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REGNOCENTRIC YOUTH MINISTRY: A PASTORAL-PEDAGOGICAL URGENCY IN THE ASIAN MILIEU

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Abstract. A multi-faith and multi-cultural Asian milieu, where Christians are still a minority, requires that all young people, irrespective of their faith, be considered part of the Christian Youth Ministry. Such a perspective necessitates that Youth Ministry be solidly founded on Christian faith and yet has the ability to strive for the fullness of life of all youth, including those of other faiths, without infringing on their right to choose and evolve their own way of life, defining for themselves the vital principles that govern their life. Notwithstanding the ongoing theological reflection and progress made in Pastoral Theology in the centuries gone by, Christian Youth Ministry in the Asian milieu seems to still be holding on to an overly Ecclesiocentric perspective. Heeding the invitation of Pope Francis that "all the young, without exception, are in God's heart and thus in the Church's heart" (*Christus Vivit* n. 235), this paper invites the reader to refocus on the central theme of Jesus' public ministry: the proclamation of the Reign of God to all. The challenge outlined here is for the Church to transcend an institutional auto-referentiality and to embody Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God and thus nurture a Youth Ministry that is above all, missionary, pastoral, and a witness to the world - one that can be rightfully called, Regnocentric Youth Ministry.

Keywords: Asian youth milieu; Reign of God; Regnocentric Youth Ministry; Religious Pluralism

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Asian Youth[1] Milieu[2] Today

Asia hosts the largest cohort of young people (nearly 60%)[3] in the world, and their lives are shaped by rapid economic change, digital transformation, demographic shifts, and contested political terrains within Postmodern landscape not so much as theories, but more as the air they breathe. The lives of young people in Asia are at the intersection of longstanding continuity and rapid change. With a lopsided share of the global youth population and enormous internal diversity, Asian youth experience pressures and opportunities that vary by subregions, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, and urban–rural location. While some contexts demonstrate resilient upward mobility and digital opportunity, others reveal persistent unemployment, social exclusion, and political exclusion.

This section presents an analysis of the Asian youth milieu across four nested levels — personal, interpersonal, socio-religious and spiritual, and political, to illustrate patterns, pressures, and potentials. Drawing on recent empirical reports, peer-reviewed studies, and policy

[1] Our understanding of the term "youth" corresponds to the following three criteria simultaneously: 1) those in terms of age between 18 and 28; 2) those who are in the process of *acquiring certain independence* in terms of finance, habitat, intellectual ability and decision making and 3) those *not having made a definite life-choice* such as marriage, priestly or consecrated life or secular single life, etc.

[2] The word "milieu" holds for us a broad meaning of a human environ with its own structures and organizations of life and relationship. It is many things simultaneously – *a physical and geographical space*, wherein actions that have a bearing on every aspect of life takes place; *an environment* which consists of complex of situations within which the growth and development of the individuals, society and culture take place; a *natural human community* wherein the process of socialization takes place; it is a *texture of human relationships* that possesses certain unique characteristics and it is a *socially and politically organized community*. See, Jerome Vallabaraj and Sivy Koroth, *Empowering through Animation – A Pastoral-Pedagogical Paradigm of Youth Ministry* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2010), 45-46.

[3] https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/08/south-asia-youth-rewriting-its-growth-story/ (accessed: 28 August 2025).

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analyses,[4] the section synthesizes trends at these four levels. Each level interacts with others: for example, personal mental health can be influenced by labour-market precarity (social level) and parent-child expectations (interpersonal level), and political mobilization is both an expression of personal convictions and a response to social grievances.

1.1. Personal Level: Identity, Aspirations, Mental Health, and Challenges

With regard to Identity negotiation**,** Asian youth navigate multiple identity frames — familial and religious commitments, national/political identities, and globalized cultural identities shaped by media. The tension between filial, communal expectations and emergent individual autonomy is acute in many East and South Asian settings. Asian youth often struggle to negotiate between traditional values and modern influences. Confucian filial piety in East Asia, caste and communal identity in South Asia, and religious obligations in the Middle East and Southeast Asia play defining roles. At the same time, globalization and digital culture expose them to individualistic ideals and a consumeristic mindset that threatens to reshape self-understanding.

As regards the Education and Aspirations, education becomes a dominant axis since academic excellence is tied to family honour and

[4] Sources for this section are: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "World Youth Report," in https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/07/2020-World-Youth-Report-FULL-FINAL.pdf? (accessed: 06 June 2025); UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report, 2023," in ww.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/ www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2024_escap-report-population-development-17.pdf? (accessed: 06 June 2025); World Bank Group, "Jobs in East Asia and Pacific: Pathways to Prosperity, Brief April 18 2025" in https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eap/brief/jobs-in-east-asia-and-pacific-pathways-to-prosperity? (accessed: 06 June 2025); International Labour Organization, "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024," in https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2024? (accessed: 05 September 2025); UNESCO, "Youth 2023: Progress Report 2023," in https://www.unesco.org/ sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub/youth2030-progress-report-2023? pgs. 21-23 (accessed: 05 September 2025).

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economic mobility. However, there exists intense pressure that can lead to stress, mental health issues, and in some cases even to youth suicides.[5] Education becomes frequently the primary axis around which individual aspirations revolve; however, credential inflation and weak absorptive capacity in labour markets produce disenchantment among graduates. For example, several Asian countries report significant rates of educated youth unemployment.[6] A high incidence of the National Eligibility Entrance Test among young women. (e.g., intense college entrance competition in parts of East Asia) and unmitigated job uncertainty contribute to elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among youth.

Mental health concerns among youth have risen globally, and in Asia, they are attributable to academic pressure, economic uncertainty, and social media pressures and anxieties. Concerning psychological and spiritual struggles, rapid urbanization and digital saturation often leave youth facing loneliness, identity crises, and disorientation. Yet, spirituality – whether expressed through traditional religions, new spiritual movements, or mindfulness practices – remains a resource for resilience.

1.2. Interpersonal Level: Family, Friendship, and Digital Relations

The family remains a central axis of youth socialization in Asian societies, but intergenerational tensions are rising as young people adopt

[5] "A new study points out that although suicide rates for Asian men have increased 72% and for women 125% over the past 25 years:" See, NBC News, "More Asian young people are dying by suicide – and some subgroups are faring worse than others," https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-american-youth-increase-suicide-rcna167592 (accessed: 23 September 2025).

[6] "The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a massive disruption of labor markets, with disproportionate impacts on youth employment. Job loss among youth was projected not only to continue throughout 2020, but to also double the unemployment rates among youth:" See, Uniter Nations, "Factsheet: Youth employment trends in Asia and the Pacific Regions," in chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/ https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/YW3%20Factsheet-eng.pdf (accessed: 23 September 2025).

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different values, relationship expectations, and career priorities. Norms of arranged marriage, authority of elders, and expectations about filial duty continue to cause frictions in many contexts, especially in those instances when youth press for autonomy. However, intergenerational gaps are bound to be skyward as long as young people pursue modern lifestyles that challenge traditional gender roles, conservative marriage goals, or mediocre career choices.

Peers, as part of youth subcultures (like fandoms,[7] online and other creative communities), offer alternative sources of identity and support. Importantly, online friendships have become a vital resource for many youth who feel isolated in their immediate context. Friendship networks, both offline and online, have become crucial for Asian youth identity. Digital media expand these networks globally, yet the trend also augments cyberbullying, online radicalization, and addictive behaviours.

Concerning gender and interpersonal dynamics, the changing roles of women and the rising consciousness of LGBTQ+ highlight the subsisting tensions between cultural conservatism and emerging right claims. These interpersonal negotiations often test the social norms around marriage, sexuality, and gender dynamics.

Social media, now up throttled by the advanced digital mediation, proves a double-edged sword: while it enables political mobilization and identity formation, it can also aggravate mental-health problems and spread misinformation. The role of social media platforms in organizing protests (e.g., anti-CAA mobilizations of 2019 in India,[8] the Sri Lankan Youth Unrest of 2022, the Bangladesh Youth protests of

[7] It is a popular term that refers to a community of passionate fans who are dedicated to a specific team, person, TV show, movie, or other forms of entertainment.

[8] Anuksha Bhilwar, "Social Media and Protest: A Case Study on Anti CAA Protests in Asia," delivered during the 3rd International Conference on Advanced Research in Social Sciences, 11-14 March 2021, Oxford – United Kingdom, in https://www.dpublication.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/16-225.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed: 06 September 2025). CAA denotes Citizenship Amendment Act. See also Swetasree Ghosh Roy, "Social Media,

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2024, the Nepalese Gen Z protests of 2025[9]) and their part in shaping youth discourse are well evidenced.

1.3. Social Level: Economy and Culture

High youth unemployment in countries in Asia, like the Philippines, contrasts with overwork cultures in Japan and South Korea.[10] Added to this, many Asian youth migrate for jobs, leading to both economic opportunity and family separation. With regard to economy and employment, it can be observed that the structural barriers to decent jobs, such as the skill mismatches, the phenomenon of automation, and the shrinking share of 'quality' manufacturing jobs, are key socio-economic challenges for the youth across Asia. The World Bank and ILO[11] highlight persistent youth unemployment pockets even where national growth appears robust.

Cultural conception among youth demonstrates intense hybridization: local traditions blend with global cultural flows (K-pop, anime, online content), changing the so-called cultural tastes and identity repertoires. This hybridity supports innovation and promotes new forms of social belonging, giving rise to both empowerment and cultural fragmentation.

Youth and civil Unrest in Asia: A New Rebel's Dilemma," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics,* 10/2 (2025): 97-112.

[9] Eathen Teekah, "2025 Nepalese Gen Z Protests," in https://www.britannica.com/event/2025-Nepalese-Gen-Z-Protests (accessed: 23 September 2025).

[10] "Karoshi syndrome, also known as 'death by overwork,' has been a topic of study and concern in Japan since the 1980s. World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labour Organization (ILO) joint unveiled that in 2021, approximately 750.000 deaths due to Karoshi syndrome globally." See Haitham Ahmed Al-Madhagi, "Unveiling the Global Surge: Unravelling the Factors Fuelling the Spread of Karoshi Syndrome," in https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov /articles/PMC10746923/ (accessed: 23 September 2025).

[11] International Labour Organization, "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024," in https://www.ilo.org/sites/ default/files/2024-08/GET_2024_ExecSum_EN_0.pdf (accessed: 10 June 2025).

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1.4. Religious and Spiritual Milieu

Throughout the millennia, Asia has been characterized by its quest for the divine and for its lofty ethical principles. Many of the world's major religions have had their origins and have been nurtured in Asia. A remarkable spiritual sensitivity permeates the Asian worldview, its life, and its societies. Youth are continually called to interact with the youth of other faiths and traditions.

Religion continues to be a powerful force in Asia, offering identity, moral frameworks, and community. For youth, however, there is often a movement from institutional religion to personalized spirituality, creating new expressions of faith. Although religion remains a robust organizing force in many Asian societies, the younger generations increasingly display individualized patterns of faith or spiritual seeking, challenging the traditional congregational forms and erstwhile faith practices.[12]

The religious and spiritual milieu of Asian youth reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, faith and secularism, community and individuality. Their spirituality is less about rigid institutional affiliation and more about navigating personal meaning, social identity, and an improvised sense of belonging in an interconnected and increasingly globalized world.[13]

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[12] Pew Research data from 2024 shows that young adults in East Asia (Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) and Vietnam are less likely to be religiously affiliated than older generations, with younger people being significantly more likely to identify as religiously unaffiliated or to have switched from their childhood religion to no religion. See, Isabel Ong, "East Asians Leave Childhood Religion Most in World, but Remain Spiritual," in https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/06/pew-east-asia-christians-buddhists-korea-hong-kong-taiwan/#:~:text=Pew%20found%20that%20adults%20with,adviser%20to%20the%20Pew%20report (accessed: 23 September 2025).

[13] Jayeel Cornelio, "Youth and Religion in East and Southeast Asia," in https://www.academia.edu/12880080/ Youth_and_religion_in_East_and_Southeast_Asia (accessed 29 August 2025).

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1.5. Political Level: Participation, Protest, and Policy

Asian youth seem to be growing increasingly vocal in their political choices. From the Indonesian youth protest of 1996[14] to the most recent Gen Z protests in Nepal (already referred to), young people in Asia have emerged as drivers of change. Youth involvement ranges from formal mechanisms (youth councils, party youth wings) to informal/digital activism and street protests. Young people often rely on networks and digital tools to organize rapidly, which can circumvent traditional gatekeepers.

Authoritarian regimes, censorship policies, and age-based exclusions often prevent youth from fully exercising political agency and getting them on their feet against the systems. Although there is an observed policy trend among the governments in Asia to promote youth empowerment through education, entrepreneurship, and digital skills programs, still obvious gaps remain between policy rhetoric and actual youth inclusion/empowerment. Multilateral initiatives (like UN Youth2030) and national youth policies exist, but effective inclusion requires a much effective bridging, with opportunities for appropriate employment, mental-health services, and meaningful civic engagement.[15]

In conclusion, Asian youth constitute a dynamic, heterogeneous, and pivotal demographic. Hence, a holistic understanding of Asian Youth requires acknowledging these multilayered realities and responding through integrated approaches in ministry, policy-making, and pastoral accompaniment.

[14] Human Rights Watch, "Indonesia Election monitoring and human rights," in https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996 /Indonesi1.html (accessed: 23 September 2025).

[15] United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, "Anticipating Risks and Uncertainties for Asia and the Pacific – 2023 Updated Key Risks Report" in www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp-rbap-key_risks_report-2023.pdf? (accessed: 15 June 2025).

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Some Key Characteristics of Asian Youth Today

Keeping in mind the milieu of Asian youth across the five key levels (personal, interpersonal, social, religious/spiritual, and political) and taking into account cultural, technological, and religious dimensions, recognizing that Asia is diverse and experiences vary across regions, we present some key characteristics of Asian youth today.

- *Family-Oriented but Individualistic*: Loyalty to family remains a strong value across Asian societies; youth often support and live with extended families. However, individualistic aspirations (career choices, lifestyle, marriage decisions) keep growing, most times causing generational conflicts.

- *Educationally Driven Yet Pressured*: Education is highly valued across Asia as a pathway to success, social mobility, and a factor of family honour. Youth face intense competition, exam pressures, and high expectations from family and society. While many excel academically, this pressure often contributes to stress, anxiety, and mental health concerns.

- *Economically Ambitious but Unequal*: Many youth aspire for financial stability, career success, and entrepreneurship, influenced by rapid economic growth in Asia. At the same time, economic inequality, unemployment, and precarious labour conditions affect a significant portion of youth, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

- *Digital Natives and Tech-dependence*: Most Asian youth are deeply immersed in the digital world, heavily reliant on smartphones, social media, and online platforms. They are influenced by global trends (for instance, K-pop, anime, esports, influencers, etc.) but also shape regional ones (Facebook or Instagram communities and others). Digital connectivity fosters creativity, networking, and entrepreneurial ventures, but at the same time, exposes them to cyberbullying, digital addiction, and misinformation.

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- ❖ *Socio-Political Awareness and Control Mechanisms*: Young people in Asia are increasingly vocal about issues such as climate change, gender equality, democracy, human rights, and corruption. They use social media as a tool for activism and collective mobilization. However, in numerous contexts, there is a felt prevalence of restrictions on free speech, political activism, and rights-based participation.

- ❖ *Global-Minded yet Rooted in the Local Traditions*: Exposure to global culture through technology, travel, and media creates a cosmopolitan outlook in the youth. However, many still retain strong connections to the local and traditional family values, community ties, and cultural heritage. They personify what is defined as "Glocal" in their very worldview.

- ❖ *Resilient and Adaptive*: Asian youth show resilience in the face of social, political, and environmental challenges. They adapt quickly to change, blending tradition with modernity, and local values with global trends. Their flexibility makes them agents of cultural innovations and social transformation.

- ❖ *Religious and Spiritual Search*: Religion still continues to play a strong role in the identity of many Asian youth, though secular world vision and religious pluralism are also on the rise. Some youth maintain traditional religious practices, while others explore new forms of spirituality, interfaith dialogue, or even religious indifference as a means to greater humanity. The youth often struggle to reconcile faith and religiosity with modern scientific, technological, and socio-economic realities.

These youth characteristics demand that the Catholic Church and Christian communities establish a unifying and underlying foundation that can facilitate a ministry that pertains to all, recognizing that Catholic youth themselves are a minority in most of the Asian countries. This outlook demands greater strength and tougher commitment to mission, making the Christian or Catholic youth realise their identity of being the "leaven in the dough" (Mt 13: 33-35). Let us begin with understanding the original identity and experience of the Christian call.

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A Digression from Regnocentric to Ecclesiocentric Ministry[16]

It can be gathered from the pages of the New Testament, that the first-generation followers of Jesus had a very strong sense of the mission, i.e., a sense of being called or chosen and being sent to make known the joy of belonging to the Reign, to serve and to transform the world with compassion and love following a renewed and radical command that Jesus gave: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn 13: 34). The central reality was how this "as I have loved you" was concretised – namely, in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus who continued to live in the faith community and through the community, invited everyone to enter into the experience of the Reign of God.[17]

With the conversion of the Roman emperor in CE 313, when Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the mission tended to lose much of its emphasis; unity became the key concern, given the size of the community. A strong sense of commitment to commonality was stressed. Standard structures helped to diminish discord, strife, and dissension. By law, the Christian community was associated with the empire. This development resulted in the setting aside of the emphasis on mission and the rise of the Christendom culture.[18]

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[16] Several parts of this paper are adapted from Jerome Vallabaraj – Sivy Korath, *Empowering Through Animation – A Pastoral-Pedagogical Paradigm of Youth Ministry* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2010), 63-79.

[17] See John Gnanapiragasam and Felix Wilfred (Eds.), *Being Church in Asia,* Manila, Claretian Publications, 1994, 13.

[18] For more details see James A. Coriden and William W. Bassett, *The Once and Future Church: A Communion of Freedom* (New York, Alba House, 1971); Loren B. Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991); Humphrey D. F. Kitto, "Shifting Paradigms in Youth Ministry," in Pete Ward (Ed.), *The Church and Youth Ministry, Oxford, Lynx Communications,* 1995, 21-33.

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The mission culture brought about the Regnocentric ministry and theology, while Christendom tended to focus on the Ecclesiocentric ministry and theology.

In Ecclesiocentric theology, the four fundamental aspects of the theology of mission were placed in the following order of importance: Church, Mission, Proclamation, and Reign of God.[19] In other words, the mission was defined by the Church.[20] But the documents of Vatican II, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*EN*), as well as the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (*RM*), all indicate a clear reconfiguration of the relationships among these four fundamental elements. All these documents place the theme of the Reign of God immediately after speaking of Jesus as the Saviour and Redeemer. *Redemptoris Missio* (in No. 13) affirms that "the proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom are the purposes of His (Jesus') mission." It is the mission that defines the Church. The Church, as John Paul II puts it, is "effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom" (*RM* n. 20). Mission involves bearing witness to the Reign of God and its values. True, the Church is not merely the instrument, but also the symbol, the realization of the Reign of God. Proclamation becomes a fundamental and primary element by which the Church seeks to bring about the Reign of God. Though proclamation is commonly understood as the verbal announcement of the Good News, written and/or oral, an attentive reading of the document *Ecclesia in Asia* (*EAs*) shows no exclusive emphasis on the use of words or doctrinal formulas to communicate this Good News. On the contrary, it indicates that proclamation can be carried out through a variety of approaches. These approaches can range from stories, parables, symbols, personal contacts, forms of asceticism, i.e.,

[19] Peter C. Phan, "Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church: What for, to Who, by Whom, with Whom, and How," Unpublished paper, delivered at the Conference and Annual Meeting of the United States Catholic Mission Association, 2001, Memphis, Tennessee, in https://paperzz.com/doc/8105082/proclamation-of-the-reign-of-god-as-mission-of-the (accessed: 09 September 2025).

[20] Peter C. Phan, "Proclamation of the Reign of God."

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detachment, renunciation, simplicity. And, above all, silent witness and holiness of Christian life still remain an excellent way of proclaiming Jesus and His message.[21] Already in 1985, the Bishops' Institute for Inter-religious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in its Final Statement clearly indicated this same perception: "That the Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom […]. That the Church is an instrument for the actualization of the Kingdom."[22]

If the mission of the Church is to proclaim and bring about the Reign of God, then every ministry, including Youth Ministry, is for the Reign of God. If the mission of the Church is to the world, then the mission of Youth Ministry also needs to move towards the world of the youth. This move is based on the conviction that the Holy Spirit is the "principal agent of mission" and that the Spirit directs the mission of the Church to be present and to be active in every time and place. "The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals, but also society and history, peoples and cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history" (*RM* n. 28).

Exigency to Move Towards Regnocentric Paradigm

A rapid overview of the documents of the Church and that of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) confirms this

[21] John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia,* Apostolic Exhorations, https://www.vatican.va/content/ john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html (accessed: 12 January 2019), 20-23 and 42.

[22] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference – Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, "Final Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the theology of dialogue," Pattaya, Thailand, 17-22 November 1985 in Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arevalo (Eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991,* Vol. 1 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pg. 252.

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Regnocentric paradigm[23] as the foundation of being Church in the world and especially Church in Asia.[24]

The mission of Jesus Christ here on earth is fundamentally grounded in the everlasting love of the Trinity. The Incarnational theology enables one to comprehend the power and presence of Jesus as a permanent part of human life. The ultimate purpose of Jesus' earthly mission is to proclaim and manifest God's Reign here on earth. Motivated by God's will to save everyone through his definite intervention and thus lead all persons to partake in the fullness of communion between him and the Father in their Spirit of love, Jesus inaugurated this Reign of God. He manifested this Reign of God through a love that liberates, heals, and renews. A process of liberation highlights the situation of negative or oppressive factors, of unfreedom, of various limitations and restraints. While healing denotes a restoration to the original state or self, renewal invites the individual to deal with the scars caused by the hurts, the damage left behind by the hurt. Jesus, by liberating, healing, and renewing, invites individuals to enter into personal relationships. Entering into a personal relationship requires the setting aside of fear and making a choice to be on the part of Jesus. Setting aside fear on its part requires putting away four fundamental manifestations of fear: fear of rejection, fear of pain, fear of failure, and fear of death. One can discern the manner in which Jesus confronted these four expressions of fear throughout

[23] Avery Dulles affirms that there is an integral connection between an image and model. When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one's theoretical understanding of a reality, it becomes what is today called a 'model'. A model rises to the status of a paradigm when it has proved successful in solving a great variety of problems and is expected to be an appropriate tool for unravelling anomalies as yet unsolved. See Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Garden City, 1978), 27-33.

[24] Some parts of this section have been published in Jerome Vallabaraj, *Empowering the Young Towards Fullness of Life*, (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2003), 59-60.

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his public ministry.[25] But in Jesus' teaching and proclamation, one also notes that "liberation is not merely *from* something, but also *for* something else."[26] It is also more than wholeness, which "is a static image. It indicates a structure of balance between various elements."[27] But Jesus also proclaimed that the Reign of God through a love that liberates, heals, renews, and leads one to grow towards fullness.

Notwithstanding some negative and ambiguous implications, at times attached to the term *Reign of God*, many prefer to use this term in the absence of a more appropriate expression to indicate the rich, comprehensive, and multiple meanings that this traditional symbol carries. In the context of the different schools of thought and lengthy discussions that centre on the theme Reign of God, a certain emerging consensus can be discerned.

The Reign of God is a symbol of the active presence and sovereignty of God

> over all creation and history, heaven and earth, now and always […]. (It) evokes both God's intentions for and God's activity in history; it symbolises God's intentions of peace and justice, love and freedom, wholeness and fullness of life for all, and for the well-being of creation, and it symbolises that God is active in partnership with human agency to effect these universal intentions […]. The reign of God is first and always a gift that comes by the grace and power of God […]. God has called humankind into a covenant that requires us to live toward the realization of God's reign. What God wills *to* us - fullness of life for all - is God's will *for* us, that is, the rule by which we are responsible to live. The reign of God is both gift and responsibility, promise and command.[28]

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[25] Don Kimball, *Power and Presence. A Theology of Relationships* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 64-103.

[26] Michael Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness. Searching for an Integral Spirituality, Lectures in Memory of Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass* (1932-1990), Bangalore, NBCLC, 1994, 2.

[27] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness*, 2.

[28] Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith. A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education & Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 16. All other

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This Reign of God in Christian faith is envisaged in terms of "already begun," in that it has been definitively initiated in Jesus the Christ, and as "coming now." Every time people fulfil God's will, this Reign becomes a reality; while it is 'not yet' in that its complete fulfilment will be radically new at the end of time. Through the saving and life-giving event of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, God empowers individuals to choose to live free *from* the power of sin in all its forms, *for* the values of God's Reign and *towards fullness of life*.

In his mission on earth, Jesus made it clear that all people are welcome to live and participate in God's Reign by practising the radical law of love – loving God by loving one's neighbour as one loves oneself. Jesus also made it clear to His disciples that such a call for the radical law of love manifests a covenantal partnership with God in Jesus, with one another, and the disciples' willingness to follow Jesus' way of life and to live in right relationship with God, others, selves, and all creation.

Thus, the Reign of God in Jesus becomes a symbol of both "hope and command, promise and responsibility."

- ❖ At the personal level, the Reign of God in Jesus is realised in authentic love and care for the self which "is marked by inner peace, realization of one's dignity and worth, recognition and development of one's gifts, by a sense of hope and joy in life, a satisfying of what one needs, physically, socially, and aesthetically" for the fullness of life.

- ❖ At the interpersonal level, such a Reign of God in Jesus demands of individuals "a lifelong conversion of deepening relationship with God and of turning toward one's neighbour with all that love requires (justice, peace, respect, etc.)."

- ❖ In the social and political realm, the Reign of God in Jesus means that Christians and Christian faith communities "should publicly reflect its realization in their lives and ecclesial structures and participate as a 'public church' in society that helps effect its eminently social values of life for all." God's Reign in Jesus

quotes in this section are taken from page 17 of the same source.

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is an invitation for a true partnership which involves active participation in realising this promise within and through human history.

The personal, interpersonal, and socio-political ramifications of the Reign of God become the paradigm towards the transformation of the Asian youth realities presented earlier.

Refocusing on a Regnocentric Vision

The central theme of Jesus' public ministry was the proclamation of the Reign of God. This reign, marked by love, mercy, justice, and reconciliation, provides the foundation for Christian discipleship and mission. The Synoptic Gospels consistently attest that Jesus announced and embodied this reign through his teaching, parables, miracles, and table fellowship. Yet, in the history of Christian thought, the Reign was often conflated with the institutional Church, leading to an Ecclesiocentric emphasis that sometimes obscured the broader eschatological and transformative vision of God's reign.

The 20th century, particularly through the *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council, witnessed a renewed theological focus on the 'Reign of God'. *Lumen Gentium (LG)* in no. 48 envisages the Church as the "Universal Sacrament of salvation." As 'Sacrament of the Reign,' the Church is not identified with the Reign of God, but "constitutes here on earth the seed and the beginning of the Reign of God" (See also RM 18-20). It is "in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (LG 1). It is a 'sign,' therefore an announcement and germinal presence of the grandiose project of God for humanity that we call 'God's Reign.'"[29] The Church constitutes a providential, historical mediation, not by closing within itself its borders for the realization of this project, but as "messianic people" who give witness and proclaim to the world the advent and the promise of the Reign and at the same time bringing forth the first fruits of such a Reign. Karl Rahner states that the Church "is

[29] "The Church is its sign. In the Church we find the visible manifestation of the project that God is silently carrying out throughout the world." Puebla 227.

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the sacrament of salvation for a world, which in effect means that in its greater part it is saved by the grace of God beyond the institutional aspect of the church."[30]

Thus, the first and fundamental indication is that the ecclesial praxis does not have as its goal the Church itself or its self-preservation or affirmation in the world, but envisages itself in terms of a plan that transcends and determines its meaning: the spreading and augmenting of the *Reign of God and its values* in history. It is here that the Christian community finds the ultimate meaning of its own efforts, that is, to ensure the advance of the values of the Reign: communion with God and with humans, fraternity, liberty, peace, happiness, and life.

'*In the world and for the world*': Such a perspective presupposes a renewed vision of the *relationship between the Church and the world*. The world (the history of humanity) ought not to be thought of either in opposition to or as inimical to the plan of God's Reign, nor simply as the place to bring about salvation proclaimed, but as the *true place for the realization of the Reign* in the measure in which it affirms the inspirations of the Spirit. The Church, as part of the world and at its service, declares itself as "the servant of humanity"[31] and "goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family" (GS 40).

Gaudium et Spes situates the Church's mission within the joys and hopes of humanity, aligning it with Reign and affirms in no. 45 thus: "While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass." The Council documents describe the Church not as an end in itself but as

[30] Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 77.

[31] Paul VI, *Concluding Discourse of the Second Vatican Council*, 7 December 1965, in http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6closin.htm (accessed: 15 October 2018).

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a sacrament and servant of the Reign. This shift gave rise to a Regnocentric orientation in pastoral theology, which continues to inform evangelization, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and socio-political engagement in the contemporary world. This shift was further ratified by Pope Francis, calling for a Church that goes forth and affirms that "The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace, and dignity.[32]

We are living in the era of New Evangelisation today. We are aware that ever since John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio,* the term "new evangelization" has become part of Catholic vocabulary. It encapsulates at least three levels of significance – that the Gospel be shared with those baptized Catholics whose lives are disconnected from the Church; that our efforts of evangelisation over all be characterised by a new ardour of reaching out, new methods of building relationships and new expressions of communicating the Gospel; thirdly, that it becomes a paradigm for all pastoral activity, one that links *mission* and *communion* in all arenas of evangelisation.[33] Hence, the call to the new evangelization is a call for the baptized members of the Church to deepen their faith and reach out to other Christians and the entire humanity, in deep need of a new encounter with Christ. In modern times, this means re-proposing the Gospel to people in countries and cultures heavily influenced by secularization. It comes forth strongly as a Regnocentric vision of the Christian mission today.

[32] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelium Gaudium on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, 180-181, Apostolic Exhortations, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed: 04 September 2025).

[33] John McGrath, "Befriending Context and Tradition: Evangelization and Catholic Schools," in *The Australasian Catholic Record* 89 (2012) 3: 283–298, in p. 285.

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5.1. Regnocentric Vision Leads towards Fullness of Life for All

In this complex economic, political, socio-cultural, multi-faith context, it is important to acknowledge the inner search that lies within each person. The present condition is perceived as one of poverty, oppression, or non-freedom. Some search for health, others search for wealth, and still others search for peace or happiness. This search normally begins with the desire to liberate oneself from all that enslaves the person, be it in the economic, social, political, moral, or spiritual sphere. But liberation or "integral liberation" here tends to emphasize only one aspect, and normally denotes a negative perspective, a "liberating from."

Others search for "wholeness," which refers to the integration and completion of what is divided or multiple or partial.[34] Although the term is more positive, yet it tends to become a

> static image, a structure of balance among various elements. A visual image of such wholeness is the *mandala*. A *mandala* is a balanced geometric pattern constructed with circles, squares, and triangles […] that helps in integrating and unifying the mind and the attention, which are normally drawn or pulled in different directions. Though it is inclusive, it has no dynamism […]. It does not necessarily indicate life.[35]

It only underlines the multiplicity and difference that promote integration in wholeness.

The more attractive term "fullness," even though it too can be contrasted to emptiness or limitation, evokes images that are more attractive and assume greater significance and meaning in a multi-faith and multi-cultural context. To a considerable section of Asian tradition, Fullness, the Ultimate Reality, is the symbol of the ultimate mystery. Fullness manifests life and creativity. By sharing its abundance in creation, the Ultimate Reality does not lose anything either by giving or by creating.

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[34] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness*, 2.

[35] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness*, 2

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> The multiplicity and the variety of creation are seen not as division and fragmentation, but richness rooted in a unity that is fullness […]. It is the mystery of God in all things and all things in God. It is fullness that is inclusive and transcendent. It is the vision of the *advaita* – of non-duality – that is one and many or, from another point of view, neither one nor many.[36]

Further, Fullness denotes not merely life but the abundance of it, in its newness, continuity, and creativity. It becomes a symbol of unity and sharing.

A similar image of life and fullness is also evoked in the Christian Scriptures and Tradition. In fact, the entire Christian revelation is the story of God's design to share the fullness of God's essence with human beings and an invitation to human beings to participate in this fullness of life. The first three chapters of Genesis speak of God's decision to create humankind in God's own image and likeness. By means of diverse literary forms, the Scripture reveals the ultimate vocation of human beings, namely, that God, the creator and saviour, wants humankind to participate in God's fullness of life and for this reason, offers and invites human beings to a special relationship as sons/daughters and with each other in brotherhood and sisterhood. The Old Testament narrates the story of a people who, despite their long story of repeated betrayal and unfaithfulness, sought liberation and fullness of life symbolized in a human way in their quest for a land of their own. The prophets kept constantly challenging and calling them back to true life.

At the appointed time, God sent God's only son, Jesus, the Christ. In Jesus of Nazareth, "we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). He gave a new commandment, the commandment of love: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). He also established a new community that is open and inclusive – a community of freedom, fellowship and justice to proclaim the good news of the Reign of God. All His teachings, cures, and miracles are signs and symbols of His desire to offer fullness of life. Finally, Jesus offered Himself in sacrifice

[36] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness* 3.

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to reconcile all things in unity. By His resurrection, He overcame death and sin and offered humankind once more the possibility of sharing in the fullness of life.

5.2. Purpose of Regnocentric Ministry

Right from the first moment of his public appearance, Jesus intended to teach people how to live for the Reign of God with love and compassion, peace and justice, holiness and freedom. His ultimate goal was that all might come to fullness of life – here and hereafter in eternity.[37] "I came that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10).

The Reign of God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament is "a profoundly social symbol or, perhaps, more accurately, a spiritual symbol that demands social engagement and responsibilities,"[38] Hence, the Church is a sacrament of the Reign of God in the world. This demands that the Church be "an effective sign that causes to happen what it signifies."[39] The great commandment of love, the ultimate law of God's reign, demands love of God and self, which cannot come to fruition apart from love of neighbour; and love of neighbour is a social endeavour.

By proclaiming the Reign of God and instituting a radical law of love, Jesus personified a *fullness-of-life-for-all*[40] value system or ethics. This ideal of *fullness-of-life-for-all* unites love of God, that of the neighbour, and of the self, and is lived with all one's mind, heart, and strength, with no restrictions or barriers as to who one's neighbour is.

Within Jesus' total commitment to the Reign of God, the New Testament highlights his special concern for the poor, oppressed, and

[37] Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life. A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Texas: Harper & Row Publishers, 1998), 38.

[38] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 178.

[39] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 179.

[40] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 305.

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marginalised. In this manner, Jesus becomes a countersign for the evil and oppression in his social context. In the beatitudes, he declared that the Reign of God belongs to the poor and to those who work for justice and peace (cf. Mt 5:1-9).

> Such justice demands unqualified commitment to the dignity and sacredness of every person; working for the common good; honesty in one's dealings with neighbours and groups; actively helping to create social structures that distribute fairly society's resources and promote the rights and responsibilities of all; bringing to every level and arena of life a deep commitment to the full liberation of humankind and the integrity of God's creation, with special favour for those most in need.[41]

Once again, Jesus declared that "people will come from east and west, from north and south and will eat in the kingdom of God" (Lk 13:29). He points out that the Reign of God includes not only the universality of God's love, but also the universality of God's will for the salvation of all people.[42]

> Being Catholic entails an abiding love for all people with commitment to their welfare, rights, and justice. It welcomes diversity, is open to learn from other traditions, and lies in solidarity with all humankind as brother and sister […] free of discrimination and sectarian sentiment and welcomes 'the stranger' with outreach, especially the most in need.[43]

This Reign of God can be spoken of as "already begun," as "coming now," and as "not yet" fulfilled. In Jesus Christ, this Reign of God has already been definitively initiated; it is "coming now" as individuals and groups seek to do God's will, and it is "not yet" in that its fulfilment will be radically new at the end of time. The Reign of God is both transcendent and immanent.

> The Reign of God transcends the Church already now insofar as God is sharing God's life and love even now outside the Church […]. As immanent it manifests itself in the efforts of people to build up a

[41] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 378.

[42] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 395-422.

[43] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 413.

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> community of love, freedom, and fellowship in history […]. While in one sense the fullness is in the future when the whole universe will be gathered together, and God will be all in all, in another sense the fullness is already now, but at a trans-historical level.[44]

Thus, we see that the Reign of God is for all categories of persons, great and small, rich and poor, healthy and sick, near and far, Jews and others, men and women, righteous and sinners, rulers and subjects, individuals and groups. He [Jesus] is available to all. He is interested in the needs of every person, body, and soul. Accordingly, it becomes evident that the purpose of Jesus proclaiming the Reign of God was that all may have life and have it to the full, i.e., *fullness-of- life-for-all*.

Fullness-of-life-for-all has its foundations in the fullness of God and has to be achieved or grown into since fullness in life is not given. Life with its limitations, divisions, and fragmentations forced on individuals and society by the abuse of freedom at all levels demands a process of integration if growth towards *fullness-of-life-for-all* is to be promoted. Such integration needs to take place at two levels: at the personal level it is an integration, that is, a net-work of relationships of self with creation, the body, the emotions, the mind, the spirit, the other and God; at the community level, it is an integration through dialogue and building of community, human and Christian which is at the service of the human community.[45] The Christian community's Regnocentric ministry towards fullness of life for all is clearly manifested in the four mediations or signs: service (*diakonia*), communion (*koinonia*), witness (*martyria*), and celebration (*leitourgia*).[46]

Right from their first meeting in Manila and at various other General Plenary Assemblies, the concern of FABC has always been centred on life and the desire to offer a better and fuller life. Recalling

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[44] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness*, 81-82.

[45] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness*, 62-89.

[46] Emilio Alberich and Jerome Vallabaraj, *Communicating a faith that transforms, A Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004), 34-42.

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briefly the extraordinary story of the FABC, the Final Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly states:

> It is the story of a listener attentive to the perils of life, to the visions of life, to the celebratory songs of life, and who wants to share the singular wealth one has, which is the memory of the person named Jesus, who is for us the Way, the Truth, and the Life.[47]

Asians are not only searching for a better economic, social, and political life, but, for the greater majority, life itself.

This search for life is permeated with a holistic vision that is the "fruit of integral development, the authentic development of the whole person and of every person."[48] The great commandment of love is realised through a life that seeks to recreate communion with God and the neighbours. Serving life by recreating communion demands solidarity with suffering humanity, demands a resolve to liberate our societies from whatever oppresses and degrades human life and creation. Serving life by recreating communion also becomes a symbol of hope and enables everyone to realise that "life still pulsates and flows, life is a promise that is being realised and will be fulfilled in Jesus and His Spirit."[49]

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[47] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, "Final Statement of the Seconds Bishops Institute of Interreligious Affairs on the theology of dialogue," Pattaya, Thailand, 17-22 November 1985 in Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arevalo (Eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991,* Vol. 1 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pg. 252.

[48] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Sixth Plenary Assembly, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly, January 10-19, 1995, Manila, Philippines in Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1992 to 1996,* Vol. 2 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pg. 3.

[49] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Sixth Plenary Assembly, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today," 4-5.

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Regnocentric Youth Ministry in the Asian Milieu

The ongoing theological reflection and progress notwithstanding, Christian Youth Ministry in the Asian milieu seems to be rooted in an overly Ecclesiocentric perspective, deriving from the so-called Christian society. Examples of this can still be seen in the thinking and writings expressed in many books dealing with Youth Ministry, which advocate the two major fields of Youth Ministry: fellowship or communion and mission or outreach.[50] In Catholic Youth Ministry, the above-mentioned two fields are often identified with the two principal goals of Youth Ministry: catechesis and evangelization/re-evangelization. A rapid look at the Youth Ministry scenario seems to illustrate this. Youth Ministry practised by the Church is, more often than not, restricted or geared to the young who come into the Church or its pertaining premises, and generally does not take into consideration the thousands who do not enter those premises. In many cases, even what is done for those outside seems to be from the perspective of their potential membership in the Church.

Certain assumptions underlie the above approach. It implies that the whole of society is basically Christian; that the young perceive religion as being of fundamental importance; that the young seek adequate solutions to their problems within the Church or from the Church, etc.; and that the Church's Youth Ministry has nothing to do with the rest of society and its young people. Can such assumptions be sustained? Isn't it high time for Youth Ministry to bring about a paradigm shift from the overly Ecclesiocentric to the Regnocentric perspective?

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[50] See Pete Ward, *Youthwork and the Mission of God – Framework for Relational Outreach* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1997). Again, Tim Neufeld, "Postmodern Model of Youth Ministry," *Direction* 31/2: 194-205 (2002). Or again, Arthur David Canales *Models & Methods for Youth & Young Adult Ministry* (California: Wipf and Stock, 2018). The author presents four models of Youth and Young adult ministry. They are Biblical-hermeneutic model, the servant-leadership model, liberation model and the Christian Discipleship model.

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If the fundamental task and final goal of the Church is "Proclamation of the Reign of God in the world and for the world"[51], the actualization of the Reign of God is made visible here and now in its four fundamental signs/mediations. Reign of God in its *ecclesial visibility*

- *is realized* in love and service of persons (sign of *Diakonia*);
- *is lived* in fraternity and in communion (sign of *Koinonia*);
- *is proclaimed* in the salvific proclamation of the Gospel (sign of *Martyria*)
- *is celebrated* in the celebrative and liberating rites and rituals of the Christian celebrations (sign of *Leitourgia*).

These four signs/mediations are so intimately linked to each other that no one sign/mediation guarantees authenticity and exactitude if isolated from the other three. The harmonious and integral presence of these four signs/mediations becomes the criterion for the proclamation of Regnocentric ministry and for discernment of Christian and ecclesial authenticity.[52]

The Church realises concretely the proclamation of the Reign of God in certain actions that promote the dynamism of its mission.

- ✓ *Missionary Action*: It is the first step in the holistic process of proclamation of the Reign of God that is directed towards non-believers or those indifferent to religion. This takes on different forms: presence, service, dialogue, witness, all leading to explicit announcing of the Gospel;
- ✓ *Catechumenal Action*: It comprises all those actions directed to those who wish to be Christians or to those who want to take up again the path of following Christ through the rites of initiation:

[51] Jerome Vallabaraj and Antony Christy Lourdunathan, *Cultivating a Faith that Transforms* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2023), 31.

[52] Vallabaraj and Lourdunathan, *Cultivating a Faith that Transforms,* 31-36.

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reception, accompaniment, catechesis, rites and sacraments of initiation, mystagogy. The catechumenal action is an essential function that expresses the motherhood of the Church (DC 61-65).

- ✓ *Pastoral Action*: It is the known environment of action "*ad intra*" of the Christian community wherein the traditional functions are exercised: cult, celebrations, sacraments, preaching, catechesis, community life, ministry of various types and to various believers, service of charity, etc.

There is a gradation here which becomes complete only with an additional stage of "presence and action in the world," that describes the ideal dynamism of the ecclesial action in its concrete historical realization.

- ✓ *Presence and Action in the World*: This oft-neglected stage merits particular attention. It is the ecclesial action that results in the realization of witnessing concretely to the gospel in society: human promotion, social and political action, educative and cultural action, promotion of peace, ecological engagement, and so on. They are environments where the Christians, through their presence, are called to move beyond their own Christian environment to be at the service of the Reign of God in the world.

6.1. Situating Youth Ministry within the Regnocentric Paradigm

Within the Regnocentric paradigm, Youth ministry is *always pastoral* since it is most often, commonly, and primarily situated *within the pastoral action* of the Christian community. Through Church's pastoral action "young people will be able to discover the personal love of the Father and the companionship of Jesus Christ and to live out this season of life particularly 'suited to the great ideals, to generous forms of heroism, to the coherent demands of thought and action" (*DC* n. 244). Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* (*ChV*) encourages the Christian "communities to examine, respectfully and seriously, the situation of

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their young people, in order to find the most fitting ways of providing them with pastoral care" (n. 103). Again, he affirms "that every form of pastoral activity, formation and spirituality should be seen in the light of our Christian vocation" (n. 254).

Regnocentric Youth Ministry is *always missionary*. Pope Francis affirms that if the Christian community "can hear what the Spirit is saying to us, we have to realize that youth ministry is always missionary" (*ChV* n. 240, emphasis added). In ChV, the Holy Father continues to uphold that the

> Synod called for the development of a youth ministry capable of being inclusive, with room for all kinds of young people, to show that we are a Church with open doors. Nor does one have to accept fully all the teachings of the Church to take part in certain of our activities for young people. It is enough to have an open mind towards all those who have the desire and willingness to be encountered by God's revealed truth. If we can hear what the Spirit is saying to us, we have to realize that youth ministry is always missionary (n. 234).

Regnocentric Youth Ministry is *presence in the world*. Pope Francis insists that legitimate room should also be made for

> all those who have other visions of life, who belong to other religions or who distance themselves from religion altogether. All the young, without exception, are in God's heart and thus in the Church's heart. We recognize frankly that this statement on our lips does not always find real expression in our pastoral actions: *often we remain closed in our environments*, where their voice does not penetrate, or else we dedicate ourselves to less demanding and more enjoyable activities, suppressing that healthy pastoral restlessness that would urge us to move out from our supposed security. The Gospel also asks us to be daring, and we want to be so, without presumption and without proselytizing, testifying to the love of the Lord and stretching out our hands to all the young people in the world (*ChV* n. 235, emphasis added).

If the Church's educative ministry, health ministry, and social ministries are open to all, irrespective of race, religion, and caste, why does the Church continue to close its Youth Ministry predominantly only for Catholic youth?

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6.2. Defining Youth Ministry from Regnocentric Paradigm

Youth Ministry, therefore, needs to shift its horizon from a narrow perception of ministering to the young who come into our environment to a wider and holistic perspective of *fullness-of-life-for-all*. It is only in this wider and holistic perspective that the Church can become a sacrament of the Reign of God for all people, especially for the youth. Regnocentric Youth Ministry, founded on *fullness-of- life-for-all,* lays emphasis on developing right relationships with one's own self, with others, with society, with the entire creation, and above all with the author of life and creation under whatever form one may understand or believe. The *fullness-of-life-for-all* paradigm offers all young people, irrespective of their creed or religion, a future, a meaning, an identity, and a sense of belonging, since these are the fundamental life-yearnings and explorations of all young people. This unfolding and realization of right relationships within oneself, with the neighbours, and with the cosmos, lead to the summit experience of harmony with God. If spirituality is understood as "one's way of life"[53] and defined as "that which is believed to be the vital principle or animating force within living beings,"[54] then this holistic goal *fullness-of-life-for-all* can become the spirituality of Regnocentric Youth Ministry and the universal, all-encompassing vision of Youth Ministry in an ever-increasing multi-faith and multi-cultural context of the world. Hence, our proposed definition of Regnocentric Youth Ministry:

> *Youth Ministry is the name that refers to the entire gamut of actions by which the Christian community, animated by the Holy Spirit, empowers the young to become agent-subjects in relationship*[55] *and to advance towards fullness-of-life-for-all*[56] *through*

[53] Groome, *Educating,* 330.

[54] Mark Springer and Cheryl Smith, *The Seven Principles of Effective Youth Ministry. A Handbook for Spiritual Growth* (California, Resource Publications, Inc., 1995), 94.

[55] I borrow this term from Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 8-9.

[56] The expressions "towards fullness" and "for life for all" are two phrases utilised respectively by Michael Amaladoss and Thomas Groome. '*Towards fullness*' used by Amaladoss highlights the process. Cf. Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness. Searching For an Integral Spirituality. Lectures in Memory of Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass*

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> *the ever-changing concrete life situations, thus contributing to building up in the world, the Reign of God, proclaimed, manifested and inaugurated, in and by Jesus Christ.*

Thus, Youth Ministry is a ministry rendered by the Christian community in fulfillment of its inherent mission, rooted in the call, the commissioning, and the identity as a Christian community. Such a ministry is an expression of the unique and singular commitment of the Christian community, at the service of the Reign of God in the world and for the world. Empowering the young signifies "to give them a voice and a call to responsibility and accountability with regard to the issues that affect them, their future and the world."[57] The compound phrase *agent-subjects in relationship* indicates how the young are to be both challenged and formed by Youth Ministry. Thomas Groome uses

> the term *subject* to signify the intrinsic value of persons *qua* persons, a meaning heightened when we think of subject in contrast to object, the latter always being something of a qualified value. I preface it with *agent* to emphasize the originating and historically responsible dimension of human 'subjectivity;' '*agent* subjects' are to be consciously aware, reflective, discerning, and responsible people. *Agent* as a modifier of *subject* also helps to avoid the possible connotation of the latter as a position of subordination, as in 'subject to.' I use agent-subjects *in relationship* to indicate that the authentic 'being' of people is always realized 'in relationship' with others in time and place.[58]

(1932-1990) 1993 (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994). While *'for life for all'* is an expression of Thomas Groome who summarises the personal-cum-social purpose of education, ministry and evangelisation. According to Groome the purpose of all education is to become fully alive human beings who contribute to a society of the common good. See also Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent,* Texas, Thomas More, Allen, 1998.

[57] Jerome Vallabaraj, "Youth Ministry in Asia. National Youth Pastoral Plan: Salient Features and an Appraisal," in Anthony Francis-Vincent (Ed.), *Seguire i percorsi dello Spirito – Studi in onore del prof. Mario Midali* (Rome: LAS, 1999), 189.

[58] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 8-9. It is also in this perspective I will interchange this expression with another term "protagonist."

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"Fullness is the symbol of ultimate mystery."[59] *To advance towards fullness* "indicates an effort to become free, to become aware of our being, to experience our life as God's,[60] since fullness is breaking down the wall of egoism that keeps the individuals separate and obstructs the discovery and experience of our union with God, others, and the world. Jesus evokes the image of life and fullness when he says: "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly" (Jn10:10). "From his fullness we have all received" (Jn 1:16). Thus *fullness-of-life-for-all* emphasises the need to develop right relationships - with oneself, with others, with the society, with creation; and above all, with the author of life and the entire creation! To *advance towards fullness* requires the young to realise the God-given gifts of their life and the world around them, inviting them to destroy everything that impedes this search for fullness. This ought to be the rationale of every ministry, formation, education, and animation. *Ever changing life situations* refers to the continual rediscovery of God's love, goodness, and gift on the part of the young. Hence, Youth Ministry invites the young to assume in a consistent fashion the ordinary aspects of life; to accept the challenges, questions and tensions of growth; to strive towards gathering life's fragments into a unity realised as a human vocation; to overcome the ambiguities present in daily experience; to leaven every option with love: all this is part of the process necessary for discovering and loving daily, concrete life-situations as a new reality in which God's Reign is realized (*GS* n. 40).

6.3. Foundations for a Regnocentric Youth Ministry

A multi-faith and multi-cultural situation requires that Youth Ministry be solidly founded on the Christian faith and yet have the ability to offer life to others without infringing on their right to decide and to evolve their own way of life and the vital principles that govern their life.

[59] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness*, 3.

[60] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness,* 4.

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An anthropology (*Humanitas Anthropology)*[61] which proposes that Youth Ministry perceive and cultivate youth as persons, and promote "an abiding spirit of affirmation, appreciation, and celebration of life and of human beings".[62] Such a vision requires the youth ministers to have an enduring commitment to the whole person, and they perceive the young as true protagonists or agent-subjects who foster rights and responsibilities.

Youth Ministry is also called upon to tap the youth's attitude toward life in the world *(Sacramental Cosmology*). This requires that youth ministers "personally cultivate a sacramental consciousness – a sense of the 'more in the midst' – and a spirit of contemplation toward life."[63] This perspective implies that the youth ministers encourage the young to look for meaning and for 'the more' in life and to promote imagination and aesthetic gifts, and to build up the ecological consciousness of being stewards of creation.

The promotion of a *"Community of Persons" Sociology* highlights the need of the youth ministers to "be committed public servants who educate in ways that promote the 'common good'"[64] by fostering cooperation and partnership among all learners.

The appreciation of *History's Legacy of Tradition* invites all youth ministers to evolve an educative agenda that is "humanizing, available to all, and lays the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic foundations needed for every vocation."[65] This invites the youth ministers "to grow as educated and cultured participants in life" and demands a

[61] Thomas Groome, in his book "Educating for Life," reminds every one that an essential partnership must be present if we are to educate all persons, especially the young. Here his thoughts and ideas are applied and adapted to youth ministry.

[62] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 428; See also 67-115.

[63] Groome, *Educating for Life,* 428; See also 118-168.

[64] Groome, *Educating for Life,* 428; See also 171-212.

[65] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 429.

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dual responsibility "to conserve the most humanising traditions and to draw new life from them."[66]

A *Wisdom Epistemology* invites youth ministers "to a deep passion for truth – to pursue it, to live it, to teach it. Their teaching should reflect commitment to the 'whole truth:' cognitive, relational, and moral."[67]

A *Personal Spirituality* invites the youth ministers to care for their own personal spiritual life and to see their vocation as a spiritual commitment of enabling the young "to live into the mystery and depths of life, to become 'fully alive' to the glory of God."[68]

Living in a context where poverty, injustice, and oppression are prevalent, the youth ministers are invited to a *personal passion for justice, which* is to be marked by right relationships with persons, with the environment, and with all the elements in one's teachings.[69]

Living in a pluri-faith context, *Catholicity* invites youth ministers to a universal consciousness and to strive to help them to be "leading-learners," fostering in the young "openness of mind and heart, by stimulating curiosity, and by helping them prepare for lifelong learning."[70]

Conclusion: Regnocentric Youth Ministry — Unity in Pluralism

The Asian Bishops gathered at Manila in 1970, described the Asian continent and the Church as the continent and Church of the

[66] Groome, *Educating for Life,* 429; See also 215-265.

[67] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 429; See also 267-318.

[68] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 42; See also 319-357.

[69] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 359-392.

[70] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 429; See also 395-423.

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Poor and the Young.[71] Being a minority and widely scattered, the Asian Church also faces the "stark choice of either becoming closed enclaves servicing their own internal needs or of bravely opening up to the real needs and deepest aspirations of the wider society."[72] The Fifth General Assembly of the FABC, in its journey towards the third millennium and reflecting on the new way of being and becoming Church in Asia, stated:

> The Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities* […] It is a *participatory* Church […] it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all […]. It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a *prophetic* sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come.[73]

Again, in its General Assembly at Samphran (2000) in the year of the Great Jubilee, the Church in Asia committed itself to a renewal towards a mission of love and service "in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and

[71] Asian Bishops' Meeting, "Message and Resolutions," Manila, in Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arevalo (Eds.), *For All the People of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Vol. 1 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pg. 4.

[72] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office of Evangelization, "Consultation of Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad Gentes:* A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia," 14-17 September 2000, Hong Kong, in Frans-Josef Eilers, (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2001,* Vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), pg. 222.

[73] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, "Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium, Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly," 27 July 1990, Bandung, Indonesia, in Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arevalo (Eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991,* Vol. 1 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pg. 287-288.

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sisters, and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths."[74]

In this renewed mission of love and service, among its five primary pastoral concerns, the FABC, in its Seventh General Assembly, identified youth as people to whom the Church in Asia needs especially to direct its mission of love and concern, and as those who are equally partners in that mission.

> Youth are the reality of today, not only the hope of tomorrow. They are a source of energy and vitality in society and in the Church. At the same time, they are the most vulnerable and are victimised by structures of exploitation in our world […]. Youth of all backgrounds, urban and rural, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, the organized and unorganized, are all being tossed about by the waves of contemporary culture.[75]

Thus, the Church is called to minister to all youth.

Such ministering to youth in a multi-faith context often leads one to conceive of Youth Ministry in a dichotomous manner – on the one hand, as ministry to the Christian youth and on the other, ministry to the youth of other faith traditions. Looking at Youth Ministry from an *Advaitic* perspective may enable us to overcome this misconception.

> *A* + *dvaita* means 'not-two.' It denies duality. It is an affirmation of unity in pluralism that is not monistic. It does not explain anything. It just points to the complexity of reality. To understand how what we perceive as being two things are not-two we have to look at reality. Depending on each reality, the advaitic relationship may be more or less integrative.[76]

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[74] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, *"A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service, Final Statement of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences,"* January 3-12, 2000, Samphan, Thailand in Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2001,* Vol. 3 (Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 2002), pg. 3.

[75] Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), For All the Peoples of Asia, pg. 9.

[76] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness,* 45-46.

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Just like in a human person, the soul and the body are not two different things. They are two and yet not-two. "Differentiation can never be a separation."[77] Ministry to Christian youth and youth of other faith traditions, thus, ought not to be considered as separation but has to be perceived as unity in pluralism since *fullness-of-life-for-all* becomes the goal in both situations. Pluralism in Youth Ministry is not relativization of ministry since "where there is pluralism that is co-dependent, every unit is obviously limited."[78] Instead, pluralism in Youth Ministry becomes an enrichment. It suggests that different ways of perceiving ministry to the young in a multi-faith context enable one to comprehend Youth Ministry in a fuller and richer manner. In addition, the concept of pluralism corroborates the concept of relatedness. God alone is absolute and full, and all others are related to God. Thus, relatedness in Youth Ministry, in terms of interrelatedness, shows the way to fullness.[79] Relatedness of persons also brings out the dimension of freedom, freedom to be in communion with others and God. "Communion among persons is life, loving and sharing that finds expression as the fullness of joy – *ananda* – the joy of living, the joy of loving, the joy of creating and the joy of communion."[80]

Hence, in a multi-faith context, ministering to the young with the goal of sustaining the young towards fullness of life for all implies life-giving.

> It is dynamic and creative. Creation need not mean producing something, but just increasing the quality of life and relationships […]. Given our limitations, a move towards fullness is a move towards authentic freedom through awareness, experience, transformation and creation. Fullness then is not the immobility of monistic self-sufficiency, but the

[77] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness,* 47.

[78] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness,* 48.

[79] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness,* 48-49; Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office of Theological Concerns, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," Kathmandu, Nepal, May 2000, in Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2001,* Vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 332-338.

[80] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness,* 49.

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> participation in the fullness of life and communion that has its root in the Trinity itself.[81]

It is such a Youth Ministry that the Church in Asia is called upon to uphold and develop. Regnocentric Youth Ministry reclaims the centrality of the Reign of God in Christian life and mission. It challenges the Church to transcend institutional self-referentiality and to embody God's reign through justice, love, reconciliation, and ecological care. Rooted in the Gospel and renewed by contemporary theological reflection, Regnocentric Youth Ministry offers a holistic vision for fullness of life for all in the 21st century, a vision that is missionary, inclusive, transformative, and generative.

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[81] Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness* 52.

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