

IN THEORY:

Youths' negative image of Christianity

Many young people think Christianity is too judgmental, hypocritical and anti-gay, according to new findings by Christian-based research firm The Barna Group. The group reportedly found that church attitudes about people are creating a negative image of the faith among people 16- to 29-year-olds, and thus driving them away. Are you seeing this within your own faith community? And even if it's not Christian, how do you convey traditional religious messages to youth to keep them interested in the faith?

I don't believe most youth stay away from the church based on the reasons given above.

We are all immersed in a culture that constantly promotes the message that religion and the spiritual path is naïve or without merit.

From early in life we are taught that happiness is found in wealth and possessions. The typical TV sitcom or drama relays the message that sex is great and we needn't be concerned about commitment or consequence. It is difficult for many young people to accept a spiritual path, which itself is often mocked or trivialized by the consumer, "it's all about me" culture in which we live.

In my own tradition, individuals may accept the challenge of faith at any age, and I certainly am blessed to know many young people between the ages of 16 and 29 who are deeply committed to their faith.

I do believe that for many individuals, faith comes with maturity. When, for example, someone discovers how shallow and nonfulfilling life can be when lived for the wrong reasons, they may gravitate back to the faith of their youth. I often see individuals ready to make that transition after a major change in life such as marriage or parenthood.

Committed faith isn't for the faint-hearted or the immature. Real faith demands the complete transformation of one's person from selfishness to selflessness.

Parents need to be the primary teachers of their children in the ways of faith. At best, churches can support and strengthen that which is first nurtured in the

home. Negative images of faith would have no place in an environment where God is allowed to thrive.

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