EMERGING YOUTH CULTURES

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Without a proper understanding of the cultural reality of the youth, pastoral care is likely to propose answers to questions that do not exist. This Plenary Assembly wishes to listen carefully to the "issue of the youth" which is evident in the different continents and wants to understand the situation of the youth. It is marked by complexity, is fragmented into different types, with no single or homogeneous model. Indeed, it is very diversified depending on the influences of family and economic factors, on social environment, and formative capital. In fact we will be dealing not just with youth but with young people

Our analysis is limited to adolescent and youth cultures of those between 15 and 29 years. This choice is dictated by the precocity which is a characteristic of youth culture in virtue of hyper-stimulation, of the enormous communicative possibility of a dominant visual culture. This has resulted in both an anticipation of the exit from the parental environment, as well as a postponement in achieving true independence due to lack of employment and, consequently, a delay in the marrying age. The social marginalisation of new generations obliges us to prolong increasingly the youthful age. In such a context, young people suffer more and more from the so-called 'Peter Pan syndrome', that is the child who does not want to grow or who is not allow to grow.

It is evident that there is a 'youth Question' in the Church, due to the obvious difficulties in the transmission of the faith among other things. But, before creating good evangelizing practices, we need to have a good vision with regard to the transformation of culture and society, of the problems of the family, and of the inter-

generational conflict. Listening to the new generations and considering their situation is a valuable opportunity and a must for adults and for the Christian communities.

We are confronted with a new phenomenon that requires a new understanding and a new reformulation. Young people are like 'spies' (acute sensors) sensitive to the social contradictions in which we live, somehow anticipating the evolution of society. We cannot make judgments about them without a prior effort at reflection.

Here are some of the questions that we pose:

What is new in the world of young people? What data emerges from cultural analysis, from research and from sociological studies on youth in the last few years? What are the main challenges and tensions that characterize the young? How does cultural change affect new generations? What do we know of the vital dialectics (existentials) of the youth? How should we communicate with the new generations? Are they really the "emotional illiterates"? How do we see the new youth socialization? What are the emerging values, the most salient trends in the area of values, in the search for identity and relationships with the adult world? How can we interpret the hermeneutical key cultural changes that are taking place? What model of life should be imposed on young people? How can the relationship between the new generations and faith be developed? Do the young people with their leadership qualities constitute a strategic resource and an opportunity for the society and the Church? Are we faced with a generation lost to the Church or in front of a future of believers without belonging or of non-practicing members?

Attempting to give an answer, although brief and concise, to these questions will be the task of the next plenary Assembly of our Dicastery, which will allow us to offer our contribution to a fuller integration of young people in the life of the Church.

1. Our approach: cultural analysis and the critical sympathy

The theme of young people is very vast, and so it would be necessary to study it from a perspective appropriate to the competence of our Dicastery itself. This perspective could be that of cultural analysis. The cultural analysis presupposes the perception of dominant values, of the scale of interests, of trends, evolutions and changes in social practices, the typical models of behavior, customs and traditions, the judgments of the group, in the processes of socialization of new generations. Cultural analysis is exercised at two levels, the first being that of the descriptive inventory that redesigns, as objectively as possible, the distinctive hallmarks of a culture. The second aims to interpret the meaning of culture for those who live (live in it, experience it). Every culture comprises elements which are not narrated and which we must bring out through an in-depth analysis of cultural symbols, of latent meanings which reveal behaviors and cultural expressions. The discomfort of the youth situation runs against two factors: on the one hand, cultural transformations taking place, and on the other hand, the inadequacy of ideas and expressions to interpret the changes underway.

We cannot understand many of the things that young people think or do without a profound process of sympathy and understanding toward them. We must try to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the young people, because they are the most sensitive to and are exposed to these transformations.

2. The phenomenological overview

Situating ourselves in a globalised world

Youth in developing countries make up the largest segment of the world population growth. More than half of the 5 billion people

living in these countries are less than 25 years of age. In this context, youth are not only the future but also form the present.

- Children and youth constitute almost 50% of the population of developing countries.

- 85% world youth between 15 and 24 years live in these countries.

- Approximately 238 million young people survive on less than a dollar a day, which constitutes 25% of people living in extreme poverty in the world.

- About 133 million people between 15 and 24 years do not know how to read or write

- Between a third and one-half of youth whose age fluctuates between 15 and 24 years did not have a job in many developing countries. At the global level, young people make up to 41% of the total number of unemployed persons.

- About half of the newly infected persons by HIV/AIDS are young people under 25 years.

- Almost 12 million young people live infected with HIV/AIDS. In countries with higher incidence of this evil, the projections tell us that, in the future, about 75% of the young people of 15 years will die due to AIDS.

Radical changes in human experience.

In fluid fragmented, fleeting times, cultural instability reigns, combined with political economic and educational instability. Adolescents and young people have an incomplete and weak

identity in reference to the cultural canon of adults that is not transmitted.

The epochal transformation that we are experiencing certainly raises great theoretical questions, and, above all, a more serious practical or existential uncertainty. It would not be wrong to characterize the contemporary human being as a "fair weather man" an expression coined by literature to describe in depth this vague and intangible feeling of anguish and loss that produces a discomfort difficult to explain, but with deep roots, which penetrates into men and women of our time.

The most negative consequences and risks fall back on the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged persons, where, among others, are young people. These are described as marginal, invisible or absent in historical and cultural processes of society.

Being "young" has become one of the greatest, almost mythical reference of our culture, virtually the only social model available to everyone. However, the symbolic supremacy of youth lifestyle hides a society that, in practice, abandons youth to their luck, and confines them to the last places in the hierarchy of interests that move it.

It is necessary to open a breach in the pessimism and develop faith in the youth. In various feedbacks received from members and Consultors, as well as numerous essays and sociological and cultural surveys, adolescents and youth appear to be painted in dark colors: reasons for concern are the crisis in the education system, the early school dropouts, the difficulties in the labour market, the scarce value given to and the limited voice of youth.

The school seems to be struck by serious educational problems, like the difficult social inclusion, the lack of motivation to study, the lack of desire to grow and invest in the future.

On the more psychological side we are presented with an age that is affected by painful tensions and by deep disturbances (teenagers who are bored set on fire a homeless person, girls who sell their own intimate photographs for a recharge on their mobile phones, teenagers who run riot on Saturday evening, everyday events of violence, etc.).

Principal Charateristics:

1. Affective culture that gives precedence to the feeling, to immediate emotion; Where the feelings orient the desire, the impressions determine the intelligence, the pursuit of sensual pleasure and the exposure of intimacy are nourished by mass culture. Lured by feelings, they move about like nomads more by impulse than by conviction, preferring the present rather than living with total intensity. They are little disposed to a an essentialist conception of morality, to fulfill duties assigned to them. The rules of the knowing-living are built in daily interaction.

2. Self centric culture, determined by pragmatic individualism, as an absolute value, with the consequent privatization of faith and denial of belief. An arbitrary logic of "save" or "delete" that which is of interest, withstands a system of order, of principles, of ethics. In evident contradiction the culture of generous and selfless volunteerism expresses itself with a surprising availability.

3. Consumer culture, seduced by the siege and the strong market forces, greatly conditioned on the model of success, of competitiveness, productivity; generator of aggressiveness (video games of children, bullying and hooliganism). This culture produces victims of poverty and social

marginalization, unemployment or underemployment, drug trafficking, gangs etc. As regards drugs, society does not know how to answer to the growing demand for artificial modification of mental states. The new generations offer original contributions and react effectively, inventing unedited forms of humanity.

4. Culture of social indifference, with the loss of utopian and ideological tension, political apathy, resignation and melancholy. Many young people seem to be living in another world, "disconnected" from the real one, to escape the unbearable complexity of life; but are looking for alternatives to everyday tensions. The desire to escape from the world is the expression of a revolt against a society that does not appreciate their training and offers small goals, corruption and inconsistency. Many of the adolescents and young people do not want to be defined as being deprived of commitment, and even less perceive themselves in conditions of hardship or risk. In spite of everything, we are, in fact, in some places, in front of a youth apparently happy, that has made consumption and idleness its key of identification.

5. Digital culture, with a revolution in the reference points for mental and social human growth. Rapidly developing technical appliances, with the transition from mobile phones to tablets, and the spread of virtual social communication transform the quality of shared information, create new challenges for discernment and open up opportunities for an active cooperation and an effective involvement.

6. A flattened culture of fast humanism, light entertainment, dominated by the logic of life as a spectacle, sensationalist, promoter of mediocrity and destined for futility, the promoter of capitulation and despair, which moves fleetingly from slowdown to rapidity, from euphoria to depression. At the same time, young people are particularly adept at pursuing

realistic, significant goals, according to their measure, even though in difficult conditions.

7. Performative culture, expressed in playful practices and attitudes (radical sports, nightlife) aesthetic work (inscriptions left on urban buildings and their own bodies; mode of dressing according to a specific style of the Group).

8. New religious cultures of youth, aggregated in new communities and new movements. They correspond to the need of belonging to a group. Under certain circumstances, they become capable of assuming social and cultural initiatives in contexts never imagined. There are good experiences when young people become the protagonists of a new expression of the Christian faith.

3. Critical Vision, toward creators of a new culture

The churches are called to face a big challenge to understand a new language and a new model of communication and local dialects, and to assist in building codes in which the Christian view would be decisive.

Main attitudes:

1. Building an elementary grammar of existence capable of transforming nomads lost along flattened or interrupted paths into pilgrims, on the affective cultural, spiritual and religious level. Once they do not define themselves anymore by their positions but by their itineraries, it would be necessary to walk the path of relevance to access to that of truth.

2. Freeing people dependent on their social and cultural environment in search of immediate gratification of the senses into autonomous and independent people. Enhancing the experience of the body as a place of openness to the

Christian message. Helping to overcome the nostalgia of the patterns of the past that are sometimes radical, searching for typical modalities for today, and offering answers to the question, although widespread and disturbed for meaning and hope.

3. Offering training to provide an order to the vast amount and diversity of information, in order to create references and referrals and overcoming their fear of the future. Offering content that allows the comparison, sharing and the making of decisions on proposals.

4. Understanding the desire of community life, sought through membership in bands and small tribes, and creating living spaces of a pure, unselfish love, attentive to the promotion of the good of all. Walking together with the youth, sharing joys and concerns, creating group networks that can collect affinity in a strong social relationship.

5. Accommodating the yearning of youth for the prophetic dimension of the Gospel, recognizing their denunciation of hypocrisies, and simulations of inconsistencies, without fearing the familial or religious social proscription, and nurturing the hope that frees from shallowness and apathy and commits to social justice, to ecological causes and movements promoting the overcoming of prejudices.

6. Faced with a culture of continuous communication, communicating our experience, our love and esteem, life projects, making them available and open to experience, with a boldly innovative concrete presence, entering symbolic territories open to connectivity.

7. Poetry and art, currently confined to the periphery of the denotative platform serve to pass on to evocation and invention, with games of freedom and responsibility, with a

frontline language, able to 'have a style', a necessary element of adolescent and youth subcultures.

8. In the face of the offers from the culture of the masses, becoming educators who are at hand, and who look to new generations not as being an opaque, mysterious world, but rather recognizing the fragility and sensitivity of youth.

9. To those who are in need of models, offering proposals of paternity and maternity which is competent and demanding. For, there is a situation of being orphans, because of the lack of or excess of parenthood, and a strong competition of elective networks of friends.