YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
with RELIGION *and* FAITH
in the 21ST CENTURY

Youth Engagement With Religious or Spiritual Communities in Social, Political and Economic Activism: A Matter of Historical Mediation of Values

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INTRODUCTION

This article presents seven models by which any religious or spiritual community can mediate its sapiential wisdom -the meaning of life and death- in history. It was written with the aim of explaining the youth engagement process with them in matters of socio-environmental, political and/or economic activism. In this regard, we (you/I) are going to wonder from a historical-ontological approach, why, despite the fact that youth are far more recognized at this time for re-thinking unfair socio-environmental, political and economic structures than they were years ago, they are not engaging (in high numbers) with religious or spiritual communities (especially with the most traditional ones). Are not the religious and spiritual communities the quintessential guardians of

all religious and moral values among human beings? Why are they not being attractive enough for young people to engage with?

In this article we are going to consider the hypothesis that youth engagement with religious or spiritual communities (at least, in most parts of the world) is fading today, as a result of most of these communities not properly mediating their values in history (ethically and historically). One example will help us to clarify our hypothesis.

In our days, the gender value presents ethical contents, which correspond to the dogmatic cores of our traditional religious or spiritual communities (e.g. women's dignity, the role of women in society, the eradication of all kind of violence against women,

etc.), but also it includes others that contradict them (LGTBQ+, sexual reproductive issues, etc). How are most of our traditional religious or spiritual communities dealing with the gender value nowadays? While most of our communities accept the need of empowering women, most are not favouring the development of fairer ethical-political institutions and/or structures capable of supporting them (and those who acknowledge themselves from another non-binary gender horizon) towards the enjoyment of their rights, in more inclusive societies.

Does not it sound a bit contradictory, reductive or excluding? Is not there any possibility for our communities to accompany some liberating gender initiatives at the grass-root level despite the valid dogmatic contradictions? The answer to this question depends on how our religious or spiritual communities understand the process of mediation of values in history.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section we are going to present the main concepts of the Inculturated philosophy from which we will understand the seven processes of mediation of values that any religious or spiritual community can develop in history (they are not the only ones). In a second moment, we will present some statements that describe the reality of the youth in our days to understand why we need to consider them at the time of mediating values in history.

Religious and spiritual communities as communication communities

The Inculturated philosophy is a specific branch of the Latin American philosophy of liberation mainly developed by the Jesuit Priest, Juan Carlos Scannone, and other Latin American and Caribbean thinkers (Carlos Cullen, Rodolfo Kusch, Mario Casalla, etc). It was developed in dialogue with the European and

Judeo-Christian philosophical traditions respectively focused on "the being" and on "the happening".

In the case of the Inculturated philosophy, it found its global horizon of interpretation of reality in the "experience of being somewhere" (the locative use of the verb "to be," "estar" -in Spanish-). These horizons of interpretation should be considered in circumincession -in reciprocal existence- and rooted in the "experience of being somewhere." This uniplural metaphysic will allow us to think of the peoples on earth as communication communities, and analogously, to do the same with any religious or spiritual community.

Which are the main characteristics of any communicational community?

1. They are historical and cultural communities, which are not either mere additions of individuals (the analytical way of thinking a community from "the being") or mere concrete cases of an abstract humanity (the dialectic way of thinking a community from the same global horizon) (Scannone, 1990, p. 137-138). They are the humanity historically and ethically-culturally mediated in a plural unity of people (Scannone 1990, p. 209).

2. Every communication community is historical and ethical-cultural (Scannone 1990, p. 126-129.215). What does that mean? That no communication community can be understood without their histories and cultural ethos (the ways of relating with the others, the environment, and the transcendent mystery from the ethical horizon of the absolute good).

3. The plural unity of every people is grounded on the principle of otherness negation (Scannone, 1990, p. 64, footnote 68), which indicates the ethical way of relating to the others within a communication community. In this, the "I" turns

into a "me" (accusative form) responding to the "you" (who is in front of the "me" sharing the same geo-cultural ground) as well as to both the "him/her/it" and to the "Him/ Her/ It" with capital letter (the absolute).

4. In these plural unities the "me", "you", "him/her/it" (Him/Her/It) do not lose their uniqueness (singularity) (Scannone, 1990, pp. 190-191). This manner of relating to each other in a communication community is ethical by essence. All the community members tend to behave in a responsive way rather than in a pretentious or dominating manner.

5. From this perspective all the peoples are communicational communities in which the man-woman dialectic process (dialectic of fraternity and peace) is prioritized over the master-slave dynamic (dialectic of separation and injustice) (Scannone, 1990, p. 177).

6. The principle of otherness negation provokes every communicational community to agree on a core of sapiential contents about the meaning of life and death (Scannone 1990, pp. 17-18), which is also constituted as a plural unity. This sapiential wisdom is manifested by symbols and also implies a set of values that each community should mediate in history (Scannone, 1990, p. 29).

7. A communication community can be analogously analyzed as any communication, what means, at its semantic (content-sapiential wisdom), syntactic (way of living the contents), and pragmatic level (the community) (Scannone, 1990, p. 112).

Youth engagement in activism

The *World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda* (United Nations, 2020) references that "[…] young people between 15 and 24 years of age number 1.21 billion and account for 15.5 per cent of the global population," as well as that "[…] the youth cohort will reach 1.29 billion (15.1 per cent of the world total) by 2030 and almost 1.34 billion (13.8 per cent of the overall population) by 2050 (United Nations, 2019c)" (p. 5). In addition to that, the document, *Youth 2030: Working with and for young people* (United Nations, 2018) affirmed that "close to 90 percent of them [of the youth] live in developing countries" (p. 4).

The *Youth2030: Progress Report 2021*-the first report on the implementation of the UN *Youth2030 Strategy* (launched in 2018)- states that "in 2020 alone, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 168 million students lost access to almost all in-person learning, one in four young people were out of work, and the mental health of hundreds of millions of children and young people risked deterioration;" immediately, it clarifies that "young women were particularly affected by the increased burden of care work, lost economic opportunities and were at greater risks of violence" (UN, 2021, Foreword).

How are we going to build a better world for the youth without including them when shifting unfair structures that target young people as one of their first victims?

"It is abundantly clear that it is only by engaging and working with them [the youth], supporting them in standing up for their rights and creating the conditions allowing them to progress and play an active role, that the international community will be able to achieve peace, security, justice, climate resilience and sustainable development for all" (United Nations, 2018, p.4).

METHODOLOGY

This paper will shed light on the structural level of the youth engagement processes with our religious or spiritual communities from a historical-ontological

approach, rooted in the Inculturated philosophy. This methodology sees the peoples (pueblos) as communication communities which, necessarily and continuously, mediate values in history. In this regard, we are going to make use of seven models (colonialist, modernizing, subversive, dialectic, of resistance, populist and of liberation) identified by the Jesuit Priest Juan Carlos Scannone (1990) in his book, "*Un nuevo punto de partida para la filosofía latinoamericana*", models by which any communication community can mediate their values on its geo-cultural ground.

In his research, Scannone discovered seven historical-ontological models by which most of the Latin American peoples have mediated their values in history from the colonization process (1492) until the end of the 20th Century. Following his steps, we will structurally read the youth engagement processes with our religious or spiritual communities nowadays.

Can we use these models to read the youth engagement processes with our religious or spiritual communities if they have been identified on a Latin American and Caribbean geo-cultural ground? Yes, we can. These models work as situated universals at the philosophical level, and therefore, avoid incurring into an ethnocentric point of view. These models are historical -in the sense that they respond to diverse historical processes occurred in Latin America- but also ontological -because it asks about the "being" of the "ways of being" of the Latin American peoples along those centuries-. For these reasons, these models are both universal (philosophical level) and situated (self-ground).

SEVEN MODELS BY WHICH A RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY CAN MEDIATE VALUES IN HISTORY

The models will be explained considering their semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions as well as the role played by the negation moment involved

in every process of mediation. The last model, the seventh, will be proposed as one efficient way of mediating values in history, and therefore, also as competent to promote youth engagement processes with our religious or spiritual communities in socio-environmental, political or economic activism.

The analysis below will not indicate which religious or spiritual community proceeds one way or another. The paper does not seek to stereotype any community but invites them to initiate a self-reflection process. Owing to the fact that the names of the processes come from the Latin American history, they remain analogously open to the cultural and historical appropriation and re-interpretation of each religious or spiritual community.

Colonialist

This model is followed by those religious or spiritual communities, which mediate their religious and ethical values in history as colonizers or local elites. They use this to impose their core of values, which are described as civilized or universals, on the local people with whom they share the ground. For them, the locals are unshaped or chaotic material who should be informed by the civilized values coming from the cultural foreign core they represent. Those religious or spiritual communities live among the locals as superior entities and do not root themselves in the local ground. They tend to consider themselves as soteriological communities (which is something positive), but at the same time, they use to deny the local people who should be shaped by their salvific religious and cultural interventions.

What is the kind of rationality that underlies this process of mediation? The analytical rationality grounded on the Greek-Western global horizon of interpretation of "the being," which has been identified in history as identical, intelligible, necessary and universal. This hermeneutical horizon has given birth to two kinds of rationalities, the analytical rationality and the dialectic, which have also given

birth to rational/abstract or material rationalities. In this process, the rationality which energizes the historical mediation of values follows the analytic-functionalist model considering the universals (the religious/spiritual/ethical cores) in an abstract way. At the semantic level, the values preached/behaved by these religious or spiritual groups are unambiguous, analytical, standardizing and abstractedly universal.

At the pragmatic level, these "civilized" religious or spiritual approaches are limited to transplant, or in the best cases to adapt, their core of values to the barbarian, unshaped or uninformed geo-cultural ground in which they move in, despite the fact that they are uprooted from it.

The syntax level seems to be reduced to the mere process of limitation of their universal core of values/cultures by the particular local ground and people living there. In the cases these communities historically manage to impose themselves in a community, this process of mediation could end either in the submission of the locals or in their condemnation to the entire forgetfulness or the marginalization of their values, institutions and communities. This cultural transplantation to the "non-civilized" ignores the otherness and the historic novelty of the religiously/spiritually/culturally colonized. The social, political and economic structures that emerge from this process of mediation follow a dominating form.

There is not much space for critic youth activism in these communities. The youth that might engage with this kind of religious or spiritual communities are those who have been ideologized or see in these communities a way to their self-promotion from another culture.

Modernizing

This model of mediation of values is closely related to the previous one, and in some cases, as this intrinsically implies the ideology of "progress," it can come as its second phase. The religious or spiritual communities which follow this process of mediation conceive their roles in society as normative agents of progress. They tend to promote the local cultural transition from a supposed underdeveloped stage to the real development which implies urbanization, industrialization, and scientification.

We are not saying that progress is a problem itself, on the contrary, but the content of and the way of transmitting it. At the semantic level, the values that these religious or spiritual communities try to mediate in history continue being imported from outside the local geo-cultural ground, what means, from agents self-described as already developed. In this case, the religious or spiritual communities which mediate their values following this model no longer consider the locals as unshaped people, but as a community which lacks its own plan and purpose (telos) which should be given by the most developed communities. Here, the moment of negation of this sort of mediation reduces the otherness to someone who lacks both a technical-instrumental model (and what is worse, an own end) and resources to develop themselves by their own initiatives.

From a pragmatic perspective, the religious or spiritual communities that follow this model of mediation of values interpret the development as the touchstone for the local community in which they move (at least in the Western countries). That's the reason why the syntactic moment of this process of mediation configures this as a pure technocratic imitation or transference of a plan and resources uprooted from the local ground or geo-culture.

There is not much space for critic youth activism in these communities either. The youth that might engage with this kind of religious or spiritual communities are those who have also been ideologized or see in these communities a way of self-promotion to the progress.

Subversive

The religious or spiritual communities which mediate values in history by this model are possibly responding to the previous two alienating process of mediation. Nevertheless, they do not manage to affirm either their own religious and moral values or the geo-cultural identity of the peoples in which they live in. This is as a result of understanding the dominant and alienating cultural agent as pure disvalue.

The negation moment of this process of mediation is structurally abstract for considering the local population totally alienated, and therefore, without any semantic or cultural contents to affirm. The religious or spiritual communities which follow this dynamic of negation do not consider the local peoples as real subjects of their history and culture (like the previous models) as a consequence of interpreting them as abstract (without semantics or cultural content) negation of the negation (oppression).

At the pragmatic level, these religious/spiritual communities try to promote a humanizing subversion but they do not manage to do it owing to the fact that they do not take into account the local semantic. They only foster the inversion of the structural oppression by a mere reaction, which does not make honour to the local cultures.

This way of interpreting the process of mediation of values leads them to a syntactical cycle of violence of all kind (institutional, economic, political, etc.) because this project responds with the same negation of value that they suffer from the denier. This sort of mediation of values can be conducive to a new oppressive social structure including a plus of repression. Most of the religious or spiritual communities that mediate values this way follow a willingness or utopia of ethical justice, but as the process of negation of the external element is abstract, they fall into an "utopianism" or into an abstract ethical idealism.

There is more space for critic youth activism in these communities. The youth that might engage with these kinds of religious or spiritual communities are those who see/hear/feel the injustice produced by some local structures but they remain in abstract ideologies, or in some cases, recur to the violence.

Dialectic

This way of mediating values in history follows the Marxist dialectic of class struggle. The religious or spiritual communities which are energized by this model do not absolutize the materialist perspective of this philosophy but manage to keep open a religious or spiritual gap for religiosity, assuming the structural sociological approach of this horizon.

Here, the negation moment is concrete and determined. They leave the abstract level of the previous processes of mediation of values. Nevertheless, the dialectical negation they follow denies the negation (what distorts or oppress the own religious/spiritual and ethical core and/or that of the local people) but it does not manage to achieve an authentically historical mediation for not considering enough everyone's liberty. By reducing the denier to a mere denier, someone who does not have anything good to offer, the ethical-historical mediation of liberty cannot take place here.

The same that happened in the previous model occurs here as regards the semantic of both the religious/spiritual and the local communities. Who follows this model, implicitly accepts the idea that he/she lives alienated depending on the economic infrastructure.

At the pragmatic level, those religious or spiritual communities which follow this process of mediation of values interpret both the first and second affirmations of all mediations as mere negative statements ("we are oppressed" and "we denied the denier"). The novelty in history does not include the denier, either what they have of good or bad. That is the reason why these

sorts of historical projects end in a new oppressive structure. They can effectively liberate the oppressed people from the denier but cannot liberate the society (oppressed/oppressors) from the oppression of the social whole.

The syntax of this process of mediation reduces both the particularity (the first statement of any mediation) and the universality (the second statement of any mediation) as mere negative moments of the process. The universality that comes from this syntax is concrete and oppressive.

There is also space for criticism of youth activism in religious or spiritual communities. The youth that might engage with these kinds of groups are those who see/hear/feel the injustice produced by a dominant cultural structure but tend to polarize at the concrete level the negation of the deniers, and in some cases, recur to the violence.

Of resistance

The religious or spiritual communities which mediate through this model advocate the first positive self-statement ("we are/we believe that the meaning of life and death is…") of any liberating process of mediation. The resistant attitude involves the affirmation of the own values (semantic level) but it remains inefficient in the structural level of any real historical-ethical mediation of values.

These communities tend to resist to all new ways of cultural, economic and/or political dependency with creativity, passivity or humour advocating their own cores of values. Nevertheless, they are not capable of assuming the valid elements of the other which is threatening their sapiential wisdom. That is the reason why, in this model, the negation moment of every process of mediation remains abstract (without semantics / content).

The pragmatic moment of those religious or spiritual communities which mediate their values this way, implies a vital attitude of resistance. They assume their own values but do not recognize any of these on the other side. In the best cases, these communities will continue existing in the local society they move in, but they will never be real historical-ethical subjects if they behave this way. As mere resistant, they do not bring into play their own values for transcending them -passing these through the negative "ethical" mediation of values-, so as to build a new set of values which includes the own and those of the others. As a consequence of being only resistance, these communities lack of an own syntax at the time of mediating their values, and therefore, tend to suffer the imposition of the dominant syntactic structure they try to resist.

There is space to criticize youth activism in religious or spiritual communities. The youth engaging with these groups might see/hear/feel the own core of values of their communities as well as the injustice produced by any dominant cultural structure, but may tend to polarize their deniers in a absolute way.

Populist

Despite the fact that this process of mediation starts from the positive affirmative statement of the own religious or spiritual community (semantic level), it is inefficient. In this paper, the adjective "populist" describes those religious or spiritual communities which begin their mediation of values from a first positive statement -not remaining as mere resistance-trying to perform a historical process of mediation, but do not manage to effectively accomplish their goals as a result of not penetrating enough into the material density of history (do not building strong ethical-political structures).

The pragmatic dimensions of these religious or spiritual communities not only involve the first self-affirmative moment -their own core of values- of

every liberating process of mediation but also its ethical-political level of mediation which considers positive values in the others. Anyway, they do not embody the values (neither the own nor those of the others) in new solid, historical and fair structures. That is the reason why at the syntactic level their attempt to mediate values in history still remain abstract (without content).

If a religious or spiritual community forgets or does not manage to achieve the ethical-political level of any process of mediation of values (which in our world seems to be economic, technical, structural-institutional and legal), will historically act in an inefficient way, being more likely to fall into the temptation of becoming pure ideology (mere ideal level). This process of mediation of values is ethical but not historical-ethical.

Liberating

A religious or spiritual community which configures itself as a mediator of the human liberty, acknowledges its own core of values, ethically rejects what is dehumanizing and accepts what is positive in the core of values which constitutes the others, transcends their own core of values from the positive values of the others, and embodies the new vital synthesis of values in new historical-ethical structures at ethical-political level (economic, technical, structural-institutional and legal).

The religious or spiritual communities which have accepted to engage with their local culture, and to do it in an irreversible way, they have realized that for living together is entirely necessary to affirm their own semantics/statements (cores of values or sapiential wisdoms) but in an open way (in intercultural dialogue).

These communities understand themselves (pragmatic level) as soteriological or liberating due to the fact that they are not only capable of ethically resisting

the moment of cultural negation of the others, but also of creating new intercultural symbols in which co-exist the own core of values and the positive values of the others, reaching this way, new historical synthesis of values structurally institutionalized. The institutionalization of these new vital syntheses is possible because they engage different cores of values in a plural unity which does not reduce the difference or uniqueness of any of its members.

The syntax dimension of these communities follows begins with the affirmation of one's own core of values. In second instance, it implies the ethical negation of those cultural values which reject or oppress the own sapiential wisdom (otherness negation) and the acceptance of those cultural values which are positive for the people living on the same ground. In a third stage, the religious or spiritual communities re-interpret their own core of values in engagement with the positive values of the culture of the others, transcending the own popular wisdom (meaning of life and death and set of religious & ethical values) through the positive values offered by the local culture. This last stage generates a new intercultural core of values which brings humanizing novelty and liberty to the local histories, and must be, for being really efficient and liberating, structurally institutionalized at the ethical-political level. If they do not manage to perform the structuralizing process at this stage, the mediation of values will not be historically efficient (liberating or humanizing).

This process of mediation really opens the door to youth activism (believers or not) because it includes the geo-cultural ground in which they are rooted in, as well as enables them to ethically be part of their history. They are not negated by any adults or religious/spiritual dogma but called into dialogue, assuming they have something essential to say and do for shifting unfair structures in history. This process of mediation transcends the self-affirmation of those belonging to the religious or spiritual communities and of the youth and local cultures, bringing this

way, ethical novelty to the human history in which everyone is invited to live in plural unity without being reduced or excluded.

CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this paper we have discussed from an ontological approach seven models by which a religious or spiritual community can mediate their values in history. The first two models (colonialist and modernizing) share the same process of negation. The religious or spiritual communities that follow any of these models tend to deny or oppress the culture of the youth living on the same ground, instead of dialoguing with them. In case they think in a different way (materially or formally), they do not recognize anything humanizing in this group of people, and therefore, they will try to inform them with an abstract and universal culture (colonialism) or with a normative model of progress (modernization).

The third and fourth models (subversive and dialectic) have in common the same process of negation of the others. A religious or spiritual community which follows some of these models tends to interpret the others in a manner that also alienates them. In the first case, the religious or spiritual communities consider the others as total deniers of the own core of values, constituting themselves as pure abstract negations (without any semantic). In the fourth case, they also interpret the others as total deniers but they do it in a material way (economic), a way of interpreting the others which also alienates them (without content).

The fifth and sixth models (of resistance and populist) let the religious or the spiritual communities affirm their own core of values (first positive moment of any liberating process of mediation). In the first case, they are not capable of accepting the humanizing values which belong to the others. In the sixth model,

they accept the positive values of the others but are incapable of building structures for embodying them in history at the ethical-political level (economic, technical, institutional and juridical) levels.

The seventh model effectively mediates values in history (and for this reason favour the engagement with the youth) because its process of negation does not imply the total exclusion of the others. The religious or spiritual community following this way of mediating values in history dialectically denies what is oppressive of the culture of the others but accepts what is valid or humanizing in this, building new historical and ethical structures capable of embodying the new vital syntheses achieved in plural unity.

To conclude, we are going to say that the youth engagement processes with religious or spiritual communities will continue declining (at least, with the most traditional groups) if these do not change their way of mediating their own core of religious and ethical values (sapiential wisdom) in history: i) affirming their own meanings of life and death, iia) negating what is inhuman in the culture of the others with whom they co-live on the same ground, iib) accepting the valid semantics of the others, and iii) building new eminent syntheses -structurally embodied at the ethical political level of every society-in plural unity. Mediating their values this way, they will promote youth activism within their lines.

Set of recommendations for social agents

- Re-affirm the own core of values (sapiential wisdom or meaning of life and death).

- Stay open to the others despite their bringing some values that can negate some of yours.

- Reject what is inhuman in the culture of the others and acknowledge their valid items.

- Bring into play your core of values with the valid semantic of the others.

- Build new ethical-political structures (economic, technical, institutional and legal) for embodying a new uniplural vital synthesis of values which includes all the people co-living on the same ground.

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