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Catholic Youth Ministry between 1896 and today: From Clergy-led Piety to Self-Guided Youth Associations
Patrik C. Höring

Abstract

The involvement (participation) of young people is the central characteristic of youth work in Germany. Where does this approach come from? And what role does it play in practice today? The following article gives a short introduction into youth work in Germany and traces how the idea of participation has developed in Catholic youth associations and what demands and challenges it poses in practice today.

Keywords: Catholic youth work, Germany, participation, history, theory of youth ministry

1. Youth Work and Christian Youth Ministry in Germany – Characterized by Participation from the very Start

Youth work in Germany finds its legislative basis in the *Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB VIII). Achtes Buch. Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*. It was newly formed in 1990 regarding new developments in social work and youth work. All forms of youth work, including Christian youth ministry, are or have to be related to the aims fixed there:

"Young people must be provided with the youth work services necessary to promote their development. They should be linked to the interests of young people and be co-determined and co-designed by them, enable them to determine their own lives, and encourage and lead them to take on social responsibility and social commitment" (§ 11.1 SGB VIII)¹

This main definition of youth work already contains the main aspects which can be summarized in one word: participation. These aims are realized not only but especially by various youth associations (cf. § 11.2 SGB VIII) which are united in the different *Jugendringe* locally, regionally and nationwide. Therefore, these associations are supported by the Government (cf. § 12 SGB VIII)² because this form of youth work

"is organized and shared by young people and they take the responsibility themselves. Its work is long-term and usually focused on its own members, but it can also be directed at young people who are not members. Through youth associations and their associations, the concerns and interests of young people are expressed and represented" (§ 12.2 SGB VIII).

¹ All quotes are provided in a translation given by the author.

² Cf. „Jugendverbände in Vielfalt vereint“ vom 31.05.2017 (<https://www.dbjr.de/fileadmin/Positionen/2017/2017-DBJR-HA-POSITION-Jugendverbaende.pdf> / 25.07.2019).

Now: Where does this concept come from? And how is it related to Christian (Catholic) youth ministry?

2. Catholic Youth Associations under the Influence of the Youth Movement: From Care to Co-responsibility

2.1 Characteristics of the Youth Movement at the Beginning of the 20th Century

The youth movement (*Jugendbewegung*), which began with the first strolls of the *Wandervogel* in 1896 in Steglitz near Berlin (today a part of it), is generally regarded as the beginning of what is still understood by youth work today. Although groups of young people led by adults existed already as well as state- or church-organized care for young people in need with the *Wandervogel*, officially founded in 1901 as the "Committee for School Trips", something new began.³

These groups of school boys, led by young adults, opposed a bourgeois society and were carried out under the principle of freedom, through self-management and self-organization and without explicit educational objectives. This becomes clear at the first *Freideutsche Jugendtag* on 11th/12th October 1913 on the *Hohe Meißner*, a meeting opposing the opening of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* in Leipzig which took place at the same time. In contrast to this militaristic event youth groups from all over the country gathered and spent their time sleeping in tents with dance and music. But they also gave an insight in what society might be in future and how this youth groups understood their being:

"The *Freideutsche Jugend* wants to shape its life from its own destiny before its own responsibility, with inner truthfulness. It stands up for this freedom under all circumstances. All common events of the *Freideutsche Jugend* are free of alcohol and nicotine."⁴

This youth movement can certainly be regarded as the first, concise example of the innovative power of youth cultural movements, whose sufficient condition is the fatiguing tendencies of Wilhelmine society, supported by a reform pedagogy and a profound critique of civilization, whose necessary condition is in turn the "*Führerprinzip*": voluntary obedience to an exemplary charismatic personality.⁵

2.2 The Pastoral Concept of Carl Mosterts (1874-1926): Love and Authority

³ Cf. Hermann Giesecke, *Vom Wandervogel bis zur Hitlerjugend. Jugendarbeit zwischen Politik und Pädagogik*, München 1981.

⁴ Willy Bokler (Ed.), *Manifeste der Jugend* [AltDok 3], Düsseldorf 1958, 10.

⁵ Cf. Wilfried Ferchhoff, *Jugend und Jugendkulturen im 21. Jahrhundert. Lebensformen und Lebensstile*, Wiesbaden 2011, 37.

These principles of the youth movement quickly found supporters in all youth groups, including the Christian ones. From 1909, groups of Catholic young people began to emerge, which were closely modelled on the youth movement (*Quickborn, Jungborn, Normannsteiner, Kreuzfahrer*). Also in the youth ministry of the Catholic dioceses the opportunities these forms offered for a contemporary youth work were soon recognized, first for the male youth which already left school, later also for the work with girls done by Congregations of the Virgin Mary.⁶

For the male youth it is Carl Mosterts, from 1907 General Secretary and from 1913 *Generalpräses* (national vicar) of the *Zentralverband der katholischen Jünglingsvereinigungen*, already founded in 1896 and later renamed to *Katholischer Jungmännerverband*, who pursues a programmatic and organizational renewal on the background of the youth movement. Mosterts' educational concept can be seen in numerous individual contributions to the *Korrespondenzblatt*, but above all in the anthology *Jünglingsseelsorge*, which was published in 1920.⁷

The guiding principle: "The soul of youth care is the care of the youth soul"⁸, sums up his programme: Youth care and youth ministry are, in his view, "above all the care of mind and will; but their innermost is necessarily pastoral care, i.e. religious and moral guidance, leading the soul to its ultimate goal in life, shaping the soul according to the idea of the Creator"⁹. In this it becomes clear that Catholic youth ministry is not merely leisure activities, but a form of personality formation and education¹⁰.

And in this again the difference to the youth movement becomes apparent: "The Catholic youth movement has one goal. In this it differs consciously from what is called the youth movement par excellence. Its goal is: The Catholic person."¹¹

It is about the connection between religion and biography, religion and everyday life, grace and nature, about "understanding the relationship between religion and life, religion and work, religion and profession, religion and family, religion and state, religion and joy, religion and suffering, religion and the world, and making mutual connections in one's own life"¹².

Mosterts is concerned to take into account the peculiarities of both age cohort and the individual. In relation to the man growing up it is important to him to maintain and

⁶ Cf. Patrik C. Höring, *Jugendlichen begegnen. Arbeitsbuch Jugendarbeit*, Stuttgart 2017, 112-120.

⁷ Karl Mosterts (Ed.), *Jünglingsseelsorge. Ziel und Aufgaben einer planmäßigen Seelsorge für die herangewachsene männliche Jugend*, 2.-4. verm. u. verb. Aufl., Freiburg 1923; Franz Josef Wothe, *Carl Mosterts. Ein Leben für die Jugend*, Kevelaer 1959, bes. 57-87.

⁸ Carl Mosterts, *Vertiefung der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 1. In: *Korrespondenz-Blatt* 25 (1920), 1-3; cf. Karl Mosterts, *Notwendigkeit und Ziel der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 3. In: ders. (Ed.), *Jünglingsseelsorge*, 3-56.

⁹ Mosterts, *Vertiefung der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 1.

¹⁰ Cf. Mosterts, *Notwendigkeit und Ziel der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 1.

¹¹ Carl Mosterts, *Unser Ziel*, 109. In: *Verband der Katholischen Jugend- und Jungmännervereine Deutschlands* (Ed.), *Unser Ziel. Aus dem Erleben und Erarbeiten unserer ersten beiden Verbandstage*, Düsseldorf 1922, 109-112.

¹² Wothe, *Carl Mosterts*, 62.

promote the aspect of freedom.¹³ Whoever suppresses the young person's urge for freedom "would suppress one of the most important forces and would soon no longer have any followers among the young people"¹⁴.

"Religion must therefore not approach him with external coercion, but must turn to his intellect and free will and overcome it. If this succeeds, all is won; if this does not succeed, all else is of no use. For religion is the conscious and free surrender to God".¹⁵

For this reason, when dealing with young people, a humility is needed which does not expose them and does not force them to adopt foreign forms of religion.¹⁶ The content and form of religiosity should also correspond to the young man's nature.

"For the same reason, religion must not be sleepy, tired and weak in its forms and appearance. For, as much as at this age emotions and feelings predominate and many a young person tends to sentimentality, a purely emotional, sentimental religion would repel him. [...] Soft and sweet religiosity, unctuous preaching disgust him and are proof for his assertion that religion is only good for children, old women and weaklings."¹⁷

So intellectual discussion is also necessary - an aspect that becomes increasingly important during adolescence.¹⁸ Of course, the different talents and needs of the young people have to be taken into account, which differ from a young worker to the university student.¹⁹ The prerequisite for a fruitful accompaniment of young people is therefore obviously two things: an "own thorough knowledge and deep comprehension of religion"²⁰ as well as "the understanding of souls"²¹.

Mosterts is not only about theoretical knowledge about youth, but also about real participation. Only in this way can the priest be a "true friend and leader"²² - there is not yet any talk of youth leaders (lay people working on a voluntary or part-time basis), but the image could also be transferred to them. With this image, the double task of accompaniment becomes evident, which can be brought to the concept of love and authority.²³

¹³ Cf. „Jugendarbeit ist Bildung in Freiheit zur Freiheit“ („Youth work is education in freedom to gain freedom.“) [Helmut Kentler, *Versuch 2*, 51. In: Carl Wolfgang Müller – Helmut Kentler – Klaus Mollenhauer – Hermann Giesecke, *Was ist Jugendarbeit? Vier Versuche zu einer Theorie*, München 1962, 37-88.].

¹⁴ Mosterts, *Notwendigkeit und Ziel der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 36.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶ Cf. Ibid., 38f.

¹⁷ Ibid., 35

¹⁸ Cf. Tobias Faix – Martin Hofmann – Tobias Künkler, *Warum ich nicht mehr glaube. Wenn junge Erwachsene den Glauben verlieren*, Witten ²2014.

¹⁹ Cf. Mosterts, *Notwendigkeit und Ziel der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 34.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Ibid., 48.

²³ Cf. Wothe, *Carl Mosterts*, 67-70.

"But what every youth pastor must have is a warm heart for all concerns, for all needs and difficulties, yes, for all, even the external concerns of his youth. [...] Above the home of each youth chaplain must be the words which can be read above the entrance to the abbey church of Muri-Gries in Tyrol: 'Porta patet, sed cor magis.'"²⁴

The second aspect, authority, is given to the priest by ordination and his role in Church, but also takes up the principle of charismatic leadership of the youth movement:

"No matter how much the young person deserves indulgence in his weaknesses, his leader must not be lenient to his whims. [...] The authority of the *Präses* (vicar) guarantees that discipline and order, regularity and continuity prevail in our youth associations, when the members know that it is a matter of course and a demand of honour to faithfully fulfill the obligations once they have been assumed. And vice versa, constant letting pass, lukewarmness and indulgence of the leader has a slackening effect on all. Apart from the fact that no common ground, no youth club without order can exist, the members do not feel well in a loosely managed club. They notice that there is no strength in it and none emanates from it. In spite of, perhaps because of his tendencies to flings, the young person wants to feel a firm hand."²⁵

Still today that lack of profile and non-binding character can be the reason for a lack of attractiveness of youth ministry.²⁶

Finally: First echoes of participation and co-responsibility of the target group itself can already be found in Carl Mosterts' concept. "There is hardly anything that does the young person such good and strengthens him/her internally as this."²⁷ Mosterts' successor will - without touching the principle of priestly leadership - set new accents here.

2.3 Participation in the Catholic Youth Movement under Ludwig Wolker (1887-1955): "Young leaders to the front!"²⁸

Two years after the death of Carl Mosterts, the 5th central meeting of the *Jungmännerverband* in 1928 in Neisse was a "further milestone of inner organization"²⁹. Under the motif "from preservation to probation"³⁰, what had already been indicated under Mosterts was now taking shape: the successive transfer of responsibility to the boys or young men themselves, the *Jungführerdienst* (service of youth leadership) was invented.

²⁴ Mosterts, *Notwendigkeit und Ziel der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 48.

²⁵ Wothe, *Carl Mosterts*, 69f.

²⁶ Cf. Katharina Teutenberg, *Warum verlassen Jugendliche den Verband? Der Verbandsaustritt aus der Sicht ehemaliger DPSG-Mitglieder*. In: *deutsche jugend* 62 (2014), 377-386.

²⁷ Mosterts, *Notwendigkeit und Ziel der Jünglingsseelsorge*, 39.

²⁸ Ludwig Wolker, *Jungführerdienst und Jungführerbildung*, 51. In: Bokler, (Ed.), *Manifeste der Jugend*, 50-57.

²⁹ Ludwig Wolker, *Neisse, der 5. Meilenstein*, 47. In: Bokler, (Ed.), *Manifeste der Jugend*, 47f.

³⁰ Wothe, *Carl Mosterts*, 74.

"We hold fast to the principle of priestly leadership, because it is a matter of course for us from the idea of the Kingdom of God and the will of the Lord. But we must also new establish the principle of youth leadership."³¹

The external reason for this was the rapidly increasing number of members of the association, which had become a mass movement in the 1920s.³² This meant that there were no longer enough priests available to accompany the groups organizationally, but also personally and spiritually³³ - an early form of priest shortage in the Catholic church. But just as today, it brings with it the opportunity of a stronger participation of the laity, which - sometimes more, sometimes less credibly - is also expressed as a central inner conviction:

"The inner truthfulness demands that when we speak of an empire of the youth and the youth movement, the juveniles themselves are in the forefront, not only as executors, but also as co-leaders."³⁴

What the Second Vatican Council will later negotiate under the heading of the lay apostolate finds its predecessor here.

With Wolker the influence of the youth movement becomes even stronger. In the Catholic milieu it is now said too: Youth leads youth. Wolker wants to win young adults for this, especially young teachers and young Catholic academics.

"The club uncle, a nice old bachelor or widower who likes to take care of the youth, provides the lemonade, or acts as a doorkeeper of the youth club, repairs broken toys and provides the heating, he may be quite good here and there. And we are grateful for every support. But this is not the ideal of youth leadership. Also the older, adult lay helper as youth leader and hiking guide [...] is not our wish [...]"³⁵.

Wolker wants to carry out educational work in the line of Mosterts, which is perceived by young people who come from the youth work itself and have discovered their talent for it. The assumption of the task follows a double principle, which guarantees the participation of the members: It is done "on behalf of the *Präses*", but nevertheless through the "election of his brothers"³⁶. The consent of the other is always necessary! - This double principle of consensus is still valid today for the appointment of *Präsides* (spiritual leaders) in the Catholic youth associations in Germany: They are elected by the members and officially appointed by the Bishop.³⁷

³¹ Wolker, *Neisse, der 5. Meilenstein*, 47.

³² Cf. Barbara Schellenberger, *Katholische Jugend und Drittes Reich. Eine Geschichte des katholischen Jungmännerverbandes 1933-1939 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rheinprovinz*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, Reihe B: Forschungen, Bd. 17, Mainz 1975, 2.4.15.194.

³³ Cf. Wolker, *Jungführerdienst und Jungführerbildung*, 51.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 52

³⁶ Ibid., 53. Cf. Ibid., 54f.

³⁷ Cf. Bundesordnung des Bundes der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (BDKJ) in der von der BDKJ-Hauptversammlung am 10. Mai 2014 geänderten Fassung, § 16,3. In: Bundesvorstand des Bundes der

Participation can then be varied and it is "educationally necessary and valuable"³⁸. Wolker recognizes that participation is not only necessary for practical reasons and required by inner conviction, but is also an educational tool. Wolker also believes that this demanding task requires the appropriate preparation. Three moments are important to him³⁹: (1) The spiritual formation, the "personal inner formation", which also includes "having at least once participated in a closed retreat". (2) "Service from bottom up". Wolker is concerned with a step-by-step approach and accompaniment which makes it possible "to grow from task to task". He does not want "a straw fire of enthusiasm, but slowly growing embers", that is, tasks and duties according to the respective experiences and talents. (3) Professional and personal accompaniment through "board meetings and leaders' evening". This is above all the task of the *Präses* and the bigger organization, which offer professional support in leadership conferences, leadership courses, leadership seminars and a variety of journals.

3. Catholic Youth Associations after World War II: Youth Work as a Democracy Laboratory

"Third Reich" and World War II led to a painful end of the youth movement. But immediately after the war, those returning from the war and those who remained found the old associations anew. In 1947, the Catholic ones were merged into a new organization, the *Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (BDKJ)* (Union of Catholic Youth Associations).⁴⁰ On the background of the foundation of the state, the youth associations also had a new role to play, namely "to win as many young people as possible [...] for the new democracy"⁴¹.

This task could refer to the self-conception of the Catholic youth movement of the interwar period: It sees itself not as a counterpart or alternative space ("*Jugendreich*") but as an active part as church in society. That is why the "goals of the BDKJ" to this day are: (1) the "co-shaping of the church" and (2) the "co-shaping of society".⁴² Only

deutschen katholischen Jugend (BDKJ) (Ed.), *Bundesordnung*, 27f.

(https://www.bdkj.de/fileadmin/bdkj/Dokumente/Beschluesse/Bundesordnung_BDKJ_Stand_2016.pdf/24.07.2019); Die deutschen Bischöfe: *Geistliche Verbandsleitung in den katholischen Jugendverbänden*, ed. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2007, 18.

³⁸ Wolker, *Jungführerdienst und Jungführerbildung*, 53.

³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ Cf. Höring, *Jugendlichen begegnen*, 122-124.

⁴¹ Hermann Giesecke, *Die Jugendarbeit*, München ⁵1980, 22f; cf. Wibke Riekmann, *Demokratie und Verein. Zum demokratischen Selbstverständnis von Jugendverbänden*. In: *deutsche jugend* 59 (2011), 68-75, esp. 71-74.

⁴² Grundsatzprogramm des Bundes der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (BDKJ) in der von der BDKJ-Hauptversammlung am 16. Mai 1998 beschlossenen Fassung. In: Bundesvorstand des Bundes der deutschen katholischen Jugend (BDKJ) (Ed.), *Bundesordnung*, Düsseldorf 2016, 6-8; Cf. Die Bundesordnung (1948), Nr. 3-6, Archiv des Jugendhauses Düsseldorf 03/001-251.

groups which can show "democratic structures" can become members of the BDKJ.⁴³ Thus it is common practice that from the leadership of the local group to the election of the national executive committee, every position is based on election by the members or delegates.⁴⁴

Youth associations could therefore be called "living workshops of democracy"⁴⁵ and they play an important role in democracy education⁴⁶ as outlined in the SGB VIII. It should not be denied that concrete practice can lag behind these ideals.⁴⁷

It is now characteristic for the Catholic youth associations (united in the BDKJ) that they understand the principles of youth work mentioned above also as principle of their self-understanding as part of the church and their participation in it:

"The BDKJ brings these forms in which the faith of girls and boys as well as young women and men is expressed into the church as enrichment. In doing so, the BDKJ, together with other church groups, develops new ways of dialogue and new structures of participation in the church and implements them in its actions. This commitment is based on the commitment to a democratic culture in the church, which is characterised by the necessary rights of lay people in terms of decision. The life in associations is an expression of such a democratic culture in the church. In the BDKJ [...] perspectives for new ways of an equal coexistence of Christian men and women are developed and implemented."⁴⁸

No question: In this self-concept conflicts between church leaders (bishops) and youth associations (or their leaders) are rooted.⁴⁹

4 New Concepts of Youth Work and Leadership since the 1970s

In the 1970s the former concepts which went back to the 1920s were further developed or replaced. The guiding principle up to today is that of youth work or youth

⁴³ Cf. Bundesordnung des Bundes der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (2014), § 6, 2.4.

⁴⁴ Cf. Annette Jantzen, *Die katholischen Kinder- und Jugendverbände und ihr Dachverband*. In: Angela Kaupp – Patrik C. Höring (Ed.), *Handbuch Kirchliche Jugendarbeit*, Freiburg i. Brsg. 2019, 233-247.

⁴⁵ Deutscher Bundesjugendring, *Jugendpolitisches Eckpunktepapier: Jugend braucht Gestaltungsmacht*. 77. Vollversammlung, 3./4.12.2004, 2.

⁴⁶ Cf. Benedikt Sturzenhecker – Elisabeth Richter, *Demokratiebildung in der Kinder- und Jugendarbeit – partizipative Potentiale nutzen*. In: Gerhard Himmelmann – Dirk Lange (Ed.), *Demokratiedidaktik. Impulse für die Politische Bildung*, Wiesbaden 2010, 103-115.

⁴⁷ Cf. Helmut Richter – Benedikt Sturzenhecker, *Demokratiebildung am Ende? Jugendverbände zwischen Familiarisierung und Verbetrieblung*. In: *deutsche jugend* 59 (2011), 61-67.

⁴⁸ Grundsatzprogramm des Bundes der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend, 7.

⁴⁹ Cf. Annette Jantzen, *Beschluss und Wirklichkeit: Der Demokratieförderplan des BDKJ und der Konflikt mit der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 1994*, in: Patrick Becker – Christiane Heinrich (Hg.), *Theonome Anthropologie? Christliche Bilder von Menschen und Menschlichkeit*, Freiburg i. Brsg. 2016, 339-354; Rainer Drews, *Zur Krise katholischer Jugendverbandsarbeit. Eine Lokalstudie von Strukturen kirchlicher Jugendarbeit in Berlin (West)*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, esp. 273-294; Lothar Roos, *Katholische Jugendorganisationen im Spannungsfeld Kirche – Gesellschaft. Konflikte, Ursachen, Aufgaben*, ed. Katholische Sozialwissenschaftliche Zentralstelle Mönchengladbach [Kirche und Gesellschaft Nr. 51], Köln 1978.

ministry understood as an invitation or "personal offer" („*Personales Angebot*“), which is realised in the form of "reflected groups".

In the mid-1960s, Catholic youth work, which passed a renaissance after World War II, had fallen into a crisis. The increase in commercial competition on the leisure market, the tendencies towards de-churching in Western Germany, the emancipation of the youth from the conventionality of the Adenauer era and its politicization, as well as the new awakenings within the church following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) made it necessary to find a new positioning of youth ministry and Catholic youth work. Looking on contemporary pedagogy and the theology shaped by the Council led to the resolutions of the Würzburg Synod (1972-1975).

Is it coincidence? During the Synod the topic of youth work was brought to the commission dealing with Christian diaconia/caritas, which at the same time had to deal with the issue of the situation of workers and foreign fellow citizens. But coincidence subsequently becomes a principle. Youth work is no longer regarded under the perspective of religious socialization and education, catechesis or sacramental pastoral but under the perspective of diaconia.

This perspective became influential for all parts and kinds of youth work up to catechesis: Youth work is the church's service to the youth and to society as a whole, a "social diaconia".⁵⁰ Recruitment is not its purpose, but the service that takes place as a "personal offer" in form of "reflected groups".

Connected with the concept is a certain understanding of the roles of those involved in youth work, above all of those who accompany them. The influence of the concepts of spiritual care popular at that time, mainly developed in the United States during the first half of the 20th century (especially in the Pastoral Counselling movement whose ideas were taken up by the German Pastoral Theology in the second half of the 1960s), and the pedagogy of the late 1960s (partly influenced by concepts of a non-directive, personal approach following Carl R. Rogers and by the group dynamics), are clearly noticeable: No more charismatic youth leadership, but rather the relations of authority turn upside down - the group as instrument and content moves into the centre. Leading groups therefore means initiation and moderation of group processes in which everyone is a subject and participates fully and right from the beginning. The model of group leadership is no longer that of 'leading', but is similar to that of the 'trainer' in the context of counselling processes.⁵¹

These ideas were avidly incorporated in the concepts of catholic youth ministry not only but also by the numerous social workers who began to play a vital part and by all those theologians who were open for human sciences as an indispensable partner of theology.

4.1 The "Personal Offer"

⁵⁰ *Ziele und Aufgaben kirchlicher Jugendarbeit. Beschluß*, 290.294. In: Bertsch, Ludwig (Ed.), *Gemeinsame Synode I*, Freiburg i. Brsg. 1976, 288-311.

⁵¹ Cf. Hermann Steinkamp, *Seelsorge als Anstiftung zur Selbstsorge*, Münster 2005, 101-118.

The basic form of the „personal offer“ is the „reflected group“, which sees itself as a new methodological approach for the existing peer groups. The peer group is the basis – as it was already during the youth movement in the 1920s. Its characteristic feature now, however, is the regular interruption of the group process and the reflection on the factual, but above all on the relational level. In this way the „reflected group“ can realise something like the original form of community, namely participation, authentic give and take, sharing life of the participating subjects. It represents a form of church, desired by many, in which sustainable relationships are at the same time an authentic, credible witness of Christian faith, a realisation of church as *koinonia*.⁵²

4.2 Reflection as Goal and Method

The focus of the „reflected group“ is reflection, understood as interpersonal feedback, as it is common today in counselling, therapy, supervision and pastoral care.⁵³ It can be understood as an expression of a parrhesia practice, the "speaking truth to the other", as Michel Foucault puts it⁵⁴, the frank speaking, the mutual truthful sharing of truth. In this way, the behaviour in the group, the mutual speaking of the "truth between us"⁵⁵, becomes a proof of the credibility of speaking about the 'truth' we believe. The practice of the group is thus a form of domination-free communication, is "communicative action", as Edmund Arens and Helmut Peukert described it following Juergen Habermas.⁵⁶ At the same time it is a communication in faith, whereby faith is primarily not the content but the motive of communication.⁵⁷ The support of such groups requires certain, above all communicative and personal competencies, e.g. the "ability to hear and bear questions", the "basic attitude of readiness to learn, which is also ready to question outdated understanding of norms and outdated patterns of behaviour", the "creativity in discovering and testing new forms of living together", the "readiness to confront with values of tradition" and "in all this the readiness and ability to let participate in one's own faith".⁵⁸

4.3 Questions for today and beyond

⁵² Cf. Höring, *Jugendlichen begegnen*, 227-352; Patrik C. Höring, *Koinonia: A Roman Catholic Perspective on a Theological Pattern for Youth Ministry in Church as a Community*. In: *Journal of Youth & Theology* Vol. 12 (2013), Number 1, 46-57.

⁵³ Cf. Steinkamp, *Diakonie statt Pastoral. Ein überfälliger Paradigmenwechsel*, Münster 2012, 234f.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *Das Wahrsprechen des Anderen. Zwei Vorlesungen von 1983/84*, Frankfurt / Main 1988.

⁵⁵ Steinkamp, *Diakonie statt Pastoral*, 234.

⁵⁶ Cf. Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis. Grundzüge theologischer Handlungstheorie* [QD 139], Freiburg i. Brsg. 1992; Helmut Peukert, *Wissenschaftstheorie – Handlungstheorie – Fundamentale Theologie. Analysen zu Ansatz und Status theologischer Theoriebildung*, Düsseldorf 1976.

⁵⁷ Cf. Steinkamp, *Diakonie statt Pastoral*, 234.

⁵⁸ *Ziele und Aufgaben kirchlicher Jugendarbeit. Beschluß*, 299f.

This brings us back to today's practice: Are our proportions correct? Is the relationship between factual and relational levels correct? Is there enough time for reflection in the youth group, also on the relationship level? Can 'disturbances have priority'? Does today's spontaneous, project-like, temporary participation allow group processes that can be reflected upon? For while cohesion, the joining together in the peer group, used to be the prerequisite for action, today the opposite seems to be the case: Participation in individual actions can only lead to group formation.⁵⁹

Furthermore: Are the facilitators sufficiently competent? Are they able to distinguish between digital (factual) and analogue (relational) communication? Are they able to reflect factual orientation and metacommunication in their respective effects? Are they able to distinguish information and performative messages - for example, the difference between the statement: "You weren't there last time" and the sentence: "We missed you at the last meeting"? To what extent do the facilitators have the courage to face the 'risky truth' against a harmony and order loving majority of participants and clients? To what extent are they able to realize a participatory practice that makes the individual the subject of youth work and takes him/her seriously as a subject of the church?

These questions cannot be answered in this paper but could and should be discussed in education and training with those doing youth ministry/youth work. These questions do mark furthermore the gap between theory and daily routine in youth ministry. And thirdly they may indicate that circumstances and conditions have changed so that the concept of the "reflective group" might need further development.

5. Conclusion

Participation as the main principle of youth work (in Germany) today and as the main focus of Catholic youth associations could be traced back to its very roots in the youth movement of the early 20th century. Theologically it can be founded in the self-concept of the church as a community of subjects with equal dignity. While in the beginning participation focused on the service of young group leaders it shifted in the last decades to the group itself. That led to a new understanding of leadership so that the group not only is the indispensable condition for youth work but rather the main instrument for any educational process.

⁵⁹ Cf. Steinkamp, *Diakonie statt Pastoral*, 225f; auch Judith Könemann, *Sozialformen der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit im Wandel: Von der reflektierten Gruppe zum Projekt?* In: Kaupp – Höring (Ed.), *Handbuch Kirchliche Jugendarbeit*, 460-472.