

TerrorCulture: Worth Living For or Worth Dying For

Sam George

In the second chapter on Youth and Globalization, I want to look at another emerging culture among the global youth. Just as TechnoCulture shapes the 'Globalization from above', there is another significant culture when we view 'Globalization from below', which I will call as TerrorCulture. In both these culture there are strands of a much deeper reality of being young and their search for God and meaning.

TerrorCulture is a culture of violent aggression that is on the rise among youths everywhere. There seems to be growing tendency toward violence in the emerging generation. It is not limited to any geographical territory, religious groups or socio-economic class. Although militancy and terrorism are some expressions of it, terrorculture¹ includes violent rebellion at home, gun culture, media violence, school shooting, youth gangs, and underground movements in different parts of the world. This is the culture of the marginalized and disadvantaged youths of the world. Both globalization and religion have a **reciprocal** relationship with TerrorCulture, shaping it and shaped by it.

Ahmed Shah, at 17, was shy and introverted, preferring the solace of his room to the chatter of his friends. His father, Yusuf Shah, a schoolteacher, says he usually spent his time studying so he could become a doctor. Ahmed even got himself photographed wearing a doctor's coat and a stethoscope and kept the framed picture in his room.

The youngest of three brothers, none in the family thought his behaviour had changed when Ahmed started spending nights in the local mosque next door. It was good, his parents thought, that he was taking an interest in religion. They were somewhat troubled however when, on some evenings, Ahmed would read the Quran by candlelight even when there was no power. It soon became a routine, the flickering flame and the Quran, Ahmed suddenly reading out aloud and crying.

Then one day, Ahmed just left home. Three weeks later, he called his father and said: "*Abbu, mein jaa raha hoon* (Dad, I'm leaving)." A few hours from then, the Shahs heard security vehicles screech to a halt outside their door. Their son, they were told, had exploded himself at the Army headquarters in Srinagar (Kashmir). His neighbors in downtown Srinagar locality were shocked that the shy Class XII dropout could have been a suicide-bomber. He had driven a stolen red Maruti—laden with explosives—to the high-security barrier. What remained of him were several pieces, his body having been blown over a distance of 100 metres.

Story adapted from the article "Portrait of A Suicide Bomber" in *The Week*, Dec 24, 2001.

The Kashmir Valley has seen some 45 suicide attacks (29 in 2001 alone) since the Kargil conflict came to an end in July 1999. The two strikes in New Delhi were highly symbolic: the Red Fort in December 2000 and the Parliament Complex in December 2001. One of the fascinating common denominator in the worldwide terrorist or separatist movements is that youth are at the forefront of it. Countless number of young people lay down their lives every year and become 'martyrs' for various ideological causes. This phenomenon is not limited to the 'fault lines' of the world like Afghanistan, Kashmir, Palestine, Sri Lanka or Yemen, but is rapidly **spreading** all over the world.



The resurgence and global expanse of terrorist activities are evident from recent attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The symbol of global mobility, airplanes, has been turned into a weapon against globalization itself, knocking down the symbols of capitalism. Yet the recent attack was not just an attack on globalization, it was also an **expression** of it. Anti-globalization protests have become one of the

¹ In this paper, we might mostly look at religiously motivated violent opposition to modernity, but this culture is not limited to that. Benjamin Barber called it 'Jihad' (contains an Islamic overtone), while Samuel Huntington called it 'Clash'.

most globalized events in the world today. Unlike the resistance of anti-globalization protesters, terrorculture is changing the equation of globalization entirely. Just like in technoculture, youth are in the cutting edge (bleeding edge, actually) of the terrorculture. The nexus of globalization and religion lies at the heart of terrorculture. The products of globalization have found perfect match for the intents of terrorist groups and tug of war for the New World Order continues.

Modern terrorism, it is said, originated in the bleak ghettos of Beirut and Belfast. Since then, the phenomenon has come a long way and has spread its tentacles to all corners of the world. The farm crisis fueling a violent Sikh nationalism, with unemployed and angry youth taking up arms, or Tamil Tigers equipped with cyanide capsules in Sri Lanka, or a Bible-flaunting Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma City. Terror has become the **short-cut** to fame for anyone with a cause and a grievance. It has been greeted with instant indignation but has also served its purpose. What makes definition of terrorism harder is that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Terrorculture is not restricted to any region and has no religion, instead it has embraced values of hatred and violence. It has earned publicity for the perpetrators, created martyrs for the cause and generated emotive mythologies.

The recent expression of terrorculture, the terrorist attacks on America, distinguishes itself from traditional crime and violence, in the sense that these acts do more harm to the **living than the dead**. Terrorist acts are now performed for a television audience around the world and its target is never the innocent victims, but the larger audience whose lives will be gripped in fear. It aims to destabilize the economy, society and geo-political clout of nations, not simply kill a few people. They are strategically conceived, funded and executed by global networks.

Anthony Giddens called '**fundamentalism** as a child of globalization'², while Benjamin Barber thought that 'interdependence makes boundaries permeable not just for good but for the bad, for Jihad no less than for McWorld'³. Time's cover page article on Al-Qaeda Network admitted, 'As they (intelligence experts) dig deeper, it is becoming clearer how effectively globalization has spread terrorism around the planet.'⁴ Another shocking revelation of the network has been how young people are being recruited, trained and entrusted to carry out sophisticated terrorist activities around the world. TerrorCulture has become the new fad of many youngsters around the world. They are finding it worth enough to lay down their lives.



TerrorCulture: Why Youths?

Youth are in the forefront of the terrorculture. The common traits of terrorists are - young, daring, possess professional skills, global citizens, fun loving and determined. The new recruits of extremist groups around the globe tend to be young single males. The recent news headlines confirms this – what makes youths volunteer,⁵ young and ruthless⁶, youth driven into extremism,⁷ youth terrorists,⁸ child soldiers⁹ etc. They include both poor school drop outs and university students, idealists and devout with a sense of "something missing in their lives." They also tend to be members of financially and socially marginalized sections of society. A tabulation of ages of Sikh extremists killed by police indicated that most of the men were in their early twenties.¹⁰ Hamas consists largely of 'urban males in their late teens.'¹¹ The age requirement to join

² Anthony Giddens, *A Runaway World - Reith Lecture on Globalization*, at New Delhi, 1999. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/events/reith_99/week3/lecture3.htm)

³ Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, (NY: Times Books), p49.

⁴ *Time*, November 12, 2001. p 67.

⁵ *Ibid* p 70.

⁶ *Newsweek*, October 22, 2001.

⁷ *Outlook*, Mumbai (India) – October 15, 2001

⁸ *New Strait Times*, Singapore – October 28, 2001

⁹ *India Today*, November 19, 2001.

¹⁰ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Mark quoted figures based on obituaries printed in World Sikh News during 1988.

¹¹ Emmanuel Sivan, (191)

Tamil liberation movement in Sri Lanka is only ten!¹² The Northern Alliance in Afghanistan claimed it never inducted anyone below the age of 18, but the rule was never enforced.

Our world is astonishingly young. More than half of the world falls below the age of 25. The United Nations reports that 85% of the global youth population lives in Third World countries and is expected to rise to 89% by 2020.¹³ Teenagers in China alone exceed the total population of America. Islam is the second largest faith in the world, with over 1.2 billion adherents and is the fastest growing religion. With high fertility rate and the death of older men due to war, the Islamic population is mostly young. Close to 55% of them fall under the age of 30. In Iran, about two thirds of the population are 30 or under, and are called 'the angry generation longing for jobs, more freedom and power.'¹⁴ Demography is not only changing society, but also economic and political systems.

Talking of the US teen population, which is expected to rise from 29 million to 36 million in the next decade, *Rolling Stone* observed, "resistance is futile. Teenagers are **driving** our culture – and they won't be giving the keys back anytime soon."¹⁵ Although youth are discerning and fickle, both TechnoCulture and TerrorCulture have found it easier to win loyalty of the emerging generation than any other segment in the society. Another reason why young people are ideal recruits is that they are easy to indoctrinate as well as intimidate.

Within the first six months of the breakout of war in Afghanistan in September 2001, it is believed that more youngsters **joined** the cause of Jihad than any time in history, much like Jewish youth going to Tel Aviv in 1967 to fight the Arab-Israeli war. Among the radical youths many "want the clash of civilizations to happen."¹⁶ In 2002, hundreds of children were known to have been forced into the ranks of the Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen (terrorist outfits in Kashmir valley). Hundreds have been arrested and returned to their homes by the Indian Army, but many more have died.¹⁷

The demographic explosion in Islamic societies and availability of large number of often-unemployed males between the ages of 15 and 30 is a natural source of instability and violence. Samuel Huntington considers this as the major reason for the propensities of violence in the Islamic world. He cites another example as Sri Lanka, the peaking of the Sinhalese nationalist insurgency in 1970 and of the Tamil insurgency in the late 1980s coinciding with the **youth bulge**, meaning the years when the "fifteen to twenty four year olds" exceeded 20 percent of the total population. This is true of the Tiananmen generation in China and of the conflicts in Chechnya. The high birth rates among the Islamic and Asian countries without educational and vocational opportunities result in not only widespread poverty, but also produces migrants and fighters. Both of which drive globalization in the differing forms of multiculturalism and terrorism. A United Nations estimate reveals that the Muslim population will be disproportionately young and will have significant political consequences in the future.

More than the statistics or the youthfulness of the emerging generation, there is another important factor why young people worldwide are more inclined towards the emerging terrorculture and technoculture.. It's not just that young people see things differently; it's that they have a **different** way of looking. They have a very unique perspective and that is their strength. They are deeply spiritual and fervent in their quest for the ultimate truth. We might call them by different names across the globe, but the teens and tweens of 90s and beyond are a different breed altogether. A new worldview and a new consciousness shaped both by their inner spiritual longing and the prevailing culture around them.

¹² *Frontline*, Chennai (India), November 24, 2001.

¹³ www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/q-and-a.htm United Nations defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, December 7, 2001.

¹⁵ Quoted by Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn, *Starting Right – Thinking theologically about Youth Ministry*, (CA: Youth Specialties, 2001). p18.

¹⁶ What makes Youths volunteer? *Time*, November 12, 2001. p 74

¹⁷ Catch them young, *Frontline*, Chennai (India) – November 24, 2001.

Culture Wars and Culture of Wars

Globalization and culture are deeply intertwined subjects. Globalization lies at the heart of contemporary culture and cultural practices are at the heart of globalization. Immanuel Wallerstein called culture the 'ideological battleground of the Modern World-System.'¹⁸ Other scholars on culture covered the issue of a global culture in terms of cultural homogenization, assimilation, integration, distinction etc. Arjun Appadurai summed it up well:



The new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery model (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries). Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull (migration theory) or surpluses and deficits (balance of trade model) or consumers and producers (neo-Marxist developmental theory).¹⁹

Often the debate on youth culture in the context of globalization has focused on the popular culture. The discussions are confined to changing cultural patterns and its impact on adolescent development. Global cultural studies compared the aspects of traditional culture and western culture, assimilation, evolution of hybrid cultures etc. In many parts of the world, the globalizing of popular culture is regarded as cultural imperialism. The popular culture has mostly been so pre-occupied with its own profitability, market dominance that it has ignored or failed to take seriously another culture out there, the culture of war or culture of death and destruction or TerrorCulture. As Western society battled over its ideological differences and partisan politics, another culture has **brewing** around the world, which hold the potential to steer the globalizing powers in entirely different direction.

Human history is punctuated by wars and wars will continue to define our future. 'Organized crime', says Prof. Louise Shelly of Washington American University, "will be a defining issue of 21st century as the Cold War was for 20th century and colonization was for 19th century. Trans-national crime groups are the major beneficiary of Globalization"²⁰. Most of the organized crime and terrorist networks have taken to these extreme measures in their youthful days. The irreconcilable **paradox** of a sense of justice in them, and incidents in their own lives or being witnesses of atrocities against humanity, drive them to extremism. And as they grow up, they are willing to take any measures to establish that fairness in the world around them. The fundamental source of conflict in this New World will not be primarily ideological or economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural."²¹

Another important aspect of the TerrorCulture is that the globalizing forces of economy, technology and culture do not appear to change people's sense of who they are or where they belong. Barnett & Cavanaugh cited the example of how "Serbs and Croats, Sinhalese and Tamils, listen to the same Michael Jackson songs while they take up arms against each other."²² Violence becomes the ultimate form of **identification**: the acute necessity for self-definition amidst radical cultural flux in which artificial distinctions between neighbors are ruthlessly upheld.²³

While in the past ethnicity, nationality, cultural and faith heritage helped shaped the identity and sense of belonging in the community, now they are all getting redefined. We live now in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-national and multi-whatever world. This comes out clearly in the testimony of a British

¹⁸ Mike Featherstone, *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, (London: Sage, 1990) pp. 31-55.

¹⁹ Arjun Appadurai, Difference in Global Cultural Economy, in *Global Culture*, Ed Mike Featherstone, (London: Sage, 1990), p 296.

²⁰ Cited by Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: Rise of Religious Violence*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001.

²¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). p265.

²² Richard Barnett & John Cavanaugh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and the New World Order*, (New York: Touchstone Books, 1994), p 138.

²³ Arjun Appadurai, Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the era of Globalization", *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*, Eds. Brigit Meyer and Peter Geschiere, 1999, p 305-329.

lawyer Anjem Choudary, 40, a British passport holder and extremist Islamic group al-muhajiroun - "For a Muslim, a passport is no more than a travel document ... Our allegiance is solely to Allah and his messenger, not to Queen and any country. Nationality means nothing."²⁴ Nationality, citizenship, oath, pledges etc are getting a major twist in its understanding. But in these kinds of cultures, matters of faith continue to provide the philosophical **foundations** and much needed motivation to carry out such horrendous acts.

Faith Matters: Where is God?

Traditionally religious violence attacked the houses of worship of other faiths. Examples abound like Jerusalem Temple in Israel or demolition of Babri Mosque in India or churches in Indonesia etc. But the recent attacks, although religiously motivated and many have called it as religious fundamentalism, are turned against economic and military targets. This is the result of marriage of globalization and religion, using the products and services of globalization to carry out attacks against globalization itself for religious motives. This new war does not target the leaders of any faith anymore, but destroys innocent followers to engage in a psychological warfare between the leaders, ideologies and worldviews. It aims to shake the **foundation** expecting the superstructure to collapse. It engages suicide bombers in aerial attack on institutions that are standing tall in the landscape of modernity. Also the counterattack is not targeted at any nation or a faith, but at individuals and networks of terrorists. But the religious undercurrents are obvious in all these encounters.

Mark Juergensmeyer analyzed the global rise of religious **violence**, ranging from Christians attacking abortion clinics, between Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland, Hamas attacks in Middle East, Jews who supported assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister, Sikhs who killed the Indian Prime Minister and the Japanese Buddhists who released nerve gas in Tokyo subways, concludes that rise of globalism and end of Cold War has led to a crisis in moral leadership. Religion not only give people a sense of origin, meaning and destiny of life, but is increasingly used to control and manipulate people. The diverse nature of interpretation and understanding of scriptures, conflicting divine revelations and the challenge of engaging in 'cosmic war' has made faith matters more vital than ever, in spite of the attempt of modernity to replace it with reason.

For religious terrorists, violence first and foremost is a **sacramental** act or divine duty. They are executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative and justified by sacred scriptures. There is also the visible emergence of radical clerical leaders who merge intentional activism and militant ideologies with theological justifications. Religion thus provides the legitimacy for acts of terrorism. By engagement, you become a divine agent to carry out God's order in the world. Another reason behind this religiously-violent activity is the aim to resist secularization. It is defensive aggression and hostility against the neo-colonial evil forces and falling prey to a Western imperialistic agenda.

According to Erik Erikson, "religion, through centuries has provided this bedrock of confidence. In times of crisis it has served to restore a sense of trust."²⁵ In between the stages of life of childhood and adulthood, youth experience acute marginality in traditional societies built around families where there aren't any highly developed youth cultures as in Western industrialized societies. There are not many alternatives that are contending for the allegiance of the youth, except the terrorist groups. The religious groups provide much needed home and extended kinship. Youth are developmentally predisposed toward what Eric Erikson called "totalism" – the vulnerability of an unformed self to fusion with an **ideal**. Instead of possessing the ideal, the ideal possesses them, and they are drawn to movements that capitalize on their affective spiritual awareness, and on their idealistic desire to 'go the distance' for something worthy of their fidelity.²⁶

²⁴ What makes Youths volunteer? *Time*, November 12, 2001. p 74

²⁵ Erik Erikson, *Identity and Life Cycle*, (New York: Norton, 1980), p65

²⁶ Kenda Dean, "We Aren't the World", Princeton Project on Youth, Globalization and the Church, (August 2000). Unpublished work.

Many Muslim leaders hate the West because the decadent pleasures of Western culture are luring the faithful away from Islam. Of course, many Christians share this abhorrence for Western culture's indulgence in immorality, pornography, sexual perversion and divorce. The best thing that the West could do for Christianity is to make itself attractive, reclaim the moral leadership and establish a society based on moral values. The notion of current war as the West vs Islam facilitated the reduction of antagonism within the Islamic nations. They not only distanced themselves from the western Christian ideology, but also began to come together in their opposition to the West, leading to the theory of civilizational clash.

Many believe that the current war on terrorism is a clash of civilizations. More aptly it is the clash of worldviews - one that of progressive and scientific against the traditional and tribal. It is easy to export the products and services of globalization, like communication and technology tools, across the world, but harder to develop people who could build them. The concepts of the free market, accountability in political systems, and the rule of law are based on the Christian worldview, which does not fit well in various other religious worldviews. A New York Times editorial stated that if terrorism is to be defeated, the world of Islam must take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern world is based, and without which Muslim countries' freedom will remain a distant dream.²⁷ But there is another religion of violence and a value system of hatred that is quickly spreading across the world and youth are promptly responding to this culture of guns.

Rite of Passage: Guns 'n' Roses:

The recent terrorist acts in America have caused much reflection on why do terrorists do such horrendous acts? Why do these perpetrators and evil conspirators hate the West? A wide range of rationales has been prescribed by the experts like lack of educational and economic opportunities, limited freedom and power, unemployment, corruption, religious sanctions, fanaticism, etc.



Without prospects for higher education or better economic avenues, many drop out of educational pursuits. With skyrocketing unemployment rates, due to weak economic development or corrupt leaders, the youth look for other avenues for their youthfulness. The recent crackdown on terrorist networks have revealed that many young educated professionals have also gone over the edge into fanaticism and fundamentalism. They are searching for a nobler cause in life. Unfortunately, religious fanaticism appears to be providing them with what they see as a 'noble exit'. They are seeking for a more definite cultural identity and sense of belonging. Many bright young Muslim immigrants in Europe and America find in religious fundamentalism an outlet for their energy and talents.²⁸ The young are drawn to the extreme Islamic politics, which eventually led them to terrorism.

Guns have become a literal metaphor of the rite of passage into the TerrorCulture. The challenge of terrorist leaders to the young can summed up as - "deny yourself, take up your guns and follow" much like Jesus' challenge to his disciples. On completion of strenuous preparation at the terrorist training camps, young people are rewarded with automatic assault weapons. The scenes of 12-year-olds skipping along with AK-47 slung over their shoulders seem almost normal in Afghanistan.

The TerrorCulture provides ample avenues for the young to enter adulthood. It adds value, purpose and significance to an otherwise completely marginalized life. The sheer profusion of people in many parts of the world mean that life is literally regarded as cheap. Due to the population explosion in China, India and Islamic nations with relatively far less economic empowerment, the worth of individuals have dwindled. For a meagre amount of money, hit men (actually youths) are available for hire, and even life threatening 'assignments' require very little compensation. Ministry in TerrorCulture would have to restore worth and dignity to every individual life.

²⁷ *The New York Times*, November 2, 2001.

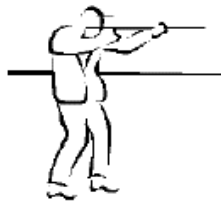
²⁸ *Escape to Extremism*, *Time* November 12, 2001. p 75

Young people in every era are **claimed** by their cultures during puberty; if it does not happen, both the young person and his or her offspring becomes a threat to the tribe of origin²⁹. Young boys are being lured by the machismo and romance of guns and fatigues. Afghanistan's youth have never known peace; they have lived through wars all their lives. Hollywood war films are being used for terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. For two decades, their country has been at war, first with the Soviets and then among homegrown factions. If Afghanistan is ever to settle into peace, these children will have the hardest time adjusting to a place where people don't resolve political squabbles with the pull of a trigger.

Young boys crave for male **role models** to emulate and long for affection. When their fathers or other men around them fail to provide role models, they look elsewhere. When empty on the inside and hungry for love that was denied in the childhood, they will risk anything to grab just a little fleeting affection or attention of those who take you 'under their wings'. The popular culture has provided enough models from the fields of art, music, sports, media, technology gizmos, etc, to keep large numbers of youth pre-occupied with them. But in the absence of positive role models, they often turn to extremist leaders.

Final Act: When Death means more than Life

The young people of TechnoCulture and TerrorCulture (Jihad and McWorld) have a strange fascination with death. They are not scared of dying, but are only looking for a reason to make the final exit. Their language is filled with metaphors of death. Most of the young terrorists die a cruel death. Gen-X suicides are as common as fleas on dogs. Self-destruction is the ultimate **rebellion** and a way out of life made crueler by the world around them.



In the popular culture, the destructive themes are evident from the recent acts of violence in public schools, prevalence of gangs in urban areas and high suicide rates. Writing about Gen-Xers, Kevin Ford affirms that "we think a lot about death. And it leads to despair and depression. Our preoccupation with death is displayed on our skins: we avoid the sun, we cherish our pallor, we look like ghosts or corpses. Xer women often favor makeup in shades of white, black, blue and purple – the colors of death and lividity and corpsehood."³⁰ The obsession with **death** causes them to take risks and dare death to come and get them. Suicide rates are three time higher among Xers than the Boomers; three quarters of all teenagers have contemplated suicide and one quarter have attempted it.³¹

Martyrdom is a popular idea among all terrorist outfits. Martyrdom attacks (in other words suicide bombers) against Israeli targets have become the most dramatic and bloody weapon in the armory of the Palestinian militant groups. The cyanide capsule tied around the necks of Tamil Tigers is a literal reminder of having renounced their right to life. To many young men who have lived their entire lives under humiliating conditions, commitment to martyrdom is a final act of power, stemming from desperation. They act in the belief that they will go straight to paradise, where they will get places of honour next to God. According to Islamic tradition, he who gives his life for an Islamic cause will have his sins forgiven and a place reserved in paradise. The promise of eternal life of pleasure with plenty of comfort, food, alcoholic beverages and sex are very attractive to single young men. The reward of a Jihad martyr has gone up from 70 to 100 black-eyed beautiful and willing virgins recently, in order to recruit more youth. They are also assured that their families will be looked after well. A martyr is revered and gives his family the highest status ever. His name becomes immortal. The **legacy** of a martyr is an irresistible appeal for other young people and is a powerful recruitment strategy.

<p>If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.</p>
--

²⁹ Aaron Esman, *Adolescence and Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

³⁰ Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation – Putting Gospel in the Language of Xers*, (Chicago: IVPress, 1995). P 104.

³¹ Stephen Arterburn and Jim Burns, *When Love is not Enough*.

When robbed of broader, transcendent meaning, many turn inward and easily fall victim to the extremist idea as a form of **salvation**. Talking of youth, Eckersley (who says he is not a Christian) said, “there is no expectation of an afterlife – no fear of hell, and no hope of heaven, and it does not matter if you die.”³² Some heroes gain their reputation by the life they live, while others by the death they die. The call of martyrdom gives young people a sense of mission and noble cause big enough for their lives.

Ministry in TerrorCulture: Battle for the Souls

The terrorist networks and global capitalism is doing a better job in winning the **allegiance** of young people around the world than the church. The pull of technoculture and terrorculture is so intense on the emerging generation that they cannot see anything else. So what must the church do? What message does it have for the emerging generations? Who will eventually win the battles for the souls in the coming world? What can the church learn from emerging cultures?

All religious terrorist groups aims at nothing less than the souls of their adherents, not only its beliefs, but also to its various interpretations. The moderate and fanatic Muslim groups are gunning for the hearts and minds of youths throughout the Muslim world. Clerics in many Middle Eastern nations have turned back to religious rule and governance by Islamic law is the norm. The moderates are trying hard to offer youths a compelling role model other than radical Islam. The souls of the Muslim youth are being **pulled** in opposite directions.

Beneath the veneer of hatred and violence of young terrorists, we will see fragile young men struggling to find a cause worthy enough to live for in a world that cares too little for its young. Like all other marginalized youths in our society and church, terrorist youths are created in God’s image and we must celebrate their worth and value unconditionally. The **idealism** of youth is the face of divine order and their relentless quest for divine knowing could only be met in Jesus Christ, not in a religious system, including church. Youth challenges us to shed the mediocrity that we as the church have settled into and incarnate God’s hope for the whole of humanity.

The business world is quick to recognize the largest emerging market of youth populace and is positioning its products and services as cultural products to win their loyalty. Talking of the global teenage market, the Fortune article reports that, “No marketing challenge is more basic than capturing the heart and mind of teens. There are billions to be earned.”³³

The Western corporate world is awash with stories of how they are betting their future on younger generations. A new executive position on culture watch is found not only in MTV and fashion business, but also among automakers, software and consumer products. An article titled ‘The Future is younger than you think’³⁴ chronicles the stories of how future product development is being done by teenagers in Silicon Valley in California. Not only has the technoculture set its eyes on the future, but is also using the future to capture and control the future. They are winning the very hearts and souls of emerging generation every day.

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

Rom 8:6 NIV

Both cultures are making a radical claim and challenge to the emerging generations and are winning more converts to its ideology. They extensively use battlefield language like conquer, dominate, destroy, reject, kill, overpower etc. Terrorculture sees it as territorially, while technoculture see it economically. The former is motivated by religious beliefs, while the latter by profits. But the bottomline is converts in both cases. Ministry in terrorculture will call for radical discipleship.

At present, the church pales in comparison to the terrorculture in the power of its rites and rituals for young people. However, the church has the potential to compete with and even outpace these cultures in meeting youth’s quest for significance, security and community. Sadly groups like Occults and New-Agers are

³² R Eckersley, ‘Values and Visions’, *Youth Studies Australia* (Autumn 1995), 15-16.

³³ Shawn Tully, *Teens: The Most Global Market of All*, Fortune, 1994, May: 90-97.

³⁴ Fast Company, Issue 8, p93.

aggressively pursuing the emerging generations. Not to mention that the ‘Mormons have sent youth missionaries to most cities of the world to specifically reach youth.’³⁵ Will the church wake up to its challenge of emerging generation?

The contemporary church faces the challenge of **reclaiming** a mission to its own future and not just some marginalized youths out there. Church should not reduce its ministry to youth merely to some programs, recreational activities or worship nights. The typical Western middle class conception of youth ministry, with youth pastors and a youth department within a denominational structure or youth organisations, may not be transferable or effective around the world. The resource-rich, curriculum and entertainment-based ministry might not be the most appropriate youth ministry model for the rest of the world. We must develop new models of ministry in order to win the emerging generations to Christ.

The followers of Jesus Christ around the world have a daunting task of **showing** a Christ as one who is worth dying for and living for to the emerging generations. In the history of humanity He alone stands tall, beckoning us to make our lives really count for His greater purposes. Jesus died that we may live. He defeated death on the cross. I do not have to pay with my own blood, because someone else has done it already. And in dying to ourselves and letting him live through us, that we would really have a life in the first place. Jesus alone deserves our total allegiance, both in life and in death. Jesus followers must share and show a life of meaning and hope. We have a story of love, affirmation and self-worth. Amidst a culture of death, we could breath life; in a culture of war, we could be agents of peace; in a culture of hopelessness, bring a ray of hope and purpose. A complete allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ alone could give the young people of the world a coherent sense of their being, establish profound connections to the world around them and have a purpose worth living for. In total obedience to one who died in their place, can they die to their own self and live unto the eternal purposes of God?

I (Jesus) came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they have ever dreamed of.

John 10:10 Message

As followers of Christ, we must **recognize** the power of terrorculture and capture afresh the life -giving power of the gospel. We must celebrate life and richness of life in Christ. Affirm the spiritual longing of the emerging generation and lead them to the person of Jesus Christ, rather than any doctrine or church. We must create a safe haven for these marginalized youths to discover their God-given potential and purpose in life. Ministry in terrorculture calls us to go beyond the ‘feel-good’ Sunday morning Christianity. They are counting and willing to pay the cost of a **radical discipleship**.

³⁵ Dave Livermore, Billion to be Won, *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, July 2001, p 332.

Applications:

1. Identify marginalized youths and shades of terrorculture prevalent among them.
2. Research about young people involved in terrorism and their religiosity.
3. Think about how you could relate to youths deeply entrenched in terrorculture and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. Develop a cross cultural missiology for terrorculture.
5. Evaluate violence in media, school and neighborhood and its influence youths in the community.
6. Explore scripture about radical nature of God's call (count the cost of discipleship)

Conclusion:

Today's youth will look for right things at the wrong places just like their predecessors. Their most basic pursuit remains the same throughout generations. What they really need is **radical** re-ordering of the self in light of one's relationship with God. Young people will continue to look for a "god" who is big enough for them and make a life commitment to such a "god" who is capable of turning their lives inside out and the world upside down. Youth need a life worth living, a cause truly worth dying for. They need a purpose larger than life itself, which would add profound meaning to their global existence.

We must enable youths to discern the allure of both TerrorCulture and TechnoCulture and help them from being victims of some of its destructive forces. Yet redeem the currents of the times for God's eternal purposes. We must charge them to establish redemptive purposes of God for their times and for the generations to come. Jesus alone is one **worth living** and **dying for!**

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are the shapes of TerrorCulture?
2. Explain how and why youths gets marginalized?
3. What similarity and differences do you find between gangs and terrorists?
4. How could lessons from cross-cultural mission be translated into terrorculture?
5. How does the leadership in terrorculture mission look like?
6. Why do you think terrorculture appeals to young people?
7. How could you present the gospel to youths in terrorculture?
8. Why do you think Christian message lost its radicality? How would you restore it?