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**THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE –  
A PRIORITY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

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Our topic today is one that I am sure we have often reflected on in our prayer, meetings and in our work and programming sessions. It is a topic that takes on even more interesting significance at this meeting. We have come from all over the world with our different cultures, languages and ethnicity for one reason only, and that is to find out how we can better serve young people. We want to improve the way we carry out our mandate to be evangelisers, a mandate that was given to us by Jesus Christ himself.

This talk will have two parts, each with a specific objective. I hope that these two parts taken together will illuminate our awareness of the challenges and encourage our work in pastoral ministry.

First of all I shall try to describe the challenges seen today on each continent as we try to educate young people in the faith. Youth ministry today has to identify these challenges intelligently and address them with the courage of faith. Although I am taking each continent separately, this does not exclude the fact that there are elements in common that we must all address if we wish to give vitality and meaning to youth ministry. We shall try to identify these common elements which we could also regard as being absolutely essential.

In the first part I shall also give some ideas that will help us, as educators in the faith, to perceive how we understand education today. We know that a paradigm shift is currently taking place in this field, and we know that we cannot be indifferent to this fact. A culture that is passing from a humanistic view of education to a utilitarian view is calling us, evangelisers and educators, to be aware of the consequences that a paradigm shift of this kind will have on education today with all its complexity and different formats.

In the second part, I shall enter directly into the everyday experience of pastoral ministry. We shall see how important it is to identify the cultural challenges that we must face and to recognise the treasure we have in the teachings of the Church. I would like to emphasise that we must all become acquainted with the contents and assimilate them so that they will give light to our pastoral work.

Here the need is seen for pastoral experiences not to stop short from going beyond the threshold of the human, although they must begin there. We need pastoral practices that have the courage to listen to our young people's longing for the divine and that can offer ways and means to carry this longing to the highest possible peak.

Paul said to the Corinthians: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1Cor: 9: 16). The pastors of the Church continue to recall this warning because it still applies to us today. We find ourselves before an immense crowd of young people who are hoping to find authentic witnesses and prophets who are enamoured with God.

Finally, I shall reflect on the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI. He gives clear guidelines for pastoral methodology that can help us on our way. Our task requires a great capacity to listen and much compassion and courage in order to show young people the beauty of the Word and the joy of the Eucharist.

## PART 1

### YOUTH MINISTRY AND THE CHALLENGES FACING EDUCATION TODAY

#### 1. Can we point to the challenges encountered by young people in each continent of the world?

##### 1.1 The challenges for youth ministry

There are several approaches we could take in our overview of the circumstances in which youth find themselves in different parts of the world. We could choose to refer to each continent with its challenges and opportunities, or we could take a transversal approach and list the various challenges with indications of where they are to be found. I am taking the first option, the geographical one, and then I shall summarise the challenges that appear everywhere.

##### 1.1.1 Africa

- **Meeting Jesus** – personally and with conviction
- Ways in which **young people are the prime movers – agents of reconciliation, justice and peace**

In his apostolic exhortation *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict XVI continues the reflection that was begun in the previous exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* by Blessed John Paul II. The methodology used in *Africae Munus* is one that looks at the challenges – in this case reconciliation, justice and peace – from the perspective of the individual person. The pope says that these concepts are pre-political, and he shows how this journey is a process centred in a person’s heart. This is where the decision to follow Jesus is made, matured and carried through.

I am mentioning this pastoral method because the main challenge for youth ministry in Africa enters into the same logic. Our commitment as evangelisers of youth and as their educators in the faith begins with the conviction that the objective of our youth ministry is a **personal and convinced meeting with Jesus**. Youth ministry that does not seek that objective can easily remain simply a lovely experience, but one that has no roots and that leaves no deep impression on a young person. Youth ministry that takes people towards a meeting with Jesus needs to have a systematic plan with clear objectives that are precise and that are consistently carried out. This cannot be improvised and cannot be invented. Leaders need to be firmly rooted in the word and in the sacraments, and they must be willing to make plans and they must be good teachers.

A second challenge connected with the first is to provide youth ministry that offers young people more than simply an opportunity to receive witness. They must also acquire the conviction and

desire to give witness themselves. We have to make young people aware that **they should be agents of reconciliation, justice and peace**. This means that we have to give more than a superficial reading to what the Church says about this subject. The study and knowledge of the Church's teachings is not the reserve of a small number of people. It is asked of everyone who is called to be a teacher of the faith. Our pious desires are not enough to help young people to take the lead. They need to follow a personal process that becomes witness and strength both emotionally and practically. It is this that will make our efforts credible.

### 1.1.2 Asia

- The importance of providing **content that is substantial and consistent**
- Youth ministry that has **clear awareness of its faith in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context**

This is a continent that is undergoing unprecedented economic growth. Here the challenge to live the faith is very much connected with globalisation: "Globalisation, a priori, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it. No system is an end in itself... One of the Church's concerns about globalisation is that it has quickly become a cultural phenomenon. The market as an exchange mechanism has become the medium of a new culture."<sup>1</sup>

In a social situation of this kind, attentive youth ministry has to make sure that it provides **content that is substantial and consistent**. The new cultural models treat development in ways that sometimes go against cultural values that have been generally accepted until now, and the contribution of faith will not challenge this if it does not have strong roots and firm content. It is up to us as evangelisers to be familiar with these new cultural models and to consider these changes to be opportunities rather than problems.

A second challenge arises from the first, and that is to have a **clear awareness of our own faith that enables us to speak out for it in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context**. This immediately brings to mind Peter's warning in his first letter: "in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you**; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame" (*1Pet* 3: 15-16).

This is not a small challenge. It is dealt with at length in the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*: "Deeply aware of the complexity of so many different situations in Asia, and 'speaking the truth in love' (*Eph* 4:15), the Church proclaims the Good News with loving respect and esteem for her listeners. Proclamation which respects the rights of consciences does not violate freedom, since faith always demands a free response on the part of the individual. Respect, however, does not eliminate the need for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness" (no. 20).

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<sup>1</sup> "Many observers have noted the intrusive, even invasive, character of the logic of the market, which reduces more and more the area available to the human community for voluntary and public action at every level. The market imposes its way of thinking and acting, and stamps its scale of values upon behaviour. Those who are subjected to it often see globalization as a destructive flood threatening the social norms which had protected them and the cultural points of reference which had given them direction in life" (JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001).

The challenge must be addressed in accordance with the methodology of the process: “But the process must involve the entire People of God, since the life of the Church as a whole must show forth the faith which is being proclaimed and appropriated. To ensure that this is done soundly, the Synod Fathers identified certain areas for particular attention—theological reflection, liturgy, the formation of priests and religious, catechesis and spirituality” (no. 21).

In a multi-cultural and multi-religious context, the call to learn more about our faith and to be ready to give a reason for our hope – both in youth ministry and in general pastoral ministry –, is part of a path pointed to by the Synod: theological reflection, liturgical life, sacraments, faith education, catechesis and spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1.3 America

- Youth ministry that fosters a **meeting with Jesus** as a way to renewed communion and solidarity, prophecy and mission
- A clear experience of faith that can bring about a **strong social dimension to conversion** that will encourage young people to be prime movers in social structures

With all the variety of social and pastoral situations to be found in America, we see that there are similar pastoral challenges everywhere. I shall deal with just two of these challenges that can serve as catalysts for other processes within youth ministry itself.

The first challenge is to have systematic processes and courses available for young people that will foster a **genuine and profound meeting with the person of Jesus**. We educators in the faith can build on the strong heritage of popular piety and on the general belief in God found in this culture, and we can offer pathways that lead to renewed communion and solidarity that result from personally accepted faith. In a society where there is a risk that the sense of faith will be weakened because of a culture of consumerism and materialism, witness that is given by a generation of young people who find the answer to their longings in Jesus Christ has a very strong impact.

A second challenge can already be seen to be addressed in several countries on this continent, and that is the intra-continental missionary experience taking place here. It confirms the desire of young people to live out their faith as **disciples and apostles, followers and missionaries**. It is clear in all of this that a large part of the experience and vision of *Aparecida* comes from youth ministry, and it, in turn, encourages the projection of youth ministry into the future.

This means that we should not be afraid to offer missionary experiences to young people in which they will feel that they are key players in their own faith decisions and not simply receivers. We must have the courage to provide opportunities for our young people to take further steps and to **give their faith a strong social dimension**. They then become people of faith who are builders in the areas of social structures, political platforms and cultural forums.

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<sup>2</sup> See PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*. The document was finalised by the participants of the third (inter-Christian) consultation who met in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25 to 28 January 2011.

#### 1.1.4 Europe

- Youth ministry that **educates and evangelises the search for meaning and thirst for the divine** in a post-secular society
- To provide **itineraries** that are places of **belonging** and also places and focal points of **identity**

Romano Guardini wrote in an article in 1946, “Europe shall be Christian or it shall not be”.<sup>3</sup> If taken alone, this statement does not express the fullness of Guardini’s reflection on the subject. However, what is interesting for us here is the fact that the strength behind the statement is repeated by the Nobel prizewinner for literature, the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, when he was commenting on World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid. Immediately after the event he wrote: “For a long time it was believed that religion, this elevated form of superstition, would disappear with progress in knowledge and democratic culture, and that science and culture would amply substitute it. This, we now know, was another superstition which reality has gradually demolished... The majority of human beings find answers — or at least the feeling that a higher order exists, of which they are a part and which gives meaning and tranquillity to their existence — solely through a transcendence that neither philosophy, nor literature nor science have managed to justify rationally”.<sup>4</sup>

I feel that there are two challenges in this area that must be addressed in Europe. The first is to understand the **deep search for meaning and thirst for the divine** among young people in Europe, and to know how to **educate this search** by nourishing it with the **power of the gospel**. Recent sociological research confirms what pastoral practice has learned when it uses courage and intelligence to satisfy this thirst by showing young people the beauty of the Good News.

The second challenge sustains and reinforces the first. There are no genuine itineraries or good processes that do not give young people a **sense of belonging** or that do not provide them with processes that become **places and focal points of identity**. We are happy to see in successful youth ministry, first of all, how authentic educators and evangelisers provide experiences that move gradually at the pace of the young people. Secondly, we note that their ministry does not lower the target of reaching the highest degree of holiness.

#### 1.1.5 Oceania

- Youth ministry that is **centred on Christ** and that can provide real motivations for **faith to be lived out as a community**
- **Christian instruction that gives reasons for faith** in a multi-religious and multi-cultural environment

The multi-cultural and multi-religious milieu in Oceania is described very well in the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*. The theme of the document was: *Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania, walking his way, telling his truth, living his life* (no. 8). This theme contains

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<sup>3</sup> R. GUARDINI, *Europa. Compito e Destino* (Morcelliana, Brescia 2005<sup>2</sup>) 59.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition) 21 September 2011 published a translation of an article on World Youth Day by the Peruvian Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa that had appeared in *El Pais* on 28 August 2011.

the challenges for youth ministry in this part of the world.

The first thing is to provide the sort of youth ministry that has its **foundations in Jesus Christ**, the Son of God who became human for us. This faith is not limited to knowledge but is also based on experience, and the youth take part in this experience as a community. The theme of **community** and **communion** is central in this apostolic exhortation. It not only reinforces the faith of young people, but it also provides them with the firm support of each other in living out their faith serenely and in truth. A strong community dimension is characteristic of this continent, and it therefore must not only be seen as an element of support, but more like a *modus essendi* or a *modus vivendi* of pastoral ministry itself.

It is for this reason, and as a second challenge, that there is great need for **Christian instruction that gives reasons for faith** in a context where faith in Christ can easily be regarded as one more in a range of possibilities to help us reach out to the transcendent. Saint Peter's reminder to the early Christian communities is very appropriate for the pastoral situation in Oceania today. Blessed John Paul II recalled it in his homily at the proclamation of the beatification of the first Papua New Guinean, Peter To Rot, on 17 January 1995: "Do not be afraid to commit yourselves to the task of making Christ known and loved, especially among the many people of your own age, who make up the largest part of the population".<sup>5</sup>

This call is answered in two ways. One way is through genuine sound **discipleship** in which the youth strive to learn about their faith. The second way is through authentic **apostolate** in which they become witnesses who proclaim to other young people the joy of faith in Jesus Christ.

#### 1.1.6 Elements shared in common

- Perceptive listening to youth culture
- An approach that uses planning and evaluation
- Systematic and consistent group experiences
- Experiences based on the Word and sacramental life
- Group dynamics that are experiences of living the gospel
- Continuing education provided in the teachings of the Church
- Spiritual accompaniment

After this general overview of the continents, I think it would be only right to identify those elements that appear everywhere in all situations where youth ministry takes place. Some of these can help us to better understand today's challenges and to provide ministry that is increasingly more possible.

First of all, as evangelisers and educators, we must be prepared to **listen perceptively to youth culture**. As evangelisers and educators we do not live out our calling in a vacuum. We are inserted in history, and this presents challenges and opportunities. To listen to the stories of our young people is not an added extra that some of us decide to do. It is a duty that we cannot neglect. As we shall see later on, the methodology used in Church documents is to always take as their starting point an awareness and interpretation of the current times.

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<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Rite of Beatification of Peter To Rot at Sir John Guise Stadium in Port Moresby, 17 January 1995.

Another element that cannot be disregarded is that we must be leaders whose approach is one of **planning and evaluation**. Today, more than ever, we cannot provide itineraries that depend on improvisation and where things are decided on the spot. In order to plan and evaluate, we must know, respect and respond to the expectations of young people. We must also make places and structures available so that youth will really see our desire to serve them.

A third element is that of ensuring that **group experiences are systematic and consistent**. Nothing is more unpleasant for young people than the kind of attitude that leaves people in the dark not knowing how and when to move forward, or even if they should move forward at all. In our throw-away culture, any experience that does not give a clear authentic message will not attract the attention and interest of young people who want to follow a clear-cut path.

A fourth element that we must be convinced of is that young people do not shy away from experiences **based on the Word and nourished by sacramental life**. Here we must be attentive to the danger presented by our own selves. We sometimes transfer our resistance or reductionist approach onto the young people, and in so doing, we deny them the solid food that they are seeking because they are ready to receive it.

Our fifth point is to remember that true pastoral ministry is animated by **group dynamics that are experiences of living the gospel**. This means that we should not fall victim to an approach that creates a kind of spiritual intimism. The youth themselves have a desire to be more than receivers of God's goodness. They want to be its messengers and to serve the poor and the underprivileged. In other words, we must have the courage to provide youth ministry that can go beyond a kind of spiritualistic ghetto and be an experience of apostolic charity that is carried out with joy and optimism.

A sixth point or objective is to **provide continuing education in the teachings of the Church**. We must honestly recognise that we are often very generous in helping young people and giving them our time, but we are less familiar with the great advances made by the Church since the Second Vatican Council. Our lack of knowledge, not to say ignorance, of documents like *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Catechesi Tradendae*, *Redemptoris Missio* and the *General Catechetical Directory*, does nothing to help provide a path that is guided by and inserted in the Church's journey. The same goes for the great patrimony we have in the social doctrine of the Church. It is a wonderful guide that is intended to direct the action of the faithful in society, culture and politics.

Finally, our last point deals with what has been one of the most palpable shortcomings of youth ministry but one which is gradually being addressed. I am referring to **spiritual accompaniment**. Now is not the time to go into the history and development of this ministry which is a treasure in the Catholic Church. However, we need to remember that in times of epochal change throughout history, spiritual accompaniment has always played an inalienable role. Its recovery is a sign and confirmation that we are on the right path.

## **2. A correct understanding of education today**

In addition to looking at the challenges at a continental and at a transversal level, I would like to share with you my reflections on the subject of our understanding of education. The question would be: to what extent are we aware of the more general picture of education? How is it

understood and experienced, and what models are conditioning the educational experience in the wider sense of the word?

## 2.1 An autonomous and utilitarian view of education

If we consider the development that has taken place in the field of education, we immediately become aware of one particular fact. This is the move towards an **experience and understanding of education that fragments knowledge** and that has a **utilitarian purpose**. This has all put into second place the goals of education that have an integral humanistic perspective.

Pope Benedict's address to young university teachers during WYD in Madrid gives a clear synthesis of the present situation: "This sort of utilitarian approach to education is in fact becoming more widespread, even at the university level, promoted especially by sectors outside the University. All the same, you who, like myself, have had an experience of the University, and now are members of the teaching staff, surely are looking for something more lofty and capable of embracing the full measure of what it is to be human. **We know that when mere utility and pure pragmatism become the principal criteria, much is lost and the results can be tragic:** from the abuses associated with a **science which acknowledges no limits beyond itself**, to the **political totalitarianism** which easily arises when one eliminates any higher reference than the mere calculus of power".<sup>6</sup>

This radical change is of great concern to us because it is the model that surrounds the experience of our young people. This model conditions their way of seeing things and of assessing what is happening around them. **Romano Guardini** once commented on how, in the name of freedom understood as autonomy, modern educational methods have disassociated personal uniqueness from the totality of what is real, and have therefore forgotten the latter and lost the former.<sup>7</sup> "The trend towards autonomy has misunderstood itself. **In the name of a correct but only partial goal, it has put aside its intent for totality...** It has been said that modern educational theory aspires to its own autonomy. This is mostly seen in the effort to remove and exclude any kind of transcendental purpose, which is a feature of positive religion, a purpose that is immediately written off the moment it is called 'confession'".<sup>8</sup>

**Jacques Maritain** takes Guardini's idea further in his book *Education at the crossroads*. He shows how contemporary educational theory has ended up by allowing the aims to be lost in favour of the means: "The **greater importance attached to means rather than aims and the subsequent collapse of any certain goals** and of any real effectiveness in achieving them, would seem to be the major accusation with which we reproach modern education. It is not that the methods are bad. On the contrary, they are generally better than those used in education in the past. The problem is precisely that they are so good that we lose sight of the goals. This is the cause of the surprising weakness of education today, a weakness that derives from our attachment to the inherent perfection of our means and educational methods, and from our inability to adapt

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<sup>6</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with young university teachers gathered in the Basilica de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 19 August 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. CARRELLI, "Sull'idea di educazione", in A. BOZZOLO . R. CARRELLI (editors) *Evangelizzazione e Educazione* (LAS, Roma 2011) 356-395.

<sup>8</sup> R. GUARDINI, "Fondazione della teoria pedagogica", in ID., *Persona e libertà* (La Scuola, Brescia 1987) 51.62 [our translation].

them to their goal”.<sup>9</sup>

I think that it is important that we come to some **conclusions** in this discussion. We would not be out of place if we question ourselves about our pastoral ministry. Perhaps we also run the risk of attaching **too much importance to the method and of losing sight of the goal**. Perhaps we are placing emphasis on a ministry that delivers events to be consumed rather than a ministry that fosters experiences to be internalised.

We must also ask ourselves if we are aware of **whether the educational methods** that our young people are accustomed to – as inhabitants of this territory –, **contrast with the educational methods that we are using** either consciously or unconsciously.

## 2.2 Let us recover a humanising vision of education today

In the second part of Benedict XVI’s address to young university teachers, he suggests an approach in education, an educational model that is based mainly on the educator. He speaks of two points here that are also important elements in healthy pastoral ministry.

The first is that “young people need authentic teachers: persons open to the fullness of truth in the various branches of knowledge, persons who listen to and experience in their own hearts that interdisciplinary dialogue; persons who, above all, are convinced of our human capacity to advance along the path of truth.. We cannot come to know something unless we are moved by love; or, for that matter, love something which does not strike us as reasonable. ‘Understanding and love are not in separate compartments: love is rich in understanding and understanding is full of love’ (*Caritas in Veritate*, 30). If truth and goodness go together, so too do knowledge and love. This unity leads to consistency in life and thought, the ability to inspire demanded of every good educator”.<sup>10</sup>

We should have these qualities too, insofar as possible. We know well that knowledge and intelligence are usually the places where processes begin, and these give rise to great opportunities in the hearts of young people.

The second point is to have a **transcendental view of truth** that goes beyond a purely human outlook: “we need to recognize that truth itself will always lie beyond our grasp. We can seek it and draw near to it, but we cannot completely possess it; or put better, truth possesses us and inspires us. In intellectual and educational activity the virtue of humility is also indispensable, since it protects us from the pride which bars the way to truth. We must not draw students to ourselves, but set them on the path toward the truth which we seek together”.<sup>11</sup>

**Don Bosco**, in his synthesis of education, calls for an essential vision of education in which human desire recognises its true goal in the meeting that takes place between creature and Creator. His well-known words on the subject are simple yet deep when he speaks of how education concerns the totality of a person, each one’s unity and ultimate destiny: “**Remember**

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<sup>9</sup> J. MARITAIN, *L’educazione al bivio* (La Scuola, Brescia 1961) 15-16 [our translation].

<sup>10</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with young university teachers gathered in the Basilica de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 19 August 2011, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*

**that education is a matter of the heart, of which God is the sole master, and we will be unable to achieve anything unless God teaches us, and puts the key in our hands”.**<sup>12</sup>

An educator of our times, **don Luigi Giussani**, from whom we can learn much today, takes up the theme of the heart in its most beautiful and lofty sense. The heart asks to be accompanied by the same care and love with which it was created. The attention given by God who creates because he loves, and because God loves he therefore educates. God the Creator gives this task to us, the evangelisers and educators in time and history: For “a true education, one that matches human reality-that is, [...] the first concern of a genuine and appropriate educational method is the education of the heart of man, just as God made it. [...] Education is [...] introduction to reality. The word ‘reality’ is to the word ‘education’ like destination is to journey [...]. Clearly, then, the value of an education is measured by how closely and obediently it follows reality, how much attention it calls to it, and how closely it follows even its faintest indication. First among these indications is a person's original need for dependence and the patience that a growing process requires”.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3 Let us learn from the educational method used in the Gospel – Emmaus

An example of a humanising process of education, one that necessarily remains open to mystery, can already be found on the evening of Resurrection day. **The story of Emmaus is one that will never end.** On the day of victory over death and sin, the community of Jesus’ disciples and apostles is still a community without hope. They are on the threshold of losing their faith. While the mystery of mysteries is taking place, human experience is still lost in the dark.

What happened to the two disciples on the road as they were distancing themselves from Jerusalem has become an amazing example that continues to speak to us today. It was precisely there on that road when they were most confused that Jesus met up with the two disciples. It was just when they were escaping the city and abandoning the community.

Then Jesus, an educator *par excellence*, made a clear choice. He quietly joined them on their journey. He became one of them. He listened to their story. When they finished, he offered them a challenge which became a window of hope that opened up to recovered faith. The place where everything became clear was the eucharistic table.

The teaching method that takes place in this gospel story should not leave us unmoved. In our times, we cannot allow ourselves to be “foolish” and “hard of heart”. There is absolutely no reason that could possibly justify a pessimistic outlook. We must be aware of how our hearts are burning. **We must patiently find the courage to listen attentively and humbly just like the One who ‘opened the scriptures to us’.**

Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this call and its existential implications: “This drama of the disciples of Emmaus appears like a reflection of the situation of many Christians of our time: it seems that the hope of faith has failed. Faith itself enters a crisis because of negative experiences

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.salesians.org.uk/html/letter\\_from\\_don\\_bosco.html](http://www.salesians.org.uk/html/letter_from_don_bosco.html)

<sup>13</sup> L. GIUSSANI, *The Risk of Education* The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2001, pp. 7, 50-51.

that make us feel abandoned and betrayed even by the Lord. But this road to Emmaus on which we walk can become the way of a purification and maturation of our belief in God”.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.4 The Fathers of the Church in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries

Another source of eloquent examples of education in the faith is that of the **3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Fathers of the Church**. They were pastors who had the ability and wisdom to see the social and cultural challenges of their times with the eyes of their deep and enlightened understanding of the Good News. The result was that their reflections became a response to those challenges. They gave a **contemplative reading to the Word which was interwoven with the times and history in which they were living**. They recognised both the challenges and the opportunities that this presented.

*Catechesi Tradendae* makes the following observation about that period of history: “Next we see a striking fact: Some of the most impressive bishops and pastors, especially in the third and fourth centuries, considered it an important part of their episcopal ministry to deliver catechetical instructions and write treatises. It was the age of Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom, of Ambrose and Augustine, the age that saw the flowering, from the pen of numerous Fathers of the Church, of works that are still models for us. It would be impossible here to recall, even very briefly, the catechesis that gave support to the spread and advance of the Church in the various periods of history, in every continent, and in the widest variety of social and cultural contexts. There was indeed no lack of difficulties. But the word of the Lord completed its course down the centuries; it sped on and triumphed, to use the words of the Apostle Paul” (*CT* 12).

Their challenge is our challenge today. Their example is a source of hope and a standard to discover and to offer to others.

### THE CONCLUSIONS OF PART 1

The main purpose of this first part was to present two central ideas: the first one was to **specify the challenges of youth ministry according to continent**, together with the imperatives demanded by genuine youth ministry wherever the Lord calls us to be evangelisers and educators of young people.

The second idea was to offer a reflection on the **understanding** we have today of the **education experience**. We asked how we could recognise the current dominant standard, and this is not only so that we may avoid the risks that could weaken our educational efforts. It is especially in order to have a style of education that can offer ways to help people to be mature in their faith choices and to help them in every aspect of their growth as people of faith.

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<sup>14</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Regina Coeli, 6 April 2008.