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By

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# "THE WHOLE YOUTH"

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ORGANIZATIONS

THE two decades just past have witnessed many movements of absorbing interest and importance, but among them few can lay claim to greater universality and intensity than that which revolves about youth. With scarcely an exception the hands of all kinds of institutions and organizations, aye the long arms of the nations of the earth, are stretched out towards youth from the undeveloped stage of childhood to the maturity of manhood and womanhood.

The conquest of youth for new ideas and ideals, for new philosophies of life and government has occupied a major position in the programs of the individuals and groups who are today striving for the mastery of the earth. Notably in Europe, in Russia and in the Orient has resounded the clarion call to youth to rally to the support of the new ideologies, in which the nations are promised new life, new vigour, new power, new prosperity, new wealth. Balila, Giovannazza, Hitlerjugend, Russian Atheistic Youth columns, uniformed Nipponese School organizations are but the more familiar forms among the many national organizations which have with unprecedented enthusiasm accepted the discipline, usually hard and exacting, by which modern leaders are wont to train their followers and prepare them for action.

Nor have we in America remained untouched by this modern realization of the potentialities of youth. We have avoided to a large extent military regimentation and fanfare, but our youth has received unusual attention in the matter of school athletics, club formation and especially in the programs of the Civilian Conservation Camps and National Youth Administration. Nor has our youth escaped indoctrination, open and clandestine, with the newer ideologies, cleverly disseminated on the school and college campus, in workingmen's circles, in forums, through books and pamphlets of an endless variety, not forgetting popular fronts, pink and red.

## REASON OBVIOUS

The reason for this general concentration upon the conquest of youth is not difficult to ascertain; Youth has intelligence, imagination and romance, qualities which are easily captivated by and for new ideas. Youth has ambition, hope, strength and a spirit of adventure, is all too readily enticed and enlisted for new conquests. Youth actually holds within its grasp the possibilities of realizing in the future all that the genius of the present reasons, schemes and dreams about. There seems, indeed, no more certain avenue to success for any great campaign than to captivate the mind of youth, harness its enthusiasm and send it forth gallantly to study, to work, to battle or even to play.

No wonder then that, even from a natural or human point of view, the Church should be specifically conscious of her mission and responsibility for youth to an even greater degree than secular powers and agencies. Note here a great difference; the Church regards her attitude towards youth as a mission, as a responsibility, as a duty to do something for youth; other institutions, especially the modern totalitarian State, regard youth as a potentiality to be cultivated, developed, capitalized, exploited for the benefit of the agency or State. The Church cultivates youth for the benefit of youth; secular agencies, especially the totalitarian government, train youth for the benefit of the State.

The Church has in reality been the pioneer in youth education and training. To her the vision of Christ sitting by the wayside with little children crowding around Him has at all times been an inspiration. His "Let the little children come unto Me, and forbid them not", is a mandate that comprehends all the youth and every phase of service—spiritual, moral, intellectual, even physical. Hence, the early establishment by the Church of centers of instruction and human welfare and their progressive development. Hence, also the answer of the Church to the modern challenge for a youth movement and program, more specific, more comprehensive, more intense, more insistent than were those that seemed to meet the needs of the previous generations, that were less exposed to the dangers of modern times.

### "THE WHOLE YOUTH"

Somewhat misleading perhaps is the title of our discussion—"THE WHOLE YOUTH." It is precisely what the modern totalitarians claim, "The Whole Youth,"—Body, mind, heart, energy, work, service, life

itself are demanded of youth in this new form of servitude, whose master is the party, the State, the Duce, the Fuehrer or the Commissar. It is the most complete form of self-abnegation and passive absorption in the State mechanism. The old terms patria, patrie and fatherland have practically ceased to conjure up visions of chivalry and heroism. In this new form of servitude youth is trained to submerge individuality, surrender personal liberty and face every situation including death with icy Spartan stoicism. Even the older pagan slogan "pro ara et focus"—for the altar and the home-fireside—seems to have lost its power of inspiration, for in the new order the State exists for the protection of neither religion, nor the home, nor the individual, but all three exist or are tolerated only to serve the State.

Quite different is the christian concept of "The Whole Youth". It is our understanding that the subject of the youth movement or program is the whole of this wonderfully complex but divinely integrated creature called man. This heaven destined masterpiece of visible creation, this creature composed of a marvelously constructed body that enshrines yet does not encompass the soul that animates it. This creature endowed with a soul that challenges the study and speculation of the sages, gifted with a mind that can scan the universe, fathom the depths of the sea, measure the size and movements of the planets, attain to a knowledge about the unseen world and lose itself in contemplation before the nature and attributes of the very God. This creature with its potent will that has been known to attempt the conquest of the universe and almost succeed. This mysterious creature with its labyrinth of emotions, its network of passions, its paradoxical capacity for angelic virtue and for satanic malice.

Such is youth, in all its complexity, beautiful and grand in its natural setting, yet infinitely more entrancing in its supernatural exaltation effected through the miracle of divine grace. This creature which must face the world courageously and battle bravely for life, health, happiness and progress; this creature which must engage in relentless warfare against evil, physical evil, moral evil, social evil, spiritual evil; this creature that must elude the wiles of wicked men and escape snares of the very demons of hell; this creature that is born to rule the earth and to conquer heaven itself; "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away". Such is the being which we visualize when we speak of "The Whole Youth".

## AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM

In virtue of the inexorable law that the means must be commensurate with the end, nothing short of an integrated program can suffice to meet the challenge presented by modern youth. In other words to be worthy of the name a youth program must provide for the entire gamut of youth-needs, must balance and coordinate as perfectly as possible its services. Experience teaches that a completely integrated and well balanced youth program must comprise at least four points: it must be *religious*, it must be *cultural*, it must be *vocational*, it must be *recreational*. To each of these salient points or features we shall now devote brief attention.

### YOUTH AND RELIGION

The most flagrant defect in the purely secular youth program is the emphasis which it lays on the natural and its omission of, if not contempt for, the spiritual, the religious, the supernatural needs of human nature. Man's nature even at its worst grows weary and sickens, when it is overfed on what is merely material and physical. Sooner or later there will arise out of the innermost depths of the soul that cry to God of the great St. Augustine: "Our hearts are restless, until they rest in Thee!" To know, love and serve God is the threefold fundamental mission of man, to which every other end and purpose of life must be subordinated and towards which youth in particular must be guided and directed. To teach and train youth to confine its quest for happiness to the material, the physical, the ephemeral gratifications of this world is to do violence to its very nature. Not to make youth conscious of its spiritual capacities, its vocation to a supernatural life and its right to a heavenly heritage of everlasting blessedness is to deprive it of that which alone makes life, effort and sacrifice worthwhile.

Therefore, a youth program must devote paramount importance to the inculcation of religious truth and to the integration of life through religious practices. We want a Catholic youth that knows its faith, is familiar with Catholic moral principles, is proud of its Church and glories in its fidelity to religious duties. A Catholic youth which is intellectually and morally able to expound and defend Catholicity in the classroom and on the campus, in the drawingroom and at the club, in the office and in the workshop, on the lecture platform and in the pressroom. A Catholic youth that is brave and courageous in the open profession and practice of its

holy faith, confessing Christ before men, so as to merit Christ's recognition before the Father in heaven.

The youth program should, therefore, promote, with due consideration for the capacity and station in life of each respective individual and group, the study of religious truths, apologetics, Church history and the sacred liturgy. The formation of discussion clubs, evidence guilds and elocution classes among the young would be an excellent approach to the development of genuine leadership. Let us not raise soft pampered Catholics. Corporate religious exercises on special occasions are very commendable, but the encouragement of individual fidelity to spiritual duties and practices of piety would seem to produce far more substantial and more enduring results. Each boy and girl, each young man and young woman must learn to stand firmly on his or her own feet!

## YOUTH AND CULTURE

Not the last nor the least of the many glories of the Catholic Church are her remarkable success in preserving the fragments, that barbaric vandals left of ancient pagan culture, and her preeminent achievement in the development of a new culture which is in conformity with christian principles and ideals. Almost infinitely superior, far more diversified and incalculably richer is the culture which the Church has fostered through education and through the encouragement which she gave at all times to scholars, scientists and artists. To introduce Catholic youth to the knowledge, appreciation and joy of these achievements must be definitely recognized as part of our responsibility. To make youth conscious of a relative duty to cultivate the arts and sciences, to aid it in developing its God-given talents in this direction, to encourage it to pass on this cultural heritage to succeeding generations, more abundantly enriched in quality and quantity, is one of the highest functions of a youth program.

Hence, the importance of reading circles, library and museum appreciation, book reviews, historical lectures, musical concerts, dramatics and art exhibits. In our larger cities an occasional tour, under capable guidance, of churches that have special architectural, artistic and liturgical merit would prove an interesting and profitable variation. Nor should periodic excursions into God's beautiful nature, to some historic point, to some interesting city be overlooked as means to develop the finer side of human nature, not to speak of the educational value of such tours.

## VOCATIONAL INTERESTS

No institution lays quite as much stress on the question of vocation as does the Catholic Church. Entirely apart from the superior consideration given to the development and cultivation of the definitely spiritual callings to the sanctuary, the monastery and the convent, there prevails in the Church a fairly persistent conviction that God at least endows everyone with certain aptitudes and inclinations, which point to the particular state of life and occupation in which each may hope to find satisfaction and wellbeing. Young, inexperienced, and of immature judgment youth cannot always face unaided the problem of a wise discernment and prudent selection in a matter upon which depend its happiness and prosperity through life, and even its security in eternity.

Hence, a well thought out constructive youth plan should make provision for occasional practical talks and private consultations pointing to vocational guidance and a proper understanding of the responsibilities, advantages and prospects of certain vocations. Priests, physicians, experienced nurses, business executives, craftsmen, leaders in industry, banking and labor, government officials and experts and many others would be successfully approached to give talks, that would prove practical, interesting and useful to youth groups. Not every unit is equipped to extend its services into the educational field, although in larger centers vocational training might be feasible along cooperative lines. But youth can at least be directed to where specific training and apprenticeship are available.

Individual enterprise not infrequently finds the way for giving aid and guidance. For instance down in Louisiana a certain parish priest in a small community found that his boys were depressed over the hopelessness of gaining permanent employment. Learning of the year-round demand for spring chickens, he decided to experiment with his boys in the raising of broilers for the hotels and restaurants of the nearby city. With a comparatively small investment and the help of a few fellow citizens he has in a little over one year built up a thriving business that gives employment and the prospect of future success to a number of lads in his congregation.

Highly important in this vocational program is the proper guidance of those who contemplate marriage with its consequent implications of homemaking and



parenthood. Too often is advice along these lines given by persons, professional or private, who have decidedly materialistic, immoral and irreligious views on these issues. A judicious, well-informed, conscientious youth leader can render many a useful service to inexperienced and sometimes misguided girls and even boys, whose confidence he or she succeeds in winning.

## "A SOUND MIND IN A SOUND BODY"

It seems almost superfluous to talk about the recreational features of a youth program. The tendency in many places seems to have been to concentrate, even almost to the extent of monopoly, upon recreational activities. The spontaneous reaction of young people to the invitation and opportunity for play has resulted in almost obscuring every other feature, even where religion, education and culture receive fair consideration. There is a glamour about athletics, sports and frolics to which youth reacts as does a piece of steel to a magnet. We have seen youth movements grow and spread with remarkable rapidity, chiefly because of the opportunity they offered for play, boxing tournaments and athletic contests. The recreational program is practically the one form of youth activity that offers spectator attraction and revenue possibilities, which is another reason for its popularity. In a sense it is also the one feature that sometimes draws the boy who is most in need of the spiritual attention discussed above, the bait after which he snatches eagerly, little knowing the greater blessings that await his more intimate association with the larger movement.

Discretion in the selection of recreational activities is highly important. Games suitable for boys are not always commendable for girls; rules require adaptation to the sex and ages of participants in the more strenuous games; the physical strength and endurance of individuals must be carefully gauged before permitting them to join in certain exercises; in tournaments and inter-parochial or inter-district competitions care must be taken to avoid rivalries that may endanger charity and friendliness; social gatherings, dances and parties should be prudently supervised to avoid the very pitfalls against which they are intended to be safeguards; to sustain interest the program should be systematically varied, adjusted to the seasons of the year and well balanced in respect to outdoor and indoor exercises.

## ADULT INTEREST

Leadership and sponsorship are the avenues through which adults can find their way into the youth movement. Leadership may be professional or amateur, salaried or gratuitous, but under all circumstances it should be unselfish, capable and sincerely interested in the welfare of the group which it undertakes to serve. Leaders must understand and love youth, know how to win and keep their respect and confidence as well as be able to maintain order and discipline without seeming dictatorial or arbitrary. Success or failure depends not infrequently upon the character, the temperament, the discernment, the sense of fair play, the sense of humor of a leader. The same group will grow stale and disintegrate under one type of leader, while under another it will go through fire. Probably in his own particular field there has been no better example of the highest type of leadership than the late Knute Rockne, whose pat upon the back of a player coming off the field was as effective as a fiery harangue in the dressing room.

Adult sponsors play an important part in a youth setup. Their interest, counsel and aid can be of tremendous value. We are speaking now of that comparatively small group of interested men and women, who will meet from time to time to discuss intelligently and sympathetically the youth program of the parish, the district, the diocese; who will hold themselves in readiness to render every possible moral and material assistance to pastor, youth director and bishop; who will lend their influence and prestige to the promotion of every youth project that has proper approval. In this group it is of vital importance that there exist freedom and frankness of expression, a spirit of mutual confidence and unity of action. Such a group can give to a youth program a background that will inspire good will, give encouragement and insure success. Happily we are gradually witnessing the development within our Catholic circles of this type of sponsorship among our men as well as among our women.

We would like to touch upon another type of sponsorship, which we might designate organization or mass sponsorship. It is the support of large groups like the Holy Name Society, the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, the Diocesan Council of Men or of Women, or even a parish or district as a unit. Such groups can give great moral and material support to the youth movement and help to solve in a practical easy manner the financial responsibility. We might compare such group

sponsorship to the rooters and fans, to whose enthusiasm and generosity baseball, football, boxing bouts and tennis tournaments practically owe their existence and prosperity.

The basis for this mass sponsorship must be the sense of a common responsibility for the welfare of youth. The day is past, if in reality it ever truly existed, when our responsibility for the welfare of youth ended in the home or in the classroom, with the parent or the teacher. The problem and task has become too large and too complex for such simple handling. It has become a community problem, a neighborhood problem, a church problem, a diocesan problem, even a national problem as is evidenced in the establishment of the N.Y.A. For us as Catholics there seems no alternative but that we approach the youth problem in the same spirit of religious, moral and material responsibility with which for generations we have solved generously our educational problem. For this reason we stress the value of mass sponsorship with the conviction that when large interested groups, and especially the parish units, align themselves enthusiastically and generously behind their local youth programs, these will thrive and prosper to an unprecedented degree. The result will be a generation of Catholic Americans, who will be the glory of the Church, a bulwark to the nation and to their fellow citizens an edification and the leaven for a nobler christian life.

## TRIBUTE TO THE N.C.C.W.

This discussion on this particular occasion would be decidedly incomplete did we fail to pay a well-merited tribute to the National Council of Catholic Women, whose officers and members have for a number of years sponsored a youth program for girls and young women which has been a blessing in many dioceses and parishes. The outline which we have ventured to present is based largely upon what the Council has developed progressively through its youth committee and field secretary under the able direction and sacrificing soul of the National Chairman of Youth. This work owes its inception and inspiration chiefly to our late Holy Father of blessed memory, Pope Pius XI and to His Excellency our highly esteemed Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Cicogani. It has manifestly pleased our Saviour Jesus Christ, the divine friend of children and of youth, to bless this work in the past; let us hope and pray that it may flourish even more gloriously in the years to come.

