

Vinayasādhana

Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation

VOL. XIII, No. 2, July 2022

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR YOUTH TODAY

Published by

Institute of Spirituality & Counselling

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Editorial

Challenges and Prospects for Youth Today

Youth are in a period of transition from being a child who is dependent on their parents or caregivers to be an independent and self-reliant adult. The transition period is extensive and involves a lot of challenges and opportunities for the youth. The July 2022 Editorial wants to focus on the transition of youth within the psychological and spiritual setting in the world today.

The world is still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and is threatened with new viruses like Monkeypox over a short period. The present generation is coming to terms with viruses and understanding that these threats are a part of life. The world is also swimming against the tide concerning the economic crises and the rising cost of living worldwide. Open wars are still going on in Ukraine, and silent wars like the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria remain conscious in the minds of the youth. Rising global temperatures, unpredictable weather variations, and increasingly common extreme climate conditions like strong winds, cold and hot temperatures, dust storms, and heavy rains are also present in the youths' reality. Some offshoots of the new normal are the work-from-home situations, events and reality going digital, online learning and teaching, and social media usage.

Youth faced a set of general crises during the COVID-19 pandemic. The restricted mobility, deepened learning crisis, massive closures of education institutions abruptly, stunted growth of skill development, constraints in job opportunities, minimized business ventures, sudden reduction in income through salary cuts, and disruption in economic opportunities, to name a few. There was also the risk of domestic abuse, uncertainties about the future, delay in settling down in career, academic year loss, gaps in digital connectivity, diminished youth productivity, family stress,

and social isolation. The current pandemic can be a lingering stressor that can cause long-term health consequences. Professional physical and mental care personnel and other stakeholders could proactively prevent psychosocial crises, foster psychosocial wellness, and develop cost-optimal accessible interventions for youth in trouble.

From a psychological perspective, one of the issues close to the youth is the socio-behavioral changes in families, family values and resilience during troubles, and community-related risks for mental health. The American Psychological Association (2020) reported that these effects could potentially have longstanding difficulties because of how these contextual risks permeate the structures and processes of family systems. Prime, Wade, and Browne (2020), based on the systems model of human development and family functioning, purported that the social disruptions from the pandemic will generate increased levels of psychological distress for caregivers, impact the quality of relationships among marital couples, parents and their children, and indirectly, siblings. Adversity in the family social context can negatively affect the children's level of adjustment through the difficult times the family is facing (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002).

On top of this, the youth also faces a constantly changing world. To keep up with the latest information and knowledge, they must spend extra time and resources studying and up-skilling themselves. In such circumstances, close relationships within the family can help weather unfavorable circumstances within the family system. Research has found that maintaining a robust parent-child bond helps promote healthy development in children and youth, particularly among low socioeconomic status (Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012). Distinctive patterns of family engagement through family organizational processes- routines, rituals, and rules- can help through the pandemic-related disruptions in the family. Routines emphasize a pragmatic function, while rituals are symbolic and can carry an emotional significance. Participating in daily routines like creating a schedule for morning habits and exercises can have a utilitarian function. Rituals like gathering for meals or family prayer can strengthen the family unit and its shared values. Rules can refer to any unspoken emotional and relational patterns that govern the interactions in a family or the limits of standards of behavior. Rules are necessary to ensure family members stay connected and checked even when frustrated. People in pastoral care and Church authorities can use this knowledge to encourage families in the accompaniment and formation of youth at home.

Good and Willoughby (2008) indicated that the decline in adolescents' religiosity and spirituality could be associated with the emergence of abstract thought and the development of complex skills for self-regulation in adolescence. The decline in spiritual connectedness may contribute to the rise in suicides, substance abuse, or other mental or physical health problems during this developmental period. At the 20th Latin American Meeting of National Youth Pastoral Leaders, Pope Francis gave the message to encourage the young people to deepen their knowledge of the person of Jesus. Pope Francis reflected on how he was open to being inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations around him.

Youth can get a way out of their world of conflicts through affirmation, appreciation, affection, availability, and accountability. Formators, mental health professionals and counselors can focus on youth transition into productive adulthood by helping families have effective rituals, routines, and rules. Spiritual leaders and pastors can identify families with youth that require guidance and support. *Amoris Laetitia* mentions that "parents always influence the moral development of their children, for better or worse. They should take this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably, and appropriately."

In the address of the II Vatican Council to Youth (1965) was a final message and warning to the youth who are to bear the torch from the elders, live in a world of historic transformation, and are the future of the society- "You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it."

Reflections from Pope Francis

The *Christus Vivit* (Christ Is Alive)- Pope Francis' post-synodal apostolic exhortation in Rome is one of the recent efforts of the Pope to address the youth. The Holy Father, in the document, encourages the youth to live lives of holiness, "dream great things," and listen to the wisdom of the elderly. His advice to the Church is to heed the concerns of the young people and be cautious in dilemmas that require you to encase in the past or accept all the world is offering.

It is time for the Church to take action to help the youth as they are the world's future. Pope Francis uses the metaphor of the young generation as the fertile and new soil God gives to Christian communities. The point insists one reflect on how much accompaniment is required in their journey of personal maturity so that they can be "strengthened in faith and grace of the Lord: and "bear fruits of love and hope" (Pope Francis, 2019).

To the youth, Pope says that if they at any time find that they have reached an ideological juncture that the Church hasn't reached yet, they should "have the patience to wait for us." He insists that the Church become one that 'listens' and not 'condemns' so that the youth would not feel like their concerns are falling on deaf ears. Age, according to Pope, does not establish privileges, which implies that being young does not put less worth or dignity on the youth.

Pope Francis also describes the youth as "the age of choice." He understands that the generation's young people should take chances and not be afraid of making mistakes. He calls for young people to be "protagonists of change" and "courageous missionaries." He also encourages the young and the elderly to combine their dreams and visions to peer into the future. His final words to the youth were to "keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or afraid."

Tactics and Implications

As a psychologist, spiritual leader, formator, or psycho-spiritual therapist, there are various ways in which parents, youth, and the Church can be driven to provide the environment required for efficient and holistic youth development. From the literature on psychology to the message of Pope Francis, it is clear that for the youth to develop, there needs to be a sufficient accompaniment, opportunities to be develop, and guidance equally through challenges and prospects in their life. The Church can one source through which this can be provided to the wider community. The youth, the parents, and caregivers also need to be inspired and challenged to see their perspectives on youth development. One that accompanies, nourishes, and gives a listening ear to the youth would have a better connection with them than one that condemns them. Writing blogs, regular meetings, professional camp and interactive sessions help parents to reflect on their behavior and modify them to one that will help the children thrive. There are successful cases where books for parents were given away in camps or other occasions that helped parents and youth gain a better perspective of what they are required to do. Especially with the advantage of the software and online resources, Church members should not be hesitant to use the resource to connect with the parents and youth of the Church.

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COVID-19 and its Impact on Youth: Challenges and Coping Skills

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Abstract

COVID-19 posed many challenges to the youth affecting their physical health, social life, economic security, educational growth, career, and psychological and mental health. However, it is evident that despite the challenges, youth exhibit great potential for growth and inner resources to overcome the obstacles. Building resilience, faith in God, youth spirituality, involvement in meaningful activities like voluntary services, and a strong support system can help young people overcome challenges and problems and attain their life goals. Accompanying the youth in their efforts to go beyond the COVID-19 challenges with courage and confidence is an urgent task and a social responsibility.

Keywords: COVID-19, Youth, Challenges, Coping skill, Resilience, Youth spirituality, Meaningful existence, Accompaniment

Introduction

One of the unforgettable tragic events of this century is the outbreak of the deadly epidemic COVID-19, which is considered to be the biggest public health crisis after the Second World War. World Health Organization declared an international public health emergency in January 2020 (WHO, 2020). It became a global pandemic affecting millions across the globe. The pandemic has caused immense suffering to the entire humanity and affected every spectrum of human life in terms of economic devastation, stress, severe illness, and loss of life.

Everything came to a halt with unprecedented nationwide lockdowns to limit the spread of the virus, which affected the normal life pattern of every single individual. While it affected the world's economies, the developing countries paid a heavy toll, leaving millions deprived of their essential needs. Though the elderly and the physically vulnerable were affected by COVID-19 more than any other age group, it has dramatically impacted the youth. It is important to identify the real problems of youth in the covid and post-covid times and accompany them with effective measures. The article is a humble attempt to enter into the world of youth, bring to light some of the challenges they faced on account of the pandemic, and analyze the coping skills that can be helpful for a meaningful and practical life.

COVID-19 Crisis and Its Challenges to youth

The pandemic posed many challenges to youth across the world. International Labour Organization (ILO) warns that the multidimensional challenge the pandemic poses on youth can have a long-term impact (ILO, 2020). It was against the backdrop of their existing vulnerabilities like substance abuse, educational demands, financial difficulties, limited employment opportunities, and subsequent migration. In such a context, the pandemic has put the youth under tremendous pressure. It has accelerated their physical and mental health concerns, loneliness and isolation, lack of social and economic security, educational and career instability, and poor quality of life. Increased social media and online pressure, lack of safe space, lack of genuine trusted relationships, and higher risk of exploitation were some of the problems that youth faced. Some of these issues are very evident in the national and international surveys and studies carried out in the recent past. They highlight the multidimensional challenge the pandemic poses for young people through the resultant disruption to education and training, amplified vulnerabilities among the young workers, and a long and challenging transition into decent work (ILO, 2020). They reflect the long-term impacts of COVID-19 not only on the lives of young people but also on the entire humanity. Such impacts can exacerbate inequalities and risk, reducing the productive potential of an entire generation (ILO, 2020).

One of the most vulnerable informal youth sectors that often do not appear in surveys and studies is the migrant youth. Millions of young people are out of their homes, even away from their homelands, for study and work. The pandemic has severely impacted the livelihood,

security, and health of the migrant youth. Being least organized and lacking institutional support, domestic workers, especially young girls, are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and human rights violations. India witnessed one of the worst migrant crises in history when it imposed a nationwide lockdown in 2020. It was a crisis within a crisis (Vig, 2021) or a crisis of mobility (Irudaya Rajan et al., 2020). Such an inhuman crisis has long-lasting effects on millions of young students and employees who were migrants. In the global scenario, the young migrants also experienced cultural discrimination, having no access or limited access to healthcare and vaccination. Some of the challenges the pandemic posed on the youth are discussed.

Physical Impact

Young people were not exempted from the attack of the COVID-19 virus. World Health Organization (WHO) warned more than once that young people are also prone to be infected by the virus and can be potential carriers of the infection. The studies show that many young people were physically affected by the virus. Many were anxious about their physical health and well-being (Shukla et al., 2021). Many young people with a pre-existing history of physical health issues were more affected physically and mentally. Pre-existing health issues like allergies, asthma, cancer, kidney problems, obesity, immune disorders, epilepsy, and arthritis put them into severe physical and mental anxiety (Hawke et al., 2020). Youth with pre-existing health concerns are a vulnerable population from both physical and mental health standpoints (Hawke et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this situation. It also puts more significant pressure on them because of the sickness or the loss of their dear ones caused by the pandemic. The shock and discouragement drained them of their hope of a brighter future. Substance addiction and eating disorders were some indirect impacts of COVID-19 on youth, which will have long-lasting effects on young people's physical and mental health. Family stress, domestic violence, and physical and sexual abuse are serious problems young people have to undergo. An overall reduction in physical activity and sports have negatively influenced the physical well-being of the youth. Lack of access to healthy food too deteriorated physical health.

The physical impact of COVID-19 is much more severe among the migrants, of whom the majority are youth. Many are employed in the informal economic sector, like domestic workers. The poor working conditions, limited payment, huge workload, lack of nutritious diet,

and lack of access to medical facilities harmed the health of the youth. The survey among the domestic workers reveals that 42.3 % of domestic workers had severe health issues. Among them, 67.3 % had to discontinue the treatment. The major reasons for their discontinuity were reported as lack of affordability and lack of transportation (Sumalata et al., 2021). This report points out the severe health issues and lack of access to medical treatment among the working class during the pandemic. Such a situation has led to the loss of lives of many young migrants in India and abroad. This points toward the inequality that is a stark reality in our society.

Psycho-Social Challenges

The human being is a social being. Adolescence is a time of emotional and social development. The inevitable social distancing due to COVID-19 had a huge impact on youth. Ordinarily, youth spend much time with their peer groups in educational institutions. Educational institutions provide structure, intellectual stimulation, peer interaction, recreational facilities, and socializing. The school closure will have many unintended impacts on the psycho-social well-being of children and youth (Serlachius et al., 2020). Many adolescents reported heightened anxiety about their schooling restrictions and peer relationship (Daniunaite et al., 2021). The impact on the free movement, on account of the lockdown measures, led to greater loneliness among the youth. Social distancing kept them away from their peer groups and normal socializing. The youth experienced significant hardship due to social isolation. Broken ties with educational institutions, workplace colleagues, and community members kept them aloof. Lack of athletics, social gathering and other healthy outlets added to the stressful situation of the youth. Though media became a means of social communication, it had its limitations. The physical and social distancing and other COVID-19 restrictions fostered feelings of isolation and loneliness, disrupted routines, and limited access to extended family, friends, neighbors, and other community support (Jones, 2021). The restrictions on social gatherings, celebrations, and religious festivals also setback socializing.

Challenges to Economic Security

Rapid measures taken by the governments like complete lockdown to limit the spread of the virus have led to a global economic slow-down (ILO, 2020). Its impact on people, jobs, and businesses is likely to

be long-term and hit hard on the most vulnerable section of society, including the young. The global unemployment rate among youth had been very high even before the pandemic (ILO, 2020). The economic crisis due to COVID-19 has hit hard on youth. Youth unemployment rose sharply. It is undeniable that most of the young, irrespective of their countries, experience a financial crisis. However, the intensity of the crisis may vary from person to person. It has caused an economic recession. The WHO (2020) stated that tens of millions of people risk falling into extreme poverty. Millions of enterprises experienced existential threats that sped up youth unemployment. Informal economy workers, or the poor daily laborers in the Indian context, have suffered much poverty and have been deprived of their essential needs. Many youths who were employed in informal economic sectors that the pandemic has severely hit have lost their jobs. Young women reported that financial strain was the most significant impact of lockdown. Loss of employment and money strain affected the young workers. Restricting food supply and other essential things aggravated their financial strain (Napier-Raman et al., 2021). Many vulnerable youths who are migrants and homeless have experienced the bitter reality of poverty and hunger. The economic crisis has been exacerbated again due to the ongoing war situation.

Impact on Education and Career

The impact of the pandemic on the education of the youth is immeasurable. The closure of the educational institutions affected the young students leaving many without access to teaching, training, or any courses. Most youth testifies that they have learned less during the pandemic. According to the survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), about 70 % of youth were adversely affected by the closure of their universities and training centers. It was worse in developing countries that were either poor or had no access to internet facilities. Thousands might have lost the chance to learn without access to online classes. The ILO Director underlined how the pandemic is “inflicting multiple shocks on young people. It is destroying their jobs and employment prospects and disrupting their education and training and seriously impacting their mental well-being.” Around 38 % of those who participated in the survey were uncertain about their future career prospects. The ILO report underlined that such a situation inevitably leads to greater anxiety and depression among the youth. Millions of youth were unable to develop the skills that would

give them a good job, start a business and engage in their community. Many young women expressed a keen desire to return to education that had been curtailed. Some of them expressed their frustration and depression at being unable to study and work (Napier-Raman et al., 2021). The ongoing war also poses many challenges to young students who were pursuing their higher studies in Russia and Ukraine.

Psychological Impact and Mental Health Issues

Severe disruption to learning and working along with health crises and the loss of dear ones have had a huge psychological impact on the youth. It has witnessed the deterioration of the mental well-being of the youth from a global perspective. 1 in 2 or 50% of youth are considered to be subject to anxiety or depression while 17% are already affected by it according to the ILO survey (ILO, 2020). The survey conducted by UNICEF reveals the immense impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health. Increased anxiety and depression counted high. One in 2 feels less motivated to do the activities which they enjoyed earlier. Many feel pessimistic about the future (UNICEF, 2020). The studies carried out in India also reveal the impact of COVID-19 on the youth's mental health (Chaturvedi et al., 2020). The lockdown had severe implications for mental health, resulting in psychological problems, including frustration, stress, and depression (Chaturvedi et al., 2020).

Mental health issues were high among the poor. The survey conducted among domestic workers shows that about 90% had anxiety as their mental health condition. Among them, 45.8 % had severe anxiety that their sleep pattern got highly disturbed (Sumalata et al., 2021).

Creative and Skilful Response to the Challenges

There have been all-out efforts to face the challenges of coronavirus from all sectors of human society. Every government has put maximum effort to respond to the challenges with various measures. Many young people took to new skills and new modes of living, studying, working, and socializing. Many inner dynamics can play a major role in facing challenges and living a meaningful life.

Building Resilience: An Effective Coping Skill

Resilience is the ability of an individual to withstand adversity. It is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress- such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial

stressors (APA, 2020). It helps protect and promote an individual's psychological well-being and reduces the intensity of possible mental health issues. It reduces the negative effects of a stressful event and accelerates recovery. Studies have shown that it is also highly related to many socio-emotional learning skills (Grazzani et al., 2022). Having a positive attitude and confidence in one's inner resources can help the individual overcome the struggles. Responsible decision-making is also highly related to achieving resilience. Bouncing back from tragic experiences also involves profound personal growth (APA, 2020). The pandemic has allowed facing the challenges and increasing the inherent resilience in every human person. It is a choice to be happy and be at the best of one's ability, even in adverse circumstances of life. As Victor Frankl writes, everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way. Therefore, choosing to be happy in the given situation can beat even the worst of tragedies.

Resilience is an important element in youth development. There is a wide range of theories on the relationship between resilience and positive youth development. Cultivating resilience is important to promote adolescents' psychological and social development. Some of the factors that contribute to the building up of resilience are the following: 1) *Bonding*: It is a strong emotional strength, knowledge, and wisdom that comes from relationships with the family and caretakers, close relationships with mature and supportive and prosocial adults, connections to prosocial and rule-abiding friends, and bonding to people in prosocial organizations. 2) *Competence*: It includes *cognitive competence* that is good cognitive abilities, *emotional competence* in terms of good self-regulation of emotions and impulses, *moral competence* that is positive self-perceptions, *behavioral competence* that is talents and behavior valued by self and society, *social competence* that is a general appeal and or attractiveness to others. 3) *Optimism*: It is manifested in self-efficacy, spirituality that is faith, and a sense of meaning in life, as well as a clear and positive identity. 4) *Environment*: The organized home environment, school environment, neighborhood, and social system play an important role in building resilience. Other factors like cultural values and a good sense of humor can enhance resilience (Lee et al., 2012). However, building up resilience is a personal effort. It requires a lot of emotional and cognitive workouts. An optimistic attitude alone can help one to

be courageous in challenging situations in life. Positive emotions and thoughts have tremendous power to change a person's life.

Faith in God and an Adequate Youth Spirituality

Many theories highlight the link between positive youth development and spirituality. In Fowler's developmental theory of faith, the fourth stage is important for the youth. In this stage, faith development takes place in the form of individuative-reflective. It is characterized by personal struggle and choice. The existence of personal struggle and choice are important elements of mature spirituality (Shek, 2012). Therefore, youth spirituality must be the fruit of their own experience of the divine in their daily realities of life. Active reflection and experience are important processes in developing spirituality among the youth. Many theories underline the correlation between the quality of life and spirituality. They suggest that spirituality is an antecedent to quality of life (Shek, 2012). It is a prerequisite for well-being. Many studies show a positive relationship between spirituality and adolescent mental health. Spirituality positively affects adolescent health attitudes and behavior (Shek, 2012).

Another aspect of faith and spiritual life is that it gives healing and hope. It has always played the role of being a healing balm to the soul. Regular participation in religious practices is associated with better emotional health outcomes. Religion is important for finding meaning, sparing us from "existential angst" (Azar, 2010). Practices like meditation and contemplation enhance attention and turn off the brain's areas that focus on self (Azar, 2010). Such practices are not only pathways to God but also bring about greater peace and calmness to the disturbed mind. One of the studies carried out in Poland in the context of COVID-19 reveals that a greater need for God was seen among the people during the pandemic. Faith or spirituality, in broader terms, can be a force that helps to overcome the mental crisis as well as facilitate adaptation to the disease or the restrictions resulting from it (Kowalzyk et al., 2021). In the light of the pandemic, most people are much more open to faith and prayer. It might have been associated with the fear of illness and death (Kowalzyk et al., 2021). The overall pandemic situation reveals the stark reality of life that despite the power, knowledge, and riches, humanity remains helpless to combat the pain, discomfort, and loss of lives. One of the studies in Italy reveals that spirituality and religious practices are protective factors connected not only with mental and psychological well-being but also physical

health. Many people experienced spiritual hunger when their places of worship had to be locked down, and the standard religious practices were suspended. It had its own spiritual and emotional impacts. Not having done a religious funeral rite for their dear ones who were victims of COVID-19 brought untold pain to the family members in many cases (Coppola et al., 2021).

Family plays a vital role in instilling and deepening the faith and religious beliefs among the youth. Pope Francis reminds us in *Amoris Laetitia*, “Home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbor” (Pope Francis, 2016). The lived experience of faith in the family becomes the basis for the continuous search for God in the life of every child and youth. Moments of family prayer and devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon. It is formative in itself (Pope Francis, 2016).

Creative Involvement and a Meaningful Existence

The studies reveal that youthful age is a time of seeking the deeper meaning of one’s existence. They tend to ask questions like what is the purpose of life? Why do we exist? And What is a meaningful life? These questions often lead them to take up challenging tasks and overcome difficulties. The importance of meaningful activity in adolescent life is clear from history, where youth have been taken up by meaningful activities and even moved into action by strong ideologies that give them satisfaction and purpose. Young people are with tremendous potential for achieving greater things. Identifying their life goals and moving ahead with meaningful activities can help them cope with the difficulties they face in their growth process. According to the theory of Victor Frankl, when one fails to find meaning in life, one experiences an existential vacuum characterized by boredom. Research shows that people are experiencing greater life meaning report greater well-being and less psychopathology (Shek, 2011).

Despite the adverse life situation, the young people were not onlookers in the crisis during the pandemic but were active contributors to facing the challenges. Many of them mustered up the courage and were determined to step up to be partners with governments, social activists, civil society, and other institutions to combat the virus. One of the many ways the youth responded to the crisis was by becoming volunteers to help the poor, to reach out to the elderly, bring awareness

about the safety measures, volunteer for burials, etc. Through such voluntary services, the youth themselves feel empowered and able to find meaning in their suffering. They also cleaned and disinfected public spaces, produced and distributed protective gear like masks and other PPE, combated misinformation and stigma around COVID-19, distributed provisions for vulnerable groups, and supported local police and healthcare personnel to monitor COVID-19 regulations (UNV, 2020). Many young medical personnel, like doctors and nurses, were at the forefront of combating the virus. The meaningful and productive activities gave them an impetus to look beyond the challenges and hope for the better.

The Role of Supportive Mechanism

It is of paramount importance to have a strong support system, especially for the youth in their efforts to face the challenges in life. Family plays an important role in the life of every individual. In the family, a young person develops his/her qualities and forms a value system. The role of the significant other in the developmental process of a young person is very important. Therefore, parents and siblings have an important role in the overall growth and development of the personality of every young person. The lockdown situation gave young people more time to be with family members. Having trusted relationships with others like family members, peers, teachers, and mentors with whom one can disclose inner feelings has immense power to reduce stress in a difficult situation. The Social, supportive system act as a protective mechanism in challenging situations. Therefore, it is essential that the government, educational authorities, mentors, spiritual directors, mental health professionals, and NGOs all work hand in hand to encourage and accompany the youth in their efforts to cope with their challenging situation. The youth sector needs to be connected, engaged, mobilized, and monitored.

The Dynamics and Nuances of Accompanying the Youth

In the overall situation of growing disorientation and discomfort among young people caused by the existing challenges, accompaniment plays an important role. It can be spiritual accompaniment, mentoring, counseling, or career guidance, though each has its unique path, diverse methods, and purposes. More than ever youth of today requires persons who can journey with them. Accompanying the youth who are struggling to rise from their brokenness is a challenging task. As the

word accompaniment suggests it is walking with a young individual in his or her quest for meaning and purpose in life. The exhortation of Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* has a deeper meaning in today's context of the youth. He states: "The community has an important role in the accompaniment of young people; it should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging, and challenging them. All should regard young people with understanding, appreciation, and affection, and avoid constantly judging them or demanding of them a perfection beyond their years" (Pope Francis, 2019). Accompanying the youth means meeting them where they are. It involves entering into the sacred space of each individual with respect and reverence and listening to them with empathy, understanding, and compassion. Such an accompaniment is possible only when a genuine relationship builds up trust and confidence. Building up trust and confidence, active listening, recognizing and identifying the inner resources for better planning, motivating to make use of the resources, and evaluating the outcome are all various dynamics of an effective accompaniment. Careful and proper educational and vocational accompaniment in the discernment process helps the young in their vocational journey.

The qualities of someone who accompanies the youth as put forward by the young people themselves and expressed by Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* are; a faithful Christian who engages in the Church and the world, someone who constantly seeks holiness, someone who is a confidante without judging, someone who actively listens and responds kindly, someone deeply loving and has self-awareness, someone who recognizes his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey (Pope Francis, 2019). It is evidentially clear that young people value authenticity and depth.

Conclusion

The pandemic COVID-19 has caused a lot of havoc in human life, especially in the lives of millions of young people hampering their physical, social, educational, economic, psychological, and mental health and well-being. The pandemic, along with the ongoing crisis of war between Russia and Ukraine, makes the situation worse, shattering the dreams and aspirations of many. The worst humanitarian crisis of millions fleeing their homes is a current reality. In such a situation, we can never be just onlookers or feel safe within the limited space in which we live. We need to hear the cries of the poor and needy, especially the youth puzzled by the crisis. It is important that youth have

a forum for expression and that their voice is heard. Youth and their education, career, employment, and physical and mental well-being need to be prioritized in various government policies. Their in-built resources and coping skills like resilience, faith in God, meaningful activities and a strong support system must be facilitated. Resourceful accompaniment of the youth is an urgent need of the time. Youth will determine the future of the nation and society at large. Therefore, they need to be motivated and encouraged to be at their best. The role of youth in building up the Church and society needs to be recognized. It is they who will ensure continuity, growth, and development.

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Ministering to Youth Today

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Abstract

Today's youth needs to be accompanied in their circumstances. The Catholic Church sees the young as one of its greatest resources because they bring a new dynamism and a fresh approach to life, are open to new possibilities and ideas and are willing to try out new solutions. There are various challenges that youth are facing today, and the Catholic youth can overcome them through education, employment and a positive attitude towards religion. Catechism of youth must aim at giving them an orientation to the communitarian aspect of life by emphasizing the strength and the joy of living together.

Keywords: Youth, Human Formation, Catechism

Introduction

The youth today need a church that accompanies them in all circumstances and is welcoming. They look for a church that is patient and forgiving when they fail, guiding them in their life choices and helping them grow into mature and responsible Christian adulthood. They deeply desire a church that is personal, loving, and relevant. They aspire to a vision of a just, fraternal, humane, and sharing society (Arimpoor, 1982). Therefore, ministering to young people requires a comprehensive effort by the Catholic Church to serve these broad needs (Diocesan Youth Centre, 1995). The Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) of John Paul II officially expressed the importance of the Church's deep concern for caring for the youth.

Through the exhortation, Pope John Paul II reveals to the youth and the vast multitude of children and young people Jesus' message, the plan of God revealed, the call he addresses to each person, and the kingdom that he wishes to establish in this world (John Paul II, 1979, no.35).

The Catholic Church sees the young as one of its greatest resources because they bring a new dynamism and a fresh approach to life, are open to new possibilities and ideas and are willing to try out new solutions. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN)*, no 72, Pope Paul VI suggested that the Church devotes its attention to young people as they were making their presence felt in society (Dillon, 2012).

The Church has recognized youth work as part and parcel of its ministry in the world. The belief that each young person carries the germ of God's new life and that God loves the young should be the foundation of youth work (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). Much has happened recently in the Church that compels one to consider different approaches to youth ministry. This was also expressed in *Christifideles Laici (CL)* of Pope John Paul II. In this post-synodal exhortation, he wished that the youth be given particular attention. The exhortation mentioned that youth show exceptional potential and are a great challenge for the Church's future. It stated that the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself, and that youthfulness resulted from Christ's spirit (John Paul II, 1989, no.46). The life of young people with new values and new criteria for a living has changed profoundly along with society and the Church. As pastoral activities constantly change, new praxis must be applied (Mullick, 2010).

Youth defined

The term youth refers to individuals who are between the age group of 15 to 24 ("Youth," para 2). It is a period of maturing biologically and psychologically, assimilating culture, and preparing to take their place in society by attending to a life choice and a life plan (Luke, 1985). Complex socio-cultural and institutional realities frequently make the young belong to different social, cultural, and religious groups (Vallabaraj, 2003).

The Characteristics of youth

Young wants to be accepted, understood, loved, exalted, and heard (Vukich & Vandegriff, 2002). One of the main characteristics of youth has always been to a protest, dissent, challenge, question, and strive

for a perfect world. Young people will not accept the truths of faith merely because their elders have accepted them. They want to discuss and understand issues relating to their faith (Morissette, 1980). They take nothing for granted and call everything into question (Panackal, 1992). Behind their brazen and careless facades is a search for answers to questions that touch their existence (Kattikaran & Vettickathadam, 1978). In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente (TMA)*, Pope John Paul II makes a special appeal to the youth of our times. He mentions that Christ expects great things from young people since they are the world's future and the Church belongs to the younger generation (John Paul II, 1999, no.58).

Needs of youth

Some of these needs are more lasting than others, some more intense, and some more recent. These needs arise with different intensities, change their balance from time to time, and disappear or reappear according to the person's life experience and the incentives available to them. If there is a proper meeting of these needs, it helps young people become more responsible, secure, and reliable. In contrast, the failure to meet these needs may cause frustration, insecurity, and social instability. According to Warren (1978):

Youth have a need to be accepting and accepted for who they are; for proper affirmation; to belong to a group where they can experience fellowship and fun; to express themselves; to find the importance of their individual selves; a place to be and belong; an outlet for physical and emotional energy; to have someone who can be trustful; to have a solid and a stable influence; to help others and be of service to peoples; to experience and to understand their faith correctly; to express themselves to God but don't know how; to understand family, peers, sexuality; opportunities to grow and develop into mature humans (p. 139).

Situations and Challenges Facing Youth

In today's world, the lives of the young present a wide range of educational, family, employment, health, and faith experiences that depart in significant ways from those of earlier generations. They present new challenges. Some of these challenges are:

Self-Identity. Self-image is the core of a person's personality. The young today are constantly engaged in a struggle for their self-identity. Many fail in this struggle as they hear too many criticisms from others,

resulting in inferiority complexes. They often compare themselves with others based on intelligence, talents, abilities, physical appearance, achievements, or personal qualities. Because of this comparison, they can consider themselves useless if they don't measure up. Some long for freedom and independence from the regulated regime of family life and end up rebelling and fighting against their parents (Meares, 1973). There are still others who, because they worry about their changing moods, inability to handle bodily changes, and sadness at having lost the security of childhood, suffer from a sexual identity crisis and lack of precise goal setting in life (Jose, 1993).

Materialistic Culture. Youth today are increasingly trapped in the vicious circle of materialism and consumerism, forcing them to keep pace in a fast-changing world. Many Indian youths, mainly from the middle classes in urban areas, are swept along the tide of a fast-growing consumer and materialistic culture, including mass hysteria, hero-worship, and blindness to reality (Vincent, 1993).

Mass Media. The media plays a significant role in the life of young people. Consequently, today's youth are well informed about what is going on in their locality, city, country, and other parts of the world. Although new technology has opened up a new world, young people tend to misuse them and develop unhealthy attitudes (Andrew, 1993).

Career. For many young people, choosing a job is the first complex adult decision they are called to face. School and college often do not prepare them for work-life challenges. The competition and focus on a career can make them immune to contemporary issues. Consequently, it could be inferred that they can become indifferent and complacent to the growing problems in society (Suna, 2001).

Unemployment. Today's youth are caught in the race for jobs and success in a world little concerned with values and morality. A whole category of youth is occupied in menial jobs with little hope of sustaining themselves or their families. There is also a growing number of youths in our towns and cities who are unemployed, marginalized, and consequently at high risk of being trapped by communalism and crime. What they need is hope ("Final Statement of 4th Asian Youth Day," 2006).

Victims of Abuse. Many young people are also victims of sexual abuse, oppression, and violence. Because of the social stigma attached and the inability to cope with such situations, they remain silent and resigned

to their situation (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). Hence, they suffer from guilt, inferiority complexes, depression, and lack of self-confidence.

Power/Control. Young people do manifest the desire to dominate and control. When this desire reaches an extreme, controversies arise, gangs are formed, and there is a constant struggle to maintain their one-up position. Sometimes, they look for affiliations with political parties, politicians, and ministers to enjoy the power and prestige that comes with political clout. There is also a rising consciousness regarding the mutuality and equality of dignity and rights of man and woman, gender awareness, and sensitivity to women's empowerment ("Final Statement of 4th Asian Youth Day," 2006).

The Problem of Intimacy. Relationships can cause a great deal of tension among young people. There is a constant mention of rifts between parents and children and a continuous search among young people for a genuine understanding of their body and sex. Movies make a habit of projecting scenes that stimulate the sexual impulses of young people. This gives rise to masturbation and pre-marital sexual relationships. Thus, building healthy relationships is a problem facing youth (Jose, 1993).

Lack of Aim in Life. The lack of an aim in life is another significant problem confronting young people. Today there is a degradation of moral values; the dominant factors in society are power, money, and influence. Many young people today have lost the sense of right and wrong. They go after pleasures, enjoyments and are selfish and self-centered in their behavior. Since the Church is built on the identity of Jesus, it is necessary to look at the development of His identity to understand the growth of the Church today. This is especially pertinent for today's youth (Pickard, 2012).

The Youth Context of India

India has often been described as the subcontinent of the young (Vallabaraj, 2003). Ours is a land of varied cultures, religious beliefs, and economic distinctions, and that is why Pope John Paul II said that young people were also the heirs to ancient cultures, religions, and traditions (Ecclesia in Asia, 6). In India's complex economic, political, socio-cultural multi-faith context, youth search for wealth, health, peace, happiness, liberation, and fullness (Vallabaraj, 2003). The aim of God's mission has always been uniting all things in God as new creations so that God may be all in all (Eph 4:6).

Catholic Youth. Catholic youth are only a microscopic minority of the youth of India. As such, they largely reflect the general characteristics of the youth of this country (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). They are no different in facing the challenges that youth at large face. Like all other youth, catholic youth yearn to play a decisive role in every sphere of life and have become conscious of their identity and of the tremendous power they possess.

Education. The Church can boast of a nationwide network of schools, colleges, and professional institutions; however, the number of Catholic youth who take advantage of higher and professional education opportunities is few. The reasons could vary from lack of proper guidance and ambition to pursue high goals to lack financial stability (Rosario, 2010).

Employment. A small section of Catholic youth from the higher classes and cities are equipped with the necessary skills and the benefits of the current process of economic liberalization. Youth in the cities have the luxury of choice, yet a whole group of working youth have menial jobs. The majority of the youth who live in villages and rural areas have no option but to manage with the limited income from the less productive agricultural land and are mostly caught up in poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. They constantly struggle to assert their self-identity and claim their share of the benefits of development (Vallabaraj, 2003).

Attitude Towards Religion. Today, a large proportion of our Catholic youth are so attracted by the materialistic and consumeristic culture that religion fails to attract their attention. Many youngsters look with suspicion and distrust at organized religion. They feel that religion is primarily a matter of personal conviction and commitment. Young people perceive the Church very differently and speak of it as an institution that suits older people, boring in its worship and outmoded in its norms. They practice their faith in a very superficial way, and only a few actively participate in the life of the Church (Rajan, 2004). Due to insufficient faith formation, many young people tend to become pious ritualists, and some even experience a certain kind of disenchantment with the institutional Church due to a feeling of not being wanted or recognized by church authorities who sometimes exhibit an authoritarian style of leadership (Vallabaraj, 2003).

Conclusion

Personal religion plays a significant role in people's lives, including youth. Young people are going to form the backbone of the future Church. Hence the Church cannot neglect young people. She cannot accept youth only for their labor while leaving their needs and problems unaddressed. This would not augur well for the mission of the Church (Dhinakaran, 2010). Therefore, the Church today faces a tremendous challenge and must make adjustments as it learns to live in an unchurched modern culture. Youth ministry is a special ministry of the Church. Keeping this in mind, the Church needs to rise and become a significant and relevant voice and offer the outlets for finding meaning in this world (Rajan, 2002). The Church today needs to look at youth from a modern perspective. She needs to portray herself as a perfect example for youth to emulate and should be an instrument to uplift modern youth towards holistic growth.

Rather than just come across as a dispenser of grace through sacraments and right doctrines, the Church should work towards establishing an environment that would allow grace the space to move and grow towards an integrated and holistic Christian life (Warren, 1978). The Church can and should be the community where youth can grow, experiment, and experience the complexities of life within the freedom and love of the church community. They need the kind of love that always has a listening ear and the freedom that offers the space to grow and make mistakes without condemnation. What is needed is a church that has taken its ministry seriously to youth and has committed adult leaders who can see each young person as a unique human being created and loved by God (Holderness, 1981).

Catechism of youth must aim at giving them an orientation to the communitarian aspect of life by emphasizing the strength and the joy of living together. They must be made to understand that the Church exists as a community, and hence the members of the Church are called to live in communion with Christ and their fellow human beings (Choondal, 2012). Youth ministers must develop intimacy with youth and help them confide in the guidance of the Church by dealing with their problems with parental concern. The Church must include youth in the ministry of God as active participants. They must be empowered in the Church for it helps them develop their leadership skills and thus enhance their personality. Hence, the role of the Church is to turn young people into better persons with the sincere help of her social

institutions, youth animators, and youth ministry. This would play an important, vital and indispensable role in guiding and molding young people.

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Youth and Drugs

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Abstract

Drug abuse poses a serious threat to modern society. Youth is an asset to the community, but they often become victims of drug addiction. They have various reasons for drug abuse: frustration with life, boredom, family problems, social issues, peer pressure, or even a rebellious gesture towards the norms of civil society. A thorough understanding of this problem is necessary to effectively prevent or significantly reduce this social malady. A well-organised program of education is required to avoid drug abuse.

Keywords: Addiction, Drug, Factors, Family

Introduction

Issues of drug addiction is covered in the newspaper almost daily, showing the issue's seriousness. The drugs, the people, and the circumstances vary from place to place and from culture to culture. Limiting the availability of alcohol and its control of production and trade alone is insufficient to prevent alcoholism. The illicit drug phenomenon cannot be viewed outside the context of contemporary economic, social, and political developments. In an increasingly complex world, the scope for profit-making in the illicit drug trade is rapidly expanding. The relationship between illegal drugs and economic growth is far more important than generally recognised. The threat of drugs is a problem that goes across national territories. Today there are more young addicts between the ages of 15 and 24 than ever before in the history of humanity (Kapur, 1985), and this estimate is

increasing year by year. This article aims to understand the various factors leading the youth to drug abuse and how it can be treated and prevented.

What is a drug?

A drug is a substance that can be taken into the human body and, once taken, alters some processes within the body and mind. Some drugs kill bacteria and help the body recover from infections. “Some drugs cross the blood-brain barrier and affect neurotransmitter function” (Sussman & Ames, 2008). A pharmaceutical drug, also called a medication or medicine, is a chemical substance used to treat, cure, prevent, or diagnose a disease or promote well-being. Traditionally, drugs were obtained through extraction from medicinal plants, but more recently, by organic synthesis (“Drug,” 2022). The definition of the word drug proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO) refers to “any substance that, when taken into a living organism, may modify its perception, mood, cognition, behaviour or motor function” (World Drug Report, 1983). Some drugs may create dependence in a short time. Drugs also have an effect on moods, perception and consciousness.

When a drug is misused or overused to the point where it becomes the central focus of an individual’s life, it is known as drug abuse. Drug abuse can be defined as “the knowing ingestion of any property which has solid or semisolid form with the end, whether intended or not, of inducing physical or psychological dependency” (Mohan & Sehgal, 2004). Goodwin (1991) observes that the elaborate dependence proposed by the American Psychiatric Association can be collapsed more or less to a single sentence: Alcoholism involves a compulsion to drink, causing damage to self and others.

Drug Addiction

In the 4th century B.C., Aristotle referred to drunkenness as an organic disorder, and discussions of opium addiction have appeared in medieval documents (Hollen, 2009). The use of drugs was widespread because it formed a part of the ceremonial and sacrificial rites in the Vedic age. In contrast, the hemp plant’s narcotic products were mainly used for medicinal purposes (Parikh & Krishna, 1992). The drug induces physical and psychological dependency. Addiction to drugs is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as “a state of periodic or chronic intoxication produced by the repeated consumption of a drug characterised by an overpowering desire or need to continue taking

the drug and obtain it by any means; a tendency to increase the dose; psychological and physical dependency on the effects of the drug resulting in effects detrimental to the individual and society” (Pillai, 1997). Parikh and Krishna (1992) explain the characteristics of addiction:

1. An overpowering desire is a need (compulsion) to continue taking drugs and obtain them by any means
2. A tendency to increase the dose
3. A psychic (psychological) and sometimes a physical dependence on the effects of the drugs

An addict becomes powerless when he cannot choose whether to drink or not. Biological, genetic, and environmental factors influence an individual’s vulnerability to addiction, just as the addiction liability of the substance in question affects the individual’s response. DSM-IV (2005) lists seven criteria and suggests that dependence/addiction is present when three or more have occurred within the last twelve months. The criteria are: (1) tolerance; (2) withdrawal; (3) often consuming more than was intended; (4) persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down (5) spending a great deal of time with drug-related activities; (6) giving up important social, occupational, or recreational activities; (7) and continuing consumption despite physical or psychological harm.

People do not start their lives dependent on substances, but they become dependent through repetition, by repeatedly using something to satisfy some need or longing. Thus, a person with addiction is someone who “has demonstrated failure to refrain, despite having attempted to so, or who would have demonstrated such failures under different environmental conditions” (Vuchinich & Heather, 2003).

How do Addictions Begin?

There are various reasons for drug-taking. However, it is significant to note that most drug addicts begin willingly. Many young people want to try drugs just to satisfy their curiosity. They desire to experiment with anything mysterious, dangerous and illegal (Pillai, 1997). One of the main reasons for taking drugs, especially by young people, is to be accepted among their peers. Other significant causes of addiction are family relationships, age, moral values, peer group pressure, religious influences, socio-cultural factors and economic instability.

Genetic Factors. The addictive inheritance is studied in the case of alcoholism. Most researchers believe the causes of alcoholism lie in biology and environmental factors, and some cite convincing evidence that the former plays the more significant role. Hollen (2009) argues that “biology and genetics underlie metabolic disorders, ethnic susceptibilities, certain prenatal influences, and network of neurotransmitters and neuromodulators in the brain, all of which subtly contribute to a person’s vulnerability to alcoholism.” The association of specific genes with alcoholism helped launch a series of investigations within the scientific community into the genetics of addiction.

Goodwin (1991) argues that studies endeavour to separate genetic from environmental factors, such as those in which adopted-away offspring of alcoholics compared to adopted children with non-alcoholic biological parents. They have claimed a three to four times greater alcoholism rate for those whose biological parents were alcoholics. Control-drinking theorists like Heather and Robertson (1983) propose that “some problem drinkers are born with a physiological abnormality, either genetically transmitted or as a result of intrauterine factors, which makes them react abnormally to alcohol from their first experience of it.” Findings like these have led genetic theorists and researchers to propose that inherited vulnerability to alcoholism takes the form of a more significant risk of developing drinking problems.

Family Relations. Alcoholism runs in families and is considered to be a familial disorder. Galante (1983) observes that familial alcoholics should have a positive family history of alcoholism, early onset of alcoholism, and severe symptoms requiring early treatment and intervention. It is crucial that drug addict often feels that they are not getting sufficient attention from their parents and turns to the drug.

Moreover, parents are always too busy to help or even genuinely sympathise with them (Kapur, 1985). Thus, the trend among urban families is that the younger generation is left alone. They want to escape the stark reality that their parents cannot help them or are willing to do so after a point. Drugs cause them to feel as if they are still happy and have the confidence and trust of their parents. The perfectionist parents continually demand perfection from their children, who think they can never be good enough. Consequently, they have feelings of inadequacy, discouragement and deep self-hate, which leads to depression and hostility towards their parents. This situation at home causes them to

take shelter under peer groups, and they learn to identify with these groups in all aspects (Mithra, 2016).

Thampu (1994) revealed that most addicts come from unhappy family backgrounds. And these include not only broken homes but also blighted homes, where parents co-habit and conflict, traumatising and starving their children emotionally. There is an ironic message that drug addiction afflicts the whole family. With the addict, the entire family also is derailed. Parikh and Krishna (1992) report that the New York University study compared the family background of 80 boys who were addicts with that of 30 boys who were non-addicts. All the families lived in a high drug use neighbourhood. Almost all 50 addicts came from families with troubled family relationships between parents, such as divorce, separations, and hostility. It has been known for many years that family members of alcohol-dependent patients have a significantly greater risk of becoming dependent than members of the general population.

Biological and Physiological Factors. The drugs primarily affect the brain and alter physiological functions within the body, subjective experience and behaviour. In their book, Mohan and Seghal (2004) discuss three types of theories relating the use of drugs to the chemical changes they produce in the brain:

- a. Deficiency theory: - This theory suggests that an individual deficient in a particular neuro-transmitter or neurohormone will use the drug as a replacement for it. This deficiency is presumably present from birth or results from inappropriate brain development.
- b. The second theory concerns brain reward mechanisms. When activated, specific neurons produce a pleasurable or rewarding effect; dopamine is the neurotransmitter for these neurons.
- c. The third view suggests that effects on various neural systems are likely to be involved in mediating the effects of drugs. No one simple effect is responsible for drug use. Instead, a range of drug effects may be responsible for its use.

Recognising that stress is a well-known risk factor in the development of addiction. Sinha (2008) proposed the pathophysiological pathways of stress-related addiction theory. This theory is supported by population-based studies that have identified specific stressors and individual-level variables as predictive of abusive and compulsive use of the drugs and

substances of abuse. The deleterious effects of early life stress, child maltreatment and abuse, and various traumatic mental and physical disorders can cause alterations in the brain.

Koob (2008) proposed the theory of emotional systems of the brain and addiction. He argued that the emotional systems of the brain that mediate arousal and stress systems in the amygdala are essential for understanding the development of addiction, including the negative emotional state that occurs when the use of a drug or substance of abuse is abruptly discontinued. The biological-determinist view argues that addiction is a disease and that “addicts” have an illness that has a physiological basis. Nora Volkow, the head of the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse, states that addiction is a brain disease (Daley, 2016).

Social Factors. An individual’s social background plays an important role in his behaviour and action. Breakdown in the family, strained relationships, lack of understanding and love, social upbringing, poverty and meaninglessness in life make a person feel it is worthless to live. When a person goes through these realities, he seeks to find other means whereby he could get rid of these problems and pressures. The effects of society on individuals make people go mad. Sometimes, inequality, injustice, and lack of concern and care for the suffering tend to make the younger generation adopt the philosophy of ‘eat, drink and make merry.’ They see nothing but hopelessness and meaninglessness in their future, but it seems reasonable to do it today; tomorrow does not matter and is the attitude that has crept into the minds of the new generation (Mithra, 2016).

Social scientists have interpreted drug abuse as partly a response to alienation. People who are not well rewarded in the mainstream of society seek alternative gratifications, such as drugs. Even if drug use is not a response to educational failure or economic deprivation, it may be engendered by other social pressures and changes (Mohan & Seghal, 2004). Drug abuse has challenged the future lives of many individuals. Drugs destroy all the beautiful values of life and lead them even to murder and suicide. An individual’s youth can be one of the happiest stages of his life. Mithra (2016) argues that drug addiction among youth is the result of a multiplicity of factors in society, and the changing standards of the world and its problems have robbed youth of their happiness. The World Drug Report (1997) argues that the rapid disintegration of traditional social structures has been put forward as a

contributing factor to new patterns of drug abuse in countries in a state of transition where there has been insufficient time to replace the old norms, values and customs with new ones.

Friends and Peer Groups. One of the most common replies as to why the addicts take drugs will be, ‘because my friends also take them.’ That seems to justify their taking drugs themselves. Thus, the attraction of drugs lies in the fact that it feels that they have actually performed miracles for a while. However, the aftermath is such that it leaves no doubt that drug takes their toll. “At a more banal level, ‘curiosity, ‘my friends were doing it’ and, there didn’t seem to be any particular reason not to,’ are among the most common reasons for experimenting with illicit drug use” (World Drug Report, 1997).

Drug use is closely tied to a person’s social and peer groups. Jessor (1979) has identified peer pressure’s power on adolescents’ drug use initiation and continuation. Styles of drinking, from moderate to excessive, are strongly influenced by the immediate social group. Such social learning is present in all types and stages of drug use. An individual is under pressure to choose the best of life and the peer group’s recognition and identity of their peer society and the pleasure of their self. For many, the need to build friendships is the primary motivation to begin using drugs. Daley (2016) narrates the experience of Palin, who, after migrating from Vietnam, went to an Australian high school. Unfortunately, he had little grasp of English. Classrooms were impossible for him to “fit in”, but he soon noticed the group of boys who were skipping classes. This group was appealing to Pailin, who wanted to escape from the classroom and also wanted friends. He said, “I couldn’t speak properly, and I met the wrong group of friends. I wanted to fit in, I guess. I knew no one, so I guess I just wanted to fit in. And I started taking drugs.”

Most surveys reveal that most addicts were introduced to drugs by their friends. They wanted to be accepted and taken note of. Thampu (1994) quotes the experience of an addict from Mumbai: “I must have introduced more than three dozen friends to brown sugar. I don’t know why I did it. But I don’t think it was for cheap thrills. Perhaps I derived security from their insecurity.” Those with strong affiliative needs are particularly likely to be influenced by their friends and associates’ encouragement to take drugs (Mohan & Seghal, 2004).

Psychological Factors. Since ancient times, it has been recognised that drugs profoundly affect man’s mind. What has taken us very long to discover that this effect is bothersome and perplexing. There may be

ways of explaining why and what happens on a drug trip, but nobody knows exactly why. Kapur (1985) argues that psychedelic drugs and opiates raise the mind to a level of perception far beyond that found in ordinary states. The feeling is one of intricate, computer-like order in all perceptions. The principal reasons for drug misuse are a combination of personality and social variables. Psychoanalysts believe that the drug addict is an immature, orally fixated individual. Mohan and Seghal (2004) argue that a crucial element of drug misuse is self-destructive behaviour motivated by hostility or guilt.

Many drugs affect parts of the body without affecting the brain, but psychoactive drugs affect the brain and result in behavioural changes. Wells and Stacy (1976), in their study of 5540 addicts, observed that drug misuse consistently was related to elevated levels of anxiety, neuroticism, and psychoticism. A survey conducted by the Delhi School of Social Work (Mohan & Seghal, 2004) on university students reported that 87% of drug abusers were insecure, immature, dependent, frustrated, diffident, anxious, and worried. They suffered from a sense of failure and personal inadequacy. Their social contacts were limited to a very small and close circle of friends.

Moral and Ethical Perspective. As human beings in a society, we need some guiding principles for our day-to-day life. To decide right and wrong, we need a measuring rod that could be ethics. One is under ethical obligations as long as one is in the community. We have moral and ethical duties to perform, which probably start at home and extend to society. Ethical standards are for the community and even for one's self.

On the other hand, if everyone formulates their moral standards for their end and behaves as they please, they will not benefit the community. For it will bring chaotic problems to the community and society in general. Mithra (2106) shares the cry of an addict:

Frequently I suffered separation from the family members I loved. The peer group were those I did not really love, but for pressure. Loss of wealth also came on me; I drained the family economy... ignominies, dishonour, full of affliction from police officials and likewise from the community, excessively poignant pain, both mental and physical. I also underwent frightful indignities of parents and fierce deaths, and captivities of addiction. I had fallen into the hell and torments in the house of the withdrawal.

Every addict will have a similar story to tell. Does this scene make us feel guilty for the dereliction of our moral and ethical responsibilities? Thampu (1994) observes that the terms ‘substance abuse’ mean only alcoholism and drug dependence to most people. But it is essential to realise that these two most typical expressions symbolise a much broader problem. And that problem concerns the total orientation of life that the very substance of human existence, the essence of our being, is abused.

Treatment

Many possible scenarios bring individuals into treatment, but most are linked to negative consequences of use. Johnson (1980) proposed that individuals progress through the following stages of recovery:

The *first* stage of admission occurs when individuals enter treatment settings and accept or admit that they have a substance abuse problem. The *second* phase of recovery is compliance. Compliance involves a change in an individual’s attitude from resisting to complying with treatment. The *third* stage of recovery, acceptance, involves personal responsibility for recovery. The *fourth* stage of recovery, surrender, is signalled by an appropriate display of caution about the future and the realisation that aftercare is necessary for the continued maintenance of change.

Mann (1970) speaks about the status of alcoholism as a disease in the medical sense. She wrote: Alcoholism is a disease which manifests itself chiefly by the uncontrollable drinking of the victim, which, if left untreated, grows more virulent year by year, driving its victims further and further from the everyday world, and deeper and deeper into an abyss which has only two outlets: insanity or death. Alcoholism, therefore, is a progressive and often fatal disease. Treating drug abuse goes far beyond providing a medical remedy for a physiological malfunction. In treating an addict, there are complex problems needing attention.

Cunkapura (1986) believes alcoholism was considered a moral and legal problem in the past, and alcohol-related issues were handled in courts and hospitals. Such a restricted method of dealing with the abuse of alcohol is far from reality, as alcoholism itself is a product of multivariant factors. Since alcoholism is a disease of the mind, body and spirit, we must understand how the person’s total being is affected by the addiction process. Susman and Ames (2008) propose a multidisciplinary approach to treating drug addiction. They say that

treatment of substance abuse in many countries is progressing toward a multidisciplinary approach. As a chronic disease, addiction requires lifelong management.

Prevention

The ultimate goal of preventing drug-related problems is to ensure that the members of a given population do not abuse drugs and consequently do not put themselves at risk of suffering damage or causing social harm. Preventing drug misuse through educational efforts has gained momentum. Most educational programs aimed at youth and school-based early intervention programs are necessary to provide young people with an aversion to drug use. Parents need to become more accurately informed about drugs. Chunkapura (1986) observes that a comprehensive approach to the problems of dependence on alcohol and other drugs should include a robust and well-organised education program aimed at prevention. As explained by Mohan and Segal (2004), primary drug abuse prevention can be affected by the following three approaches: elimination of pathogenic agents, control of contributing environmental conditions and strengthening host resistance. Sussman and Ames (2008) hold that with various types of education programming, highly interactive prevention programs (i.e., interaction among teachers with students and students with each other) tend to be the most successful. The Socratic (interactive) method of teaching is one in which questioning by the teacher is used to elicit pertinent prevention information from participants.

Hollen (2009) suggests several ways parents can help protect children from the dangers of alcohol. Parents should teach healthy ways of dealing with life's problems so that adolescents do not rely on the false promises of alcohol to cope. Healthy and forthright discussions are to take place in families about the dangers of drugs. It can enhance children's self-esteem and confidence. Parents must listen to the children's concerns without judging or accusing them. It will create an atmosphere of freedom in the family. The parents shall not hesitate to intervene at the first sign of trouble. Family involvement is a relevant means of providing prevention. Pagliaro and Pagliaro (2012) speak about three levels of prevention: -

- Primary*, prevention is aimed at preventing the initial use of a drug or substance of abuse. For example, it may involve the implementation of drug education programs in primary schools.
- Secondary* prevention involves the early detection of drug

and substance use disorders and the provision of immediate therapeutic efforts. *Tertiary*, prevention is aimed at limiting the degree of harm associated with the active use of the drugs and substances of abuse and promoting optimal health and social functioning when harmful effects are irreversible.

Spiritual Perspective

While I was in a parish as the parish priest, there was an alcoholic addict. He started consuming alcohol in his early childhood because his father also was an addict. His father used to give him alcohol, and later on, he became an addict. He has a wife and two children, who had a very miserable life. I took him to a de-addiction centre when I learned his story. After being treated for about two months, he returned as a new person. After his renewal, he initiated a spiritual journey and was very particular about his sacramental life and family prayer. The spiritual life he started helped him sustain his journey as a renewed man. Spirituality can, thus, contribute significantly to the renewal of an addict.

In his epistle to I Corinthians (3:16-17), St. Paul says: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” Drugs enslave men and women and deny God’s purpose for them. Abusing the body is a sin against God since it is his throne and dwelling place. Addiction deprives one of abundant living and true happiness and is a denial of God’s fullness of life. The experience of drugs is an illusion, unreal, momentary, and harmful to oneself and society.

Carl Jung’s oracular statement, *Spiritus contra spiritum* (the Latin word for both spirit and alcohol) or only spirit can heal the victim of spiritus; it speaks much about the role of spirituality in treating drug addicts (Grof, 1993). A large-scale study of over 2,000 female twins examined the relationship between religiosity and substance abuse (Kendler, Gardner & Prescott, 1997) and found that while traditional religious beliefs may prevent initial abuse of substances, recovery from substance abuse appears to be facilitated by personal. The findings from various studies suggest that perceived comfort and support derived from religious and spiritual beliefs at entry into addiction treatment is associated with positive treatment outcomes. Spirituality is vital in the process of recovery from drug addiction. Miller (1998) writes that spiritual or religious concepts and practices have traditionally

played a more significant role in addiction treatment than other modes of treatment. Building spiritual growth may allow the addict to expand the management of the addictive disease process. In A.A.'s (Alcoholics Anonymous) understanding, spirituality reliably drives out the possessive spirits of addiction.

Conclusion

Not only do drugs affect the mind and destroy social relations – they cause untold damage to the human body itself. Thus, a few moments of pleasure, if it can be called that, are not worth risking the entirety of one's life. Addiction can be understood only as a multifactorial phenomenon: it takes place along a continuum in degrees and is not limited to a single object. There are many factors – social, psychological, family, genetic, biological and physiological, peer group pressure etc.- behind drug addiction. An addict becomes increasingly unpredictable and incapable of maintaining balance in relationships with family, friends and society. Family and community play a crucial role in preventing someone from being a drug addict. Our young generation must be made aware of the dangers of drug abuse. Our young people must get real happiness in their families and societies.

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Creative Response through Self-Transcendence: Logotherapeutic Perspective of the Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing of the Parish Priests in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The covid-19 pandemic exposed itself as a challenging scenario for the parish priests in India due to its embarrassing consequences on personal and pastoral lives. Creative response through self-transcendence could be a therapeutic meaning-making approach for priests to overcome their emotional and spiritual misfortunes. Self-transcendence could mean going beyond oneself in search of higher meaning—realizing a creative pastoral ministry, experiencing noble values of priestly existence, and bravely facing inescapable suffering. The article is a brief analysis of the psychospiritual issues of the parish priests during the pandemic in light of the psychological approach of Frankl and the spiritual insights of Nouwen (*The Return of the Prodigal Son* and *The Wounded Healer*).

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, Parish priests, Self-transcendence, Psychospiritual wellbeing, attitudinal modifications

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, the global humanitarian crisis, has presented the question of survival among millions worldwide. In recent years of human history, no one has witnessed such a drastic shift in human

life's daily momentum as caused by the launching of the Covid-19 pandemic, with no exceptions for continents, nations, religious traditions, or any other social strata. The pandemic demanded closing nonessential businesses, canceling gatherings, and encouraging people to shelter in place at home, all attempting to break every possible chain of transmission (Greger, 2020). As one of the world's most populated countries, India had the highest risk of preventing coronavirus transmission, especially among the working-class people. In a way, preventive measures in the country had caused chaos, making ordinary human life miserable due to administrative incompetency and deficit medical professionalism in handling an unprecedented threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. The public felt a lot of stress due to separation from their loved ones, loss of freedom, and the feeling of helplessness (Parayil, 2020). All the established institutions had gone through the severe impact of the pandemic, and the Catholic Church in India was not an exception. The general norm that evolved amid the pandemic's muddles regarding human survival was not survival of the fittest but the survival of the quickest (Parayil, 2022). It was an anomaly to remain stagnant in a world quickly adapting to the alternative ways of the new world order.

This article aims at a retrospective reading of the emotional and spiritual life of parish priests who had to confront pastoral demands and personal predicaments in a pandemic scenario. Undoubtedly, facing a constant threat of contagion, concerns about the disease and related issues, uncertainties about the future, and [the death cases in the parishes have aggravated the parish priests'] situational distress (Hooda, Sharma, & Yadava, 2021). In a way, the external adversities of the pandemic turned out to be a triggering event, potentially causing emotional and spiritual exhaustion in parish priests. Therefore, the study hypothesizes that the unprecedented shift brought out by the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant effect on the psycho spiritual wellbeing of the parish priests in the Catholic Church in India. The contextual study on the psycho spiritual wellness of the pastors of the Church amid the complexities of a pandemic has its contemporary significance since there exists a significant correlation between psycho spiritual flourishing and pastoral efficacy rates. In the Indian context, for many priests in the parishes, the absence of the in-person congregation raised personal, pastoral, liturgical, and theological questions without the time for sufficient and solid reflections (Gill, 2020).

Nouwen beautifully displays the fruitful victimhood of a priest when he is destined to live existential wounds of the contemporary life—an old legend in the Talmud may suggest to us the pertaining meaning in the creative pastoral ministry. The Messiah is sitting among the poor, binding his wounds one at a time, waiting for the moment when he will be needed (Nouwen, 1979). Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic had been an ample opportunity for the parish priests to transcend the anxiety symptoms of their existential wounds through creative and responsible pastoral responses to the worries of their flock. In the pandemic circumstances, the pastors have recognized that meaning-making is what seems sensible more than the physical, sociological, and financial contentment of priestly life. In this regard, Logotherapeutic perceptions of Frankl is an efficacious therapeutic method in broadening parish priests' visual field to perceive deep-down possibilities of meaning-making (Frankl, 1963). An essential advantage of logotherapy in psychospiritual integration is its possibility to integrate the psychological and spiritual aspects to answer distressing situations (Boileau, 2021).

Mental Health and Pastoral Ministry

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the issue of the mental wellness of [the parish priests] chronic as they suffer from alienation, separation, and loneliness in personal and professional life (Hooda, Sharma, & Yadava, 2021). Therefore, serious attention to the mental wellness of the priests was the need of the time when they had been possibly affected by the psychological and spiritual misfortunes. Mental health and emotional maturity are the contributing variables of a flourished and contented priestly life. The strongest predictor of priestly happiness is the priest's sense of inner peace. There is a positive correlation between one's spiritual life and one's mental wellbeing (Rosetti, 2011). Retrospective analysis of priestly life in a pandemic would provide sufficient insights to tackle future concerns over the similar fatality.

In a pandemic, rumination would be possibly another psychological condition intruding priestly life in the face of existential vacuum, and boredom in ministerial life. Brooding in this way is associated with maladaptive cognitive processing that can lead to negative affect, depression, and suicidal ideation (Russo-Netzer, Schulenberg, & Batthyany, 2016). Apathy (loss of interest in the ministry), boredom episodes ('Sunday neuroses,' Frankl, 1963) in some cases, the burn-out syndrome, and anxieties might lead a minister to brood over

the negative impacts of the pandemic and thus allowing himself to deteriorate emotionally and spiritually. As rumination is a destructive behavioural and attitudinal problem, the priest has to bring about an attitudinal modification by activating his will to meaning.

Pertinent Questions in a Crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis might raise existential invalidations in the priest's mind since the sources of his meaningful life appear as arrested. Therefore, some relevant existential questions the article tries to answer are: How are parish priests expected to be connected in ministry during a pandemic? How could a parish priest function at times of social restrictions in the future in the Indian context? What initiatives should a parish priest take to find a meaningful life in a crisis?

The Covid-19 pandemic scenario could be described as one of the flimsy circumstances when the vulnerability of the parish priests is exposed to the Church society. The parish priests might feel unimportant and unneeded in an unsympathetic pandemic where their services are not sought or restricted due to the social distancing policies (Cervo, 2020). Hence, their life purpose was questioned by the Covid-19 pandemic due to heavy restrictions on public gatherings in churches, forced isolation to be in the parish house, and the absence of the parish community for the Eucharistic celebrations. Here the related question is: how does a diocesan priest pursue the meaning or purpose in life and ministry during a toxic atmosphere just like the pandemic in future especially when there exist heavy restrictions on assembling in the parishes or forced isolations? (Kundukulam, 2021).

The Necessity of Healing in the Crisis. Whatever is the crisis in priestly life, it calls for profound and holistic healing of the person emotionally and spiritually. Priests need to master the necessary psychospiritual skills and bring attitudinal modifications to their personal and pastoral existence. The areas where remedial steps are required are meaninglessness and consequent frustrations, loneliness and identity crisis, apathy and boredom episodes, vocational dissatisfaction, pastoral anxieties, lack of emotional and spiritual fulfilments. Therefore, pastoral care of priests is an essential spiritual service, and it involves therapeutic conversations, crisis intervention, pragmatic counselling, and spiritual companionship. Research has shown that having purpose and meaning in life increases overall wellbeing and general satisfaction,

improves mental and physical health, enhances resilience, builds self-esteem and decreases the chances of depression (Valladares, 2015).

Healing through Embracing the Crisis. The possible psychological and spiritual imbalances in the personal and professional life of the parish priests brought by the pandemic are similar to what Frankl (1963) described as a ‘shock’ in the lives of the inmates of the concentration camps. The shocking experience of being locked in the Auschwitz camp is the dreadful realisation of their painful and unescapable fate (Frankl, 1963). Similarly, the clergy possibly were shocked by the awful impact of the pandemic because the Covid-19 pandemic along with its lockdowns, quarantines, social distancing, contamination of the disease and tragic death cases, and problems with giving a decent farewell to the deceased parishioners. Many of us lived a ‘delusion of reprieve’ that we would soon be liberated from the clutches of the pandemic and return to everyday life. As it did not happen as we expected, the parish priest had to acknowledge the realities of the crisis and take a leadership role.

Acknowledging a crisis is seen as the self-detachment capability of human beings towards the challenges arising from within and surrounding environment. It can be identified as the inner movement of the Prodigal son of Nouwen (1992) in *The Return of the Prodigal Son* to acknowledge and embrace the impinging absurdities of his life. Good News Bible version shows the inner movement of the Prodigal with a beautiful phrase, “At last, he came to his senses” (Lk 15: 17a). The Prodigal son in Nouwen’s story could detach himself from the anxiety symptoms arising from his inner self and surrounding wretched conditions in the distant land (Nouwen, 1992). Therefore, self-detachment competence is the sign of a determined priestly mind to march his life against an impending fate of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, embracing a pandemic crisis is a pronounced decision-making event in the life of a parish priest.

Healing Through Meaning-Making. Logotherapy is a reasonable substantial psycho-philosophical theory with an effective therapeutic intervention to stimulate the potential meaning of priestly existence at times of redundancy in a pandemic. Regarding the psychospiritual healing process, Frankl holds that when man’s search for meaning is frustrated or thwarted, it leads to spiritual distress, though not the same as a mental disease (Costello, 2015). What is unique in meaning-making process is: perspective change is fundamental to reorienting

clients from egotistic concerns of pleasure and success to the meaning-mind set of being responsible for the wellbeing of others and its resulting deep satisfaction (Russo-Netzer, Schulenberg, & Batthyany, 2016). Attitudinal modification of the individual by conscious attempts is essential in the meaning-making process. Hence, logotherapy is a highly insightful philosophy and a result-oriented therapeutic method for a priest in idleness to rediscover the values such as intentionality of his vocation, the responsibility of life, power of self-transcendence, and courageous suffering. The meaning-making therapy equips a priest to differentiate between himself and his anxiety-provoking symptoms of ministry in a pandemic scenario. The therapy further advances a priest to make a positive reappraisal of his life, thus perceiving the positive aspects of the adverse events surrounding his committed life. The meaning-making is possible through the following ways.

Realisation of Contextual Meaning and Pastoral Responsibility. The discovery of contextual meaning in one's life could be regarded as one of the specialities of the logotherapeutic method in healing emotional and spiritual issues. Frankl suggests that the contextual nature of meaning implies that one cannot point out the specific meaning for another (Frankl, 2014). Each must see the meaning of their context. Vatican II urged, "priests should be adapted to the circumstances of time and space so that priestly ministry will always answer the pastoral requirements of the particular area" (Vatican II, 1966). The contextual meaning is not something an abstract, transcendent concept. The parish priest is incardinated to a particular geographical place and destined to live with a specific group of people. He is not a mendicant moving from place to place (Rosetti, 2009). Therefore, his meaning of life is also contextual. Context sensitivity makes priesthood respond to the real needs and expectations of the people and the cultural and social situation (Selvam & Karunaraj, 2010). The sensitivity of priests to the pandemic environment and the needs in which they live and administer their pastoral duties turns out to be a source of their meaning in priestly life.

Frankl maintains that asking questions on the meaningfulness of one's life makes him more responsible towards himself, others, and life (Frankl, 1975). Therefore, in his existential vacuum (noögenic neurosis, Barnes, 2000), the priest had to dare to hope in the face of hopelessness, detach from the fate of the distressing situation, retain the defiant power of his inner spirit, and consider honestly the

meaning in living a priestly life. The above-mentioned psychospiritual developments would happen when he becomes a responsible pastor amid factual life circumstances. The essence of his priestly existence could be seen in the responsibility towards personal and pastoral life (Frankl, 1958). Thus, the spiritual core of a [priest] is recognized as capable of taking a stand toward negative and painful external circumstances and its psychological character structure. Such recognition conveys to a renewed awareness of self-worth and human dignity (Kimble & Ellor, 2009). Pastoral responsibility in crises induces a sense of specialness, the essential element of the priesthood. In the place of existential meaninglessness and faith crisis, a new meaning and deeper faith begin to grow (Goergen, 1992).

Realisation of Priestly Dignity and Spiritual Dimension. The profound meaning in the ministerial life can be again traced in Nouwen's story (1992). The younger son discerned the intact indelible mark of his sonship and dignity. There is a meaningful association between the realisation of the deepest self by the prodigal son and the rediscovery of meaning by a parish priest in the face of a hostile pandemic. The grace of indelible mark of the ministerial priesthood and the grace of the dignity of the sonship is ontologically related (Nouwen, 1992). The meaning is inherent in every priest's inner being. The realisation would become the source of self-worth, confidence in one's abilities to respond proactively to the demands of the concrete circumstances of one's life. With existential aloneness and apparent meaninglessness, priests who recognize their worth and strengths can use this knowledge to bounce back and carry on from an event that has caused hardship (Russo-Netzer, Schulenberg, & Batthyany, 2016). The realisation of priestly dignity for a priest is a compelling spiritual quotient that would assist him in being resilient in life.

The story of Nouwen further explores that the young man was dispossessed of everything except for one thing, his sword. When embracing his father after returning home, the only remaining sign of his dignity is the short sword hanging from his hips- a badge of nobility. The sword is the symbol of grace in him which he still has not abandoned even in the face of the tragic moments of his life. Even amid his debasement, he had clung to the truth that he still was the son of his father. Otherwise, he would have sold his so valuable sword, the symbol of his sonship. The sword is there to show that, although he came back speaking as a beggar and an outcast, he had not forgotten

that he still was the son of his father. This remembered and valued sonship finally persuaded him to turn back (Nouwen, 1992).

The hanging sword at the side tells us of the invisible noetic or spiritual dimension, the grace of the sonship, of the young man, which prompted him convincingly to return to life. For Frankl human person cannot be reduced simply to a mere collection of drives or urges, but it is his spiritual dimension, the invisible grace, that becomes an impetus for him to strive for meaning in his life. The invisible grace makes him free to transcend the boundaries and constraints of the most difficult situations of life which prove unchangeable yet rich in meaning and fulfilment (Kimble & Ellor, 2009). It is true about a priestly life undergoing difficult desolation and neurotic moments. Rosetti (2009) speaks to us that any moment of crisis in priestly life is an opportunity to embrace the graces to come from the disasters of life. God has the uncanny (Frankl, 1963) ability to transform the greatest of disasters into moments of grace. Therefore, our task is not to let the moments of disasters pass without gleaning the grace has in store for us. We ought to pursue this purification of the priestly life vigorously (Rosetti, 2009). The realisation of the inherent spiritual dimension, or the permeating grace, would serve as a strong push for a priest to search for resilience and endurance through meaning-making at the moments of devastating crisis. The spiritual quotient is a powerful reservoir. In the noetic or spiritual dimension background, Frankl depicts the human person possessing a different form of being. Therefore, the apprehension about the meaning of priestly life is more spiritual distress, which may have very little connection with one's psychic disease (Frankl, 1958). The spiritual pain in the process of pursuing the meaning of life in a pandemic can be diagnosed in light of the logotherapeutic ideals of freedom and responsibility.

The Virtues of Freedom and Responsibility. A priest was not free from the biological, sociological or psychological conditions of the pandemic. Still, it takes self-determination to take a stand using the reservoir of the spiritual dimension by being free and responsible in the frightful circumstances. A human person is free to choose his destiny at moments of existential struggles and is responsible for his choice in making his life worth living (Frankl, 2014). When a situation does not provide a sense of satisfaction, emotional and spiritual nourishment, they should not expect someone to provide the meaning. Instead, the

priest is responsible by being aware of life predicaments, feelings, destiny, and suffering at the moment of struggles (Onah, 2000).

The Virtues of Self-detachment and Self-transcendence. The virtues of self-detachment and self-transcendence would become an effective tool for a priest in an existential crisis to get mastery over overwhelming circumstances of a pandemic when the churches were closed and priestly ministry had been restricted. By the capacity for self-detachment, man is capable of detaching oneself not from a situation and self, and choose an attitude toward themselves. They take a stand toward their somatic and psychic conditions and determinants (Frankl, 2014). Self-transcendence would be another capacity available for a priest in their conscience to prove humanness and strength of the spirit in the face of trivial circumstances. By this capacity, a priest could go beyond self to encounter something or someone searching and accomplishing priestly life's meaning. Thus, the virtue of self-transcendence becomes the essence of priestly existence. Only through self-transcendence can one find meaning in love and unavoidable suffering. The more one reaches out to others in love, or, a meaning to fulfil, the more human they become (Onah, 2000). Therefore, when a priest uses the virtues of self-detachment and self-transcendence, they prove the witnessing quality of life in a pandemic time when ordinary people are perplexed in their lives. Thus, the qualities of these two virtues would become instrumental in determining the essence of his priestly existence in the frightful situations of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Will to a Meaningful Priestly Life

The insight of the logotherapeutic ideal of the will to meaning and the Nouwen concept of choice for life will effectively resolve the questions of meaninglessness and noögenic neurosis of a priestly life during the Covid-19 pandemic. Figuratively, the prodigal son stands for the priest destined to leave his home to a distant land of the pandemic, where he suffered from emotional and spiritual starvation and was deprived of a flourishing life. The priest wanted to return to his home: the home is regarded as a state of his emotional and spiritual wellness. The priest also confronted a spiritual struggle like the prodigal son had in the distant land. He struggled to decide and choose. In logotherapy, this inherent struggle for meaning has been taken as an indispensable element. Frankl calls this inherent spiritual struggle in human beings as noö-dynamics in logotherapy (Costello, 2015). It is a spiritual struggling and striving. A priest's will to meaning enables him to be a

self-creator of his ministerial life. The will to meaning would ignite a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, competence, and growth mindset in the personal and pastoral life.

The Meaning-Making Process in a Pandemic

Pastoral charity is the entire theatre for a diocesan priest to live out his spirituality. Emotional and spiritual nourishment of priests happen through their pastoral engagements in gathering and building up the Christian community, by the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the liturgy, mission and service (Greshake, 1982; Rosetti, 2009; Manalel, 2006). Priests transcend themselves to a flourishing life experience through pastoral ministry. Priests achieve the meaning and purpose of their life through discerning, committing to, and pursuing over searching goals in their pastoral fields. In a traumatic situations, a priest would rack up a sense of meaning only by broadening the horizons of pastoral life. Keeping a realistic picture of the limitations and possibilities of their pastoral ministry, priests are challenged to broaden their visual field by using creative and attractive ways of reaching out to the people and doing pastoral ministry. The centre nerve of logotherapy, ‘He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how’ (Frankl, 2014) celebrates itself as a motivational factor for a parish priest in retaining purposefulness of his pastoral life. Frankl (1963) urges, “there is nothing in the world that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one’s life.” The broader a person’s horizon, the greater the opportunities for freedom. Realising the will’s freedom suggests a priest be responsible for his life. A priest becomes a dynamic presence to the realities of his life, and his conscience will undergo dynamic changes as his horizon or world of meaning expands (Lauder, 1978). Expansion of horizon in the midst of apparent meaninglessness of a pandemic life happens mainly in three ways: by creative engagements, loving experience of noble values, and bravely embracing inescapable suffering.

A Creative Pastoral Ministry. A creative pastoral ministry is a curative way of finding the existential meaning of life for a minister in his pastoral setting. The unique key to healing in logotherapy is to activate clients’ spiritual will to meaning in a creative way that suits clients’ unique predicaments, personal history, and personality (Russo-Netzer, Schulenberg, & Batthyany, 2016). By taking a spiritual attitude towards the somatic, sociological, and psychological conditions of life,

a priest can self-distance and self-transcend himself from the drastic situations of a pandemic life by exerting the creative possibilities of his freedom derived from his noölogical dimension of the self. In this way, he becomes a master of his self and his circumstances (Costello, 2015). St. Peter exhorts the priests in this regard, “I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly as God would have you do it ... be examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:2–4). Through creative interventions as “specialists in other people’s pain, they recognise how this dynamic of loss can be part of their psychological and spiritual growth. In this way, priests learn again and again in their pastoral ministry that a crisis is not abandonment by God but an avenue for God’s intervention” (Goergen, 1992). By being creative in ministry, a priest actualises his capacity for self-transcendence simply by creating something new or contributing something positive to this world. It does not require always grand gestures to do or experience all these things. The self-transcendence of a priestly life takes shape in the everyday ministerial life (Perrin, 2021).

Exploration of Contextual Needs. The pandemic crisis demands priest’s creativity to his pastoral work by realising a contextual call which can transfigure priestly life with profound meaning. At this exploration of the particular call in the factual case, priestly life and ministry transcend the mere cultic practices of the ministerial priesthood. Creative interventions in the pastoral domain enhance a priestly life’s status from mere functionary to missionary. Frankl exhorts, “everywhere man is confronted with fate, with the chance of achieving something through his suffering” (Frankl, 1963). Thus, the creative pastoral ministry provides ample opportunity for a priest to witness the way he accepts his fate and sufferings, the way he takes up his cross in front of others who undergo similar outward fatality. Through witness, the priest can reach people’s hearts. His spiritual authority as a man of God, his charismatic aura, and his dynamism as a religious and spiritual person have a persuasive, infectious effect. The messenger himself become the message here: a genuine encouragement (Augustin, 2010; Dey & Parayil, 2020). Creative pastoral ministry is a healing for the loneliness and boredom experiences of the parish priests. In a pandemic, the parish priest becomes a Good Samaritan through creative interventions (Lk 10:25–37).

Pastoral Solidarity in Pain. The spirituality of a parish priest persuades him to move out of his comfort zone to have a deeper engagement in the burning issues of his time. This movement from hostility to hospitality ameliorates him to reach out creatively to the many we meet on our way (Nouwen, 1975). Pastoral solidarity in priestly ministry is the need of the pandemic time. In Hebraic history, we encounter several incidents where the prophets criticise the clergy of the times. For instance, in the book of Ezekiel, we find the prophet turning against the shepherds, who also include the priests. The shepherds did not feed the sheep, meaning that they did not take care of the sick, the weak, the strayed, whereas they lived extravagantly at the cost of the poor (Ezek 34:1–10). We ought to learn from history and face the present and future crises proactively to renovate the Church’s mission (Kundukulam, 2021). Thus, pastoral solidarity in the pains of his flock provides the parish priest courage to bear the terrible how of his existence. The parish priest can also fruitfully become a teacher of logotherapy to those who find difficulty in searching for meaning in their lives. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic environment calls for the compassionate intervention of the shepherds of the flock through their pastoral charity because there are a good number of despairing human beings who find no sense in living due to various reasons such as, to mention a few, grieving due to the loss of the loved ones, psychological imbalances, burnout experiences, financial struggles, and apathy in life.

Creative Response to Existential Loneliness. Priestly life in the Covid-19 pandemic was when they underwent such a weird death experience of loneliness in their personal and professional lives. Studies have revealed a significant correlation between loneliness and the spiritual dryness in priestly life due to lack of social network, lack of intimate relations, and the inability of the person to be alone. With the predicaments of loneliness, the person might indulge in sexual fantasies if he is not conscious enough to handle his loneliness fruitfully. It might also lead him to immature affectivity and abuse alcohol or chemicals which are not uncommon nowadays in priestly life (Baumann, Frick, Jacobs, & Büssing, 2019). Since loneliness is a testing time of their longing for intimacy and transcendence, the priests must be trained to respond creatively to their loneliness. Loneliness becomes fruitful when it is used for a creative spiritual life in the sense that “the priest should find the courage to enter into the desert of his loneliness and to change it by gentle and resistant efforts to a garden of solitude. A perspective shift in loneliness will help a priest gradually

convert from anxious reaction to loving response (Therukaattil, 2009). The Lord speaks to his minister's heart in silence (Job 4:12–16; Ps 107:28–30; 1 Kings 19:12). A creative spirituality transforming loneliness into a fruitful solitude motivates a priest to be hospitable to those who need his voluntary and compassionate interventions. Exploration to the life of the other is the most excellent antidote to loneliness (Nouwen, 1979). In living the solitude, the priest can ask himself some thoughtful questions accompanying his priestly being. The exercise would enlighten him to be a free and responsible person at times of an external fatality of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pertinent questions are:

- Am I really a happy person?
- Should I be unhappy when the people are taken away from me?
- Am I actually alone?
- How can I respond creatively to my loneliness?
- Is my ministry redundant?
- How can I make others' life happy by my meaningful interventions?
- What are my positive strengths and weaknesses?
- How can I creatively foster a quality relationship with God and others?

Experiential Values of Priestly Existence. We have seen above that meaningful priestly life can be accomplished in adversities through creative and concrete explorations into something or someone. But there are times when a priest cannot initiate innovative interventions in life. The desert experience of the pandemic might cause a priest to subside the eternal values for which he lives. He might have doubted his faith, lost his hope, disregarded the beauty of his call, and might have felt prayer time as something extraordinarily dull and fruitless. Being in an unfriendly land of the pandemic along with wild temptations and fantasies, the priest is expected to be responsible and committed to the sacred values of the ministerial priesthood. He is to contemplate The Good, the Truth, and the Beauty against the perils of tragic triads of life, pain, guilt, and death. The spiritual intelligence of faith, hope, and love becomes an impetus to pursue meaning in his priestly existence. The spiritual quotient contributes to the awareness, integration, and adaptive application of the non-material transcendent aspects of one's existence for a greater sense of meaning and wholeness. We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but we are spiritual beings having a human experience (Maniampra, 2020). Finding meaning

through experiencing the triad of faith, hope, and love transforms a parish priest resilient and persistent in harsh conditions.

Experiential Value of the Divine Goodness. Frankl has openly shared how the therapeutic power of faith and trust in an ultimate reality transform person under unimaginable suffering into a hopeful and meaningful life. The inmates in the concentration camps used to attend their religious gatherings with enthusiasm because it had a relieving and healing effect on their bodies and minds. By this everyday exercise, the camps' inmates could retain their life of spiritual freedom amidst the terrible surroundings (Frankl, 1963). Focusing on the existential distress in prayer, a priest promotes flexibility, resilience, hope, and the power of endurance to break ingrained patterns of behaviour that sap his energy (Maniampra, 2020). The experiential value of prayer helps him be open to the guidance of the Spirit of God in a pandemic. The prayer experience of the priest can induce hope and confidence in others in their distress (Mk 4:35–41). As ambassadors of God, the priest's intercession for his people is also a necessary part of his pastoral charity. Real faith and love experience with God helps a priest neither ignores the threatening aspects of life nor avoids them. What he can do is face them as they are, without despairing over them (Countryman, 1999; Parayil, 2020). The integrity of priestly life comes when he spends his quality time in the loving presence of the Lord.

Experiential Value of Hope. Hope is an additional sign of the person's will to live and an inner strength against his life's certain desperate circumstances. Frankl affirms that the inmates of the concentration camp could survive the horrific circumstances in the camps by retaining their inner strength by hoping for a future goal. Hopefulness has a psychotherapeutic effect on each one because they could find a reason on their way to look forward in life (Frankl, 2011). Under the struggles for survival human person can live meaningfully by looking into a future goal. Faith and trust in an ultimate reality can only induce unquenchable hopefulness within us. Priests are to be the heralds of hope who announces the Gospel of hope in the face of restlessness in the world. "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 2:15). Hopefulness provides a sense of connectedness for priests to transcend the predicaments of the pandemic and enables them to see things through a hopeful lens.

Experiential Value of Priestly Solidarity. Priestly solidarity is a motivational factor that instils the feeling of meaningfulness in the lives of parish priests in the face of a pandemic circumstance. A priest can understand another priest's problem clearly. Priestly solidarity is a kind of fruitful spiritual coexistence. The faith and hope of my friend priest can have a profound influence on my faith and hope. Being together in priestly communion in the face of uncertainties of a pandemic can be a source of healing for a priest in a strong sense of the shared humanity by listening to the thoughts, hopes, prayers and insights of others, and getting the courage to speak out one's fears and beliefs, emotions and desires. This communion naturally brings in them a sense of security and self-esteem. Priests often find they are re-energized and refocused after gatherings with brother priests (Rosetti, 2009). The following proposals are productive in fostering pastoral solidarity.

- During the pandemic, priests from the neighbouring parishes can have a community life with meals together. They can share their parish experiences and personal anxieties related to the pandemic situation in their koinonia.
- Instead of celebrating the Eucharist privately, the priests can have a joint Eucharistic celebration, which would be an effective occasion to conscientize their priestly vocation and commitment to their people's concrete pain and sufferings.
- A community life is an ample opportunity for priests to have an intellectual sharing about the modern trends in theology and psychology, which would help them be informative and heal their maladaptive thoughts, behavioural patterns, and the intruding loneliness.

The Meaning of Suffering in Priestly Life. The Covid-19 pandemic turned out to be a triggering event of existential suffering for the parish priests, of course, due to its sociological and psychological constraints. The destiny of the inescapable suffering of a priest in an anxiety generating circumstance has been determined by the stand he takes towards his predicaments. In the face of unavoidable sufferings, Frankl (1963) proposes the attitudinal value: "Whenever one is confronted with an inescapable, unavoidable situation, whenever one has to face a fate which cannot be changed, like an incurable disease, just then one is given the last chance to actualise the highest value, the meaning of suffering, the attitude in which we take our suffering upon ourselves.

Suffering is the most fertile soil for meaning fulfilment (Onah, 2000). Thus, the mystery of the meaning of suffering is ontologically superior to the meaning of work and love. It is on this stuff the saints are made of. In such fatal situations, a priest may, or may not, live up to his responsibility by the answer he gives. If he courageously accepts his suffering as part of life, he turns a personal tragedy into a human triumph (Frankl, 2014). Thus, suffering ceases to be suffering when a priest discovers meaning in the experience. When a priest can discipline himself patiently in the turmoil of suffering, his brave suffering becomes a sign of God's presence and love with perseverance, bringing hope to the pandemic victims.

Grace of the Eucharistic Celebration. The predicaments of a pandemic—desolations, loneliness, boredom, loss of interest, spiritual dryness, and all sorts of crises of the ordinary people—turn out to be the subject matter of a meaningful celebration of the Eucharist. Rosetti (2011) writes that a survey among the catholic priests revealed that meaningful celebration of the Eucharist is one of the significant factors contributing to priestly happiness. The Eucharist is the source of the spiritual energy and the centre nerve of meaning and joy for intensifying the priest's inner self to be hopeful towards the future and be responsible in the devastating conditions of his ministry. In the Eucharistic celebration, the existential frustration of a priest transforms into the victimhood of Christ (Sheen, 1970). The priest identifies himself with Christ and the ailments of the pandemic when he says, "This is my Body" and "This is my Blood." The suffering servanthood dimension of the ministerial priesthood becomes internalised when he celebrates the Eucharist amid the intense and excruciating silence of the pandemic. He feels the pain and isolation in his humanity, but he experiences profound consolation and hope in spirit. Thus, the celebration of the Eucharist turns out to be the reservoir of meaning in suffering.

A Radical Witness of Integrity. Meaningful suffering is a call to a life of integrity. The Covid-19 pandemic is an excruciating atmosphere that demands a lot from the priestly life by way of witness: to become a man of integrity. Integrity is possible when the priest accepts his weakness in emotional and spiritual life and seeks help to heal the wounds of his mind and conscience, especially with the help of a matured spiritual father. Therefore, the pandemic time is when a parish priest needs psychological and spiritual accompaniment. Courageous suffering by

being faithful to his vocation in itself is a sign of priestly integrity. The integrity of priestly life is a powerful witness, a sign of hope to those who struggle emotionally and spiritually in a pandemic. It becomes the experiential base for radiant, even contagious, confidence in facing the most resistant problems in human experience and helping others do so (Kennedy, 2021).

Loving Embrace of the Cross. The Cross stands for the existential suffering of a priest in the pandemic. No one is better just because he suffered. Suffering matters depending on how he suffered. When a priest embraces his cross of existential suffering, he transfigures himself to be a victim after the model of Christ. Victimhood means a deep consciousness that we feel the guilt and sin of the world as if it were our own, and by constant union with Christ, seek to reconcile all humanity to him. It is a term of humiliation, tribulations, and trials of a hostile circumstance (Sheen, 1970). The priest is a victim who embraces a pandemic hopefully by contemplating on the saying of his master, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk 16:23). The brave embracing of the cross of a pandemic by a parish priest has its attitudinal value just as the inmates in the concentration camps. They embraced their frightful fate, courageously enduring all horrible conditions of camp life with delight. They were worthy of their sufferings. Yet they did not survive the camp and had a dignified death (Frankl, 1963).

Logotherapeutic Interventions and the Meaning-Making Process

Logotherapeutic interventions in the lives of parish priests were worthwhile in expanding the horizon of his priestly ministry amid the Covid-19 pandemic, where he suffers from redundancy and apathy in ministry. The proclaimed goal of these interventions was to broaden the visual scope of a priest to dredge up and actualize the meaning potentials in their lives (Frankl, 1963). The intervention is focused on mainly three ways of meaning enhancement. The first step is the ‘Exploration,’ the priest would explore his current pastoral situations where he showed some trace of self-transcendence. Here they were encouraged to express selfless interest in a worthy cause or personal responsibility to do what is right or matters in their ministry. The second step, ‘Insight,’ involved helping the priests gain insight into the noble, spiritual side different from their culturally conditioned egotistic and worldly thinking. Lastly, ‘Implementation’ included awakening the clients’ willingness to implement their insights,

realising that the world is full of potential for meaning and goodness in rampant suffering, violence, and death (Russo-Netzer, Schulenberg, & Batthyany, 2016). Paradoxical Intention, De-reflection, and Socratic Dialogue are instrumental in generating the logotherapeutic virtues of self-detachment, self-transcendence, and attitude modification in effects, respectively.

The Technique of Paradoxical Intention. Paradoxical Intention is a logotherapeutic technique using the human person's innate capacity for self-distancing from an impending anxiety stimulus. The rationale behind paradoxical intention is that most problems are more emotional than logical. Clients become involved in a cycle with fears evoking symptoms, increasing the fears. By encouraging clients to do or wish for the thing they fear most, clients might change the attitude toward the symptom (Erford, 2015). Paradoxical Intention helps the client master the intruding anxiety symptoms and get relaxed through the mental exercise. To tell a priest who is continuously anxious about having no pastoral ministry or worried about getting contaminated by the coronavirus, imagine what might happen if he becomes jobless one day and recognise that he becomes lonely in his house. Imagine he actually becoming lonely and feeling the satisfaction; this might take the pressure off the anxiety symptom (van Deurzen, 1997).

The Technique of De-reflection. The technique of De-reflection is a method of intervention based on a conversational approach. The therapist disputes false ideas of the client and suggests different ways of thinking about the client's unique predicament. The De-reflection method encourages the client to shift the focus of attention from a distressing stimulus toward meaning through self-transcendence. The following scale was designed to provide a reliable measure of self-transcendence in priestly ministry by scoring the following statements.

- I assume full responsibility for my priestly life and my behaviour.
- I consider it a privilege and joy to suffer for my parish community.
- I take good care of myself to take good care of those under my care.
- I care about my parishioners' wellbeing, even when they are unrelated to me.
- My purpose in life is to serve others, even when it demands personal sacrifice.
- I do my priestly responsibility to create a better parish community.

- I experience deep satisfaction from serving God or my parish community.
- I feel spiritually connected with God and others.
- My faith or hope extends beyond my external situations.
- I am willing to take risks and accept challenging responsibilities in my priestly ministry.

Priests are asked to rate how each statement is characteristic of them on a five-point rating scale, ranging from “Not at All” to “A Great Extent.” This scale can be used for meaning therapy to monitor their progress in pursuing self-transcendence (Russo-Netzer, Schulenberg & Batthyany, 2016).

The Technique of Socratic Dialogue. Socratic dialogue is a technique of questioning the fundamental aspects of one’s suffering and helping the client see suffering from a different perspective. Socratic dialogue could help them make choices: either remain in the situation, and continue to suffer, or search for and discover meaning that would bring an end to their suffering (Guttmann, 1996). Viktor Frankl’s self-discovery discourse will help extract the unconscious spiritual condition of the priest. The priest must be examined through the typical Socratic style of questioning. They have to face questions about the essence of priestly ministry and whether they can differentiate the essence from the accidentals. They have to identify the fundamental values of the ministry, and learn to fix the priority of values in the proper order. If this spiritual examination is not done right, there is every possibility for the priest to feel that the ministry is redundant. The priest has to examine, either by themselves or by a spiritual guide, these questions:

- How am I constituted within my soul?
- Have I got control over my emotions and feelings?
- Are the natural urges adequately directed towards the attainment of true happiness?
- Have I attained deep and inseparable communion with Jesus?
- Have I got clarity about the values in my life as a priest?
- Will Jesus be happy about the way I am representing him in the parish?
- Is my Bishop happy about my ministry in the parish?
- Are my people happy about my service to them?

The Socratic questioning would challenge the destructive attitudes of the client towards his concrete suffering, which results in the attitude modification of the person (Frankl, 2014). These questions, if rightly examined and answers found in the light of the Spirit of God, the Covid-19 pandemic would be seen by the priest as an occasion for spiritual empowerment.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis served as a potential platform for parish priests to dredge up life's contextual and unique meaning for flourishing their lives. Once a pandemic thwart the sources of meaning in priestly life, the creative attempts to embrace the pandemic crisis and its constraints by the clergy would bring resilience and persistence in spiritual distress. Logotherapy as a meaning-centred therapeutic method has been an effective practical aid for creative response through self-transcendence for priests who undergo struggles in their pastoral life. Nouwen explored that a compassionate priest would look at the miseries of evil and pain around him not as disturbing interruptions of his life span, but rather opportunities for conversion of himself and his fellow human beings (Nouwen, 1979). In the horrible circumstances of the pandemic, when a priest puts his wounded self in service of the faithful in all the conceivable ways, he can metamorphose his wounds as the genesis of healing for others. It is only through self-transcendence that man can go beyond himself to find meaning in love and unavoidable suffering. The more man reaches out to others in love, the more human he becomes (Onah, 2000). The wounded healer imagery of the parish priest is explored in the words of St. Paul, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5–8).

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Mindfulness to Cope with the Stress: Empowering Adolescents to Convalesce Wellness During Covid-19

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Abstract

The world was severely hit by the catastrophic repercussions of the pandemic COVID-19. Nevertheless, human beings can always be above the chances and changes of this world. In taxing situations of this sort, mental health awareness is necessary. Consistent attention to mental healthcare is inevitable for maintaining proper mental hygiene. Tested mindfulness programs can undoubtedly bring about significant positive conscientisation of mental well-being. Through various studies, we know how mindfulness among young people successfully countered the pandemic's repercussions on adolescents and provided specific ways to enhance their emotional and psychological well-being and mental-care awareness. Since even the young people have the potential for self-compassion, the role of the mentors is to enable them to grow in self-awareness, seek required help, and equip themselves for mental wellness.

Key Words: Mindfulness, Pandemic, well-being

Introduction

Since the end of 2019, the entire world has passed a rollercoaster ride. There was havoc and heartache, catastrophic deprivations and unprecedented deficiencies in handling the pandemic repercussions of various grades, unanticipated psychological and emotional distress and failure of public and private sector systems to meet the basic material

needs and medical supplies of the masses. Although no one is spared from the upshots, the adolescents had become particularly vulnerable from a psychological point of view. The impact on adolescents' mental health and quality of life has been adverse. Many governmental institutions worldwide plunged into drastic yet inevitable measures to gain control of the critical situation and assure the citizens' needed security and well-being. Lockdowns, quarantine and strict isolation were enforced. People also were subjected to huge losses of financial securities. The restrictions in interpersonal contact and social interactions, the rise in various psychological problems and suicides are being reported. Health-care personnel went through great stress and sleepless nights in attending to and caring for the patients of COVID-19. In stressful situations of this sort, awareness of mental health is necessary.

Tested mindfulness programs can undoubtedly bring about significant positive conscientisation of mental well-being. As witnessed in the preservation of proper mental hygiene, consistent support from mental health-care employees played an important role. Hence, the article will attempt to present how mindfulness is successful in counteracting the repercussions of the pandemic on adolescents and provide specific ways of enhancing emotional and psychological well-being and mental-care awareness among them.

The Havoc That Needs Attention

As we said in the introduction, COVID-19 had created havoc on adolescents' psychiatric and psychological well-being. Globally, adolescents of varying backgrounds experience higher stress, anxiety and depression rates than COVID-19. Research also reveals that adolescents have a higher frequency of using alcohol and cannabis during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lancet Psychiatry* discovered during the pandemic that adolescents are at increased risk of psychological problems (Patra & Patro, 2020). A study by *Psychiatric Quarterly* found that mental health problems are grave among most youth groups (Liang, Ren, Cao, Hu, Qin, Li, & Mei, 2020). This adversity is caused by what they witnessed in their kith and kin: the death of a dear one, fear of illness and many other stressors caused by the pandemic parallel to adjustment disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (Rousseau & Miconi, 2020). Another social psychiatry research hypothesised that adolescents manifest a closer association between pandemic-related stress and psychopathology (Rosen, Rodman, Kasperek, Mayes, Freeman, Lengua, Meltzoff, & McLaughlin, 2021). The "State of

the World's Children 2021" report indicated that 14% of 15-24-year-olds in India reported losing interest in daily activities and feeling depressed. This parallels the American Psychological Association research that confirms increased isolation due to continuing pandemic has only worsened the mental state of youth. And the report shows that nearly 80% of college students across a wider range of ages felt depressed by the impact. Gen Z, young people between 13-23, is the age group that suffered greater mental balance in the United States due to the pandemic (Multani, 2022). Hence, adopting solutions and establishing the required technological infrastructure could increase efficiencies in accessing and delivering quality mental health care that could also enable a dynamic response to public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Davenport, Cheng, Iorfino, Hamilton, Castaldi, Burton, & Hickie, 2020). It is a compelling urgency to meet adolescents' psychological and psychiatric problems during the pandemic.

Necessity of Self-care to Solve Mental Problems

There isn't a better solution than self-care to solve mental problems. 'Care for others' and 'self-care' go hand in hand. In this regard, social support undoubtedly plays a great role in psychological well-being but can be turned into serving self-help. Research by American Psychological Association proposes to introduce Skills for Psychological Recovery. They felt the need to expand and focus on social media for what may be prolonged isolation or future need for periodic social distancing, which can help reinforce or detect positive coping skills and support mental health (Saltzman, Hansel, & Bordnick, 2020). Since emotional well-being is a state of positive mental health to handle one's emotions and all life activities, understand one's emotions, moods, and feelings and learn how to cope with various negative situations, adapt oneself and find a positive emotional state. It finally leads to well-being delineating concrete ways to find and progress well-being in challenging situations like the pandemic.

To help others, one needs to help oneself priorly to know its effectiveness. Compassion toward others necessitates self-compassion primarily. Hence, reducing feelings of isolation and anxiety is paramount to promote well-being for everyone by raising awareness of the importance of self-care (Butler, Carello, & Maguin, 2017). Tulane School of Social Work in New Orleans, Louisiana, in support of this effort, developed an extensive website dedicated to self-care tools and resources realising that the first step in the recovery process

is the accessibility to self-care tools that promote individual coping. The aim consisted of developing a website that provides easy access to devices across the main self-care areas of meditation/mindfulness, physical activity, social connectedness, and indulging/fun activities (Saltzman, Hansel, & Bordnick, 2020). Of course, self-care needs to be cultivated in India to face mental problems since those who think it is good to seek support for mental health issues are just 41% of young people between 15 and 24. This is a detailed comparison between Indian young adults with those of other countries, where an average of 83% felt that reaching out for help for mental health problems was the appropriate way to deal with these problems (Multani, 2022).

Mindfulness and Mental Well-Being

Mindfulness can be of great help at this point. Positive psychology is an umbrella term which encompasses all that makes life go well with scientific understanding. Instead, mindfulness practices are congruent with much of the theory and practice in positive psychology (Hupperta & Johnson, 2010). By drawing people to the present moment, mindfulness provides the type of balanced awareness that forms the foundation of self-compassion. Mindfulness is concerned with observing what is going on in our field of awareness just as it is – right here, right now. Mindfulness is “meta-awareness,” which means awareness of awareness (Neff, 2013). To late philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, meditation does not consist of the suppression of thought or conformity to a system but a discipline that comes into existence through observation of thought (Krishnamurti, 2021). In a situation like a pandemic, one can have many negative and self-defeating thoughts, which can be rightly remedied by mindfulness. And meditation is an irreplaceable technique to rest the mind and attain a kind of consciousness which distinctly differs from that of the normal waking consciousness. Mindfulness and meditation have become more mainstream and socially acceptable ways to manage stress and increase productivity (Chung, Smart, Zdradzinski, Roth, Gende, Conroy, & Battaglioli, 2018). Therefore it is truly a necessity during COVID- 19 times that the adolescents are conscientized to feel the need for self-help to enhance their psychological well-being.

Urgency of Training in Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a constituent of self-compassion and can also be used purposefully as a regular practice for self-care. The practise of

mindfulness has been integrated into many facets of counselling. For those who are drawn to mindfulness, non-judgmental awareness for self-care can be integrated as a practice with a set time for engaging in a specific mindfulness exercise or by way of being during the progression of the day. Exercises such as mindful eating or walking and maintaining sensory awareness while washing dishes are optimal means of brief daily self-care (Coaston, 2017). Mindfulness is the practice of purposeful and non-judgmental attentiveness to one's own experience, thoughts, and feelings (Chung, Smart, Zdradzinski, Roth, Gende, Conroy, & Battaglioli, 2018). As the repercussions of COVID-19 exasperate adolescents, the practice of mindfulness certainly works to get a grip over their lives. It's necessary to train adolescents in this way. It strengthens their immune function, reduces stress, improves sleep, and offers countless other benefits (Shapiro, 2020). When they undergo a depressive or disheartening moment in these troubling times, they can be taught to stop for a breath or two and acknowledge that they have a hard time and that their pain is deserving of a kind, attentive and caring response (Neff, 2013).

Young people can be taught this very easy method that Krishnamurti proposed: "Watch, observe, be attentive to what is happening around you, what is happening in yourself, be aware of the whole movement. A meditative mind is a silent mind. Silence is not the product of suppression of noise, it is not the opposite of noise. But it comes when the mind has completely understood itself" (Krishnamurti, 2021). And so here is the observation of everything and the silence that one can reach through observatory understanding.

Similarly, DeMello (2020) echoed, "Be aware of what you're saying, be aware of what you're doing, be aware of what you're thinking, be aware of how you're acting. Be aware of where you're coming from and your motives. An unaware life is not worth living. The unaware life is mechanical. It's not human. It's programmed, conditioned." So the young generation can be trained to become consciously aware of whatever feelings and emotions they undergo and understand, including their reactions to them.

Shapiro proposed a new paradigm for mindfulness. "It was the first scientifically-based model that explicitly included intention, attention, and attitude:

- Intention directs our heart's compass, reflecting our deepest hopes and values.

- Attention trains and stabilises our mind in the present moment.
- Attitude refers to how we pay attention – with an attitude of kindness and curiosity” (Shapiro, 2020)

The more one practices this, the more one’s mindfulness grows. And Shauna Shapiro affirms in categorical terms that neuroscience is catching up with ancient wisdom. But then again, revolutionary findings in neuroscience have demonstrated that we can change our happiness set-point. But it is not to be so through changing our external life or external situations of life (Shapiro, 2020) like COVID-19 but through changing the internal landscape. We’ve got to drop illusions or false notions and conceptions of life that anything outside will make us happy. Life is easy and delightful to those who can change their inner landscape. It’s only hard on the one with illusions, ambitions, greed, cravings etc., with which one has identified oneself (DeMello, 2020). And the best way we can change our inner landscape is by just focussing on the now.

Just Be Happy, Don’t Strain to Be Happy!

The youngsters can be trained to be happy, which can become the key to their growth, well-being and lasting happiness. To transform young people’s lives, we must keep them young, always ready to change, and liberate them from the myth of perfection (Shapiro, 2020). Teenagers should be made to understand that perfection can be expected neither from themselves nor from external situations. This mind-set keeps them on the track of constant and continuous growth. When one has a perfectionist attitude, one starts fighting the unacceptable situation one is entangled with, and it gets worse.

Therefore to transform the lives of the youngsters, we need to focus on direction and not on the destination, says Shauna. And only by understanding, we can flow, cope, be pliable and thus overcome with spiritual intelligence. She, therefore, proposes a toolkit of questions to answer oneself, which we can adapt to the condition of the pandemic. There we can pose questions to the young to introspect and answer:

- “At the calamitous strike of COVID- 19, can you remain perfectly calm?
- Can you cope with the challenges it poses with resisting or fighting?
- Can you love everyone around you unconditionally, even in these troubling times? Can you find contentment just where you are?

- Can you be equanimous in the midst of the havoc and tragedy caused by the present situation? (Shapiro, 2020)

If we can answer these questions ‘yes’ and aid young people to do the same, then mindfulness is effective.

Experience of Effortless Happiness

And yet this shouldn’t come as a result of effort. Lykken and Tellegen (1996) study made a dour conclusion: “Trying to be happier is as futile as trying to be taller.” Krishnamurti (2021), questioning the pursuit of happiness, said, “If you pursue happiness, it becomes an escape from unhappiness, and therefore it will always remain, covered over perhaps, hidden, but always there, festering inside.” Complementing this, DeMello (2021) once said, “Come home to yourself. Observe yourself. Self-observation is such a delightful and extraordinary thing. After a while, you don’t have to make any effort because, as illusions begin to crumble, you begin to know things that cannot be described. It’s called happiness.” Paradoxically the harder we try to find happiness by living up to some ideal of perfection, the more elusive real peace, happiness and connection become. It is because, in the pursuit of all of that, we lose touch with what matters, what is essential, and what is deepest in ourselves, which is the trustworthy source of peace and transformation. All that we see is that we’re not measuring up. Dispirited and defeated, we give up (Shapiro, 2020).

Therefore’ we can assist the young people in practising certain exercises so that they can elevate their set-point of happiness in the life circumstances enabled by volitional activity:

- living gratitude in the daily moments of life, in the concrete situations of life,
- doing good things to others or helping others selflessly
- doing things to develop one’s creativity just delightfully.

But certainly, one thing needs to be kept in mind while doing these things: youngsters must change their mind-set from one of self-improvement to one of self-liberation. Self-liberation means freedom from our limiting beliefs, our misguided idea that there is something wrong with us that needs to be “fixed”. Our constant attempts to “get it right” and to be “perfect” leave us in a state of exhaustion, never resting in the present moment, and never happy with who we are (Shapiro, 2020). Real liberation is the liberation from the self, the

greatest tyrant of life who voluntarily and willfully seeks the self-aggrandisement that deludes effortless happiness.

Enter into the Flow of Life

Flow isn't an uncommon experience for most of us. Most people can remember experiencing such a state. Athletes term it as 'being in the zone', others a 'heightened state of consciousness.' Psychologists call these absorbing experiences 'flow states'. The word was coined by a world-renowned psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi (Boniwell, 2012). Regarding the phenomenon called 'flow,' Csikszentmihalyi explained a few characteristics like the clarity of goals and immediate feedback on progress, complete concentration, losing awareness of oneself or self-consciousness, sense of control, the transformation of time and intrinsically rewarding of actions (Boniwell, 2012).

Psychologists also call the engagement of life flow. It refers to the experience of completely losing oneself in an activity. Individuals in flow become absorbed in what they are doing and lose the sense of time. They are not thinking about the action they are into but are unified with what they are doing. Seligman refers to this phenomenon as the 'engaged life'. Being in flow invigorates the person, filling oneself with positive energy (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). In one of the studies, the engagement reflected absorption and interest. As one might expect, psychological interest resulted in greater commitment to and engagement in school. It similarly gave students a greater sense of hope (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015).

When a person is broken down by the troubles of life caused by COVID- 19, what is essentially needed is understanding, insight, and awareness of the problem one is entangled with. Logically when there is effort, struggle and conflict within, there is little understanding of the situation because the person is overwhelmed by the problems. But when there is understanding, awareness and insight, the person flows with life situations without resisting, fighting and grudging, without blaming oneself and others for the problems but facing them as they come on the way realistically (DeMello, 2020). Therefore the youth can be brought to the awareness of the detrimental feeling and self-defeating thoughts in this way:

- Can you decipher and call the feeling or thoughts at the moment by name?

- Can you objectively understand that the feeling or thinking is in you and not outside you?
- Can you disidentify yourself with the noxious thoughts and feelings running in you?
- Can you give yourself the right medicine called self-compassion (without self-condemnation) and compassion (without condemning others and the situation around you)? (DeMello, 2020)

In flow, one is not to be a dictator to oneself and not to push oneself. Once the youth gain the right understanding, they are already into the reality of life and the flow of life.

Always Be on the Journey of Transformation

Dougherty (2015) was determined to change students' mind-sets about taking exams, which are typically anxiety-provoking. He used a variety of strategies to shift these negative expectations. First, he labelled exam days "learning celebrations" to create a positive expectation about how students would perform. Then he brought in balloons, streamers, and treats on these days to "create an ambience for assessment that enhances learning and joy." In other words, he wanted to shift students' mind-sets about exams from dread and fear to joy and celebration. These strategies led to improved test scores (Sanderson, 2019). Similarly, it assists youths in changing their mind-set to face the challenges posed by COVID- 19.

Further, they need to understand that change is the direction and not the destination for an effective transformation. This empowering mind-set requires that we reassess many of the "facts" about personal change that society has conditioned us to believe, such as the benefits of "no pain, no gain" or "whipping ourselves into shape." We aren't changing ourselves so much as liberating our best selves. This path is not a self-improvement project with perfection as its ever-receding goal. Instead, it's about opening to the possibility of change, growth, and evolution (Shapiro, 2020). Psychiatrist Siegel (2021) reminds us, "We are always in a perpetual state of being created and creating ourselves." When the youngsters are brought to this state of continuous and constant self-transformation, life becomes delightful, refreshed and loved. Therefore, St. John of the Cross says emphatically, "Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love"(Sullivan & Dodd, 2012). It is because love is a proper transformer. Love can transform every

situation and enable the youth to immune themselves to the pests and tempests of life like COVID- 19.

Conclusion

The article emphasised the necessity of leading the youngsters to emotional well-being. It is a state of positive mental health where the individual is in a position to handle one's emotions and all life activities. It is where one understands one's emotions, learns ways and copes with all the negative situations, and achieves and finds a positive emotional state, finally leading them to embrace wellness. The outbreak of COVID- 19 has adversely shaken the world's wellness from many angles and parameters around the world, where rich and poor alike felt the urgency to re-equilibrate themselves existentially and psychologically after the shocking adverse impact of the pandemic. The article attempted to give attention to mindfulness and how it had been positive and constructive in handling and healing the world. Mindfulness training can truly aid them to subvert stress, despair and depression and empower them to live happy, contented and fulfilling lives by entering into the flow of life. It is important to seek and use all available resources and therapies to help youths mediate the adjustments caused by the pandemic. Undoubtedly more research is needed on improving youngsters' mental health during COVID-19 and similar disasters to address the same's psychological needs and enhance holistic wellness.

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Female Religious and the Habit after Vatican II

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Abstract

One of the most notable visual effects of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the largescale abandonment of the religious habit amongst uncloistered female religious. This article seeks to understand why this was the case. It will draw on case studies of female religious and reflect on their own experience of the religious habit. This will be contextualized within the broader matrix of secular and religious expectations of gender norms. Therefore, this paper will argue that female religious abandoned the habit as a response to and repudiated social control of the female body. This was not, however, only an act of defiance, but a response to the particular social environments, the body as a site of contestation and resistance, and the very nature of the habit as a 'restrictive' garment.

Keywords: Habit, Female Religious Women

Introduction

Many uncloistered female religious complained that the habit made them feel 'less than human' and negatively impacted their ability to minister prior to Vatican II. According to the Roman Catholic Church, the habit symbolizes the female religious's commitment to the broader Church, their order, and their religious vows. The very essence of the habit was to 'cloak' – effectively subduing – both femininity and individual identity. It was, therefore, a means of social control by the

Church, ensuring complete alignment of personal identity with the Church (Michaelman, 1999).

It is impossible to overestimate the Roman Catholic Church's significant changes during and following Vatican II. The Council led to a general liberalizing and updating of the Church on many theological, liturgical, and ecclesial issues and themes. This was especially true of female religious orders where many women religious became un-cloistered and began to engage with the secular world, especially in social activism. However, the election of Pope Paul VI saw the Church move in a more conservative direction on key issues, especially birth control and clerical celibacy (Wilde, 2004). Already battle lines were being drawn between conservative clerics and progressive female religious sisters, straining relationships for decades to come.

The Role and Context of the Religious Habit

It is essential to situate the habit within the broader sociological discourse of the 'uniform.' Doing so will allow the reader to see how the habit, and in turn, the female body, became sites of contestation and resistance within the Church. In their classic study of the role of the uniform, Joseph and Nicholas (1972) try to demonstrate how the uniform is totemic and symbolic as it designates and embodies the attributes of the group itself. For instance, the uniform is meant to suppress individuality or subordinate it to the group. Before Vatican II, this was one of the stated goals of the religious habit. Further, the uniform imposes on the wearer a visual and embodied symbol of Church hierarchy and demonstrates this hierarchy to the outside world. As Joseph and Nicholas (1972) argue, the uniform is most often given in a ceremony that symbolically confers a changed status. From this perspective, when the female religious receives her habit, she is fully conformed to the norms and identity of the group to which she has vowed her life. This ceremony, especially the investiture of the habit, re-establishes and reinforces the hierarchy established by the uniform's conferrer, representing the imposition of the group hierarchy (religious order per se) and the hierarchy of the wider Catholic Church. Most important to the purposes of this paper is how the uniform ensures the survival of the group is maintained as leaders use it symbolically to carry out simultaneously the goals of the religious order specifically and the Catholic Church generally.

The Habit as Embodied Practice

The discussion of habit-as-uniform must not get separated from the real people who inhabit these garments. Here Entwistle's (2000) discussion of dress and the 'fleshly body' is important. Entwistle argues that dress is always an 'embodied' practice; dress is not a separate entity from the body and should not be discussed. Further, Entwistle argues that the way women occupy social worlds through embodied dress is different from males. She suggests that women often identify with the body and embodiment to a higher degree than men while inhabiting their respective social worlds. This then changes women's subjective experience, especially as they interact with workspaces. Therefore, Entwistle suggests that dress is not necessarily inscribed; but that the wearer is structured by, and in turn, structures dress and subsequent interactions in the microsocial order based on these dress choices. That is to say, the woman religious will respond to the habit as she responds to her social environment.

The above framework also helps the reader understand the sometimes extremely visceral negative reaction to an un-habited woman religious by more traditional elements in the Church. In answering why the habit was abandoned on such a large scale, it becomes clear that the more conservatives and traditionalists within the Church reacted to un-habited nuns, the more women religious seemed to shun the habit. A prime example of this dynamic is at play in the case of the Maryknoll Sisters of Los Angeles.

Alternative Choices to the Habit and Their Consequences

The Maryknoll Sisters, or more formally, The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, were a group of female religious who were the source of controversy within the Church for refusing to wear the habit. The source of contention emerged when traditionalist Bishop James Francis Cardinal McIntyre decreed that every female religious teaching in diocesan parochial schools was required to wear the habit at all times (Keeley, 2019). In his justification for the decree, Cardinal McIntyre argued that it was the habit that allowed students and parents to identify the sisters. He further argued that an abandonment of the habit was tantamount to an abandonment of their religious vows.

The Vatican immediately sided with Cardinal McIntyre. As a result, 315 of the 380 sisters petitioned to be released from their religious vows (Keeley, 2019). This episode emphasizes the power of uniform-

as-embodied as a visual marker of identity and a contested site of power between the Catholic Church and the female religious. The Cardinal explicitly had the idea that the habit facilitated recognition and that individual identity of any kind should be subordinated to the group through the ‘uniform’ of the habit. However, as Entwistle argues, this cannot be divorced from the body and embodied practice.

Following Vatican II, the notion that the religious habit established the core identity of the women religious continued to be pervasive. In the eyes of many traditional Catholics, any rejection of the habit is associated with a full-scale abandonment not only of their very identity as female religious but also of their vows and, by extension, as good female Roman Catholic religious. As Pope, John Paul II took a similar stance throughout his papacy by emphasizing the ‘different calls’ made on men and women in the Church and the need for female religious to recognize this by wearing the traditional habit of their respective order (Keeley, 2019).

A Growing Awareness of the Control the Habit Exerts

During Vatican II and the years immediately following, female religious did view the abandoning of the habit as part of a more comprehensive project of modernization, but not necessarily a repudiation of the institutional Church. However, as female religious continued to face abuse for not wearing the habit, they began to embrace not wearing the habit as a means of resistance to what they understood to be repressive gender ideologies and control over the female body (Sullivan, 2005). This is an example of how to dress is not simply inscribed; but rather emerges from navigating social worlds (Entwistle, 2000).

For instance, female religious were often subject to intense scrutiny inside the Church in the best of circumstances. They were thought by conservative elements in the Church to be ‘power-hungry’ and concerned only with temporal power. In more extreme cases, they were called ‘dikes,’ ‘freaks,’ ‘wicked,’ or even ‘satanic.’ This was especially true of any women who allied themselves with progressive or feminist causes (Keeley, 2019). However, as some nuns navigated this abusive landscape without a habit, many more nuns abandoned the habit and joined many progressive third-wave feminist causes (Sullivan 2005). Through this complex negotiation of identity and navigation of unfolding social worlds, female religious increasingly began to see rejecting the habit as an act of resistance in and of itself.

It should not be overlooked that how people dress in response to a given social environment is not always an act of resistance but can be an act of conformity. For instance, American religious discourse has always contained a fundamentally independent and individualistic ethos. However, this had been historically foreign to Catholicism in America (Sullivan 2005). It is possible that in many cases, the abandonment of the habit was actually in conformity to this emerging privatized Catholicism.

The Habit as the Means to Renegotiate Social and Personal Identity

Both of the above examples demonstrate that the increasing abandonment of the habit resulted from renegotiating the social identities of female religious. As Michaelman (1999) argues, it was a process of ‘revealing the nun to herself.’ It is therefore important to note that changes in dress are always part of wider social and environmental changes. For example, many female religious increasingly abandoned the habit, but often not as a first step. With its calls for a renewal of the religious orders promulgated in *Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican II led to uncloistering, increased social activism, and abandoned religious names for their given birth names. The habit was only one component of this renegotiation of personal and social identity, although the most visible and, therefore, the most contested.

One of the most common forms of interaction with the environment for un-cloistered female religious was through service to the poor or activism. The un-cloistered, post-Vatican II female religious gained newfound autonomy in their various roles. They often ran schools, hospitals, social agencies, and orphanages without male oversight (Keeley, 2019). This new autonomy often puts female religious in new and unfamiliar positions of authority. It was, therefore, important to assess their new social environment to help make sartorial choices.

Ruggerone (2017) takes a Deleuzian affective approach (affect theory: that emotions represent only the cognitive response to a situation and that most responses remain ‘pre-cognitive’ or unconscious) to suggest there are always pre-cognitive feelings and assessments that become tangible in a given social environment through culture and language. In this case, navigating this through ‘dress’ culture. As female religious appraised their newfound autonomy, many chose to abandon the habit. Michaelman (1999), in her interviews with many female religious, writes that many women religious found it easier to facilitate normal,

daily interactions in the provision of social services or other activities they were involved in without wearing the habit. Similarly, many female religious Michaelman interviewed suggested that not wearing the habit made them feel more ‘human’ and opened the possibility of ‘positive social interactions’ (Michaelman, 1999). As female religious cognitively appraised the social situations they were involved in, they came to view the habit not as something that amplified their role but detracted from it. In other words, being a committed religious sister did not require a habit.

Renegotiating personal identity also meant conflicts over modesty, deciding what to wear, and expressing material humility. In addition, other aspects of personal appearance had to be re-learned (Michaelman, 2019). Similarly, female religious used various mediums proactively to highlight the changing nature of the modern ‘nun.’ To navigate this new collective identity in the public sphere, many non-habited nuns would often appear on the cover of major news magazines such as *Time* and *Harper’s* (Sullivan, 2005). By utilizing popular culture by highlighting themselves without the habit, they could exert influence both inside and outside the Church. The message became apparent: a member of a female religious order is not defined by the habit; therefore, abandoning it was not a rejection of her identity or vows. The habit, or lack of it, combined with popular culture became a powerful means of renegotiating collective and personal identity for female religious.

The Female Religious and Social Activism – Without the Habit

Female religious became notorious for their social activism by the 1970s. For instance, female religious were one of the most outspoken groups against American foreign policy in Latin America, often allying themselves with liberation theologians. It is no coincidence that many of these female religious distanced themselves from official Church teaching, which at the time denounced liberation theology by not wearing the habit during their activism (Keeley, 2019). The habit, eschewed by many female religious, also became a tool of reverse discourse. As evidence that many female religious viewed the habit as outmoded and stereotypical, they would often wear it to protests to ‘play’ on its symbolic nature. For instance, splashing blood across their habits during Secretary of State Al Haig’s commencement address at Syracuse University (1981) meant protesting United States policy in Nicaragua.

The “Unthinking” Habit

Eco (2007) has argued that one of the most important elements in understanding clothes and the affect they have on a person is the everyday sensorial experience they produce. Eco argues that new sensations can orient us to the world differently through an ‘epidermic awareness’ of them. He argues that there is a fundamental interplay between the clothes themselves, our awareness of the sensations they produce, and how we orient ourselves in our social worlds. Crucial to this paper’s understanding of the habit is Eco’s gendered analysis of this phenomenon.

Eco (2007) argues that tight-fitting garments have traditionally been imposed on females to orient them toward the ‘unthinking.’ Therefore, he argues, clothes can act as symbols that point beyond themselves in a dialectical process between oppression and liberation. One of the key reasons this paper hypothesizes that female religious abandoned the habit is just as Eco describes: many female religious orders’ traditional habits were extraordinarily restrictive, especially along the hairline. As female religious asserted their identity by abandoning the habit, it oriented them toward the thinking world and fundamental engagement in issues of social justice, feminism, and other forms of activism.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the rejection and abandonment of the habit was a process of negotiating identities in the years following Vatican II. This complex negotiation process included questions about gender roles and norms within the Church and the secular world. The historical analysis demonstrated different reasons for abandoning the habit at other times. This was in response to the restrictive nature of the habit itself and the social environments that female religious women began to work in. Through the course of this analysis, this paper has demonstrated that the essential catalyst for the rejection of the habit was a deeper fundamental rejection of male control of the female body by Roman Catholic Church authorities. This dynamic struggle between conservative forces in the church hierarchy and female religious committed to new Christian ministries (especially social ministries which took them frequently out of their convents) led to the widespread rejection of the habit by un-cloistered female religious.

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Last but not the Least: Youth and Formation

Last but not Least would like to bring into perspective a lot of the factors required for efficient youth formation and ask the reader to reflect on how they can use this knowledge to practical implication. The factors are a combination of various literature, articles, conference publications, and knowledge from veterans in the area of Youth formation and accompaniment.

Accompaniment cannot and should not happen in an elitist or exclusivist environment. An ‘open door’ concept that reflects inclusiveness and belongingness (*Christus Vivit*, 234) is essential in youth ministry. Accompaniment with the youth in their journey should reflect the journey that the disciples had on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-32). Even though Jesus understands that the lack of belief in the two men had closed their eyes to reality, He accompanied them in their journey. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus told stories from the time of Moses, the prophets, and how it is now being fulfilled. It was when Jesus gave thanks and broke bread with them that they realized who He really was. This is a relevant passage for the Church leaders and formators. The goal of school or university-level campus ministry is to be “an expression of the Church’s special desire to be present to all who are involved in higher education” (*Empowered by the Spirit*, 13). Here, the peer-to-peer ministry has the advantage of spreading the Gospel to a broader group. It would be easier for them to find common interests and goals to strengthen their bond of trust and spiritual friendship, worship, and faith fellowship. The following points focus on formators who accompany the youth in ministry with a focus on psycho-spiritual development- building resilience, identifying vulnerability and protective factors, and skill building.

Resilience can be traced back to pioneering research on children with schizophrenia during the 1960s and 1970s (Luthar, Lyman, &

Crossman, 2014). With new research, it was noticed that numerous protective factors among children distinguished well-functioning at-risk youth from those faring more poorly. These factors included strong, supportive ties with the family, informal support systems outside the home, and dispositional attributes such as sociability (Werner & Smith, 1982, 2001). Significant adversity in the youth's life and positive adaptation are often not directly addressed but are two subsumed constructs in resilience.

The formators' role in building resilience begins not with the youth but with young couples or families that are building up their families. They should realize the importance of helping young couples develop a psychologically and spiritually nurturing family to ensure that the children who grow up there will later form efficient youth.

Various factors around the child, like alienation from parents or a negative school or social climate, can be viewed as vulnerability factors or markers that can exacerbate the adverse conditions of the youth. In contrast to that, promotive or protective factors that reduce the effects of risk in a positive direction include support from caregivers and peers. Even support from extended family can be important in helping at-risk youth. Barnett and colleagues (2010) studied how among children exposed to harsh maternal parenting, high levels of grandmother involvement can reduce the risk of maladjustment in grandchildren.

The formators and Church pastors, along with various Church authorities, can keep an eye out for vulnerability factors and protective factors that the youth in their Church are exposed to. Open discussion about the vulnerability factors and active involvement with the Church congregation to increase protective factors can considerably reduce the risk of the youth falling into the wrong trap. Parents are also highly vulnerable to stress in a chronic community (Jain et al., 2012). Hence, it is essential to focus on youth and the environment they will return to at the end of the day. Positive personal characteristics and emotionally supportive caregiving during the early development years can pave the way for children to identify factors that will enable or hinder their growth.

The social psychologist Goleman (1995) developed the idea of emotional intelligence and integrated a range of skills in three critical areas of soul development and practice at work and in life. For a long time, research has focused on the deficit models of adolescence. Researchers

started arguing for developmental plasticity and diversity in adolescent development (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). The nature-nurture debate is a long-going topic of discussion, especially regarding the development of children and youth. For example, Bronfenbrenner's approach to understanding development from multiple perspectives using interpersonal contexts of human development and trans-contextual environmental factors beyond the family setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1970) was essential in understanding development nested in the different systems. The role of the community and the interaction the community has with the members of the family, will have an impact on how the youth progresses over time. In a study published in the American Psychological Association, provided the perspective of social contexts' influence on religious and spiritual development during adolescence and the role of religion and spirituality in the broader aspects of adolescent development like health, subjective well-being, education, risk behaviour, and civic engagement (King & Roeser, 2009).

Benson (1997) asserted 20 internal and 20 external assets or positive traits of an individual. The internal assets include the individuals' commitment to learning, positive values like strong guiding principles, social competencies, and positive identity including a sense of control, purpose, and recognition of strengths and potentials. The external assets includes support including and not limited to emotional support, family support, positive family communication, caring neighbourhood, and caring culture; empowerment, which includes feelings of empowerment and value to their contribution; boundaries and expectations mentioned through clear regulations for youth conduct and consequences for violating them; and constructive use of time made possible through opportunities to develop skills. Research on youth revealed that with higher levels of assets, there were lower levels of multiple risk behaviours and higher levels of thriving irrespective of various factors like present location, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011).

The main practical implication of these findings for the Church is understanding that empirical literature is available to help understand the relevance of interaction and involvement with the youth. Research based on scientific study design with outcome measures and evaluation of effects have shown that positive youth development programs have created considerable effects on the youth. Of these, skill-training and mentoring have been identified as effective programs to promote

positive youth development. Thus the aim of formators would be to update themselves with the latest research in youth development, be effective practitioners of culturally valid and reliable interventions and tool to measure youth development, and have peer systems of formators who can have dialogues on youth development progress. Publishing the results of such programs and providing proof to the community of the result of youth engagement also encourages more families to join in the effort to provide opportunities and challenges to the youth. A few words for thought:

“The youth say stupid things and they say good things, as we do, as everyone does. But hear them, speak with them, because we must learn from them and they must learn from me, for us” (Pope Francis, February 18, 2016).

“They are our future, and we must have a dialogue. This dialogue between the past and the future is important. Because of this I underline so much the relationship between the youth and the grandparents. They must speak with” (Pope Francis, July 31, 2016).

“Dear young people, do not be satisfied with anything less than Truth and Love, do not be content with anything less than Christ” (Pope Benedict XVI).

“It is Jesus who stirs in you desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal” (Pope John Paul II).

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