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Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to the youth today

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ABSTRACT:

As Christians, we must do everything to ensure that the Gospel of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, is genuinely passed on to future generations – especially to young people. We should also do all we can to let people know the meaning of the liberating work of God's power. In this way, the human condition becomes united with the redeeming love, and ultimately acts as a power against evil in the world. Various forms of youth participation in the Church can, and should, be understood as "Ecclesia". The community of the Church is not only constituted by adults, the Church manifests itself not only by the presence of church structures and the pastoral work with young people, but it is young people who shape the Church through their participation. The message of the Gospel challenges young people by formulating a promise and an expectation. Understanding and accepting the Gospel is a condition for young people to enter the community of the Church.

KEYWORDS:

youth, Church, faith, God's image, pastoral care of the youth

STRESZCZENIE:

Chrześcijanie muszą zrobić wszystko, aby Ewangelia Mesjasza Jezusa z Nazaretu była autentycznie przekazywana następnym pokoleniom – zwłaszcza ludziom młodym. Należy także podjąć wysiłki, aby ludzie mogli poznać znaczenie wyzwalamyjącego działania mocy Boga. W ten sposób kondycja ludzka łączy się w jedno z odkupieńczyą miłością, a ostatecznie występuje jako moc przeciwko złu w świecie. Różne młodzieżowe formy uczestnictwa w Kościele mogą i powinny być rozumiane jako „Ekklesia”. Wspólnota Kościoła to nie tylko dorośli, Kościół manifestuje się nie tylko obecnością struktur kościelnych i działaniami ich aktorów, ale to także młodzi ludzie, którzy poprzez swój udział kształtują Kościół. Przesłanie Ewangelii rzuca wyzwanie młodym ludziom, formułując obietnicę i oczekiwanie. Kwestia znaczenia Ewangelii dla życia młodych staje się kryterium decydującym o wchodzeniu we wspólnotę Kościoła.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

młodzi, Kościół, wiara, obraz Boga, duszpasterstwo młodzieży

Pastoral care of the youth involves working with young people as well as for young people within the Church community. The Church wants to work not only with the youth who are close to the Church, but also do something for the benefit of all young people. Fulfilling this mission, the Church needs to recognize and take into account how young people live today and what they need for a happy and fulfilled life. In various areas of the pastoral care of the youth, such as youth social work, working with young adults or in youth education centers, the needs of young people are recognized and an effort is made to fulfill them.

Young people, their faith and what they expect from the Church were the main topics of the Youth Synod – an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which took place in October 2018. Already since the beginning of 2016, intensive work had

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been carried out to prepare this event: questionnaires had been sent to bishops, online surveys had been conducted and two debates involving young people from around the world had taken place in the Vatican to discuss the most important issues.

The process continues even now, when the assembly of the Synod of Bishops has ended. First, it is important for Pope Francis that the local churches think of how they can implement the Synod's recommendations.¹ Secondly, an "apostolic letter" was published for young people at the end of the 15th Synod of Bishops.² Thirdly, in June 2019, a post-synodal assembly in Rome was announced with the

¹ XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Youth, faith and discernment of vocation*. A final document, Vatican City 2018. See also: <https://episkopat.pl/dokument-koncowy-synodu-biskupow-mlodzi-uczestnikami-i-wspoltworcami-zgromadzenia/>.

² "Letter to the Youth" written at the end of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2019, www.deon.pl/religia/kosciol-i-swiat/z-zycia-kosciola/art,36155,ojcowie-synodalni-napisali-list-do-youth-wind-spirit-blowing-harder-scattering-clouds.html [viewed 3.09.2019].

participation of young people from around the world, to discuss suggestions for the implementation of the Synod's recommendations.

YOUTH AND FAITH. A SEEKING GENERATION? QUID EST VERITAS?

Probably never before has there been such an enormous variety of possibilities to get a greater correlation between the concept of reality and the reality itself, i.e. the possibility of getting closer to the truth.

However, despite a quick and easy access to information, the answers to the question about what is important and what is true seem to be blurred. A constant exchange of information, appearing even as a "blessing" of our times, gives rise to a powerful trend of interpersonal communication – the so-called social media. Here, every piece of information, knowledge and opinion is subject to immediate verification and confrontation by people allowed to speak their minds in a social media group. However, do such discussions give answers to questions about fundamental things? Is the truth revealed or is it obscured by "quasi-discussions"? What is the individual's reflection over life and death today? It is after realizing the inevitability of death that it becomes clear what life is. And from there one can clearly see what is human, what is important. A true confrontation with oneself concerns the innermost human needs and requires courage. It is carried out in the relationships of love with God and people, through prayer, works of mercy that strengthen the spirit and lead to the fullness of life.³

In recent decades, the Church and faith have lost significance for many young people in Europe. Although 61 per cent of young people still belong to one of the main denominations, only 19 per cent of them call themselves religious, according to the results of a study presented at a synod in Würzburg in 2018. God or a parish continues to play a major role for about 5 per cent of them. What is most important for the surveyed people aged 19–27 are themselves, their families, friends and acquaintances. One can get the impression that we are dealing with a post-Christian generation, a generation that lives an independent, happy life,

³ See Francis, *Christus vivit*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation to young people and the whole People of God as a summary of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City 2019, no. 17–20.

without the community of the Church. And speaking even more sharply: we are dealing with a generation that burned almost all bridges connecting them with the Church and that no longer assigns an important role to it in either personal or social life. The Church must acknowledge that young adults do not expect anything from being its members.⁴

Despite the current trends, in order to continue attracting young people to Christ, the communities of the Church need to undergo modernization. The Church must strengthen its message through digital means. The Church needs new places for the community and must convey its message in a language that young people would understand. Church music should also meet the sounds of the younger generation. Finally, leading Church organizations should give young people an opportunity to collaborate more widely.⁵

CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WRITTEN IN THE MARGINS

Who should I turn to? – this is a question often asked by young people. The youth nowadays are less and less attached to traditional religious communities. But are they also less interested in religion? “Yes, but...”. Young people who are asked: “Are you a believer?” often answer in one breath: “Yes, I am a believer, but not in the religion I am part of” – says Zuzanna (17). “Yes, I am a believer, but I can’t say that I believe in the Catholic Church or any other religion,” explains Anna (18). “Yes, to a certain extent, but I am not so much involved, because I will not find a solution there,” says Iwona (17). “Yes, I am becoming more of a believer but less of a religious person” – John (25) quotes his grandmother and adds: “It is the same with me”.⁶

Why do young people rarely answer the question about their faith as clearly as Andrzej (24), who says: “Yes! I am Catholic”? God is Andrzej’s everyday companion in life. The 24-year-old believes in a personal God with whom he can talk and who also listens to him. He lives his faith in regular personal prayer: he prays every day with the “Liturgy of the Hours”. “Voluntarily” – he adds. For him, living

⁴ See Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, *„Was mein Leben bestimmt? Ich!“ Lebens- und Glaubenswelten junger Menschen heute*, Hannover 2018, pp. 5–6.

⁵ See Francis, *Christus vivit*, op. cit., chapter I and II.

⁶ Conversation held on the 23rd of March 2019.

faith also includes making a sign of the cross before eating and regular participation in the Holy Mass. He clearly has positive associations with the Church. It is his home – a community of people who focus on God. Christian values guide Andrzej in everyday life. It is very clear to him: “I am Catholic.”⁷

Religious and ethical issues are currently undergoing a comprehensive transformation process. Only less than a third of young people aged between 14 and 24 surveyed in the summer of 2006 said they considered themselves “religious.” But simultaneously, 69 percent of teenagers said they believe in God.⁸ This discrepancy, illustrated by the sentence: “I believe in God, but I am not religious”, show the process of erosion of religiosity traditionally associated with the Church and the transformation of the image of God. In addition, it suggests a subjective view of religiosity that is “diverse, fragile, and contradictory”. It can be summarized by the following sentence: God is in the air.⁹ The authors of the 16th Shell Youth Study 2010 from Germany have come to a similar conclusion. Among other things, they show that religion plays only a moderate role in the lives of most respondents between the ages of 12 and 25. However, neither denominationalism nor atheism has grown. Above all, it is religious uncertainty and sometimes impersonal understanding of God that increases.¹⁰ However, some researchers of youth culture are not surprised that young people are no longer involved in faith as defined by the institution of the Church: “In our society, young people learn to filter a wide range of meaning”. Do they choose what seems right to them in a given moment? Values are more important for teenagers than for older people. Perhaps the answers to the question “Are you a believer?” do not contradict each other, but are rather related to each other? Or, finally, it may not be a matter of faith for the youth, but rather a matter of sense? Perhaps the basic question should be: “Why am I here?”¹¹

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Th. Gensicke, *Jugend und Religiosität*, in: *Jugend 2006*, Frankfurt a.M. 2006, pp. 203–240.

⁹ See R. Polak, *Megatrend Religion? Neue Religiositäten in Europa*, Ostfildern 2002.

¹⁰ M. Albert, K. Hurrelmann, G. Quenzel, & U. Schneekloth, *Jugend 2010: die 16. Shell Jugendstudie. Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung*, „Journal of Childhood and Adolescence Research” 2011, 6(2), pp. 199–205.

¹¹ See B. Großegger, „Seinen Platz im Leben finden ist manchmal schwierig ...” *Jugend zwischen Spaßsprinzip und Zukunftsangst*, in: *Wege aus der Angst. 37. Jahrbuch der Diözese Gurk*, ed. Bischöfliches Gurker Ordinariat, Klagenfurt 2013, pp. 39–41.

In addition, today's youth are very critical of institutions. What young people think of the Church ranges from "It's all about money" through "In the name of God, people are killed" and "This whole celibacy thing is totally outdated" to "Women cannot hold any office in the Church". What's more, the rigid, unchanging framework that the Church commandments does not simply fit into the rapidly changing world in which young people must live today. The daily lives of young people are characterized by a change and growth, but the Church is not there. "It is necessary to rethink the role of religious communities", says Beate Großegger, as: "Youth is so institutionally skeptical because the institution expects them to adapt to its framework rather than develop together with them".¹²

So the question is: where do young people look for answers to their questions about meaning, if not in the religion of their family home? Zuzanna is inclined towards Buddhism and Hinduism "because she believes in being born again". Bożena is also interested in Buddhism, which is "not a religion but an attitude or philosophy" for her.¹³

According to Beate Großegger, one should not underestimate the fact that young people are not only interested in finding an answer to their questions about "here and now". The experience itself also plays an important role, regardless of whether it is exciting, mysterious, exotic or entertaining. That is why many young people find an Indian temple simply more attractive than a European church. "I'm cold there". Bożena, among others, is also fascinated by shamanism, where "you have to go through dance, rhythm and song to a different state of consciousness in order to be able to immerse yourself in this world".¹⁴

Where is the Catholic youth? During a traditional service, they are rarely found in a church. Young, believing people prefer to pray individually and in private. However, as experience shows, there are ways to help young people and the Church meet again.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Conversation held on the 23rd of March 2019.

¹⁴ See B. Großegger, „Seinen Platz im Leben finden ist manchmal schwierig ...” *Jugend zwischen Spaßprinzip und Zukunftsangst*, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁵ See A. Szelałowska-Mironiuk, *Religijność młodych – co poszło nie tak?*, www.deon.pl/religia/kosciol-i-swiat/komentarze/art,3288,religijnosc-mlodych-co-poszlo-nie-tak.html [viewed 13.09.2019].

“For me it was hard to believe that Jesus would rise again in one piece of bread. I believe rather that there is something that holds us together, that shows us the way. However, I don’t know if it must be God”, says Daria, a 20-year-old scout. Many young people think like her today. More and more of them are skeptical of traditional worship and the Church as an institution.¹⁶ Research shows that young people do not necessarily need an institution of the Church to live their faith. They deal with their doubts and questions alone. Where does our world come from? Is there life after death? Young people, like every generation before them, are concerned about the meaning of life because, according to research, today’s generation of the Internet and modern technologies prays almost as often as their peers 60 years ago. Young people are looking for answers not only in their own religion practised at home. To form their individual beliefs, they use elements of all world religions. Very often, the rules and regulations of the Church start to seem disappointing for them.¹⁷ Young people are different and interested in different things. Therefore, the Church must show that it can also be diverse. In addition, it should fulfill its social tasks. “The Church can truly accompany young people if it does what our faith teaches us: if it shows love of neighbor!” – says Bożena, 18.¹⁸ The tasks that the Church should fulfill are: accompany youth on their life’s journey, listen and be ready to answer all questions of every young person, believer, religious or not. Young people are the best advertisement for the Church. Through their testimony, their friends and acquaintances find their way to a temple. If the Church loses youth, it will start to disappear more and more.¹⁹

LIFE SITUATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE GOSPEL AS THE CENTRAL POINT OF THE CHURCH’S ACTIVITY

Relations between the Church and young people must be shaped by the message of the Gospel, which is the basis of working with young people in the Church and,

¹⁶ Conversation held on the 23rd of March 2019.

¹⁷ See C. Uhlmann, *Wie „tickt“ die Jugend?*, in: *Adoleszenz in schwierigen Zeiten*, ed. H. Kipp, A. Richter, E. Rosenstock-Heinz, Psychosozialverlag, Gießen 2018, pp. 11–20.

¹⁸ Conversation held on the 23rd of March 2019.

¹⁹ See A. Stopka, *Religijność młodych na rozdrożu. „Czy sprawy można zmienić?”*, <https://pl.aleteia.org/2017/07/28/religijnosc-mlodych-na-rozdrozu-czy-sprawy-mozna-zmienic/> [viewed 19.06.2019].

thus, it should be constantly reminded and developed in the light of the current situation of young people. Only the Gospel can bear fruit and bring about a series of valuable pastoral activities addressed to young people and implemented together with them.

The Church's activities are undertaken in the hope that the Gospel will become visible and tangible in the world for the young generation. According to the Gospel, faith comes through the Spirit of God and is, therefore, a gift. This fundamental belief continues to determine the relationship between the Church and youth. The transmission of faith depends on whether people discover and experience themselves how the Gospel revives religious practices, communities, the Church's activity towards the young, and what support it gives to the charitable work every day.

Simultaneously, Church activities offered to young people cannot be determined solely by adults' interpretation of the word of God. Young people themselves should discover the life-giving effects of God's word in their world by discussing the Gospel with other young people and adults. The main task of the Church – the transmission of the Gospel – should be regarded as “a conversation about the promise and the reality”. In this communication, tradition and the current situation of young people become interrelated in a dynamic process; in other words, the Gospel becomes intertwined with teens' life.²⁰

Such an interaction can occur and be successful in various circumstances, e.g. during biblical work, on a rowing trip, during a youth service, a pastoral meeting, a meeting in a bar in a recreation center for youth, during a Church event for the youth, a religious education class or spontaneous youth prayer during a bonfire service. Knowing the difficulties of living the Gospel on a daily basis, the Church should avoid giving specific theological fields a privileged position (e.g. focusing in sermons or catechesis only on the Catholic sexual ethics) and creatively search for different areas where the Church and youth can meet.²¹

The Church's work with young people is shaped by the situation of young people themselves. On the one hand, youth is perceived in terms of a “generational position” (Karl Mannheim), which depends on the age, fashion, style and beliefs of

²⁰ See XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Youth, faith and discernment of vocation*, op. cit., no. 128.

²¹ See *ibid.*, no. 8–9.

young people. This generational position has been repeatedly described in youth research. On the other hand, young people, as individuals, receive a religious offer that can be significantly different from what the mainstream of teenage life brings. This offer responds much less to the characteristics of a generational position than to the individual life situation of a young person. The generational position of teenagers, as well as their individual life situations should be the starting point for Church activities undertaken with young people.²²

In addition, the Church needs to take into account different environments with which young people feel connected. The environment creates youth culture, and thus relationships with the Church and faith. What is characteristic of modern times is that the “youth” in today’s Church are already scarcely present. There are many different ways of living during adolescence that are more interesting than stiff church structures. Talking about the youth in the Church means embracing the diverse ways of life of young people.²³

Various forms of youth participation in the Church can, and should, be understood as “Ecclesia”. The Church community does not comprise adults only. The Church manifests itself not only by the presence of church structures and the pastoral work with young people, but it is young people who shape the Church through their participation. The Gospel message challenges young people by formulating a promise and an expectation. Understanding and accepting the Gospel is a critical condition for young people to enter the community of the Church.

THE INDIVIDUALITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE SUBJECTIVE ORIENTATION OF THE EVANGELICAL PROPOSALS

Young people grow up in different life situations that shape the individuality of each person. Given the diversity of life circumstances, young people need to find their own way of participating in society and develop a plan to live in a multi-position society that constantly demands making decisions and defining the surrounding reality. Adolescence is a period of life in which people face two major

²² See K. Mannheim, *Problem młodości w nowoczesnym społeczeństwie*, in: *Młodość jako problem i wyzwanie ponowoczesności*, ed. Krystyna Szafraniec, Toruń 2011.

²³ It is worth getting acquainted with the sociological research among young Europeans conducted before the synod on the young: S. Bullivant, *European youth and religion. Results of the European Social Survey (2014–2016)*, London 2018.

challenges. Firstly, they face the challenge of dealing with developmental tasks such as shaping identity, developing competences, separating from family and origin, or coping with their own sexuality. Secondly, young people, as “quasi-adults”, must solve everyday problems, such as finding themselves on the qualifications and labor market and making risky career choices. Recognizing these aspects, young people must move independently and decisively in society.

Some find pragmatic and creative ways to constructively deal with the challenges that oscillate between social determination and individual self-determination (Sennett 1998). Others have little competence in dealing with this ambivalence.²⁴

In addition to real life problems, one should point to compensatory behavior of young people as a response to specific restrictions resulting from the acceleration of the pace of life and changes in the modern world. The enormous requirements for shaping one’s own identity are often geared towards risky behavior in free time, jeopardizing psychophysical health and increasing addictions.

Young people, who start their adult lives with small material and social resources, have little chance of meeting these requirements, which often results in resignation, long-term stay in problem groups and aggressive or auto-aggressive behavior. In general, the importance of close family and a reference group is important for young people, even when their own family situation is rebuilt and changed many times. Young people hope for optimal living conditions for themselves. This is manifested, for example, in the ever-growing pursuit of one’s own stable partnerships, success in starting a family and fulfilling the role of parents, and in the quest for friendship. Belonging to a reliable reference group seems to be an important factor in the stabilization, verification and further development of the appropriate construction of one’s own world. In this context, generational conflicts are now less severe than a few decades ago.²⁵

The Church’s response to the life situation of young people nowadays should lie in the evangelical education of young people, which has been proven for centuries. Healthy youth formation has been led for generations by religious communities working among young people, including Salesians, Piarists, Pallottines,

²⁴ See K. Szafraniec, *Młodzi 2011*, Warszawa 2011.

²⁵ XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Youth, faith and discernment of vocation*, op. cit., no. 10–14.

Jesuits, or Dominicans. In this sense, education means demanding that man fulfill his purpose as God's creation in aspects that go beyond social norms and short-term purposefulness. Education understood in such a way emphasizes the autonomy and uniqueness of the person before God. Therefore, man is expected to make independent judgment on theological matters.²⁶ At the center of education is man himself, not his functioning in society, the Church or economy. Therefore, Church proposals addressed to young people should focus on the needs corresponding to their individual and generational situation. The subjective orientation should not be confused with the so-called "fun orientation", which rejects the idea of imposing subordination, requirements and supporting maturity. Young people can be encouraged to make decisions based on the Gospel in which they can experience the promise and requirements of the Gospel message and explore the importance of Christian freedom for their own lives. This requirement allows teenagers to exercise their freedom while deliberately giving up less valuable activities. For example, empirical studies show that young people volunteer for an activity when it opens up the opportunity to answer the question: "Am I important and one of a kind?" And thus enables the recognition and experimentation with life plans.²⁷

Appreciating the personal and interpersonal competences of young people requires appropriate motivation as well as specific offers and support systems. They should be based on the attitude of openness to ideological issues, ability to deal with problems, as well as an open access to social spaces. The subjective orientation of proposals for young people requires freedom in which they could act independently.

LONGING FOR A RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION AND THE OFFER OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Many young people long for an orientation that would give meaning to their life, and, thus, for some religious proposals. Young people want to interpret their life experiences in a way that would offer them a diagnosis and, simultaneously,

²⁶ See P. Tomasik, *Możliwości ewangelizacji w szkolnym nauczaniu religii*, in: *Katecheza ewangelizacyjna. Poszukiwania koncepcji*, ed. P. Mąkosa, Lublin 2010, pp. 67–83.

²⁷ See P. Tomasik, *Możliwości ewangelizacji w szkolnym nauczaniu religii*, in: *Katecheza ewangelizacyjna. Poszukiwania koncepcji*, ed. P. Mąkosa, Lublin 2010, pp. 67–83.

give a prescription for future life. The experience of breakdowns in everyday life and the dynamics of growing up often leads to the longing for transcendence and spirituality of what goes beyond young people's individual existence. This longing is only partly quenched by religious socialization in the family or peer group. The question arises: which religious forms can be used to answer this longing?

In the opinion of young people, the Church is not a popular institution. It ranks right before political parties. That is why for many young people Christian churches are not the first address to seek support in the matters of sense, especially in the beginning. Nevertheless, "Religion Monitor" 2008 (Bertelsmann Stiftung) clearly shows that youthful religiosity has in no way disappeared. Even traditional beliefs, for example those relating to the image of God, resurrection or faith in creation, lose little importance in the perspective of past centuries. However, faith in a personal God is apparently losing its value.²⁸

With their questions, longings and needs, young people live in a society which offers them a variety of ways of rediscovering a sense of life. They reach young people without asking for permission. First of all, the number of quasi-religious products that are free for interpretation has increased significantly. Films and novels present excavations of historical church and pseudo-church characters. Live role-playing games give one the opportunity to identify oneself with fairies, witches or monks. Computer RPGs open up the possibility of looking at one another through the prism of divine attributes, as well as survival in virtual worlds.

Young people respond to this market situation by matching the religious and esoteric elements offered to them with their own needs and combining them into one religion (handicraft or *patchwork*). They check various solutions in terms of their practical use and socialization. In doing so, they do not want to be told what to do or be corrected. They prefer to be open and flexible and avoid institutional obligations. The Church is just one of many providers of meaning and can no longer rely on occasional bonuses or religious socialization in childhood. Even in churches, among faithful young people there are mixed forms of Christian beliefs and those that come from other traditions. One can observe more and more

²⁸ See *Religion Monitor 2008 Europe. Overview of religious attitudes and practices*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh 2009.

“religious flaneurs” who selectively and temporarily engage in religious matters or participate in religious meetings, but then withdraw and lose their interest in religion. Therefore, youth religiosity cannot be measured solely by the intensity of one’s willingness to commit to the institution of the Church and one’s involvement in its matters.²⁹

The Church encourages youth to think critically and reflect on popular youth culture and engages in a dialogue with it. Until now, however, these have rather been occasional actions, with little use of coordinated measures. It is worth noting that the Church’s involvement in the development and implementation of legislation on the protection of minors also contributes to the discussion on the quality of judgment and how it is shaped through film, television or the Internet.

In the face of young people’s longing for a religious orientation and a diversity of proposals offered to them, individual pastoral conversations are becoming increasingly important for young people. To those young people who can listen, the Church offers a scope for action, whether they are volunteers, youth group leaders, church team members, religion teachers or educators in the parish and social services. It is important to maintain this potential and continue to cultivate it for young people.³⁰

THE POPE WANTS NON-CONFORMING YOUTH

2018 was the Youth Year in the Catholic Church. Just before Easter, Francis called young people to be rebels and non-conformists. This means difficult times for the Catholic Church because young people’s demands, for example for greater equality for women, are extremely loud.

Francis is afraid that youth will be left alone in society and the Church. At the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2018, it was discussed how this could be prevented. Since it is the clergy that mainly participates in such events, the Vatican had been seeking in advance to talk directly with the young³¹, so in the autumn of 2017 a global online survey was conducted. In this way, the Vatican

²⁹ See *ibid.*

³⁰ See H. Zaręba, *W kierunku jakiej religijności? Studia nad katolicyzmem polskiej młodzieży*, Warszawa 2008.

³¹ See XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Youth, faith and discernment of vocation*, op. cit., no. 1–3.

wanted to learn more about the realities of young people's lives, their problems and challenges they face in planning their lives, as well as their attitude towards the Church. Over one hundred thousand young people took part in the study. Although the Vatican expressed its satisfaction with the survey, taking into account that the Church is an organization with about 1.2 billion members, on a global scale, the number of respondents that participated in the study questions the representativeness of the study sample. It could be a sign that not only in Europe, but around the whole world, many young people turned their back to the Church and did not expect too much from this institution.

The Pope wants to counteract this situation with his current initiatives. He asked students, instead of theologians, bishops or cardinals as in previous years, to write a meditation on the traditional Way of the Cross at the Coliseum on Good Friday. In mid-March 2018, he invited three hundred young people from around the world to the Vatican. He asked them to contribute to the autumn discussion at the Synod of Bishops. Young people were asked to outline their current life situation and form their expectations towards politics, society and the Church.

About 15,000 young people from all over the world participated in conversations in the Vatican through various Facebook groups. Most of the participants were Catholic, but the Vatican intentionally invited young people from other religions, as well as those who call themselves atheists.

The youth discussed unemployment, poverty and justice, human trafficking and corruption in the state and economy, democracy in the Church and persecution of Christians. It was about showing the ambivalence of technological progress and the digital revolution. Young people agreed that they want tips and guidance when making decisions. But at the same time they made it clear that they want to act themselves; they do not want adults to decide for them. Discussions have shown that the life situations of young people around the world are very different, so different answers will be needed. For the Catholic Church, this means that it will have to take into account diversity in its approach towards and understanding of many religious and social issues, including Catholic sexual morality, since young people criticized the Church's one-sided approach to this important area of their lives.³²

³² See *Instrumentum laboris Synodu nt. młodzieży*, <https://episkopat.pl/instrumentum-laboris-synodu-nt-mlodziezy/> [viewed 05.09.2019].

At the end of the weekly discussions, the young adopted a twelve-page document. They complained that the Church is often too “moralistic”, that it needs a modern language and must be in places where there are young people: on the streets, in bars, cinemas or on sports fields. It is interesting that the topic: “Woman in the Church and society” was extensively debated. Although young people did not speak directly about the priesthood of women, they called for a greater visibility of women in decision-making positions in the Church. On the one hand, Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed for five years that he wants more women in decision-making positions in the Church, but so far he has not given clear signals and structurally has not created conditions for the presence of women in the Church’s leadership in the Vatican. It will be interesting to see, therefore, whether “non-conforming” young people he constantly wishes to be present in the Church will make him more consistent in this aspect.

Don’t we notice how disgusting it is to become “like everyone else”? In a book-length interview, which was published shortly before Easter 2018 in several languages, in the chapter entitled “God is young” Francis speaks about a young generation. The Church and society should support a young generation so that they become a generation of “non-conformists”. The Pope regrets there is a lack of employment opportunities and prospects for young people. He becomes concerned that there is a growing pressure to adapt to certain standards imposed by society. As an example, he mentions cosmetic treatments that are becoming more common among young people. Beauty mania ultimately dehumanizes the human beauty. “Do we not realize how ugly it is to become like everyone else?” – says Francis.³³

Francis wants the Catholic Church to care more for young people. At the level of the universal church, he initiated a consultation process. However, the situation in the Church will change only if those responsible at the lower levels seriously engage in conversations with the younger generation. The Pope does not seem to be afraid that young people, who are non-conformists, will also ask difficult questions and test old traditions. This should raise concern, especially among conservative forces in the Catholic Church. In any case, the game is at stake for the Church.

³³ See Francis, *Otwieranie drzwi. Rozmowy o Kościele i świecie*, Kraków 2018.

If it does not take the dialogue with young people seriously and is not ready for change, the Church may eventually lose touch with the younger generation.³⁴

RAISING AWARENESS

In such a complex and challenging situation, the following elements are necessary:

- spiritual scouts (also street priests),
- specially designated time,
- centers of contemporary youth culture,
- centers of art, discussion, music, dance and prayer,
- projects and events such as the World Youth Meeting in Taizé or the World Youth Day,
- liturgical meetings, also at unusual times and in unusual places.³⁵

It is about building and activating social networks of relationships as carriers of new communication and new credibility. In particular, the Church should strive to ensure that the Christian tradition acquire the character of individual experience of faith proclaimed in the family, which today is facing a number of difficulties, but also in informal groups (friends, neighbors, etc.) with which young people are in contact every day.³⁶

It must be clearly stated that the current forms of Church pastoral care largely differ from the mentality of incoming generations. Limiting pastoral activities in many parishes to organizing pilgrimages to holy places and collection for the construction of the church and material support of the parish is currently insufficient. A coordinated and planned action is needed to accompany young people in all dimensions of their lives, taking into account cultural and moral values.

³⁴ See XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Youth, faith and discernment of vocation*, op. cit., no. 128–143; Francis, *Christus vivit*, op. cit., no 198–201.

³⁵ See M.N. Ebertz, *Aufbruch in der Kirche. Anstöße für ein zukunftsfähiges Christentum*, Freiburg 2003.

³⁶ See M.N. Ebertz, „Heilige Familie“ – ein Auslaufmodell? *Religiöse Kompetenz der Familien in soziologischer Sicht*, in: *Gottesbeziehung in der Familie. Familienkatechetische Orientierungen von der Kindertaufe bis ins Jugendalter*, ed. A. Biesinger, H. Bendel, Ostfildern 2000, pp. 16–43.

INSTEAD OF THE ENDING

Working in the Church with young people and for young people is what we call youth ministry. The Church not only wants to work with young people who are close to the church, but wants to do something for all young people. The Church wants to draw attention to how young people live today and what they need for a happy and fulfilled life. In various youth pastoral activities, such as youth social work, working with young adults or youth education centers, the needs of young people are addressed.

The fundamental commitment of Church structures to read the signs of the times, especially in the context of young people, should be based on Pope Francis' "Evangelii Gaudium" exhortation and its foundations: "Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature

As long as the Church finds ways to attract young people and their potential, it will not lose youth, because youth are seeking people – and this will not change in the 21st century.

to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16)."³⁷

This bold idea should become the foundation of youth pastoral work. The idea is to think in terms of communication by faith.

Such modern phenomena as music, film or blogging also affect the way we communicate with God and engage in a dialogue with God in the liturgy. Conversely, the symbolic basic structure and the communal character of experiencing

³⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican City 2013, no. 9.

the liturgy demands the inclusion of the world in which a young person is brought up to experience a real, personal relationship with God.

The Church still wants to reach young people. This, however, means that it must offer them something they will not find elsewhere. Impressive examples are the international Taizé meetings or the annual Diocesan Youth Meetings. At these meetings, young people deal with questions about life, God and the future. Young people also appreciate the ministerial and parish groups, summer camps and youth church workers' offers. As long as the Church finds ways to attract young people and their potential, it will not lose youth, because youth are seeking people – and this will not change in the 21st century.

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