The Crisis of Adults and Its Implications for the Youth. A Theological-Pastoral Study within the Context of Croatia and the Roman Catholic Church Teaching

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Abstract: This article aims to show the connection between the current crisis of adults and the changes that can be observed in the level of religiosity/spirituality of today's youth. The Roman Catholic Synod on Young People held in Rome highlighted the need to understand young people and their religiosity. Understanding and interpreting the religiosity, ecclesiasticism, and spirituality of today's youth is necessary if we wish to answer their religious and spiritual questions properly. Nonetheless, this paper considers only one specific aspect of youth religiosity, that is, the connection between the world of adults, especially the crisis that has affected many of them, and the development of young people—especially of their spirituality/religiosity. The first part provides a basic outline of young people's religiosity and their relationship to the Roman Catholic Church based on the research. The second part reflects on the crisis of intergenerational transmission of faith, critically evaluating the existing channels used for this purpose. The third part is a critical evaluation of some aspects of the life of adults, especially in light of the crisis that has affected adulthood. The last part, containing results and conclusion, emphasizes the necessity and importance of the formation of adults in the Roman Catholic Church. The research is based on a literature review, analysis of data obtained from research—carried out especially in the Republic of Croatia—as well as directions that come to us from the Roman Catholic Church documents.

Keywords: youth, religiosity, youth education, crisis of adults, Church, Peter Pan syndrome

The relationship between young people and religion is anything but simple. Establishing dialogue with younger generations represents an important and urgent task of the Church. Indeed, the Church has recently faced numerous complex problems such as migration, bioethical issues, environmental issues, protection of the human person's dignity from conception to natural death, abuse in the Church, financial problems, intra-Church disputes, and more. In this sense, because the Church is burdened with problems of exceptional importance and urgency, it is reasonable to ask ourselves the question of the extent to which it manages to remain focused on the issues of young people, including their religiosity and spirituality. Without diminishing the importance of the various problems that the Church is facing today, it is indisputable that the topic of educating young people is of crucial importance for its present as well as its future. The key question is whether Christianity will survive if the new generations do not find the beauty, strength, and reason for their

existence in the Gospel. The question of young people is, in a way, that of the future of Christianity, especially when it comes to Christianity in Europe (Matteo 2017, 9). Without determined young Christians, the Christian voice will become quieter and more insignificant in the future, both in families and in society.

If education is to be considered "the most important means available for encouraging deeper and more harmonious human development and thus for reducing hunger, poverty, exploitation, ignorance, oppression and war" (Delors 1998, 13), then we can say that education is the most accessible means for discovering, accepting and living evangelical values, that is, for the future of Christianity—to the extent that it depends on human strength, of course. Pope Benedict XVI noted that a person's education is a fundamental and decisive issue that calls for the awakening of courage in the process of making conclusive decisions (Benedict XVI 2008). On another occasion, the Pope used the expression "educational emergency" (*emergenza educativa*), which became quite widespread after the Pope's intervention. Pope Francis remains on the same track when he points out that the restoration of society and community is only possible if we prioritize education (Bergoglio [Papa Franjo] 2015, 102). The existence of educational urgency is evidenced by the many failures of adults in their efforts to mold young people into persons of character, open to cooperation with others and capable of giving meaning to their own lives.

The Roman Catholic Church shows in different ways that it is aware of young people's importance. Therefore, the World Youth Day established by John Paul II has a special meaning and pastoral value.[1] The World Youth Day is a true pastoral phenomenon that has permanently committed the Church (Mandarić 2007, 187). The first was held in 1986, and so far, a total of 37 have been held. Another important event that testifies to the Church's devotion to young people is the Synod on Young People. Between 3 and 28 October 2018, the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was held in Rome on the issue of "Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment," after which Pope Francis published *Christus Vivit*, an apostolic post-synodal exhortation intended for young people. The value and significance of these events at the general level of the Church is undeniable. In the Republic of Croatia, a meeting of the Croatian Catholic Youth (SHKM) has been held every two years since 1996. Yet, the question remains: does that suffice? Regular life in parishes and dioceses does not show too much concern for educational issues related to young people, their religious life, and the many crises they face.

The religiosity/spirituality as well as the ecclesiastical nature of young people requires special attention. Anyone who researches and studies today's religious situation can notice great changes in the religiosity of contemporary youth. Previous research highlighted the following characteristics regarding the religiosity of

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[1]   See the list of all gatherings at: https://www.vatican.va/gmg/documents/gmg_chronicle-wyd_20020325_en.html.

adolescents and young people: subjectivity in the approach to religion; distancing from religious practice; departure from authority; acceptance of new religiosity characterized by syncretism, eclecticism, individualism, and distancing from traditional religion, and more. Traditional religious authority has lost its strength, while individuals pay increasingly more attention to their own autonomous frames of reference. The increasing distancing from the Church is additionally fuelled by a widespread culture for which Christianity is distant and alien—a culture that goes as far as to exhibit anti-Christian and anti-Catholic attitudes.

Considering the depth and complexity of these changes in young people's religiosity and their relationship to the Church and religion, a strong educational and pastoral-catechetical engagement of the Church in relation to the new generations is to be expected. How is it that such efforts have yet to be initiated? Although there are many reasons for such an attitude and behavior of the Church and its authorities, let us focus on only one of its aspects in these considerations. In more exact terms, this paper hypothesizes that this attitude of the Church and the adults in the Church towards the young represents a sign of the crisis in which the adults find themselves. Unsure of their own identities and their own "adulthood," they are unable to take responsibility for young people.

1. Young People, Their Religiosity and Spirituality, and the Church

Seeing that every society renews itself through its young generations, special attention should be directed towards young people, who are often labeled the "future of society." Yet, it is fairly difficult to define the term "youth" in an extremely complex society. Regardless of the different divisions of life span into preadolescence, adolescence, and youth, the common feature of all divisions and reflections is the phenomenon of "prolonged youth" (Razum and Mandarić 2019, 1085). The age group considered by the Synod on Youth refers to the ages between 16 and 29 (*ChV* 68).

Young people's value orientations and lifestyles partly remain anchored in traditional society while simultaneously being strongly influenced by the contemporary socio-cultural environment. Some numerous processes and phenomena influence the religiosity/spirituality of young people and contribute to the existence of multiple value reference frameworks. The processes/phenomena of secularization, individualization, modernization, and globalization, as well as the development of science and technology, unbridled consumerism, and the migration of people to larger cities, have influenced religious practices in many European countries, including the Republic of Croatia (cf. *EG* 70; Semeraro 1995; Razum and Mandarić 2019, 5; Begić and Kutleša 2021). Today, life is intensely marked by relativistic subjectivism, neopaganism, the ideologies of the market and consumerism, as well as the ideology of

personal success, and the influence of means of communication (cf. *EG* 70). In such an environment, characterized by strong ideological and religious pluralism, social incentives to be a Christian and attend church services are practically non-existent.

Sociological research confirms that the Republic of Croatia is one of the most religious countries in Europe. According to the European Values Survey, religious self-identification in Croatia almost exceeds 85% (Baloban, Črpić, and Ježovita 2019, 88). A high percentage of religious self-identification has also been noticed in the population of adolescents and young people. However, while research on the religiosity of adolescents and young people in Croatia confirms that most of them are religious and identify with the Catholic faith (86.1%), many distance themselves from active involvement in the life of the parish community after receiving the sacraments of Christian initiation (Razum and Mandarić 2019, 1093). Research shows that young people are scarcely or not at all engaged within their Catholic communities. Their spirituality reveals signs that go beyond the scope of the dominant, so-called traditional, Catholic spirituality. Young people's faith is increasingly becoming private, subjective, and distant from the Church. Subjectivism is becoming one of the fundamental characteristics of religiosity (Razum and Mandarić 2019, 1094–99; Baloban, Hoblaj, and Crnić 2010). The special relationship that young people have with the Church is indisputable. Their more critical attitude towards every authority—including the Church—is well-known. For religiosity, the space for actualization is no longer exclusively found in the institutional field. A religiosity that moves away from the Church and its teachings is increasingly emerging. Young people who come from families that are distanced from religion have a weak sense of religion. Furthermore, the Synod recognized that many young people do not ask the Church for anything. Such an attitude was built based on certain negative experiences such as sexual and economic scandals, inappropriate communication of ordained ministers with young people, low-quality homilies or catechesis, the passive role of young people in the Christian community, etc. (cf. *ChV* 40). Young people are increasingly becoming a generation "without" God and "without" the Church, insensitive to the spiritual dimension of life (Matteo 2017, 20–21).

Based on the empirical research on the religiosity of adolescents and young people, it can be concluded that one may encounter different typologies of religiosity among the youth (D'Agostino 2019, 29; Grassi 2006, 25–85; Semeraro 1995). The changes in this respect are increasingly related to the alienation from the Church, a much lesser attachment to tradition, a greater reliance on one's own beliefs and experience, a growing distance from Church institutions, the search for spirituality, etc. Young people harbor feelings of mistrust and indifference towards institutions, including the Church in its institutional dimension, which is also fuelled by the current scandals that are rocking the Church (cf. Mion 1995, 20–25). There is a noticeable tendency among young people no to be "against" but rather to become accustomed to living "without" the God revealed in the Gospel and "without" the Church.

At the same time, the preparatory document for the Synod on Young People (*Documento preparatorio* 2018, chap. 2) points to the fact that young people resort to alternative religiosity and a spirituality that is not overly institutionalized.

Despite the high percentage of those who identify themselves as Catholic believers, Croatian society is increasingly based on pluralistic foundations. Some markedly different models of understanding and practicing the Catholic faith are manifested under the common denominator of Catholic identity. For several decades now, Europe has witnessed a slow but progressive shift of people, especially young people, away from the traditional places that determined their religious affiliation (Davie 2005, 122). For religiosity, the space for actualization is no longer exclusively institutional. Today, we can see a religiosity that moves away from the Church and its teachings; a religiosity in which it has become possible to "believe and not belong". Moreover, a certain departure from the official teaching is noticeable within the Church itself, especially concerning morality, although this does not always result in the abandonment of one's religious community. In this religion, each person chooses what suits them according to their tastes, pleasures, and needs. This results in the emergence of a religiosity in which it is possible to "belong and not believe" (Hervieu-Léger 1996, 253), that is, one in which the relationship to religion is predominantly external, formal, traditional, historical, national or opportunistic (Razum 2009, 613).

Churches, therefore, are losing influence over the shaping of the human consciousness and the education of human values. The gap between the world and Christians is expanding; there is less and less understanding between them and the Church itself has become a stranger for many a Christian. Though they may still formally and legally belong to it, they have left it a long time ago when it comes to its moral, spiritual, and intellectual aspects. The emergence of many changes, which are increasingly difficult to manage and control, alters religious practices and may significantly change a person's attitude toward religion. It is precisely this changed structure of society conditioned by the modern way of life that is a vital cause of the growing distance between contemporary people and the Christian faith, especially in relation to some of its components. The lives of today's people, their mentality, their choices, customs, and values are less and less inspired by the Christian faith and Christian values. Nonetheless, it is obvious that religion is not dead. Most people are still interested in it (Begić and Kutleša 2021, 966). It is also true that contemporary religiosity uses different ways, forms, and language compared to Christianity from earlier times. Many young people today lack the experience of faith, so ignoring this fact inevitably condemns religious education to failure. One must, therefore, ask whether the Church takes into consideration the lack of religious feeling/experience of today's youth. During the past decades, most pastoral workers failed to notice and understand the deep changes that were taking place in people, creating a generation of non-believers.

2. The Crisis of the Intergenerational Transmission of Faith

Due to the new cultural and religious context, traditional catechetical activity has found itself in an uncertain situation. After all, its traditional model was conceived for Christian society. The progressive disappearance of that society and the strengthening of a new, no longer Christian world, has depleted the system of transmitting the Christian faith (Razum 2011, 653).

Today, it is generally accepted that we are in a state of severe crisis when it comes to the intergenerational transmission of faith. Considering the task of introducing new generations to the faith, the traditional system of Christian initiation reveals a fundamental flaw insofar as the end of Christian initiation usually coincides with leaving the Christian community (Razum 2009, 604). The traditional initiation model was put into question, even in a state of crisis, when the socio-cultural context was separated. One cannot ignore the fact that there are many significant cultural changes taking place in today's complex society, especially given the numerous profound developments that also affect the transmission of faith and Christian education (Montisci 2006, 46–61). It is impossible to design models of Christian education while ignoring the aggressiveness and progressiveness that impose a new model of a person as a human being who thinks, feels, reacts, and behaves in a fundamentally different way. In light of the extent and depth of these changes, which by no means leave the Christian community intact, we cannot continue in the same way "as we have always done." Today's mentality, customs, and life choices are revealed to be less and less rooted or inspired by the Christian faith. The construction of the Christian identity in today's young people is not supported by the social context (Razum 2009, 612). It is fairly obvious that in recent decades "there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young. It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. Growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray. There is also a certain exodus towards other faith communities" (*EG* 70).

Today's youth live in a time of general hopelessness. In more elaborate terms, these are times "deprived of the future, in which the coming time does not represent hope but anxiety" (Razum and Mandarić 2019, 3). In terms of confronting this issue, the fundamental question facing the Church is how to nurture in young people a mature faith that is both personal and ecclesial. The path to such a faith leads primarily through young people, listening to them, getting to know their world, and establishing relationships with them. Pope Francis often highlights the importance of listening. The document *Christus Vivit* critically emphasizes: "Rather than listening to young people attentively, 'all too often, there is a tendency to provide pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing their real questions to emerge and facing the challenges they pose'" (*ChV* 65). Belonging to the Church is not only

about adhering to certain truths and lifestyles. It is the result of interpersonal relationships (Razum and Mandarić 2019, 9).

In the past centuries, the transmission of the Christian faith was facilitated by a wider Christian environment, at least in the sense that everyone was baptized and that the social environment was Christian or predominantly Christian. Religious pluralism did not exist, or at least it was not manifested publicly. "Introduction to Christianity" was reduced to a mere process of religious socialization. Processes of integration and social conformity were dominant. The term "introduction to Christianity" had not been used for centuries. After the first centuries, it was out of use until the 20th century, when people came to use it again to describe part of the introduction of its liturgical-sacramental element. The Second Vatican Council then expanded the use of this term (*AG* 14). Today's environment, marked by strong ideological and religious pluralism, is no longer a school of practical Christianity. Believers can no longer live off pure tradition and favorable social influences but need to personally establish their faith. Christian families fail to convey Christian education to their children. Young people who come from families that are distanced from religion have a weak sense of religion. If the parents, as the first educators, do not provide their offspring with a religious experience, i.e., an experience of the Christian faith—especially prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, and a concrete relationship with the commandment of love—children and young people remain deprived of a sense of God, that is, of a sense of religion. In this sense, the current religious-pedagogical and pastoral-catechetical practices, especially in the context of Christian initiation, cannot assume that the children and young people addressed by this practice have a developed religious sensibility and religious experience.

Education in the faith does not begin in the parish, much less in the school. Religious education in the parish or school builds on the testimony of parents, as well as that of other adults, regarding the importance of the Christian experience for a fulfilled and happy life. The most radical and effective "means" for transmitting the faith and teaching new Christians is a personal relationship with people who live the Gospel and have it in their hearts. Yet, if that personal relationship with convinced Christians who live and testify to their faith is missing, religious education in parish communities will have a rather weak effect. Therefore, apart from Christian families that leave their children and young people religiously malnourished, a great responsibility for young people who distance themselves from religion and the Church also rests with religious communities, which do not enable children and young people to have real contact with mature and convinced Christians (Razum 2011, 653).

In the Republic of Croatia, the Church has placed great hopes and invested many resources in religious education in schools since the state's very inception. Research on the religiosity of adolescents in the city of Zagreb shows that religious education brings numerous positive effects. More specifically, 40.3% of the surveyed high school students claim that their faith has become stronger thanks to religious education.

When it comes to their religious formation, religious teachers come third in terms of importance, preceded only by their mothers and fathers (Mandarić, Razum, and Barić 2019, 148). What is surprising, however, is that only 2.4% of respondents emphasized the role of catechists in their religious formation. Still, this extremely low percentage is much less shocking if one considers that as many as 63.6% of respondents answered that they never participated in parish catechesis or meetings for young people. (Mandarić, Razum, and Barić 2019, 149). This shows that parish catechesis is being neglected, which the Croatian bishops are also aware of: "Therefore, while we proudly point out all the positive efforts that have been invested to introduce religious education in schools, we must state that the original form of systematic religious education, which takes place in the parish community, has been at least partially neglected ... the crucial question is how religion is lived in a concrete local Church, that is, a parish community" (Poruka hrvatskih biskupa – župna kateheza u službi župne zajednice 2000). Its future, the future of faith, and the future of the Church in the West largely depend on the Church's attitude towards young people. To keep young people in its fold and to win back those who have left it, the Church is called to intensify its pastoral and catechetical care for children and young people.

3. Adulthood. Impact on the Youth

From a functional point of view, the term "adulthood" refers to the chronological age between adolescence and old age. Different approaches are necessary to derive the fundamental features of that age, and the approach connected to psychological sciences is particularly important. Numerous scientists have tried to outline the basic dynamics of the development of that age from a psychological standpoint (cf. Bucciarelli 1997, 32–33; Lorenzetto 1989, 112–20). Although a person is usually considered to be mature after reaching a certain age, this criterion is not sufficient to determine a mature age. Being mature implies much more than just age. Maturity entails reaching certain physiological, psychological, social, and moral levels. As Joseph Colomb points out: "it can be said that a person has not entered adulthood and has wasted his or her youth if he or she has not developed into a responsible person" (Colomb 1981, 126–27). Accepting responsibility for oneself, other people, and the world is a key feature of adulthood. While there is no such thing as a perfect adult who embodies all the qualities of adulthood, it can be said that a person who truly strives to attain and live these characteristics, i.e., this ideal, is an adult. Being an adult has always been synonymous with being "mature," or being able to take responsibility for oneself and others. These characteristics, however, are increasingly difficult to encounter in the lives of adults today (Cucci 2012, 25). *Becoming an adult* is scary and *being an adult* is difficult. Facing the challenges of social complexity and

cultural pluralism causes many adults to feel powerless, lost, insecure, and experience an identity crisis.

3.1. Who/What Is an Adult Like Today: A Paradigm Shift

The attitude of contemporary culture towards adulthood is fairly interesting. In the past, adulthood was the desired age—that of independence, security, decision-making, and authority. In contrast, modern society no longer seems to view adulthood as the desired age; it is as if it does not want to reach that age at all. That is why it is hardly surprising that today we increasingly encounter adults who are, in fact, eternal teenagers.

Adults today are no longer what they used to be. The old wisdom paradigms are no longer active as new horizons of meaning are emerging—precisely those that govern the lives of Western people, especially adults. In a brief time, these new instances became the common heritage of Western people, in no small part thanks to modern technology that enables fast and powerful communication. The development of communication technology has set the stage for new ideas/ideologies that have marked the late 20th and early 21st centuries, also affecting adults to a significant extent. These include, just to name a few: the changes related to the new self-awareness and social position of women, the transgender ideology that goes against the morality of tradition, the ideology based on the cult of money, markets, free digital communication (Cucci 2012, 33), the ideology of radical self-realization. Divorces hardly arouse anyone's indignation anymore and few are concerned about the increase in suicides resulting from social deviance and sexual disorders the likes of which one would never mention even in polite social circles in the past. For the most part, we manage to peacefully live alongside such issues as abortion and euthanasia, as well as the problem of millions of homeless and starving people. Even the latest threats to our freedom in the world of the "new normal" do not seem to bother us. All these new value/life paradigms very easily and swiftly became entrenched in the mentality of modern people. Changes occur so quickly that it is almost impossible for us to notice them as they are happening. Modern people have lost themselves in the overwhelming number of possibilities they are given daily.

Postmodern culture promotes the idea of people marked by individualistic and narcissistic attitudes, people who are focused on themselves, on material goods, on quantity over quality, on ever-changing desires and immediate pleasures. The fear of transience directs people's lives towards the superficial and transitory, as well as radical freedom. An individual is seen as a self-sufficient entity on a permanent, one-sided quest for satisfaction and happiness (Portera 2011, 22). Today, one can go as far as to describe it as true egolatry, that is, the cult of "I." The development of modern and postmodern individualism has strengthened the notion of self-love—narcissism—"making it no longer a problem of only the individual, but one of the most

typical characteristics of our culture" (Halík, 2022, 141). The ideology of radical self-realization, characterized by extreme egoism, is now at work. Many have fallen prey to this mentality. Adults are captivated by the cult of self-realization and lost in their own myths: youth at any price, money and career at any price, and culture of one's own "I" at any price. But they seem to be unaware of what "at any price" means for their children. (Matteo 2018, 46).

3.2. The Crisis of Adults: The Disappearance of "Adulthood" and "Maturity"

The behavior of adults testifies to their fascination with youth, to the detriment of their adulthood/maturity. They take many imprudent steps in their attempts to return to the irresponsibility and nonchalance of childhood or the allure and vigor of adolescence, longing to stop time, or even reverse it (Bruckner 1997, 85–91). Adolescence is seen less as a period of life in which one prepares for adult life and more as a life phase that a person does not want to leave. The attitude of "staying young," and remaining "an eternal adolescent" is very popular and widely accepted. Adulthood has been affected by the Peter Pan syndrome (Cucci 2012; Matteo 2021; University of Granada 2007). The Peter Pan syndrome characterizes people who refuse to grow up and take on the life responsibilities associated with adulthood. If adults remain adolescents at the level of their desires and imagination, it means that they no longer see adulthood, i.e., growth and development, as a desired ideal. Thus, what becomes the ideal is not to grow, not to develop, i.e., to remain trapped in one stage of life—adolescence.

The loss of value and attractiveness of growth and development toward adulthood is a recent phenomenon that was completely unknown in the past. It seems that growing, developing, and aging are considered something bad. Old age has become almost synonymous with uselessness and frustration, while aging is perceived as something to be ashamed of, akin to a disease (Cernuzio 2017). This is an illusory endeavor since time cannot be stopped, except at the level of desires and imagination. However, the effort to stop time will not save one from aging—it will only fill one with fear and apathy regarding growth and changes, i.e., life. The price paid for permanent youth is the hindered development of the person and the impaired development of younger generations (Savage 2009, 95). Even Pope Francis points out that adults who do not want to be adults and assume the role of eternal adolescents are an obstacle to the development and growth of their own children (Cernuzio 2017).

Today, it has become almost impossible to see a clear intergenerational boundary between children, young people, and adults. They are all connected by the same style of dress, communication, behavior, life, relationships, and feelings. Everyone shows similar reactions to different life challenges so it is difficult to understand who has truly grown up. In the context of contemporary times, when a person is not

so much marked by age as participation in certain lifestyles, we are reaching a point where the biological boundary is erased and hybrid figures of aged adolescents, adult adolescents, and the eternally young are created. (cf. Cucci 2012, 16). On the one hand, it is increasingly difficult to encounter adults who behave like adults, and on the other, we are witnessing the emergence of another phenomenon—children behaving like adults, which was also unheard of until recently. It seems that all ages have lost their specificities, drowning in common, undifferentiated features. Our society is increasingly becoming a society of eternal children.

If we consider adults to be people who accept their responsibility for "future generations and for the world in which they will live" (Alberich and Binz 2002, 93), who take responsibility for the consequences of their words, actions, and life decisions, then we cannot turn a blind eye to the strong weakening of the presence of adults in modern society. Adults get lost in situations and experiences where this happens to their children as well. The concept of maturity, construed as closely related to responsibility, is disappearing along with the notion of an adult person. In this sense, there is no longer any need for education either, since everyone is considered self-sufficient. After all, in the society of "eternal children" it seems that no one is even able to raise another person. The crisis of adulthood is closely linked to the changes occurring in family relationships as well as the education crisis. The disappearance of adults strongly affects relationships in families: it is no longer children who need to learn rules and lessons from their parents—parents now adapt to the criteria and behaviors of their children, thus seeking their acceptance and approval (Cucci 2012, 31–32; Show and Wood 2009).

Adults, parents, and teachers who struggle with their adolescent crises and are unable to make clear decisions will not help in children's development. We are witnessing immature educators who still follow unrealistic ideals of absolute freedom, are unable to manage their lives, and are incapable of combining personal freedom with the principles of the common good, commitment, and responsibility. Many young adults are guided by the belief that one must strive only for self-fulfillment, even at the expense of one's neighbors, which then leads to one's inability to be loyal or respect obligations and values (Portera 2011, 23; Show and Wood 2009). Even though the education of younger generations represents one of the key tasks of adulthood, there is a noticeable lack of educational determination and effectiveness among adults—as if they have given up on educating children and young people.

3.3. Adults and Young People

Young people are a reflection of their living environment. We can understand all their values, aspirations, problems, and insecurities only if we place them within the socio-cultural environment whose spirit they assimilate every day. Young people are the expression of a society that is very different from that of the older generations.

Rapid social changes contribute to the growing distance between the young and the elderly. While the world of young people has always created problems at the level of relationships, it seems that these problems are even more pronounced today than ever before.

Although it is not always easy to understand and accept certain thoughts and behaviors of young people, difficulties in the relationship between adults and young people often arise from the many prejudices that the former have towards the latter. Adults may feel envy, jealousy, fear, and resentment towards the youth. These negative feelings can arise from the following: not accepting one's age, fear of aging and losing power and authority; memories of one's failures, wrongdoings, and weaknesses, as well as a certain superiority that young people may show in certain areas of life. Insofar as they are focused on themselves and the accumulation of goods and privileges, adults become incapable of caring for the young (Matteo 2017, 12). The document *Christus Vivit* warns of various kinds of abuse in the Church, the desire for domination, the lack of dialogue and transparency, double life, and especially the problem of clericalism as a permanent nuisance for priests (*ChV* 98).

The relationship between young people and adults is often filled with misunderstandings, prejudice, criticism, and judgment, from both sides. The notion of a "crisis of the educational function of adults" (Alberich and Binz 2002, 65) is increasingly discussed, as are the generational downfall and gap. The adults who "were once young, while the young were never adults" (cf. Alberich and Binz 2002, 65), among other things, are more responsible for the current situation. There is no education, and therefore no education in religion, without responsible and high-quality educators, i.e., without responsible and mature adults.

3.4. The Impact of the Adult Crisis on the Religious Life of Young People

The adult crisis is also manifested in religious life. The immaturity of adults manifests itself as the immaturity of adult Christians, which has dramatic consequences for young people and their religious life. Speaking in biblical language: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39). Can an immature adult help a young person become a mature adult?

What is truly important to today's adults, "eternal adolescents," is almost exclusively their socio-economic status, career, personal success, health, and aesthetic form. In the heart of an adult, there is room for everything, except religious experience. God, the Church, the Gospel, sin, salvation, death, sacrifice, prayer, and eternity are no longer part of the family vocabulary. The life of an adult is marked by the absence of God and the absence of the Church (Matteo 2018, 33). The crisis of family religious education is more than obvious. Children are deprived of paternal and maternal role models in an area where they particularly need their presence and assistance. Today, for a variety of reasons, families increasingly remain silent on

religious reality. At the level of everyday life, religious language is belittled and there is less and less reliance on God. Religious rites are disappearing (participation in the Sunday Eucharist) and certain moments, such as prayer, are losing their meaning (cf. *EG* 70). Families no longer spontaneously discuss God. Nevertheless, they still try to maintain a surface-level connection with the Church's religious tradition, even though they have reduced it to a conformist choice, depriving it of its religious content. If religion is no longer important to parents, it is difficult to conceive that young people might find it important themselves. Many young people show no interest in religion (for many, Confirmation is a departure from the religious community—at least for a certain time). Atheism and indifference of contemporary youth are further fed by the death of Christianity in family life, by the obscuring of God in the eyes of fathers and mothers (Matteo 2018, 34). The chain of transmission of faith has been broken. The intergenerational transmission of faith is no longer self-explanatory. The notion of family Christianity has died, as has the reality of the family as the "first and small Church," which was entrusted with the task of educating new believers throughout history. The chain of transmission of faith has been broken without any special consideration and virtually without any regrets. God has gradually disappeared from the horizon of consciousness of adults born in the second half of the last century to the same extent to which there emerged adults increasingly marked by a life in which God simply has no place. (Matteo 2018, 34; *EG* 70).

The faithlessness of young people originates directly from this new figure of an adult, which is increasingly manifested as a post-Christian person that the current Western generations have invented and diligently embodied. It is an adult devoid of all responsibilities towards new generations and of any authentic connection with God, religious community, society, the future, and thus, with his or her own children—an adult who loves, respects, and supports his or her youth more than young people do; an adult who, for this very reason, has nothing to do with everything that characterizes the notion of a Christian (Matteo 2018, 64).

4. The Formation of an Adult

It is impossible to explore the issues of the Confirmand crisis, the distanced attitude of young people towards the Church, or the abandonment of religious practice after childhood, without first discussing the issue of adults. If we want the new generations to continue to be convinced and persuasive Christians, the focus and emphasis should be on the formation and empowerment of Christians themselves. Besides, the commitment to adult catechesis was clearly expressed in many Church documents (Alberich and Binz 2002, 30–36) following the Second Vatican Council. Despite the Church's determination to make the adult catechesis "the main form of

catechesis to which all, always necessary, forms of catechesis are somehow directed" (*DCG* 20), current pastoral attention is still mainly focused on children, and sometimes the elderly. Catechesis, where it exists, is mainly aimed at children, and the general impression is that the Church is a place that specializes in the world of children. Whereas historically pastoral care has focused on children, today the focus must be on promoting adult believers with adult faith (Alberich 1992, 32). The question remains, however, whether the Church is affected by a fear of adults and of "maturity," whether it wants mature adult believers, and whether, for its part, it is ready for a co-responsible dialogue with the adults of our time.

If mature adults—also mature in their faith—are crucial for mature living and passing on the faith to younger generations, we must ask ourselves how much attention and care the Church devotes to the formation of new adult believers. The fundamental question is whether the Church has the power to give rise to new believers, i.e., whether it can form new adult believers since its future depends on it. Yet, the rule "do as it has always been done" does not apply when it comes to the formation of adults. For before us is a different adult. A post-Christian one. According to Pope John Paul II, man "is the primary and fundamental way for the Church" (*RH* 14), and if so, special attention should be paid to the issue of a person/subject, and we should try to meet that person where he or she is found on the path of abandoning the Christian faith (cf. Emmaus, Luke 24:13–35). When burdened by the weight and complexity of the problems that stem from the modern world, pastoral and catechetical answers can sometimes seem completely inappropriate. Inappropriate pastoral and catechetical attitudes emerge when the concrete cultural situation is simply ignored, when current changes are not understood, and when the usual pastoral and catechetical practice is continued without attempting to analyze or interpret it. Traditional pastoral service, which assumes that the people are already Christian, does not grasp the logic and dynamics of the evangelization process. In a Christian society, where education in faith takes place within the family and Christian community, such a situation may limit the catechesis to the development and deepening of knowledge about the faith. Today, however, the lack of primary religious socialization cannot simply be compensated and replaced by catechesis and religious education, nor can it be substituted by deepening catechetical efforts, especially if they comply with the traditional model of transmitting and deepening religious truths (Razum 2011, 663).

How to preserve faith and overcome the crisis in the modern world? One of the important ways of "confronting" the culture of narcissism, individualism, and division is networking, and building communities and institutions capable of contributing to the development of a Christian identity. The negative forces of the dominant culture are too strong for individuals to resist them alone. It is necessary to build stable and strong communities that nurture faith. Christians are expected to be a creative minority and to offer a bright alternative to this cold and increasingly

dark world. All this should be preceded by the act of awakening Christians stunned by the intoxicating poison of materialism, consumerism, hedonism, and technicism. If we wish to survive as Christians, we must rediscover our identity and roots.

Communicating faith in a secularized society represents a challenge and a complex task for the Christian community. The existence of living Christian communities is certainly a *condizione sine qua non* for recognizing the God of Jesus Christ. As highlighted in the 1971 General Catechetical Directory, "Catechesis, finally, demands the witness of faith, both from the catechists and from the ecclesial community" (*DCG* 35). In a world where the authenticity of what a person represents is expected to be substantiated by a "live example," the emphasis placed on witnessing becomes crucial for catechesis as well. A catechist cannot expect to interest, engage, and educate anyone in the Christian faith if he or she cannot rely on the testimony of the community. (Razum 2011, 664–65). The Christian community is now faced with the serious task of engaging an increasingly numerous generation of unbelieving Christians.

Conclusion

The world of young people and their religiosity are experiencing profound and permanent changes. They result from deeper and more far-reaching transitions taking place at the socio-cultural level. The socio-cultural environment of the former traditional religiosity/spirituality was one dominated by religious and Christian reality. One in which the Christian life was adopted by the very belonging and participation in society and family and whose life was significantly marked by religious traits. In the meantime, however, the social world has gradually de-Christianized.

Current research on the religiosity of young people unequivocally indicates the changes in traditional religiosity taking place in the world of young people. The religiosity changes among today's youth are so profound and powerful that failure to account for them may well spell doom for the mission of the Church itself. Changes are also noticeable in relation to young people's attitudes towards the Church—they are showing an increasingly strong distrust and critical attitude, which has been further exacerbated by the recent sexual and financial scandals. Young people are increasingly becoming a generation "without" God and "without" the Church, insensitive to the spiritual dimension of life.

Young people's religiosity and attitudes towards the Church are strongly influenced by adults. Adult age, on the other hand, is marked by the crisis of adulthood and maturity, which is closely related to changing family relationships and especially to the education crisis. Since adults are experiencing an identity crisis, the question is how ready and able they are to devote themselves to the issues of young people and

how reliable teachers, educators, and witnesses they can be. Only an adult and mature person—one engaged in a constant process of becoming adult and mature—can guarantee a quality education for new generations, which will enable children and young people to develop into adult, mature, and happy people, and into convinced and convincing Christians. This is a task in which the current generation of parents and educators is bound to face many difficulties and setbacks.

The best testimony that Christians can offer to the world, and especially to their children if they want them to be Christians too, is to simply be the Church, the community of Jesus' disciples. Christians are called to live in communion. Contrary to many forms of individualism, we need Christians who show solidarity; people of the community, able and willing to live their faith "with others." The Church community is one of life, love, and truth. The Spirit of Christ empowers Christians to be a different community—one that represents a challenge to the world of divisions, violence, conspiracies, and rejection. Therefore, if they want to be convincing to others, and especially to their children, adult Christians will have to become more authentic narrators and witnesses of the Christian truth. Traditional pastoral-catechetical models, which assume that the people are still Christian, cannot be effective in the contemporary post-Christian and missionary context.

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