

Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment

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The *Preparatory Document* of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to be held in October 2018 on the theme “Youth, faith and vocational discernment” was released by Pope Francis on Jan 13, 2017. This document is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, entitled ‘*Young People in Today’s World*,’ provides useful elements for contextualizing the situation of youth in today’s world. The second chapter highlights the importance of discernment in the light of faith in order to make life choices that truly correspond to the will of God and to the good of the person. The third chapter, entitled ‘Pastoral Action’, emphasizes the importance for the Church of accompanying young people in welcoming the joy of the Gospel, ‘especially in these times of uncertainty and insecurity’.”

This document is basically addressed to the youth. It deals with the faith and how can the youth help the church to communicate the Good News in the best way possible. The term ‘vocation’ is understood in a broad sense. It includes vocation to married life, priesthood, religious life, also vocation to be a social worker, teacher, healer, etc. Today’s youth need to make a proper discernment in order to find out the will of God in their life. The document considers youth to be between the ages of 16 and 29. So most of

what the document suggests will be very much applicable to young seminarians and religious.

The Church has decided to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to the fullness of life and love, and to ask young people to help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today. The youth are very efficient in using the modern means of communication through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other electronic media. So they will be able to contribute much in spreading the good news effectively through electronic media. Good News has to be proclaimed through words, deeds and life. We have to become the Good News. Our words and deeds need to go together.

Situation of Youth Today

A rapid process of change and transformation is the main characteristic of contemporary societies and cultures. The highly complex nature and rapid pace of this process is creating a situation of confusion and uncertainty never experienced before. We are not sure whether this state of affairs is a problem or an opportunity. The growth of uncertainty results in a state of vulnerability, that is, a combination of social unease and economic difficulties as well as insecurity in the lives of a large part of the population. We are living in a world of globalization, indifference and throwaway culture. Individuals and nations have become very self-centered and have lost concern for the poor and the marginalized. Compared to a privileged few, who can take advantage of the opportunities offered by the processes of economic globalization, many people live in a precarious and insecure situation, which has an impact on the course and choice taken in their life.

Today's generation of young people live in a world which is different from that of their parents and educators. Economic and social changes have affected the gamut of obligations and opportunities. Young people's aspirations, needs, feelings and manner of relating to others have changed as well. Furthermore, from a certain point of view, young people, because of globalization, tend to be more homogeneous in all parts of the world. Nevertheless, they remain in their local surroundings and their unique cultural and institutional settings, which have repercussions in the process of socializing and forming a personal identity.

The challenge of multi-culturalism is present in a special way in the world of young people; for example, with the special features of "second generations" (that is, those young people who grow up in a society and a culture different from those of their parents, as a result of migration) or, in a certain sense, the children of "mixed" marriages (from the vantage point of ethnicity, culture or religion).

Today, the younger generation is characterized by its relationship with the modern technologies of communication and what is normally called the "virtual world", which has very real effects. This "virtual world" provides potential access to a range of opportunities which previous generations did not enjoy, but not without its risks. Nevertheless, it is very important to focus on how the experience of technologically mediated relations might structure the conception of the world, reality and interpersonal relationships. On this basis, the Church is called upon to evaluate her pastoral activity, which needs to develop an appropriate culture.

With the Modi-wave catching up in the country, secularist values are at stake. Ban on beef seems to be the first step towards making India a Hindu nation. Most of the agitators

in Kashmir are young people. How does the church respond to the present political developments?

How Can the Youth Respond?

There are times when we feel that we have no control over our lives. We often blame ourselves, others and life situations for our unhappiness or misery. We feel that our lives are controlled by outside forces whether they are people or situations. We feel helpless and become resigned to our fate of a lifetime of frustration and unhappiness. We become victims of external forces. As long as we feel this way we are reacting to the external realities and the source of our happiness and peace is placed outside of us. Instead we can learn to be proactive and our responses to the external realities can be controlled by us whatever may be the provocation from outside.

We may not be able to change many of the external realities. But we can change our attitude towards ourselves, others and situations. Attitudes are learned. Some of them are unconsciously imbibed in childhood from significant persons like parents, relatives and teachers. They can also be carefully nurtured through conscious training. Since they are learned they can also be unlearned. If we watch our thoughts, we can identify and correct our attitudes. Since attitudes are results of repeated thinking, they can be replaced by healthy attitudes by constant thinking in the opposite direction.

We are what our thoughts are. If we engage our minds in good, creative, positive and constructive thoughts, the results will be incredible. Therefore, we need to be extremely careful about what we allow to pass through our minds. Jesus said that a bad tree cannot produce good fruits and from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk 6:43). American psychologist William James remarked that

the biggest discovery of this age is the realization that by controlling our thoughts we will be able to control our lives. We don't have control over many things that happen to us or around us. But we can decide how we are going to respond to those situations. A tragedy can be a disaster for one, but the same tragedy can be an opportunity for beginning a better life for another. We look at reality differently according to our past experiences.

Happiness is the ultimate goal and the deepest longing of every human being. In our frantic search, we mistake pleasure for happiness. We tend to look for happiness in externals. We think that if we change our work, or place of work, or the people with whom we work, we will be happy. Life is meant to be happy and in every human being there are enough resources to lead a life of contentment. It is our attitude that makes all the difference. Our happiness is determined not so much by what life brings to us as by the attitude we bring to life. Bad circumstances are not excuses for making bad choices.

We go forward in life not by a series of chance-occurrences but by the conscious choices we make. It is totally within our power and control to give direction to our lives. We hold immense possibilities to lead a far more meaningful and challenging life. We are slaves of many silent assumptions. I think I have to be rich or well-connected socially to get started. Since I am from a poor family with severe limitations, I must not dream of success. I assume that my thinking is correct. That way I do not get the best advice possible.

Every place – be it a home, a society, an organization, or a country – has a culture. Culture in any place always moves from the top down, never from the bottom up. The Church

hierarchy and the religious can exert a lot of influence to create a loving and friendly atmosphere in the Church. We need to create a healthy culture wherever we are. For example, Pope Francis as the head of Catholic Church has brought a new culture in the entire Church. Bishops, Parish priests, Prime Minister of a country, Chief Minister of a state, president of a nation, class leaders, Student Council Representatives, etc., can bring about a new culture in their own respective areas.

In order to develop positive thinking, we need to become a seeker of goodness. You need to focus on the positives in your life. Start looking for what is right in a person or situation instead of looking for what is wrong. Looking for the positive does not necessarily mean overlooking limitations. A good way to invite change is to concentrate on the positive than the negative. Some people will find fault with every person and every situation. Pessimists are unhappy when they have nothing to complain about. They cannot enjoy their health because they think they may be sick tomorrow. They forget their blessings and count only their troubles. On the other hand, optimists enjoy peace of mind. They appreciate the good qualities and strengths of themselves and others. If they want to benefit from any institution or organization, they must be able to see goodness and greatness in that institution or organization.

If you want to lead a truly Christian life, stay away from negative people and influences. If you associate with them, you will soon become like one of them. Keep away from negative movies, television programmes, gossiping and negative news items.

The Pope reminds the youth the words which God spoke to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and

your father's house to the land that I will show you". (Gen 12.1). He says that the same words are addressed to the youth today and they are to set out towards a future which is unknown but one which will surely lead them to fulfilment, a future towards which He Himself accompanies them. God's assurance is there in Jer 1:8: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you."

Abraham received a compelling invitation, a challenge, to leave everything and go to a new land. What is this "new land" for us today, if not a more just and friendly society, which we deeply desire and wish to build to the very ends of the earth? A different world is possible. We need to work towards a world where there is equality, justice, peace, love and dignity for all. A better world can be built as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity.

But unfortunately, today, many youth want to create this "new land" by means of violence, force and war. Many are drawn to underground and terrorist groups. Many movies promote violence and taking the law into one's own hands. This ideology is slowly creeping into the Church circles also. Many Catholics are becoming Naxalites and Maoists.

Many of us are involved in some kind of social involvement as part of our ministry. Do we fall into the temptation of quick results through violence, bribe, etc.? We need to see things from the perspective of God. We need to love people and use things, not the other way about. We need to follow the path of suffering in order to bring about social transformation. Suffering is necessary for bringing about the Kingdom of God. *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* are the means taught by Mahatma Gandhi to bring about the Kingdom of God.

We believe in the risen Lord. Our God is a living God. He is concerned about the lack of life and promotes life (Ex 3:7-8). Our God is opposed to idols who do not act in order to support life (Ps 115:4-7). Mary's Fiat can be an inspiration for all of us. Let it be done to me according to your Word. From the time of Annunciation till the death of Jesus on the cross, Mary kept up her hope in the words of the angel Gabriel. After the resurrection, Mary remained with the disciples as the mother of hope. Christian hope is centred on Jesus and his redemption (1 Tim 1:1). Christians place their hope in the resurrection of Jesus. Since Christ has been raised from the dead, we too can hope to be raised like Christ (1 Cor 15:12-20).

Young people are the future of our nation and the Church. They have to take up the leadership roles in the near future. If they have the right motivation and the proper direction, our nation and the Church will be in the hands of committed and competent people. If their goals are clear, they will be able to make sacrifices in order to reach those goals.

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