

858703

Tanner, Paul.  
The Church and youth  
AdW 9992

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

---

---

# THE CHURCH AND YOUTH

BY

REV. PAUL TANNER

Director, Youth Department, National Catholic Welfare Conference,  
Washington, D. C.

The second in a series of nine addresses on **THE CHURCH IN ACTION**, delivered in the Catholic Hour, broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company, in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men, on September 12, 1943.

---

---

**National Council of Catholic Men**  
**Washington, D. C.**

## THE CHURCH AND YOUTH

Friends: It is proper that early in this series of addresses on "The Church in Action" we should devote one broadcast to youth, for in her activities related to youth we see the Church in action among her favorite souls. Christ ordered His disciples to permit the children to be brought to Him, despite the press of other labors, "for of such is the kingdom of God" (*Mark* 10: 14). The Church exercises the same solicitude for youth and for the same reasons as did her Founder. She speaks to them authoritatively and infallibly of the great central problems of human existence; not merely as does great literature or poetry, or with the persuasive arts of human wisdom, but as the very mouthpiece of God, "thus saith the Lord,"—with the solemn definitiveness of a divinely mandated and guided Teacher, Ruler, and Sanctifier. Seldom in man's history has there been greater need of a generation of youth closely attentive and obedient to the sublime commandments and precepts of the Church.

Sometimes our commonest blessings escape attention merely because we have become used to them. We should thank God that here in the United States the Church has been given perfect liberty to organize and inspire and direct

groups of youth. Public authorities and private agencies have generously and consistently encouraged and aided the Church in this work. In other parts of the world we have seen instances where the State itself assumed the sole right to organize and direct youth groups. When Hitler seized power, for example, he wasted no time trying to convert people over 40; either they accepted him at once or he put them out of the way. No such savage alternative was proposed to the youth of Germany. Instead, every available technique was used to indoctrinate them, from earliest childhood upward, with the Nazi ideology. Thus in one short generation a substantial portion of the German nation was cut off from an inheritance of Christian culture and civilization that had taken centuries to accumulate. With a sneer of contempt young Brownshirts swept into the discard a tradition of kindness and decency and honor the value of which they did not even know how to appreciate. In Italy, except for the stubborn and effective opposition of Pope Pius XI, Mussolini all but succeeded in capturing and perverting the youth in the same manner. The indoctrination of the youth of Russia by the Communist Party is a matter of record. How

grateful we Americans ought to be, therefore, that the State has not usurped the rights of the Church and other agencies to foster and develop organizations of youth in our beloved land. How vigilantly we must guard against such a policy in the United States.

The comprehensiveness of the program of the Catholic Church for her youth in the United States is appreciated by very few people. Perhaps the chief reason for this unawareness is the fact that we are not accustomed to think of certain purely religious or educational activities of the Church on behalf of youth as youth work; but actually these religious and educational services constitute the very soul and core of the Church's youth program. As I see it, there are three main areas of Catholic youth work; you can envision them by thinking of three concentric circles. The inner circle is symbolized by the parish church, the middle circle by the church's school system—primary, secondary, and university—and the outer circle by the parish hall. The parish altar, the classroom, and the recreational center, each in its own way and in due proportion to its importance in life, plays a part in the youth program of the Church.

At the very core of her youth program stands the parish church—18,976 of them in this country.

The first contact of the Church with her youth is a divine act—the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism which communicates sanctifying grace, infuses the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and implants in the soul of the child the germs of all the supernatural virtues. As years bring the dawn of reason, habits of devout prayer are acquired, and near the parish altar the child learns through sermons and catechism lessons of the wondrous and almost incredible mercies of God in His dealings with men—in such truths as the creation of man, the fall of Adam, the promise of a Redeemer, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, our redemption by His death for us on Calvary's bloody hill, the establishment of His Church to continue His ministrations among men, and of the solemn realities of death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Near that same altar the child early enters the tribunal of God's mercy to experience the thrice-blessed comfort and consolation of the Sacrament of Penance; at the parish altar he receives for the first time his Eucharistic Lord—the beginning of a life-long habit of intimate communion with Jesus Christ depicted so unforgettably in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. During the placid days of childhood and through the critical and sometimes

confused years of adolescence the youth strengthens his hold on the spiritual and supernatural realities of the life of grace through the frequent and regular assistance at Mass and the reception of the sacraments. Finally the days of youth are climaxed by the exchange of the vows of Matrimony before that same altar. The world cannot be saved merely by good laws and social institutions and organizations—good men are needed first and above all. The business of the parish church is quite literally the making of saints, and only to the degree that this job is accomplished will the world be populated with men and women capable of making radical changes for the better. It approaches understatement, therefore, to say that the quiet, unpublicized, daily labor of the parish church is the heart and soul of the Church's youth program.

The second circle is the Church's school system. Here we need some straight thinking and courageous speech and action. A man's philosophy of education will be determined by his philosophy of life. If, therefore, a man believes in God, if he believes that the most important business in life is the sanctification and salvation of his immortal soul, if he views the ownership of material wealth solely as a stewardship for which an exact accounting must one day be

rendered to His Master, if he believes that his love and service of God must be manifested and proved by his love and service of his fellowmen, if he believes these and dozens of other truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then inexorably he will insist that the educational discipline in which his children are schooled shall include these most important truths as an integral and essential part of the curriculum. If religion is not just a part of life, isolated and unrelated to the whole life, but rather life at its fullest and best, then true education must be religious education. Because the public schools do not include the most important of all knowledge in their curricula—the truths of religion—Catholic parents, at great cost and under the unjust burden of a double taxation for the education of their children, have erected a school system that harmonizes fully and completely with the Christian philosophy of life. Training given therein reaches not only the head but the heart as well, it embraces all reality—spiritual as well as material—and gives its students an integral, complete picture of the whole of life. It is quite impossible to calculate the service to youth being given by the Church's school system which last year aggregated 2,035,182 pupils in grammar schools, 361,123 pupils in 2,105 high schools and 161,886



college students in 193 colleges.

Finally we come to the third circle—the recreation center or parish hall. This is the avowed field of leisure-time activities in which the free time of youth forms the pattern around which recreational programs for youth are built. The youth work of the Church in this third circle has grown by leaps and bounds of late years and will continue to grow. Not that the Church sees in good recreation the panacea for all social ills and private woes—she understands clearly that eternal salvation cannot be achieved by such inadequate means. But even as Christ used the familiar things of everyday life—the hen and her chicks, the flowers of the field, the wedding dinner—to elevate men's thoughts to God, so His Church regards a bat and ball, a song or a play, a game or a contest as not unworthy instruments to be spiritualized in the service of the Master.

With lavish generosity the Church has provided many different types of youth organizations for both boys and girls, young men and young women, covering a variety of interests in the religious, cultural, social, hobby, guidance, and athletic fields. I do not speak of the highly specialized care provided for that small minority of youth who because of the death,

incapacity, or desertion of their parents, or because of sickness or injury, or because of crime, stand in need of the expert care of professionally trained workers. Fortunately the majority of the Church's youth enjoy the blessing of a normal home and it is for these typically splendid young people that the parish youth program is designed. Recently the Church in the United States has seen fit to unify and coordinate these far-reaching and diversified youth groups through the instrumentality of parish, district, and diocesan youth councils. Together with the two national college student federations, these diocesan youth councils constitute the National Catholic Youth Council. The promotion and development of the National Catholic Youth Council is one of the chief responsibilities of the Youth Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

The chief reason for the formation of the National Catholic Youth Council was to strengthen and accentuate the growing consciousness on the part of youth groups of their opportunities to serve in the Christian apostolate. Webster defines apostolate as "the office or mission of an apostle" and clarifies the definition by adding that an apostle is "one sent forth—one of the twelve disciples of Christ, sent forth to preach the Gospel; more

widely, any of the others sent forth by Christ, or, as Paul and Barnabas, soon after his death." A secondary, and not irrelevant, meaning of the world apostle is "the first Christian missionary in any region; also, one who initiates any great moral reform." It is in this sublime tradition of the term, dating back to the first Bishops of the Church, that we speak of a Catholic youth apostolate. The sole reason for the existence of a Catholic youth movement is to penetrate and reform the natural temporal order of society with the spiritual supernatural vitality and truth of Christ in His Church.

In the words of Bishop Duffy of Buffalo, the Episcopal Chairman of the Youth Department of the N.C.W.C., "Men hope and believe that stability will come out of the present chaos, that settled conditions of life will eventually replace the present uncertainty. Youth

must necessarily play a vital part in the attainment of such stability and order. This makes the direction and guidance of youth the most important work that Church or State can engage in. Our vision of a better day cannot become a reality unless the youth of this hour, who will be the men and women of tomorrow, have developed a character and disposition that favors the arts of civilization and world peace. The Catholic Church, which has lived through the rise and fall of empires, the dissolution of governments, and the extinction of great civilizations, sees this problem with crystal clarity. It, alone of all, knows from the experience of centuries, the profound truth that peace and a settled social order will come only when the youth of a transitional era are properly trained mentally, physically, and by far above all else—spiritually" (*Bishop Duffy*).



---

# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Thirteenth Year—1943

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

Our Sunday Visitor Press  
Huntington, Indiana



454