

SYNOD IN FULL SWING



The Synod has reached the height of its activity between plenary and minor work circles, synod fathers, young people and listeners. Many sources of information on this event can be accessed.

Among other things, I find interesting the position taken by a synodal father during the daily briefing of the Vatican Press Office: adults who express the desire to “speak the language of the present time, including the digital one.” Precisely for this reason, different forms of communication are being studied, usable by the new generations, and even the Synod’s final message will be written in a language in line with that used by youth, which includes multimedia content.

Wonderful news! Yes, because, in the words of Bishop Michele Falabretti, Director of the Pastoral Youth Service of the Italian Episcopal Conference, the present Synod “is not so much about young people as it is about adults and the Church, about its generative nature in faith, about listening to reality.”

From 23-28 September 2018, an International Congress entitled “Young People and Life Choices: Educational Routes,” was held at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome. The event was organized by the University itself, in collaboration with the Auxilium’s Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences and the resulting conviction is that while we are talking about young people, we are inevitably, as adults, called to change the way we look at them, to “decentralize,” “destabilize,” reposition ourselves so that we are not as much walking ahead of them as in step with them, alongside them.¹

¹ From this point on, the statements in quote marks are excerpts from interviews with speakers at the aforementioned Congress. To obtain more information on the subjects treated and listen to the entire talks and interviews, please access the following address: <https://www.pfse-auxilium.org/it/notizie/25-09-2018/materiali-del-congresso-giovani-e-scelte-di-vita-prospettive-educative/roma>.

Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, fma, one of the auditors at the Synod, recounts the emotion she felt listening to the young people in the synodal hall: “I felt very, very small in front of them,” she said. “They are so young and so brave to face a world that seems to leave them very little space, that crushes them, that sometimes simply ignores them. These young people inspire confidence: they know how to dream and they have the courage to make difficult choices, like going to share the life of the refugees. They speak to me of God—his love, his beauty, his stubbornness. They are the face of God.” Young people, therefore, who are “not simply receivers but also protagonists,” and who should be heard by the Church not only to “give it a heart massage,” said Franco Garelli, sociologist of the University of Turin, but even more to “demonstrate their courage and intelligence through not just generic attention [to what the Church has to say] but by addressing ‘hot topics’ such as bioethics and sexuality. Young people today experience within themselves a series of tensions between faith and reason, religion and science, personal well being and transcendence.

“Today’s generation comes out of contexts that are either too protected or too uniform and so we must get to the heart of problems. The Synod will be a missed opportunity if it does not incite us to be present in the public sphere, more imaginative in our educational proposals, and more pro-active on the decisive themes of existence.”



I would like to present here a few “metaphors” that call adults into question.

QUALITY ADULTS: A RARE COMMODITY TODAY

According to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary General of the Youth Synod: “Young people are waiting for us; they want us closer to them. [The Church’s] current pastoral work is not enough: it does not

speak to them and attract them.” Synodal reflection “helps to pose the question of personal choice and of educational paths within the vocational horizon of human existence as such. One cannot think about choices of life from the Christian view if not from within this broad vocational vision.” The Cardinal proposed two educational perspectives: “accompaniment” and “discernment,” advising us to grasp their intrinsic relationship insofar as “we accompany young people not to ‘waste time’ with them, but to lead them to maturity, to help them become adults. We have an epochal need of quality adults, who seem to be a rare commodity these days.” It is from this perspective that “accompaniment naturally takes on the traits of vocational discernment.” For Cardinal Baldiserri, synodal listening to youth “has restored oxygen to a Church in desperate need of it: we are not, generally speaking, well equipped with competent and mature adults able to accompany young people. This fact should spur us on to create the conditions for ecclesial renewal.”

THE “GULLIVER COMPLEX”

Bishop Raúl Biord Castillo of La Guaira, Venezuela, underscored the revolutionary innovation that the Pope has in a certain way called to everyone’s attention. With this Synod, young people have become “an authentic ecclesial subject.” On the practical and pastoral levels, this translates into the urgent need to “listen to the voice of God in the voice of youth because they will tell us what they expect of the Church.”

In fact, for Bishop Biord Castillo, it is important that, as adults, “we do not allow ourselves to be taken in by the ‘Gulliver complex,’ that is, to make young people feel like ‘dwarves’ in the face of needs. On the contrary, they are bearers of great possibilities. They have not distanced themselves from the Church; it is the Church that has distanced itself from them. Because of this, it is absolutely necessary to remain in the midst of them so as to build bridges and overcome our educational and apostolic timidity, that is to say, to act in such a way that we truly accompany them in making vocational choices of life.”

Pastoral conversion is urgently needed. Pope Francis invites us to “not lose the train of young people, because unfortunately we have already lost that of their parents!”

YOUNG PEOPLE: HANDLE WITH CARE; THEY CONTAIN DREAMS!



Gennaro Cicchese, from the Pontifical Lateran University, highlighted how urgent it is today to help young people learn how to walk all over again. “It is the exact opposite of what modern society is doing,” he said, “which is training them to race ahead, to make haste and ‘burn up the track,’ to consume everything and to do so immediately. Instead, moving ahead at a slower pace gives us the chance to think and make free choices. Consequently we must recover the itinerant dimension of *homo viator*.”

“Contemporary youth must discover that a walking pace not only moves us forward but also allows us to get to know ourselves better and helps us realize that we are not alone; that many others are on the way like us and with us: hence the value of closeness, of witness and of educative alliance. Moreover, young people are called to move between a future that does not exist and a present that absorbs them too much, to the point of making them feel the need to be present everywhere, which reduces a person to slavery. And yet they [young people] are the only present we have! Perhaps they themselves are showing us that a new and better future is possible through peaceful and convivial coexistence.

“It is up to us to remind them to ‘enter through the narrow door because the one leading to perdition is wide and spacious and many choose it.’ So they should not become discouraged by obstacles and problems; instead they should come to realize that we have to pay a price for things if we are to appreciate them.”

Maria Antonia Chinello, fma