II. Toward a Participatory Ecclesiology: Catholic Students and the Quest for Ecclesial Adulthood

In his 2019 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis identifies an important challenge for the church today. "Youth ministry," he writes, "has to be synodal; it should involve a 'journeying together' … through a process of co-responsibility … Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church."[60]

Here, the pope responds to some of the concerns raised by young adults in the unprecedented process that led up to the 2018 synod on "Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment." Unlike the other fourteen ordinary sessions of the synod, the 2018 synod solicited the direct input of laypeople, in this case young adults, in a process that included both a questionnaire, which received more than 60,000 responses, and a "pre-synodal meeting" that convened more than 300 young people in Rome a few months before the synod.[61]

In their final statement, the young people at the meeting asked for a greater voice in the church's structures:

> On many occasions, young people have difficulty finding a space in the Church where they can actively participate and lead. Young people interpret their experience of the Church as one where they are considered too young and inexperienced to lead or make decisions as they would only make mistakes. There is a need for trust in young people to lead and to be protagonists of their own spiritual journey.[62]

This struggle of young adults to have their voices heard and to be welcomed as full participants is not new and is not limited only to the church. In 1962,

[60] Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit: Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), §206, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html.

[61] "2018 Synod: Already 60,000 Answers from Young People Worldwide," *Zenit*, July 4, 2017, https://zenit.org/2017/07/04/2018-synod-already-60000-answers-from-young-people-worldwide/.

[62] *Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting*, Rome, March 19–24, 2018, http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/news/final-document-from-the-pre-synodal-meeting.pdf.

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the Port Huron Statement of Students for a Democratic Society envisioned a "participatory democracy," where decisions concerning the common good would be made transparently with the active participation of all relevant stakeholders, including young adults.[63] In 1995, the UN General Assembly enumerated youth participation as a key feature of youth policy. More recently, young adults have demonstrated their desire to be heard as they take on roles at the vanguard of the major contemporary social justice movements from Black Lives Matter to the ecojustice movements.

Among Catholics, one dynamic voice for youth participation in the church and in civil society is the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS-Pax Romana). For 100 years, this student-led movement has exhibited what could be described as a participatory ecclesiology, a model of church where all the baptized, including young adults and other underrepresented groups, are seen as active agents.

Like a participatory democracy, a participatory ecclesiology highlights the importance of intermediary groups, movements, and associations like IMCS-Pax Romana as mediating forces for empowerment, civic formation, and representative decision making. A participatory ecclesiology makes a special option to listen to and reinstate the voices of those groups marginalized from systems of power. In connection to the centenary of IMCS-Pax Romana, which is celebrated this year, this article briefly explores the impact of this movement in the formation of this participatory model and what lessons can be learned as the Catholic Church rethinks the meaning of synodality today.

A Laboratory of Participatory Democracy

From its foundation in 1921 as a student-led initiative to bring peace to a world divided by war, IMCS-Pax Romana has consistently emphasized the agency and responsibility of university students. With lay students democratically elected as international presidents and officers from the very beginning, this movement promotes a model of youth agency at all levels.

Today, the IMCS brings together more than seventy national associations of Catholic university students.[64] Among the stated objectives enumerated in its present statutes, IMCS seeks (emphases added):

[63] Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement: The Vision Call of the 1960s Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

[64] IMCS Pax Romana, "Who We Are?," The International Movement of Catholic Students, 2021, https://www.imcs-miec.org/who-we-are-2/.

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a) to promote the student apostolate among students in higher education *stressing their responsibility in life*, in the Church's mission and in the world
b) to recognize the problems of justice, a recognition which is vital to the transformation of society, and work with all concerned women and men *for joint action and reflection leading to a more just and equitable social order* at all levels: national, continental and international;
c) to further the Christian faith experience *lived in one's own commitment* and to try to communicate this faith to the student milieu by bearing witness to Jesus Christ;
d) to encourage *pedagogies of action* which help students integrate their Christian faith in their efforts to build a more just society[65]

This mission of empowering students to take action and responsibility in the student milieu, the church, and society has taken on different forms over the past century.

a. Specialized Catholic Action in a Broken World (1921–1946)

From 1921 to 1946, the organization was known primarily as Pax Romana, an emblem adopted after its founding peace congress to reflect universality.[66] Early on, this confederation was associated with the model known as Catholic Action, which was famously defined by Pope Pius XI in 1928 as the "participation and co-operation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate."[67] Pax Romana embraced this definition, but also pushed past its more top-down and defensive interpretations.

In the mid-1920s, for example, it cooperated with its Protestant counterpart, the World Student Christian Federation, in the establishment of several relief programs for students displaced by the war.[68] At the same time, Pax Romana was developing a proactive advocacy program with the League of Nations. This enabled it to play a representative and advocacy

[65] IMCS Pax Romana, *International Statutes of IMCS Pax Romana* (International Movement of Catholic Students, 2007), https://www.imcs-miec.org/statutes/.

[66] For a history of Pax Romana's foundation, see Guillaume de Weck, *Histoire de La Confédération Internationale Des Étudiants Catholiques "Pax Romana" 1887–1921–1946* (Fribourg: Max Jendly, 1946).

[67] Pope Pius XI, "Letter of Pius XI to Cardinal Bertram," in *Clergy and Laity: Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Odile M. Liebard (Wilmington, NC: McGrath, 1978), 30–34.

[68] Jules H. Levasseur, "Pax Romana, Its Higher Educational Role" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1965), 18; Eugene G Schwartz, ed., *American Students Organize: Founding the National Student Association after World War II: An Anthology and Sourcebook* (Washington, DC: American Council of Education and Praeger Publishers, 2006), 56.

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role, giving students a voice on issues directly impacting them, such as education policy. To facilitate this work, it cofounded two separate umbrella networks: 1) an informal grouping of major international student organizations, and 2) the Conference of Presidents, to convene the leaders of Catholic organizations maintaining a formal relationship to the League of Nations. This engagement, as was summarized in a note to Giovanni Battista Montini in 1947, "were [*sic*] barely tolerated by the Roman Authorities."[69]

By the 1930s, Pax Romana increasingly associated itself with the "specialized" approach emerging out of Belgium in the movement of the Young Catholic Workers, founded by Joseph Cardijn in 1925. In contrast to the "general" approach to Catholic action, which placed lay mobilizing under the direction of a centralized structure controlled by the hierarchy, specialized Catholic action envisions a model in which young people formed their own autonomous movements of, for, and by young people themselves.[70] For Pax Romana, this meant prioritizing leadership and the apostolate within the student milieu rather than on priests or adults. The student movement, at the campus, national, and international levels, should be led and directed by students themselves. If no such groups existed, Pax Romana endeavored to create them.

One such area was the United States. Although two Americans were present at Pax Romana's founding, it struggled to have a formal national federation in the United States.[71] Despite several attempts, Pax Romana leaders failed to persuade the Federation of Catholic College Clubs (later the National Newman Club Federation) to join. Instead, it focused its efforts on mobilizing students at Catholic colleges and universities.

After attending the 1937 Pax Romana Congress in Paris, Winifred Byles, a student at Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, was charged with creating a national federation "both for the American students' own purposes and for affiliation with Pax Romana."[72] In October 1937, Byles organized a meeting of student delegates from Catholic colleges in the northeast, and the National Federation of Catholic College Students (NFCCS) was created. At the inaugural meeting, Byles spoke to the mission and vision of Pax Romana as she lamented

[69] Quoted in Rosemary Goldie, *From a Roman Window: Five Decades of the World, the Church and the Laity* (Melbourne: HarperCollins Melbourne, 1998), 47.

[70] Joseph Cardijn, *Challenge to Action: Addresses of Joseph Cardijn, Founder and Chaplin General of the Young Cristian Workers*, ed. Eugene Langdale (Chicago: Fides Publishers, 1955), 64–65.

[71] See Kevin Ahern, "Students Beyond Borders: American Catholics and the Work of Pax Romana 1937–1947," *American Catholic Studies* 132, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 39–66.

[72] National Federation of Catholic College Students, "History of NFCCS," 1957, http://dcmny.org/islandora/object/nfccs%3A113.

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the passivity and isolationism among her peers. Students, she stressed, had an "abundance of riches," yet too often ended up looking like:

> A poor little rich girl … because he receives such a wealth of fine religious, philosophical and moral training that he doesn't know what to do with it … Perhaps his knowledge will appear so vast to him that he will shut himself up in his own little shell and hoard his St. Thomas and his moral theology … He will be a miser, an intellectual capitalist. Is that social justice?[73]

What was needed, she argued, was "intercollegiate Catholic action." Byles' call to action worked, and the NFCCS quickly became a national organization that would ultimately include membership of student governments or other groups at more than 100 Catholic colleges across the country.

Encouraging students to take active participatory roles on their campuses, in their communities, and in national and international debates was a major theme for the federation until its dissolution in 1968. Like IMCS, more broadly, the NFCCS encouraged students to become active agents in the student milieu. It helped to create the National Students' Association; it prioritized the creation of democratically elected student governments at Catholic colleges; it mobilized in its first decades more than $500,000 in relief funds for students displaced by the Second World War; and it created regional and national commissions to work for social action and interracial justice.[74]

b. Responsibility and the Lay Apostolate (1946–1967)

Following the Second World War, Pax Romana's focus on student participation and agency increased at multiple levels. In 1946, the global organization was restructured into two branches, IMCS for university students and, the International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs for professors and graduates. In 1947, Pax Romana was admitted as one of the first nongovernmental organizations with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Under Pax Romana's leadership, the Conference of Presidents was relaunched into the Conference of International Catholic Organizations for those "ICOs" at work in the UN system.

Meanwhile, the Catholic student movement was actively spreading beyond Europe. Regional offices and programs were established in Latin

[73] Winifred Byles, "Notes of Address," organizational meeting of the National Federation of Catholic College Students, New York, 1937, http://dcmny.org/islandora/object/history-socialaction%3A323?search=1937.

[74] National Federation of Catholic College Students, "History of NFCCS," 1957, http://dcmny.org/islandora/object/nfccs%3A113.

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America, Asia, and Africa. By the end of the 1950s, IMCS had become a global network led by a cadre of lay student leaders who worked to promote Catholic student responsibility and agency.

IMCS' concerns for student participation centered largely on its understanding of the student apostolate, an idea that built on the conviction within specialized Catholic action of the so-called apostolate of like to like. The best agents to evangelize students, according to this framework, were other students themselves. The movement endeavored to urge university students to take up the responsibility that came with their privileged position.

This concern is evident in the major themes of national and international congresses. In 1948, for example, the NFCCS focused on "The Students' Responsibility in the Community" and in 1949 on "The Catholic College Student—A Call to the Lay Apostolate." Internationally, IMCS organized congresses on "The Responsibility of the Catholic University Movement" (Lima, 1946); "The Christian Duty of the University Student" (Fribourg, 1946); the "Social Responsibilities of the Student" (Louvain, 1948); "Political Responsibility of the Christian" (Luxembourg, 1954); "The Social Responsibility of the Student" (Manila, 1959); and "The Responsibility of the University Towards Society" (Montevideo, 1962).

In this period, the focus on responsibility was generally outward toward society and the university world, but it did not take long for IMCS and leaders formed by this movement to turn toward examining lay and youth participation in the structures of the church.

In the holy year of 1950, IMCS organized a pilgrimage of close to 7,000 students to Rome, including 3,000 students from the NFCCS and National Newman Club Federation, which had by then affiliated to the international structure.[75] This pilgrimage took place in Amsterdam on the theme of "The Cooperation of the Intellectual in the Work of Redemption," just after the World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in Rome.

A few months later, Vittorino Veronese, a former leader of the IMCS Italian affiliate, the Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana (FUCI), and international vice president of ICMICA-Pax Romana, called a meeting of eighty lay delegates representing twenty-two countries and fifteen ICOs. Together, they envisioned a World Congress for the Lay Apostolate to be organized the following year.

[75] "7000 Pax Romana Pilgrims From 31 Countries Visit Holy City," *The Catholic Standard & Times,* September 8, 1950, Catholic News Archive; "3000 Catholic Collegians Now on Way to Rome in Largest U.S. Pilgrimage," *NCWC News Service,* August 15, 1950, Catholic News Archive.

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The 1951 World Congress for the Lay Apostolate convened representatives from forty ICOs and delegates from more than seventy countries and seventeen ethnic groups, with several dozen national IMCS leaders represented in the delegates.[76] Pope Pius XII approved of this initiative and created the Comité permanent des congrès internationaux pour l'apostolat des laïcs (COPECIAL). Veronese was named as secretary and Rosemary Goldie, a long-time IMCS leader from Australia and member of the Fribourg office staff since 1946, took on a role as a staff member. Among other tasks, Goldie spearheaded efforts, often through the networks of the YCW and IMCS, to seek out the voices of lay Catholics from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Emilio Guano, Montini's successor as national chaplain of the FUCI in Italy and the international chaplain of IMCS, took on a role as an expert.[77] Together, along with Cardijn and others from the movements of Catholic action and specialized Catholic action, they planned a second congress in 1957. This time, with more than 2,000 participants from eighty countries. The theme of the second congress echoed many of the themes addressed by IMCS in that period: "The Laity in the Crisis of the Modern World: Responsibilities and Formation."

After Pope John XXIII announced the call for the Second Vatican Council, IMCS and its alumni who were in leadership in other international lay associations took on proactive roles to engage the work of the Preparatory Commission for the Lay Apostolate.[78] This included a confidential consultation in 1960 hosted at the Fribourg secretariat with participants representing six continents.[79]

By 1963, Pope Paul VI, who engaged Pax Romana in his role as a national chaplain, turned to the leadership of the ICOs, including several former IMCS leaders, when he sought to appoint lay auditors to the Second Vatican Council. Of the fifty-three lay auditors appointed to Vatican II, six were involved as leaders or former leaders of Pax Romana.[80] One of these, Rosemary Goldie, has detailed the specific contribution made by these auditors, their lay networks,

[76] Comité Permanent des Congrés Internationaux pour l'Apostolat des Laïques, ed., *Actes Du 1er Congres Mondial Pour L'apostolat Des Laiques*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Rome: World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, 1951).

[77] Goldie, *From a Roman Window*, 25–27.

[78] Rosemary Goldie, "Lay Participation in the Work of Vatican II," *Miscellanea Lateranense*, no. 40–41 (1975 1974): 509.

[79] Rosemary Goldie, "Ramon Sugranyes: Catholic International Organizations, COPECIAL and Vatican II," *Notes and Documents (Institut Jacques Maritain)* September-December (1998): 24. See also Kevin Ahern, "At the Vanguard of the Geo-Apostolate: Pax Romana (1946–1971)," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Religions- Und Kulturgeschichte* 115 (2021): 391–408.

[80] These included Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, Vittorino Veronese, Mieczyslaw De Habicht, Silvio Golzio, Rosemary Goldie, and Luigi Gedda.

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and chaplains, particularly in the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

Apostolicam Actuositatem offers an important call to participation on the part of all the baptized no matter what age in a way that complements *Sacrosanctum Concilium*'s call for "full conscious, and active participation" of laypeople in the liturgy (§14) and *Lumen Gentium*'s understanding of the church as the people of God (§12).[81]

In its second paragraph, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity uses the metaphor of the Body of Christ to declare that the baptized Christian "who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself" (§2).

Speaking directly about young people, paragraph 12 affirms the growing desire of young people to "assume their own responsibility, and … to play their part in social and cultural life." Citing addresses of Pope Pius XII to the YCW, the text continues by affirming a central element in the model of specialized Catholic action. Young adults, it teaches, "should become the first to carry on the apostolate directly to other young persons, concentrating their apostolic efforts within their own circle, according to the needs of the social environment in which they live." In the following paragraph, it continues by affirming the value of the "apostolate of like toward like" (§13).

These sections of the conciliar texts offered support to IMCS' efforts to deepen youth participation in the church. This can be seen in IMCS' active engagement in the third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate in 1967. The event gathered more than 2,000 national and international delegates and was organized in conjunction with the first meeting of the Synod of Bishops. For some, the link between these two meetings raised hopes that some sort of lay consultative congress might be organized alongside each session of the synod going forward. Such a hope was expressed in the formal communication of the congress to the synod, which called for the creation of "representative structures" at all levels in the church.[82]

[81] Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1963), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[82] Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, "Memorandum to the Synod of Bishops," *Lay Apostolate* 3 (1967): 10–11.

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Like the first two congresses, Pax Romana leaders played leading roles in this third world congress. Veronese gave the opening address; Thom Kerstins, former IMCS secretary general (1955–1958) gave the introductory lecture; P.T. Kuriakose, IMCS president (1967–1971), spoke on a plenary panel; Paola Zabban, a member of the IMCS delegation was featured as among of six "voices of youth"; and Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez, who as a student was president of Pax Romana during the war (1939–1946), offered the closing synthesis. Each, in their own way, addresses the question of participation.

Kuriakose spoke to the growing generational tensions and the "the frustration of young people, their anguish, their inability to be understood by their elders, their feeling of being left out … Decisions seem to be taken for them by others, and they are unwilling to accept this anymore."[83] This frustration expressed in relation to younger generations was something expressed by other participants of the congress as laypeople. This is visible in the closing synthesis by Ruiz-Giménez, who addressed the need to enact the council's teachings by creating structures of co-responsibility and co-participation in the church. The "change in mentalities" initiated by the council, he urged, "is not enough; there must also be normal channels for this dialogue, for this interconnection and intercommunication, if you like; channels at all levels of the Church, from the parish to the Holy See … in a sincerely representative and democratic spirit."[84]

These concerns can also be seen in the eight resolutions passed by the congresses, including the call for "a serious doctrinal study … on the place of women within the sacramental order and within the Church."[85] By the following year, COPECIAL was dissolved and the tradition of World Congresses for the Lay Apostolate ended.

c. Participation as a Sign of Liberation from Oppression (1968–1985)

Already, at the time of the third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, many IMCS groups deepened their understanding of what it meant to participate in the apostolate of the church through a framework of liberation, and in some cases, revolution. The fourth Pan Asia Catholic Students Seminar in Colombio,

[83] *God's People on Man's Journey: Proceedings of the Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate* (Rome: Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate, 1967), 75.

[84] Joaquin Ruiz-Gimenéz, "Towards the Future," in *God's People on Man's Journey*, 167.

[85] Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, "Resolutions Adopted by the Assembly of Heads of Delegations," *Lay Apostolate* 3 (1967): 16–17.

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Ceylan (December 1966–January 1967), for example, focused on the theme of "Christian Students and the Asian Revolution." Students engaged a series of working papers prepared by the IMCS Asia Chaplain, Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, and reaffirmed their commitments to social transformation.[86]

In the decade following the Second Vatican Council, the emerging framework of liberation theology became the primary lens thorough which IMCS approached the meaning of the student apostolate. IMCS leaders and chaplains in Latin America, particularly in the Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos (UNEC) in Peru, *were beginning to rethink the meaning of the student apostolate*. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *the national chaplain of* UNEC, offered a critical important framework in a paper on "a theology of liberation," which was first published by the IMCS regional secretariat in Montevideo (MIEC) in 1969.[87]

Globally, IMCS embraced this model. In 1971, IMCS' assembly focused on the theme of "Liberation—How?" The next assembly, four years later in Lima, met with the theme of "Christian Commitment in a World in Crisis." Here, it defined its mission "to be a sign of the Church committed to the transformation of the world starting from the university."[88] Student leaders recognized their own responsibility "for the sins of the Church and its unfaithfulness to its mission. Gradually, we have realized that evangelization also helps the Church in its mission as we participate in its own conversion to Jesus Christ."[89]

The development of this new vision of mission was not easy and the ground shifted quickly. Many IMCS members in Europe and North America, including the NFCCS, disappeared and its commitment to liberation placed it into conflict with the hierarchy for the first time since its foundation.[90] Gustavo Gutiérrez comments on this:

> Today, apostolic youth movements have radicalized their political options … The ever more revolutionary political options of Christian groups—especially students, workers, and peasants—have frequently been

[86] International Movement of Catholic Students, "Christian Students and the Asian Revolution" (Pan Asian Catholic Students' Seminar, Colombo: Pax Romana Publication, 1967).

[87] See Anna Maria Bidegaín, *From Catholic Action to Liberation Theology: The Historical Process of the Laity in Latin America in the Twentieth Century*, Working Paper 48 (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute, 1985).

[88] 28th Interfederal Assembly of IMCS (Lima), "Toward a Re-Definition of the Movement," International Movement of Catholic Students, 1975, 6, AIF 75/312/FES, Pax Romana Archives, University of Fribourg.

[89] Ibid., 5.

[90] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 59.

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> responsible for conflicts between lay apostolic movements and the hierarchy. These options have likewise caused the movement members to question their place in the Church and have been responsible for the severe crises experienced by some of them.

Once at the vanguard of lay organizing, movements like IMCS and the YCW under Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI were now, in many ways, at the margins.

d. The Right and Duty of Youth Participation (1985–Present)

In 1979, the UN General Assembly designated 1985 to be "International Youth Year" with the theme of "Participation, Development, Peace." After 1985, IMCS intensified its advocacy and engagement in the UN system regarding youth participation, including taking an active role in the four World Youth Forums of the United Nations system (1991, 1996, 1998, 2001). Concerns of IMCS and other youth NGOs were addressed by the UN General Assembly in 1995 as it adopted the World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY) to guide the work of the UN system on youth policy for the coming decades. In 2007, after consultation with youth organizations, including IMCS, the WPAY was reaffirmed and expanded by the UN General Assembly. Among the key priority areas outlined in the texts, is youth participation:

> The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account … Youth organizations are important forums for developing skills necessary for effective participation in society, promoting tolerance and increased cooperation and exchanges between youth organization.[91]

In 2010, the United Nations again launched an international youth year. During the opening session for the year, Maya Saoud, a member of IMCS' UN advocacy team, was asked to speak on behalf of youth NGOs. In her address in the UN General Assembly Hall, Saoud framed clearly an understanding of participation using the language of human rights:

> More often than not, young people are marginalized in our countries. They are pushed to the fringes of society and prevented from making a difference

[91] United Nations General Assembly, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*, A/RES/50/81 (New York: United Nations, 1996), nos. 104–06.

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> in times of need. Instead of being encouraged to be active agents of change, they are seen as being part of the problem, not the solution. They are silenced or simply neglected. Their skills and capacity for peace building are tragically wasted. But, I have to remind you, that participation is a right that MUST be respected. Participation in the political process is the essence of fairness, of equality. If young people are not treated like viable players in the field of politics then a grave injustice is being committed.[92]

Could these same concerns also be applied to the church? For IMCS, the answer was yes.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, IMCS deepened its focus on participation as a countersign to what it perceived as the creeping consumerism within the exercise of student ministry. At its 1986 Interfederal Assembly in Louvain, IMCS made these links clear:

> The evangelizing presence of the movement must lead it to transform students into active protagonists of the University Apostolate, and not mere consumers (as they so often are made out to be). This mission of developing a responsible lay apostolate among students is a fundamental one, if students are really to live their faith in a committed manner in the Church and the world.[93]

The following year, Etienne Bisimwa, the secretary general of IMCS from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was selected as one of the auditors for the 1987 Synod on the Laity. Again, IMCS stressed to the church leaders the centrality of youth participation. In his address he told the bishops that it was "essential that the Church listen to the concrete situations of the young."[94]

In this period, IMCS also relaunched a new effort to mobilize students in the United States. With the support of several students and campus ministers, IMCS created the National Catholic Student Coalition (NCSC) in 1982 to bring together Catholic student groups with a participatory vison:

> Called by name to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ by virtue of our Baptism, we are committed to fidelity in living the Gospel. We see Christ as the embodiment of all that it is to be human, acknowledge the dignity of all Creation and rejoice in our responsibility as servants and stewards. We recognize the global vision of the Gospel which calls us to a change of heart

[92] Maya Saoud, "The International Year of Youth; Dialogue and Mutual Understanding, August 15, 2010, https://icmyo.org/2010/08/15/the-international-year-of-youth-dialogue-and-mutual-understanding/.

[93] XXXI Interfederal Assembly, *Study Session 4: Movement* (Paris: International Movement of Catholic Students, 1986).

[94] Séan Mac Réamoinn, "1987 Diary of the Synod of the Laity," *Pobal Dé* (blog), April 3, 2019, http://pobalde.ie/1987-diary-of-sean-mac-reamoinn-of-the-synod-of-the-laity/.

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> expressed through word and action in solidarity with the struggle for justice and commitment to love.[95]

This network drew inspiration from the 1986 pastoral letter by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Empowered by the Spirit*. Like *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the bishops affirmed the agency and leadership potential of students in the here and now. "All the faithful on campus, by virtue of their baptism," it teaches, "share in the task of bringing the humanizing light of the Gospel to bear on the life of the academic community."[96] Students themselves are empowered by the Holy Spirit to take on leadership roles among their peers.

For more than thirty years, NCSC did this in a number of ways, including assisting IMCS in advocacy work at the United Nations in New York and in representing students with two positions on a subcommittee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Campus Ministry.

As a national student-led student organization dependent upon membership fees, the NCSC's structure, like many IMCS national groups, was financially fragile. Ultimately, by the 2010s the NCSC was unable to weather the pressures emerging from a decreasing number of Catholic student groups, the increasing shift toward professionalization of campus ministry that often prioritized the lay minister, and the rise of heavily funded evangelical ministries like the Fellowship of Catholic University Students.

The 2018 Synod on Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment again offered IMCS an opportunity to advocate for youth participation and the importance of representative youth organizations. IMCS leaders, including its secretary general, participated in the pre-synod meeting. Linked to the publication of a book on small campus faith groups, IMCS organized a series of events in New York, Nairobi, and at the Jesuit Curia in Rome just prior to the synod. From these meetings, IMCS published a six-page statement, "Young Catholics and the Synod: Listening to Voices from Around the World." This text, which enumerated six recommendations for the synod, was circulated among the synod participants. Participation is again a central theme:

> The primary agents of student and youth ministry ought to be students themselves, even if this means allowing them to make mistakes. Empowering young people to be evangelizers to their peers is not easy

[95] David Klopfenstein, "National Catholic Student Coalition (NCSC)," in *Equipped for the Work of Ministry: A Reflection and Planning Guide for the Continuing Formation of Priests* (USCCB Publishing, 1996), 180.

[96] NCCB/USCC, *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future* (Washington, DC: US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1985), no. 22, https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-education/empowered-spirit-campus-ministry-faces-future-table-contents.

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> as it is inhibited by real temptations to clericalism, ageism, and a type of spiritual consumerism where young adults become consumers and the ministers, a service provider.[97]

In both the final statement of the synod and in *Christus Vivit*, the idea that young people should be empowered to be agents of the church's mission gets affirmed. For Pope Francis, this recognition is closely linked to synodality. In other words, as baptized members of the people of God, young people must be actively engaged in the journey together.

Conclusion

As the Catholic Church today embarks on the synodal process launched by Pope Francis, what lessons, if any, might be offered by the century of mobilizing by students in IMCS-Pax Romana? What, in other words, might IMCS' experiment with a participatory ecclesiology offer? From this brief look at the life of one of the oldest youth movements in the church, three takeaways are worth considering.

First, like the framework of a participatory democracy, a participatory ecclesiology recognizes the important role played by a range of intermediary organizations and mediating structures including national and international youth organizations. Such structures play a number of roles, including leadership formation by offering young adults practical experience in synodality.

It is not surprising perhaps that many of the lay leaders who called for greater lay participation in the life of the church around the time of the Second Vatican Council were previously student leaders in IMCS. In those roles, they advocated for more spaces to have their voices heard and worked to form common ground with peers from different cultures and contexts.

Thanks partly to the advocacy work of IMCS and other youth organizations, the United Nations explicitly recognizes in a number of documents the value of youth NGOs in leadership development and in facilitating youth participation. In soliciting the input of young adults, the church, like the United Nations, is challenged to find truly representative voices and avoid the risks of nepotism or tokenism. Youth-led youth organizations operating beyond the local level offer authentic and accountable voices for processes of consultation. With a wider view, similar points could be made for other marginalized groups, including women, LGBTQ Catholics, and those

[97] "Young Catholics and the Synod: Listening to Voices from Around the World," October 1, 2018, https://www.icmica-miic.org/2018/10/listening-to-voices-from-around-the-world-young-catholics-and-the-synod/.

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from racial minority groups. Supporting and sustaining these structures of synodality must be a priority in any synodal process.

Second, a participatory ecclesiology encourages a wider vision of youth and campus ministry. Although the rise of lay ministry is a significant positive development in the postconciliar church, there may be something lost in the shift away from the language of the apostolate. Ministry, if perceived through a consumeristic or clerical lens, risks disempowering young people rather than strengthening their agency and ownership over the church's mission. Engendering more of a participatory model of church may help to shift attention away from the minister or priest and back to the young people themselves as the primary agents of evangelization. As such, there may be some value in reclaiming the language of the apostolate.

Finally, greater research is needed to understand the impact of Catholic apostolic youth movements like IMCS and YCW at the national and international level. With some notable exceptions, the work of these movements in helping to shape key elements of Vatican II's teachings and in the emergence of liberation theology remains underappreciated. Uncovering these and other historical contributions reveals a much more complex and dialogical background in the development of doctrine.

In *Christus Vivit,* Pope Francis affirms a principle that has been at the core of a participatory ecclesiology: "Young people themselves are agents of youth ministry … they need to be helped and guided, but at the same time left free to develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity."[98] For a century, IMCS-Pax Romana has served as a vehicle for this type of creative, and sometimes audacious, agency. Revisiting the story of this and other apostolic youth-led youth organizations not only sheds light on the past but can also offer some ideas in the development of a more synodal and co-responsible church today.

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[98] Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit,* §203.

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