

Krakow, January 19, 2023

Fr. dr hab. Paweł Maciaszek  
Institute of Cultural Studies and Journalism  
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow

**Review of the doctoral dissertation:**

**Fr. mgr lic. Tesfay Haileselassie Hailemariam**

**entitled: *The Role of Pastoral Care of the Catholic Church***

***in Personal Transformation of Youth in the Diocese of Adigrat – Ethiopia,***

**Warsaw 2022, pp. 293. Supervisor: Fr. prof. dr hab. Marek Tatar**

**1/ General description of the dissertation**

The work is divided into 5 chapters. In the contents of the first one (pp. 18-60), fr. Tesfay Haileselassie Hailemariam made presentation of Ethiopia in historical-geographical and religious aspects, explained the term “youth” and described the behaviours that characterise this age group. He identified the location of Ethiopia and its division into areas, described the climate, characterised the people living there and the languages they speak. He pointed out the elements that distinguish Ethiopia from other African countries; it is the only non-colonised country in Africa with its own alphabet, digital writing and calendar. Speaking about the economy, he pointed out the directions of its development (agriculture and animal husbandry) and the difficulties it faces (civil war, restrictions on private activity, drought).

The Doctoral Student presented the religious practices of the inhabitants of this country; he described Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant missions. He presented the historical background, the persecutions, the forms of worship, the activities of missionaries and the ecumenical dialogue. He described the Catholic Church - explaining the process of the formation of its rites and indicating the areas of its activity. He also compared it to other denominations and religions. He clearly indicated the great

contribution of Catholics to the development of the country in the areas of education, medical treatment and economy.

The Author considered as necessary to present the etymology of the term “youth” and the changes which are taking place in the way of life of young people. He did this by referring to the teaching of the Popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis) and the conclusions of researchers of this age group (Joe-Barth C. Abba, Charles M. Shelton, Eric Erikson). The Author, repeatedly referred to the situation of young people of the Diocese of Adigrat, which consists the research area of this dissertation. Already at the beginning of his work, he wrote about the local youth that they are “the resource and treasure of society”, “they can make themselves through inventive forms of self-realization”, or even “they can make society” (p. 57). He also stated about the youth: “not considering the feelings of others, not giving attention to elders, do not care about unethical characters and unjust actions, and can be seen being careless” (p. 50).

The first chapter concluded by giving current implications relating to youth ministry. They are based on worldview, culture and politics. These areas of human life influence the daily actions of young people more than the content transmitted by priests, than the teaching of the Church. In such a situation, an increasingly accurate knowledge of God and the process of changing one’s life according to His guidance does not take place in the minds of young people. Hence, the Author has formulated recommendations that will contribute to making the Church’s teaching given by priests more influential on young people.

The second chapter (pp. 61-120) describes the formation of the youth which takes place in the family (described as a primary school of faith formation). The Doctoral Student portrayed the tasks performed by individual members (father, mother, children) and current values (love, prayer, education). Also, he explained the understanding of the family in the Diocese of Adigrat. In particular: who belongs to the family; what relationships create family; who is the most important in the family; what are the differences between cultural values and those resulting from faith; as well as the importance of the process of production and consumption within the family. In this part of the work, the Author also presented the role of the Church in the lives of young people, describing this community as a teacher and mother. Further, he presented the concern for the youth of three most recent popes (John Paul II,

Benedict XVI, Francis). He defines this care as a unique pastoral form, as helping them in their search for a better and true life, as discovering the place of young people in experiencing and passing on the value of faith. This chapter concludes with an answer to the question of the importance of the World Youth Day for the propagation of the faith. He saw in these gatherings an aid to the faith development of young people. Namely, he enumerated the following effects: the revival of mutual trust between the Church and young people resulting from a mutual commitment to live the Gospel on a daily basis; the possibility of continuing dialogue as a means of proclaiming the Word of God; gaining experience of the universality of the Church; discovering the true face of the Church in which friendship with Christ is developed; discovering further tasks to deepen personal relationships with Jesus (pp. 117-118).

The pages of the third chapter (pp. 121-175) were filled with content on Scripture and Christian Tradition. Father Tesfay Haileselassie Hailemariam argued that they are a way to grow in faith. He described what faith is and what it means for human beings. Further, he explained why there is talk of an ongoing crisis of it, why it is worth practising and nurturing its development. The Doctoral Student presented the doctrine of faith contained in the Holy Scriptures, especially in the texts of St. John and St. Paul. It was shown as an encounter with Jesus Christ and experiencing His closeness and power on a daily basis life. Faith indeed makes it possible to live according to the teachings of the Savior and to bear witness of belonging to Him. Faith always remains as a gift of God, through which He makes people His own - both here on earth and in heaven (temporality and in eternity). The Author characterised also the religious practices of Catholics, among whom local customs with elements of Jewish tradition are maintained. He also pointed out the danger of interpreting the Holy Scriptures according to one's own (wrong) wishes and departing from the Church's commandments. Such situation was described based on the words of Card. Robert Sarah, who speaks of a crisis of faith consisting in yielding to the satanic temptations of the world leading to secularisation. Respecting the Church's teaching and its Traditions, the faithful are fighting against practices that reject them, which manifest themselves, for example, in the lack of respect for life and unity of a family. The faithful see more and more clearly the need for conversion, the course of which should be supervised (guided) by priests.

The Author boldly described the situation of the Church in the Catholic Diocese of Adigrat, which is involved in the creation of social life - education, health care, human promotion and social rehabilitation. He noted that the current state of the religious life of the local faithful there requires a continuous commitment to their spiritual development. The Author characterised the human work as an activity that distinguishes it from other creatures. People have been destined for eternal life, which they achieve, among other things, through honest daily work. In this way, man praises the Creator and cooperates with His creative work. The Author indicated the current need of constantly reminding (urging) especially young people, about the necessity of service to other people. Such an attitude testifies to the correct understanding of the Church. When the young people's search for God and quest for the answers to questions regarding life result in finding God and understanding the importance of faith for the proper living of everyday life, then they simultaneously feel the need to engage in the work of evangelization. Carrying out this work is based on genuine friendship with Jesus. This is the formulation of the need – discernible in the Diocese of Adigrat – for God's Word and the speaking of Him to be translated into the daily witness of life. The acquisition of knowledge along by young people is insufficient; what is truly needed is Christian action. This attitude is made possible by recognising God the Father as Love, Jesus Christ as Master and Teacher, and the Holy Spirit as Comforter and Counsellor. Through the Holy Trinity, young Catholics will be able to engage in the life of the diocese with their hearts, their minds and through the work of their hands – by loving, acting prudently and doing good works.

In the fourth chapter (pp. 176-207) indicated the contemporary challenges faced by young people living in the Tigray region. These challenges concern the following situations: confession of sin and celebration of the Lord's day, the use of new technologies and the use of social media, the threat of secularism, the dangers of religious pluralism, unemployment and poverty, the instability of the political situation and migration, and finally the defence of children's rights. The need to urgently address the above mentioned challenges was justified by the description of the situation taking place in the Diocese of Adigrat. The author of the work could not ignore them because they not only concern young people, but also pose a threat to their faith.

The fifth chapter of the work (pp. 208-258) is entitled “Perspectives for a more effective youth pastoral ministry”. It begins with the thought of The Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Ethiopia concerning young people: talking about their future requires taking care of their present (now). This thought accounts for the need to indicate the tasks of youth ministry. According to the Author of the dissertation, it should begin with patient listening to what young people have to say and by identifying their needs. He then pointed out the need to involve this group of believers in the life of the Church, using their talents and desires. There is no doubt that young people are looking for priests who are able to indicate the possibilities of solving their problems and assist them to see their lives in a perspective; priests who are distinguished by the ability to listen and empathise. There are many young people who need permanent formation in the field of spiritual life. At the base of this is the certainty that Christ loves young people and his love makes it possible both to discern life's vocation and to realise it. Such an experience bears fruit in the form of a desire of being close to Jesus. Hence, the Doctoral Student formulated the postulate of arousing an admiration for the person of Jesus among young people. This admiration manifests itself in the authentic love of the Word of God and especially in living a sacramental life. Many of them seeking a deeper spiritual life and find themselves fitting in Catholic communities operating in the diocese.

## **2/ Substantive value of the dissertation**

The substantive value of the dissertation should be assessed highly. The reason for this assessment is the fact that the doctoral candidate has achieved the goals of the work. He systematically and comprehensively presented the pastoral tasks of the Catholic Church leading to the personal transformation of the youth of the Diocese of Adigrat. The following can be mentioned as deserving a special recognition:

a/ Showing the real situation of young people in the diocese Doctoral Student presented their attributes: both hope and joy (p. 113), novelty and treasure (p. 55), as well as the dangers that threaten them: crime and violence (p. 196), addictions, secularism and hedonism (p. 238). He also listed the challenges faced by young people, which appear to be current and important,

since they concern personal development in everyday life and overcoming threats leading to death (p. 210).

b/ The work presented the participation of the Church in the lives of young people, so much undermined today. The reader of the work gains the conviction that the Church is for the young a teacher (pp. 101-103) and a mother (pp. 103-108). In support of this, the author has used an example of great strength of conviction, namely the commitment of three Popes to the young (pp. 108-118).

c/ In the structure of the dissertation, one can see a juxtaposition of the Church's teaching with the actual situation in the diocese of Adigrat. Content that can be at first recognized as merely theoretical, after reading the description of the situation in the diocese, appears to have very practical application. As an example, we can mention the description of the use of World Youth Day in youth ministry (pp. 114-118) – “the institution of WYD brought to the Adigrat Diocese is an opportunity to organize various spiritual movements for the young people at the parish level, University level, and for Youth Catholic Workers” (p. 118).

d/ In reference to the previous statement about the practical use of the Church's teaching, the work answers the question: how can the life of youth of the Diocese of Adigrat change (what will it look like) under the influence of faith? Namely, faith in Jesus Christ “makes us responsible for each other and for our human history. Our faith, therefore, gives us eyes to see all of humankind in a new light and inspires us to work for full human solutions to the problems and evils in the world. True faith is lived in daily life and is translated into concrete action in the world at the service of Christ and his members” (p. 126).

e/ The Author outlined the perspective for youth pastoral ministry. This is the more valuable because pastors responsible for this type of ministry (especially many Conferences of Bishops of a certain countries) are thinking about the most effective forms of action. In addition, it is also worth mentioning that at the beginning of the work, the Author recalled a following remark: “Today, the youth ministry (YM) is in ‘desperate need of a theological, psychosocial, and ecological grounded’. (...) This area needs a new path, idea, and approach, which helps to have an enthusiasm for a lifelong commitment to Christ and spiritual transformation. The study attempts to give a fresh approach and perspective to youth pastoral ministry by analysing the current system and its results” (pp. 12-13).

f/ Particularly valuable are the Author's recommendations and suggestions regarding youth ministry. Indeed, they relate to the personal lives of young people, their families, society and the whole Church. Accepting these recommendations and fulfilling them ensures security and development, proper acquisition and use of both material and spiritual goods (pp. 259-260).

### **3/ Assessment of the formal aspect**

Formally speaking, the work is comprehensible and readable; it has a precisely defined topic, a logical plan for its development, a bibliography and the proper way of citation. Also, footnotes were made correctly; in creating them fr. Tesfay Haileselassie Hailemariam, showed accuracy and diligence.

Appropriate methods were used in the work as to realize the topic. It should be emphasized that the Author described in detail the use of each of these methods in the dissertation.

The Doctoral Student proved that various and rich sources are available. In order to develop his main theme, he first made a solid query of sources and read the literature on the subject in great detail so to choose the content relevant to the dissertation. The choice of materials is appropriate, and their analysis allowed for an accurate presentation of "The Role of Pastoral Care of the Catholic Church in Personal Transformation of Youth in the Diocese of Adigrat - Ethiopia".

A significant advantage of the work is that the Author made a short but very precise introduction to each of the chapters. He also concludes each chapter with a factual summary. The end of the dissertation offers Recommendations and General Conclusion presented also in a very clear and specific way.

The language of the work is comprehensible to the reader. The content is conveyed in a logically linked, the thesis is coherent and succinct.

#### **4/ Comments and suggestions**

a/ The construction of the first chapter suggests that both the description of the term “youth” and the characteristics of this social group based on the teachings of popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis) and the theories of scientists (Joe-Barth C. Abba, Charles M. Shelton, Eric Erikson) should be placed in chapter two. The first chapter would become then a description of Ethiopia in its historical, geographical, political and religious aspects.

b/ The fourth chapter is entitled “The contemporary challenges of young people”. The titles of the paragraphs are the following: “Losing the sense of sin and the meaning of Sunday” (4.1.); “Technology: the digital environment” (4.2.); “Secularism” (4.3); Religious pluralism and its controversies (4.4); “Unemployment and poverty” (4.5); “Political instability, internal-displacement, and migration” (4.6.); “Influence of children’s rights” (4.7.). It would be more correct to formulate these titles in a form which defines the challenges described in the text. Namely: Restoring the sense of sin and the importance of keeping Sunday (4.1); The proper use of new technologies and social media (4.2.); Rejection of secularism that eliminates the need for God and faith in the search for the right way of life (4.3.); Recognizing the dangers of religious pluralism and transforming it as part of the mission of evangelization (4.4.), Combating unemployment and poverty (4.5.), Responding to the political instability and internal displacement and migration (4.6.); Defending children’s rights and protecting their dignity (4.7.).

c/ The bibliography omits the names of translators of the publications (Benedict XVI, *In the Beginning...*; John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope...*; Kasper W., *Jesus the Christ*). In the bibliography, in the case of the translation, the principle of including the name of the translator should also be applied.

d/ In the bibliography, there is an inconsistency in the use of the alphabetical order in the list of literature. The publications of the papal teaching were listed in two different ways: papal encyclicals and exhortations according to the order of pontificates, and papal letters according to alphabetical order.

e/ In some online sources, the author and title are missing; only the address and date of access are given.



## **5/ Questions for discussion**

I would like to ask two questions:

a/ There are two Rites in Ethiopian Catholic Church (pp. 37-38): the Geez Rite (in the North) and the Latin Rite (in the South). What is the significance of the fact that two rites are present and practiced in Ethiopia for youth faith and youth ministry?

b/ In his work, the Author formulated the following recommendation: "In the Diocese of Adigrat, the focus should be made on the reorientation of cultural and Christian values and training and generating employment" (p. 259). What actions (in the first place) should be taken by those working in youth ministry to promote Christian values among young people?

## **6/ Final statement**

Doctoral dissertation by Fr. Tesfaya Haileselassie Hailemariam, is a study of the appropriate scientific level. It is interesting and valuable, and contains extensive source of knowledge. The Author fulfilled his task which was to present the role of the pastoral ministry of the Catholic Church in the personal transformation of the youth of the diocese Adigrat. The dissertation is an interesting, important and complete presentation of the subject as given in the title of this work. Reading the dissertation led me to believe that it meets all the requirements for doctoral dissertations set out in the Act of March 13, 2003 [Journal of Laws No. 65, item 595, as amended]. Therefore, I am recommending fr. mgr lic. Tesfaya Haileselassie Hailemariam for further stages of the procedure of gaining doctoral degree.

*fr. Peter Maciaref*