

Addressing Youth Drug Abuse in the 21st Century: A Theological and Sociological Perspective on the Role of Mainline Churches in Youth Empowerment and Rehabilitation.

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ABSTRACT: The rise of youth drug abuse in the 21st century presents a pressing challenge that necessitates a comprehensive approach rooted in both theological and sociological perspectives. Mainline churches have a crucial role in addressing this crisis by promoting youth empowerment and facilitating effective rehabilitation. Traditionally, societal narratives often depict young people as troublesome or beyond redemption, neglecting their inherent potential, energy, and creativity. Such stigmatization and moralizing attitudes can alienate youth from faith communities, intensifying their feelings of spiritual emptiness and detachment. This study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing interviews, focus groups, and literature review to explore the underlying causes of youth drug abuse and the church's role in mitigation efforts. The findings reveal that a compassionate, non-judgmental approach centered on love, understanding, and spiritual support can significantly influence youth recovery and reintegration. The research emphasizes that engaging youth through meaningful dialogue, faith-based interventions, and community support fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, making a drug-free generation achievable. Based on these insights, the study recommends that churches develop holistic

programs that combine spiritual nurture with sociological support, actively involve youth in church activities, and foster partnerships with community organizations to combat drug abuse effectively. Inspired by John Paul II's affirmation that youth are a vital treasure of humanity, mainline churches are called to serve as transformative spaces where young people find acceptance, healing, and empowerment to overcome drug dependence and flourish spiritually, morally, and socially.

Keywords: *Youth, Drug Abuse, Church, Empowerment, Rehabilitation, Theological Perspective, Sociological Approach.*

Introduction

In his keynote address at the Synod on Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of listening to the youth. He stated, "The Church needs to listen, including to those young people who often do not feel understood by the Church in their originality and therefore not accepted for who they really are and sometimes even rejected... a Church that does not listen cannot be credible, especially for the young who will inevitably turn away rather than approach." (Gerard O'Connell, 2018). This call to attentiveness has inspired a profound reflection on the necessity of dedicating this year to the youth.

Today, many young people within the Christian community and society at large are vulnerable to drug abuse, with some spiralling into addiction, leading to chaotic and troubled lives. Okello highlights that "drug abuse among the youth is currently a matter of great concern not only in the developed world, but also in developing countries, and the problem is escalating. It elicits significant concern from authorities, educators, and parents" (Okello, 2018). The United Nations characterizes illicit drug use as a "youth phenomenon," noting that consumption increases through teenage years, peaking in early adulthood (United Nations on Drugs and Crime, 2012).

Several factors contribute to this crisis, including family disintegration due to high divorce rates and domestic violence, poor communication within families, moral decay, globalization-driven shifts in family life, negative media influences, unemployment, hereditary traits, and rebellious tendencies. A prevailing myth

exacerbates the problem: the misconception that youth are troublesome and irredeemable. Such judgments lead to neglect from families, communities, and society, which often results in youth seeking solace or validation elsewhere. Paradoxically, many youth continue to fill church pews but receive minimal support largely due to a generational gap. Young people often view adults as outdated, while adults see youth as inexperienced. As a result, young people frequently feel misunderstood, unloved, and unaccepted.

Love, as a moral obligation and Christian calling (John 13:34), requires intentional effort choosing to love youth rather than condemn them. Mother Teresa famously said, “If we judge people, we have no time to love them.” To effectively address youth drug abuse, the focus must shift toward positive engagement setting aside negative stereotypes and recognizing the potential for meaningful change. Pope Francis underscores this by calling for the abandonment of “prejudices and stereotypes” and emphasizing that “relations across generations are a terrain in which prejudice and stereotypes take root with proverbial ease...” (Gerard O’Connell, 2018).

Bridging the generational divide involves creating more positive perceptions of young people, thereby restoring their hope and confidence in living fulfilling lives within the Church and society. John Paul II also reinforced this perspective in his 1985 address to the youth, describing them as “a special treasure and a special possession of humanity itself.”

Drug abuse fosters a culture of death, and it is imperative that the Church actively promotes a pro-life culture. This includes raising awareness about the dangers of drug use and advocating for reforms in social structures that enable or promote drug consumption. Furthermore, youth must be accompanied through discernment processes that empower them to make healthy, sound decisions regarding their lives and to choose God as their ultimate source of holistic healing. Pope Francis emphasizes that “discernment is the method and at the same time the goal we set ourselves. It is based on the conviction that God is at work in world history, in life’s events, in people I meet and who speak to me” (Gerard O’Connell, 2018).

In the spiritual realm, it is ultimately God who can fill the void in youth's lives through the sacraments and the proclamation of His Word. Scholars like Okpalaenwe have examined the physical, social, and psychological impacts of youth chemical dependence, along with health risks associated with drug addiction. Strategies for recovery, such as those proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente, focus on experiential and behavioral change processes. However, this paper adopts a different approach, emphasizing the need for spiritual intervention. It explores the root causes and implications of youth drug abuse from a theological and sociological perspective, offering a spiritual pathway to healing and rehabilitation—affirming that God's grace is central to true recovery.

This paper contends that addressing youth drug abuse in the 21st century requires a holistic approach that integrates theological principles with sociological understanding. The mainline churches have a vital role in empowering and rehabilitating youth by fostering genuine love, understanding, and spiritual growth—helping young people find meaning, hope, and purpose in their lives through divine grace and community support.

Definition of terms

According to the youth dictionary a youth “is a young person who has not yet reached adulthood and refers to the time period before you become an adult.” It can also be referred to as “the state or quality of being young especially of being vigorous, lively, or immature, impetus, etc.” It also points to an early stage of growth and existence.

Unesco (2018) says the term youth “is more fluid category than a fixed age group” This is also supported by Sahaya (2017) in his article, *Defining Youth: Pastoral Implications for Africa* says the term youth is “a slippery term that defies any precise definition” He explains that several reasons contributed to the fluidity of the terminology and conceptualisation. Each country or organization defines the term differently. Some prefer to define the youth in terms of energy, dynamism and vitality. Nyoni (1993) in support of this says “many of the African Churches in Africa define the youth in terms of feeling young” The African Youth Charter for instance,

extends the youth age range from 15-35. The United Nations for statistical consistency across regions defines youth as “persons between the ages of 15 and 24years, without prejudices to other definitions by Member States.”

According to the Collins dictionary a drug is “a chemical which is given to people in order to treat or prevent an illness.” The dictionary further describes drugs as “substances that some people take because of their pleasant effects, but which are usually illegal.” Broadly a drug has been defined as “any substance which when taken into the living organism, may modify one or more of the functions.”

Drugs may be legal for instance, alcohol, caffeine and tobacco and illegal for example, cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin. Drug abuse therefore, refers to non-medical use of drugs. Ghodse (2003) explicates “a substance is considered abused if it is deliberately used to induce physiological or psychological effects or both for purposes other than therapeutic ones and when the use contributed to health risks or some combinations of these.” The psychoactive drugs are divided into four categories namely; depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens and ‘other’.

Youth characteristics

The period of the youth particularly the adolescent period is the most critical and most significant in the development of a person. It is also characterised by a litany of problems because of the need to fulfil certain needs which are physiological, and psychological. According to Shodhganga the psychological needs constitutes the need for freedom, for adventure, for independence, for social life *etcetera*. The physiological needs constitute the need for activity and sexual satisfaction. Young people are also characterised by a heightened emotionality and this is reasonat times they show uncontrollable anger. They will always view law and order as a big challenge to bow themselves to. Mondo (2006) characterise the youth as the “headache of the community.” He sees a certain level of delinquency also picked up by the African Synod, *Ecclesia in Africa* which puts it categorically that the youth are “a conglomerate of obstacles that thwart their development. They are illiterate, idle, hungry and drug abusers” (John Paul 11, 1995).

Due to the problems and confusions of this period it has often been described by Arnett (1999) as a period “of storm and stress.” These needs help us to understand the young in some of the behaviours they manifest because of what is going on in them without necessarily having to judge and condemn them. For instance, the need for adventure will help us understand that without proper guidance in their bid to explore many things the young may end up engaging in aimless wandering, vagabonding and other unruly social acts such as drugs, strikes and demonstrations. Furthermore, the physical development of their bodies can lead to pleasure and excitement in some while in others it may bring shame, disgust, confusions, anxiety and guilt. In the case of too much excitement, they would want to experiment with things like sex and drugs no matter the risks beyond the actions. This is why Arnett (1999) argues about three domains of conflicts related to the transitional period from childhood to adulthood among young people as “conflict with parents, mood disruptions and risk behaviour.” Nyomi (1993) however, explains that this youth period is regarded in many cultures as “the spring of life.” This is due to the rapid growth and development of the person and also in his capabilities and commitments which takes place before reaching 30.

Motivation toward the Youths

According to Ojore (2001) “more than half of the World’s population is below the age of 25 and in Africa; the youth constitute 50% of the total population.” Inferring from the above statistics Ojore (2001) says that it is a fact that “youth ensure the continuity of a country, of a Church and of a particular community. They are bearers of cultures, traditions, customs and values of their people into the next generation.” Thus, the youth is the most generous time and so, targeted by all. Manoj (2018) articulates that they are also “the best agents for change; they hold the key to the lifestyle of the world. They are leaders today and tomorrow both civilly and in the Church. Politicians as well as priests and laity are all among them.” Therefore, as a Church we cannot afford to ignore them but respond to their needs for a complete turnaround.

In a wider context, Martin explores the interest of the Catholic Church in the young people. He says “we have a shared vision of life; there is God at the heart of the

world. Life is not just chance or luck. It is a gift. All learning is holy because it is a search for truth, wholeness and ultimately, that is search for God” (Ajore, 2001). The Church should make young people feel loved and accepted and should work towards their committing themselves to God. They are to be helped to train and assist them to commit themselves to the values of the Kingdom as at their age possess a spontaneous zeal for them. But the challenge for now is to work towards bringing most of the young people back to the Church so that we may be able to help them. Unless they are drawn back to the Church the quest to help particularly, drug addicts remain a dream yet to be realised. Achieving the dream will not only bring personal transformation in their lives but a sense of mission will be realised in them to the extent that they become evangelisers to their own peers. John Paul II (1995) says “no one can do it better than they.”

However, the temptation in many adults is that they have broken ties with the young. Most of their hearts have remained closed rather than open in understanding. There is always a rational and emotional gap between the two groups. Lespinay (2009) explains “to understand young people we have to esteem them without judging them.” We have to accept that we do not understand. Once in the world of adults he says “we lose contact with what a young person is living. But they are called to follow Christ just as we have been called.” To substantiate this point Manoj (2018) expresses the fact that youth “are a complex reality that must be treated with caution. From a distance they might seem like troublemakers, but when one draws near them and shares Christ with them, they become the most lovable and noble friends.”

A closer look at the neglect of youth then brings to our attention a ‘culture of death’ which is increasing among the youth today and this often leads to a void in their hearts, a deep spiritual crisis which entails a spiritual search for a spiritual solution. The expression ‘culture of death’ was coined by John Paul II in *Evangelii Vitae* “to describe the prevailing violence against human life in our day” (Hardon, 2018). It refers to abortion and euthanasia, but also to a wider acceptance “practices among others in our modern culture” (Culture of Death, 2018). In this regard we can also relate drug abuse as a culture of death and we believe God is the answer to this

culture where the sacredness of the human person is threatened Cf. (John 10:10). Drug abuse eventually leads one to chemical dependency or addictions which are detrimental to their health and undermine the integrity of the human person.

Foundations for drug abuse

Chief among the reasons why young people find themselves into drugs is due to disintegration of families. This could have been brought by divorces or domestic violence. Lespinay (2009) says that divorces have been rampant “they exceed 50% of most contracted marriages in the civilized’ world today.” Domestic violence has been common in the home and it takes different forms as sexual, physical, emotional and psychological. Bansikiza (2013) in his article, *Challenges Facing the Christian Family In Africa Today* says “the increasing number of destitute young people and children roaming the streets of most urban centres in Africa are victims of domestic violence.” They are in despair and hopeless situation as the unity and stability has been compromised and therefore, they lack the love and care.

Family disintegration can also come about by movement in search of greener pastures in the form of work. Stronger family bonds and family values have been greatly disrupted. The Christian family values such as love, joy, patience, unity and kindness are constantly threatened. The family ceases to be a community of life and love. Bansikiza (2013) explains “families are not growing together and sharing life together. Individuals and communities are torn by different interests, professions and commitments.” The globalised family will lose sight of the essential principle of unity in the family. Therefore, families pay little attention to the value of the family in order to responsibly bring forth responsible persons desired by Church and society. This is why John Paul II (1981) explicates that Christian marriage and family life as an issue at stake is extremely serious since truly “the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”

Family disintegration has often led to yet another acute problem for the young that is, loneliness. It is not just loneliness for the sake of it; something surely is disturbing them up in their minds and they have no opportunity to share their struggles, troubles or whatever is going on in their lives. The family as the first school of virtue and

moral values is compromised. Bansikiza (2013) says “parents have no or little time to render parental guidance and to counteract misleading messages, information and formation in the family...” Lack of communication by family members make them resort to alternative repugnant enjoyments such as drugs, pornography, promiscuity and alcohol. As if the torture of family neglect or separation is not enough some close family members take advantage of the young and abuse them either sexually, physically or emotionally by beating them or using abusive words against their ego. This could be an experience of a biological parent or step parent or a trusted close family member or relative. Some are raped and in the process contract HIV and AIDS. Bansikiza(2013) quoting Onyango says “parents, step-parents, close relatives, and caretakers have been reported sexually abusing their children under their care. Often the abusers are those known and familiar rather than strangers to the child.” These can be labelled as predator guardians. Abuse can also happen in schools and other correction institutions. These past traumatic experiences and the experience of loneliness disturb them; in fear it remains a secret that would never be shared. The emotional, physical and spiritual states of the individual in this case are severely disturbed and so it is easier to fall prey to drugs in order to seek consolation. John Paul II (1994) in *Letters to Families* says “as a result of these dangers families cease to be witness to the civilization of love... in society.” The young person’s experience is characterised by a lot of suffering.

The break-up of the family moral fibre has led into a series of miscalculated deaths, parents dying earlier than the life expectancy. When parents die this affect children. The children are left orphans and this has been the order of the day. No one is taking good care of them if not old helpless grandparents. Some youth have been left behind with the burden of being child parents to their own fellow siblings. Due to suffering because of assuming parental responsibility when they are not physically and emotionally prepared puts pressure on them let alone the memories of missing the care and love of their beloved parents they resort to drugs. Eddy Peter (2018), a television personality and actor in the *Kenya Sunday Nation*, narrates his ordeal of losing his parents when he was still young and the pains of looking after his fellow brother. In an interview with Hilary Kimuyu he narrates “it was not easy stepping into the role of a father and a big brother. I got into many things, from illegal

businesses and ended up using drugs. I used heroin, cocaine, weed and a lot of alcohol.” It is easy as Okello puts it that young people are more exposed to drugs in this environment than ever and the risk is high. They engage in all sorts of drugs for temporal pleasure and to drown in their own worries. Eventually, without anyone to look up to, indulgence in drugs act as a catalyst to their dreaded conscience, they engage in miscalculated journeys and become victims of child trafficking in the form of child prostitution or child labour in a bid to survive; if not at all they die resisting the unforeseen dire consequences.

Since the orphans are denied access to the privileges and rights belonging to a family they resort to becoming street kids in ghettos so that they at least survive. For them, life becomes meaningless they live anyhow and, in this case, the orphans are exposed to all forms of child delinquencies. The environment they are exposed to is now faster than their age and pace and so they cannot bear it anymore. Searching for meaning in their lives they engage in that which is available and give them consolation and temporary happiness though it is short lived. Eventually because of the pressure and circumstances the orphans experience in the new environment, they opt for drugs.

Young people are marked by a certain kind of rebelliousness which always needs adults to understand and help them. If young people are neglected they would increase in moral decadence as their freedom is somehow not monitored and controlled. Modernization and cyber-technology have been instrumental in the erosion of moral values among young people. Bansikiza (2001) puts it succinctly “ young people in Africa are greatly influenced by the environmental attitudes and ideologies depicted from literature, radios and various audio-visual aids and are fast at imitating them to their own detriment and that of the community.” Partnership for Drug-Free Kids (2018) also concurs with this when they confirm that “45% of the teens agree that the music that teens listen to makes marijuana seem cool and 45% of the teens consent to the idea that movies and television shows seem to glorify drugs; it seems okay to consume and to talk about it. Some are blindfolded by successful role models especially in the West who are well known drug abusers. It is however, this mentality and the abuse of such media platforms that pornography, sex, drugs

and money have been hailed as the norm and young people seek consolation in these things. This has been the effect of globalisation where morality is judged by personal standards of an individual. A person pursues what one thinks is good for oneself. Globalisation has had the inclination of permitting and trivialising evils as the normal way of life for instance, deviant behaviour, divorce, planned single parenthood *etc.* are viewed lightly as acceptable socio-ethical standards.

Furthermore, some abuse drugs simply because they grew up spoiled either by their parents or guardians. The youth act as spoiled 'brats'. They start smoking little by little without anyone reprimanding them. Having everything at their disposal for instance, money and always receiving a pat at the back the youth live in a world of fantasy. Parental correction is taken as an offence. In this regard treating children with kid gloves and 'too much' emphasis on children rights have had a serious parental educational crisis. Okello says that they will lack strong fundamental values from their parents, teachers and families thereby searching for such values in wrong places. Irresponsible parenting is not the way to go. Bansikiza(2001) says "it is the responsibility of parents to morally form and be role models to their children. Parents have a moral responsibility to their children to communicate moral values to their children by fulfilling their parental moral obligations" as the home is the "first school of Christian life and a school for human enrichment" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1657). Parents have to be aware of this fact that when it comes to children, it is not just co-creating with God but have an ardent task to educate rightfully their children in all matters that affect their lives.

Young people may also abuse drugs because of idleness. As goes the saying, 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop'. Das (2001) explains "if adolescents have nothing to do or rather nothing that occupies their minds during their free time they tend to be involved in some unsocial and criminal activities that are detrimental to their lives." With many of them having acquired a series of educational qualifications still they are idle as the rate of unemployment in most African countries is very alarming and high. K. Roberts *et al*, (1984) in their article, *Youth Unemployment: An Old or New Life-Style* has it that "without employment, individual self-concept diminishes and shame and stigma of being jobless might drive the victim to social isolation and

misery.” A significant study conducted by Nandi “...revealed that poverty due to unemployment and lack of adequate education and vocational training led to alcohol and drug taking” (Bansikiza 2001). The youth are also not willing to explore other job alternatives as doing self-help projects as they look up to formal employment especially in the form of white collar jobs. Due to idleness, social isolation and misery the youth see their future as shattered and they seek solace in drugs. Okello (2018) notes “due to lack of jobs, even adults have resorted to selling drugs to the young in order to learn a living. Desperation has destroyed their consciences to the point that they no longer consider whom they are selling to and whether it is right or wrong. What matters for them is income in order to survive as each day comes.” As if that was not enough, some African governments are fighting for the legalization of marijuana all in the name therapy without even calculating the harm this would have to younger generations. The situation in this case, may turn from bad to worse as control may be difficult as the drug will be readily available and present without any law enforcement against it.

However, for some youth drug indulgence and abuse could be a hereditary trait or curse that should always seek a spiritual solution. Some families tracing back their successive generations have a history of drug abuse. Okpalaenwe (2014) explains “it has long been established that genetic factors along with social and psychological factors are contributors to addiction. Epidemiological studies estimate that genetic factors account for 40-60% of the risk factors for alcoholism.” Thus many youth are in bondage and would only be freed by seeking a spiritual solution; it is beyond some human intervention. The only solution is to dedicate their lives to God in prayer.

Implications of Drugs on young people

It is the duty of the Church to seek to alleviate the plight of the youth from drug abuse. John Paul II says “the future of the Church or society is invested in the young, if they are spoiled therefore the future generation is in a state of extinction.” Excessive use of drugs no doubt cripples individual persons, families, communities and the nation as a whole hence, the need for integral healing. Imagine a country with a high percentage of drug addicts; cannot invest much into the future. As a matter of fact, it creates a generation of lazy people without dreams and goals as well

as targets to fulfil. Laziness also wreaks havoc on their souls as it is one of the seven capital sins. Okpalaenwe (2014) explains that some persons are surviving on chemical dependency; they feel compelled to drink alcohol or take drugs, even when it has its negative consequences on their health, relationships, social life and more. They develop tolerance to drugs and they tend to underperform in any work if they have not taken it and perform normally after taking it and working under its influence. Okpalaenwe (2014) further notes “at least 4% of all adults are alcohol dependent. It is around 7% for men and 3% for women. The highest rates in men are in the 20-24 age group and fall steadily after that.” This could be the most productive age that is wasted because of over reliance on drugs. They have no will power and the strength to work as all the energy would have been drained by this excessive indulgence in harmful substances and eventually engage in unruly social acts such as stealing and prostitution for their survival.

In spite of the little efforts to help young people, many have died because of the continuous abuse of drugs. The youth seem to pay no heed to the dangers associated with the abuse and one of such dangers is eventual death. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that alcohol abuse results in 2.5million deaths per year and that heroin, cocaine and other drugs are responsible for 0.1 to 0.2million deaths per year. Substance abuse is responsible for such significant deaths and moreover, the treatment of drug addiction is expensive and creates a tremendous burden on society. The cost world-wide is estimated to be \$250-300million per year according to the UN statistics. Such a scenario can be a catalyst to worse family disintegration scenarios as parents fight and shelve the blame on each other for the children’s failures. Some parents may not even accept well the situation and this may even have an effect on their health too. This will have a destabilizing effect on blood pressure, sugar level control and can cause heart attacks.

However, the Church should positively respond to the needs of young people in such a predicament otherwise, they risk losing their worth as persons. In spite of any predicament every person has a right to human dignity. John Paul II (2015) echoes that “the Creator has special love for each human being and therefore, confers upon him or her infinite dignity.” God gives us worth and value for who we are as we are

created in His image and likeness. Benedict XVI (2005) puts it more succinctly when he says “we were conceived of the heart of God each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.” It is our responsibility to respect the sacredness of human life and as Christians guard against cosmetic spirituality that is, to preach love and mercy which is not part of us. Echoing Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross insists that God “sustains every soul and dwells in every soul substantially, even though it may be the greatest sinner in the world” (Lawrence, S. Cunningham, 2018). There is always sanctity with regard to human life and therefore, everyone is special no matter the condition you find yourself in.

John of the Cross once expressed that the Trinity in heaven is always contemplating compassion and grace. He says that once the Trinity was discussing, who will go and redeem people from their sins? The Son, the Eternal Word of the Father was sent through the mystery of the Incarnation and died for everyone through the most inhumane and painful way of the Cross so that the will of the Father may be fulfilled. The will is that every person’s life maybe elevated once more to the dignity that must be enjoyed by the sons and daughters of God. Christ died for young people who are addicts too and faith entails that it is the mission of everyone to raise others to the level of Christ’s dignity bearing in mind that every person is not a something but a someone. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2015) expresses “created in the Image and likeness of God the individual is capable of self- knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons.”

Benedict XVI whilst addressing the Church of America on the mission of the Church reiterated that faith cannot survive unless it is formed by charity. This charity is moved by appreciating the intrinsic value of a person created in the image and likeness of God and is redeemed by Jesus Christ. It is also our Christian way of living like Jesus, the life of the beatitudes. However, human dignity implies acting justly by living in right relationship with God, friends, co-workers and community or anyone we come in contact with. We have a responsibility upon others because of the vision of interdependence and solidarity. This responsibility exerts “a claim on us, a moral call to be at the service of our brothers and sisters” (Joseph Pieper, 1966).

This is why Pieper (1966) says “to be just means more than to owe something and to pay the debt. It means we owe something to others and they, to us as our lives are always enmeshed in relationships that carry inescapable moral demands.” A just person therefore, lives with others in mind. Christian justice entails us to see traces of God’s goodness in those with hopeless or the seemingly irredeemable situations without necessarily having to judge them and offer no help (Lk. 6:37-42). Just like the Richman because of wealth and luxury failed to see God’s presence in Lazarus we can also be morally and spiritually blinded to see the plight of these young people who are addicts. In light of this McDonagh (1982) reminds us that recognizing the image of God in others “constitute a way of life... and is constantly in danger of being obscured by the false beauties of gods created in our own image.”

Spiritual solution to save their plight

The writers appreciate that so much has been written on drug abuse by young people. Many for instance Matowo, 2013; Ngesu & Njeri, 2014; Oxford young health talk, 2014; Ongwae, 2016; Open Institute for Western Africa (OSIWA) have written on the causes, problems, effects and remedial measures of drug and substance abuse. Some for example, Okpalaenwe have discussed on youth chemical dependence; its physical, social and psychological problems, effects and health risks related. Prochaska and Diclemente have offered an outline of a recovery change programme on therapeutic strategies based on the experiential and behavioural processes. The writer still insist will this be enough to save this plight in young people? A person needs to be assisted holistically. Thus, he advocates paying special attention to the spiritual aspect of the person, there is more to the person than the eye can see. The youth are also spiritual though they have tended not to be religious. The spiritual void in the youth need to be attended to. The youth could be invited back to the Church by opening youth centres for their rehabilitation and healing and offer sessions for a spiritual growth so that they be in touch once more with God.

Eddy Peter in the Sunday Nation explains that the turning point of his life in the drug world was to stop the abuse of the finances he acquired and, use it for the better and eventually had the task to rededicate his life to Christ. The youth could be reminded that the knowledge and fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Let

youth come, learn and know God's redeeming ways for a holy life. Christ invites all the youth to come (Rabbi where do you live? Come and see. John 1:35-51), learn (learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart. Mt. 11:29) and to share His life (I am the way, the truth and the life. John. 14:6). Jesus invites youth as His friends to come and share His life. A drug free generation is possible if and only if young people commit and trust themselves to the ways of Christ.

The Church is called to healing and healing is part of the sanctifying office of the Church. The 1983 Code of Canon Law says "the Church carries out its office of sanctifying in a special way in the sacred liturgy, which is an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ." We experience the need for healing through all sacraments but in a special way in Reconciliation and Anointing as we are subjected to sin, suffering, disease and death. Youth can be healed too by introducing them to the life of the sacraments. The youth need that awareness and interior disposition of the value of the sacraments received with proper disposition. In participating and receiving the sacraments the youth are now connected and in touch with Christ. He is the healer par excellence and He heals their brokenness through the sacraments. Schuchts in his book, *Be Transformed, The Healing Power of the Sacraments* expresses that one of the fundamental purposes of each sacrament is to bring healing in a particular way. For instance, baptism will heal a person from rejection while the Eucharist heals our wounds of abandonment. Muropa explains that the spirituality of the seven sacraments returns to Jesus, the primordial sacrament, He is the centre of all sacraments. He further says "sacraments are God's Word (Self-Communication) in which he offers Himself to people and thereby liberates them to accept God's self-communication a deliberate act" (Muropa, 2012). Young people thus, must be brought to an awareness and appreciation that they can receive healing through receiving the sacraments. Christ heals us deliberately and freely without counting any cost.

Just as Christ in time was a physician of the blind, the lame, the crippled, the deaf and dumb and demoniacs and restored them to bodily and spiritual health so is, now through the working and presence of the Holy Spirit. He effects healing and salvation to everyone through the sacraments. The Eucharist is the means by which persons are

“brought to spiritual healing and cleansed from their sins and restored in charity.” Pollock in his article; *The Eucharist As a Sacrament of Healing* explains that even those involved in rehabilitation or health care centres must not forget that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our Christian life and must bring healing to the person by receiving Christ in the Eucharist. Even the *viaticum*, the final healing brings consolation and hope to the soul even as a person is making a Passover journey from death to life.

Another way of bringing healing to young people is to introduce them to the Word of God. They can be healed spiritually through the Word of God and this can be a turning point for their lives. The Psalmist says that it is the Lord who heals always (Ps. 103:3, Prov3:7-8). Pounds (2018) in his article; *Healing in the Bible* affirms the word healing means “to make solid or whole.” Thus, in the Bible healing means restoration of health making the person whole or well physically, mentally and spiritually. Jesus healing ministry was characterised as such and aimed at the integrity of the whole person. Christ performed healing in the context of teaching, and if young people receive teaching as well as preaching they can receive healing in their souls. Christ healed through His power and spoken word. If we too proclaim to the young we bring not only healing but a proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Even in the scriptures Paul proclaimed the Kingdom to young Eutychus and all present when he resuscitated him from the dead after he went asleep, fell out of the window and died while he was delivering his sermon (Acts 20: 7-12).

Campbell in his article; *The Way of Human Dignity: Embracing the Way Series (part 6)* explicates that Jesus healing ministry was not simply taking care of physical ailment but was integrating the people into the larger society for example, lepers. In other words, he restored people back to life by restoring their dignity. If one does not enjoy his dignity as a person it is as good as one is dead. Thus, Jesus gave them life and they lived happily and in peace communicating with God and others. He did not only give them life but empowered them to be part of a larger society. For instance, in curing the deaf/mute, Campbell (2018) says Jesus gave the person the opportunity to communicate with friends and neighbours (Mk 2:1-12). In curing the paralytic, Jesus was giving him the opportunity of becoming an active member in the

community. The healing ministry is part of the Church's calling (Jas 5:13-15) and must be characterised by such an empowerment that is, not just seeing young people out of their problems but empowering them to become better people in life by engaging them in beneficial youth projects that offer them basic sustenance. This will act as an enemy to idleness and create employment. This will also minimize unruly acts as stealing, prostitution, terror gangsters, indiscipline and violence. In such a scenario they breathe life and they are able to see things differently. The youth having been empowered they are able to see and taste the Lord's goodness beyond their individuality (Ps. 34:8).

It is essential therefore, to appreciate that it is Christ who heals through Word and Sacrament as He acts through signs and speaks through scripture and that has an effect through our lives. Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* invites all to trust in God as the source of goodness and healing. He says "... it is only becoming-one with God can be the true process of man's healing" (Ratzinger, 2007). The ultimate integral healing can only be possible not by human means but by God's love.

Recommendations for youth guidance

Promoting Life

It is the task of the Church therefore, to search and rediscover the world of the young people afresh. A culture for pro-life must be cultivated and therefore, it is the duty of the Church as a moral conscience for society to stand for the truth and to see to it that such a goal has materialised. However, it is the duty of the families, communities and mother Church to play second fiddle as God's channels. In collaboration with relevant civil authorities, in unison they must condemn and castigate all structures that promote the supply of drugs to the young in the name of business. Perpetrators must be hunted down and brought to book. When all is said and done, we will be promoting life rather than destroying it and we can make the world a safehaven for the younger generation rather than just blaming them. Like Jesus, we can safely say it is consummated, God's will to live rightfully as children of God would have been realised in their lives through families, community and Church cooperation.

Social Reformation

To this cause of drugs adults are to accept youth in different unbearable conditions and environments due to drugs and show them the way and light to Christ. Vatican II outlines its concern that “the Christian response to the ills of the world today includes the concern for social reforms that address the basic living conditions of the poor and marginalized...” It affirms they should also increase the availability of healthcare so that those on the peripheries of society, the poor, the disenfranchised young people and the elderly may experience the healing work of Christ. It is our prime duty and responsibility therefore, especially in this year dedicated to young people in the Church to bring them more and more closer to Christ especially those already in critical conditions that require treatment and rehabilitation. We recall Christ’s words on the parable of sheep and goats about the Last Judgment; “Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt. 25:40). It is our immediate duty to attend to such particular cases in our families and communities and never to give up. *Aluta continua!*

Create Awareness

There is also need to create awareness that there is more to life than just drugs. Any youth ministry as it were, must strive to place young people at the centre making them a priority of all we dream, plan and execute. This is so as the scriptures attest to the truth that children and young people are very close to the heart of Jesus whose basic attitude they are called to imitate. Drugs consume and just deplete their lifespan with all its potentialities. As a long term solution, effective programs must be in place such as counselling sessions and rehabilitation centres for those already affected. These can be done at a parish level and the parish should see to it that professional counsellors are engaged for effective therapy results. Priests may not be as effective since it is not their area of speciality. The target should be worst scenario cases of those who cannot find help in any form from their immediate families or small Christian communities they belong to. It is the duty of the Church to cover the physical and spiritual sores of them and never to abandon them as there is more to the human person than what the eye can see. Otherwise, there must be many programs such as youth vocational trainings, academics or activities with a Christian

ethos to help and build up young people primarily by wasting away much of their unused time and energy thereby lowering the risk of indulging into drugs. We must always welcome them to the Church and give them a sense of identity and belonging in all Church activities especially by promoting an active, conscious participation in liturgical celebrations, decision making bodies *et cetera*.

Youth activities

Programmes for young people using sports to promote drug prevention and community engagement can have important effects on the outcome. The Church must see to it that it reduces drug abuses by engaging youth in sport participation. In addition, they must entice the youth by things that they are greatly attracted to in a positive way social media sites, entertainment and search for play activities they are greatly fond of. The only way to get them and keep them with us is to have these things at their disposal and engage them in competition and fun sessions. With this in mind we propose the following for youth care and for keeping them interested, attracted and faithful to the Church thereby growing in right relationship with Jesus;

1. Befriending- just being a friend to troubled youth is beneficial
2. Counselling- developing awareness and support at parish level.
3. Life Skills Group Work- Imparting life skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution and decision making
4. Youth mentoring ‘walking’ with a youth over an extended period of time.
5. Parenting talks
6. Volunteer training- equipping volunteers with necessary knowledge and skills in helping youth at risk and their families.
7. Outdoor Adventures- rock climbing, mountain biking, hiking etc.
8. Sports or recreational activities.

Discernment

Young people must be accompanied and helped in the area of discernment for a healthy living and a brighter future. The Church as it were, must inculcate in the young the attitudes of discernment namely listening, gathering interior silence and

acting with asceticism challenging today's culture of 'noise' in every decision they may undertake. With a soul open to the spirit and a genuine discernment a drug free generation is possible, let us all together work out for this noble cause. Whoever has the task of accompanying young people must not be afraid to dirty their hands as they work with 'soft clay' that is, young people. They must be able to reach out to them, mix with them without any fear. Like the potter, the Church must give shape to the young people. Understanding and drawing near to them is the first step in the Church's mission concerning the youth and the wonder of educating is always the joy of seeing young people entrusted to our care take shape and succeed in life.

Conclusion

Having explored the causes of drug abuse among the young people, we have come to the realisation that some are caused by family background, some due to economic crisis, some breakdown of the moral fibre, laziness, the need for adventure while for some it is the negative influence of media and globalisation. Many factors are at play and the youth are not completely to blame and therefore, a continuous effort to understand the youth through dialogue will keep the Church young and relevant. John Paul II (2015) says "the Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favourable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations, and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society." Drug abuse destroys the present and future generations of our young people physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially and even spiritually. It can lead to destruction of self, family and community, social isolation and eventual death. The youth are considered hopeless and helpless and therefore, must instil hope in them by positive engagement; promoting a pro-life culture, creating awareness of the danger of drugs, reformation of social structures which facilitates the abuse of drugs. The Church should also engage in youth activities to reduce the abuse as well assisting the youth in the discernment so as to make healthy and sound decisions in the journey of life. They too are uniquely willed and created by God and therefore, must not be rendered helpless or treated with scorn but with equal dignity as each individual is original for God and cannot be repeated.

Therefore, there is need in adults to demythologize youth identity, look at them with positivity and have the urge to continuously help them without necessarily having to judge them and give up.

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