

A Worthy Model of Faith Transmission for Contemporary Youth? An Assessment Based on the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the 15th Synod of Bishops

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In this article, we will explore one paradigm of faith transmission currently being used with young people. In so doing, we will assess the *Instrumentum Laboris*, written for the Synod for Youth that is scheduled to take place in 2018. In order to discuss and clarify the value of this paradigm of faith transmission, we shall offer evidence from pertinent events and ecclesial documents with a special focus on *Dilecti Amici* which was written by St. John Paul II in 1985 and addressed to the youth of that time. Our approach will be to use the relevant tools available from comparative and descriptive methods in order to understand the shifts that occur in the paradigm, and then apply the analytic method to help us explain reasons for our findings.

Introduction

In Krakow, Poland, at the opening of the last World Youth Day, that of 2015, Pope Francis brought back memories of Pope St. John Paul II's manner of approaching youth, when he addressed a direct question to the remarkably large crowd of the youth who were in attendance: "Can we change things?"¹ The vast audience of youth shouted back their reply in unison: "Yes!" That shout came from this very large throng representing almost every country in the

¹ See, for example, JOHN PAUL II (1994), *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London: Jonathan Cape, 124.

world – and the emphatic tone that ushered forth from their youthful hearts, capable of a creative idealism, manifested their sense of urgency for change. All were united in their convictions: *No* to injustice, *No* to the whims of today's throw-away culture, *No* to globalized indifference. Caught up in the enthusiasm that spread forth like an uncontrolled bonfire, the crowd had taken its stand. At that moment, Pope Francis invited them to listen to the cry arising from their own inner selves and from all those around them chanting the same answer. "Even when you feel like the prophet Jeremiah, and in the inexperience of youth, God encourages you to go where He sends you: *Do not be afraid, [...], because I am with you to deliver you* (Jer 1:8).²

The planners for the Synod for Youth that will take place in October 2018 have expressed their conviction that it is *the right time* for Church leaders to *listen to the voice of youth who seem to cry back unanimously to Pope Francis and the Church: Can we change things?* The Pope himself has not yet given his own reflections on the mood of the youth since he himself must first formulate his convictions so that he may act in his role as Pope through this Preparatory Document: *The Youth, the Faith and Vocational Discernment* (PD) in a form that might be expressed in this or in a similar statement: *Change is possible if you help me.*³

The Fear of Changing the Status Quo

It may be difficult to decipher why people are afraid to change a status quo that seems not to correspond adequately to the norms of the truth in love that we discover in Jesus and the Gospel. We may draw upon a comparison between the youth's frame of mind with the milieu within which Pope Benedict XVI promulgated the

²Pope Francis, *Letter to young people on the occasion of the presentation of the Preparatory Document of the 15 Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 13 January 2017, available online (accessed 6 May 2017): https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170

³Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly, *Young People, the faith and vocational discernment: Preparatory Document*. (Accessed 1 May 2017). http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20170113_documento-preparatorio-xv_en.html

Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et semper* in September of 2010. With this document, Pope Benedict XVI instituted the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.⁴ Immediately after its promulgation, there seemed to be critical comments and questions such as: Do we really need a "New Evangelization"? What about the "old" one? Are we going to denounce evangelization tools and methods that are currently in use, are well understood by many, and indeed have worked well up to now? How will this "New Evangelization" affect our parishes and formation houses? Will it provoke dramatic change? What will this involve in terms of instructors needed to teach this new approach, books that would be necessary to implement planning and development, and the training of new staff who would learn the new approach and, in their turn, introduce and teach these changes to young people not only by an oral transmission of content but also by a meaningful praxis? Finally, how would the Church proceed to evaluate with effective assessment tools the degree of success that the New Evangelization might achieve?

In order to initiate the New Evangelization, the Pope insisted on priorities that were either rejected, forgotten, or brushed aside by many. The Pope urged those in responsibility to: (a) study the Catechism of the Catholic Church, (b) read the Bible, (c) renew and make more profound the programmes of catechesis; and (d) strengthen the parishes to function as centres for both human and spiritual growth. Simultaneously, the new Pontifical Council was already analysing in detail how the social, political and economic climates were themselves changing in complicated, almost unanalysable fashion and so were making people more confused than before.

The first Prefect for this Pontifical Council, Cardinal Rino Fisichella, accepted the opportunity to examine negative factors that seemed to act as catalysts for crises of faith. He noted that there were conflicts in axiological norms, beliefs, and practices

⁴ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Ubicumque et semper* establishing the Pontifical Council for promoting the New Evangelization, in The Holy See, (accessed 1 May 2017), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921

especially in the regions that historically were thought to be solidly built on Christian values.⁵

Soon after, we witnessed the *Instrumentum laboris* of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly, entitled: “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,”⁶ where Bishops from all over the world discussed how to evangelize in a changing world where social and consequently religious paradigms undergo rapid and sudden shifts. This event coincided with the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the inauguration of the Year of Faith. The Synod proceedings gave birth to the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) written by Pope Francis.⁷

The Pastoral Self-Assessment

Let us now return to Pope Francis’ “Letter to Young People”, a document that he issued on the 13th of January, 2017, in which he stated: “I wanted you to be the centre of attention, because you are in my heart.”⁸ And later in the same document we read: “My brother bishops [and] I want even more to ‘work with you for your joy (2 Cor 1:24).’”

⁵ In his book, the Prefect analyses the context and circumstances in which the Pontifical Council had been established. “Secularization has put forward the thesis of living in the world *etsi Deus non daretur*, as if God did not exist. Nevertheless, having removed God, our contemporaries have lost themselves... If God is relegated to the corner, the darkest and the furthest away from life, the human being becomes lost because there is no longer any meaning to being in relation with oneself, much less with others.” R. Fisichela (2012), *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 31.

⁶ XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith: Instrumentum Laboris* (2012), Vatican City: Vatican Printing Press.

⁷ Papa Francesco (2013) *Esortazione Apostolica Evangelii gaudium*, Milano: Edizioni San Paolo.

⁸ *Pope Francis’ letter to young people*, in: Rome Report, (accessed 6 May 2017), <http://www.romereports.com/2017/01/13/pope-francis-letter-to-young-people>

The *Instrumentum laboris* expressed this same desire: "By listening to young people, the Church will once again hear the Lord speaking in today's world... Listening to their aspirations, the Church can glimpse the world which lies ahead and the paths the Church is called to follow."⁹

In a manner similar to what happened at the time of Pope Benedict's initiation of the New Evangelization, one can wonder about the Church's strategy regarding youth during the period preceding the preparatory document. One can think sceptically and ask: What was the Church doing up until then? Was the Church ignoring youth and their needs within the community of the faithful? Was the Church *neglecting to listen* to the voice of young people?

The introductory part of the document seems not to ignore the possibility of such negative thoughts: "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."¹⁰

In this sentence, we see more clearly that *the Church declares publicly* the need for an ecclesial self-examination in order to help young people to discern and accept the call to the fullness of life and love, i.e., the call to follow Christ. The Church also professes her desire for the collaboration of young people in the task of identifying the most effective means for evangelizing in today's world.

Youth are at the centre of the document. The Church acts in the role of the *servant* who intends always to be an *ally* of the youthful generation. The world, on the other hand, does not seem to be youth's ally. The world is the place where the youth grow and where they fight for their daily survival; it also seems to be precisely the world that prevents young people from becoming the very "disciples whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7). The world, in other words, inhibits young people so that they are slow to reply to Our Lord Jesus' generous invitation to join Him.

⁹ PD, Introduction.

¹⁰ PD, Introduction.

The Pope suggests that despite the Church's effort to take charge and lead the youth forward, the world of today drains the young people of their momentum because it is not able to satisfy their needs. In her service to young people in this precarious situation, the Church needs to review carefully what her Founder has decreed in order to resolve this unfortunate stalemate situation.

Because John the Apostle is both an example of a young person who chooses to follow Jesus and the "disciple Jesus loved," he serves as an inspiration at the beginning of the process of the discernment that leads to the fullness of joy in Jesus.

In the search for meaning in their lives, the two disciples of John the Baptist hear Jesus make the penetrating question: "What do you seek?" To their reply, "Rabbi (which means Teacher), where do you live?", the Lord responds with an invitation: "Come and see" (Jn. 1:38-39). At the same time, Jesus calls them to embark on an inner journey and to be prepared to move forward in a practical way, without really knowing where this will lead them. It will be a memorable encounter, so much so that they even remember the exact time of day (cf. Jn 1:39).

As a result of their courage to go and see, the disciples will experience the abiding friendship of Christ and will be able to pass each day with him. They will ponder his words and be inspired by them; and will be deeply affected and moved by his actions. John, in particular, will be called to be a witness of the Passion and Resurrection of his Master... John's example can be of assistance in understanding that the vocational experience is a gradual process of inner discernment and growth in the faith which leads to discovering the fullness of the joy of life and love, making a gift of oneself and participating in the proclamation of the Good News.¹¹

A Changing Paradigm for Pastoral Ministry

Although the Preparatory Document doesn't quote St. Pope John Paul II, we find here an echo of his Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* that he promulgated on the 31st of March 1985 in preparation for the International Youth Year.¹²

¹¹ *PD*, Introduction.

¹² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici*, to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year, in the Holy See. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985 Accessed 20 April 2017.

In you, young people, there is hope, for you belong to the future, as the future belongs to you. To you belongs responsibility for what will one day become reality together with yourselves. In this regard, the first and principal wish of the Church is that you should "always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you."¹³

When one makes a cursory comparison of *Dilecti Amici* with the Preparatory Document for the Synod on Youth, one notices immediately that Pope St. John Paul II supported his affirmations with about 70 quotes from the Bible and concentrated his presentation on the Church's full awareness of the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to her.

As the Second Vatican Council teaches, [the Church] is a kind of sacrament or sign of the intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. Every vocation in life, insofar as it is a Christian vocation, is rooted in the sacramentality of the Church: it is therefore formed through the Sacraments of our faith.¹⁴

The document from 1985 identifies vocation as a crucial dimension of the commitment of every Christian who has met and recognized Jesus through sacramental initiation within the Church.

St. John Paul II explains the contours of the word "vocation":

One could speak here of the *life* of vocation, which in a way is identical with that plan of life which each of you draws up in the period of your youth. But *vocation* means something more than *plan*. In this second case I myself am the subject who draws it up, and this corresponds better to the reality of the person which each of you is. This *plan* is a *vocation* inasmuch as in it there make themselves felt the various factors which call. These factors usually make up a particular order of values (also called a *hierarchy of values*), from which emerges an ideal to be realized, an ideal which is attractive to a young heart. In this process, the *vocation* becomes a *plan*, and the plan begins to be also a vocation...

Young people, entering into themselves and at the same time entering into conversation with Christ in prayer, desire as it were to read the eternal thought which God the Creator and Father has in their regard. They then become convinced that the task assigned to them by God is left completely to their own freedom, and at the same time is determined by various circumstances of an interior and exterior

¹³ DA, 1.

¹⁴ DA, 9.

nature. Examining these circumstances, the young person, boy or girl, constructs his or her plan of life and at the same time recognizes this plan as the vocation to which God is calling him or her.

I desire therefore to entrust to all of you, the young people to whom this Letter is addressed, this marvellous task which is linked with the discovery before God of each one's life vocation. This is an exciting task. It is a fascinating interior undertaking. In this undertaking, your humanity develops and grows, while your young personality acquires ever greater inner maturity. You become rooted in that which each of you is, in order to become that which you must become: for yourself – for other people – for God.¹⁵

A more in-depth comparison seems to indicate that these two documents vary in their core structure. The first one presents the Church as a strong leader, as a companion for youth on their life journey, and sees youth as people ready to sacrifice and struggle for their vocation. The Preparatory Document for the youth Synod, written 37 years later (which is not really a long time) brings to the surface a dramatically different paradigm: it locates both the Church and the youth within a *milieu* of rapid social changes. The Church exists in this milieu, but she fails to have an impact on the society-at-large; nor does she have an impact on youth even though she would wish to do so. The texture of this document shows the prevailing paradigm: many allusions within the document make it *heavy* on sociology and social psychology and *light* on Scripture and Tradition.¹⁶

This might be justified by the style of the present Pope, but also it is visible and characterized in the document where the Church loses its leading shape but believes to get it back after listening humbly to (forgotten) young people. By the same time, reasons of these problems are connected to the rapidly changing world where 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.¹⁷ The

¹⁵ *DA*, 9.

¹⁶ Cf. T. R. Ascik, "The 2018 Synod and the new approach to youth in the Church," *The Catholic World Report*, March 16, 2017 (accessed 31 May 2017). http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/5501/the_2018_synod_and_the_new_approach_to_youth_in_the_church.aspx

¹⁷ Cf. *PD*, Part 1, Section 1.

document characterizes youth as a group that always want their options open. At the same time there are youth who suffer because the door to education, employment and training seems definitively shut. The contrast with the tone of Pope St. John Paul's document is remarkable:

Young people, on one hand show a willingness and readiness to participate and commit themselves to concrete activities in which the personal contribution of each might be an occasion for recognizing one's identity. On the other hand, they show an intolerance in places where they feel, rightly or wrongly, that they lack opportunities to participate or receive encouragement. This can lead to resignation or fatigue in their will to desire, to dream and to plan, as seen in the diffusion of the phenomenon of NEET ("not in education, employment or training", namely, young people are not engaged in an activity of study or work or vocational training). The discrepancy between young people who are passive and discouraged and those enterprising and energetic comes from the concrete opportunities offered to each one in society and the family in which one develops, in addition to the experiences of a sense of meaning, relationships and values which are formed even before the onset of youth. Besides passivity, a lack of confidence in themselves and their abilities can manifest itself in an excessive concern for their self-image and in a submissive conformity to passing fads...

Together with the spread of western culture, a conception of freedom as the possibility of having access to ever-new opportunities is emerging. Young people refuse to continue on a personal journey of life, if it means giving up taking different paths in the future: "Today I choose this, tomorrow we'll see."¹⁸

Another aspect that might surprise the reader is the fact that for the 2018 Synod for Youth, the term *youth* has been narrowed to people between 16 to 29 years, leaving room for adaptation according to local circumstances. This might bring confusion and/or misunderstanding, especially if we keep in mind that such a narrowly defined age group might be considered and recognized as normative only in developed countries while the other 80% of the world's population defy such a distinction by facing the cruel reality of a child forced to become an adult as soon as possible. This particular confusion about the meaning of the demographics,

¹⁸ Cf. *PD*, Part 1, Sections 2 and 3.

in my view, may affect the accuracy and reliability of data that are to be collected from every diocese around the world.

From the sociological point of view, we learn that the notion that youth constitute a separate group within a society has a short history. Maintaining their custom of systematising and categorising, the social sciences recently divided a social group into certain subdivisions. But again, applying every qualification that the sciences make is often limited to the developed world.

What seemed to be a common point of agreement in the recent past is that young people as an age group roughly coincided with what was called the “young generation”; and often the ones who belonged to this group were not distinguished from children until the elders recognized them as having reached a certain stage of maturity by conducting a ritual social initiation. It could be a tribal initiation or an actual marriage. The *PD* does not indicate the precise reason for its identification of the 16 to 29-year-old age range as the period to be designated “youth”.¹⁹ Neither does it specify whether the range is based on biological markers or the kind of cultural indicators that cultural anthropologists may adopt from such perspectives as beliefs, family life styles, or socio-political organizations.²⁰ It is well known that without such specification, *youth* can become “just a word” that carries within itself an evolving concept that can easily become social in its repercussions.²¹ For instance, the UN has defined youth as a person from 15 to 24 years of age.²² Some sociologists define youth as a transition between childhood and adulthood.²³ Nevertheless in spite of such attempts to establish an age range for youth with

¹⁹ Cf. C.W. Stewart, *Adolescents*, in R.J. Hunter, ed. (2007) Dictionary of pastoral care and counseling, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 8-10.

²⁰ Cf. M.J. Kehily (2007) *Understanding youth: Perspectives, identities and practices*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

²¹ Cf. P. Bourdieu, (1978) *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage Publication, 94-102

²² Cf. United Nation, *Definition of Youth* (accessed 14 May 2017), <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

²³ Similar theories and statements might be find in J. Roche, et al. (2004) *Youth in Society*, London: Sage Publication.

precision, one has to notice that many cultures have good reason to offer their own parameters: the African Youth Charter, for example, defines youth as people between the age of 15 and 35.²⁴ This seems logical enough since a 33 or a 34-year-old woman who is not married may still be called a girl in some African cultures.

If we return to the perspective that characterises this Preparatory Document, we notice a particular emphasis on the fact that young people are those who "seek a religious faith community for two primary reasons: spiritual transcendence and social belonging."²⁵ The issue of age parameters, however, remains. Does the lack of clarity – or the lack of concern – that this *Instrumentum Laboris* manifests about who belongs to that group of people called youth intensify for some the difficulties inherent in understanding the document's intention? Is this a problem that casts a shadow over the international character of the document and the questionnaire that supplements it?

Although this document takes pains to note that some international studies were conducted to help understand the characteristics of the young people of our times²⁶, the author(s) of the document do not mention a specific reference related to these identifying characteristics. On the other hand, the authors of the document seem to undertake their analyses without specific supporting studies. This approach brings forth repercussions in the attitude adopted towards socialisation and the formation of a personal identity of a young person.

The word *discernment* holds a prominent place in Part II, Section 2 of the document. The authors of the document understand the word in the context of what Pope Francis already wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he uses three guiding verbs in relation to discernment: recognizing, interpreting and choosing.²⁷

²⁴ Cf. African Union Commission (2006), *African Youth Charter* http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf (accessed 6 May 2017)

²⁵ S.D. Parks, "Youth Adults", *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, R.J. Hunter, (Ed.). Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2007, 1344-1345.

²⁶ Cf. *PD*, Part 1, Section 2.

²⁷ *EG*, 51.

While mentioning meditation on the Word of God and dialogue with Jesus as a significant dimension for all three stages of the process, this Preparatory Document seems to bring into the foreground the socio-psychological character of discernment: “recognizing”, for example, is related more to desires, feelings and emotions than to a purely spiritual dimension that accords with the norms of truth in the love of Jesus. “Interpreting” has its connotation of understanding to what the Holy Spirit may be indicating by means of feelings and desires. The final verb accentuates what takes place in the individual’s conscience when he or she makes a vocation-related decision.²⁸ While the document warns against both relativism and individualism in the discernment process – and the temptation to be ego-centred – one sees so to speak an unbalancing because of the stress on the emotional pushes and pulls that are captivating the person’s attention during the process. In 1985, Pope St. John Paul II, on the other hand, did not stress the individual’s dreams and desires. He stressed the desire of one person, Jesus. “It is Christ we must ask for the answer.”²⁹

A Risk Made Worthy by the Gospel

In its First Part, the Preparatory Document recalls the ever-present search for persons of reference or *heroes* and indicates parents and families as those who are supposed to engage themselves in the primary role in the *search*. At the same time, the document seems to be restrained in its attitude towards the family and tends to avoid giving any place of privilege to the family who in fact may provide the milieu for the first discernment that takes place in a life of a young boy or a girl.

This low-key attitude towards the family carries an impact on the second part of the document entitled Faith, Discernment, and

²⁸ Cf. *PD*, Part 2, Section 2.

²⁹ *DA*, 3. This very clear evangelical statement finds its detailed explanation in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* written by John Paul II on the inauguration of his papal ministry. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, in *The Holy See* (accessed 12 May 2017), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html

Vocation.³⁰ The title of this Second Part might provoke a bit of confusion because, if there are substantial insights related to faith or discernment, the reader will not find them there. One notices that, yes, there is a promising remark about faith: "Faith is seeing things as Jesus does." Yet if a person was hoping to see the indispensable niche that belongs to the truth in both faith and discernment – the truth of who Jesus is as Redeemer and Lord and the personal truth, i.e., the identity of the one doing the discerning – he or she would be disappointed.

Of course, this is understandable if, as it was stated right from the beginning, the Church has decided to listen to young people and to learn from them without speaking in an authoritative manner about the vital issues that concern the lives and destinies of the young people to whom she is listening. We suggest that this is another very important contrast to Pope St. John Paul's Apostolic Letter of 37 years ago.

For instance, in relation to marriage and the family, the document highlights the gift of discernment and relates this gift to the ability to cultivate opportunities for self-realization. The Preparatory Document does not give guidelines about how a family may prepare a son or daughter for the most precious vocation of marriage. Indeed the document blithely refers the reader to *Amoris Laetitia*, nn. 159-190, where much is said about the formation in ethical habits, but not much is said about forming children to the vocation of marriage.

We may witness the quite evident contrast from the way John Paul II specified the role of family. In his 1985 Letter to the Youth he speaks specifically about the discernment and choice to marry as an issue that concerns the parents of the prospective bride or groom.³¹ He mentions the all-important point that when a young couple begin their journey through life as a sacramentally married man and woman, they carry within their hearts and souls everything that they learned from their parents as an "inheritance".

Pope St. John Paul wrote his Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* within the context of what he had written four years previously in

³⁰ Cf. *PD*, Part 2.

³¹ John Paul II, *DA*, nn. 10-11.

his 1981 Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (FC). There John Paul related the role of the family to the various stages of preparation for the marriage of the son or daughter who grows with his/her parents.³²

The document from 1981 is careful to give backbone to the young person's discernment about entering a Christian marriage:

Remote preparation begins in early childhood, in that wise family training which leads children to discover themselves as being endowed with a rich and complex psychology and with a particular personality with its own strengths and weaknesses. It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in interpersonal and in social relationships, with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one's inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex, and so on. Also necessary, especially for Christians, is solid spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission, without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to the priestly or religious life.

Upon this basis there will subsequently and gradually be built up the proximate preparation, which – from the suitable age and with adequate catechesis, as in a catechumenal process – involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were, a rediscovery of them. This renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary in order that the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions. The religious formation of young people should be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various concrete requirements, with a preparation for life as a couple. This preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life, such as stable work, sufficient financial resources, sensible administration, notions of housekeeping...

³² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, in Austin Flannery (Ed.) (1982) *Vatican Council II: More Post-Conciliar Documents*, vol. 2. Bangalore: St. Paul Publication, 813-898.

The immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding, so as to give a new meaning, content and form to the so-called premarital enquiry required by Canon Law. This preparation is not only necessary in every case, but is also more urgently needed for engaged couples that still manifest shortcomings or difficulties in Christian doctrine and practice.

Among the elements to be instilled in this journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate, there must also be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage, as well as preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the... marriage liturgy.³³

By means of this example, we witness a contrast between the tendency of the Preparatory Document to understate the family's role in vocational discernment and Pope John Paul's more emphatic use of language that highlighted the spiritual, ethical, and cultural inheritance that the family passes on to its youth, an emphasis that lay the foundation for the first World Youth Day.

The Church should listen to young people: the Preparatory Document says this; Pope St. John Paul II said this on a number of occasions.³⁴ But who is catching the attention of young people? To whom are they listening? What is the source of their knowledge and insight that they, in their turn, can communicate to the Church and to the Pope? Surely their source is not Christian Tradition because as it is stated in the document, "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..."³⁵ This keynote statement seems to insinuate that young people listen to sources that do not help them to recognize and accept the call.

John Paul II expressed what happens when someone does not accept God as his or her source of knowledge. The person who does not listen to God may confuse good and evil: "When God is removed from evaluations of good and evil, then evil is put forward as good, and good itself is rejected."³⁶ Through analogy, we know that if a teacher does not explain his or her subject eloquently and

³³ *FC*, 66.

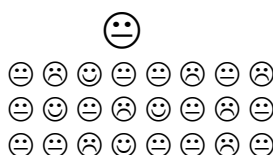
³⁴ See, for example, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*,

³⁵ *PD*, Introduction.

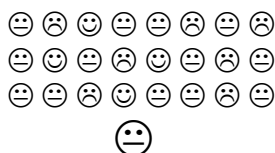
³⁶ *DA*, 4.

accurately, then the students might face a big difficulty during the exam to give correct answers. This rule applies to the Magisterium. Those who do not listen to the Magisterium may suffer great confusion when they try to answer life's most pressing questions.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* finalized its Second Part by recalling the importance of accompaniment. In this respect, we find a similarity between the recent document and the one that John Paul wrote in 1985. It harmonises with Pope John Paul about the difference between accompaniment in discerning and psychological support. The document minces no words about the objective of accompaniment: "By accompanying young people in their personal discernment, the church accepts her call to collaborate in the joy of young people rather than be tempted to take control of their faith."³⁷



Solitary Leader



Fearful Leader



Responsible Leader

The one who accompanies a young person can only fulfil his or her responsibility if he harmonises his conduct with Evangelical standards. The diagram above shows three kinds of leadership: the first one represents a leader that accompanies his flock without looking at them. He does not care much if his speed matches with that of the group. The second leader is the fearful one and uses the flock as a shield. Surely, he does not know the way and is not willing to sacrifice himself for the group. The last one represents

³⁷ PD, Part 2, Section 4.

the leader who is ready to accompany the flock by listening to them, walking at their pace and ready to "take on the smell of sheep and the sheep are willing to hear their voice."³⁸

Pastoral Ministry in an Unfriendly Environment

The Preparatory Document now shifts its focus to the pastoral and vocational care of young people. Pastoral care requires a profound and continuing reflection concerning the rights and obligations that the Church assumes in helping youth to reach the joy of the Gospel.

The question that arises at this point draws our attention to the current state of pastoral ministry: "How does the Church help young people accept their call to the joy of Gospel, especially in these times of uncertainty, volatility and insecurity?"³⁹

This question takes its roots from the First Point of the First Part where we have read:

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. With regard to work, this situation brings to mind unemployment, an increase of flexibility in the labour market and exploitation, especially of minors, or the overall series of civil, economic and social causes, including those of the environment, which explain the overwhelming increase of the number of refugees and migrants.⁴⁰

According to some researchers, one of the most devastating factors that prevent youth from enjoying the fullness of life is unemployment.⁴¹ During his visit to Kenya, Pope Francis met with the youth at the Kasarani stadium in Nairobi, where he suggested that unemployment pushes a young person into a number of

³⁸ *EG*, 24.

³⁹ *PD*, Part 3, Section 1.

⁴⁰ *PD*, Part 1, Section 1.

⁴¹ Cf. J.A. Gorka (2013) *Youth ministry in the face of unemployment: A historical-critical study of the development of the Church and its concern for youth formation and employment in Mwanza (Tanzania)*. Doctoral Thesis, Rome: Pontifical Salesian University.

dangerous areas: depression, criminality, drugs, prostitution, and sometimes even suicide.⁴²

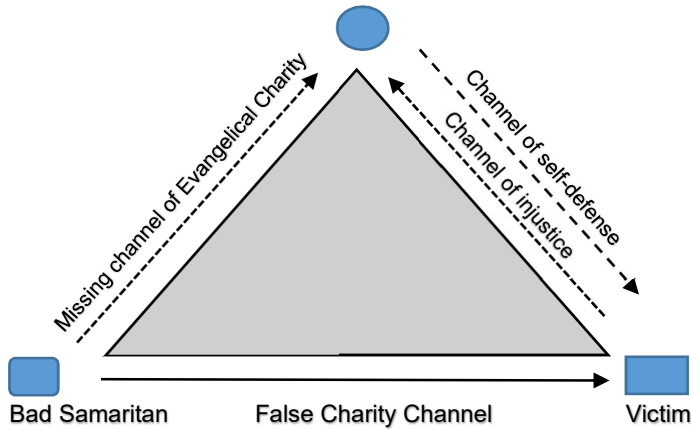
The Preparatory Document invites the Church to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to the fullness of life and love and to incorporate the contribution of young people into an analysis of the most effective methods for announcing the Good News in today's world. If we were to participate in this self-examination, we would notice that what often seems to hinder the young generation in their effort to recognize and accept this call to the fullness of life and love is a *False Charity* on the part of those with whom the youth interact. The diagram shown below describes, unfortunately, the typical situation when a deceptive political correctness, dishonest diplomacy, and a lukewarm attitude towards the Gospel (cf. Rev. 3:15-16) on the part of some of her leaders diminish the trust of the youth in the Bride of Christ (cf. Matt 5, 13).

The diagram on the following page, identifies a “charitable” person that helps the victim but is afraid to confront the one characterized as a “tyrant/oppressor” who may very well be the reason for the female victim’s pain and misery, for her sorrow, who may be ultimately depriving the male victim of hope and joy, and who may be responsible for marginalizing many.

In the First Point of this section, “Walking with Young People”, the document cites *Evangelii gaudium* and recommends that agents of change for the youth apostolate be “bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 33).⁴³ The document suggests Jesus’ pastoral style follows three dynamisms: going out; seeing; and calling.

⁴² Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, *Meeting with Young People, Kasarani stadium, Nairobi, Kenya, 27 November 2015*, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Kenya, Uganda and Central African Republic, 25-30 November 2017, in The Holy See, (accessed 12 May 2017), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151127_kenya-giovani.html

⁴³ *PD*, Part 3, Section 1.



We must not confine ourselves to routines that have sapped us of our zeal: we must go out to enter the lives of young people in such a way that they discover their own inner freedom and ability to contribute. “Seeing” means paying attention: to fully understand and then review the gifts of God to the young persons we meet, we need to look further to know their historical and contextual background in depth. This will help us to empathize, i.e., experience the young person’s situation not from my point of view but from her/his point of view. In other words, before anything else, I should actively listen to what he or she is saying. Only then will I be able to walk with the young person as Jesus walked with disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk. 24).

In the Second Point, “Agents,” the document proceeds to highlight a conviction that lay at the heart of Pope St. John Paul II’s *The Acting Person*. All young people are self-determining agents living within the freedom that allows them to choose, as subjects, to live their lives in the Holy Spirit and so be a gift for others. The document specifies who these agents are: the young people who live in poverty, zones of war, violence, disease, disability and suffering – these are the ones into whose hearts God pours forth his love by giving them the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). The co-agents who accompany them, especially “people of reference,” are to open their own souls to the same Holy Spirit.

This part shows similarity with one of the Conciliar documents *Gravissimus educationis*⁴⁴ (GE), a document that reminds the Church, Parents, Schools and Government that they carry special and irreplaceable responsibility in cooperating within themselves, and them in accompanying and forming the future of our society.⁴⁵ The Preparatory Document mentions Parents and Families, Shepherds of Souls, Teachers and other Educators. Jesus invites the Church to continue tirelessly the process of education that goes in line with its etymological source coming from the Latin word *educere* that means both *to bring up* and *to lead out*.⁴⁶

Each and every young person is a gift from God. The powers that inhere within the souls, minds and hearts of youth should be properly cared for, given scope to develop.

The Third Point of the section indicates strategic “places” where the Church accompanies youth so that the Church may form an integrated network of communication to the youth and so cultivate a suitable operating style of “going out”, seeing” and “calling”. The document specifies (a) World Youth Days, (b) Parishes, (c) Universities and Catholic schools, (d) Social activities and volunteer work especially among those who are poor and on the margins of society, (e) Associations, ecclesial movements and centres of spirituality, and (f) Seminaries and houses of formation. In a way that readily brings to mind a favourite theme of Pope St. John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *The Mission of the Redeemer*, the document mentions a new Areopagus, namely, the Digital world:

The world of the *new media* deserves special attention, since, especially in the case of younger generations, it really occupies a major place in their lives. The *new media* offer many opportunities, especially with regard to access to information and creating relations with those in distant places. However, they also pose risks (such as cyber-bullying, gambling, pornography, hidden dangers in *chat*

⁴⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimus Educationis*, 28 October, 1965 in Walter M. Abbott, (ed.) (1982) *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York: Guild Press, 637-651.

⁴⁵ GE, 3.

⁴⁶ R.R. Osmer, “Education, Nurture and Care”, in R.J. Hunter, Ed. (2007), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 336-338.

rooms, ideological manipulation...). Despite the differences in this field among various regions, the Christian community is still developing her presence in this new *Areopagus*, where young people certainly have something to teach her.⁴⁷

We may and should ask ourselves if we are ready and able to transmit our faith to youth that are always connected to the virtual world. There are some writers that call the young generation by the label *Born Digital*, while others suggest that they have already made their home in the digital world and only sometimes are connected to the one that by older or senior people is considered as the normal and real one. Often we adults are not aware of all the new opportunities and hidden dangers that inhere in the digital world.⁴⁸ It seems that theoretical knowledge about new forms of communication and the use of the internet might not be sufficient. We should not feel uncomfortable if youth might invite us to join their virtual world by reversing Jesus' invitation: come and see.

Appreciating the Power of Youth Ministry

One last issue relating to the Third Point draws our attention towards the avenues that the Church has chosen to fructify the field of pastoral activity. One pertinent observation concerns the Church's need to focus once again on tools that, despite their utility, have been neglected in our times. The great resource within the Church that seminaries and schools of theology usually designate as Pastoral Theology introduces students to practical forms of ministry that traditionally derive from knowing and understanding the realities of life that exert a noteworthy impact on all of God's human beings and hence either facilitate or obstruct the human beings' journey into the Heart of God. Pastoral theology does not limit itself to simple observations in order to understand new challenges, but rather directs its search towards answering

⁴⁷ Cf. PD, Part 3, Section 3.

⁴⁸ Valerio Bocci and Antonio Sparado written ground breaking books where they propose (each one of them in specific form) new form of catechization and evangelization addressed to "digital" youth 2.0. Cfr. V. Bocci, (2012) *Communicare la fede ai ragazzi 2.0*, Leumann, TO: Elledici; A. Spadaro, (2010) *Web 2.0: Reti di relazione*, Milano: Paoline, 2010.

fundamental questions, questions that may not be answerable by observation alone.

Pastoral Theology begins its reflection from the experience of History, and later, on the basis of an amalgam of Systematic Theology, Church Doctrine and Social Teaching proposes the most appropriate and predictably effective program for apostolic action. In other words, pastoral theology may be called a Science of Action, more specifically, a programme of action that serves to adapt theological knowledge to the concrete situation of the people.⁴⁹ The dimension of Pastoral Theology that dedicates itself to youth manifests an ability to be effective when it leads young people towards Jesus and so helps them to become ethically upright citizens and virtuous Christians.⁵⁰

This simple and concise explanation of Pastoral Theology seems to resonate well with what Pope St. John Paul II wrote in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV) where he explains the importance of Pastoral Theology:

It is a scientific reflection on the Church as she is built up daily, by the power of the Spirit, in history; on the Church as the “universal sacrament of salvation,” as a living sign and instrument of the salvation wrought by Christ through the word, the sacraments and the service of charity. Pastoral theology is not just an art. Nor is it a set of exhortations, experiences and methods. It is theological in its own right, because it receives from the faith the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history, a Church that each day “begets” the Church herself... Among these principles and criteria, one that is especially important is that of the evangelical discernment of the socio-cultural and ecclesial situation in which the particular pastoral action has to be carried out.

The study of pastoral theology should throw light upon its practical application through involvement in certain pastoral services which the candidates to the priesthood should carry out, with a necessary progression and always in harmony with their other educational

⁴⁹ Cf. R.L. Kinast, “Pastoral Theology”, in R.J. Hunter, ed., (2005) *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Bangalore, India: Theological Publications, 873-874.

⁵⁰ Cf. F.V. Anthony, *Buoni cristiani e onesti cittadini competenti nell'agire generative e responsabile*, in: F.V. Anthony – Bruno Bordignon, eds., (2013) *Don Bosco Teologo Practico? Lettura teologico-pratica della sua esperienza educativa*, Roma: Las, 2013, 61-89.

commitments. It is a question of pastoral "experiences," which can come together in a real program of "pastoral training," which can last a considerable amount of time and the usefulness of which will itself need to be checked in an orderly manner.⁵¹

In summary, pastoral theology – unlike its relatives, Dogmatic Theology, Biblical Theology or Spiritual Theology – does not concentrate on the data of divine revelation that are communicated to the Church and to the world-at-large through the Bible, the Apostolic Tradition, the teachings of the Fathers and the Doctors, and the lives and writings of the saints. Pastoral theology concentrates on the application of these other brands of theology to the praxis of real life as it unfolds from day to day. For that reason, when pastoral theology makes its applications in communion with those branches of theology that are directly connected to divine revelation and the Church magisterium, pastoral theology makes effective contributions to the self-realization, self-actualization and self-determination of the Church.⁵² Pastoral ministry's main goal is to ensure a constant renovation and updating of lines of action in perfect harmony with Jesus' intentions for the Church and for all humanity.⁵³

Keeping this in mind, we can understand why the Preparatory Document wishes to keep its mindset in tandem with the array of mindsets that characterize today's youth and the multi-cultural milieu within which they are immersed: "As opposed to situations in the past, the Church needs to get accustomed to the fact that the ways of approaching the faith are less standardized, and therefore she must become more attentive to the individuality of each person."⁵⁴

⁵¹John Paul II (1992), Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis, On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, n. 57.

⁵²Cf. H. Geller, (1979) *Operatore di pastorale*, in: K. Rahner – F. Klostermann – H. Schild – T. Goffi, eds., *Dizionario di pastorale*, Brescia: Queriniana, 476-481.

⁵³Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 1-4, in W.M. Abbott, ed. (1982) *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York: Guild Press, 199-308.

⁵⁴*PD*, Part 3, Section 4.

This Pastoral Ministry has its own distinctive branch that is called Youth Ministry and is dedicated distinctively to members of society, who are considered to be the young generation, the future of their own societies and the future of the Church.

In synchronization with Pastoral Theology, Youth Ministry (*YM*) is based upon the practical-concrete experience of everyday life. As the label implies, they serve youth, as they grow, mature, finish the required basic education and move forward into an erstwhile pursuit of vocational interests, life choices, training, employment, and formation. During each stage of the process, Jesus is present: youth ministers encourage the youth to recognize Jesus' presence in their lives.

Youth ministry, therefore, sets objectives for strategies and action that correspond to the prerogatives of Jesus and the Church, always within the milieu of the hidden but effective action of the Holy Spirit. *YM*'s effort is designed to bolster trust in God's Master Plan, a plan that confirms His Love for all of humanity, but with a preferential love for youth. Youth ministry then purports to see and understand a young person within Jesus' own vision of that person. Together with his Father he has endowed the young person with rights, needs, responsibilities and significantly with a capacity to give of oneself as a perpetual gift of love, which, in turn, creates the milieu for living his/her life in fullness.⁵⁵

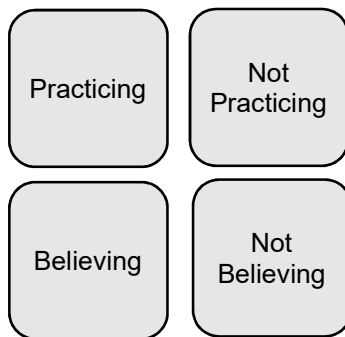
Youth ministry, following the example of Jesus, accepts the human person in the gestalt of their existence, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. *YM*, therefore, functions entirely within a Christian cultural orientation; hence it opens the minds, hearts and hands of the youth to respond promptly to the urgent needs of their brothers and sisters in humanity. As the young people grow in their friendship with Jesus, they realize that it is an imperative and inescapable moral obligation for them to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and the imprisoned... in a word to open their interior life to a wholehearted love for the least ones (cf. Matt 25:31-46). With this in mind, the youth realize that they

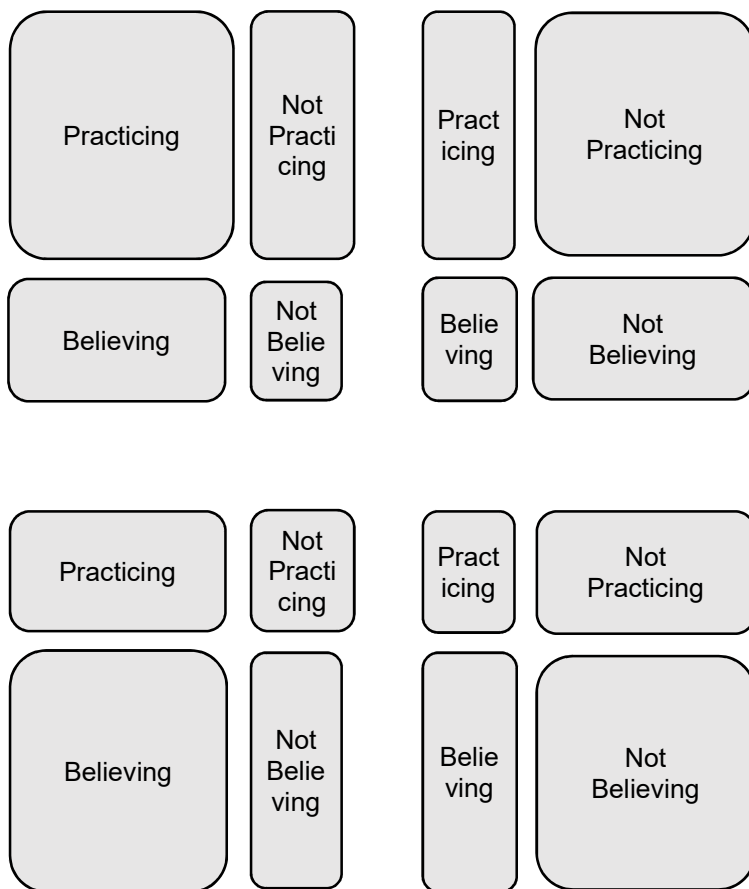
⁵⁵ Cf. R. Tonelli, (1992) *Pastorale giovanile*, in: M. Midali – R. Tonelli, eds., *Dizionario di pastorale giovanile*, Torino: Elle Di Ci, 755-756.

are devoting their lives to a Christian culture where the inequalities of wealth, the unbridled pursuit of sensual pleasure, and the anxious search for power defy the very notion of human person.

Youth ministry addresses forms of injustice and oppression by offering concrete solutions that are based upon convictions about human dignity, and God's perennial call to be generous in order to resist materialism, to be chaste in order to resist sensuality, and to be humble, in order to resist the thirst for power. Its methodology is solidly based upon a theology of action – dynamic theology that leads to programs of change, strategy and a positive source of action.

Youth ministry encourages youth to move out of the existential vacuum by promoting employment. Youth ministry strives to fulfil its mission, its responsibilities and its goals, i.e., it confirms its own identity and presence, when it engages in any socio-economic, psycho-social, and political activity that resist materialism, sensuality and the selfish pursuit of power.





Diagnosing a parish – especially the youth in the parish – according to concrete criteria that indicate whether persons and groups are believers and are practicing their faith can be very helpful for designing strategies for action. There is one item from each of the four variations of the diagram that easily catches the reader's attention. (A) If the influential group in the parish are the ones practicing their faith, the group of non-believers tends to be small. (B) If the influential group in the parish are the ones who are believing, the number of non-practicing parishioners tends to be small. (C) If the influential group in the parish are the ones who are

not practicing their faith, the number of believers in the parish tends to be small. (D) If the influential group in the parish are the ones who are not believers, the number of those practicing their faith is small. From the diagram, we learn how one positive pastoral effort that aims at encouraging people to practice their faith and at the same time does what is necessary to fortify their beliefs in Jesus and the Church can help to shrink undesirable pastoral challenges. Similarly we see that any pastoral neglect that provokes a decline in religious practice and leaves a trail of ignorance in matters of the faith can pull the parish away from its love for Jesus and the Church.⁵⁶

Thoughtful engagement in Church practices and meaningful intellectual and emotional involvement in the essential truths of the faith are only possible within an atmosphere of silence and contemplation. Youth ministry labours wholeheartedly to cultivate this atmosphere. In order to practice silence of the mind and silence of the heart, youth ministers provide a formation for understanding one's experiences and for listening to the voice of one's conscience.⁵⁷

We may come to the conclusion that the parish continues to be the best model for reaching young people. It has to be a parish, of course, that is ready to reorganize itself periodically – even frequently – in order to reach all, especially those who live on the peripheries. The parish, in other words, must have a preferential love for the marginalized (cf. Matt 9:12).

The Preparatory Document then gives voice to the name of a very important person in the life of each and every one of us: Mary. She is the Mother who is able to help the Church to rediscover once again her mission. She is the Mother to whom the synodal process has been entrusted.⁵⁸ She opens our mind to understand the real meaning of the famous *Go* that Abraham heard once from God. "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to

⁵⁶ Cf. H. Schilderman (2009) Religion, solidarity and the Church, Draft document presented on 12th January 2009 during Symposium on "Empirical Theology: Prospects and Problems", organized by the Institute of Pastoral Theology & DPGC at the Salesian Pontifical University Rome, Italy.

⁵⁷ Cf. *PD*, Part 3, Section 4.

⁵⁸ Cf. *PD*, Part 3, Section 5.

the land that I will show you” (Gen 12:1). Addressing young people around the world, Pope Francis affirms:

These words [that were addressed to Abraham] are now also addressed to you. They are words of a Father who invites you to *go*, to set out towards a future which is unknown but one which will surely lead to fulfilment, a future towards which He Himself accompanies you. I invite you to hear God’s voice resounding in your heart through the breath of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In the course of this essay we have indicated the major points of emphasis in the Preparatory Document (*Instrumentum Laboris*) for the Youth Synod and have accentuated the Church’s desire to shift its paradigm of faith transmission according to the multi-cultural milieu in which the youth find themselves. We have elucidated noteworthy contrasts and similarities between this document and John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of 1985, a document that corresponded to the International Youth Year. We highlighted the differences in approach between the Preparatory Document and Pope St. John Paul’s letter on the issue of formation within the family, especially in terms of vocational discernment on the part of those who eventually marry.

The addressees of the document seem to be determined and trustful towards the Church. The Church, for her part, presents herself as ever loyal to the mandate that Jesus entrusted to the Apostles (cf. Matt 28:16-20). The Preparatory Document seems to be at pains to discern the variations in circumstances to which the youth are exposed from one country to another, from one culture to another, from one milieu to another. Why? ... In order to bring forth the most effective manner of youth ministry for the country, the culture and the milieu in question.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Letter to young people on the occasion of the presentation of the Preparatory Document of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 13 January 2017. See online:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170113_lettera-giovani-doc-sinodo.html.

Accessed 6 May 2017.

In the final analysis, the Preparatory Document injects hope into the Synod – it realistically creates the expectation that the outcome for the Synod will be desirable.

When we consider once again a comparison between the *Instrumentum Laboris* and Pope John Paul's letter, we recognize that the two documents link together in their common emphasis on *accompaniment* where spiritual and formative values overshadow the socio-psychological ones. The author of the present article believes that this emphasis might serve as a reference or starting point to help the Church rediscover how her mission and self-identity can have an impact on the young people of today, and, conversely, how the youth of today can have an impact on the Church, her mission, and her understanding of herself. Youth Ministry serves a primary role and is in a position to act as the facilitator for re-establishing mutual trust and dialog between the young generation and the Church.

There are three elements that seems to be crucial for both the youth and the Synod members:

1. At times the youth may feel neglected by the Magisterium. They may feel as if they are alone as they struggle with day-to-day challenges. This dissipates their sense of belonging to the Church and often is a factor for them to lose the faith.
2. The Pope, on behalf of the Church, recognizes that the cry of the youth is not heard as it should be. The Pope himself, however, is ready to listen and to walk together with the youth.
3. The Church confirms that it has a lot to offer – principally, she gives Jesus to youth and to the world – and so in the Spirit of Jesus, she is willing to study the changing paradigms of the transmission of the faith and to adapt youth's suggestions to the pastoral ministry.

The Synod maintains its awareness of this last point and realizes that it can have positive implications for fortifying the bond between the Church and young people. The Synod hopes to generate valuable insights from the results of the questionnaires that are being issued in every diocese throughout the world. Other factors that facilitate the effort to listen to what the young people have to say is the recent decision to open the Vatican website to

solicit input from youth, let them speak to each other and fill out the questionnaire even if they are on the go with a certain busyness in their lives. This kind of process creates a network that is relatively independent of the local churches that might not be putting too much emphasis on the preparation for the Synod.

Surely, we understand that not all problems will be solved (one remembers what happened after the Synod for Families in 2015). Nevertheless now is the proper time to listen to the young generation with a wholehearted openness to its issues.

There is still a need for a worthwhile discussion that can help in the discernment of the progress that the Church has made during the 37 years that have passed since the International Youth Year and the challenges she still faces. The present moment is always exactly the right moment to win the trust of young people and to walk together with them: we do not know what the youth will be like after another 37 years... What we are sure of is this: the Church is and will always be the Bride of Jesus, with the same mission, namely, to conduct herself as the unfailing, ever faithful Mother who offers to all the fullness of life, in a particular way to the young people that search for this life, sometimes with great restlessness, at moments with intense anxiety, at other moments with a hesitant hope, but always with the anticipation that God will not disappoint them.