Torino-Valdocco, February 5, 2019

Europe Youth ministry AND MISSIONARY ANIMATION delegates meeting

Sala Rossano sdb

**FIRST MOMENT**

**PRIORITIsING AND CONNECTING**

**Entering the synodal process with mind, heart and hands**

This afternoon I’m proposing to you a creative and demanding work!

I’m trying to list some “generative thematic nuclei”, in view studying them in groups. Such “nuclei” may be important for your work of coordination and animation. They all emerge from the ongoing synodal journey of the Church.

I’m not focusing my intervention on spiritual accompaniment and vocational discernment from a Salesian perspective, that will be the theme developed by Fr. Eunan McDonnell, and which still remains a “generative thematic nucleus” on its own. We are called to really be professional in this field: masters of Salesian spirituality, and so companions of the young people toward a vocational maturity.

My main frame of reference will the *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) together with the *Final Document* (FD) of the Synod. Please remember that these two documents should be read together:

It is important to clarify the relationship between the *Instrumentum Laboris*and the *Final Document*.  The former is the comprehensive and synthetic frame of reference that emerged from two years of listening;  the latter is the fruit of the discernment that followed and it draws together thematically the key discussion points that the Synod Fathers focused on with particular intensity and passion.  So we recognize the diversity and the complementarity of these two texts. (FD 3).

The order of these 15 “generative thematic nuclei” is deliberately random. In fact, each one of you, in the second time of our meeting, will have to put them in the right order and to find the right connections between them.

**FIFTEEN “GENERATIVE THEMATIC NUCLEI”**

**EMERGING FROM THE SYNOD**

1. The strategic relationship between generous service and vocational discernment

Through all the synodal process, there has been a progressive growth in the awareness of the strategic relationship between the experience of generous service and vocational discernment. IL 194-195 summarize many different experiences in this field reported by several Bishops’ Conferences. If we only think of the many experiences of service and volunteering that we offer, perhaps we have to wonder if these experiences are eventually taken into consideration in the moment of vocational discernment. Maybe here lies one of our flaws connected with our pastoral activism: we propose many different experiences to our young people, but then we are too much in a hurry to accompany them and to refer to them from a vocational perspective. By doing so, we feed in many young people the “collecting of experiences” which is typical of our time.

The theme of *diakonia* (FD 137) is really generative for the Church and for the young people, but it needs to be better organized and studied in deep as a “thematic nucleus” with its roots and its consequences for youth ministry.

1. The relation between the communitarian and personal level

Accompaniment and discernment are the focuses of the third and fourth chapter within the second part of the FD (91-113). These paragraphs from the FD cast new light on these themes compared to the respective paragraphs of the IL (106-136), because the Church has been put at the center as the home of accompaniment and environment for discernment. It is interesting, indeed, to see the double move in the external and internal order of these two chapters in comparison with the IL: there discernment came before accompaniment, while in the FD it becomes clear that we accompany to discern, and that the goal of accompaniment is discernment; the IL, furthermore, proposed the personal dimension first, and then the communitarian one, of both accompaniment and discernment, while the Synodal Assembly reversed this perspective, integrating the personal dimension within the communitarian one.

I’m just kidding here, but let me say that we moved by a more “jesuitic” approach to a more “salesian” one! Indeed, our *Frame of Reference* goes exactly in this direction: it address the accompaniment of the environment first, and then accompaniment at the group and personal level. Visually, they are like three concentric circles.

1. The prophecy of fraternity in pastoral organization: from offices to projects

The key to understanding the ongoing ecclesial renovation is the “missionary synodality” (cfr. FD 115-127). This perspective was the answer to the question on the model of the Church expressed in the first chapter within the third part of the IL (138-143). Young people, with their presence and their word, reopened the *Dossier* on the synodality within the Church in the Third Millennium: n. 118 of the FD is the key to reading the whole FD and to understanding the journey in front of us in the Third Millennium.

Concretely, this makes us reflect on the way we work together as YM/MA delegates: n. 209 of the IL invited us to journey *Towards an integrated pastoral care* and n. 141 of FD demands us to pass *From fragmentation to integration*. In the Dioceses, and even in some Bishops’ Conferences, these ones are dramatically current issues. Because the specialization and atomization of our *ministries* risk to destroy the *pastoral* unity of the Church. They are the great challenges to face for a true “Institutional conversion” (cfr. IL 198).

1. Renovating the idea and the praxis of the oratory starting from the “oratorian criterion”

The oratory and the oratorian criterion really are our treasure, a specific gift that we keep in our hearts and which we are called to share with all the Church. For us it is clear that “oratory” means transforming the Church in a home for the young people, as beautifully phrased by FD 138:

Only a pastoral approach capable of renewal on the basis of care for relationships and the quality of the Christian community will be significant and attractive for the young.  The Church will thus be able to present herself to them as a welcoming home, characterized by a family atmosphere built on trust and confidence.  The longing for fraternity, which emerged so many times as the Synod listened to the young, asks the Church to be “a home for many peoples, a mother for all peoples” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,*288): pastoral ministry has the task of realizing in history the Church’s universal maternity through concrete and prophetic gestures of joyful, daily welcome that make her a home for the young.

In this sense, after clarifying what we mean by “oratorian criterion” (cfr. art. 40 of our *Constitutions*), the oratory is also presented as a specific pastoral context. It was mentioned in n. 180 of IL and it appears again in n. 143 of the FD, where we are asked to “bring more dynamism” to the oratory, so to make it a privileged tool for “a Church who goes forth”. How to do so? How do we imagine the oratory of the III Millennium?

1. Regaining a renewed youthful dynamism

The first chapter within the second part of both the IL (74-84) and the FD (63-76) address the distinctive trait of youth as a specific time of one’s life: specifically the IL from a biblical point of view – often quoted during the Synod’s Assembly – and the FD from a Christological, anthropological and pedagogical point of view. These two chapters, if read together, help us understand that the Synod really is a call to the Church to rediscover within herself and her action a renewed youthful dynamism and her own youth!

Also this one is really a “generative thematic nucleus” of great interest, especially in Europe where lately we are quite depressed from a social, ecclesial and pastoral point of view! Much humiliated, but not so humble!

Let us not forget that the article 10 of our Constitutions states that Don Bosco did not work only for and with the young people, but that his mission is characterized by a true “youthful dynamism”. This means that Don Bosco learned by the dynamics of youth the style of accompanying young people!

1. A co-responsible and virtuous planning

The theme of pastoral planning has not emerged that strongly in the Synodal Assembly. It was more present in the contributions sent by the Bishops’ Conferences.

IL nn. 206-208 raised the double issue, strongly highlighted, of the pastoral improvisation and incompetence on the one hand, and the difficult relation between extraordinary events and ordinary life on the other hand. The two issues were presented in a very clear and precise manner.

In the FD only the second issued has been addressed, at n. 142. However, the first one remains a dramatic issue in the Church: the lack of expertise in planning, as a consequence of our ineptitude to teamwork, is at the basis of many failures in youth ministry. We are not always able to create a collaborative and co-responsible environment, and we replace it willingly with a hierarchical approach that at this point is no more accepted by young generations (cfr. “clericalism” as described in IL 199), creating an environment of distance and discouragement. It was very clear to everybody in the Synod that the young people are not going to accept anymore a hierarchical and pyramidal system in the Church!

1. Becoming aware of anthropological and cultural challenges

The fourth chapter of the IL (51-63) remains unequalled in describing the six anthropological and cultural challenges that we are called to address in our time: body, affectivity and sexuality; new inquiring paradigms and the search for truth; the anthropological effects of the digital world; disaffection with institutions and new forms of participation; a decision-making paralysis in an over-proliferation of proposals; beyond secularization.

In the FD all these challenges are considered and addressed in different moments and in an unsystematic manner. All the six challenges are presented there too, with different underlining and in-depth analysis.

For us it is clear that these challenges shape the reality where the ecclesial mission is called to act today: these challenges must be studied and analyzed in depth in every context where we are present. Every person who takes care of young people is called to address them and consider them. We need seminars, study, in-depth analysis, in order not be left estranged from time and history!

1. Rehabilitating liturgy in a convincing manner

On the one hand, the synodal journey started without considering adequately this theme, so to address its rehabilitation. On the other hand, liturgy is the first form of ecclesial communication! Not only within the Church, but also as an expression visible to everyone.

The issue was not raised in the introductory phase of the Synod (the *Preparatory Document*). Then, in the phase of listening to the young people the theme of liturgy emerged (cfr. IL 69). Together with the numbers of IL referring somehow to liturgy (72, 178, 184, 192), there are some numbers expressly devoted to this theme (187-189). Here many important points are raised.

N. 51 of the FD – entitled *The desire for living liturgy* – is entirely devoted to the liturgical theme. Then, in the FD, just like in the IL, there are three numbers directly devoted to liturgy (134-136).

Let us not forget that «liturgical experience is the principal resource for Christian identity» (FD 51) and that liturgy is an irreplaceable resource for youth ministry. Because it enables us to taste the value of silence, contemplation, gratuity and prayer. Liturgy tells the primacy of grace in our life. That’s not a small thing!

1. Privileged care to poor and abandoned young people

Both in the phase of listening (cfr. IL 41-50: *In the throwaway culture*; IL 166-171: *Closeness and support in situations of discomfort and marginalization)* and in the phase of the *Synodal assembly* the need to give more to those who have received less has been put into the foreground. It is a very Salesian underlining, that we appreciate very much.

It is sufficient to read some numbers of the FD to check this: migrants (25-28 e 147), abuses (29-31), various forms of vulnerability (40-44), wounded young people (67).

How could this attention find some space in the proposals and initiatives of our Provinces? How can we better concentrate on these “natural beneficiaries” of our Salesian mission? How are we today “signs and bearers of the God’s love” for the poorest among the young people?

1. The redemption of the adults and the qualification of the companions

The synodal journey has been in some respects humiliating for us, adults, and for the whole Church.

We started this journey convinced to be called to accompany young people to faith, to awaken in them the passion for Jesus, to be called by God to find new ways for the evangelization of the young. We had this idea in mind: “We are living a Christian life, now we have just to bring young people back here”. The synodal journey highlighted in many ways that the situation is quite different (it is enough to read IL 174 to understand it!).

Very often the problem is not the young people, it is us: adulterated adults and “adultescent” (adolescent-adults), therefore, insignificant adults; watered-down Christians, more post-Christians than disciples of Jesus; a too bureaucratic Church, able to tell everybody what he/she has to do, but unable to walk together with joy as family of recognizing her own fragilities. Many young people walked away from us adults, from us Christians, from us Church because they have not met in us a living holiness, a good, beautiful, true, attractive life.

Here is the issue of the quality of the adults, of the formation of those who are meant to accompany the young people. Many proposals, interventions and complaints were devoted to this theme in the synodal journey.

It is enough to mention some references to the profile and the formation of those who are meant to accompany the young people: IL 130-132 (*The qualities of mentors*) and FD 101-103 (*Quality accompaniers*), even without entering the complex and concluding chapter within the third part of the FD (FD 157-164: *Integral formation*).

1. Creating adequate environments for discernment

The synodal journey started with the idea that we need to accompany young people in their journey of vocational discernment and then we became aware that the Church herself needs to enter into the rhythm of vocational discernment if she wants to understand her mission in history today. This means that the Church herself is called to assume the *habitus* of discernment in her own way of thinking, planning and implementing her mission. On this topic one may read n. 1-2,4,73,137-139 of the IL. Just like n. 62,104-105,110-113 of the FD. Please let me quote the n. 124 of the FD, which is focused on this topic, because it touches the theme of the exercise of the authority as a service in favor of communitarian discernment:

The experience of “walking together” as the People of God helps us to understand more and more deeply the sense of authority as service.  Pastors need to have the capacity to increase collaboration in witness and mission and to accompany processes of joint discernment so as to interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith and under the guidance of the Spirit, with all the members of the community contributing, starting with those on the margins.  Church leaders with these capacities need a specific formation for synodality.  In this regard, it would seem desirable to devise joint formation courses for young lay people, young religious and seminarians, especially where matters like the exercise of authority or collaborative ministry are concerned.

1. Forming young people by forming ourselves together with them

For the Salesian Congregation and our youth ministry, perhaps, the two major provocations emerging from the Synod concern the accompaniment of young people toward a Church characterized by a “missionary solidarity” where everybody is called to be a subject of the mission, that it is always entrusted to the Church as a whole and never exclusively to a limited group of her members.

All this was generated by the powerful intuition included in the introduction and in the first chapter within the third part of the FD (FD 115-127). Such premises require, then, a specific formation for the mission and for adult life.

In this sense, it is important for us to refer to numbers 160 and 161 of the FD in order to discern what we are called to offer as Congregation and as Provinces in view of the formation of the young people for the mission. N. 160 invites to establish «centers of formation for the evangelization, aimed at the young» and n. 161 demands a true ecclesial mobilization able to offer to those young people who are interested in it, some time devoted to the maturation of Christian adult life, that

should involve prolonged detachment from habitual environments and relationships, and it should be built around at least three indispensable elements: an experience of fraternal life shared with older formators that is essential, simple and respectful of the common home; an apostolic proposal that is strong and significant, to be lived together; an offer of spirituality rooted in prayer and sacramental life.  In this way all the necessary ingredients are in place for the Church to be able to offer the young who wish it a profound experience of vocational discernment.

Here it is about our Salesian houses, works and our religious communities. We are called to be creative and innovative, involving our confreres, communities, lay people and young people in a project of common formation. Is this an utopia or a prophecy? How can we start some “pilot experience”?

1. The vocational qualification of youth ministry

This was the focus of the Synod and also the main urgency to be addressed: to pass from a youth ministry of entertainment to a vocational youth ministry. Such a perspective puts us in a momentous change!

There are multiple references to this: at the center there is the second chapter of the second part of both the IL (85-105) and the FD (77-90). There are too many references and it is not possible to make an adequate synthesis here, because the theme is strategic and fundamental, from both a theoretical and a practical point view: thinking vocation as the expression personalizing the life of faith of each baptized powers up a series of long-term consequences. This topic would be sufficient for a week seminar of study!

Specifically, one may start with n. 139 (*Vocational animation of pastoral ministry*) and n. 140 (*A pastoral vocational ministry for the young*) of the FD.

This, actually, seems to me to be the fundamental “generative thematic nucleus” powered up by the synodal movement of the last three years.

1. Need to work together – networking

The theme of the “missionary solidarity” is central and goes in two directions: both inward – i.e. in the ecclesial contexts and in the collaboration between us – and outward – i.e. involving and collaborating with all those who care about young people.

Many times, we discover – with great sadness and shame – that it is easier with third (civilian and social) partners than between us (Province, other Church entities, our offices and our delegates).

The need for working together requires strong relational virtues and a great ability to involve the others. The numbers 204-205 of the IL properly raised this issue.

The Synod recognized, then, that the Church has to enter into a true dialogue with the territory where she lives, for a real exchange of gifts (FD 132), and that the preparation of new mentors should include the specific skills of networking (FD 159) and team-working in any field (FD 103.124.163).

1. The empathic listening to young people

The synodal debate, from the beginning, recognized that the journey of preparation denounced a Church “owing a deeper listening”. Pope Francis himself said it in his opening speech of the Synod:

The journey of preparation denounced a Church “*owing a deeper listening*” also to young people, who often feel that the Church misunderstands their originality, does not welcome them for what they really are, and sometimes even rejects them.

The issue of listening is more radical than we could think: it is rooted in the inability to listen to God and His Spirit that continuously speaks and acts in history. It is the fruit of that “spiritual superficiality” and of that “spiritual chasm” of a Church that speaks too much: presumptuous enough to learn something from someone; so proud to think herself as the only owner of truth.

Many paragraphs of both the IL and the FD refer to listening: it is sufficient to look at the fifth chapter within the first part of the IL (64-72) and to the first chapter within the first part of the FD (6-9) to verify it. Listening «is the manner in which God himself relates to his people» (FD 6) and therefore it has a theological, before having a pedagogical and pastoral value! Many interventions reaffirmed that we are called to rediscover, through listening, the empathic ability to leave our point of view so to enter in the point of view of the other person, looking at and feeling the things as his/her heart does. How are we doing it in our Provinces? With our confreres? With the lay people? With the young people?

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**SECOND MOMENT**

**PRIORITIZING AND CONNECTING**

**Entering the synodal process with mind, heart and hands**

After verifying if, in your opinion, there are other thematic nucleuses that have not been taken into consideration, please try to make the following three steps, at the personal level and then with your group.

1. **PRIORITIZING**
* **Prioritize the 15 “generative thematic nuclei”, starting from your role as YM/MA delegate and from your educative and pastoral sensitivity**
* **Share your ideas with the other members of your group and seek to agree a common order of nuclei**
* **Express the reasons for your choice, trying to explain them adequately**

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1. **CONNECTING**
* **Try to group together the 15 “generative thematic nuclei” in consistent groups (clusters), looking for connections, convergence and similarities between them, and their internal order**
* **Share with the others: try to reduce the 15 “generative thematic nucleuses” until you come to organize them in a few consistent groups (clusters)**
* **Try to express the reasons for your choice, explaining them adequately**

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This third step you can take it at home, together with your Provincial team-equip for YM/MA.

1. **CHOOSING**
* **Try to imagine how you could involve your team/equip in the discernment for the YM/MA of your Province in relation with the two steps you made before.**
* **When you go back home, try to find a way to involve them and to grow up with them: try to understand together from which nucleus it is important to start in order to improve, innovate and create something new in your ministry**
* **Always try, in each step you take, to express the reasons for your choice, explaining them in a proper manner. Otherwise, they will be but arbitrary choices.**

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