

GENERATION X, GENERATION Y, GENERATION WHAT NEXT?

An anonymous wise person once observed that 'in case you're worried about what's going to become of the younger generation, it's going to grow up and start worrying about the younger generation!' How prophetically true this has become for families and authorities. Whether society is prepared to admit it or not, one of the characteristics in today's culture is the strength of the voice of the rising generation and the influence of that voice being heard across all sections of society. Adolescence is no longer associated with a 'middle way' between childhood and adulthood.

There is little doubt that since the mid 1960's, the age of permissiveness, young people and now even younger children are missing out on the natural joy and innocence of childhood. They are fast becoming clones of the 'overnight celebrities' in the clothes they wear, the language they use, and the freedom they expect. In many families, both parents have to work. Children, therefore, have got to be minded, amused, stimulated, occupied and materially compensated. They know that for every new piece of technology they possess it soon becomes superseded. For them, all these devices are just a normal technological part of their lives.

However, the computer age, despite its overwhelming contribution to communication research, information and education, etc. is still a cause for great concern and needs careful monitoring. The need for young people to seek fun, knowledge and stimulation outside their four walls belongs to another era. Too many have become overly dependent on illicit pastimes.

Generation 'No Guarantees' has become a cult of its own; a cult which is challenging the attention of the older members of society. Their reactions are varied. The most common feeling today is one of bewilderment, confusion, anxiety, and a strong feeling of 'I don't know how to cope with young peoples' attitudes and behaviours anymore'.

One does not have to be an expert to recognize that adolescence brings in its wake some of the important upheavals in a young person's life. Many of the problems experienced are those of identity crisis, emotional instability, anti-authority, loneliness, material wealth as opposed to spiritual poverty, need for experimentation and boredom. Sadly too, it is a time when young people want to put on hold all their acquired childhood sets of values whilst searching and experimenting to see if there are other values which are more appealing. No wonder that the majority of 'No Guarantees' cannot find any real meaning in their lives.

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So, is there a solution? Is it too much to ask when are those of us who are seriously concerned about this generation going to stand up and be counted? Surely, when we examine the utter regression in human conduct in both the older and younger generations, we should indeed be asking soul-searching questions. But to change individual behaviours through the manipulation of external circumstances – to build a just society – requires something more than simply asking questions.

To suggest that inner renewal and a belief in a just and acceptable set of values might be the answer appears unacceptable to the majority of society. Unfortunately, too many of us are not only afraid but also ashamed to speak out. Perhaps, for some of us, these barriers have their roots in our own unrelenting self-centeredness. Maybe, we are too concerned with what other people will think of us rather than stopping to consider what we could and should be doing to get ourselves, and the younger generation, out of the mess we are creating on this planet.

However, not all is gloom and doom. Quietly, it is emerging that many young people are slowly reassessing their outlook on life. It is also heartening to witness that having taken it all in their stride, many of them are now showing signs of searching for that elusive 'something more.' This is not to suggest that young people are turning their backs on materialism but that there are definite signs of a generational shift in attitudes towards religion and spirituality.

How about the rest of us?

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