



CONCLUSIONS PLENARY ASSEMBLY 6-9 FEBRUARY 2013

At the conclusion of the 2013 Plenary Assembly on Youth Cultures, Bishop Carlos Azevedo, Delegate of the President, presented the following conclusions:

Jesus invented the parable of the sower to explain the reasons for which the seed of the Word, the message of the Kingdom of God had not entered hearts and changed lives. He knew it was a matter of culture; that is a question of the terrain.

"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." (Mark 4)

St. Gregory the Great, in the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, wrote his *Pastoral Rule*, where he pointed to the duty for those who preach the Gospel to respect the diversity of the recipients of the Word. He compiled a list of some 35 types.

Today, the reality of youth needs special attention, a critical discernment and a conversion of language and attitudes.

1 . Observation

Listening to youth cultures is to know the various "types of terrain"

There is a clear lengthening of the time of youth, which today begins earlier because of the pressures stimulating it precociously, and at the same time it is longer because people leave home later, only after finding emotional and professional stability, not least due to the problem of unemployment. Instability, which affects several essential dimensions of life, from the financial to the professional, the educational angle to politics, means that young people in this *liquid* time are the weakest and most vulnerable in society.

Youthfulness has now become a myth or a social imperative in the horizon of eternal youth, even if the youth are generally excluded from economic life, consigned to social problems and accepted with difficulty in the Christian communities. So it is even more important that there be a respectful proximity to the youthful *multiverse*. Young people give voice to the crisis of society in general, with cultural connotations for different conditions, contexts and training. In fact, some young people have enormous resources in terms of knowledge and information and others are almost illiterate in terms of being able to communicate; some young people live in a privileged position and have economic resources, while others enjoy social guarantees and job opportunities, yet many others experience uncertainty, without options, unable to leave the family "nest" and forced to emigrate, a forced displacement, almost a flight at the risk of their own lives, of total failure, exposed to extreme vulnerability and without basic rights. Others welcome market mechanisms and engage in the production cycle, but without ethical evaluation. On the other hand there are those who enter into drugs and violence, even just for survival or as a result of radical disenchantment with

society and institutions, or they make a criminal choice to oppose society. Some choose suicide, renouncing themselves in a sign of emptiness and loneliness.

The complexity of identities of young people follows the structural contexts. Understanding this includes a cultural dimension, together with the structural and economic vision.

The beginning of the twenty-first century is a big turning point for youth culture, as a result of processes that are still in flux: the reduction of the role of the State in social policy, the acceleration of technology and the digitisation of communication combined with a cultural globalisation, the growing power of the market intensifying consumerism to which many young people submit. There is also the phenomenon of protest, in the years 2011 and 2012 there were the "*indignados*", expressing the fatigue and disenchantment of young generations with the system, the radical changes in the way we conceive leadership, the speed of the spread of information, and calling into question former political practices and the usual way of passing on the faith.

Social maturity is not a decisive and absolute aspiration for young people. They live a futureless "nowism", where experiences have value in themselves, where you switch from one to another without any purpose, and without distinguishing the boundaries between the objective and subjective, making of personal experience something public, giving life to communities based on feelings, creating global relationships that converge on a cyber-identity, with the option of accessing other visions of the world and producing reflections that go beyond themselves and their horizons .

Technology is a central aspect of youth identity, it is a force that gives centrality to their lives. The maze of networks offers space for new questions. They take possession of knowledge without looking to authority. Young people fearlessly take stands in light of information, break hierarchical systems, choose the themes and most significant issues for them according to their own subjectivity, distance themselves from the logic of institutions and political parties.

The experience of building your own identity takes place in a new environment: the new generations become self-propagating, moving further away from adults, unless they become partners in a shared life rather than authoritarian obstacles in a process of affirmation.

The assertion of identity via the body is experienced with great tension. The way to dress, looks, the tattoos or piercings are part of the construction of personality, assertion of dominion over their own bodies. The way you present yourself is a language, a mark of identity. The relationship with your body is a means to mark out individuality, expression of self-esteem.

The discomfort of being oneself, doubts about identity, are lived and resolved in a group that offers support and models. Being seen by others is essential for self-esteem.

Youth cultures is a vision that helps us decipher the prospect of life for the future. The technologies in the experience of people allow an expansion of human potential. The digital environment is part of everyday life, it is an extension of the real space of the life of the digital native. I seek, I find, I use when I need it. This means selection, possibility of comment and interaction. Young people are more ready to interact than to interiorise. But these two are to be combined.

The human person is looking for signs and searching for meaning, is overrun with answers without even looking for them. The problem today is decoding the quantity of data received.

Young people become storytellers through the revolution of photography, which as well as being a support for memory, becomes a means to experience that same reality.

We must preserve spaces that allow interiority to develop, to accommodate the radical questions and the need for silence and meditation. People can internalise experiences when they are able to have a living relationship full of participation and engagement.

The way of thinking is changing, the digital native lives spirituality as something that breaks the system, changes the rules, the usual view, automatic logic.

We want to understand the mentality of youth, the cultures that move them, that shape the minds marked by the digital age and hearts subjected to an intense emotive experience lived in a culture of relationships centred on the ego. The difficulties for harmonious development of abilities to relate with the self and with others, to manage and interpret their own emotions, leads to dissatisfaction and sometimes depression. The absence of an integrated conception of love and the ease of strong passions, combined with an intense sexual life are a challenge to the educational community, starting with the basic family, many times inexistent. The emotional balance between autonomy and dependence, between happiness and hopelessness, generates anxiety and distress. This culture has a language in which we must enter, expressed in a type of music, of art, with its own grammar. Young people often do not understand the language of the Church and the Church does not understand the language of youth. Communication fails due to an abyss of cultural misunderstanding, since the transmission of the faith is through outdated methodologies and without a credible and meaningful witness. Every Christian community, from the family to the parish, from the educational community to the movement, faces many questions about the ineffectiveness of the processes of Christian initiation, at a time of a powerful and effective counter-culture.

Despite these negative indicators from sociological analysis of youth cultures, there are fascinating reasons for hope.

2 . Conversion

Critical recognition : the question of the meaning of life

The diversity of areas requires loving patience and closeness and an immediate and clear intervention.

The Church might be tempted to give easy answers to these severe youth tensions. Only a deep understanding of the youth question will allow adults to take up their responsibility, instead of acting as youth, adhering to the myth of eternal youth as a measure of the human person, missing out on "adulthood". This is characterized by the serene acceptance of the limits of the human condition, with decision-making autonomy and welcoming of others, with responsibility and evangelical maturity, with a growing relationship with Christ until the attainment of the fullness of humanity according to Christian humanism. Seduction by formulas from Eastern spirituality or the offer of a Gnostic self-realisation show the need for a simple language and highlight the lack of offers by the Church in terms of meeting the spiritual aspirations of the youth. Another temptation would be to offer false security in an escape from the present to the past under the form of traditionalism or integristism.

No event officially marks the entry of the young into adulthood, indeed the young impose on themselves stresses that sometimes lead to risky behaviour (high-speed road racing, sacrifice of the self in forms of addiction, cancellation of their own identity in meandering, abuse of alcohol and drugs). Such behaviour is produced in the pain of not finding a meaning for life. The family does not convey the essential alphabet of feelings, the relationship with what is good and with the self. Today, insecurity and instability build up the complexity of the emotional alphabet, of the deep desire to love, to relate, to be intimate.

You have to understand the logic followed by young people who want to escape in a radical way from suffering, and access their perception of themselves, by paradoxical means: suicide attempts and coma inducement, as if death were a healing from injuries, a suspension of the self, a refuge where to start again.

The Christian communities must help recognize the fundamental questions. Faith is a way to manage complexity and open the operating system within transcendence. The way the Church holds on to empty ritualism, in compromises but without audacity, does not help bring out the fundamental question of the meaning of life.

New technologies are an increasingly common means to express the desire for a spirituality that combines wisdom and the flow of life. Spiritual hearing must accompany life, the forms of prayer that draw their strength from everyday life.

The Church invites you to discover the presence of others as brothers and sisters gifted to you, not just human relationships based solely on the choice of friends.

There is an urgent need to give a voice to young people in the Church and in society, to get them out of the religious, political and social margins, providing them with the an encounter with the past and accompanying them in building a new future, aware of reality and full of utopias, in economy and politics, and in a new community life in the church.

Unemployment discourages study, fear of the future multiplies the causes of low birth rates. Still, many young people see the quality of society not in the measurement of the Gross Domestic Product, but in the culture of human relations and ethical values: justice and the common good. They dream of a world that can unite around peace and justice.

3. Coherent presence

Accompaniment and empathy from adults to generate in the faith

"Each generation shall tell of your works to the next, proclaiming your deeds" (Psalm 145)

There is an important cultural task for the Christian communities: restore dignity to the adult dimension of life, without fear of going against prevailing culture, where there is seemingly life that values youth but has no place for God, nor space to look after faith, prayer, spiritual life. There is a need to find cultural resources capable of appreciating adulthood. This is a change of logic, appealing to the codes of the young to be understood.

It is about finding places in the global and digital worlds, modes and strategies of attention to youth cultures, already possible in so many situations, that must be multiplied, making use of new technologies.

Generating in the faith is the process of growing in Christ, it passes through the serene experience of limits, of disease, to old age, physical weakening and death.

The adult can see others and see the self, the adult has a story to tell, marked by injuries, loss, unfulfilled desires. Testimony is not a model but a true experience of the work of God's grace that gives life a transcendent horizon.

You cannot change the history of each young person, but you can change their meaning. Therefore, it is important to listen to their experiences as adults, without reducing youth to being consumers of our religious products at a low cost, or integrated in a small group without a sense of community and the wholeness of the Church.

The Christian communities are called to present the beauty and joy of Christian life in which the evangelical precepts are an indication of meaning to reach the fullness of life, to help discover how the radical nature of the Christian message is a challenge that can produce wonderful spiritual fruits, as are the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Preparing young Christians to be the protagonists of a profound cultural change in society is our responsibility the future. So the new generations will be able to build a universal brotherhood, as a work of God in history, a new political culture. The Church becomes the protagonist of this impossible dream, because hope in God leads beyond the boundaries imposed by the market.

In these processes intercultural dialogue will have an important role, which begins as interpersonal dialogue, for it generates mutual trust and verification of culture. The Christian communities are part of a worldwide network of units, and the proposal of fascinating figures such as Abraham can provide models of dialogue.

Emerging proposals for the Christian communities :

- welcome with open arms the young as they are, without prejudice and moralistic judgments.
- be listening places to share the experiences of real hardship, to generate wholesome sympathy including for the complexity of situations, to be space for discussion and dialogue on the reasons for living, offering as a destination "abundant life".
- be a companion on the emotional, cultural, spiritual and religious pilgrimage of the new generations; be present in the universities, networks, suburbs, places where young people are to accompany the transition to adulthood, not in keeping them as young people;
- bear witness, courageously and joyfully, to the presence of God in the simple everyday life ;
- give confidence and future horizons to young people, who are faced with a society blind and deaf to their needs;
- offer words and especially narratives able to re-enchant the world, which balance the market statistics, such as real alternatives of hope, capable of giving life to projects that exceed the resistances of the present;
- give back the joy and zest to life, to be able to party with simple means;
- be available and equipped to support the inner journey, be a spiritual reference allowing youth to face up to the drama of the human condition and its limitations, and also to open the doors to faith, beginning with contemplation, silence and prayer.
- welcome the wisdom and skills young people have, their prophetic contribution, for the good of the world, stripped of the superfluous, open to the wonder for life, conscious of a global environmentally friendly common good, without exclusions and forms of marginalisation;
- offer integration into the community through a deep fraternal relationship and generator of a new culture, a new way of life.

+ Carlos Alberto Azevedo

9 febbraio 2013

