their inactivity, indifference, aloofness and injustice as well as their reluctance to impart knowledge and experience to the rising generation; since the latter is seen both as a minimal effort in continuing religious practices and acquiring theological wisdom and a vague chance to sustain religion existence and development.

One more reason for youngsters to ignore religion and its basic principles is the fact that many young people find themselves in a condition of radical instability at

present. On the one hand, they live in a one-dimensional universe in which the only criterion is practical utility and the only value is economic and technological progress. On the other hand, these same young people seem to be progressing to a stage beyond this narrow universe, nearly everywhere evidence can be given of a desire to be released from it [2].

Another cause for the young's unawareness of religious morals is their living in an environment devoid of truly human relationships; consequently, they suffer from loneliness and a lack of affection, mutual understanding, respect and support. This is a widespread phenomenon that is regarded to be independent of life-style: it is manifested in oppressive regimes, among the homeless, and in the cold and impersonal dwellings of the rich [1]. Young people today are notably more depressed than in the past; this is surely a sign of the poverty of human relationships in families and in society of the time.

No doubt, large numbers of today's youth are very worried about an uncertain future being influenced by a world in which human values are in chaos being no longer rooted in God; the result is that these young people are very much afraid of the appalling problems in the world: the threat of nuclear annihilation, vast unemployment, the high number of marriages that end in separation or divorce, widespread poverty etc. Their worry and insecurity become an almost irresistible urge to focus on themselves, and this can lead to violence when young people are together – a violence that is not always limited to words [1].

Besides, most youngsters being unable to recognize any meaning in life try to find an escape from loneliness turning to alcohol, drugs, the erotic, the exotic etc. At that, Christian education is faced with the huge challenge of helping these young people discover something of a virtue in their lives.

Finally, a vague sort of generosity is characteristic of many youngsters. Filled with enthusiasm, they are eager to join in popular causes. Too often, however, these movements are without any specific orientation or inner coherence. It is important to channel this potential for good and, when possible, give it the orientation that comes from the light of faith [4].

There are also a number of positive signs, which give grounds for encouragement. Religion can trace young people who are outstanding in every way – in religious attitude, moral behaviour, and academic achievement. When we look for the cause, we often discover an excellent family background reinforced by both Church and school. There is always a combination of factors, open to the interior workings of grace.

Some youngsters are searching for a deeper understanding of their religion; as they reflect on the real meaning of life they begin to get answers to their questions in the Gospel, for example. While others have already passed through the crisis of indifference and doubt being now ready to commit – or recommit – themselves to a religious way of life. These positive signs prove that a sense of religion can develop among today's young people being even more deeply rooted in them [1].

For a great number of the young a critical look at the world (with its value of science and technology, modern civilization and material goods) they are living in raises crucial questions concerning the religious plane: religion and its resistance to the pressing problems afflicting humanity, the depth of faith and the essence of a meaningful life, responsible commitment transformation into effective action, spiritual growth, apostolic work, service for others, social injustice etc.

The thing is that nowadays the youth appeals, it can be said from a historical point of view, the return to religious roots of their ancestors. But, unfortunately, often the reverse side is a high degree of religious intolerance towards people of other faiths that results in young people's indifference to the faith. Though, it is essential for today's young people to display a high degree of tolerance in their actual behaviour towards other religions, instead, as the quality of the relationship between man and man in this field depends on what direction to take for the development of our society. Hereby, it is encouraging that the majority of youngsters admit man belonging to any confession (either Islam, Christianity or Buddhism) without considering that to be a barrier to adoption or assistance.

In conclusion, there is a strong necessity to repeat the basic essentials over and over again, integrating what has already been learned, and responding to the

questions which come from the restless and critical minds of the young, breaking through the wall of indifference, and at the same time being ready to help those who are doing well to discover a “better way”, offering them knowledge that also embraces any religion. The specific methods and the steps used to accomplish the educational philosophy of the school will, therefore, be conditioned and guided by an intimate knowledge of each student’s unique situation based on an adequate account of religion during adolescence that requires attention to intergenerational social bonds, changing family structures, valued practices and groups, community norms and proscriptions and transactional relationships between parents, children and peers, among other concerns.

References

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