

REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF NORTH AMERICAN YOUTH

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This North American regional report focuses on the conditions of youth in the United States and Canada. In particular, it describes the three dominant institutions affecting the lives of young people: the troubled and weakened family; the resource-rich, but uneven elementary and secondary schools; and the highly sexualized, media-driven cultural world of the young. An examination of the transmission of the faith relies heavily on a recent, large-scale study of religion and U.S. teenagers, a study which suggests a serious breakdown of the current efforts of U.S. Catholics to transmit the faith to their children. The final section of the report lays out the blueprint of a Church-wide program to evangelize the young and, in the process, to aid in the revitalization of the faith of adult Catholics.

Currently in the United States and Canada there are 330 million people, 298,000 million residing in the U.S. [U.S. Census, 2006] and 32 million in Canada [Statistics Canada, 2006]. The populations of both countries are heavily Christian. The U.S. is the fourth largest Catholic country in the world with 67 million Catholics, 23% of its total population (Allen, 2005). With its large percentage of French Canadians, Catholics make up the principal religious group in Canada with more than 14 million or 43% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Together, Catholics represent one-quarter of North America's population.

For four centuries both nations have experienced extensive immigration and have had a good deal of experience responding to different ethnic and racial groups. Currently the racial composition of North America is 81% White and Hispanic, 12% Black, 4% Asian and 3% a combination of Native Americans, Arabs and Pacific Islanders (C.I.A., 2005).

Relative to the industrialized Western World, North America has a high birth rate, with 14.1 births per 1000 people and an average of 2.08 births per female in the U.S., and with 10.8 births per 1000 people and a somewhat lower rate, 1.61 births per female, in Canada. While slightly inferior to Western Europe, North American has a relatively low infant death rate. The U.S. has a rate of 6.5 infant deaths per 1000 births. Canada does better with 4.75 infant deaths per 1000 births (C.I.A., 2005).

The Troubled Family

There are 88.3 million young people nineteen years old or younger in North America. 80.3 million reside in the U.S. and 8 million in Canada (C.I.A., 2005). The North American family, however, has in the modern era gone through significant shifts and appears to be a less secure institution for providing children with the supports they need to reach maturity. To grow up in a family in 1806 compared to in 2006 are radically different experiences. Thirty years ago, the American sociologist, James S. Coleman, wrote about changes in children raising and particularly how, in a dominantly agrarian society, children were within the eye-sight of their parents until they left home in their late teens. Coleman observed (1974) that two generations ago the American father left the home, presumably to work in a factory or office, and one generation ago the mother left the home, also to work in a factory or office. In the intervening three decades, these trends have increased. For instance, currently in Canada the female work force participation rate is 60%, up from 31% in 1965. More relevant to family life, now 71% of married women with children six years old or young work outside the home. In 1965, the percentage was 25%. (Canada, 2006). In the U.S. in 2003, the same percentage of women, 60%, was in the workforce. Nearly 75% of them were mothers of young children (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2006). Today, the space previously filled by the family is being filled by schools, the media and the street.

It is not only less contact time between parents and children that has changed. In the past, typically a son expected to do the same work as his father, and a girl the same work as her mother. Much of family life was parents teaching their young the knowledge and skills they would need in adult life. Today the tailor's son grows up to be a software engineer. A housewife's daughter is a trial lawyer. The knowledge-and-skill transfer between generations has been greatly reduced. In fact, in many North American homes children are teaching their parents how to negotiate their way around the

Internet, program the family's VCR to record TV shows and perform other marvels of the technology age. It would appear that along with this change in roles has also come a reduction in parental authority.

Perhaps because of their personal family histories of migrating from Europe, Asia and South and Central America, North American families frequently change their residents. For instance, in 2003, 14% of Americans moved. While most of these residential moves were within the same county, a solid percentage of the moves were across state lines and even across the continent. In the same year, 2003, fully one-third of Americans between the ages of 20 and 29 changed their residences (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). All of this residential movement, largely driven by economic factors, takes its toll on families. One of the primary effects is that North American families are often living in relative isolation from the normal family support system. Children are raised at a distance from grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. The lack of 'blood ties' means less supervision by individuals who are truly concerned with a child's wellbeing. When troubles occur, families are forced to cope with them with reduced human resources.

Another factor affecting the family is the reduction in size. As the U.S. and Canada shifted from being primarily agricultural countries to more urban, industrialized nations, the number of children in families has shrunk. In the U.S. in just a few decades from 1970 to 2000, the average number of people per household decreased from 3.14 to 2.57. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 'Households have decreased in size, with the most profound changes occurring at the extremes, the largest and smallest households (2000)'. Over roughly the same period [1971 to 2000], the size of the average Canadian family declined from 3.7 individuals to 3.0 (Canadian Statistics, 2004). However, masked by these statistics is the dramatically growing trend of the single parent family. Since the 1960s, the rate of divorce in North American has increased significantly. In 2002, in both the U.S. and Canada there were 38 divorces for every 100 marriages (Statistics Canada, 2004; Divorce Reform, 2002). Curiously, in Catholic Quebec, the divorce rate in 2002 was 48 divorces per 100 marriages. In both countries the sharp upturn in the rates of divorce seems to have peaked, and even begun to decline, albeit from quite high rates. This positive development, however, is somewhat off-set by the sharp rise in single parent families in recent decades.

In 1960 only 9% of U.S. children lived in single-parent families. By 2004 this figure jumped to 28% (Catholic On-line, 2005). The recent increase of single-parent families appears to be growing as a result of three trends:

divorce, out-of-wedlock births to teenage mothers and out-of-wedlock births to women who chose not to marry. In 2002, there were 13.8 million single family households with 21.5 million children under 21 years of age. In effect, over one quarter of American children live in this condition. Eighty-four percent of these families were led by women and 16% were led by men (U.S. Census, 2003). In Canada, 15% of the families with children are lone-parent families and another 6% are common-law couples with children (Department of Justice Canada, 2000). A trend toward fatherless families leveled off in the late 1990s, but the most recent data show a slight increase. In 1960 only 9% of U.S. children lived in single-parent families. By 2004 this jumped to 28% (Catholic On-line, 2005). The difficulties and demands of nurturing and training children are greatly compounded for single parents since so many of them face severe economic problems. According to UNICEF (1996), over 50% of the solo-mother households in the U.S. and Canada are raising their children in poverty.

What these data show is that the North American family life that has emerged in these two wealthy but socially experimental countries is a very fragile structure for use in the preparation of their future citizens. It is debatable whether the looser bonds of marriage and the new family formats are providing healthy conditions for the adults involved. There is no doubt, however, that this social experiment is bringing strong negative effects to the children and youth who are involved.

Education

Both the U.S. and Canada have highly decentralized educational systems, with authority resting with the individual states and provinces. Both countries spend heavily on pre-collegiate education, with the U.S. States spending an estimated \$9000 dollars per pupil in 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, Table 33). Both countries have a mixed system of public, private and religious elementary and secondary schools. A major, and in the U.S. increasingly controversial, difference, however, is that in Canadian state funds are used to support religious schools. Currently, in the U.S. the Catholic Church annually educates about 2.5 million students or a shrinking 5% of all American students [U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As the costs of education increase, so, too, does the pressures on U.S. Catholic dioceses to close schools.

While North America is host to some of the finest universities and colleges in the world today, its elementary and secondary schools are, at best,

uneven. This is particularly true of the U.S. Since 1995, there have been a number of international studies of school achievement at three grade levels – fourth, eighth and twelfth – in science and mathematics. While U.S. fourth graders perform adequately, by the eighth and twelfth grades their academic performance on a comparative basis is quite weak. For instance, in the 1995 test of knowledge in mathematics and science, U.S. twelfth grades ranked near the bottom, 19th of 21 countries (Schwartz, 1998). On the other hand, Canadian elementary and secondary students have performed quite respectfully on these international tests.

There are a myriad of explanations for this weak performance of U.S. students. Among them is the fact that U.S. junior high and high school students spend much of what is a relatively short school day on nonacademic activities, such as homeroom, driver training, AIDS awareness, counseling and consumer affairs. In order to earn a high school diploma, U.S. students have only to spend 41% of their time devoted to core subjects (Bracey, 1998). Another issue is that many of these same high school students are employed, typically working not to add to family income, but to pay for cars and luxury items. 55% of 12th graders in the U.S. report working three or more hours daily at a paid job. This percentage is three times the international average. At the same time, U.S. high-school seniors report spending substantially fewer hours on homework than the international average for students in 12th grade (Kiyosaki and Lechter 2001). While there is a solid core of disciplined and high achieving students in the U.S., the overall picture is of an undemanding educational system which is reaping mediocre results.

Where once education in North America was a great economic escalator and social leveler, it is increasingly becoming a source of sharp social stratification. In the U.S., a college degree of almost any kind divides one from those who have only a high school degree or less. The demands of an information society versus those of our earlier agricultural and industrial society are closely linked to the skills required to negotiate a college degree. Those young people, who through poor educational opportunities or lowered family expectations, do not go to college live in a different social and economic world than their friends who go on to college. Compared with college graduates, high school graduates earn substantially less, divorce at twice the rate, smoke more, get less exercise, do less volunteer work and vote less (Pell Institute, 2004). These are just a few indicators of a growing educational gap that portend a dangerous social chasm.

For a number of years there has been concern expressed by North American educators about the poor academic performance of female stu-

dents. Of particular concern had been the academic achievement drop off of young women during the high school years. However, in recent years the situation has changed quite rapidly. Thirty years ago male students made up 58% of U.S. college undergraduates. Today that percentage has shrunk to only 44% of the college population. The majority of National Merit scholarships, as well as college academic scholarships, currently go to young women. Boys constitute the majority of high school dropouts, as much as 80% in some U.S. cities. Boys and young men are one and a half years behind girls and young women in reading ability, a deficiency which continues into college and the workplace (Gurian, 2006). The recent rise in predominance of females in Canadian colleges and universities suggests that a similar trend may be occurring north of the U.S. border (Statistics Canada, 2004).

Psychologists suggest that this lowered educational performance and rise in anti-social behavior among boys is due to changes in the character of schools and the workplace and, also, a result of the lack in so many U.S. homes of a male role model (Thompson & Kindlon, 1999; Gurian & Stevens, 2005). Because of the changes in the modern workplace, that is, its move from farm and factory to office and highly technical trades, more young men are forced to stay in school longer and to focus more on the manipulation of symbols and other cognitive tasks. While many have adjusted, many young men are not, finding escape in joining male gangs, in sexuality, and escapist diversions, such as drugs and videogames. These young men who will neither find a place in the modern U.S. economy nor find stability in marriage life represent social dynamite.

The Sexualized World of North American Youth

Fifty years ago, the Canadian communications scholar, Marshall McLuhan quipped, 'When a child goes to school today, he interrupts his education (Personal communication, March, 1955)'. The mid-20th Century world to which McLuhan was referring included radio, TV [then in its infancy], records, films and print media. Since then the media alternatives available to the young have proliferated enormously to include broadcast, cable and satellite TV and radio, the VCR, the DVR, tapes, CDs, digital recordings, personal computers and the various on-line activities they allow [e.g., the World Wide Web, e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, video streaming], both TV-based and handheld video games, iPods with huge banks of stored music, and portable cell phones capable of accessing the Internet and sending and receiving video content. As they leave home for

school each morning, some sort of miniaturized, portable media device is a standard part of North American adolescents' 'equipment'.

In 1998, a study (Nielsen Media Research) reported that U.S. adolescents view nearly 17 hours of television a week, which is more than three times their weekly time devoted to homework. A 1999 study (Roberts) found that American children spend more than 38 hours a week using such media as television, videos, video games, music and computers. By the time a young person has graduated from high school, he has spend many more hours viewing television show than hours spent in the classroom.

Numerous studies have reported on the negative effects of the current media content on children and youth. While most of these have dealt with television and film violence, a growing number of reports have focused on the sexual content. The most recent study found that among the top 20 most watched television shows by teenagers, 70% include depictions of sexual behavior, such as kissing, fondling and sex talk (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). Further, 67% of all network television prime-time shows include sexual content, averaging five scenes with sex in them every hour. In a one-week sample of all TV programming, there were 88 scenes in which intercourse was depicted or strongly implied. This study further reported that the sexual content of television programs has nearly doubled since 1998. The media's unrelenting message of sexual exploration to the young is hardly countered by the educational system. While the public schools in the U.S. have in recent decades made a major effort at what is called 'sex education', the content of the courses and materials is descriptive and morally neutral. Currently, there are some 93,300 schools in the U.S. and only 700 of them have adopted the 'abstinence-only' sex education approach (Christian Law Association, 2005). Unable or ill-equipped to deal with the spiritual and moral aspects of human sexuality, the educational aim of the sex education courses is physical health, including stress reduction. However, whatever efforts the schools are making appears to be washed out by the unrelenting messages of sexual license that surround North American children and youth.

In recent years the popular media's line between mainstream entertainment and pornography has become blurred. Currently, pornography of all sorts, catering to a wide range of sexual interests and tastes, is free and instantaneously available on the Internet. Children and youth are particular targets and they often unintentionally come across the most explicit material. Also, many North American children have become addicted to pornography and one of their major online activities is the swooping of

'porn sites'. With only a slightest effort, children can view heterosexual and homosexual intercourse, fellatio, cunnilingus, masturbation, bestiality, sadomasochism, rape and incest (Savino, 2001). It is well recognized that modern American culture is permeated with sexual messages, but the growth of the pornography industry and its effects on North American children have not been widely recognized, let alone responded to.

While the causal link between a sexualized culture and the actual sexual behavior of pre-adults is empirically difficult to establish, the sheer increase of sexual activity by the young is not. While a recent U.N. report (2005) announced that early sexual activity is climbing around the world, in North America the last decade has seen a slight reduction in teenage sexual activity. Nevertheless, this premarital sexuality activity among the young is a reduction from an historically extremely high level. Currently, in the U.S. 61% of high school seniors report having had sex (SIECUS, 2005). Forty-two percent of boys and 33% of girls between fifteen and seventeen have had intercourse. Eighty-five percent of the one million U.S. teen pregnancies each year are unplanned. One in twelve children is no longer a virgin by age thirteen. Twenty-three percent of teens think it is embarrassing to admit they are virgins (Christian Law Association, 2005). In Canada, according to a new study (The Daily, 2005), an estimated 12% of boys and 13% of girls have had sexual intercourse by ages 14 or 15. The same study reported that an estimated 28% of 15- to 17-year-olds said they had sexual intercourse at least once in their lives.

The consequences of this sexualized culture are chilling. The U.S. and Canadian profiles of teenage sexual activity are quite similar. However, U.S. teenagers have nearly double the rate of pregnancies, births and abortions as Canadian teens (Guttmacher Institute, n.d.). Each year in the U.S. almost 900,000 teenagers get pregnant. Of these, 425,000 are brought to term, representing by far in the highest teenage birth rate among developed nations (Infoplease, 2004). Presumably, the other half million pregnancies are terminated through easily available abortion. In addition to largely unwanted pregnancies, in recent years this sexual behavior by U.S. teens has led annually to approximately three million cases of sexually transmitted diseases [STDs], with gonorrhea and chlamydia being the most commonly acquired disease (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998).

North American youth, while economically among the most privileged in the World, face a very real human problem. Economic realities and their related educational demands strongly urge that they delay marriage well beyond the time in their lives when they are physically ready for sexual

activity. A culture which once strongly supported abstinence-until-marriage has all but lost out to a media- driven culture of sexual license and permissiveness. The popular media's celebration of sexual freedom seems to have drowned out youth's awareness of the physical and psychological costs, let alone spiritual consequences, of serial sexual activity: broken relationships, abortions and divorces. The only socially sanctioned messages that seem to be getting through to teenagers are 'safe sex' messages, related primarily to their physical health.

Religious Faith

The transmission of religious faith from one generation to the next has been a primary human imperative throughout recorded history. Historically, North America has been Christian and noted for the high level of religious identification and observance of its people. While the U.S. and Canada have been predominantly Protestant, since the mid-19th Century, there has been growing numbers of Roman Catholics, due largely as a result of immigration from Europe. As noted above, Catholics currently represent a little less than a quarter of all Americans and 43% of all Canadians. The percentage of Catholics in the U.S. is gradually increasing, due in large part to the substantial immigration of Hispanics from Central America in the second half of the 20th Century.

The Religious Education of the Young

Starting shortly after the founding of the initial settlements in North America, earlier settlers had a fear that their children's spiritual survival would be threatened in the untamed New World. Particularly in New England, they were convinced that teaching their children to read the Bible was a fundamentally important step to ensure their salvation. For example, in 1647, the overwhelmingly Protestant citizens of Massachusetts passed a law, famously called 'The Old Deluder Satan', requiring the establishment of 'common schools' [now called 'public schools'] in all villages and towns over a certain size. The clear purpose behind the establishment of these schools was to empower children through access to the Bible to resist the snares of that 'old deluder, Satan'. This same religious purpose for public education continued well into the 20th Century, although to a less intense degree.

The Catholic immigrants to the U.S. during the 19th Century and early 20th Century [primarily from Germany, Ireland and Italy] were fearful that

the American public schools would wean their children away from the Catholic faith. As a result, they made major efforts to build parochial schools and religiously-oriented youth serving institutions. By the 1960s, the Catholic Church throughout North America had an extensive, though qualitatively uneven, network of elementary and secondary schools and colleges. Also, in place was a rather well developed religious education program for young Catholics not attending Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Called the Confraternity for Catholic Doctrine [CCD], it provided a basic education in the faith in a 'released time' or after school venue.

At the end of the 1960s, the forward progress of these institutional efforts faltered. The causes were many. Major among them was the exodus of many men and women religious who had manned the schools, plus the declining vocations to replace them. Without trained religious and now staffed by lay teachers with weak preparation in catechetics, the Catholic content and character of Catholic schools has been severely diminished. Also, there has been a curricular retreat from teaching the theological doctrines of the Church to a more secular focus on brotherly love and social service. Further, the rising costs of education have been particularly telling for Catholic schools. The financial impact has been such that many schools have closed and most are beyond the financial means of the majority of Catholics. In addition, the attitudes of many Catholics changed after World War Two. Their social and economic status began to rise and they felt less prejudice and more acceptance from their Protestant neighbours. In the U.S, the election of the first Catholic president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, signalled to many Catholics that 'they had arrived' and their previously well-defined identity as Catholics began to fade. Subsequently, their patterns of divorce and birth control began to shadow those of the rest of the U.S. citizenry. What, however, have been the effects of these shifts on the transmission of the faith to young Catholics?

Religious Formation and Teenagers

Typically, the transmission of a religious faith begins in early childhood and continues into early adulthood. However, this paper focuses on the teenage years, 13 to 17, for two reasons. First, it is during these years that a young person in North America moves out from the close supervision of parents and get in connect with a much larger world. They begin to encounter ideas that are at variance from those of their parents and their immediate community. They become more social and they experience the

pulls of sexuality. They begin to seek their own identity and some degree of independence. In particular, they begin to examine more closely, and often to question, the religious ideas which they previously had accepted 'on faith'. It would appear, then, that these years of adolescence are of special importance in religious formation.

Second, this issue of religious formation among North American teenagers has been the target of a massive U.S. study, entitled the National Study of Youth and Religion [NSYR] completed in 2005 (Smith, 2005). A representative sample of some 3370 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 and their parents was interviewed. 52% of the teenagers were Protestants, 23% Catholics, 16% not religious, 2.5% Mormon, 1.5% Jewish and the rest a diversity of religious affiliations. Based on their extensive analyses, the researchers came to a number of conclusions:

- Religion is a significant presence in the lives of most American teenagers;
- The vast majority of U.S. teenagers have very conventional religious views, strikingly close to those of their parents. They tend to be very positive about religion with only a small minority who are alienated and rebellious about religious involvement.
- Very few U.S. youth describe themselves as 'spiritual, but not religious'. Contrary to many press reports, exotic, 'new age' religions have few adherents among under 18 Americans.
- Also, contrary to popular cultural stereotypes, the single most important influence on the religious lives of American youth is their parents.
- The more a church community does by way of outreach [i.e., instruction, youth-oriented programs, camps, opportunities and challenges to teenagers], the greater the positive impact on its teenagers. The greater the effort to reach out to teens, the greater the religious 'harvest'.
- Overall the level of religious and spiritual understanding of American teens is very low. Most had great trouble articulating the tenets of their faith. In place of holding traditional religious views, the researchers described the dominate faith of American youth as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, a faith the researchers describe as suited 'for our culturally, post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalistic society' (p. 262).

Catholic Teenagers

One of the most startling findings to the sociologists of religion who conducted this study was the laxity and relatively low level of religiosity of

Catholic teenagers compared to teenagers in other U.S. Christian traditions. Among their findings are that when compared with Conservative Protestants [e.g., Evangelicals, Baptists, *et al.*], Black Protestants and Mormons [i.e., The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], Catholic teens:

- Have lower levels of attendance at religious services;
- Pray less frequently;
- Report that their religion is less important in shaping their daily lives and life decisions;
- Have less frequently attended Sunday School/CCD, been on a religious retreat, attended a religious conference or rally or camp, or been on a religious mission or service project;

Fewer Catholic teens:

- Believe in a judgment day when God will reward some and punish others;
- Believe in miracles, the existence of angels, and life after death;
- Have made a personal commitment to live their lives for God;
- Would attend religious services if totally up to themselves;
- Are involved in a religious youth group;
- Are in congregations that have a designated youth minister;
- Have openly expressed their faith at school;
- Have adults in their church, other than family members, whom they enjoy talking with and who give lots of encouragement;
- Report that their congregation has helped them understand their own sexuality and sexual morality;
- By a substantial margin have ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful;
- Have shared their religious faith with someone not of their faith;
- Report that they find church a warm and welcoming place and that services make them think about important things;
- Believe that God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today;

On the other hand, more Catholic teens

- Believe in reincarnation and astrology, and in psychics and fortune-tellers;
- Report that they are bored in church;

The National Study of Youth and Religion also reports that only 71% of U.S. Catholic teenagers have had their First Communion, only 40% attend mass on a weekly basis and that 11% never attend. With regard to religious education, only 10% of Catholic teenagers attend Catholic schools and only 19% attend CCD weekly. The light which the survey shines of Catholic teenagers is of a group which does not know or understand what

are the core teachings of their church and do not appear to think about or care very much about the religion into which they were born. In addition, Catholic youth:

... score 5 to 25 percentage points lower than their conservative, mainline, and black Protestant peers on many of a variety of religious beliefs, practices experiences, commitments, and evaluations. Perhaps more important for Catholics, our findings regarding Catholic teenagers show many of them to be living far outside of official Church norms defining true Catholic faithfulness (p. 194).

This study appears to confirm the observations and impressions of many who see the U.S. Catholic youth as largely disconnected from their Church, going through parish CCD programs [if they attend at all] in a disengaged, if not indifferent, manner. It further suggests that even those who attend do not receive, as earlier generations did, a reasonably substantive encounter with Church doctrine and what it means to be Catholic in contemporary society. Standing back from their data, the researchers summarize:

It appears ... that too many U.S. Catholics have through inertia continued to rest assured that old organizational structures were taking care of their children when in fact they increasingly have not been. And so many or most Catholics teenagers now pass through a Church system that has not fully come to terms with its own institutional deficit and structural vacuum with regard to providing substantial and distinctive Catholic socialization, education, and pastoral ministry for its teenagers (p. 214).

This study yields a picture of the American Catholic Church whose efforts at the transmission of the faith are failing both teenagers and their parents. It is against this background of ineffectiveness that the alternative program of religious education described below is offered.

AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF YOUNG CATHOLICS

The Goal

The goal of this proposal is for the Church to launch a global effort by clergy *and* laity to evangelize the young. More specifically, the goal is for the Church to develop a fresh plan and a new vehicle for the Christian education and formation of children and youth. However, in order to achieve this goal, two proximate goals need to be reached: first, the intense and effective training of young married couples as the 'first religious educators' of

their children; and, second, the recruitment and retraining of large numbers of the laity, drawn heavily from the ranks of the single and retired, as resources in the work of evangelizing the young.

The Audiences

There needs to be a strong intergenerational quality to this evangelization program. While the primary focus will be on children and youth from ages four to eighteen, the secondary focus will be on adults. This program could be the instrument of re-evangelization of adult Catholics through their training and involvement in the program as teachers, councilors, managers, and parents. A programmatic effort of the magnitude and intensity described below will require the participation of large numbers of the laity, many of whom currently are only passively involved in the Church. While such dependence on large numbers of unprepared and uninvolved Catholics might seem like an obstacle, it may, indeed, be a rich opportunity. Many Catholic adults, especially the single and retired, have the energy, the free time and the untapped desire to respond to such a call. In fact, many hunger to participate in the work of the Church in a more substantial way than on their parish council or as lectors. The opportunity in Jesus' words to 'launch out deeper and drop your nets' is one to which many will respond, particularly if they are called to this work by our new Pope, Benedict XVI.

The Program

The driving purpose is the development of a powerful educational program to help our children *know* Christ, *love* Christ and be ready to *do* Christ's work in the world. Rather than simply an understanding of the demands of the faith, the appeal will be an affirmative one to the head, the heart and the hands. Over a thirteen or fourteen year period, our young will have a guided introduction to the Catholic faith and the responsibilities of being a Catholic in the modern world. The research on teenagers and religion cited above is strong evidence that the current efforts by the American Catholic Church to transmit is failing. Further, common sense suggests that forty-five minutes a week of religious instruction for only thirty weeks a year is inadequate to educate the kind of Catholics prepared both to save their own souls and be vital carriers of the Gospel's good news to the rest of the world. The youth program described here will require something on the

order of three hours a week for forty weeks a year through the formative years of youth.

The educational program, however, will begin in the home and continue there until age four or five. At that time, it will be augmented by the parish-centered program. Throughout a child's Catholic education there will be coordination and connections between home and parish. Parents will be aware of and reinforce parish-based activities and vis-a-versa.

The Program's Creators

At the heart of this proposal is the creation of a 21st century Catholic education program. It must bring together and draw creatively on the Church's leading theologians and religious educators and the world's best film makers and communicators. However, the first task will be carefully to examine the best religious educational materials and practices from the past and the present. At this point, the program's creators will bring into being fresh materials. In this effort, they will rely heavily on the newer media to educate our young about Christ and what it means to be His follower in today's world

Parents, the First Christian Educators

A necessary component of the program will be the preparation of married people for their responsibilities as Catholic parents. Building on the model of Catholic marriage preparation, the current requirement for nuptials in a Catholic parish, a similar program will be designed for the sacrament of Baptism. In effect, before the christening of a couple's first child, both parents will go through a short, intense course, which both outlines their responsibilities as Catholic parents and teaches how to fulfill them. Here, again, much of this training will be supported by high quality video presentations.

The Instructional Program for Youth

Throughout the curriculum and at its heart must be Christ. We are people-of-the-story. Story is the way most of us learn life's essential truths. Example, too, is our most potent moral teacher. At the curriculum's center, then, must be the story of Christ and His Church. The young will benefit by encountering the 'personality' of Christ as leader, as radical teacher, as ser-

vant. In his first international trip to Cologne as Pope, Benedict XVI said to his hearers, 'Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: It is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist'.

This generation is a visual one and the story must be seen and seen at a high standard. Therefore, creation of this curriculum, along with the materials needed to prepare the teachers, again must be the collaboration of the finest Christian educators and the most effective mass communicators. Much of the curriculum will be delivered via the newer media [DVDs and videotapes]. By directed use of the Internet both teachers and students can be put in contact with the great religious art treasures of the world. They can take virtual pilgrimages to the Holy Land and Rome, guided by scholars and area specialists.

The curriculum will need to be sequenced and structured by age or grade. Nevertheless, it will be flexible and adaptable enough to allow for some local variation. In addition to the formal, weekly program, additional and more voluntary activities can be planned, such as retreats, camps, long and short service projects, and youth clubs which sponsor a variety of religious and social activities. These latter, 'extra-curricular' activities are where the movements, such as, *Regnum Christi*, *Communio et Liberatione* and *Opus Dei*, can play a particularly important part. In fact, the development and the delivery of this new program present an opportunity for closer cooperation and activity between the movements and the parishes.

Truth and Reason

The proposed instructional program of evangelization must, also, be firmly based on truth and reason. Recently, Pope Benedict XVI reiterated the Church's commitment.

Man's unique grandeur is ultimately based on his capacity to know the truth. And human beings desire to know the truth. Yet truth can only be attained in freedom ... truths of the spirit, the truths about good and evil, about the great goals and horizons of life, about our relationship with God. These truths cannot be attained without profound consequences for the way we live our lives.

In addition, then, to the revealed truth of Scripture, young Catholics need to encounter the hard spine of rationale thought in the tradition of St. Augustine, St. Thomas and other Church scholars. At a moment in history when mechanistic and materialistic views of human life are so prevalent,

they must fully understand the Church's conception of the human person. From this bedrock understanding of who and what they are, students will move on to engage questions of what is a worthy life and what are our obligations to one another. The Church's transcendent view of the person ought to be their intellectual North Star as they thread through the various world-views embedded in secular education and as they confront an array of social issues from abortion to genetic manipulation.

Therefore, principled reasoning, long the hallmark of the Catholic religious tradition, is a fundamental aspect of this new program. Although it has been somewhat out-of-favor in recent decades, apologetics ought to be a significant part of the curriculum. It is both a vehicle for learning how to think clearly, but also to possess a coherent and reasoned understanding of the corpus of faith. Our young will need such a command of reason and truth since they are called to be both defenders of the faith and to messengers of God's word.

Inspiration

The Christian inspiration of the young must be a key element of this new program. In 'Is There Really Hope in the Young' in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope John Paul II (1994) wrote concerning the need to nurture the natural idealism of the young. He acknowledged, though, that today's young grow up 'in an atmosphere marked by a new positivism' that expresses itself mostly in the form of criticism. He urged the restoration of the romantic traditions that response to youthful idealism with duty and a call to service. Again, stories of Christian lives can do much to revive this tradition.

Pope Benedict XVI, also, has spoken of the need and capacity of the young for inspiration in his April 25th' 2005 address to German pilgrims.

If we look at these young people who were gathered around the late Pope, and as a result, around Christ, whose cause the Pope espoused, something just as comforting could be seen: it is not true that young people think only of consumerism and pleasure. It is not true that they are materialistic and self-centred. Just the opposite is true: young people want great things. They want an end to injustice. They want inequalities to be overcome and all peoples to have their share in the earth's goods. They want freedom for the oppressed. They want great things, good things.

This is why young people are – you are – once again fully open to Christ. Christ did not promise an easy life. Those who desire com-

forts have dialed the wrong number. Rather, He shows us the way to great things, the good, towards an authentic human life (Benedict XVI, 2005).

While the life of Christ must pervade the curriculum, 'student Catholics' will come to know deeply the lives of early and modern saints and see clearly that they personally are called to greatness. The lives of the Apostles and our saints down through Maximillian Kolbe and Mother Teresa must be large in their minds and imaginations. At each year of their Catholic education, they will learn about particular saints and how they came to know and serve Christ. Here in particular is the opportunity for regional and national adaptations of the curriculum by emphasis on the saints from students' part of the world. The Christian tradition is rich in inspiration, from Christ's conscious decision to offer His body to the torture of crucifixion to the long army of martyrs and saints who have followed Him. Our young must both know and develop allegiance to this tradition.

Christian Action

This new Catholic education program requires a strong experiential element. Instead of just learning about Christ and His Church, the young must be taught *how to act* as Christians. At all levels, students must be given opportunities to witness and to serve as followers of Christ. The linkage between the Word and Christian action will be a key component. There will be regular tasks in their home, neighborhoods and schools to help others. Older students, besides being heavily involved in helping teach younger students, will be woven into parish and community work. Still older students will take on larger tasks, go on religious retreats, youth gatherings and even visits to foreign countries. This component will require strong mentoring from many adults, but on the other hand, the spiritual and psychological benefits to the mentors will be great. The desired outcome here for the students is to see themselves as parts of a community of Christian worship and action. Students must perceive themselves as part of an on-going project to bring the Word of God to all His people. There is much to learn about experiential programs for youth from the successful efforts of the various Catholic Youth Service offices around the world and the work of the Mormon youth missions, the Taize community in France, and Jewish efforts to send their young people to Israel.

Private Prayer and Public Liturgy

Prayer and worship must be a key element of the program. Students must be taught about prayer and helped to make prayer a regular and intimate part of their lives. In particular, they ought to be instructed about the Mass, the central liturgical act of the Catholic Church. While special liturgies for children and youth ought to be part of the instructional program, Masses must reflect the deep mystery of our faith. In this regard, liturgies should be counter-cultural, inspiring awe and wonder rather than a comfortable familiarity. Our rich treasure of religious music can make a major contribution here. In particular, students will know and be able to sing the very best of the Church's song.

For centuries, Catholic spiritual life has been enriched by private devotions, such as those to the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin, and to various saints. However, in many places these devotions, along with Benediction, the Rosary, Stations of the Cross on Lenten Fridays and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, have been downplayed and have begun to disappear. Few children get down on their knees before bedtime for night prayers. In the past, these traditional devotions have fueled what sociologists call the unique 'Catholic imagination', the function of which has been regularly to remind us of the reality that we are children of God and only pilgrims here on Earth. The proposed program will aim to revive these private devotions.

The Church in History

The Bible, which is frequently given scant attention in Catholic educational programs, must become a familiar source of instruction and guidance. Instruction in the Divine Word must go on at each grade level. However, the program, while educating students to the stories of God's People as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, tells the story of the Church's efforts to bring the Kingdom of God into being for the last twenty centuries. In particular, given the current inaccuracies and distortions about the impact of the Catholic Church on world culture, students need a deep understanding of the past and continuing contributions of the Church, our contributions to education, the arts and the alleviation of human suffering. Recent books, such as Thomas E. Woods' *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (2005) and George Weigel's *Letters to a Young Catholic* (2004) can be quite helpful here. Nevertheless, the complete presentation of our Church acknowledges the Church's failures and frailties, stressing the need of all Catholics continually to renew and refresh Christ's mission on Earth.

Both Global and Local

As Catholics, we have one, overriding message for our children: 'Come to know God through His Son, Jesus Christ'. Since we, also, share a common humanity, the vehicle by which this message is delivered must have a certain universality. Separate national or racial or regional programs of evangelization would be counter productive. We are all part of the same Mystical Body of Christ. We all aim to be part of the same Communion of Saints. Our hunger for God and happiness is universal. Going forward in a world torn by racial, economic, religious and ethnic strife, Catholics need to see themselves first and foremost as what we are: a common corps of missionaries working to advance His Kingdom.

While elements of the program will be adapted to local Catholic communities, such as highlighting of certain saints and historical events, the Christ-centric core must be common. To start, the formation of this program will be a work of the global church. The program's initial planning and development committee must be drawn from the universal Church. In addition, elements of the project ought to be field tested in different settings. Such possible sites might be Chile, Nigeria, Germany, Korea and the U.S.

Conclusion

The proposed program, particularly given its size and scope, will encounter resistance. Currently around the world there are institutions and large numbers of well-intentioned individuals engaged in the religious education of Catholics. This new program could initially be seen as a repudiation of their efforts. Justifiably, many may feel personally threatened. The impulse to resist may be strong. Therefore, if this proposed program is judged worthy of promotion, strong papal leadership will be crucial. Also needed will be transitional mechanisms and retraining programs for our current religious educators.

Such an effort as described above will be enormously expensive at a time when the Church has many calls on her purse. A religious educational program, particularly when one currently exists and which to many seems adequate, will appear as a questionable use of the Church's limited funds. On the other hand, there is great wealth in the hands of the Catholic faithful, many of whom share this concern about the transmission of the faith to our young. If a new and modern evangelization effort were seen as the means to revitalize our Church, many would respond to a special call.

The new globalism that is sweeping the World (Albrow, 1997) is being propelled by consumerism and is energized by what Freud called 'the pleasure principle'. With globalization has come a shrill, media-driven culture which rarely acknowledges the reality of our God. The young are the most vulnerable to its seductions. Their natural impulse toward the spiritual is being blunted and starved by this intrusive, secular culture. But, while unmet, their hunger for God persists. The Church must address it. It is imperative that the Church leadership make this problem – and this opportunity – our highest priority.

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