

Fostering the Faith of the Young in Asia

An Inter-Cultural Approach to Youth Catechesis

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Promuovere la fede dei giovani in Asia

Un approccio interculturale alla catechesi dei giovani

► SOMMARIO

The paper aims to initiate an exchange on the theme of Interculturality, a factor that Christians in Asia experience in their daily life and perceive both as an opportunity and a challenge in fostering the faith of the young. Far from claiming to be exhaustive, the paper in a literary genre that delves not only into the mind, but also into the resources of the heart, attempts to look at two predominant problems that pluriculturality poses to the Asian situation: Fundamentalism and Relativism. The work, after having briefly underlined the impacts these two phenomena have on the Asian youth, explicates the response of the Asian Church. To match and to take this response forward in a holistic manner, the paper suggests a Catechesis that has an approach that is determinedly intercultural and goes on to explain what it would imply in theory and practice.

► PAROLE CHIAVE

Asia; Fundamentalism; Inter-cultural Approach; Relativism; Young.

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■ Introduction

The purpose of this paper is only to initiate an exchange on the theme of Interculturality - a factor that Christians in Asia experience in their daily life and perceive both as an opportunity and a challenge in fostering the faith of the young. This exposition, far from being exhaustive, was written as the Spirit inspired, with all the freedom implied, in the form of an essay, a literary genre which allows for the expression of one's ideas, by delving not only into the mind, but also into the resources of the heart.

On the event of the First Pentecost, St. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressing the crowd with the words of the prophet Joel, said: "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions".¹ Thus, the Church, from the commencement of its mission, clearly indicated that the young had a place and a role in the newly-formed Christian communities that professed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, the saviour "who is eternally young".²

On 8th December 1965 in its final act, the Second Vatican Council, hailed by many as a "Second Pentecost", publicly proclaimed and manifested its solitude and concern for the young in its message to them. Vatican II invited the young to look upon the Church, the Christian community, and to see in it the "face of Christ, the genuine, humble, and wise Hero, the Prophet of truth and love, the Companion and Friend of youth".³ At the same time, the Council also entrusted to the young the rejuvenated image of the Church and invited them to be the torchbearers of this Light - Jesus, who will illumine their way in the future and ignite them with the desire to establish a society of respect, dignity, liberty and love.⁴

In continuance of this care and concern for the young, Pope John Paul II wrote the Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* on the occasion of the International Youth Year in 1985⁵ and initiated the celebration of the World Youth Day alternating the event between local and world levels.

Pope Francis, in furtherance of the mission of proclaiming "The Joy of the Gospel", *Evangelii Gaudium*, affirms: "Even if it is not always easy to approach young people, progress has been made in two areas: the awareness that the entire community is called to evangelize and educate the young, and the urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership".⁶

Convoking the Synod of Bishops in October 2018 on the theme: *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, Pope Francis writes: "I wanted you to be the centre of attention, because you are in my heart. Today, the Preparatory Document is being presented, a document

¹ Acts 2: 17.

² PAUL VI, *Concilium Oecumenicum Vatican II Sollemi Ritu Concluditur*, December 8, 1965, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 58 (1966) 5-19. Translation: *Closing Message of the Second Vatican Council to youth*, <http://www.vatican.va/gmg/documents/gmg-2002_ii-vat-council_message-youth_19651207_en.html> (24.02.2018).

³ *Ibidem*, 5th paragraph.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 3rd paragraph.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici*, March 31, 1986, in IDEM, *Apostolic Letters*, Trivandrum, Carmel International Publishing House 2005. (Henceforth DA).

⁶ FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Carmel International Publishing House, Trivandrum 2013, 106. (Henceforth EG).

which I am also entrusting to you as your “compass” on this synodal journey”.⁷ The Preparatory Document for the Synod declares that “the Church has decided to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to fullness of life and love, and to ask young people to help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today”.⁸

1. The Church in Asia and the Young

Asia is a continent of ancient and diverse cultures, religions, histories and traditions, “a region like Joseph’s coat of many colours”.⁹ The message and resolution of the First Asian Bishops’ Meeting in Manila, (Philippines) on 29th November 1970 affirms that Asian Catholics desire “to be increasingly integrated within the larger communities around us, culturally part of that Asia which is coming to slow but certain birth in the present moment”.¹⁰

Asia is also home to about sixty percent of the world’s young people. The life of the young reflects Asia’s manifold economic, political, cultural, religious and educational realities. They are at the vanguard of social and political change in Asia and are also the most idealistic and enthusiastic.

The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) has consistently named the youth in the Church in Asia as a major pastoral priority. The bishops of Asia declared: “It is our resolve also, in this continent of the young, to become, in them and for them, the ‘Church of the Young’. We wish to be, in them and for them, a Church that they shall see as worthy of their devotion and hope”.¹¹ Therefore, they are not only the future of the Church and the world but already in the present, precious treasures of the Church in Asia. The youth of Asia affirm their gifts of youthfulness, strength and enthusiasm and aspire to a higher dimension as living symbols of hope.

The Christian community continues to attribute special importance to the period of youth as a key stage in the life of every person since it is the “time of a particularly intense discovery of the human ‘I’ and of the properties and capacities connected with it. At the same time, it is the period of choosing, foreseeing, organizing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will have their impact also at the social level”.¹²

2. The Changing Face of Asia and the Challenges it poses

Asia today is marked by swift and far-reaching transformation, a continent undergoing rapid modernization/post modernization and profound changes in life style because of modern

⁷ Pope Francis, *Letter of Pope Francis to Young People*, in <<http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/en/pope--young/letter-of-his-holiness-pope-francis-to-young-people.html>> (25-02-2018).

⁸ SYNOD OF BISHOPS XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, Preparatory Document, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2017, 5-6.

⁹ ASIAN BISHOPS’ MEETING, *Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops’ Meeting*, Manila, Philippines, 29, November 1970, in G. ROSALES - D.G. AREVALO (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 1, no. 7,4. (Henceforth FABC, Vol.1.).

¹⁰ FABC, Vol. 1., 4.

¹¹ FABC, Vol. 1. 6, 23.

¹² DA, no. 3.

means of information technology and social communication. Side by side with undeniable benefits and positive values of such fast transformation, these processes have also brought about the break up of traditional societies, bringing with it irreparable alienation and the disintegration of patterns of life and social relationships built up over the centuries. “Stable meanings and values which have supported their lives are deeply shaken, and Asian peoples today are left in confusion and disorientation, even in despair and darkness of spirit”.¹³ More specifically the phenomena of Fundamentalism and Relativism have seen an unprecedented rise since the past two decades.¹⁴

2.1. The Challenge of Fundamentalism

The traditional Asian concept of harmonious living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious Asia is rapidly giving way to *Fundamentalism* which has raised its head during the recent past in many areas of daily living: religious, ethnic, political and even secular. Often the supporters of such extreme and exclusivist positions end up organizing and creating communal turmoil leading up even to violence.

“In recent years, the label ‘Fundamentalism’ has been used to describe any militantly ‘traditionalist’ religious movement. In our day, the term ‘Fundamentalism’ has also been transferred to designate reactionary trends within all religions and also other sectors of reality”.¹⁵ The first aspect of Fundamentalism is ‘oppositionalism’, when members of unduly ‘conservative or overly ‘traditionalist’ movements experience threat. “Secondly, Fundamentalism is rigidly anti-hermeneutical... viz., the tendency to identify and fuse and then reject, Pluralism, on the one hand, and Relativism on the other”.¹⁶ The third aspect of Fundamentalism is the absence of nuancing that is characterized by an exaggerated simplicity, seeking clarity of statement, avoiding loss of value through compromise and seeking to protect in a perfectionist way a basic value or basic idea. Fundamentalism, from a psychological point of view, can be perceived as a consequence of alienation and can be understood as the attempt to overcome a deep existential anxiety and weariness of conflict. Individuals with such experiences tend to cultivate a desire for certainty, for a stable picture of the world, and long for a leader who knows the right way and seeks total subjection. Fundamentalism from a social perspective manifests itself as intolerance. Fundamentalism can be also perceived as a reaction to Secularism, Modernism and Postmodernism, and opposition to Globalization.¹⁷

Religious Fundamentalism, according Vorster, can be understood “as a way of reasoning which breeds ideologies that are both religious and political in nature and mount themselves against a perceived threat or enemy in order to protect their identities. These ideologists elevate certain fundamentals of a particular religion or life- and worldview to absolutes and interlace their ideas and methods around these absolutes. With a strong reactionary attitude, fundamen-

¹³ FABC, Vol. 1. 13.

¹⁴ V. TIRIMANNA, *Youth in Asia: Challenges of Fundamentalism & Relativism* in Office Theological Animation – FABC Papers 135, Introduction, 2, <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_papers%20135.pdf> (25.02.2018).

¹⁵ D. VELIATH, *Fundamentalism and Relativism*, in Office of Theological Animation – FABC Papers 135, 69, <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_papers%20135.pdf> (25.02.2018).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 64.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 63-67.

tal ideologies and religions easily resort to extremism, militancy, abuses of human rights and even violence”.¹⁸

The relationship between Nationalism and Fundamentalism is rather evident. Religion is used as a political tool to strengthen the national identity. A religious perspective is often blended with the political and social destiny of a nation. “Religious Fundamentalism tends to have what may perhaps be called an ‘idolatrous’ tendency. At times it tends to find refuge in the materiality of religious objects and texts while rejecting their symbolic significance. This type of scriptural and ritual literalism neglects if not rejects the ongoing revelation of God and his gracious guidance towards fullness of life in the march of human culture and history. Religious Fundamentalism also often has a political agenda”.¹⁹

Among the indicators of the emergence of Fundamentalism in religious traditions, according to Vorster, are: “scripturalism, the attempt to establish a rigid orthopraxis, the identification of a common enemy, anger, totalitarianism, religious fanaticism and extremism”.²⁰

2.2. The Challenge on the part of Relativism

The effects of Relativism are felt by everyone without the explicit use of the term. Relativism simply involves reference to many, not to one: there is no universal truth, only many different truths. “At the very outset, there is need to make a distinction of paramount importance between ‘Plurality’, ‘Relationality’ and ‘Relativism’. Plurality is intrinsic to the multi-dimensionality of human experience; Relationality refers to the ‘relatedness’ of reality; ‘Relativism’, instead, maintains that the human being can only attain approximations, not the truth. In its core, this latter tends to be a negation of realism”.²¹

Of the many types and schools of relativism, moral relativism seems to exert a greater impact in the lives of Asians.

Moral Relativism is the philosophical theory that morality is relative, for different groups hold different moral truths and will most often perceive morality as something that is individual, changeable and subjective. It comes in two forms: Ethical Subjectivism and Cultural Relativism. Ethical Subjectivism affirms that morality is relative to the individual; whereas Cultural Relativism is the view that “different groups, e.g., those with very different languages or cultures, may have rather different central concepts and that this can lead their members to rather different concepts of the world.”²²

“Dictatorship of Relativism”²³ - an expression of Benedict XVI, highlights the dictatorial nature which affirms that “the only view permissible among reasonable people is the view that

¹⁸ J. VORSTER, *Analytical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism*, in “Journal for the Study of Religion and Ideologies” 17 (2007), 5.

¹⁹ VELIATH, *Fundamentalism and Relativism*, 68-69.

²⁰ VORSTER, *Analytical Perspectives*, 11.

²¹ VELIATH, *Fundamentalism and Relativism*, 69.

²² Ch. SWOYER, *Relativism*, as quoted by C. DEVADASS, *Relativism: A Deeper Understanding and its Impact on the Youth in Asia*, in FABC Papers 135, 46.

²³ BENEDICT XVI, *Mass Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, Vatican Basilica, 18 April 2005, <http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html> (27.02.2018).

all subjective choices are equally valid... anyone who claims that there are objective truths and objective goods and evils is intolerant”.²⁴

2.3. The Impact of Fundamentalism and Relativism on Young Catholic Asians

The rise of fundamentalist groups can be perceived as a reaction to situations or realities which these individuals or groups perceived as threat to their self-identity and vision of society and the world, aggravating fear, anxiety and insecurity, the inclination to instil fear in others through tactics of violence and threats.

Youth are most vulnerable to especially Religious Fundamentalism. Their developmental process can be inhibited or even blocked when their formation takes place in a context of fear and threat of the other. Further, the formation process is stunted when young people are formed to accept without question whatever the leaders say about tradition and when they are taught only absolutes and not variables. In many Asian countries, the development of young people is mired when they are brought up in a totalizing male-dominated patriarchal environment. The developmental stages of young people, as affirmed by developmental psychologists and sociologist, entail experiences of transitions and insecurity.²⁵

In many respects, the period of youth is a stage during which the young confront more explicitly and consciously the four core struggles, namely “the inevitability of order, the eventual emergence of disorder, the possibility of new order and the relationality that underlies all forms of order and their explanations”.²⁶ Hence the fundamentalist groups tend to become attractive to young people who are still forming and defining their identity and are in need of a sense of belonging and security which fundamentalist groups promise to deliver.

In today’s world of information technologies and fast communication, the youth are exposed to a variety of modern values and morals that lead them to a state of confusion and disorientation with the many options offered to them. “Living a life of continuous discernment of choices may be experienced as a burden and lead them to search for the firm foundations of fundamentalist groups who offer easy answers to all sorts of complicated questions”.²⁷

In addition, there are fundamentalist groups who take advantage of the susceptibility of the young and recruit them quite early as members. At the same time there are young people who have grown up in a fundamentalist environment and would never perceive themselves as fundamentalist until they interact with the ‘out-group’. An added concern regards those young people who experience ‘spiritual abuse’ brought up in an environment that threatens them with hell-fire if they do not live up to the expectations and standards of the fundamentalist groups.

This phenomenon of Fundamentalism faced by the young challenges the Church in Asia to look at strategies of Youth Catechesis.

The impact of Relativism on the youth of today has been subtle and subversive. Clarence Devadass highlights five areas of concern that are more explicitly connected to Moral/Ethical

²⁴ M. NOVAK, *Culture in Crisis*, <<https://www.nationalreview.com/2005/04/culture-crisis-michael-novak/>> (27.02.2018).

²⁵ M. ANICIA, Some Perspectives on Fundamentalism and its impact on youth, in *FABC Papers* 135, 40.

²⁶ J. E. LODER, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspectives*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 1998, 203.

²⁷ ANICIA, *Some Perspectives*, 40.

Relativism.²⁸ Such a relativism is often not articulated *in toto* but is expressed in some traces of relativism.

Quest for Independence: The young, moving from the age of dependence and entering into an age of independence, are always connected to the need of asserting oneself in society while attempting to find one's identity. This attempt to assert one's independence often leads them to certain traces of relativistic thinking and living.

Tolerance: "Relativists often defend their position by claiming they are more tolerant of other people and other cultures. In a multicultural society it is better to be tolerant rather than intolerant. Since the ethical relativist does not believe his moral beliefs and practices are any truer than the moral beliefs of others, he can be tolerant in a way that the ethical objectivist cannot be. Hence, Ethical Relativism is preferable to Ethical Objectivism".²⁹ Tolerance attempts to be inclusive with regard to the different thought processes and outcomes that one finds in different people. In a multi-ethnic society like Asia, tolerance undoubtedly is considered as a virtue but unfortunately it can also condition the 'objectivity of truth with the consequence that it can be perceived as a negative outcome.

Secularization: The young of today are not spared of the influence of secularization. Because relativism implies a certain search for truth, one of the possible outcomes of that search can be secularization. Charles Taylor in his book, *A Secular Age*, writes of three types of secularity: "one understanding of secularity, then is in terms of public spaces. These have been allegedly emptied of God or any reference to the ultimate reality... In the second meaning secularity consists in the falling off of religious beliefs and practice, in people turning away from God and no longer going to Church... The shift of secularity in the third sense consists of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace"³⁰ In such a society no individual can dictate norms or code of conduct since each one believes to have the truth. The youth of today are much influenced by such a thought process.

Globalised Morality: The way young people think is y influenced by Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools. Ethical Relativism maintains that truth, right and wrong, and justice, etc. are all relative and because a group of persons think that something is right does not make it so. In a globalised morality, the voice of the majority dominates the views of many.

Loss of Cultural Identity: In the name of progress, some cultures seem to discard what pertains to the past (moral values, beliefs, customs, etc.) and embraces a new way of life. This process is also facilitated by the ease of communication and of gaining information and travel and migration. For many young people for example, the cultural value of chastity no longer figures in the hierarchy of values. The new way of life is based on the relativistic idea of choosing what one considers good without any regard for authentic good.

The experience of Relativism confronting the young challenges the Church to validate the relevance of Christian faith today. Pope Benedict XVI described Relativism as the central problem

²⁸ C. DEVADASS, Relativism: A Deeper Understanding and its Impact on the Youth in Asia, in V. TIRIMANNA, *Youth in Asia: Challenges of Fundamentalism and Relativism*, FABC Papers 135, 42-61, <http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_papers%20135.pdf> (25.02.2018).

²⁹ C. AUGUSTINE, *Arguments for Ethical Relativism and Objections*, <<http://www.monachos.net/conversation/topic/5296-arguments-for-ethical-relativism-and-objections/>> (27.02.2018).

³⁰ Ch. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 2007, 2 and 3.

of faith today.³¹ The challenge of Relativism calls for, more than an in-depth intellectual thought, a pastoral response which enables persons not to lose the sense of God who is all truth. To emphasise the relevance of faith today for the young once again underscores the significance of catechesis in general and more especially youth catechesis.

2.4. Christian Response to the phenomena of Fundamentalism and Relativism Faced by the Universal Church

In responding to Fundamentalism and Relativism encountered by the Church, Dominic Veliath offers the following guideline: “the Catholic mindset often calls for a ‘Both x And’ (‘Et x Et’) attitude and not: an ‘Either x Or’ (‘Aut x Aut’) stance.

As far as the plurality of religions is concerned, this changed mindset will involve assuming a stance which included BOTH an integral Loyalty to One’s Own Experience as a Catholic AND Respect for the persons of Another faith. Loyalty without Respect would amount to Religious Fanaticism, whereas Respect for another without being loyal to one’s own faith commitment would be compromise and savour of Syncretism and Relativism.

As far as the plurality of cultures is concerned, given the composite culture of many Asian nations, what is called for is a stance which includes *BOTH Rootedness in One’s Own Culture (which is a God-given gift) AND an Openness towards the Culture of Another without any Taint of Superiority or Discrimination.*”³²

In addition to the above-mentioned change of mindset, the Church in Asia also emphasises the “*Dialogue of Life*” that facilitates the discovery of what God has been doing in the life of the people of Asia for ages. It is the discernment of spiritual knowledge of what God has been doing in Asia where “people believe what they see, value persons and relationships more than doctrines... When we relate to peoples, especially people of other faiths, with the basic confidence in our fellow humanity, we discover people’s concerns, values, pains, agonies, their love of peace and harmony... It is here we discover their search for meaning, faith their values and yearnings”.³³

Furthermore, there is the need to make the implications of one’s Catholic faith a Gospel lifestyle. “People of Asia, the home of the great contemplative traditions, want to see Christians as disciples of Jesus Christ who reflect the person of the Master”.³⁴ In other words, the consequences of one’s faith are to be witnessed through a transformed lifestyle.

2.5. Catechetical Response to Fundamentalism and Relativism faced by the Young

The *General Directory for Catechesis*³⁵ in art. 181 states: “In general, it is observed that the first victims of the spiritual and cultural crisis gripping the world are the young. It is also true that any commitment to the betterment of the society finds its hope in them. This should stimulate the Church all the more to proclaim the Gospel to the world of youth with courage and creativity”.

³¹ J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004, 117.

³² *Ibidem*, 80-81.

³³ *Ibidem*, 81-82.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 82.

³⁵ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997. (Henceforth GDC).

“The definitive aim of Catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ”.³⁶ Catechesis as a process of growing in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ is “that form of the ministry of the Word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith: Catechesis has its origin in the confession of faith and leads to confession of faith”.³⁷ The process of putting the young in contact, in communion and in intimacy can be qualified as *initiating the young in the Gospel lifestyle*. Such a process, because of its dynamic nature, becomes a process of initiating the young to ‘*learning to learn from Jesus Christ*’ which is perceived by the young as an *ongoing lifelong commitment* in Christian faith life.

Gospel Lifestyle can be defined “as an ensemble of Christian practices to which the disciples of Jesus Christ assign a unified coherent meaning -being sign and sacrament of salvation in the world (LG 48) or seeking fullness of life for all - that is comprehended as the distinctive prototype shared within a community of disciples and is generated by the gift of faith received and lived in a specific socio-cultural condition with a cognitive-evaluative framework proclaimed by Jesus Christ”.³⁸

Gospel Lifestyle is manifested through *Christian competences*³⁹ which is the proven ability to set in motion the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in an integrated and creative manner and to coordinate the resources within one’s possession (cognitive, affective and volitional) and those that are externally available (Sacred Scripture, Tradition, Tradition, the Magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, of Pastors and the Community of disciples) to face one’s daily life positively as an authentic disciple in a specific cultural context.

The four fundamental Christian competences that go to ensure a catechesis of an authentic Gospel Lifestyle are: *confessing Jesus Christ* as the ultimate meaning-giver and meaning-maker; *strengthening Catholic identity* by becoming Christ’s authentic disciple; *valuing the gift of communion* by belonging to the community of disciples and *witnessing* through Christian practices for the Reign of God.

3. Confessing Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Meaning-Giver and Meaning-Maker

The challenges posed by Fundamentalism and Relativism to faith, life and culture, manifested today at the personal and social levels, ought to find an adequate response in the negotiation of the meaning of life in Jesus Christ as the fundamental and sole point of reference. In Christian revelation, religious experience plays a role of vital importance. The experiential dimension of the Word of God is of such importance that it is possible to formulate a basic structural law. “Without religious experience, there is neither communication nor listening to the Word of God”.⁴⁰ Christian significance, founded on such religious experiences, becomes *experience of faith* wherein the disciple or groups of disciples, accepting the biblical and ecclesial

³⁶ GDC, no. 80.

³⁷ GDC, no. 82.

³⁸ For a deeper understanding of this definition see J. VALLABARAJ, *Faith-Focused Mentoring as a Paradigm for Youth Catechesis*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2012, 125-127.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 128-132.

⁴⁰ E. ALBERICH - J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith That Transforms*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2004, 103.

experiences as sources of meaning, listen to the Word of God, deepen and express them in their own life.

If Christian faith is the human experience and response to the Word of God who interpellates, it then becomes the primal force that frames, colours, orders and relativises the activities of everyday life. It serves as the centre of power, value and affections. It becomes the unifying key to one's patterns of meaning by presenting a fullness that is experienced as a sense of relatedness among self, others, the world and above all with Jesus Christ. Christian faith as meaning-giving, brings to the fore the sensitivity to life that not only transcends, but also permeates and strengthens one's very existence from within, among and beneath. Such a meaning-making process enables Christians to affirm Jesus Christ as the Master, the Truth and Trust. Christian faith as meaning-making also orients one's life as vocation and therefore becomes the guiding mover of life for ethics and moral life. Christian faith as meaning-making makes the disciple to think like Jesus, to judge like Jesus, to act like Jesus and to love Jesus and to live as Jesus lived.⁴¹ Such a faith lifestyle is possible only if the Reign of God proclaimed and witnessed by Jesus Christ becomes the ultimate meaning for Gospel Lifestyle. An authentic experience of Jesus Christ as meaning-giver ought to favour an *appropriation or re-appropriation of Christian faith*, that is, when it helps the individual to move from a "received faith" to a faith as personal and significant response to the interpellation of Word of God mediated in and through Jesus Christ by means of a religious socialization.

4. Strengthening Catholic Identity by becoming Christ's authentic disciple

Identity is at the centre of any discussion on Fundamentalism and Relativism. Religious Identity is, generally, one of the more influential aspects of the life of persons, since it offers to individuals of a faith tradition, a sense of belonging to a community of believers with a long history. Identity always defines the desired pattern of faith and morals. It offers access to the resources of spirituality and social structures that can guide the life of the believer to animate the local religious community. At the same time, Religious Identity can also cause major problems. It is said that two thirds of the problems of the world today are due to this Religious Identity. Religious Identity involves a free personal affirmation, acceptance by the receiver and a "growing involvement in a *more autonomous, reflective process of spirituality and identity*".⁴²

The appropriation or the re-appropriation of Christian faith manifests itself in forging "a bond of permanent communion with Him"⁴³ and "making of oneself a disciple of Him".⁴⁴ The believers in Jesus Christ confess their faith, not only through an intellectual consensus, but in committing their lives for the cause of Jesus and His Reign through various vocations. "According to God's plan, all Christians are to find fulfilment as human beings. This is *human vocation*. Believers are also to find fulfilment as Christians, living out the baptism and its summons to be holy (communion and cooperation with God), to be active members of the community and to bear witness to the Kingdom (communion and cooperation with others). This is *Christian*

⁴¹ GDC, no. 64 and 116.

⁴² M. CRAWFORD – G. ROSSITER, *Reasons for Living – Education and Young People's Search for Meaning, Identity and Spirituality. A Handbook*, ACER Press, Victoria Australia 2006, 96.

⁴³ GDC, no. 23.

⁴⁴ GDC, no. 53.

vocation. Finally, each believer must discover the concrete vocation (as lay person, consecrated religious / secular or ordained minister) that will enable them to make a specific contribution to the construction of the Kingdom. This is *Specific Christian vocation*. In this way each Christian is called to carry out the evangelizing mission in full and organic way”.⁴⁵

Thus, Catechesis has the responsibility of enabling the young believers towards commitment for the Reign and helping them to situate themselves before their future in an attitude of availability and generosity, in front of the possible vocational choices.

5. Valuing the gift of communion by belonging to the community of disciples

Religious Belonging requires the acceptance of a system of values, a system of beliefs and models of the group. Sociological researches show that the attachment to religious values is necessarily different according to the different types of believers. This is influenced by the individual's religious history, which conditions the availability levels of the individual in keeping with the attachment that is motivated, and that which motivates this attachment. Belongingness to the Community of Disciples is to be manifested in the avoidance of two extreme forms, namely, Radical Fundamentalism and Religious Relativism.

An excessive, radical and fundamental attachment to a system of beliefs leads to Religious Fundamentalism. The features of such a Religious Fundamentalism, as described by Wood and Heelas⁴⁶ are: a passionate desire to return to the fundamentals of one's belief tradition and strip away all unnecessary accretions; an aggressive rejection of western secular modernity; an antagonistic minority group-identity maintained in an exclusivist and militant manner; an all-out effort to reclaim the public sphere as a space of religious and moral purity; and a patriarchal and hierarchical ordering of relations between the sexes.

In the Asian context, it is important not to confuse pluralism with relativism. “Pluralism is generally understood as the idea that there are multiple avenues to truth, multiple forms of truth and multiple diverse cultural expression operative at the same time. Whereas, relativism, is a lack of objective truth. The key difference is that in pluralism there is still the possibility of arriving at an objective truth even though the method or avenue in which truth is arrived at can be different”.⁴⁷

The faith in the person of Jesus Christ is fully manifested and lived through an active participation in the mission of the Community of Faith, the Church. This participation in the Christian community is nurtured through a meditative listening to the Word of God and in an intense sharing in the sacramental and liturgical celebration. Such participation develops in the young their sense of belonging to the Christian community, and at the same time, allows them to assimilate and witness to their faith in Jesus Christ in their daily life. This sense of belonging to the Christian community does not immediately reach the state of maturity, but very often stays at the level of membership, that is, a state of generic feeling of sympathy, an external adhesion and a prudent distance and autonomy. Such adhesion can become empowerment, that

⁴⁵ P. D. HOLLAND, *Vocation*, in J. A. KOMONCHAK et al. (eds), *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Theological Publications of India, Bangalore 1999, 1091-1092. Italics added.

⁴⁶ L. WOODHEAD – P. HEELAS (eds.), *Introduction to Chapter Two: Religions of Difference*, in *Religion in Modern Times*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2000, 32.

⁴⁷ DEVADASS, *Relativism*, 55.

is, an adhesion of the heart and mind, only if the Church comes to be perceived as a communion with God in Jesus Christ and with other persons in faith and charity as a sign and instrument of the Reign.

Being and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ involves being in communion with the Community of His disciples, His Church, which “is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom”.⁴⁸

6. Witnessing to the reign of god through Christian practices

Practice “connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice”.⁴⁹ Catechesis, based on actual participation are normally more effective in fostering faith growth, not just because they are better pedagogical ideas, but fundamentally because they are epistemologically correct, so to say. A catechesis, based on active participation through practice, there is a match between knowing and learning, between the nature of competence and the process by which it is acquired, shared and extended. “Practices are shared history of leaning that requires some catching up for joining. It is not an object to be handed down from one generation to the next. Practice is an ongoing, social, interactional process, and the introduction of newcomers is merely a version of what practice already is. That members interact, do things together, negotiate new meanings, and learn from each other is already inherent in practice – that is how practices evolve”.⁵⁰

The practices of fundamentalists, generally, manifest the following characteristics: “a) the search for purity in an impure world; b) ‘traditioning’ – making the ancient immediately relevant to the contemporary situation; c) totalism – taking religion out of the worship centre and into many domains; e.g. home. School, bank; d) activism – confronting establishments, political or religious, by sometimes violent protest; e) the struggle between good and evil; f) the selective modernization and controlled acculturation”.⁵¹

Richard Foster categorizes the various Christian traditions according to their unique emphasis in Christian faith and Christian practices. They are: prayer-filled Christian practices that favour contemplative lifestyle; Christian practices of virtues that strengthen the holiness lifestyle; Spirit-filled Christian practices that facilitate a charismatic lifestyle; Christian practices of righteousness and justice that advance a social-justice lifestyle; Christian practices centred on the Word that advocate a proclamation lifestyle; and Christian practices of sacramentality that sustain an Incarnation lifestyle.⁵²

The *General Directory for Catechesis* in no. 157 affirms: “Believers, indeed, in the ordinary state of Christian life, individually or in age groups, are called to respond to the gift of God through prayer, participation in the sacraments, the liturgy, ecclesial and social commitment,

⁴⁸ GDC, no. 102.

⁴⁹ E. WENGER, *Communities of Practice – Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 101-102.

⁵¹ ANICIA, *Some Perspectives on Fundamentalism*, 22.

⁵² R. FOSTER, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, Eagle Publishing, Bath, Wiltshire 2004. For a brief summary of these practices see J. VALLABARAJ, *Faith-Focused Mentoring as a Paradigm for Youth Catechesis*, Kristu Jyoti Publishers, Bangalore 2012, 228-244.

works of charity and promotion of human values, such as liberty, justice and peace and the protection of creation. In catechesis, therefore, subjects take on a commitment in activities of faith, hope and charity, to acquire the capacity and rectitude of judges, to strengthen their personal conversion, and to a Christian praxis in their lives. The same subjects, especially if adults, can contribute to catechesis, by pointing out the most effective ways of understanding and expressing the message such as: «learning while doing».

7. Intercultural Approach to Youth Catechesis in the Asian Context

Speaking of the characteristics of Catechesis for young people, the *General Directory for Catechesis* affirms: “The diversity of the religious situation should be kept in mind... It should be remembered that the most successful catechesis is that which is given in the context of the wider pastoral care of the young”.⁵³ It goes on to emphasise that “Youth Catechesis should be proposed in new ways which are open to the sensibilities and problems of this age group”.⁵⁴

Portraying the fast-changing world, the Preparatory Document *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment* of the forthcoming XV Ordinary Synod of Bishops affirms: “It should not be overlooked that many societies are increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious. In particular the presence of different religious traditions is a challenge and an opportunity. The situation can lead to uncertainty and the temptation of relativism, but, at the same time, can provide for increased possibilities for fruitful dialogue and mutual enrichment. From the vantage point of faith, the situation is seen as a sign of our times, requiring greater listening, respect and dialogue”.⁵⁵

There is no doubt that young people in the Church in Asia are also affected by the ethos of Fundamentalism and Relativism. Most young people, whether they are active practising Catholics or not, are fully immersed in today’s socio-cultural trends. Socialization among the young today is all the more an imperative in the life of the young. Fundamentalism or Relativism as socio-cultural attitudes may not lead the young Catholics explicitly out of the Church right away. However, while remaining within the Church, these orientations may infiltrate the minds of the young and cause a split in their Christian meaning, identity and belongingness and plant in their minds and hearts some potential seeds that may eventually make them either Fundamentalist or Relativist.⁵⁶

In order to overcome the growing socio-cultural ethos of Fundamentalism and Relativism in Asia, the Church in Asia needs to enhance her approach to Youth Catechesis and invite the young people to permeate their everyday life in their multi-religious and inter-cultural contexts by “bringing life to faith, and faith to life”. Such an approach can be termed as Intercultural Approach to Youth Catechesis.

⁵³ GDC, no. 184.

⁵⁴ GDC, no. 185.

⁵⁵ SYNOD OF BISHOPS XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*. Preparatory Document, 16-17.

⁵⁶ Th. GROOME, *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco 2002, 35.

7.1. Understanding the Term 'Intercultural' and Some Premises

Before we consider the Intercultural Approach to Catechesis, it is essential to distinguish Intercultural from some related terms. In the first instance, Intercultural is to be distinguished from multicultural and cross-cultural. Multicultural refers to a society that contains several cultural or ethnic groups wherein people live alongside one another, but each cultural group does not necessarily have engaging interactions with each other. Cross-cultural deals with the comparisons of different cultures. In a Cross-cultural environment, differences are understood and recognized and can lead to individual changes, but not collective transformations. In Cross-cultural environments, one culture often becomes 'the norm' and all other cultures are compared or contrasted to that one culture.

A simple description of interculturality is that of a mutual exchange between cultures that can lead to the transformation and enrichment of all those involved. Interculturality does not replace nor does it oppose inculturation. On the contrary, it is a deepening of that process. Interculturality is a participatory process which interacts with the historical, social, economic and political context in which it unfolds. It is a process that makes the development of cultures more dynamic by bringing about changes which foster the universal dimension of humanity.

Furthermore, Interculturation needs to be distinguished from acculturation which stands for the passive and spontaneous effect of engagement between cultures. Intercultural describes communities with a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. It focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationship. Interculturality results from an active and intentional interaction with persons marked by cultural differences. For Clanet, the term "Interculturation" covers "all the processes – psychic, relational, group and institutional – by which subjects and groups interact when they belong to two or more groups claiming different cultures or that can be referred to distinct cultures".⁵⁷ In Interculturality, with paradoxical dynamics, one finds closure and opening, transformation and maintenance of the systems in presence. In every Intercultural encounter, there is a twofold movement: the transformation of the system in the presence because of their interactions and the maintenance of these, because of the desire of each to preserve their identity. The process of Interculturation thus refers to the integration of a plurality of cultural references that will combine, interact with each other, and that cannot be reducible to the different cultural poles present. The three processes involved in intercultural situation are: the assimilation by each group of certain values of the other; differentiation by claiming certain specificities; the original synthesis with the creation of new all-encompassing realities.⁵⁸

Secondly, cultures, particularly Asian cultures, are deeply imbedded in a religious core or belief systems and hence, an intercultural approach can be perceived under three forms: the first, interaction between and among different cultures of different religions (inter faith dialogues); the second, interface with other Christian denominations (ecumenical communication); and the third form refers to the integration of a plurality of cultural references that will combine, interact with each other while acknowledging the same faith. It is this third form that we intend when we speak of 'Intercultural approach to Catechesis.

⁵⁷ C. CLANET, *Intercultural. Introduction to Intercultural Approaches in Education and Human Sciences*, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, Toulouse 1990, 71.

⁵⁸ Z. GUERRAQUI – B. TROADEC, *Psychologie Interculturelle*, Armand Colin, Paris 2000.

Thirdly, it is necessary to recall that Catechesis “distinct from the primary proclamation of the Gospel, promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community”.⁵⁹ Catechesis, as an essential ‘moment’ in the process of Evangelization, corresponds to the period in which conversion to Jesus Christ is formalized and provides a basis for “initiating the hearer into the fullness of Christian life”.⁶⁰

7.2. Some Foundations for an Intercultural Approach to Catechesis

Interculturality follows the Kenotic Model of Jesus’ incarnation. As Jesus explains to Nathaniel, it requires that one *be born anew*. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born anew”. The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.⁶¹ No-one is born intercultural.

An authentically intercultural dimension is possible because of its *anthropological foundation*. Human beings, in their most intimate nature, are relational beings. As human beings they “cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it... In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity”.⁶²

“Man is alienated when he is alone, when he is detached from reality, when he stops thinking and believing in a foundation. All of humanity is alienated when too much trust is placed in merely human projects, ideologies and false utopias. Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another must be transformed into true communion. The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side”.⁶³

Love, freed from egoism, is the way *par excellence* to live and actualize the intercultural dimension of humanity. “Love is the individual’s true nobility, above and beyond his or her belonging to any culture, ethnic group, social stratum or position”.⁶⁴

Christian Anthropology situates human beings and their ability to create culture because of their being created in the image and likeness of God, a Trinity of Persons in communion. “Every human being is called to communion because of his nature which is created in the image and likeness of God.”⁶⁵ Therefore, within the sphere of biblical anthropology, man is not an isolated individual, but a person: a being who is essentially relational. This communion to which man is called always involves a double dimension, that to say vertical (communion with God) and

⁵⁹ GDC, no. 61.

⁶⁰ GDC, no. 63.

⁶¹ See Jn 3:7-8.

⁶² JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, Encyclical, 4 March 1979, no. 10, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html> (04.03.2018).

⁶³ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, Encyclical on integral human development in charity and truth, 29th June 2009, no. 53, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html> (04.03.2018).

⁶⁴ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION (for Institutes of Study), *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools – Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*, no. 41. (Henceforth EID).

⁶⁵ Cfr. Gen 1:26-27.

horizontal (communion with people). It is fundamental that communion be acknowledged as a gift of God, as the fruit of the divine initiative fulfilled in the Easter mystery”.⁶⁶

The individual's communion with God, the vertical axis, consists in following the Way, that is, Jesus Christ⁶⁷ and lived in the Church which is “in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race”.⁶⁸ Because of this union with God in the Church and because of the richness of salvation offered to humanity by Jesus Christ, “the walls separating the different cultures collapsed. God's promise in Christ now became a universal offer: no longer limited to one particular people, its language and its customs, but extended to all as a heritage from which each might freely draw. From their different locations and traditions all are called in Christ to share in the unity of the family of God's children”.⁶⁹ The horizontal axis of communion is realized in interpersonal relationship. Contacts among people, cultures and nations strengthen and enhance interpersonal relationships. “Just as a family does not submerge the identities of its individual members, just as the Church rejoices in each new creation incorporated by Baptism in her living Body, so too the unity of human family does not submerge the identities of individuals, peoples and cultures, but makes them more transparent to each other and links them more closely in their legitimate diversity”.⁷⁰

The Intercultural aspect is, without doubt, *part of the Christian heritage* which has a universal vocation. “In the tradition of the Church, the intercultural perspective is not limited to appreciating the differences, but helps to build up mankind's peaceful co-existence. This is particularly necessary in complex societies, where the risks of relativism and cultural uniformity must be overcome”.⁷¹

The Second Vatican Council, already in its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, affirms “Man comes to a true and full humanity only true culture”.⁷² Further, it went on to declare that culture includes both subjective and objective aspects and points to all those means by which “man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labour, to bring the world itself under control. He renders social life more human both in the family and civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family”.⁷³ Acknowledging that culture, by nature, is profoundly historical while being dynamic, Pope John Paul II, in his message for the *World Day of Peace* in 2001 affirms that “Cultural diversity should therefore be understood within the broader horizon of the unity of the

⁶⁶ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*, 8th September 2007, no. 8, <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20070908_educare-insieme_en.html> (04.03.2018).

⁶⁷ Cfr. GS, no. 22.

⁶⁸ LG, no. 1.

⁶⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical on the relationship between Faith and Reason, 14th September 1998, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html> (04.03.2018).

⁷⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no.53

⁷¹ EID, no. 29.

⁷² GS, no. 53.

⁷³ GS, no. 53.

human race”.⁷⁴ “The radicalization of identity which makes cultures resistant to any beneficial influence from outside”⁷⁵ can be avoided only when both individuals and groups can fully grasp the deeper meaning of the difference in the light of unity of human race. Plurality of cultures indicates the underlying assumptions which manifest the sociological and ethnological dimensions due to which “different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of labouring, of expressing oneself, of practising religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridic institutions, of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty”.⁷⁶

The *International Theological Commission* already in 1988 affirmed that “the originality of a culture does not signify withdrawal into itself but a contribution to the richness which is the good of all. Cultural pluralism cannot therefore be interpreted as the juxtaposition of a closed universe, but as participation in a unison of realities all directed toward the universal values of humanity. The phenomenon of the reciprocal penetration of cultures, frequent in history, illustrates this fundamental openness of particular cultures to the values common to all, and through this their openness one to another”.⁷⁷ Therefore, not the static idea of culture but its openness gives rise to intercultural relations and has the potential, in particular, for universality of every culture that can promote dialogue among cultures.

Drawing upon the anthropological foundations and from the teachings of the Church we are in a position to describe the *pedagogical foundations* for interculturality. Interculturality is “primarily not cultures but persons who enter into contact with each other – persons who are rooted in their own history and relationships. Hence, understanding interpersonal relationships is the basic pedagogical paradigm, both the means and the end for developing the person’s very identity. This paradigm guides the idea of dialogue, ensuring that it is neither abstract nor ideological, but rather marked by respect, understanding and mutual service. It is then nourished by the idea of culture as situated in history and dynamic, refusing to push the other person into a sort of cultural prison. Finally, it is aware that the relative nature of cultures is not the same as relativism; the latter, while respecting differences, simultaneously separates them into autonomous cosmoses, considering them as isolated and impermeable. Rather, our paradigm seeks, by every means, to foster a culture of dialogue, of understanding and mutual transformation, so as to reach the common good”.⁷⁸

“From this perspective, the understanding of intercultural relationships is neither differentialistic nor relativistic. Rather, it considers cultures as inserted into the moral order, within which the fundamental value is primarily the human person. Recognizing this basic fact allows people of different cultural universes who come into contact with each other to overcome their initial feelings of strangeness. This is not just a matter of mutual respect: the process implies that

⁷⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love*, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1st January 2001, no. 7, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20001208_XXXIV-world-day-for-peace.html> (04.03.2018). (Henceforth DBC).

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 9.

⁷⁶ GS, no. 53.

⁷⁷ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Faith and Culture, Chapter 1 – Nature, Culture and Grace*, no.7, <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html> (05.04.2018).

⁷⁸ EID, no. 42.

the subjects question their preconceptions, and that everyone understand and discuss the other's point of view".⁷⁹

7.3. Intercultural Approach to Youth Catechesis

Faith that arises from divine revelation and culture which springs from the human spirit invariably link and interact with one another and the resulting "synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture, but also of faith... A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully received, not entirely thought through, not faithfully lived".⁸⁰ In analogy, one can similarly affirm that *Christian faith that does not become intercultural is a faith that is not fully received, not entirely thought through, not faithfully lived*.

"Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act. The true subject of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and, therefore animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith".⁸¹ The corollaries of this affirmation are: *The Church Fashions Catechesis* and *Catechesis Builds the Church*. Living in an intercultural context, the Church is to be perceived as a truly *intercultural communion* of churches. Christian faith with its universal message needs to be envisaged as essentially *intercultural*. Such an intercultural communion of churches needs to be modelled on *Communities of Disciples* of Jesus Christ. These Communities of Disciples are entrusted with the command to proclaim the Good News (Kingdom-centred) through its communion, service, witness and celebration. These communities need to make "the option for the poor and the option for others in their otherness".⁸² Interculturality is to be seen as the inter-weaving of inculturation, liberation and dialogue. The FABC already in 1974 concluded that it is binding for authentic evangelization to keep in mind the three factors that constitute the Asian reality: its ancient cultures, its multi-religions and its masses of poor people. Hence, intercultural communion of churches need to privilege the Prophetic and Liberative dimensions of the Good News.

Intercultural objectives of Youth Catechesis can be implemented only if the Local and Regional Churches explicitly link also evangelization with interculturality and express it in terms of competences that enhance the disciple's ability to effectively engage cultures as well as deal with cultural boundaries and relations. These competencies⁸³ can be succinctly put down as follows:

- To formulate issues of diversity Scripturally and theologically in terms of Church's identity and mission to evangelize;
- To seek an understanding of culture and its working;
- To cultivate intercultural communication skills in pastoral settings;

⁷⁹ EID, no. 43.

⁸⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to Participants at the National Congress of Catholic Movements with Cultural Commitment*, 16 January 1982, 2, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1994/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_18031994_address-to-pc-culture.html> (04.01.2018).

⁸¹ GDC, no. 78.

⁸² F.X. SCHEUERER, *Interculturality – A Challenge for the Mission of the Church*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2001, 143.

⁸³ UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Intercultural Competencies Training of Trainers*, <<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/intercultural-competencies/intercultural-competencies-training-of-trainers-program.cfm>> (04.03.2018).

- To expand one’s knowledge of the obstacles that impede effective intercultural relations;
- To foster ecclesial integration/inclusion in Church settings, with a spirituality of reconciliation and mission.

Acknowledging the risks involved in an intercultural approach to Youth Catechesis, I shall try to outline some major objectives or better, some typical features of an ideal Youth Catechesis whose silhouette one is able to imagine on the horizon in the catechetical task. It is a depiction that underlines the aspects of novelty in respect of the past, a new model of intercultural approach to Youth Catechesis that the Church needs to recoup.

Among the many objectives of an Intercultural approach, Youth Catechesis needs to help the young:

- To discover the seeds of the Gospel that is present in every culture of the catechized. This means enabling the young to become more able to explain their faith to others in the culture in which they live and to be able to “give reason for their hope”.⁸⁴
- To know and respect the indispensable elements and basic expressions of the different cultures of the young persons to whom catechesis is directed. This entails engaging cultural symbols and integrating them with Scriptures as well as developing catechesis that utilizes popular devotions of the various cultural groups.
- To express the need to communicate the Christian Good News through patterns of thought, history, culture and experiences so that various cultures perceive the Gospel message as addressed to them, in their own uniqueness and concrete situations. This includes motivating and encouraging the young to be conscious of their cultural identity and take cognizant of the riches of the cultures in order to bring and share them with the larger community as an offering of gifts, as well as developing and using culturally appropriate catechetical methods, tools, texts and resources.
- To bring to those in the majority culture the non-majority culture’s intuitions, perceptions and actions both as leaven and challenge. This signifies the call to enhancing the building of the Catholic community and the integration into the larger society by understanding the Church through respect and appreciation of the people and cultures within, as well as celebrating differences and valuing diversity as part of building cultural awareness and building the Kingdom of God.
- To identify a variety of media and draw from a variety of disciplines to communicate and engage in an intercultural dialogue. This necessitates developing and using culturally appropriate catechetical methods, tools, texts and resources.

Formation of catechists/animators is of crucial importance in the promotion of an intercultural approach to Youth Catechesis. The time spent in formation must be used to reinforce the identity, nature and purpose of youth catechesis as initiating the young to learning to learn from Jesus. Such a process ought to empower the young to discover and encounter Jesus Christ as Ultimate meaning-maker and meaning-giver which invites the young to be authentic disciples in a Community of Disciples and become witness of Gospel lifestyle through Christian practices for the Reign of God.

⁸⁴ | Peter 3:15.

In addition to the above formation, an intercultural approach in Youth Catechesis calls for formation that is particularly dedicated to promoting sensitivity, awareness and competence in the intercultural field that can be advanced by dedicating greater attention to the following three essential markers:

- Integration: This has to do with the community’s ability to be adequately prepared for receiving young people of different cultural backgrounds, responding to their needs regarding Christian faith and community life;
- Interaction: This has to do with knowing how to facilitate good relationships among peers and among adults. There is an awareness that simply being in the same physical environment is not enough. Encouragement must be given to curiosity about other people, openness and friendship, both during catechetical sessions and in other places and at other times;
- Recognizing the Other Person: “One must avoid falling into the trap of imposing one’s own views on the other person, asserting one’s own lifestyle and one’s own way of thinking without taking into account the other person’s culture and particular emotional situation”.⁸⁵

■ Conclusion

Faced with the challenges of Fundamentalism, Relativism and of Cultural and Religious Pluralism, it is essential to develop a greater awareness of the meaning and significance of an intercultural approach to Youth Catechesis. In this way, the young will communicate better – through their presence, witness and teaching – their own particular way of being persons, being *Catholic*. Youth Catechesis, highlighting the evils of fundamentalism and relativism, encourages the young to progress and promote harmony with the identity they have received from the Gospel lifestyle. Through an intercultural approach to Youth Catechesis, the young “are also invited to follow the pathways that lead to encountering others. They educate themselves, and they educate to dialogue, which consists in speaking with everyone and relating to everyone with respect, esteem and listening in sincerity. They should express themselves with authenticity, without obfuscating or watering down their vision so as to acquire greater consensus. They should bear witness by means of their presence, as well as by the coherence between what they say and what they do”.⁸⁶

As a conclusion, it is essential to reflect on the First Council of Jerusalem in the Acts of Apostles⁸⁷ from the intercultural perspective. The Council witnesses the encounter of two seemingly opposing juridical propositions, but also of two cultural milieux – one, Pharisees in Judea and the other represented by the Gentiles of Antioch. The followers of Jesus from Judea presumed the Jewish custom of circumcision as sign for being an authentic follower of Jesus and their faith in Jesus. But the encounter with the Gentile converts to the Way initiated a shared discussion “to consider this matter”.⁸⁸ The arbitration of Peter broadens the belief framework of the Jewish followers of the Way beyond their own Jewish identity. The sharing of Barnabas

⁸⁵ EID, no. 78.

⁸⁶ EID, Conclusion, paragraph 2.

⁸⁷ Acts 15:1-35.

⁸⁸ Acts 15:6.

and Paul further enriched their Christ experience and thus they learned from the cultural expressions of faith other than their own. James, quoting from the prophets,⁸⁹ reconfirmed Peter's understanding of what being a disciple of Jesus Christ means. In this manner, the cultural identity of either group was not ignored or belittled; instead, an agreement between them was developed. Is this not the real spirit of a catechesis founded on interculturality? Consequently, the intercultural encounter not only resulted in a mutual and critical faith learning and sharing at the level of culture but also ensued in furthering of Christian faith tradition and in living truly the interculturality as a way to catholicity.

Intercultural approach to Youth Catechesis can become thus the way of access to catholicity, for it recognizes cultural differences as the revelation of the countenance of humankind created in God's own image and likeness, and is enriched by the ever-deeper exchange between them. Therefore, interculturality is not an end in itself but an approach through which catechesis creates the conditions to live fully the interculturality of Christian discipleship in an Intercultural Community of Disciples.

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⁸⁹ Acts 15:16-18.