

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**MAZENGA KADJIM ALPHA, SVD.**

**THE RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE OF THE CONGOLESE  
YOUTH TOWARDS GOD**

**Resistance to Models and Methods of Christian Religious and  
Pastoral Education: A Pastoral Response**

*A Case Study of AJCM – Yezu Kristu Nto Luzingu Parish  
Bandundu/Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*

Moderator

**Dr. Samita, Zacharia W.**

A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

**NAIROBI 2005**

## **DEDICATION**

To all my beloved ones and all young persons  
in their yearnings for a meaningful life and a true Christian Faith.

## EPIGRAPH

When it seems as though more Christians are falling away than being brought in, we give way to pessimism, as though our whole apostolate were doomed to collapse. Yet there is no discernible reason why, despite the magnificence of traditional, hierarchical Christianity, we should not be able to take up the same position as St. Paul: that Christianity is a sheer miracle of grace, the precise opposite of anything obvious and natural. In this way we Christians of today could have once more the sense of being on the offensive, just like St. Paul's time: that paganism in the world is the obvious thing, and Christianity in this world is the great miracle, God's free grace.

Karl Rahner, *Christian in the Market Place*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 6

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one can doubt that we are living in a time of great changes in all areas of our lives today. One may be tempted to say that the sense of God is completely absent from the contemporary mentality. However, most of the people especially the youth attribute to themselves those qualities, which our ancestors formerly attributed to God.

In Congo today, mostly among the youth in urban areas, Dieu (French for God) is seen as "Une Domination Internationale Europeenne (French for European International Dominion). Further, their religious attitude towards God is largely functional. This means our God is a God who substitutes for human deficiencies. In other words, the relation with God is not a living one but a kink based on one's living interest. To do mission in such situation, one needs to be open to the challenges. Thus, it appears significant for us that the process of 'rooting' the youth in the true Christian faith can be realized through a theologico-missiological approach envisaged in this essay.

Undoubtedly, such work wouldn't come into being if some people had not remarkably taken part in it. Thus, we would like to thank all those who have contributed in our moral, intellectual, religious, missionary and physical formation. In a special way, we thank all our formators, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, relatives, confreres and sponsors. My success owes you a lot.

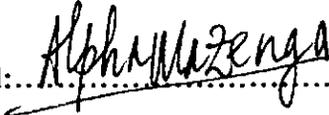
Many thanks are due to all our lecturers and colleagues who taught us, shared with us their love for study, stimulated us to think and feel with the issues of the contemporary mentality in the African Church, especially that of the youth.

We also wish to record our gratitude to Dr. Zacharia Samita and Rev. Fr. Dr. Dominigues Fernando MCCJ, who have been for us instruments of help, inspiration and encouragement and moderating this work, and to have helped us to surmount some difficulties of comprehension and documentation. We are very grateful to you *walimu!*

If this work could encourage and bring light to the youth ministers: help one single young soul to the true Christian faith, it will not have been written in vain. They should know that we desire to be spiritually at their side in their struggle for the way leading the young ones to true Christian faith.

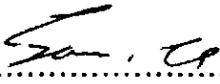
## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work, achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

Signed:  ..... Date: December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004

**MAZENGA KADJIM, ALPHA SVD**

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor

Signed:  ..... Date: December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004

**Dr. SAMITA, Zacharia W.**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

From statistics alone, it would seem that Christianity in DRC is in a good situation and there is a multiplicity of favorable signs: there is an active participation of the faithful, a growth in the number of the Christian communities, a high level of religious activities, a plethora of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This impression seems to be confirmed on the spot: there is an abundance of associations: celebrations are fervently attended: sacraments are well frequented: there is the conviction and commitment of a large number of believers: there are admirable examples of devotion. Christians in Congo allegedly form 85% of its population (Catholics 50.6% spread over 47 dioceses: 28 millions of the faithful, 53 bishops, 3261 diocesan priests, 3356 men-religious and 6487 women-religious: Protestant 25%, and Kimbanguists 10%)<sup>1</sup>. This is the impressionistic coming from Congolese Christianity.

Nevertheless, the promise for the future, as established during our work among and with the youth, is less certain because there are also disfavorable signs. The most disturbing of the latter is the religious attitude of the youth towards God. In Congo today, the religious attitude of most youth in urban areas towards God is largely functional. Thus, God is viewed as one who substitutes for human deficiencies. Put differently, the relation with God is not really a living one but made for one's living interest. In other words, the encounter between God-humans crops up at the time when one is stuck in difficulties, danger, stress, distress, death, struggle, hardship, tribulations and trials, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> - [http://www.congonline.com\\_geo.htm](http://www.congonline.com_geo.htm) , 30/08 2004. See also, *Le Clerge Séculier du Zaïre*. (Kinshasa: SGEZ, 1981)

From our own pastoral experience of working among and with them, it is rare to find youths who affirm belief in God during joyful and successful circumstances of their life. One can of course generalize that this is a universal trend today. Be this as it may: the trend does not seem to have the same meaning in the other parts of the world as in Congo. This is because its extent and its consequences seem to be more serious: the loss of Congolese deep rooted religious consciousness and life. Careful analysis of this trend seems to portray that for a large number of Congolese youth, it has become increasingly unpopular to identify with the life, work and mission of the Church.

*The Religious Attitude of Congolese Youth Towards God* is a sounding of opinions realized from our discussions and sharing with a group of fifty young people during our pastoral experience 2002-2003 when we were asked to accept the responsibility of building up a youth group at *Yezu Kristu Nto-Luzingu*<sup>2</sup> Parish (hereinafter YKTL) in *Bandundu*<sup>3</sup> (hereinafter BDD). In general, a good survey is legitimately realized on a big number of subjects. The present group of youth seemingly reveals some tendencies, which can be spotted in some other areas of Congolese youth populations.

In the present essay, our major argument is primarily that of the contemporary youth, if God exists, it is not in the first place for our benefit. Instead, it should be that

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<sup>2</sup> One of the four parishes of BDD, the County Town of the region of BDD served by the SVDs since 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Is the County Town of the province of BDD, one of the eleven provinces of DRC. BDD is at the same time the name of the administrative province and of its County Town. It is situated in the western part of DRC, 400 km away from KIN. It is located in the lower part of the river Kasai and it is built on the shore of the river Kwilu in a big savannah area, few miles from the equatorial forest. BDD is the youngest of the county towns of DRC since 1971. At the eve of the independence (1960), BDD was a big village made of fishermen whose population was only 15.000 inhabitants. Today, it has 120.000 habitants. BDD has few activities. The only activity of the town is concentrated around its fishing port. BDD is an important agricultural region. It resupplies KIN with oil, manioc, fish, meat and raw materials.

we might be of service to Him. That is to say, in order that we may serve Him.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, to encourage and bring a little light to the heralds, teachers, catechists, preachers and all ministers of faith who deal with young persons, in their search for the path leading to true Christian faith. To carry out this study, we have chosen the analytico-descriptive method and this within the theologico-missiological framework. It is made of opinions of the youth collated during spiritual directions, discussions and sharing with them. After each and every talk and sharing, we noted their responses and reactions to the matters and questions discussed.

The fundamental question in writing this essay is that of searching how to reevaluate and introduce other methods and models that we believe can turn the attention of our young people to true Christian faith and toward the spiritual treasures of the Church. Our study is structured in four chapters: the first will present the background of the situation of the youth in the parish. We will present the clear details of the situation, our arrival over there and our concrete experience with them. The second chapter recalls the main themes of our encounter with the youth. It is the question to know the how and the why of such a wrong attitude towards God. Chapter Three expounds our own Christian faith: the correct idea of God in Christianity and the relationship between Christian faith and them. The fourth chapter suggests ways through which young people can be empowered in order to help them to grow in the true Christian faith. Lastly, conclusion crowns all that we have studied, described, and analyzed in this work.

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<sup>4</sup> C., MOELLER, *Modern Mentality and Evangelization Part I GOD* (New York: Pauline Fathers and Brothers, 1967), 15.

**CHAPTER I**  
**PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND PROBLEMATIC AROUND THE**  
**SITUATION OF THE YOUTH IN YKTL-PARISH**

This chapter explains the background of the situation of the youth in YKTL-Parish. It analyses the situation of the youth in the parish, clearly details the situation, our appointment, arrival, experience and work among and with them.

**1.1. Our Appointment and Arrival in BDD**

It is highly recommended and encouraged for SVD seminarians to have an extended period of supervised apostolic activities (ministry or regency) in their own country or in another country or culture. In this way, they can strengthen their vocation, test their abilities and become familiar with their future work (SVD-Con. N0. 516. 4).

From these perspectives, the superiors and formators have encouraged one or two years of pastoral experience anywhere in the world in order to offer to their students in theology a time of probation and discernment to mature their religious and missionary vocation. In our case, we did our pastoral experience in our country, the DRC in the context of formation and education of the youth for both, those in religious life and outside.

In May 2002, we finished our second year of theology at Tangaza College. On May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004, we left Nairobi for KIN-DRC for our home leave and then pastoral experience for one year. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2002, we left KIN for BDD, our hometown for two months and half of holiday with the family. On July 4<sup>th</sup> 2002, we received from Fr. Xene SVD, Provincial Superior of Congo Province, a letter announcing our

appointment as deputy head of our pre-philosophy house of formation in BDD. On July 27<sup>th</sup> 2002, we joined Fr. Valerian D'Souza, the Director of the pre-philosophy house of formation in order to be initiated into our new responsibility before his departure for vocation animation and before the new students arrived. From July 10<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup> 2002, we had our annual retreat and on the 15<sup>th</sup> August we renewed our religious vows and our official installation as deputy head. On August 16<sup>th</sup> 2002, all the students arrived and the work started.

### **I.2. Creation of Youth Group at YKTL-Parish**

On August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002, Fr. Everard SVD, the parish priest of YKTL paid us a visit. He suggested that it would be better to have a parish apostolate, apart from our work as formator and teacher. In particular to accept the responsibility to build up a youth group in his parish since some of them decided to keep away from any church activity. The suggestion was accepted and the following Sunday, the invitation was addressed to them that there would be a youth meeting in two weeks time. We spent two weeks in planning what we thought were exciting and challenging. Being aware of what was going on between the parish priest, his council and the youth, the first priority was to gather a group of young people willing to share with us what it meant for them to be a Catholic Christian and a member of the Catholic Church today.

On Sunday September 15<sup>th</sup> 2002, a big number of almost 100 young people responded to the invitation. The reason was just to listen to them. Trying to know the reason behind their decision to keep away from the Church activity, it was discovered that they had come to that decision as a reaction and resistance to the way the parish

priest was treating them as nobody. He allegedly did not listen to them: he listened only to the elderly. This was a burning issue. They expressed disappointment that the pastor and his entourage were either not there or were too busy to find time for them in spite of the many efforts of the parish priest and his council to meet with the youth.

After listening to them, it quickly became evident that running a youth group involved more than providing creative discussions. It was decided that starting up another group apart from the existing ones in the parish was viable, a free group with its own status and independence. The following Sunday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, we began with the few who were coming to the meetings: we decided to name the group and create a committee of leaders. On Sunday September 29<sup>th</sup>, we had elections for new executives. The group was named *Association des Jeunes Catholiques sans Mouvement* (hereinafter AJCM), French for an Association of Catholic youths without Movement.

We then defined the group's activities such as to raise funds through concerts in order to support the poor of the parish: meeting every Saturday at 3h30 p.m to evaluate the activities and: to clean around the parish compound. We decided to concentrate on building relationships. We began to visit them in their homes. We visited them during their games and sports time. We even attended each mass on a particular Sunday and announced that we were looking for some friends to help us and join our newly created group in an attempt to build positive relationships with the youth. We worked into our schedule in order to find time to meet with the youth. This was done in informal meetings: visiting their families, writing personal letters, organizing concerts where the income of the group was coming from, recollections, prayers and spiritual

accompaniment. This is geared to building a vibrant youth group based on relationships. This means caring even if they do not come to Church and to youth programs.

The lesson learned was simple: ministry to the youth begins at the level of interpersonal relationship. Before we could get the youth to come back to Church, we had to go to them to hear what they had to say. In this way, we had the right to be heard.

Making the move away from the Church setting and entering into their world was a tough job. It involved much frustration and brought to the surface many of our own insecurities. But it also helped us keep a pulse on their needs, hurts, desires and dreams. At times, we were alone in the midst of large group of young people who did not know us, not cared for us. It was a difficult task to listen to and win them back. As Pope Paul VI remarks it, through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one for that matter.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3. The Range of the Sounding out of Opinions**

As was already mentioned, we dedicated a large portion of our time to meeting with the youth in both informal and formal settings. At the same time, we were carrying out our survey. That was during our sharing and discussions with them. After each activity, discussion and sharing, we took note of their opinions about the subject of our discussion or sharing. At the close of each of these activities, we did a summary

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<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation EA* (NY: Daughters of St. Paul, 1975), 13

evaluation of what we had discussed and/or shared and made recommendations based on what we had heard from them.

Among many other questions discussed, the following are those we focused on most in order to discover *the religious attitude*<sup>6</sup> of our youth towards God: What does God represent for them? Which idea do they have of Him? How do they respond to Him? In asking these questions, we were trying to discover the different religious qualities that our youth recognized of God in their spontaneous *religious momentum*<sup>7</sup>. However, we avoided starting with a prior conception of the religious attitude of youths. Also formulating items simply from what the catechism had made it familiar to them.

#### 1.4. The Youth Social Structure and Notes

Among the hundred members of youth group, only fifty were regular members. We sounded out their opinions: between 15-25 years old: students of public, Catholic and Protestant secondary schools: from form 3-6 belonging to different tribes and different provinces of the country. The tables below illustrate the social, religious structure and notes of our youth.

Age	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
N0.	6	4	4	3	4	9	4	6	5	3	2

<sup>6</sup> By 'religious attitude' we mean the feeling they have of God or their way of being or behaving in front of Him, intellectual, affective and volitive disposition toward Him. To reach this attitude, one needs to study his/her way of thinking, speaking about God, the feelings or behaviors that one proves towards Him. For a more in-depth study, see Mlle M.T., KNAPEN, "L'Image de Dieu Chez Les Jeunes Zairois". In: *TELEMA*, October 3:75.

<sup>7</sup> By 'religious momentum' we mean the force that keeps a person, an object and an event moving or developing after a start has been made: Who and/or what is God? Their faith in Him and what, how and why do they pray?

<b>Year of Study</b>	Form 3	Form 4	Form 5	Form 6
<b>N0.</b>	15	17	13	5
<b>Teaching Sector</b>	Catholic	Protestant		Public
<b>N0.</b>	15	10		25
<b>Religious Denomination</b>	All call themselves Catholics			

### 1.5. Weekly Youth Meetings, Programs and Activities

After we had established good relationships among the members and defined the *raison d'être* of the group, we then tried to establish a dynamic youth group weekly program. This included an occasional opportunity for religious education, social activities, retreats, liturgy, scriptural sharing, prayer group, service projects, pastoral ministry, and athletics. Yet the focus was twofold: first, maintaining the group, with group membership as the central goal. For example, we had specific rules, expectations, membership dues, and even membership cards. The second focus was primarily on religious education. Though we occasionally socialized together to perform a service project, the primary reason was religious education, with other activities being supplementary to and supportive of religious education goals. The table below illustrates the weekly programs of our youth group's activities.

<b>First Week</b>	<b>Second Week</b>	<b>Third Week</b>	<b>Fourth week</b>
Educational/Craft	Faith/Prayer/Liturgy	Pastoral/different forms	Social: Music/concert
<b>Meetings</b>		Every Saturday at 15h30	

## CHAPTER II

### MAIN THEMES AND RESULTS OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE YOUTH

#### II.1. The Spontaneous Thinking of God

While dealing with the youth, we kept in mind some questions, which we thought were relevant in establishing our youth religious attitude towards God. Of interest, for example, was highlighting circumstances on how the youth regarded spontaneously about God apart from what parents, the Church, schools imposed on them. The youth conceded that they did think about God spontaneously but at different frequencies: very often, often, sometime and rarely. Ninety percent of them indicated that it mostly in painful situations (material or moral) that arouse their spontaneous thinking of God. Here are some of the answers, which were written down. In between brackets the age of the concerned people are indicated. Some of them testify that:

At the moment I feel a bit unease or uncomfortable, it is in that moment that I need God. Also when I don't have money and when I am in danger, I think about Him. For example when we escaped from a road accident. If God was not there I would have died. (15)

Sometimes I think about God, when there is a big misfortune or when a member of my family dies, then I think about Him. (19)

I think about God when I am sick. I have to pray otherwise I will not be cured. It is in that moment most of the time I think about Him. (17)

Most of the times, I think about God, when my family is in deep difficulties, when I am in front of an obstacle or danger I try to ask for his assistance and help. (22)

From the responses, some youth affirmed that they don't think about God in joyful and successful circumstances of their life. Moments of joy or success are generally do not seeming to be favorable to be in touch with God. On the contrary, joy and well-being rather bring them to forget about him. Most of our youth were explicit that when all was fine with them, they did not even think about God.

There are certain periods in their life when they did not even think about him. They underlined the importance of pleasure: *You know when all ticks on well, I no more think about God. (21) There are some periods in my life I don't even think about him. I give importance to pleasure... and I don't even think about God. (23)*

Some seemed to suggest that beauty and then greatness of nature, human being in particular, brought their thinking towards God and put them in contact with Him. Some stressed again that:

The spontaneous thinking of God comes most often upon seeing human beings, other things in the universe. I find in them the entire realization, for example what gives the soil, the nature, it reminds me always that He exists. (18)  
To me the image of God, is my fellow human beings. I see God in them (20).

A spontaneous communication with God is established during meditation or contemplation time: for example, during the private reading of the Bible or personal reflection. *I think about God... for example through the reading of the Bible. (24) I think about God simply like that without words, e.g when I am in class (25).*

Among our youth, only one admitted that upon seeing a sacred place or a consecrated person brought him to think about God: *When I am having a work then I pass in front of the Church or when I meet a priest, I begin to think about God or I begin to find the meaning of what is religion all about (16).*

## 11.2. Prayer

The question discussed about prayer was focused on the content rather than the circumstances in which it is said. A material need, for example, may push one to ask for God's help. It may also help one to implore for the grace to bear it. Almost all youths admitted that they prayed in order to ask for help - material, health, well-being, and success in studies and in life. Almost all of them (90%) concurred that:

When we are suffering we must pray God, for example when we are sick. We would like that illness does not take long. Also we pray Him during exams period so that He may enlighten our intelligence in order to pass well. We need God also for our future because after our studies we would like to have a nice and prosperous life. We need God's help and assistance also when we are ready to do something which we doubt about, exams for example or when we are at ease.

Very few of them asked in their prayers a spiritual assistance, moral support, and grace, for example, to be able to avoid mistakes or sins, to resist temptations, and so on. *Often, I cry out to God as the publican in front of the tabernacle. I therefore confess to being a sinner and I ask God to help me to come out of that, and ask Him the grace not to fall again into temptations (25).*

Very few (10%) again thank God for the good things received from Him: they affirmed to do that through their spontaneous and personal prayers. *For example: at the beginning of this year I thank God for the past year, for keeping us sound, my parents and I, and I ask Him to grant me strength and good health throughout this new year (22).* Besides this, the sacrament of reconciliation was another issue we encountered with them. Very few (5%) asked for forgiveness from God for the mistakes committed.

### 11.3. Fundamental Traits of God

As we have already noted, their spontaneous thinking of God and their personal prayers have already revealed some important aspects of their religious attitude toward Him. At this point, we would like to continue our analysis by examining the fundamental traits that the youths attribute to God, in their spontaneous momentum, and which determine their real religious attitude towards Him.

#### 11.3.1 The Creator

The first fundamental trait that most of the youths attribute to God is that of the creator. Almost all of them are profoundly convinced that, there must be an origin or a cause of everything that exists that origin is precisely God. This fact is very evident that it constitutes, for most of them, the most important cause of their belief in God: the irrefutable proof of His existence. The majority (99%) conceded that:

God is the first cause and the creator of all that exists, and precisely of all of us here on earth. He is the supreme force, which prevails on everyone and everything. For us Bantu, the Spirit guides us to discover that all comes from Him: it tells us that through nature, we must recognize God. There is someone who is at the origin of that nature. That someone is God.

#### 11.3.2. The Master

This notion is intimately tied up to the notion of the creator. In their answers, it is hard to distinguish the two aspects. God, the creator is equally the Master of one's destiny, life and death. He gives the force to live and it is Him who calls the dying. For the majority of them, *"God is Supreme He is above all, creator of all. He is the Master of our nature and of the universe He is most powerful. He directs everything"*.

### 11.3.3 The Father

God, according to the youth is the Supreme Father, the origin of every life and everything. About 85% of them attributed also to God the qualities of paternal or maternal nature that every child normally recognizes to the two beings: father and mother, from whom one holds life, and most particularly to the father. They concurred:

We are convinced that God is interested in us and that He loves us. God wants our good and of all human beings. He is the Father of all. When we are in difficulties, we talk to Him and if He judges that it is good to give you what you are asking, He will give it to you. He is just like a good father in the family. Even if he sees what the child is doing is bad, he always have love for him or her. The same with God, he bears all that we do: we do wrong things but He is always patient with us. He continues giving us His grace to help us to survive in this world.

Although most of the youths attributed to God the parental qualities, not all of them speak with the same conviction of love of this Supreme Father. There are those youth (15%), who recognize God's goodness, but use some expressions, which seemed to indicate some reserves and doubts. They admitted that He is interested in them 'maybe', 'a little', or 'sometimes'. They think that God is interested in them inasmuch they are themselves interested in Him. Among these youth, many imagined that God had an ambivalent attitude towards them. Sometimes, He thinks about them and sometimes not at all: He is sometimes good, sometimes nasty. They observed that:

I can say that God is interested in me, but not directly, and not so much, but maybe a little (18). I'm not so sure if God is interested in me. To me, I think that He is interested maybe to those who are interested in Him (22). I find that He is sometimes a bit nasty but not always (18).

In some circumstances, like painful situations, there are a good number of them who ascribed God an ambivalent attitude towards them. And they adopt that kind of

attitude towards Him: affection and attachment on the one hand, antipathy and refusal on the other hand. We will speak of that further.

#### 11.3.4. Jesus-Christ

What do the youths think of Jesus, these young people who are raised and schooled in the teachings and traditions of Christian faith, whose parents earnestly try to communicate their own faith and loyalty to Him? Although they are baptized Christians in the Catholic Church, 70% of them never mentioned Christ during our discussions and sharing. It is probably true to say that they don't think of Him a lot. This does not mean that their notion of God and their attitude towards Him is in no way influenced by Christian message. But it seems, however, to be less entertained in their living faith. Of the 30% who mentioned Christ, 10% of them make their thoughts explicit and their attitude towards Christ in a favorable sense. They argued that, both, *God and Christ go together. When we think about God, we think often at the same time about Christ.* Some of them even go further saying,

We find that Christ is nearer than God, since our ancestors in faith saw him physically, we too can imagine him. He was 'concrete', 'a man with flesh like us'. Some people also love to address him than to his Father. But we know that, as it is said, if one wants to go to God, s/he must pass through him. Christ is the Son of God who was sent in this world in order to save us: he came to look for those who are lost and he died for our sins.

Christ, for the other 20% who mentioned him, is the ideal of their life. They remarked, "*We must accept to pass through suffering that Christ bore for us*". They feel attracted by him and find that he must be an 'exceptional Being'. In the context of their faith in Christ-Jesus, a large number of our youth refer to the Bible as the source of

that faith. Twenty percent of them affirm to frequently read the Bible outside religious services and classes. Another fifty percent of the group showed how they read it sometimes and the rest of the group indicated they did it rarely.

#### II. 4. Particular Traits of God

Besides the above fundamental traits of God's image among the youths, on which is based their religious attitude towards Him – Creator – Master – Father, we raised some particular traits of Him, which determine, in different levels, our youths' attitude towards Him. They are not really new attributes, but rather an accentuation of the three fundamental traits of God as we saw it. These traits can be presented in two main ideas.

##### II.4.1. Merciful and Forgiving

Inasmuch as they recognized in God the essential aspects of a 'Father', they also viewed Him as merciful and forgiving. They remarked, *for example, when we sin He will have mercy on us. He is concerned about us and interested in us. And if we ask his grace, he gives us. He is always ready to forgive.*

However, that God is merciful and forgiving all the time and towards all, is not accepted by all of them. As for the goodness of the 'father' there were those who thought, *"It depends. He is both, merciful and nasty."* Those who affirmed said,

God is a Being who appears sometimes to be good, merciful, forgiving and at times nasty. He punishes us when we have sinned. But He can forgive easily at times. He is severe with us. They tell us that he is infinitely good but we see that He is not. At times we ask ourselves if only He exists. Because they tell us that He gives His grace for people to survive. But this grace He gives it only to some people. Therefore we are asking ourselves why can't He give it to all, so that everyone may enjoy and be happy.

#### II.4.2. Norm of Life

For most of the youth, God is also the norm of life. This affirmation comes from their discussion of the questions: Do you think that God expects something from you? Do you sometimes think that you have to do something? Among the many good actions they do, while thinking about God, we noted the act of charity (help to the poor and elderly people, reconciliation); prayer to fulfill obligations prescribed by the Church such as sacrifice (70%). There are also some actions that our youth avoid while thinking about God. This includes insulting, stealing, cheating (50%), renouncing sexual pleasure (30%); recourse to magic forces and fetish (10%). As we have already noticed it, God is invoked by a quarter of our youth in order to obtain moral help, and by the rest of them for material help.

#### II.5. Specific Reactions of the Youth

We would like to finish our analysis on our youth religious attitude towards God by indicating some of their specific reactions as far as their religious experiences are concerned. The first is a question of apostolic attitude. Accordingly, a favorable reaction is needed. It consists of including other young people in the move towards God (apostolate); the second is the question of two unfavorable reactions, which seem to move them away from God or to put them in opposition with Him (revolt and doubt).

### II.5.1 Apostolate

Twenty percent of the youth affirmed that God expects of them to *show others how to find Him*. This meant to help others to become 'good Christians'. They saw the need of doing something effective in order to bring the 'lost ones' to God and to bring help to the poor and the needy of the parish. They realized that showing others the way to God was not only the work of consecrated people but for all Christians including them. *We can do so by our personal witness of life*, they added. For most of them, the gospel has to be taken seriously, and they feel the need to communicate this discovery of the 'Good News' to those inside as well as outside the Church.

### II.5.2. Revolt

Forty percent of the youth indicated that some unfortunate and unpleasant situations or painful events of life made them sometimes to rebel against God. Such included death of an important person in the family, suffering, sickness, failure in life, and deception of a prayer non-granted. They lamented in part,

Once there is a failure in life they see no need to have faith in God. If He was alive, He could not leave us in this terrible situation. In front of such event we feel a kind of revolt against God. Sometimes we pray, but there is no good result of that. When a member of our family is sick, why would God allow that to happen to him. He or she is very important to us in the family. At that time we can say that if God has pity on people, He could not let that happen.

To support their lamentations, one of them testified:

For example me, I lost my uncle who was my tutor: I felt that God was against me. He does not like me. He should not have accelerated his death. He should have waited until I finish my studies, one of them argued (15)

### II 5.3. Doubt

Forty percent again of them noted that at times they doubt seriously about the existence of God. The reasons they mentioned provoked these doubts, which are a contradiction between faith and science and the incompatibility between the existence of God and misfortunes and suffering in the world. The doubts they bore mostly on God and the causes they mentioned were: the miracles attributed to Christ, the behavior of some Church's leaders and the existence of the many churches in the world.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, we have been looking at the circumstances in which the youths think spontaneously about God. We have reflected on prayer, to see in which circumstances it was said; and on fundamental and particular traits that the youth attributed to God, which determined their religious attitude towards Him. We finish the chapter by indicating some of their specific reactions. From that analysis, we can rightly argue that rare are the youth who think about God during the joyful and successful moment of their life. In other words, when things move on well, the youth hardly think about Him. Only when facing difficulties do they seem to think about Him. The last analysis shows that their religious attitude towards God was largely functional and its object is that of their ancestors. We will develop that in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER III**

**THEOLOGICAL REFLEXION AND ANALYSIS OF THE CONGOLESE YOUTH CONCEPT  
OF GOD**

This chapter highlights the how and the why of such a wrong attitude and the failure of the understanding of the youths' image of God. After answering these questions we will try to study this phenomenon from our own Christian faith: the correct idea of God in Christianity and the relationship between Christian faith and them. Nevertheless, before addressing these questions, let us briefly discuss the subjects: first, the youth and his/her religious Christian life in general, and then second, the religious attitude of the Congolese young people.

**III.1. The Youth and Their Christian Life**

Young people are largely optimistic, more aware of possibilities than limitations. In particular if a young man, as he begins to manage his own life: he is aware of himself as a person who is his own taskmaster and his own reward. Ethical problems interest him because they are directly connected with what he is experiencing, namely, the independent construction of his own life. Hence religious questions and understandings will appeal to him under an ethical aspect since a person at this age is an ethical person in a special sense of the word.<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II recognizes that sometimes, this is a moment of exhilaration and fearful responsibility at other times. At this period, the pope underlines, the young person is in the period of ambiguity in human life. This is especially demanding for young persons whose lives are weighed

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<sup>8</sup> Karl RAHNER, *The Christian Commitment* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 157.

down by suffering, by some physical lack or defect, some handicap or limitation, or by a difficult family or social situation.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the young person is oriented towards the world seeking the fulfillment of himself, sees life as a battle, a competitive fight in which one can win. Hence, religiously, he does not yet grasp that sin is. He encounters it essentially as a failure in achievement, an expression for a task not yet fully performed. This is in recognition that his ethical optimism has not yet attained its goal, but without really bringing its ultimate success into question in any genuine fear and trembling about his own salvation. He reaches to the very marrow of his being as a person. In this respect, he readily accepts religious tasks and demands as they can be applied into concrete achievement, such as positive living, making him an active and successful person constructing his own life for himself.

For the young person, though God is a supreme formula and guarantee, which makes his youthful optimism<sup>10</sup>, still, he has problems and doubts, uncertainties and disillusionments. They are only expression of a life still on the quest for its fulfillment. He is seeking himself, slowly beginning to experience his own personality and take possession of it. Because he has not yet arrived at the full possession of his personality, he is still insecure. The attitude he takes towards God and others in the society is, on the one hand, that which he has chosen for himself, and which on the other hand gives support to his still insecure sense of himself.

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<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World*, French ed. (Kinshasa: E.d. St. Paul Atrque, 1985), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Karl RAHNER, *The Christian Commitment*, 158

If we consider all this, we shall then have to say that a youthful Christian life simply cannot as yet take possession of the whole of true Christian faith, which he falsely interprets it into doubt, revolt and disbelief. But primarily, the specific and basic thing in youthful belief is, God, giver of life, ultimate ground of life, and the creator.

### **III.2. The Religious Attitude of our Youth as Largely Functional**

The religious attitude is the point from which to look at the Congolese youth's concept of God and its specific ascesis. It seems to us that the results of this survey, sketchy though they are, draw the force line of the really religious faith of our Congolese young people. From our survey, two major facts emerge: the religious attitude of our youth is largely functional and the real object of that attitude, for the majority, is the God of the ancestors.

In the main part, our youth turn towards a God who substitutes for emptiness and human deficiencies. It is not the greatness, the beauty and the love of a transcendent God that awake our youth to the presence of God. Rather, it is the experience of their impotence and helplessness. Most precisely, it is the material insecurity, vivaciously felt, which determines the attitude of our youth towards God: to live and to have in plenty, to be successful in life and studies, are the profound aspiration of our young people, and this aspiration is the mainspring of their relationships with God.

God exists, He is near, and becomes a living reality inasmuch as He is needed to overcome the difficulties and obstacles which try to hinder the achievement of that fundamental aspiration. A small group feels the necessity of God to substitute for moral helplessness, in the achievement of moral or religious ideal. And rare are those young

people who reach God from the experience of happiness or joy. God becomes great or near, when one feels small, weak or helpless; He becomes small and far away, when one lives in material and moral security.

The relation with God here is not lived as autonomous value in itself. This is why it often remains stranger to vital interests. For a large number of our youth, the theological faith is not well integrated in their living religion which is dominated by the principle of supplant. Most of the time there is no really exchange between partners, but is a question of occasional appeal or of a need. It is an appeal to God as a stopgap. The human-God encounter arises at the time of negative or painful experience. At that time, one feels called out to God. He thinks of Him when he is jammed with difficulties. The religious attitude here is determined in the main part by the situation that arouses it. In the main part, as the pope underlines, it is the economic situation of poverty that causes a particular negative impact on the young persons.<sup>1</sup>

To some extent, this functional religious attitude arises from psychological needs. Philosophy has always been affirming: it is the finishing experience that is essential moment to go to the search of God. And that finishing, one tests it in the first place in his /her corporal life: work and natural aspirations. It is from these situations of elementary needs that one invokes God.

The internationality of religious experience of our young people, born from psychological needs is more enlightened by their doubts and revolts. For most of our youth, the disappointment of their religious hopes and of divine protection at the service

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, EAA*, 115. (Daughters of St. Paul, Nairobi, 1995), 85

of their human inspirations changes temporarily their attachment to God by refusal and aversion. Sometimes, they get angry with Him because 'he does not satisfy them, he does not always respond to all their needs, desires and all that makes them happy', for after all: "*this Supreme Being is not there to listen and to do good to me*". (20)

On that matter, we can argue that inasmuch as the doubts and revolts are seen as a reaction to a failure of religious hopes much more human, they are important and efficacious moments to help our youth to make a shift from their spontaneous religious attitude to a more reflective and structured attitude. In spite of their negative appearance, they have a positive role to play in the dynamic development of their religious attitude.

In addition, inasmuch as these doubts and revolts are a matter of the childish way of religious thinking and behaving, there are signs of maturity and constitute a positive moment in the process of religious growth of a person.

Therefore, we do not depreciate them and reduce their religious attitude towards God either to a psychological phenomenon, and that there is no real communication with the living God. Instead, this primary religiosity can be progressively revived, purified and raised at the level of a religiosity more authentic, in the course of a long process of religious maturity that will never be completed.

From our discussion and sharing with them, it emerges that some of our young persons have already reached a surprising level of authenticity in their attitude towards God. They are transformed by His presence, that a good exchange between persons has been established, where God is a good partner, and not an instance to the service of

human and natural inspirations. It follows that, for young persons the most authentic relationships with God go generally altogether with the intimate relations with the person of Christ.

### **III.3. The Ancestral God as the Real Object of the Religious Attitude of the Majority**

As already noted, the aim of our essay goes beyond merely giving details of a metaphysical or theological notion of the God of the youth. If we have brought out some essential aspects and traits that our young people recognized in God in their spontaneous religious momentum, the intention was to illustrate the different components of youth's being and behavior towards God. In the same perspective, we would like to ask a question: to what extent these fundamental aspects that our young persons attribute to God correspond to the traditional image of God of their forefathers? Let us see the essential lines of Congolese traditional beliefs before looking at the relation of the youth concept of God to the God of Christianity as the Church sees it.

The Congolese people are in general deeply religious. Their whole environment is steeped in religious meaning because they believe in the presence of God everywhere. From the very beginning, the life of every Congolese is very much influenced by his/her traditional belief. Traditionally, the Congolese believe in a Supernatural being (God, Supreme Being) and the world of spirits (divinities and ordinary spirits); the world of ancestors (life after death, departed spirits, living-dead and in the world of the living - unborn-living-other creatures).

As many other African people, the Congolese are monotheist and they believe in the existence of a Supreme Being who is the creator of heaven and earth, and the first

cause and source of life and of all vital means. He is universally called *Nzambi*<sup>12</sup> To Nzambi they add Mpungu, which means God Almighty who transcends any fetish and power. He is the one who gives or increases powers.<sup>13</sup> They have different names of God: Nzambi Tata (God the Father), Nzambi ya Ba Tata (God of the Fathers), Mfumu Nzambi (God the King) and Nzambi ya Nkenda (God of mercy = merciful God).

For the Congolese, there is only one God who does not have body, arms, legs or sex. God does not grow old, He does not die. He does not have any representation: God is spirit, there is no word to express him. God is like the wind. When a sudden silence occurs in a group of people conversing, they say that God has passed through. God knows everything. Whatever I know comes from him. The Congolese people believe in the unicity, eternity and inimitability of God. He is transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient and permeates the whole life. His power is supreme: all flows from him and inheres in him. He is the final resort: the last court of appeal and one may use intermediaries to approach him. Again for the Congolese, God is Father and as Father. He is involved in people's life.

His relationship to humans is strictly of personal order. He knows me. He listens to me, he understands me, and He takes care of my personal life and me. G. HULSTRAERT affirms the same thing for the Mongo people<sup>14</sup> when he remarks: "*son attitude envers les hommes est paternelle. Leur attitude quotidienne et plusieurs dictons*

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<sup>12</sup> Nzambi means God in one of the 4 national languages of the D.R.C. Called Kikongo, spoken in Bdd and lower Congo regions.

<sup>13</sup> V. Mulago, "Le Dieu de Bantu" In: Cahiers des Religions Africaines, N0.3, Vol.2, 1968, 25-64.

<sup>14</sup> Mongo people form one of the smaller tribes of DRC. They inhabit the Northern section of the Country, in Equateur region province

*montrent indiscutablement qu'il est pour eux le Pere Supreme*.<sup>15</sup> This is translated to mean that, saying God is Father, and it is enough. This divine paternity is communicated to humans through creation, which is a participation in the life of God and his paternity. This is the synthesis of God's attributes. From that, we can see immediately that those are the same fundamental traits of God's image that are found in most of the answers for our youth. Elsewhere, we noticed that most of our youth hardly refer to Christ. Only a small number gives the impression that their religious attitude towards God cannot sideline the person of Christ.

Besides the belief in the Supreme Being, the Congolese also believe in the world of the spirits. They have strong belief in those beings that belong to the ontological mode of existence between God and human beings. They are divided into divinities, ordinary spirits and the ancestors or *the living-dead*.<sup>16</sup>

**Beliefs in divinities:** According to the Congolese mind, these divinities are associated with natural phenomena and objects as well as with human activities and experiences. These are made up of divinities of war, of harvest, of health and healing, of weather, rivers and lakes. They are numerous and conceived of as male and female. The spirits are in charge of the natural domains. They were brought into being as functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe.<sup>17</sup> Divinities derive from the Supreme Being although some of them are said to be national heroes or ancestors who have been elevated and deified.

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<sup>15</sup> G. Hulstaert, "Les Mongo, Apercu General", Musee Royal de l'Afrique Central, Tervuren, Archives d'Ethnographie, NO. 5, 1961, 48.

<sup>16</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: LAEP, 1994), 75

<sup>17</sup> E.B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion - A Definition*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1975), 170

**Beliefs in ordinary spirits:** According to Mbiti and what is in the Congolese mind, these are generally *spirits beneath the status of divinities, and above the status of men*.<sup>18</sup> Put differently, their ontological mode of existence is higher and nearer to God. They also have more power than people. Nevertheless, they are said to be in the same geographical region as people. In fact, the Congolese believe that spirits are omnipresent so that there is at least a spirit in every natural thing. Moreover, their activities are considered similar to people although they are unpredictable since the spirits themselves are invisible. At least for the Congolese, spirits are what remain of human beings after their physical death, although some are said to have been created as a race by themselves.

In addition to the belief in the spirit-world, the Congolese have also the belief in ancestors. This is strong for the Congolese. Mbiti has stated that, the *living-dead* still have their footprints in the actual world. This means, for the Congolese, that death is not utter extinction. One's dead relatives continue to be in communion and communication with the living. This is in fact founded on the belief in the interrelationship between the other world and the actual one.<sup>19</sup> They are part of the clan and have completed their course here on earth and are gone ahead to the other world to be elder brothers and sisters of the living at the house of God, the Supreme Being. They are in permanent relationship with the living and they form one community. Though invisible, they are powerful. For example, they give children to the living, they give good harvest, and

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<sup>18</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: EAEP, 1994), 78

<sup>19</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Nairobi: EAEP, 1994), 78

they provide sanctions for the moral life of the tribe and of the clan. They are thought to be intermediaries and divinely given channels of contact with the Supreme Being.

But among the Congolese, it is not enough to die to become an ancestor. Aylward Shorter<sup>20</sup> has pointed out that there are a large number of deceased who never become ancestors: children, barren women or sterile men, cripples and social drop-outs, people who die far away from their homeland, outcasts or those who in any way incurred social censure or disapproval. In other words, the deceased must have good reputation which gives them power and respect among the living. It is generally said according to the Congolese that only good people become ancestors after they have received the "well done" judgment of the deity. Bad or wicked people will be cast into a place of rubbish heap. To be an ancestor, one must have lived to a ripe old age and in an exemplary manner and done much to enhance the standing and prestige of the family, clan, or tribe. In short, the Congolese traditionally speaking believe in the presence of the divinity everywhere and in the omnipresence of the spirits, and in the continuation of life after death. Therefore, they use intermediaries to reach the supernatural being for the protection of lives by resorting to some ritual practices.

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<sup>20</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology* (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 126

### III.4. The True Christian Faith

The true Christian faith is the point from which we are going to study the youth's concept of God and their attitude toward Him from our own Christian faith. In other words, we are going to give the correct idea concept of God in Christianity and then we will see the relationship between Christian faith and that of the youth.

Nothing in this point retracts what we believe God is, namely, a reality that can neither be proved nor disapproved by rational arguments. He is God who has been disclosed so clearly and so definitively in Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit. The OT shows that our God is a living God, known through the name Yahweh given to Moses and his descendents.<sup>21</sup> He is present and active wherever his name is known and recognized, and invoked.<sup>22</sup> He alone is the creator and the revealer. He alone governs, judges and saves humankind.<sup>23</sup>

In the NT, God is revealed and communicated in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> In Jesus, therefore, the reality of God is manifested in an invisible and personal form. In him, all the saving attributes of God in the OT are actualized.<sup>25</sup> God pardons through Christ<sup>26</sup> and reconciles the world through him.<sup>27</sup> God gives the Spirit through the Son.<sup>28</sup> However, the true Christian faith, therefore, is a believer's personal knowledge of God in Christ or of any other religious supernatural reality. Its object, in other words, is not a doctrine or a sacred text, but God, creator of all things, visible and invisible.

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<sup>21</sup> Ex 3:13-15

<sup>22</sup> Ps 72:13

<sup>23</sup> Jos 3:10; Ps 42:3, Is 37:4, Jer 10:10

<sup>24</sup> Jn 1:1-18

<sup>25</sup> Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), 287.

<sup>26</sup> Eph 4:32

<sup>27</sup> 2Cor 5:19

<sup>28</sup> Jn 15:26, 16:7

This knowledge does not originate in laboratory test nor scientific observation or common sense and everyday experiences. Rather, it is the way to come to the knowledge of God as God.<sup>29</sup> That is our perception of God in the midst of life. That is to say one who believes has no worry.<sup>30</sup> The scope of faith is unlimited; it demands total commitment to God and readiness to do God's will.

Therefore, we can conclude that from our own Christian faith and that of the youths, there is a similarity. Both believe in one God, creator of everything, giver of life, Supreme Being and among others. However, the difference comes in the level of conception. For a true believer, s/he has no worry and gives all in the hands of God. But in the case of our youths, our heavenly God is conceived of as 'a God stop-gap'. God is a living one when He overcomes human deficiencies or substitutes for one's obstacles or difficulties. This is because their religious education did not help them to discern, respond to and, be transformed by the presence of God in their lives. However, they should know that everything that exists has its first source and its final completion in God, the beginning and the end. Without God, the whole world of created values remains as though suspended in a vacuum. Evil is presented as good: good itself is rejected, wherever God has been removed from evaluations, estimations, and actions.<sup>31</sup>

If we make few biblical observations, we will find that this attitude our youths had towards God did happen somewhere in salvation History. Looking at the Israelites' story of salvation in the OT, we notice that people lost their belief in God because they

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<sup>29</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 24-25.

<sup>30</sup> Is 28 16

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter to the youth of the World*, 14

lacked water and food<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, they violated the fundamental commandment to worship other gods.<sup>33</sup> Looking at the Gospel story of Christ conversation with the young rich man in the NT who approached Christ in order to know what he must do to inherit eternal life, we see that the young rich man turned away from Christ because of attachment to what he had, external riches.<sup>34</sup> Because of his great possession, he went away sorrowfully believing that without it, his life was useless. We wish that the dialogue Christ develops with the young rich man might help our youths to know that all in the world is vanity. Only God is the ultimate basis of all values: only him, gives the definitive meaning to our human existence.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter, we have been looking at the religious attitude of the youth towards God and its object. We can therefore conclude that if the theological image of the wider group of our youth is strongly influenced by the Christian message, their living attitude towards God is not very healthy. It is very pessimistic for a small number of them. For those, as we have indicated, this influence of Christian message has made a deep insight and sublimation of the image of the God of the ancestors. These included knowledge of the essential traits and aspects of the image of God as merciful, forgiving, norm of life, the creator, the master, and the father. These traits and aspects determine the religious attitude of our youth. In addition, knowledge and situations whereby the experience of God is realized helped us to determine the main components of their attitude towards God.

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<sup>32</sup> Ex 15: 22-27

<sup>33</sup> Ex 20:2-6

<sup>34</sup> Mk 10:17-22; Mt 19:16-22; Lk 18:18-23.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World*, 14

## CHAPTER IV

### EMPOWERMENT FOR THE FURTHER GROWTH OF THE YOUTH IN FAITH

This last chapter of our essay proposes the way to empower our young people for further growth in true Christian faith. Proposals include how they can journey in their Christian faith, stand up and walk in the right paths. This could be helpful to individuals and groups ministering to young people to enable them to seriously consider reformulating their own outlook, methods, models and expectations in the face of the young ones' pathetic response to the life, work and mission of the Christian faith.

Young people have faith that can move mountains: they need opportunities to express that faith, to question it, to have it affirmed, and to shape it as their own: they need adults who are willing to walk that faith, journey with them, loving them along the way.<sup>36</sup> Pastors, then, should work out programs to improve the educational evangelization of young people.<sup>37</sup>

No new methods, models, magical formula or short cuts are envisaged in this chapter. Thus, it can be said that the return of our young people to true Christian faith or belief would turn our attention toward the spiritual treasures of the Church, which we are not sufficiently utilizing.

Youth ministers (catechists, preachers, parents, and teachers of religion) are well aware that a problem exists. We all know that a significant number of our Catholic youth refuse to identify themselves with the faith community. During this time of great paradigm shifts in the world, young people seem less and less willing to respond to a

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<sup>36</sup> J.K. Finn, *Building Youth Ministry in the Parish*, (Winnona, Minnesota: Christian Brothers Publications, 1993), 13.

<sup>37</sup> The 31-12-1987 World Synod of Bishops, prop. 52

life centered upon God/Christ and his Church. There is an obvious decrease in young people's enthusiasm and participation in the Church. This is because many youth ministers pattern their ministry after foreign missionary models. They speak to the youth in a manner that blocks free and healthy communication with them. Rahner's estimation is that only one in every four young people expresses a high degree of confidence in organized religion. This is a figure far lower than the adult population.<sup>38</sup> He further notes that an overwhelming proportion of young Catholics (82%) believe that a person can be a good Christian if s/he does not go to Church.<sup>39</sup>

Again, as we all can notice, there is in our young people a tendency of secular drift or loss of religious consciousness that has resulted in the vitiation of Christian values and convictions. Christian youth find themselves in a situation where they live and interact amidst a large percentage of non-Christian influences in which their faith is undermined rather than supported. The influence that popular music, much of which is neo-pagan in character, exerts on the younger generation serves as a prime example. For a large number of our youth, it has become increasingly unpopular to identify with the life, the work and the mission of the Church. Inviting them to make a personal choice for God/Christ and his Church rather than simply providing religious information about God/Christ and his Church will invite coming generation into the Christian faith. As Finn observed that the Church mainly concerned is built on a patriarch and hierarchical model. By implication, Church's efforts in youth ministry presume that young people would continue in the faith of their parents, to know what to believe and how to act as

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<sup>38</sup> K. Rahner, *Christian Commitment*, (NY: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 11.

<sup>39</sup> K. Rahner, *Christian Commitment*, 11.

Catholic adults. In other words, the models are programmatic and educational, providing education that would retain a 'purity of faith'.<sup>40</sup>

In the light of what has been observed, it is evident that the Church in DRC has had to face many challenges. The present and future challenge for youth ministers is to develop forms of ministry that will effectively draw youth back into the true Christian faith in God. How do we attract youth into the Christian community? What principles do we need for the successful translation of the truth of our faith in God for our young people?

From our own experience and work with and among the youth, we propose practical formula for a successful youth growth in faith. Youth ministers should translate the message of the Gospel in a way which young people can respond to. With regard to activity, the minister must develop a strategy for giving young people the opportunity to hear the message. This should combine good relationships with the minister's message. It is a preferable model in most instances, an approach that allows them to meet with and experience God through the ministers' relationships with them.

#### **IV.1. The Relationship**

As was remarked in the first chapter of this essay, when we accepted the responsibility to build up a youth group in YKTL parish, we decided to concentrate on building relationships. Only the ministers who are not afraid to leave the boundaries of scheduled events and activities and go to the places where youth work and play will be

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<sup>40</sup> J. K. Finn, *Building Youth Ministry in the Parish*, 17.

successful in inviting them to meaningful activities and supportive relationships.<sup>41</sup> We began to visit them in schools and homes. We participated in their games. We even took a large portion of our time with them in informal settings, writing personal letters, making phone calls, and organizing some public shows such as concerts. In other words, the ministry to the youth should begin on the level of interpersonal transaction. Before talking to them, the minister has to go to them to hear what they have to say. S/he must be someone worth listening to. Concerning this, Don Kimball argued that the minister must first is to do relational ministry, to be with, accept, and love people as God sees and loves them.<sup>42</sup>

At times, we were alone in the midst of large group of young people who did not seem to know us, nor cared to know us. This was frustrating but it helped us keep a pulse on their need, hurts and desires. It was a difficult task, winning the right to be heard: but as Pope Paul VI states,

Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and very powerful effective one.<sup>43</sup>

Youth ministry, therefore, should not be solely a message to be professed: it should be a witness of deeds. It is the interpersonal transaction of the minister with young ones that is most likely to open their hearts to personal faith in God/Christ and his Church. That is to say there is need of a profound responsibility of treating them as an 'end' in and of themselves. It is not to run a weekend retreat by staying in the office:

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<sup>41</sup> J.K. Finn, *Building Youth Ministry in the Parish*, 19

<sup>42</sup> Don Kimball, *Power and presence*, (San Francisco, Harph & Row, 1987), 145.

<sup>43</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation EV*, (New York, St. Paul Publications, 1975), 13.

rather it is a question of developing a good relationship. That is to illustrate the tendency of most youth ministers to see young people, at times unconsciously, as a means to an 'end'. The responsibility of youth ministers should be to treat young ones as valuable in and of themselves rather than to be overly concerned with attendance. Each and every individual must never be forgotten.

Ministering endeavors will do injustice to the Gospel when young people sense that concern for them is conditional: I care if you listen to or if you come to the meetings. Building relationships means caring even if they do not come for youth programs or to the Church. That is going out to meet them in their environment in order to build trust and a sense of belonging.<sup>44</sup> To avoid the lamentable phenomenon we are dealing with in this essay, it is important that youth ministers should develop realistic expectations in accordance with their own gifts, talents, and time commitment regarding the number of the youth that they can minister to. Therefore, a relational approach to youth ministry is a consideration to the minister's responsibility, the person-centered, based on unconditional acceptance and forgiveness.

#### **IV.2. The Message**

Once we have established a rapport with individual youth, thus the winning right to be heard, now we have to see how are we going to present the truth of God/Christ in words. The second thing we are suggesting for a successful ministry of youth is the message. Accordingly, there are things to be taken into consideration. These include listening skills, how to give the message, and what to say to the youth because young

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<sup>44</sup> J.K. Finn, *Building Youth Ministry in the Parish*, 19

persons now want to know more. However, the minister to young people, on one hand must critically investigate and understand what is to be communicated. On the other hand, the minister must attend to the methods, context and effects of the communicative process. This will help young people to discern, respond to, and be transformed by the presence of God in their lives, and to work for the continuing transformation of the world.<sup>45</sup>

#### IV.2.1. Listening to Youth

The situation we are living in nowadays demands that ministers to the youth should recognize the signs of the times by listening to the voices that pull youth away from Christian settings. They should understand what it is like to be a youth today. In other words, the ministers should get in touch and insights with their today's culture. This is possible by being involved in their lives. Some particular suggestions include listening to the words in popular music, visiting and being a participant in their activities or games, watching the movies or television programs that they like and, most importantly, listening to them personally.

#### IV.2.2. How to Give the Message

Most of the time in our talks to the youth, we like describing the understanding of life, morality and, its implications. On the contrary, we should allow them to determine how the message should be given. This involves a process whereby we take the Good News of Christ and translate it into a language in which they can relate.

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<sup>45</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 29

This process requires ministers to the youth to speak according to young people's particular needs, discovering the areas in which they are confused, troubled and hurting. Any evangelizing ventures among young people should not only be an appeal to Church authority, the Bible, or dogmatic formulations, but also, a translation of the Gospel for the lives of the youth. For that a lot depends upon the circumstance of each particular youth or youth community.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV.2.3. The Content of the Message

The third thing to be considered for a successful youth growth is to decide on what is going to be said to them. The 'what' is as important as the 'how'. The question here is what is the message given? There is no use whatever in exposing a beautiful theological doctrine, for instance, on God, Christ, the Church or even on Mary, if it is not a challenge to them. Our teaching is often too limited to the proofs of the existence of God, the author of nature, Lord of the universe, who demands one's reverence and submission. Too often, our teachings reach only the spiritual generalities such as 'God is love' or He is Father or a friend. These alone can never be enough.

Nevertheless, our teachings should be done in a way that will encourage the young ones to seek to change their lives; a message which contains a significant challenge to their lives. The message given should stimulate them for further investigation and integration. It should provide an occasion for them to question, search their souls and live as young people committed to God/Christ and his Church.

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<sup>46</sup> P. Tonna, "Youth Evangelization: a Relational Approach". In: *The Living Light*, Mariella Frye, Ed., Vol.22-No 1, October 1985, 76

Mary Reed Newland rightly commented that before our message can begin to have any meaning for them they have to experience it in their lives. They will not be converted by words or arguments, for God is not an idea or a concept in philosophy. He is the very ground of existence before we can really be persuaded to believe in Him. To discover God is not to discover God but to discover oneself.<sup>47</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has inserted us into some ways we think can help our youth to stand up and walk. Like the man who was lame from birth near the Temple entrance called the Beautiful Gate was helped by Peter and John<sup>48</sup>, we can also help our grossly crippled youth to come out of this wrong attitude and conception of God. We can rightly argue that there is a need to evangelize in a particular way our contemporary youths so that they may also stand up and walk in the true Christian faith. Therefore, the ministers should keep a balance between the importance of relationship building and the imparting of the Gospel. Put differently, the youth minister should be as credible as the message, offering his life as a sign of Christ's unconditional love. It is not just having fun with them; it requires dealing head-on with their concerns as well as problems and relating in a concrete way the truth of Christ.

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<sup>47</sup> M. R. Newland, *Youth. What Happened*, (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1976), 49.

<sup>48</sup> Act 3: 1-10

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

One of the most exciting and yet frustrating areas of service rendered by the Church over the years is that of youth ministry. For diverse significant reasons, the Church needs a more comprehensive approach in its pastoral ministry to young people. However, our task should be surely one of inspiring and encouraging them to understand them and their problem, and to appropriately assist them in working out effective solutions. The example of the Emmaus story<sup>49</sup> is a very good paradigmatic account of youth ministers. This section of Luke's Gospel highlights the ministering skills of Jesus' action. Jesus listens, he is sensitive, and helps them in their troubles through his skilled listening and building relationship with them.

This Luccan account points out how we should help the individual young persons to understand their own lives. Not only does it help them to understand their own lives, but also, it works to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person. It seeks to draw him/her to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community. Vatican II in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world states, we can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.<sup>50</sup> This is to say that the youth ministers should focus on helping the young people deepen their relation with God and one another in varying ways, to listen to their troubles, questions, hopes, ideas and feelings. In short, this ministry takes much effort.

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<sup>49</sup> Lk 24: 13-35

<sup>50</sup> Vatican II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, GS", NO 31. In: Vatican Council II-The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, Austin FLANNER, Gen. Ed., (Bandra, Bombay: St Paul Press, 1975), 819

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time and openness to God's grace for genuine ministry to happen. Good relationships do not mature or develop overnight. Personal faith and patience are two of the most needed traits in youth ministry.<sup>51</sup>

From the foregoing, we can deduce that the Church of DRC, instead of providing religious information about God/Christ and his Church, has to evaluate her aim, methods, models and strategy of youth apostolate and religious education that she offers to young persons. This will transform them into genuine, effective, socially and spiritually committed bearers of the Good News to one another, mostly to their fellow problematic youths.

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<sup>51</sup> M. Eduards, "Youth Ministry Burnout-Advice to parish councils" In *The Living Light*, Mariella Frye, Ed., Vol. 21, NO. 3, March 1985, 228-231

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AB</b>	<i>The African Bible</i>
<b>AFER</b>	African Ecclesial Review, published by AMECEA Pastoral institute, Eldoret, Kenya.
<b>AJCM</b>	Association Des jeunes Catholiques sans Mouvement (French for Association of Catholic Youth without movement), a group that we initiated during our PY.
<b>BDD</b>	Bandundu, one of the eleven regions/provinces of The DRC.
<b>CEZ/C</b>	Conference Episcopale Du Zaire- Congo
<b>CTP</b>	Cross Cultural Training Program, SVD-Ministry or Regency of two years in another culture.
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo.
<b>EIN</b>	<i>Ecclesia In Africa</i> , Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope J. Paul II.
<b>EN</b>	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> , Evangelization in the modern World, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope VI, 1975.
<b>KIN</b>	Kinshasa, the Capital-City of DRC
<b>LL</b>	<i>The Living Light</i> , An Interdisciplinary Review of Catholic religious Education, Catechesis and Pastoral Ministry, published by The Catholic University of America
<b>NT</b>	<i>The New Testament</i>
<b>OT</b>	<i>The Old Testament</i>
<b>OTP</b>	Overseas Training Program, SVD-Ministry or Regency of two years in another country
<b>PY</b>	Pastoral Year, SVD-Ministry or regency of one year in one own country.
<b>SGEZ</b>	Secretariat General de l'Episcopat du Zaire
<b>SVD</b>	Society of the Divine Word Missionaries
<b>SVD-CON</b>	Constitutions of the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries
<b>YKTL</b>	Yezu Kristu Nto-Luzingu Parish

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