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Youth mission

David Fernandez Nuñez, C.M.

Introduction

Ministry to Youth in Spain faces two very important challenges: first, evangelical inculturation and second, just as important, a lack of pastoral workers attuned to the world of the young.

Deep sociological changes, weakening much of the traditional pastoral involvement of youth, move through the world of the young Spaniard. Some pastoral workers lack any real enthusiasm as they face the increasing difficulty of building bridges to communicate between two worlds that seem irreconcilable: the Christian message of faith that wants to develop the involvement of young people and the reality of their world today.

We need to ask ourselves: Are young people a single, tight sociological group? Does a youth culture exist that is completely separate and different from the world of adults?

Orizo¹ says that age is an important and formative element shaping attitudes and values. Sociological data shows us that people become more conservative and traditional in their attitudes as they age. And attitudes that are more revolutionary, open, radical or secular are decisively those of the young.

Citing Andres Orizo himself; *"Thus, youth groups prefer values like health, adaptability to change, consideration for friends and free time, materialistic values, care of the environment, scientific advances and technology, permissiveness, potential for political action (illegal strikes and the occupation of buildings and factories), European identity. The family, religion, politics, authority, the pride of being Spanish and the struggle for country are less important values"*.

Two youth subcultures

The sociological data indicates (according to Orizo) that all young people don't follow one pattern in a series of significant values. The constellations of values are not the same for the 18 - 24 year old group as for those 25 - 34. The 18 - 24 year olds declare themselves more satisfied with life as it is, and don't seem to share attitudes and norms as much with their partners. They say they are more to the right in matters political than the 25 - 34 year olds. They seem to have little interest in politics, don't talk about politics, and are indecisive in their voting. And even further to the right are those 15 and up who say they are less inclined to divorce, abortion, or extra-marital affairs. Those 18 - 24 give the best ear to the Church, which changes when they are 25 - 34.

Those between the ages of 18 and 24 are the ones who give most attention to the voice of the Church, a situation which changes immediately between the ages of 25 and 34.

It is curious to note concerning matrimony that there is a return to the traditional style among most young people. Young Spaniards have a greater preference now for religious marriages, but this does not imply that in regard to being a couple they are much freer.

¹ Andrés Orizo. *New Values of the Spanish People: Spain in the European Survey on Values 1991*. Saint Mary Foundation, Madrid

There was a significant increase in the acceptance of complete sexual freedom between 1981 and 1990.

The youth group

Javier Elzo proposes this hypothesis: there is no homogeneous category of youth justified by the sociological analysis. This does not exclude the possibility of some comparative study of young people, their behavior or values. He identifies six sociological groups among the young:

Group 1 - Passive, uninvolved

These young people are passive, “lazy,” not involved in institutions, and do not trust or work in any new social movements. These young people typically think only about having a good time, enjoying themselves without any of the complications reality imposes. According to the data, 10.11% of youth belong in this category -- mostly male, somewhat below the median age. 8% are from the higher social classes, and many live in big cities. A variety of reasons make us think of this group as people “without feeling,” members of the “urban tribe” very similar in some ways to the “X generation.”

Group 2 - “Integrated”

34.42% of youth belong to this largest of the six typical groups.

Mostly female, younger than the others, and of a lower social class, this group sits at the political center. They give high marks to Catholic religious institutions, are idealistic and willing to take on responsibilities. They have more confidence in institutions and social movements [especially those that conform to their religious beliefs] than their contemporaries. Christian groups [parishes, catechists, etc] gain members from this group.

Group 3 - Postmodern

The survey indicates that 24.3% of Spanish youth should be included in this group. This group of young people have a high academic level and are older, above the median age. They have the preferences of leftist youth, and show a little interest in the institutional dimension of religion. They are very interested in certain social movements, like conscientious objection, pacifism, ecology, the gay movement, and the feminist movement. They have little confidence in institutionalized movements such as politics, the armed forces, and the church. They are very aware of the marginal people in today’s society who are unemployed. They are clearly permissive with moral issues of a personal or private type (such as sexual activity and the use of alcohol and drugs), but more rigorous about behavior in the political arena.

Group 4 - “Reactionary”

According to the data of the sociological study, 15% of those interviewed belong to this group. The first and most important characteristic of this group is its negative stance on current social movements in the society: for example, pacifists, the rebellious, human rights advocates, those for racial equality, for support to AIDS victims, the gay and feminist movements, ecologists and antinuclear advocates, among many others. This is a clear portrait of youth strongly opposed to sexual liberty or abortion.

The broader profile is of a young man of the middle class (and including the low-middle class) who lives in a population of less than ten thousand. He is reactionary to the new social movements, with the very “traditional,” and hereditary, morality of his family, and very much to the right.

These Spanish youth are the most intolerant toward immigrants, refugees, the marginal, etc. Some of them become violent and are called 'fascists' by their contemporaries.

Group 5 - Radical

This appears to be a minority within Spanish society. There are some regions in which they are more numerous, and united to the nationalist radical movement. According to the study that we mentioned, they represent 2.17% of the youth, but this group is the most homogeneous of all.

This group is represented mainly by males somewhat below the median age, with very little membership in the upper and middle-upper social classes. University students with a high percentage of scholastic failure abound in this group. They are very radical in politics, anti-institutional, yet insist that the government solve their problems. They reject institutional religion, and the sociologists indicate that they are the remains of a kind of youth who are doomed to disappear.

Group 6 - "Liberal Conservative"

This is the most conservative and traditional group of all. According to the survey, some 13.86% of those interviewed belong to this group. In many things they are conservatives, but they come close to "pasotismo" in justifying their behavior -- such as getting drunk, being rowdy and making noise in the streets at night, being sexually active outside of marriage, etc. They reject the use of drugs. They do not appraise highly, and sometimes negatively, new social movements. This group is not critical of institutions, but are people who use society simply for their own purposes. They are competitive, but without much might. They are a type off "social parasite".

Each kind of group (within this outline we've sketched) can be of quite significant when the time comes to plan for and organize pastoral work with the youth.

Are Culture and Evangelization related?

Some time ago, the Church intensified its reflection on this question. Pope Paul VI wrote
the rift between the Gospel and culture is, without doubt, the drama of our era. EN.20

Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, proposes the synthesis of this process of thinking and the beginning of a new ecclesial thrust. The Encyclical identifies the mission of the Church as Evangelization (¶ 14) highlighting three fundamental elements: the missionary (¶ 23); the evangelical humanization of the cultures (¶ 18-20); and the liberation of the oppressed (¶30-39).

The following paragraph is specially significant:

Evangelization loses much of its impact and its efficacy if the specific people to whom it is directed are not taken into account; if their language, signs and symbols are not used; if it does not respond to the questions that they ask; and if it does not get down to real concrete life situations. (¶ 63)

More recently, John Paul II has presented inculturation as one of the fundamental aspects of the total evangelical action of the Church, alluding also to the reciprocity of the relationship between the Gospel and the cultures to which it is preached.

It is good to remember that cultures are not directly evangelized, the people in the culture are. Evangelization works freely in one culture or another. The servants of the Gospel cannot impose their own cultural frameworks or structures; instead, they must be witnesses to the creativity of the Spirit who is also present and working in everyone else. surely it is the people of each culture who allow the Church and the Gospel to take root in their lives.

The practice of inculturation in the youth cultures

Practical substitutes are impossible. What is certain is that to inculturate oneself is not to disguise oneself or make believe that one is what one is not. A man 50 years old or more cannot make himself out to be 20. All the things he does for inculturation will be done from his own values and experiences. He cannot fake it. This is a major difficulty with direct inculturation

The only valid point of departure is to decide to work honestly from inside the shared experience of the Christians and unbelievers in a secular and significant culture. The experience thrives in a ground of respect and friendship, inviting mutual dialogue and the sharing of common problems. This exchange roots itself in a sharing of one's own life and in a commitment to collaboration in the work of liberating and developing the people, and in the attempt to share values and experiences.

Youth mission

All evangelical tasks presuppose the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the best answer to the needs and hopes of every person and every society. In particular, the Youth Mission intends to:

- 1- Bring about a personal encounter of each young person with Jesus Christ, The Way, The Truth and The Life.
2. To help the young people to respond with courage and generosity to the God of Jesus Christ whom they are searching for, who calls them and who needs them.
3. To foster the integration of the young people into parish life, in groups already existing, or in those groups that result from the mission, those groups that will help the young people to mature in their personal faith within the activities of the Youth Ministry (for example, Vincentian Marian Youth, or another group that they would prefer.)

I. Participants

We gather all the youth of the parish. We form two groups in this way:

- Adolescent Youth (14 - 17 years old)
- Youth (18 years old and up)
- Another possibility is to work with all the ages together.]

In this way, depending on the predominance of one age group or the other, we should have a determined Youth Mission. (It does not work the same when the larger group is made up of adolescents than when the group is mostly young adults. Generally, when the young adults are more active, the dynamics of the youth mission seems to have a more profound impact. Special attention should be paid to the groups of older youth, because it is from them that the moderators of the young adult and pre-adolescent groups will emerge. They are the ones who will minister to the youth of the parish.)

II. Gathering

This invitation extends from the time of the pre-mission, with its home visits, thru the discussions on the process of the Mission and contact with the people who are close the parish. These people would have been making a point of inviting the youth to get involved in the total dynamic of the mission, especially in the parts that would be of most interest to the young.

During the mission, the gathering of the youth of the parish is done by::

- the priest and parish team
- involved youth invite those not involved
- the missionaries from outside

The environments where these encounters might happen are:

- The study centers (visited by the missionaries the week before the beginning of the special activities for youth.)
- Work centers
- Amusement Centers (Missionaries and youth involved in the parish visit the discotheques, Pubs, night clubs, during the week end to invite the youth)
- In the Christian Family Assemblies
- In the visits of the missionaries to the houses, whether it be to visit the sick, or to visit an assembly...wherever they can encounter the youth and invite them to participate.
- During the general larger activities of the mission (handing out flyers)
- Informal contact (planned or accidental) with the youth to invite them to gather together.
- Radio and TV programs.

The advertisements for the gathering could be:

- * Youth mission posters
- * Personal letters sent to all the youth of the parish by the pastor or the missionaries.
- * Handouts with a schedule and invitation to the mission.
- * Advertisements on the radio and TV.

III. Schedule for organizing the youth mission

A) During the days of immediate preparation:

The missionaries make contact with the parish's more involved youth in their groups and with other groups not strictly of the young. We help them to be aware of this moment of grace with which the Mission would bless their participation, especially, if they could gather the others in to:

- The Christian Family Assemblies (some of them can be the animators, others can offer their homes for the assemblies)
- The meetings on Friday and Saturday of the first week are especially for them.
- The general gatherings of all the youth held the second week of the mission.

B) During the first week of the mission

Besides participating in the Assemblies, as we have mentioned, the presence of youth is important to encourage, and we need to seek out ways of making contact with young people at work, in school, in the places where they have fun. . . We look to connect with the natural leaders in this group, advertise the Mission for youth. Perhaps during the week end, we might have a poster contest.

C) During the second week of the mission

Besides participating in the general activities of the mission, (especially in the Eucharist and Opening Sermon in the Church), we suggest daily meetings.

In dealing with the dynamics of the youth mission, go ahead and look for an experience of faith. They should not be standardized catechetical instructions centered on intellectual knowledge, but rather, lived experiences shared interactively by the young people. Songs with messages are basic, as well as moments of prayer, group dynamics, audiovisual aids. . . Make sure the environment is welcoming and gives the right motivation for participating.

IV Follow-up to the mission.

- Plan only one concrete pastoral project for the youth (suggest the Vincentian Marian Youth)
- Find a team of youth Ministers, organizers and coordinators
- Set the organization of groups, the times, places of meetings, and the Youth Pastoral Moderators assigned to each group.
- Make sure the Missionary Team (or Youth Pastoral Team) is present for the orientation and formation of the Youth Pastoral Moderators.

Translation: Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.