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PASTORAL CARE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVENIA AFTER 1991

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to introduce the topic of pastoral care of the young people in Slovenia. The period of 60 years has revealed two main courses of development; one during the time of communistic regime (a form of totalitarian socio-political system with all its side effects), the other marks the period after 1990, when a new independent Republic of Slovenia was established, a new political system was introduced, when secularization and materialism appeared in their much more noticeable form. This stream of events left its mark on spirituality of the young people and became a challenge for the Catholic Church. The article refers to the whole range of aspects, which may be identified as crucial for pastoral care of young people in Slovenia¹.

I. PRESENT SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Slovenia, officially the Republic of Slovenia is a country in southern Central Europe bordering Italy to the west, the Adriatic Sea to the southwest, Croatia to the south and east, Hungary to the northeast, and Austria to the north. The capital of Slovenia is Ljubljana. At various points in history Slovenia has been a part of the Roman Empire, the Duchy of Carantania (only modern Slovenia's northern part), the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, the Austrian Empire (later known as Austria-Hungary), the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed to Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929) between the two World Wars, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 until gaining its independence in 1991. Nowadays, Slovenia is a member of the European Union, the Council of Europe and NATO.

¹ See *Slovenia* (from *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*), taken from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovenia> (18th October 2009).

Slovenia experienced great socio-political changes in 1990-1991. These changes (birth of democracy etc.) also influenced the life of the Church, its function, and annunciation. The Church wishes to preserve and upgrade all that is good and has been formed through the efforts of past decades (it searches for new directions of the apostolate among the young)² Despite the „new” (secularized) way of life many young people stay connected to the Church³ And what is furthermore surprising is the fact that international research from some years ago shows that the Slovenian young generation proves to be even more religious than the generation of its parents. But it also holds data that this feeling of belonging is much more passive, loose and keeping distances the young from the Church and its essence. The general regulations for catechesis says: „Fast and noisy cultural and social changes, increase in the number of young people, the assertion of the prolonged period of youth before the young resume the responsibilities of the adults, unemployment, and continual underdevelopment in some countries, pressures of the consumer oriented society etc. are the factors which give the world of the young the image of the world in waiting, the world of disappointment and often boredom, even anxiety and marginalization. This distance between the young and the Church or at least the mistrust towards it spreads among many as a permanent attitude”⁴

„According to the results of the Slovenian research the Slovenian youth now feels more optimistic towards the state of the society than in the past but it is still unprepared to be involved in the processes of changing this same society. Between 1990 and 2000, in the time of cultural and social transition, the social vulnerability of youth increased, new forms of poverty and social pathologies emerged while the young themselves are decreasingly the bearers of critical ideas. The massive withdrawal of the young from the public into the private sphere presents a significant phenomenon, the causes for which can be found in the increasing pressures for the achievement of educational results, liberal logic of competitiveness, difficulties with employment, and the general lack of partners in a dialog that are essential for the young. Findings about the withdrawal into the private sphere also hold true for the religious youth, with whom »there occurs a fairly strong urge to fence his or her faith within the private and intimate sphere, the sphere of intimate aesthetic sensing and searching for self. Since the religious youth shows a considerate lack of social consciousness we can even speak about a certain incompatibility in his or her spiritual development”⁵

² See J. Oražem, *Pokoncilski veroučni učbeniki v Sloveniji do 1981* (unpublished study), Ljubljana 1981.

³ See Stična, srečanja mladih (media information), taken from: <http://www.drustvo-skam.si/sticna/infonovinarji.php> (24th February 2008).

⁴ Kongregacija za duhovščino, *Splošni pravilnik za katehezo*, Church document, number 75, Ljubljana 1998, p. 182.

⁵ Concluding Document of the Slovenian Plenary Church Council Session, pp. 129-130.

II. DEFICIENCIES OF YOUTH PASTORAL CARE

We can be satisfied with the pastoral care and work in the field of youth pastoral care on the one hand but still observe the inadequacy of the current youth pastoral care on the other. The Catholic Church should seek new answers to the challenges of our time. Namely, there is still a prevalence of the model of parish Sunday school groups and the models of powerful spiritual meetings, which still encompass the majority of the young. Unfortunately, all of the activities usually remain within the boundaries of local parishes. The Concluding document of the Slovenian Plenary Church Council Session emphasizes that there is no denying of the fact that even those young that the youth pastoral care reaches and who are susceptible to the gospel experience, often remain unsatisfied. The contents and manner of presentation frequently do not reach into their depths; they experience their Christian communion as too rigid and inactive, and their own role within them as overwhelmingly passive⁶ Many priests, even those of a younger generation, do not perform at their best when working with the young. The Document also underlines another important fact, which is: „On a broader scale, the crisis in the youth pastoral care is revealed as the lack of basic pastoral paradigm, inclination of pastoral workers towards individualism, poor planning, and dispersion of the common pastoral space”⁷

III. RENEWAL GUIDELINES OF THE YOUTH PASTORAL CARE

The Synod, which was held in 2000, presents an important instance for the life and work of the Church in Slovenia. Experts and representatives of the religious people fundamentally reviewed the path already travelled and at the same time formed guidelines that were to help all those who work within the framework of the Church. Guidelines for the renewal of the youth pastoral care were formed with all that in mind⁸ The findings are as follows:

a) Christ as the centre and ecclesiology of the youth pastoral care

„The youth pastoral care needs to be Christocentric and ecclesiastically oriented, meaning that it needs to be oriented towards Christ and imbued with the love towards the Church, the Slovenian Church as it is”⁹ The youth pastoral care must not stay on the level of the socialization animation and humanistic debates but should in its every activity open the young person to Christ and the Church. A youth group should become a communion springing from the word of God and Eucharist.

⁶ See Episcopal Council about Youth, *Raziskava o veri mladih*, Maribor 1999.

⁷ Concluding document of the Slovenian Plenary Church Council Session, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁸ Guidelines are taken from the Concluding document of the Slovenian Plenary Church Council Session, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-134.

⁹ Addresses of the bishop Dr. F. Kramberger upon the opening of Bishopric council about youth, 25th April 1999 in Maribor.

b) logical and anthropological dimension

This represents the openness for challenges and signs of time as well as for all young, especially those most endangered and needy. The General regulations for catechesis instructs: „It needs to be emphasized that the contemporary youth evangelization frequently has a more missionary than strictly catechumenal dimension”¹⁰

c) th pastoral care as integral part of parish pastoral care

We are discussing a pastoral care that is an integral part of the parish pastoral care and which at the same instance directs into the life of a society so that it does not become its own purpose. The parish remains the primary place for the renewal of youth pastoral care thus we cannot expect fundamental turnovers in the field of youth pastoral care if the parish does not also renew parallel in the Council spirit.

d) Spiritual involvement and appropriate qualification of pastoral workers

Every priest entering the world of the young faces the crucial question how to transfer his personal faith onto those young, who are entrusted upon him, and to those young, whom he may encounter simply by chance¹¹ Thus priests should be already in the time of their studies appropriately trained for the evangelization of the young, leadership of groups, training of assistants, and personal accompaniment of young people.

e) Lay leaders and group animation assistants

This position is crucial when a certain communion sets its net of pastoral and educational offers for young people. Thus people responsible for pastoral care should search for and raise leaders from among the young. After all, there will be just as much youth pastoral care as there are 'strong' and pedagogically qualitative leaders who are prepared to walk and search side by side with the young. Many young people are ready to assume this role since „pastoral experience and research show that young people are not drawn only by that community which knows how to listen to them and appreciate them but even more by that one which is able to face them with a certain responsibility”¹².

f) Foundation of various groups

Various groups, from prayer oriented to social-caritative, and also those laically organised where young people can discover themselves and their place in life, need to be established on parish, decan, Episcopal, and interepiscopal levels. These groups can comprise of only young people or they can be intergenerational. Hence the parish is already in the time of Sunday school and especially in the time of preparation for the Confirmation chal-

¹⁰ Interepiscopal Youth Board, *Osnutek temeljnih smernic za mladinsko pastoralo v Cerkvi na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana 1999, pp. 21-24.

¹¹ See K. Smodiš, *Študij je pester in interdisciplinaren*, Družina, no. 26, year 2006, 25th June 2006.

¹² Interepiscopal board for students, op. cit., p. 31.

lenged to offer the adolescent youth the possibility to participate in different forms of active involvement into the parish life.

g) Adequacy of facilities for the work with young people

In accordance with this goal, current parish facilities will need to be re-organized¹³ It is commendable that some decanies are building youth centres, which can incorporate in their programmes everything from sporting to cultural, educational, and religious activities.

IV. STUDENT PASTORAL CARE

The student pastoral care¹⁴ in Slovenia has always been perceived as a part of the youth pastoral care. After the University of Ljubljana was founded, student religious life was very lively up to the World War II¹⁵ Franciscans in Ljubljana began lectures for students already in the 1950s. 1960s brought the formulation of student groups in parishes and student spiritual events. In the middle 60s, the committee for students was founded with the Interepiscopal pastoral council and in 1971, the Slovenian bishops founded the Interepiscopal board for students, which started to publish their paper „Bilten” that has later developed into the magazine „Tretji dan”¹⁶ This was also the time of the efforts for the foundation of the second Slovenian university in Maribor. The activities of student pastoral care were: weekly meetings within student religious communions, and also meetings of specialized connecting purpose communions under the eye of „Interepiscopal Board for Students” They organized joined actions, joined educational and spiritual events, publication of papers, book collections of theological miscellanies, pilgrimages to Taizé, and international meetings with the Pope. In the 1990s, Catholic students entered the social scene and started actively participating in the university professional and political life.

New possibilities dictate serious consideration about the foundation of student parishes in all university centres. Student pastoral care will always be urged to seek new ways of functioning that acknowledge both, the inner ecclesiastical as well as the university and wider social space. Various programmes that afford students numerous forms of cooperation must account for the spiritual, intellectual, and communion development of a young person, who is shaped into a responsible personality for his or her occupation and life decisions. Different forms of independently organized student life, which are an essential part of pastoral care for the responsible life in a society, should also serve this purpose. Student pastoral care should become the integral part of extra-curriculum university activities and as such receive its

¹³ See Snoj, A. Slavko, *Katehetika, didaktična izhodišča*, Salve, Ljubljana 2003, p. 145.

¹⁴ Taken from the Concluding document of the Slovenian Plenary Church Council Session, op. cit., p. 134.

¹⁵ See Delovanj Moš, taken from: <http://revija.ognjisce.si/leto2000/nov2000/index.htm#Vrh> (24th February 2008).

¹⁶ V Dermota, *Sodobna katehetska problematika v Evropi*, in: CSS 3 (1969), pp. 200-203.

proper place within the university framework. The last couple of years have revealed a considerate progress in this area.

V. HUNGER FOR SPIRITUALITY AND SHIFT FROM THE CHURCH

The Catholic Church in Slovenia understands the importance of youth pastoral care. Still, we cannot close our eyes in belief that by our concern of some young people we have completed our duties. Proportionally, there are many youngsters and hence we have reached just a few. We must be aware of the fact that among those who remain „out” of our reach, there are also some who seek, who desire the „spiritual food” Humans are by nature religious beings, beings who are in the process of search during the whole life. Secularization, materialism, democracy, the fall of the borders have made possible the arrival of new forms of „beliefs” into Slovenia¹⁷. All these realizations must be an encouragement for all the pastoral workers. It needs to be a challenge for the search of new pastoral and catechetical paths.

There are instances when a young person, although spending a part of his or her life within the Church, comes into conflict with the Church. Namely, young people perceive the Church as exclusively educational institution. It brings up the questions about life, supplies of the young person with the system of values which was thus often „accepted” already in the time of childhood and also fulfilled. In addition, the Church also gives sacraments, which are distinctively initiative for a young person. Mostly the expectations of the Church are identical with those of their parents. Both educational institutions thus build their expectations on the child's upbringing. If we are mostly „satisfied” with the behaviour of children in the Church then it is logical that any deviation from this behaviour, however normal they may be for the adolescent, will cause some frustration. Consequently, the conflict with the Church belongs to the ordinary occurrences when working with the youth. In this period of life, young people start alienating themselves from parish life or wish to change everything. These are normal phenomena that should be counted on and be prepared for by the Church as an educational institution¹⁸

Thus we can at this point speak of two things: one is a „proof” that humans are religious beings who search for „food” for their soul. If it cannot be found in the Catholic Church, it will be sought for elsewhere. The other thing is the fact that young adolescent people become critical; critical towards society and even more towards the Church, grow unsatisfied with it and so develop the inner conflict between themselves and the Church. All this presents a unique challenge to the youth pastoral care. This is a springboard on which well organized and well planned work must find wings.

¹⁷ See Episcopal Council for the Youth, *Raziskava o veri mladih*, Maribor 1999, pp. 6-7.

¹⁸ See S. Gerjolj, *Vprašanje identitete in vrednostne vzgoje v postkomunistični družbi*, in: *Vzgoja, vrednote, cilji (državlanski forum)*, Družina, Ljubljana 1996, p. 38.

CONCLUSION

Working with young people has improved immensely in the period from World War II up until today. On the one hand we have the socio-political changes that have obstructed the work of the Church from the post-war years until 1990, but despite these difficult times the Church managed to attract the young. Within its possibilities the Church has always worked and created conditions for the formation of pastoral care and catechesis among youth. For the period in question we can say that the response of young people was satisfactory. Youth usually felt free in Church, the various groups have been experienced as a place where they could exchange their opinions, views, build their world perspective regardless the circumstances that they lived in (communism, persecution, eavesdropping, threats etc.)¹⁹ We could say that the Church helped them build their scale of values, and shape a realistic view over the society and the world.

The socio-political changes in 1990-1991 had introduced new ideas and given more freedom to the Church. Still, many religious people (including the young) feel a kind of a hidden fear or a feeling of being second grade. It will take quite some time for the religious person to become a more confident and have a good self image. The new religious plurality is the great concern of the Church, who is in the search how to answer the challenges of time. One very strong answer from the Catholic Church was the Slovenian Plenary Church Council Session in 2000, which reviewed the state of the Church at the time and developed guidelines for future work. The Church realizes its responsibility and searches for the way towards young people in this respect. It is clear that a young person of today is the bearer of Christianity of tomorrow.

PASTORALNA TROSKA O LUDZI MŁODYCH W SŁOWENII PO 1999 ROKU

Streszczenie

Autor artykułu prezentuje zmieniającą się religijność młodych ludzi na terenie Słowenii oraz działałania pastoralne Kościoła jako wyraz troski o ich duchowy wzrost. Odwołuje się do podstawowych wskazań Synodu Plenarnego Kościoła katolickiego w Słowenii w 2000 roku, takich jak: chrystocentryzm, eklezjologia, wymiar dialogiczny i antropologiczny, zaangażowanie ludzi świeckich jako liderów i animatorów grup. Realna troska pastoralna Kościoła o ludzi młodych wymaga dostrzeżenia zarówno możliwości, jak i zagrożeń, które niesie ze sobą współczesny kontekst

¹⁹ See P. Kvaternik, Zbornik: „*Mladina – pot Cerkve*”, ki je izšel kot 2. zvezek v zbirki *Človek – pot Cerkve* Pastoralnega instituta Teološke fakultete v Ljubljani, Družina 2005. Taken from: <http://kvaternik.over.net/index.php?id=104> (24th February 2008).

społeczny, polityczny i kulturowy. Młodzi ludzie zagubieni w ponowoczesnej rzeczywistości potrzebują mądrych kierowników duchowych, którzy rozpoznając ich zainteresowania, potrzeby, kłopoty, pragnienia, poszukiwania i oczekiwania będą im towarzyszyć w „zaspokajaniu duchowego głodu”, odkrywaniu prawdy o samych sobie i Bogu. Przypomina, iż Kościół winien otoczyć swoją troską nie tylko młodych, którzy zgłaszają się do grup religijnych, ale zadbać również o tych, którzy zagubieni we współczesnej rzeczywistości nie wiedzą dokąd iść.