## YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES

Adapted From Crawford and Rossiter, 1991, Missionaries to a Teenage Culture, updated 2006

Profile of contemporary youth spirituality

Nine prominent elements in the spirituality of contemporary young people:

1. **Ideals.** As regards direction for living, young people look for guidance in clear statements of ideas and ideals about life and its management. This does not mean that they are always ready at the time to adopt these views. An ambivalence may appear in their reluctance to consider ideals proposed by authority; some may oscillate between being idealistic and not caring.. For some, definite, 'black and white' answers are needed; others can live comfortably with fuzzy ideas about life by focusing on the here and now and on pursuing a particular lifestyle.
2. **Varied sources of spirituality.** Young people draw from varied sources in constructing their spirituality:- family, friends, personal mentors, their own religion, other religions, secular movements. Their values can be modelled on prominent people, heroes/heroines and celebrities. Their eclectic spirituality can be affected by magazines, film, television and music. They tend not to see any so-called division between the secular and the religious. They see a spiritual dimension woven through life. Some actively search for meaning and are said to have a 'hunger' for spirituality; but the proportion that does this maybe small; a much greater number are more concerned with lifestyle.
3. **Being part of a community of faith.** If they are interested in religion, it will need to appear personalised, and not too prescriptive as regards morality and beliefs. The feeling of being accepted and comfortable within a local faith community is critical; they need to feel that their needs and interests are being attended to, and they want to have a say in religious affairs. It is not inconsistent for some youth to want to dismiss particular religious beliefs and rules, while at the same time wanting to be part of the community. Some identify with popular Pentecostal churches. Many youth have little or no interest in organised religion.
4. **Group membership.** Social and friendship groups often provide a psychological 'home base' for adolescents that has a major influence on their thinking and behaviour – especially for girls; the 'group' is often their principal 'interface with the world'. Online 'chatting' and their inner circle of SMS have become prominent in group communication and identification. There is often some internal conflict between the desire to be an individual while paying the price of conformism for group acceptance. Some may see ethnicity as important while others will dismiss it as irrelevant. Group identification can underpin aggression and violence. Rather than join specifically religious groups, they may prefer to participate in movements with social and environmental concerns (E.g. Amnesty International, protest groups), especially those concerned with improvement of the quality of life. Yet there are a significant number of young people who do want to be part of a religious group; at universities, many, but not all of those in religious groups tend to be active in evangelising activities.
5. **The prolongation of adolescence.** While perhaps more individualistic, more aware of lifestyle options and with higher life expectations than their forbears, young people face an increasing period of dependence on family before becoming financially independent and fending for themselves. This situation generates various social and psychological frustrations that impact on personal relationships and group membership; it affects all of the following in complex ways:- a pragmatic and existential approach to life; the urge to travel, often in backpacker format; sexual relationships, especially of the casual type; partying, and the use of alcohol and recreational drugs; playing video games; career choice; sense of responsibility; capacity for commitment and long term relationships; ambivalence about traditional goals such as settling down, marriage and raising a family. They see life like a `degustation menu' – they can pick and choose from a variety of lifestyle options at will, trying them out. They have many more options than did the precocious 'baby boomers' and they are more ready to explore them. Tasting from an extensive range of sporting opportunities is also available for Australia's sport hungry teenagers.

Some youth can appear to 'amble' along this path feeling reasonably self-centred and comfortable until something dramatic leads to a change in their circumstances or which confronts their opportunistic approach to life – an experience that accelerates their development as adults as the world intrudes on their thinking.

The prolongation of adolescence tracks back to those of school age affecting their expectations. Some can adopt the extended adolescent lifestyle well before they leave school, regarding school attendance as an extension of their leisure time with some incidental learning.

1. **Cultural plurality.** Young people value the global aspects of popular culture with which they identify, especially clothing styles and music. But at the same time, they are ambivalent about the extensive cultural plurality they experience in Western countries. They are puzzled about how to understand the extraordinary range of belief systems and behaviours in the culture; they may take refuge in closed social groups.
2. **Social and political concerns.** Compared with the politicised views of youth in the 1960s and 1970s, today's young people are generally wary of, and disillusioned with, political institutions and large corporations; authority is questioned and not respected. Yet they do little to challenge status quo, while they realise that they do not have much political leverage in any case.

Rebellion and dissent are expressed through violent and anarchic lyrics in rap and hip-hop. There is a level of acceptance of job insecurity; there is a pervading sense that they will have to be adaptable in employment. Some will be prepared to barter 'good' job for lifestyle options. Still, there is concern about unemployment and exploitative business practices such as: problems with economic rationalism and the globalisation of commerce – irresponsible economic activity on the part of the corporate world; 'fair' trade rather than 'free' trade that masks the production of goods by child labour or sweatshops; casualisation of employment and the deregulation of the Australian workplace. However, for some young people, they will not worry too much about these potential threats as long as they do not appear to affect their lifestyle. For others, the gap between hopes for career and a successful life and the reality of possible unemployment is an ongoing source of worry.

1. **Environmental concerns.** In addition to the increased public acknowledgment of environmental issues, more awareness of these issues is fostered in school subjects such as science, geography, economics, society and culture, and religion – as well as in media awareness programs (like Cleanup Australia). The young have an excellent environmental education. However, this does not readily translate into actual support by young people: for example, Cleanup Australian usually attracts only a small percentage of youth. But there is in spirit strong support for initiatives that are pro-environment. Some, but not too many, see the inconsistency between pursuing a consumerist lifestyle and being concerned about environmental and consumerist issues. Others are agitating in favour of ecological sustainability and in opposition to environmental degradation.
2. **Anxiety about a violent society.** While earlier generations were anxious about a possible nuclear holocaust, since 9/11, Bali, and terrorist attacks in Britain and Spain, today's young people live with a backdrop of global terrorism that has almost daily reminders. As a result, in a perceptibly higher numbers, there is a hardening in prejudice against minorities and those who do not appear to embrace the lifestyle and belief systems similar to what they think is the westernised norm; in turn, this generates contrary antagonism on the part of minority groups. A positive valuing of multiculturalism and a multi-faith community has been diminished as the hopes for a peaceful and tolerant society recede. Other concerns contributing to anxiety are:- levels of crime; more people in prison; increased evidence of security measures and surveillance; tighter immigration and refugee controls.