Prophets with Wings

Accompanying the Young
in Today's India

Edited by

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Dedicated to the Indian Youth,
Harbingers of Hope
and
Prophets with Wings

The Goal of Accompaniment of Youth:
A Psychospiritual Perspective

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Accompaniment suggests a journey. Every journey presupposes a destination, an end, a goal, a telos. What is the end of the accompaniment of youth? The theme of the Synod for Youth, 2018, focuses on accompanying

> the young on their existential journey *to maturity* so that, through a process of discernment, they discover their plan for life and realize it with joy, opening up to the encounter with God and with human beings, and actively participating in the edification of the Church and of society.[2]

The theme of the synod sees maturity of youth as the goal[3] of the process of accompaniment and discernment. What is maturity? The above quote also hints at some dimensions of maturity: discovering the plan for life, and to live the plan with joy, in a context of encounter with God and other people, in this way to contribute to the building up of the Church and society. In an attempt to define the goal of the accompaniment process, this chapter offers some benchmarks of maturity from a psychospiritual perspective. As far as possible, the chapter will include dimensions that are alluded to in the summary of the theme of the synod as quoted above.

The chapter is laid out in three parts, as most chapters are in the present book. The first part of the chapter situates the contents of the chapter within the context of the situation of youth and youth ministry in India. This section may not be exhaustive. It is foreseen that other chapters in this book will supplement this section. The second section of the chapter discusses three psychological models of life-long development with an aim of clarifying the benchmarks of maturity. The

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[2]Vatican, "Synod 2018: Youth, faith and vocational discernment", 06.10.2016. Italics mine.

[3]Throughout the work, 'goal' is used in the singular form because the ultimate goal of life is one. When it is used in the plural it refers to immediate goals and not the ultimate one. Of course, the ultimate goal has different dimensions which are explored in this chapter.

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third part of the chapter focuses on three means of providing the accompaniment of youth towards maturity. The proposed methods are inspired by what Michael Yaconelli (1942-2003), a non-Catholic youth minister, called, "Contemplative Youth Ministry".[4] I should hurry to add that the proposed methods are very much Catholic and have been in vogue for a long time within the Church.

The chapter reflects on the criteria for maturity within the framework of life-long development. Therefore, before entering into the main contents of the chapter, I would like to offer a few reflections on life-long development itself. The Indian ethical tradition describes (and prescribes) human life in four stages: *Bramahcharya* (student life until about 24 years of age), *Grihasta* (householder, from 25 to 49), *Vanaprastha* (gradual withdrawal, 50 to 69 years), and *Sannyasa* (withdrawal from the world and dedication to the spiritual pursuit). Similar parallel models are available in Western literature. Shakespeare in *As You Like it* (II, vii,139) talks about the seven stages: "And one man in his time plays many parts/His acts being seven ages". Shakespeare goes on to describe lifespan development in seven stages: (1) infancy, (2) early childhood, (3) adolescence, (4) young adult, (5) middle age, (6) old age, and (7) senility. On a more serious note, psychologists and social scientists have proposed different models of understanding human development in stages: Psychosexual development (Freud), Psychosocial development (Erik Erikson), cognitive development (Piaget), moral development (Kohlberg), and faith development (Fowler).

Talking about development in terms of stages is a useful framework for understanding growth-targets, however, there needs to be a caveat to this. It is important to avoid certain unhelpful assumptions in understanding and using these stage models of development: that these stages are in fixed hierarchy; that they are universal, determined, and uni-directional.[5] Human growth in stages is not to be equated with the process of metamorphosis. For instance, a butterfly has four distinct stages in its development: egg, caterpillar, pupa and adult. What is appealing about these stages is its predictability. The stages in the development of the butterfly proceed always in one direction. True, human development resembles this in some respects, particularly in the physical and physiological dimensions. For instance, an infant will always begin to crawl before she can walk! However, the same could

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[4]Michael Yaconelli, *Contemplative youth ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

[5]Fathali Moghaddam, *Great Ideas in Psychology: A Cultural and Historical Introduction* (Oxford: One world Publications, 2013) 139-147.

not be said about the psychological, emotional, moral, and spiritual growth of human individuals. It is this aspect that makes our reflection about youth maturity interesting and even necessary. Human development has a sense of suspense and mystery. Often, development is enmeshed and dynamic. Individual differences and cross-cultural variations are important factors to be considered. Therefore, the present chapter only points out at expected markers of maturity observable in youth as a result of accompaniment, it does not stipulate with certainty that at this age a person should exhibit that outcome!

1. Recognise: The Situation of Youth Accompaniment in India

More than half of the population of India is below the age of 25.[6] We can estimate that a similar demography will be noticeable among the Catholic population. The Indian youth are highly motivated, energetic, and ambitious. The family and parents put a lot of pressure on them pushing them to high levels of performance. On the religious front, even though Indian society may not be secular in nature, John Barretto points out that "a large proportion of our Catholic youth are so attracted by the materialistic and consumerist culture, that religion fails to attract their attention. Many youngsters look with suspicion and distrust at organised religion".[7] Some of those who are religious tend to be ritualistic, and others practice their faith in a superficial way.[8] They go to church because their parents want them to go to church. Their participation in church could be more due to concern for family unity and respect for parents than for a real search for God.

The presence of the Catholic church in formal education in India surely has a huge impact not only on the formation of Catholic youth but also non-Catholics. But this remains very formal and often focused on good results in examinations. Catholic informal youth ministry in India, might be energetic and creative, particularly in urban areas.[9] However, these initiatives might remain merely activity oriented, focused on a few periodic mega-events at diocesan levels, lacking a process of accompaniment at the level of the parishes. And because the Indian youth population is large, activity-oriented youth ministry may not be even sufficient.

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[6]Kaushik Basu, "India's demographic dividend", *BBC News*, 25 July 2007, in http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6911544.stm (Retrieved on 13/05/2018).

[7]John Barretto, "Ministering to Youth through Neighbourhood Youth Groups" *Jnana Janjeevani* 1/3 (2015) 23-35.

[8]P.A. Rajan, *Accompanying Youth Today*. (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2002).

[9]John Barretto, *Ministering to Youth through Neighbourhood Youth Groups*.

Several authors have attempted to point out to this and propose alternatives.[10] Youth ministry in India needs to have a coherent plan and long-term vision.

What will provide this vision? The theme of the synod for youth, 2018, as quoted in the introduction might provide a vision in terms of maturity of youth with its different dimensions. This chapter aims at exploring, in some detail, these growth-dimensions. Psychologists and social scientists have proposed various stage-models of life-long development. Erik Erikson considers the journey towards psychosocial maturation in eight stages. Lawrence Kohlberg examines moral development in six stages, which are grouped into three pairs of stages. In a similar vein, James Fowler proposes that faith development could take place in six stages. Could these models provide some framework for the vision that is needed for youth ministry in India?

Taking the gospel model of maturity (Lk 2:52) as the template, the next section of the chapter presents and discusses the psychological models of life-long development with an aim of clarifying the markers of maturity. These models presuppose that maturity could be spoken of as the immediate target to be reached at a particular age, and as the ultimate goal to be arrived at as the end of life-long development. Hence, the accompaniment of youth also revolves around these two targets: the immediate and ultimate goals. These models serve as the framework to interpret the situation and provide guidelines for educators to understand the youth in the present, and make choices in assisting the youth to plan the future in their existential journey towards an authentic encounter with God and human beings.

2. Interpret: Ideal Targets of Youth Accompaniment

Unique to all the gospels, the Gospel of Luke provides a one-sentence summary of what happened to Jesus between the age of 12 and 30, the age-group that is also the focus for our discussion here: "And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people" (Lk 2:52; NJB). To me this is the protype framework for any Christian youth ministry. It summarises the four-dimensional growth-targets for a young person. In this section of the chapter, we will focus on three dimensions that are relevant to psychospiritual maturity of the young person: the psychosocial aspect leading to wisdom, the socio-emotional aspect leading to altruism, and the spiritual dimension leading to transcendence -an experience of God in Jesus.

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[10]Jerome Vallabaraj, *Empowering the Young Towards Fullness of Life* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2003). See also, Rajan, *Accompanying Youth Today*.

2.1. Psychosocial Development: Towards Wisdom

In an attempt to understand psychosocial development through one's lifespan, Erik Erikson (1902-1994) saw individual human life in eight stages.[11] Each stage is characterised by a specific task of negotiating a tension, or what he called, 'developmental crisis'. The positive outcome of the fruitful negotiation of the crisis would be a 'virtue'. Here 'crisis' is not to be understood as a tragedy, but as a task of handling a transitional conflict. Individuals move from stage to stage, but may revisit a stage at a future level that was not previously resolved successfully. For the sake of the discussion here, let us focus on two relevant stages – the typical stage where youth are likely to be, and the final stage towards which every human being can strive.

Between the age of 13 and 21,[12] in the fifth stage of Erikson's model, there is a developmental crisis marked by a tension between identity and role-confusion. The identity is dealt with in terms of gender and occupation: who am I and what shall I do? During this stage, adolescents attempt to define their sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals. Marked also by physical changes and puberty, the adolescents may feel uncomfortable about their body for a while until they can adapt and "grow into" the changes. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of fidelity expressed in love. Fidelity involves being able to commit one's self to others on the basis of accepting others, even when there may be ideological differences. A failure to negotiate the tension will result in role confusion or identity crisis: they begin to experiment with different lifestyles (e.g., work, education or political activities).In the stage that follows there is a tension between intimacy and isolation. The result of negotiating with this stage gracefully is love. This stage could also be important for senior youth who are preparing for and settling down in marriage.

For Erikson, the eighth stage and final stage – for the purposes of the discussion here, the ultimate target of human growth – is marked by a process of life-review whereby individuals revisit old conflicts from a new perspective. There is a tension here between integrity and despair that is a negative feeling about the past and an inability to do anything given the short future. The positive outcome of resolving this crisis is wisdom. Therefore, according to Erikson, wisdom is a product of integrity. And this can be expanded in three characteristics:

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[11]Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1993).

[12]The age-limits are not to be considered too tightly.

- An acceptance of one's life and the way it has been lived;

- The abandonment of a self-centred view of life and the movement to a transcendent interest in human kind (altruism);

- An acceptance of the fear of death.

These three aspects of integrity were further developed by a Swedish sociologist, Lars Tornstam, in his concept of 'gerotranscendence'.[13] For now let us explore a little further the meaning of wisdom. According to contemporary psychology, wisdom is distinct from intelligence, but represents a higher level of knowledge and judgement. Wisdom is closely related to self-knowledge, the meaning of life, and the use of right judgement in dealing with others. This special type of knowledge is used for the well-being of oneself and others.[14]

There are also several research projects that have examined the correlation between chronological age and wisdom. Findings suggest that wisdom increases sharply during adolescence and early adulthood, then begins to stabilize thereafter (between 25 and 75 years). Peak performance in wisdom is noted in the 50s and 60s. However, wisdom-related performance may begin to decline in old age, around the age of 75.[15] This finding supports the theory of Erikson, that we talked about earlier, that wisdom is not something that automatically comes with increasing age. But it is a task and process that we consciously undertake. Age-appropriate wisdom is attainable even in youth, as Luke 2:52 suggests. The book of Wisdom (4:8-9) puts it rightly, "Length of days is not what makes age honourable, nor number of years the true measure of life; understanding, this is grey hairs, untarnished life, this is ripe old age".

2.2. Growing in Favour with People: Towards Altruism

Lawrence Kohlberg, an American psychologist, is known for his stage model of moral development through one's lifespan. He sees moral development taking place in six stages.[16] These stages are not matched with any particular age

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[13]Lars Tornstam, *Gerotranscendence: A developmental theory of positive aging* (Heidelberg: Springer Publishing Company, 2005).

[14]Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[15]Robert J. Sternberg, "Older but Not Wiser? The Relationship Between Age and Wisdom" *Ageing International* 30.1 (2005)5-26.

[16]Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development", *Moral education* 1 (1971) 23-92.

grouping. Therefore, it is possible to talk about the final and the ideal stage even for a young person.

The final stage of moral development, according to Kohlberg, is expressed in a type of moral reasoning driven by universal ethical principles. At this stage moral life is not based on fear of punishment and attraction towards self-interest, nor is it led by conformity to social norms and eagerness to maintain law and order, but it is led by a deep respect for human life and dignity. This moral maturity may begin with a willingness to honour the social contract, but ultimately the daily decisions are led by conscience mixed with a sense of duty. Beyond this stage, according to me, there is an expression of Christian perfection that is led by compassion.

In his sermon on the mount, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). What is perfection? Luke renders this same verse more explicitly perhaps in an attempt to explicate Christian perfection: "Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate" (Lk 6:36). This image of God as one who perfectly blends justice and grace, and that we are invited to imitate him, is so central to the New Testament. There are several examples of this: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-15), and most of all, the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). In this story, the elder son was always doing what was right. He says, "I never disobeyed one of your orders". And he applies a law of justice to his younger brother. But the father invites him to add a large dose of grace. Unfortunately, at the end of the story this dutiful son opts out of the party. We, on the contrary, want to be part of the party - the party of this life and the next. The only way to enjoy this party, it seems to me, is to add a large dose of grace to justice. This is altruism. I suggest, this is the meaning of growing in favour with people – the ideal that can be proposed to young people.

2.3. Growing in Favour with God: Universalizing faith

James Fowler, in his book: *Stages of Faith*,[17] spoke about seven stages that mark the development of believers. The last two stages of this development are more relevant to our reflection. Fowler calls the sixth stage: the stage of 'conjunctive faith', and the final stage as 'universalizing faith'. With due regard for our remarks

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Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard H. Hersh, "Moral Development: A Review of the Theory", *Theory into practice* 16.2 (1977) 53-59.

[17]James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychological Quest for Human Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1981).

in the introductory section, about the limitation of stage models of understanding human development, and critiques of Fowler's theory itself,[18] we explore the stages in Fowler's model that are most relevant to us. Firstly, the two stages that young people are likely to find themselves in are described, and then, the final stages are explored as the final target of faith development.

Most young people (aged between 12 and 30) are likely to find themselves in one of the two stages of Fowler's model. The stage of faith development that is likely to be noticed in early adolescence is synthetic-conventional faith that is characterised by conformity to authority. Any conflict with one's faith is ignored at this stage because of fear of inconsistencies. However, as the young person grows they are likely to exhibit a movement towards a faith with a personal identity. This leads to an "individuative-reflective faith" by the time one is in their mid-twenties moving towards their thirties. When an individual begins to take personal responsibility for their faith and their religious sentiments, there is likely to be some struggle and angst. When they are not supported at this stage they may regress to an earlier stage. However, if supported then they begin to accept the paradoxical nature of faith.

They move towards the ideal stages of maturity in faith. The stage of conjunctive faith is marked by the choice to accept one's belief with its apparent paradoxes. After all, religious truth-claims are about the mysteries of life: Who made me? Why am I here? What does the future hold for me? Why suffering? What is the meaning of birth and death? Mysteries do not have clear cut solutions. They only have meaningful explanations. This serene acceptance of one's faith is also reflected in their attitude towards the mystery that the self itself is. In the words of Fowler:

> This stage involves the embrace and integration of opposites and polarities in one's life. It means realizing in one's late thirties, forties, or beyond, that one is both young and old, and that youth and age are held together in the same life…. It means coming to terms with the fact that we are both constructive people and, inadvertently destructive people. Paul captured this in Romans 7 when he said, 'For I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do' (Rom 7:19).[19]

This stage of conjunctive faith is not just a compromise or an uneasy accommodation. It is the serene acceptance of the sense of mystery that permeates

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[18]Adrian Coyle, "Critical Responses to Faith Development Theory: A Useful Agenda for Change?", *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 33.3 (2011) 281-298.

[19]James Fowler, "Stages of Faith: The Psychological Quest for Human Meaning", 111.

human life. Eventually this stage leads to the stage of universalizing faith. In this more developed stage there is a genuine openness towards others that is an outcome of breaking up of 'selfhood' brought about by being one with God. Fowler continues, "Beyond paradox and polarities, persons in the Universalizing Faith stage are grounded in a oneness with the power of being or God. Their visions and commitments seem to free them for a passionate yet detached spending of the self in love".[20] This love is expressed in a compassionate attitude toward humanity. That is the ideal that is taught by every religion, including Christianity.

3. Choose: Means to Achieve the Ideals of Accompaniment

In this section of the chapter, I would like to propose some concrete methods of achieving the bench-marks that have been discussed above. There are many methods available, however, I would like to highlight three popular methods. They are basically psychospiritual in nature, but Christian in tradition and content.

3.1. Journaling

Diary writing or journaling has been used for centuries in human history. There could be a subtle difference between 'diary' and 'journal', in that a diary is written daily in a calendar based template, whereas a journal could be written less frequently in a writing material that is not necessarily calendar based. Saints and spiritual masters have kept journals.[21] In the recent decades, journaling has been used extensively in therapeutic contexts.[22] From a psychological perspective, journaling has been discussed under the theme of disclosure.[23] Disclosure, understood as writing or talking about emotional experiences, has been found to promote physical and mental health: with an improved immune system, reduced visits to the doctor, subjective well-being resulting from the reduction of stress, and selected adaptive or functional behaviours particularly among adolescents.[24] These effects are prevalent only when participants write at a deep emotional level and not about superficial

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[20]James Fowler, "Stages of Faith: The Psychological Quest for Human Meaning", 113.

[21]See for example, Therese of Lisieux, *The story of the soul*, Trans. Thomas Taylor (New York, NY: Cosimo, Inc, 2007).

[22]James Pennebaker, "Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process", *Psychological Science* 8 (1997) 162-166.

[23]James Pennebaker, "Putting Stress into Words: Health, Linguistic, and Therapeutic Implications", *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 31 (1993) 539-548.

[24]James Pennebaker, "Putting Stress into Words: Health, Linguistic, and Therapeutic Implications".

topics. It has been suggested that the underlying mechanism in journaling is that it facilitates cognitive processing of emotional experiences that allows assimilation in such a way that a coherent narrative is achieved. This, in turn, contributes to wellbeing.

In order to achieve wellbeing, journaling should be accompanied together with some method of processing the negative emotions that may arise out of traumatic experiences. This could be achieved by means of the individual integrating journaling with some cognitive processing. That is, the description of events with deep feelings should be accompanied by a description of how that person is trying to understand that event. Some authors have suggested mindfulness or meditation in order to achieve integration. "Being in touch with negative feelings is only helpful if you can bring some peace and mindfulness to them".[25] Others suggest combining journaling with counselling or spiritual direction sessions that can help in processing the emotions lived through in journaling.

Against this background, young people could be trained and encouraged to do periodic journaling of their life experiences. Such an exercise could help them in processing their life-experiences towards increase in inner wisdom, and in better understanding the action of God within them. This could be a useful tool in discernment and accompaniment, particularly when the young person is free to share the content of the journal with a mature guide or a confidant. We will return to the topic of spiritual direction shortly.

3.2. Contemplative Practice

Contemplative practice refers to certain practices of praying that involve silent, mostly individual, awareness-based, God-focused techniques. It is different from communal liturgical worship, and includes the individual prayers in its various forms (petitions, praise and thanksgiving, penitential invocations) that are common in Christian traditions. It is also subtly different from Christian meditation that basically involves a "discursive reasoning process".[26] Contemplative prayer transcends the thinking and reasoning of meditation, and to some extent, even the emotional and feeling aspects. It can be described in terms of silence, presence,

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[25]Beverly Bien and Thomas Bien, *Mindful Recovery: A Spiritual Path to Healing from Addiction* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 72.

[26]Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988) 9.

and awareness. Phrases like "loving gaze", and "knowing beyond knowing",[27] are often used to elucidate the dynamics of contemplation. In this connection, what is referred to as 'contemplative practice' here is also related to 'mindfulness' that is becoming globally popular, and not new to India. Finney and Malony offer a definition of contemplation that shows a similarity to the definition of mindfulness, while being different from it:

> Contemplative prayer can be defined as a particular form of Christian prayer in which one gives one's full attention to relating to God in a passive, non-defensive, non-demanding way. It is a patient waiting on God to deepen one's confidence in God's power and love. Having been made more secure by increased confidence in God, one is freed to love others more unconditionally.[28]

As it emerges from the above quote what is unique about Christian contemplative practice that distinguishes it from general mindfulness is the explicit belief in God, who is also someone who offers the possibility of building a personal relationship. From the Christian perspective, the person of Jesus also becomes the centre of contemplation.

There are also various methods of Christian contemplative practice to choose from. The most popular ones are the Jesus Prayer,[29] *Lectio Divina*,[30] Ignatian contemplation,[31] and various other derivatives of these, including the Centering Prayer.[32] Some of these, and other recent efforts, have also attempted to combine the Eastern techniques of meditation or mindfulness with Christian contemplative practices (as in the work of Tony De Mello and Laurence Freeman). The Jesus Prayer originated in Egypt in the 3rd Century CE among the earliest groups of Christian monks, popularly known as "Desert Fathers and Mothers". *Lectio Divina,* on the other hand, has a strong Benedictine tradition coming from the 6th century CE. While the Jesus Prayer and its earlier forms consist in repeating short invocations, *Lectio Divina* uses longer passages from the Scriptures. For various historical and theological reasons, the contemplative methods of prayer largely fell into disuse,

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[27]Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, 9.

[28]John Finney and Newton Malony, "Contemplative Prayer and Its Use in Psychotherapy: A Theoretical Model", *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 13 (1985) 173.

[29]Simon Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus prayer* (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007).

[30]Thomas Hall, *Too Deep for words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*.

[31]Martin Smith, *The word is very near you: A guide to praying with scripture* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1989).

[32]John Main, *The inner Christ* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988).

except among members of religious orders in the Western Christian traditions beginning in the 12th Century. The decline of the use of the Jesus Prayer in the West, for instance, could have been due to the East-West Schism of the 11th Century, and the theological debates around Mount Athos.[33]

Elsewhere I have argued that youth formation has to move from training in life-skills[34] to coaching in character strengths that focus on virtues such as fairness, compassion, integrity, self-control. Previous empirical studies carried out in the youth context have suggested that the building up of character strengths can be best achieved not just by means of seminars and workshops but through contemplative practice.[35] Together with teaching young people to contemplate, introducing them to one-on-one spiritual accompaniment will assist the young Christians a great deal to define their own identity and explore their Christian calling in these fluid times.

3.3. Spiritual Accompaniment

In a previous publication, I have presented a simple model of spiritual accompaniment[36] based on the work of Barry and Connolly.[37] The model proposes three steps in the process of accompaniment: listening, noticing the movement, and deepening the movement. "Movement" is to be understood as the working of God in the young person that attracts them to God. Each of these three steps calls for some particular skills on the part of the youth educator who functions as a spiritual director.

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[33]Marco Toti, "The Hesychast Method of Prayer: Its Anthropological and Symbolic Significance", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8 (2008) 17-32.

[34]Sahaya G. Selvam, "Christianity and Life Skills Training of Youth: Towards HIV Prevention in Africa", in B. Simon (Ed.), *Society and Church in African Christianity* (Neuendettelsau, Germany: Erlanger Verlag/Makumira Publications, 2008) 192-210.

[35]Sahaya G. Selvam, "Character strengths in the context of Christian contemplative practice facilitating recovery from alcohol misuse: Two case studies", *The Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 17 (2015) 190-211. See also, Sahaya G. Selvam and Dominic Mwangi, "Meditation and contemplative practice among young adults in Nairobi", in Sahaya G. Selvam and Diane Watt (Eds.), *African youth today: Challenges and prospects* (Nairobi: Acton Press, 2014) 67-85.

[36]Sahaya Selvam, "The Unnamed Companion on the Road: Spiritual Accompaniment in the Context of Youth Ministry", *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 11 (2014) 41-55.

[37]William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (2nd ed.) (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

The first step is basic to any one-on-one caring relationship: a set of listening skills. This will include a body posture that is open, relaxed, and which shows empathy towards the directee. It also consists of some relevant verbal feedback that furthers the narration. As the story is elaborated it is deepened by the considered response of the director who mirrors back expressions and images expressed by the directee. This helps to identify the movement in the heart of the directee. Identifying the movement calls for the spiritual skill of discernment. Once the movement has been picked up, and spontaneously confirmed by the directee, the director gently invites the directee to stay with it, and to deepen it by getting in touch with the feelings that facilitate the perception of the working of God within the individual.

Feelings or spiritual emotional states that include consolation and desolation, according to St Ignatius, play an important role in discernment. One of the ways that St Ignatius discerned his own vocation, from the days of his convalescence after the battle of Pambola to the moment of founding the Society of Jesus and even beyond, was by getting in touch with his own feelings in terms of what he called, "consolation" and "desolation". For instance, as he day-dreamed on his hospital bed about what he would do when he got back to the court and about the ladies there, he felt dysphoric after an initial experience of euphoria. He called this, "desolation". On the other hand, when he meditated on the words of Jesus, he felt challenged but also deeply satisfied. He called this, "consolation". "The General Examen" in the Ignatian tradition then is a way of getting in touch with one's inner-movements on a daily basis in terms of consolation and desolation. This becomes a vital instrument in ongoing discernment.

Once the movement has been identified by the directee, the task of the director is to honour that and help to deepen it: How does the person want to value the movement and respond to the God who moves them from within? At times there may be a counter-movement. In the parlance of St Ignatius, it is a movement away from God. It may be marked by a sense of desolation. If the spiritual director is experienced enough it may be possible to deal with this in a growth promoting manner. If the spiritual director is not comfortable it may be wiser to invite the directee to focus on the movement rather than on the counter-movement. However, often an apparent sense of desolation could be a moment of grace. For instance, a difficulty in praying could be a gentle invitation from God to look at a past hurt and move towards offering forgiveness, or to look at a past guilt and move towards seeking forgiveness. It may simply be an invitation to surrender. Similarly, an experience of loss – death, departure, and transition – could potentially draw a

person to God. In short, experiences of apparent negative affective states do not necessarily imply a counter-movement.

In a profound sense of respect for the process that God carries out in every person, spiritual accompaniment avoids giving into the temptation of using it for problem solving, or friendly correction, and even for spiritual instruction. In the early sessions, nevertheless, there might be some need to clarify what actually is spiritual accompaniment, to give instructions on methods of prayer, and to discuss some healthy images of God. These instructions may be particularly necessary for young people, who might lack the ability – or often only the vocabulary – to articulate their experience of God. During the continued prayer moments between sessions of spiritual accompaniment, the directee is invited to stay with the movement and deepen it, always being open to the God who moves the individual. In this way, the youth educator accompanies young people in their discernment of the action of God and to a maturity expressed in "opening up to the encounter with God and with human beings".

Conclusion

What this chapter has presented is a set of growth-indicators of the young person in the process of accompaniment. When we talk about bench-markers, we always talk about the ideal targets. I would like to make two remarks in conclusion.

First, there could be cross-cultural differences and individual differences in achieving these targets. The youth educator needs to be mindful of these sensibilities. If the educator forces open the pupa in order to release the butterfly, it might never fly. Individuals have their own pace. Individuals might have their own targets. And despite these near-universal criteria that psychologists talk about in terms of growth-indicators, there are always cross-cultural differences. What could be normal in one culture could be anomalous in another.

In the history of the study of adolescence, there is a famous case that demonstrates the importance of cross-cultural differences in understanding young people. Stanley Hall,[38] one of the early psychologists who is acclaimed as the father of the study of adolescence, considered adolescence as the turbulent period of life of an individual. In his scientific study of adolescence, Hall focused mainly on the biological and psychological aspects of the growth of adolescence. Margaret

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[38] Stanley G. Hall, *Adolescence* (Vols. 1 & 2) (New York: Appleton, 1904).

Mead,[39] on the other hand, in her anthropological study of adolescents, focused on the socio-cultural dimensions of their growth. Drawing her data from her study of the indigenous people of the island of Samoa, Mead suggested that when cultures provide a gradual transition from childhood to adulthood, as it is the case in most traditional societies, there is practically no storm and stress associated with adolescence.[40] Therefore, particularly youth educators who are ministering outside their own cultural context need to be extra sensitive to the cross-cultural sensibilities.

Secondly, from a spiritual perspective we need to acknowledge that every person is made in the image of God (Gen 1:27). God moves every person – young or old – from within the person, to God himself. This happens at its own pace. It is apt to end this chapter with a quote from the great Jesuit mystic and scientist, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). What he wrote to his sister, reflecting on the work of God within every person, is also relevant to every youth educator who is facilitating the work of God within every young person:

> Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability – and that it may take a very long time.
>
> And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually – let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.
>
> Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.[41]

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[39]Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychology Study in Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York: W. Morrow, 1928).

[40]John W. Santrock, *Adolescence: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

[41]Michael Harter (Ed.), *Hearts of Fire: Praying with Jesuits* (Chicago: Ignatian Press,1993).