

## Adoptive Youth Ministry of Chap Clark. A Critical Appraisal from a Catholic Perspective

### Adopcyjne Duszpasterstwo Młodzieży według Chapa Clarka. Krytyczna ocena z perspektywy katolickiej

Jason Pinto

Salesian Pontifical University,

Rome, Italy

jasonpintosdb@gmail.com

ORCID: [https://orcid.org/0009-](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1638-8334)

0004-1638-8334

Received: 19 Jan 2024

Reviewed: 15 Feb 2024

Accepted: 22 Mar 2024

Online First: 27 Mar 2024

**Abstract:** Based on the two fundamentals in Youth Ministry, namely the role of the youth in Youth Ministry as protagonists and subjects, as proposed in *Christus Vivit*, the apostolic exhortation on the Youth, a fresh thinking has been taking place in the Church. This study explores Youth Ministry based on the theology of Adoption propounded by Chap Clark, a Presbyterian Pastor from the United States, who has been in the field of Youth Ministry for the past 27 years. He proposes a Christian spirituality which is found in one's belongingness to a community, which he terms as "Adoptive Youth Ministry." The objective of Youth Ministry as adoption is for every child, every adolescent, and every young adult, to be so embraced by the community of faith that they are assured a home, a people, and a place where they can discover who they are and how they are able to contribute. It proposes a concrete step towards a process of integrating the youth in ecclesial life. A Catholic perspective on his method is an enrichment in the Church's theology of Youth Ministry.

**Keywords:** Youth Ministry, Adoptive Youth Ministry, Chap Clark, Ecumenical Youth Ministry, *Christus Vivit*, Catholic Youth Ministry, Ecclesio-centric Youth Ministry, Intergenerational Youth Ministry

**Abstrakt:** W Kościele pojawia się obecnie nowy sposób myślenia wynikający z dwóch fundamentalnych założeń duszpasterstwa młodzieży, a mianowicie postrzegania roli młodzieży jako podmiotu i przedmiotu owego duszpasterstwa według tego, co przedstawiono w adhortacji apostołskiej o młodzieży *Christus Vivit*. Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje temat duszpasterstwa młodzieży w oparciu o teologię adopcji głoszoną przez Chapa Clarka, prezbiteriańskiego pastora ze Stanów Zjednoczonych, który zaangażowany był w działalność związaną z duszpasterstwem młodzieży przez ostatnie 27 lat. Clark propaguje duchowość chrześcijańską opartą na przynależności do wspólnoty, którą on sam określa mianem „Adopcyjnego Duszpasterstwa Młodzieży”. Celem duszpasterstwa młodzieży rozumianego jako adopcja jest stworzenie takich warunków dla każdego dziecka, nastolatka i młodego dorosłego, by wstąpienie do wspólnoty wiary dawało im możliwość znalezienia domu, własnej społeczności i miejsca, w którym mogliby oni odkrywać, kim są i jaki wkład mogą wnieść do tej wspólnoty. Duszpasterstwo młodzieży wskazuje konkretny kierunek procesu włączania młodzieży w życie kościelne. Z punktu widzenia Kościoła Katolickiego metoda Clarka stanowi cenne rozwinięcie kościelnej teologii duszpasterstwa młodzieży.



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**Słowa kluczowe:** duszpasterstwo młodzieży, Adopcyjne Duszpasterstwo Młodzieży, Chap Clark, ekumeniczne duszpasterstwo młodzieży, *Christus Vivit*, katolickie duszpasterstwo młodzieży, eklezjocentryczne duszpasterstwo młodzieży, międzypokoleniowe duszpasterstwo młodzieży

## INTRODUCTION

Youth have been one of the main focal points of the Church in recent years. After exhorting the faithful about the importance of the proclamation of the gospel in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), on family life in *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), on the call to holiness in *Gaudete et exsultate* (2018), Pope Francis promulgated his apostolic exhortation focused on the Youth, *Christus Vivit* addressed to the young people and the entire People of God on March 25, 2019. This apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit* recalls the fact that “the entire community has to be involved in evangelizing the youth and in this urgent requirement the young people take on a greater role in pastoral outreach” (Francis 2019, 202). It further states that “young people themselves are agents of Youth Ministry” (Francis 2019, 203).

Based on these two fundamental elements, namely the role of the youth and their being themselves the subjects of Youth Ministry, there emerged a fresh thinking in the Church’s ministry with the youth. The focus on youth in the Church has also been a concern among other Christian denominations in the West, who can be placed under the Protestant umbrella. Faithful to the mission of the Church for the young and with the young, this paper addresses this challenge following the approach of Chap Clark, a Presbyterian Pastor working in the United States, who has been engaged in Youth Ministry for the past 27 years. The main thrust of Clark’s approach is that “God adopts us in Jesus Christ, his Incarnate Son and we as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, help the young to discover this gift” (Clark 2018, 1).

Hence, Clark has rightly named his approach as Adoptive Youth Ministry. He lays emphasis on the fact that Adoptive Youth Ministry is not so much about performing Youth Ministry, but rather about thinking of Youth Ministry in a new way with the objective of assimilating young people into the Body of Christ, the Church and helping them to realize their identity as adopted children of God (Clark 2018, 2). Much of his thinking comes from his analysis that today youth are facing a certain sense of abandonment, hence, they feel isolated. In his book, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (2011) he describes the systematic abandonment of the young (Bonner 2016, 32).

In *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry* (2001), Clark speaks about individuation as the key to understand adolescent development. Here he states, “As relational creatures, adolescent women and men are called to both care and to need care, instinctively long to connect to others, and yearn for a connection to the God who has created them. Thus, theologizing on this theme must guide one as he or she considers the implications of adolescent individuation” (Clark 2001a, 50). Therefore, the challenge before the Christian community is to present to the young a sense of closeness and a sense of belonging which is based on the Mystery of Christ and the Church.

## 1. THE CONTEXTUAL EMERGENCE OF ADOPTIVE YOUTH MINISTRY

Chap Clark has been actively involved in the field of Youth Ministry for more than a quarter of his life. In his preaching and internet interviews he has manifested his preferential love for ministering among the young and helping them in their journey of faith. This is also demonstrated in his writings. Earlier, when he spoke of Missional Youth Ministry he developed a theological reflection on the need and method to present the church community as the end of Youth Ministry and not just another activity or a community in the Church (Clark 2001a, 92). This helped him in his later development of the concept of Adoptive Youth Ministry. He proposed the theological metaphor of “adoption” for Youth Ministry. After years of research and ministry among the youth, Clark concludes that not only do the youth feel alone, but they also face a sense of an increasing collective individualism and atomization in the society (Clark 2016a, 8). This has been a motivating factor for him to think of a Youth Ministry offering the youth a sense of belonging, despite the changing situation in the society.

### 1.1. Need for an ecclesio-centric approach

Evaluating the Youth Ministry in the American context, Clark feels that at certain points in the Youth Ministry landscape, a book or a leader would come along and propose to a perceived movement or trajectory, a pragmatic, strategic or programmatic type of a method. The main focus was to help the young person to develop a maturing individual relationship with God. The common complaint among

the Youth Ministers was that they wanted to teach their children about community (Clark 2015, 79). According to him there was no deeper thought in Youth Ministry and hence, everything remained only at the superficial level. This section deals with the various models which he has observed, followed by the common threads and finally by his assumptions on the crisis of Youth Ministry. Keeping this crisis in mind, Clark suggests an ecclesio-centric approach in Youth Ministry. He proposes an Adoptive Youth Ministry. Youth Ministry understood as “adoptive” first of all means an attitudinal change. The structure follows later. It calls Youth Ministers to move from the historical complacency of institutional and programmatic defensiveness into the uncharted, mysterious and uncontrollable waters of abandoned life together in Christ (Clark 2016a, 13). He further explains that Youth Ministry as adoption is best conceived as a bridge ministry intent on moving the young beyond peer-experienced faith, by leading them into the welcoming arms of the adoptive family of faith (Clark 2015, 88). Hence, in this approach it is not just the pastors or Youth Ministers who are involved in serving the youth, but rather the whole believing community exercises this service as their vocation from God.

## 1.2. Understanding Adoptive Youth Ministry

Situating himself in the American context and based on his analysis made along with other Christian groups, Clark wishes to instil in the young a sense of belongingness to the Church. He opines that the Church as a family of families has the task to relate to all her members, especially those who have been alienated. He therefore, uses the word “adoption” to describe the familial privilege which all have with God and with one another in Jesus Christ (Clark 2015, 85). The entire faith community, and the Church has the task to commit herself to a long-term inclusion of children, adolescents, emerging adults and everyone else who calls Christ the Lord, to provide the emotional and relational environment that God has for all. Founded on the understanding of the mystery of Christ, the Church and the Spirit, he proposes that the objective of Youth Ministry as adoption is for every child, every adolescent, and every young adult to be so embraced by the community of faith that they are assured a home, a people, and a place where they can discover who they are and how they are able to contribute. In short, for him, Youth Ministry is adopting young people into the family of God (Clark 2015, 82).

Clark focuses on strategies both from the individual and communitarian perspectives of Adoptive Youth Ministry. He strikes a healthy balance between the two in order to help both adults as well as the youth to first “think” and then “do” Youth Ministry. Its objective is to recognize that the whole believing community are God’s children and consequently siblings to one another in the journey of the faith. From a broad spectrum it calls in for a greater understanding of the whole phenomena of youth abandonment and discovers the means by which Youth Ministers can accompany the young in their faith journey, while being enriched in one’s own. It gives equal importance to each and every member of the Church, acknowledging the special privilege that all have in Christ. It also calls in for a spirit of openness and collaboration with all those who are on a similar journey.

From the individual perspective, Clark lays emphasis on inclusiveness, empowerment, discipleship, nurture and leadership. The need to include is based on his findings that adolescent youth feel a sense of abandonment and hence, they should be included both in the Church as well as in the society. He also broadens the term inclusion to mean, including people who can be of help in Youth Ministry. Empowerment is for those whom the community considers as “outsiders.” This strategy seeks to involve the whole community to empower the young to become chain leaders and help them to develop their vocation (Clark 2018, 42). Discipleship is about being an authentic follower of Christ among their own peers and the community at large. It helps to nurture the faith experience of the young as well. Finally, when he speaks of leadership, he proposes a partnering leadership, where the leader recognizes the gifts of all his or her members (Clark 2015, 88). His strategies are focused and call in for a lot of creativity on the part of the whole community to reach out to the individual youth.

While considering the communitarian perspective, Clark lays emphasis on participation in the Church mission, partnering among the faithful, reaching out, formation of a ministry team and strategic planning. Being an integral part of the Church, he invites the faith community to channelize the youth to participate in the mission of the Church. Partnering among the faithful deals with collaborating with parents, volunteers, non-volunteering adults and other parents in order to achieve the goal of Youth Ministry. Reaching out to the young means in terms of helping the young, reaching out to those

youngsters who are outside the sociological and physical boundaries of the Church. A Ministry Team includes adults, youth workers, youth leaders, parents and all other faithful who could help out in reaching to the young. Finally, based on the contextual need of the place, Clark calls in for a strategic planning which is essential for efficacy. In general, his communitarian perspective is inclusive and collaborative.

### 1.3. Catholic Assessment of Adoptive Youth Ministry

From the Catholic point of view the Adoptive Youth Ministry proposed by Clark is very much relevant today. It brings about a new way of thinking about and living in the Christian community. As Clark states, “Adoptive Youth Ministry is not so much a model, rather a way of thinking and living as a community” (Clark 2018, 21). According to his proposal, Youth Ministry is about inviting the young into the calling, life and work of the Kingdom as members of the family of God (Clark 2015, 109). The Catholic Church wishes to be in the world as the mediator par excellence for service, fellowship, proclamation and celebration in analogy with the four fundamental anthropological categories of action, relationship, thought and celebration (Vallabaraj and Fernando 2015, 72). There is an echo to this desire in the approach made by Clark in his proposal of Adoptive Youth Ministry.

Clark explains that the goal of Adoptive Youth Ministry is to create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of the Kingdom within the household of God (Clark 2018, 60). Thus, creating an encouraging environment, recognizing one’s vocation as an agent of God’s Kingdom and acknowledging the common belongingness to God’s household form the three aspects of the goal of Adoptive Youth Ministry. He gives importance to the believing community in the goal of Youth Ministry. While exposing the goal of Adoptive Youth Ministry he enumerates the three tasks which are part of this goal. The first is to consider the young as the “Church of today.” The second is to welcome them. And the third is to bridge the gap between those who feel abandoned and the community of the faithful (Clark 2018, 3). Based on the accomplishment of these three tasks he has formulated his goal of Adoptive Youth Ministry. Thus, actualizing it would be the involvement of the

believing community in the creation of an encouraging environment, living their vocation as agents of God's Reign and acknowledging their common belongingness to God's household.

Clark explains that since the society has abandoned the young, the task of Adoptive Youth Ministry is to create an ambience where the youth are nurtured, empowered and included. He connects the recognition of the call to be God's agent on earth with Christian discipleship. This calls in for a responsibility as a co-worker in God's mission here on earth. Belonging to God's household is about the communitarian commitment which all have in the Church, as well as the society. Each of the three aspects of the goal are interlinked. He maintains a balance between the role of the Church, the uniqueness of the Christian vocation and the singular belongingness to the family of God. He honestly affirms that if Youth Ministry has failed to develop familial relationships with God's people, then it has only brought that person halfway. Clark inquires if the Christianity handed to young disciples is deep and relationally embodied enough in God's family for them to rely on it in the years to come (Clark 2015, 84). Here one finds an originality in his idea, where the community of believers share in the faith life of the young. He gives a new vision to Youth Ministry through his practical theological thinking. He upholds that the goal of Youth Ministry must shift away from segmenting young people off from everyone else to offering them a mutual, empowering, engaging and supportive new family (Clark 2015, 85). This is the basic thrust of his goal of Adoptive Youth Ministry.

Theological thinking of Adoptive Youth Ministry is made concrete when it is lived in practice. Clark envisages strategies which help the believing community to seek out the weak and empower all (Clark 2018, 9). The objective is to live according to the mutual adoption in Christ. The strategies proposed by him are not so much to change a person or an institution, but rather to help the whole community to reach out to the vulnerable youth. These strategies were presented from individual and communitarian perspectives. The individual perspective dealt with those strategies which the community member as an individual person can adopt in order to help the youth. The community perspective dealt with strategies where the whole community contributes to help the youth.

From a Catholic viewpoint, Youth Ministry as it was traditionally conducted, has been significantly affected by social and cultural changes. Young people frequently fail to find in the usual programmes a response to their concerns, their needs, their problems and issues (Francis 2019, 202). They have often faced discouragement. Engaging families to foster the Christian faith is a real pastoral challenge. Hence, the Adoptive Youth Ministry approach with its strategies is of help in strengthening the involvement of families in Youth Ministry. Here the three fundamental facts that were noticed in the early Apostolic and post Apostolic Christian communities need consideration. Firstly, the families were faithful to the teachings of the apostles. Secondly, they knew the importance of a witness value as part of their faith. Thirdly, they took up the challenge of handing on the faith to their own and to others with a deep faith that generations following them would be gifted to respond to the perennial truth of the gospel and be able to make it their own for their time and for generations to come (Vallabaraj and Fernando 2015, 121). Fidelity to the teachings, witness value and contextual response are fundamental to analyse the strategies of Adoptive Youth Ministry.

Clark's insights on Youth Ministry can be a launching pad for Catholics to engage in ecumenical dialogue with other Christian Churches and ecclesiastical communities. The Vatican document *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), the Directory on Ecumenism (1993) and the encyclical of Pope John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) are some of the important ecclesial documents which spell out the need, method and principles for ecumenism. The Directory on Ecumenism (161-218) delineates some concrete guidelines with regard to ecumenical dialogue. More specifically, article 214 speaks of a common discernment which different Churches and ecclesiastical communities need to make of social and ethical nature. In the *Final Document* (2018) of the Youth Synod, the need for accompaniment focuses specifically on the relationship with diversity that sees it as a mutual enrichment and a possibility for fraternal communion, against the twofold temptation of retreating within one's own identity and of relativism (Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly 2018b, 94).

Clark cites the model of the early Church (Acts 2). It did not have a preordained plan or an organizational structure in place. All that is known about the early Church is that they quickly bonded



to one another, and the family grew (Clark 2016b, 15). Thus, the need for communion or unity is essential for a good Christian witness. For this, constant dialogue and interaction with one another is needed. In dialogue one becomes aware of the contingency and the historical conditioning of one's tradition. Since the ultimate reality is ineffable, being beyond all doctrinal categories, it can be achieved only with an attitude of total humility. This attitude helps one to understand that truth is something dynamic (Anthony 2012, 179).

Dialogue is a further impetus to enter the social and cultural realities around. Entering into the social and cultural realities around is essential for every evangelizer and pastor. A Church too rooted and institutionalized, being too secure and independent from the socio-cultural context would spoil the experience of evangelical hospitality (Anthony 2012, 181). Keeping these things in mind this section concentrates on Christian youth as a theme for ecumenical dialogue, the significance of Christian discipleship, along with ecumenical and social initiatives based on ecumenical dialogue.

## 2. STRENGTHENING CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY FROM AN ADOPTIVE APPROACH

Ecumenical dialogue is of help to discover what God is bringing out in the members of other Churches and ecclesiastical communities. It is a motivation to bear joint witness. Such a joint witness of holiness, as fidelity to the one Lord, has an ecumenical potential extraordinarily rich in grace (John Paul II 1995, 11). It is a call to be open to work with one another for a common goal. Catholics are called to gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from a common heritage which are found among their separated brethren. It is right and valuable to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood (Vatican Council II 1965, 4). This is because all belong to the same body of Christ. The idea behind an Adoptive Church is that any Church or organization can embrace an Adoptive Ministry model that will help young people and others to experience full inclusion in the one body of Christ (Clark 2018, 13).

Youth Ministry in the Catholic Church has got much attention since the Vatican Council II. Theologically speaking, it is not a chronological event, but rather a causative expression to mean “because of Vatican Council II” (Sebastian 2018, 32). And hence, it is the renewal the Church makes reading the signs of the time. The 15th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is an expression of this. This was immediately followed by 300 representatives of young people from all over the globe including non-Catholics and non-Christians in order to get them involved in this process of the Church (Sebastian 2018, 51). There were also some challenges that evolved from the synod. Challenges with regard to the understanding of Youth Ministry, formation of personnel, new outlook on youth services, new research in Youth Ministry in view with other sciences and finally, the process of discernment and accompaniment of youth (Sebastian 2018, 55). There are six areas within the Catholic Youth Ministry which can be enriched from Clark’s theology of Adoptive Youth Ministry.

### 2.1. Animating Presence among the Young

Clark spoke of entering the world of the young and being present there in a creative and an active way. The process of helping an adolescent to develop a consistent faith takes time, patience and perseverance. Faith is a long, complex journey and adolescents need someone who will walk alongside them as long as it takes (Clark 2011, 189). To be present among the young in an active manner needs true accompaniment. The Catholic Church in all her latest synods laid an emphasis on it. It also stated that a good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his or her own weaknesses and frailties. Hence, he or she knows how to be accepting of the young people he or she accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence. The one who accompanies should know how to offer a word of fraternal correction (Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly 2018b, 102). It should also be noted here that some young people find family traditions oppressive, and they flee from them under the impulse of a globalized culture that at times leaves them without a point of reference. In other parts of the world, it is observed that there is even more than the generational conflict between young people and adults, there is a mutual estrangement. A fact which was observed by Clark as well.

## 2.2. Role of Significant Adults in Church Ministry

Along with the family members there are also others who play a significant role in the lives of the young, such as teachers, mentors, pastors, relatives, etc. Clark states that developing faithful adults for the future requires surrounding those youth with adults who themselves are people with faith and who are interested in them (Flies 2016, 234). The role of the adult is to help young people to grow in their human maturity. The adult manifests this maturation by the authenticity of his or her faith (Pollo 2003, 337). Faith helps to live a radical and an authentic human life and makes the adult educator an integral worker in God's Reign (Pollo 2003, 343). This helps both the adult as well as the young in their faith journey. Adults are to bear a testimony to their faith by a pastoral presence which they give. The characteristic of a pastoral presence is that it is a physical presence, constant and active, friendly and loving, educative and evangelising, preventive, witnessing and therefore helping the young to make life choices (Vallabaraj 2012, 331). Adults guide young people towards connections within the larger faith community. Their role in Youth Ministry as adoption is to be agents in the adoptive process (Clark 2015, 88).

## 2.3. Prospects for an Intergenerational Youth Ministry

For Clark, if the Church wants to create a community where every voice is heard and every person is valued, it needs to foster a kind of environment where intergenerational relationships flourish (Clark 2018, 148). As he rightly puts it "the driving idea behind Adoptive Ministry is intergenerational ministry" (Clark 2018, 171). This aspect can be integrated in the Catholic Youth Ministry. The Catholic Church recognizes the reversal in the relationship between generations. Today, adults often refer to young people as role models for their lifestyle, within a global culture that is dominated by an individualistic focus on the self. As a Vatican Dicastery states, "the problem here is the dismissal of adult life, which is the true hallmark of the Western cultural universe. Not only there is a lack of adults in the faith. There is a lack of adults «period»." Many are of the opinion that today there is not so much a generational conflict between young people and adults, but rather a "mutual alienness." Adults are not

interested in conveying the founding values of our existence to younger generations, who view them more as competitors than potential allies. In this way, the relationship between young people and adults risks being purely affective, without involving any educational and cultural dimension. From the ecclesial standpoint, involving young people in the Synod was seen as an important sign of intergenerational dialogue. As one of the youth expressed, “we have been thrilled to be taken seriously by the hierarchy of the Church and we feel that this dialogue between the young Church and the old Church is a vital and fruitful listening process” (Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly 2018a, 14). Thus, the Catholic Church sees a dire need for an intergenerational interaction in her ministry to the young.

#### 2.4. Youth as Protagonists in Youth Ministry

Clark spoke of biblical discipleship as creating an environment where growth takes place in the context of God’s household with other siblings on the same faith journey. Young people help other young people in their commitment to Christian faith (Clark 2018, 49). Youth themselves are protagonists in the service of the youth has been a dominant theme in *Christus Vivit*, the post synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis on the youth. He clearly states that young people themselves are agents of Youth Ministry. They need to be guided and formed in this venture. Further, their insight, ingenuity and knowledge to address the issues and concerns of other young people in their own language needs to be seriously considered (Francis 2019, 203).

For a continual Youth Ministry, along with the intergenerational aspect of it, there should be the dimension of intragenerational ministry, which is ministry among peers. There are areas in the contemporary world where only the youth participate, which is reserved only for their age. If there is anyone who can reach out to them in this place, it is the peers themselves. This calls to mind that groups, movements, associations for the youth should not be a closed place, but rather open to all those whom the youth can reach. Here the role of social communication through the internet, or telephonic messages, radio, and other such virtual platforms, where the youth are more competent can be considered (Anthony 2003, 108).

## 2.5. Qualitative Presence in the Educational Field

Clark suggested that children need support from people who speak for more inclusion in sports, more reasonable and accessible school environments and regular meetings where all those who work with adolescents come together and help one another to assess their unique and collective efforts to care for each child and adolescent in the community (Clark 2011, 192). When he speaks of a presence among the youth, he indicates a qualitative presence, more specifically a nurturing presence among them. The family is the first place where one learns the wise use of freedom (Francis 2016, 274).

However, the educational process that occurs between parents and children can be helped or hindered by the increasing sophistication of the communications and entertainment media. When used well, it can be helpful for connecting family members who live apart from one another (Francis 2016, 278). For the Catholic Church, to educate by evangelizing and evangelize by educating is at the heart of the proclamation of God's Reign already made manifest in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Although the two activities by themselves seem distinct, they are substantially one. They are two forces which help to generate a new person (Vallabaraj 2012, 62).

Education means restoring to each person the awareness of their dignity, the freedom to look to the future with active hope, the ability to recognize oneself as a protagonist in the complexity of human existence, both personally as well as collectively. For the Catholic Church, education is about restoration of a full human dignity through which the Church exercises her fidelity to the Lord (Tonelli 2003, 79). Catholic Ministry among the young needs to strengthen the area of qualitative presence in the life of the young which will be holistic in nature. The focus should not be limited to only academics and professional training, but the overall development of the young.

## 2.6. Strategic Planning for Youth Ministry Initiatives

Clark indicated that the role of Adoptive Youth Ministry in the twenty first century is to equip believers to be the voice of adoption and to be the catalyst for the dual task of nurturing and empowering participation (Clark 2016a, 4). As seen in his ideas, strategic planning in Youth Ministry is needed to be

effective. Youth Ministry also needs to become more flexible, inviting young people to events or occasions that provide an opportunity not only for learning, but also for conversing, celebrating, singing, listening to real stories and experiencing a shared encounter with the living God (Francis 2019, 204). From a Catholic perspective the Church's dynamic identity impels her towards the world and makes her missionary and outgoing. Without feeling the need to be at the centre, she is called to succeed with humility, to be the leaven even beyond her borders, knowing that she has something to give and something to receive in the framework of exchanging gifts (Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly 2018a, 140). This requires openness and sharing as strategic plans are made to strengthen Youth Ministry.

#### CONCLUSION

The key findings in this study are the discernment of youth potentiality, the role of adults in Youth Ministry within the action of the believing community and the discovery of the paternity of God through one's relation with His Son within the framework of Practical Theology. Considering the potentiality of the young, Adoptive Youth Ministry points out that even adults have a lot to learn from their children. Today, the Christian adult needs to consider the child as a partner in the life of the community and not just a person who must be formed. The child is a model to imitate, not only as a neighbour to be accepted, but also as a legitimate representative of the Lord (Mt. 9: 37) (*Young People: Faith, Vocation, Discernment* 2018, 220). Further, even Jesus proposes children as models for those who exercise authority in the community (Mt. 18: 1-4). He inculcated in his disciples a personalized attention towards children, spending time with them and blessing them. He also defended them as spokespersons of God (Mt. 21: 14-16) (*Young People: Faith, Vocation, Discernment* 2018, 215).

Jesus in the Synoptic gospels focuses on their social marginality. Personal immaturity and social insignificance appear to be a prototype of a disciple. Jesus places the child as a metaphor for the acceptance of God's Reign. This choice of Jesus also reveals the new conception of the child and the young

(*Young People: Faith, Vocation, Discernment* 2018, 219). Thus, acknowledgement of the potentiality of children, the young and emerging adults in the mission of Christ is essential today in Youth Ministry.

Regarding the role of adults in Youth Ministry within the action of the believing community, Adoptive Youth Ministry has much to offer. Biblically speaking, much of the New Testament literature underlines the insertion of the child into the Christian community where they belong. The healing miracles of Jesus also demonstrate that the healing was not a result of a special affection of Jesus for children. Rather, it expresses the closeness of the God's Reign and God's saving power in response to their parents' faith, which is shown in the ministry of Jesus. It is not the children, but rather the adult member of the family who asks for healing (*Young People: Faith, Vocation, Discernment* 2018, 214). A closer look at the theological insights of Clark tends towards such a holistic understanding of Youth Ministry in the Church where the role of adults within the believing community is highlighted.

Finally, Adoptive Youth Ministry reveals the paternity of God, who does not exclude anyone. The abandoned condition in which the Christian youth finds himself or herself, both in the society and the Church, was the basis for Clark's creative theological envisioning of a holistic Youth Ministry. It recognizes that in Jesus, all are children of the same Father. The end of every Church ministry is to lead all to an awareness of the great Mystery of God. It includes both, the ones who exercise this ministry as well as the beneficiaries of this ministry. It is a mystery which is inexhaustible and ever appealing. This aspect of the theology of Adoptive Ministry resonates with what the Indian sages had meditated upon centuries ago, which is found in the *Iśa upaniśad* – *Om puṛṇamadah puṛṇamidam, puṛṇāt puṛṇamudacyate. Puṛṇasya puṛṇamādāya, puṛṇamevavaśishyate*<sup>1</sup> which considers God as an inexhaustible mystery which does not exclude anyone and which is not confined to human limitations.

The whole of humanity is on a common discovery as it approaches the mystery of God. A mystery which Christians claim to be revealed in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. As a Christian believer who labours among the young and with the young, he or she is forever enchanted with this

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<sup>1</sup> ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पुर्णमुदच्यते पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥ which translates as – Fullness here, fullness there, fullness everywhere. **Take fullness from fullness. Fullness still remains** (*Iśa upaniśad, verse 1*).

Divine Mystery, which encompasses all. Adoptive Youth Ministry is a reminder that, Youth Ministry has this theological end, through Christ, guided by the Spirit, for the Church and in the context of the society.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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