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Press Conference to present the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis, “Christus vivit” dedicated to the young

At 11.30 this morning, in the John Paul II Hall of the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis dedicated to young people, “Christus vivit”, the outcome of the fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment* (3 to 28 October 2018).

The speakers in the press conference were: His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, general secretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops; H.E. Msgr. Fabio Fabene, under secretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops; Dr. Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Dicastery for Communication of the Holy See; Ms. Laphidil Oppong Twumasi, head of the youth group of the Ghanaian community of the diocese of Vicenza; and Professor Alessio Piroddi Lorrai, second level secondary school teacher (diocese of Rome).

In his intervention, Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri defined the Apostolic Exhortation as “a milestone in the Synod path”, and explained that “the Document published today will constitute for the near future a *magna charta* of youth and vocational pastoral ministry in the various ecclesial communities, all marked – although in different ways, depending on the different latitudes – by a profound transformation in the condition of youth”.

“The first aspect of the Apostolic Exhortation is its title: *Christus vivit*”, he remarked. “We all know that the beginning of an ecclesiastical document usually offers an overall hermeneutical key to the text. The fundamental message that the Holy Father wishes to transmit, to the young and, with them, to all of us, is that Jesus Christ does not belong only to the past, but also to the present and the future, because He is the eternal Living One. Every generation of believers discovers in Christ a contemporary and a travelling companion”.

“A second aspect of the Apostolic Exhortation is its Marian nature”, he continued, “as clearly shown by the Holy Father’s symbolic decision to sign the document at Loreto, in the house of Mary, this 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord”.

A third aspect that I must highlight is the style of the Document and its intended recipients. It is a post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation that explicitly assumes the form of a “letter” (see 3). A letter addressed first and foremost

to the young: therefore, on many occasions the Pope addresses them directly, using the informal “tu”. It is the same style characteristic of the Holy Father in his encounters with the young: a style made up of closeness, frankness, simplicity, tenderness and warmth”.

“In any case”, he concluded, “this letter is addressed “to the entire People of God, pastors and faithful alike, since all of us are challenged and urged to reflect both on the young and for the young” (3). Therefore: all the young, but not only the young. For this reason, there are many paragraphs in which the Pope proposes “more general considerations for the Church’s discernment” (*ibid*), aware that the issue of the young relates to us all, and that adults are called at the same time to give and to receive from the young”.

Bishop Fabio Fabene went on to highlight some specific content of the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, commenting first that it was “is significant that the publication of this document takes place on the anniversary of the death of Saint John Paul II, the pope who wrote the first *Letter to the Youth of the World* in 1985 on the occasion of International Youth Year”.

Msgr. Fabene went on to remark that “*Christus vivit* is distinguished by its strong Christological nature and by the distinctive note of love that resounds throughout. The Holy Father reminds every young person that “God loves you”. ... The whole document is inspired by the trust that the Pope places in the young (and by the repeated invitation he addresses to them to fix their hope in Christ, so that no-one may take it away from them”.

Among the many elements that could be underlined, under-secretary Fabene noted first “the relationship that the Holy Father shows between the young and the ‘entire People of God, pastors and faithful’... There does not exist a ‘Church of the young’, nor does there exist a ‘Church with the young or for the young’. There exists a single ‘body’, the Church, of which the young are living and creative members, who contribute, with their very belonging, to the well being of all and to the mission of the proclamation of the Gospel and of the beauty of life in Christ on behalf of the entire ecclesial community”.

In harmony with the Fathers gathered last October in Rome, Pope Francis reaffirms decisively “the importance of synodality in the Church. He underlines that youth pastoral ministry itself must be synodal and therefore capable of giving form to an effective ‘walking together’. There emerges from the text almost a proposal for alliance that the Holy Father addresses to young people: an invitation to collaborate to build a better future, in particular in relation to those areas identified by the Synod Assembly as crucial points, that run through the life of the Church and of society: the digital environment, migrants, the issue of abuse of minors”.

With reference to the collaboration Pope Francis asks of the young with regard to the theme of migration, Msgr. Fabene explained that “it tends towards favouring a mentality that proposes a balanced approach to the issue. Indeed, they are asked in particular ‘not to play into the hands of those who would set them against other young people, newly arrived in their countries, and who would encourage them to view the latter as a threat, and not possessed of the same inalienable dignity as every other human being”.

“Among the various contributions disseminated in the text that the young can offer,” he concluded, “I wish to highlight one more: the communication to other young people of the beauty of their own personal experience of encounter with Christ. Beloved of Him and wishing to bear witness to the Gospel with their own life, they are invited to make Jesus the Saviour known to all, also to those who seem to be the most distant and most indifferent, up to the extreme existential peripheries”.

Ms. Laphidil Oppong Twumasi, head of the youth group of the Ghanaian community in the diocese of Vicenza, Italy, who collaborated with the redaction of the pre-Synodal Document, of which the Exhortation has drawn entire paragraphs, expressed her satisfaction that the Exhortation is not “merely a manual of doctrine and teachings”, but rather “a guide and a set of suggestions, something that may be referred to when we feel a little lost. It does not have pre-packaged answers to our questions. ... It is up to us as young people in the Church, involved in youth pastoral care, in the parishes, in the various ecclesial aggregations, in pastoral units in general, to get up and to get busy. We must pick up the final Document of the Synod and this Apostolic Exhortation, extrapolate the themes and issues closest to us, and adapt them to our needs”.

She continued, “This tells me that there is a mutual need, that there must be closeness between the ‘adult’ Church and the ‘young’ Church, as we young people have strength, enthusiasm, charism, but we need experience and the knowledge of adults who can show us the way and help us to channel our gifts”.

Professor Alessio Piroddi Lorrain approached the text from the point of view of his profession as a teacher, a catechist and an educator, observing that in the heart of all there is the same battle between the attitude of the rich young man and that of Peter, and that for the Church and for whoever is engaged in education, it becomes a struggle between a culture that wants us to be orphans and therefore without roots, and in the end, alone.

“How can we respond to this challenge?” he asked, going on to focus on “just one of the indications of the Holy Father, among the many present in the text: ‘to make a home’. Parishes and schools must know how to offer a place in which one may feel at home, freely loved and at the same time accompanied, guided, even corrected, but with the desire that each person bear his or her best fruit thanks to this ‘home’. Pope Francis writes that the Church is young not when she follows the latest fashion, but when she returns to her original source, to He Who makes all things new”.

Finally, the prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, Dr. Paolo Ruffini, focused on several points of the Exhortation relating to communication in its broadest sense.

“The first things I would like to say is that this Exhortation bears witness to the truth – also communicative – of the Synod journey of the Church. A journey that does not finish here, but continues; it does not stop but instead goes ahead precisely because the oldest are able to pass on their witness to the youngest”.

The second point “regards the need for us communicators not to mistake a part for the whole, ending up by giving a false representation of reality. In our case the young, and the Church. In this too, the Exhortation seems to use very clear words in assuming the point of view, the overall perspective of the young, who on the one hand want to see neither a silent and timid Church, nor one always at war over two or three themes that are an obsession; and on the other ask in turn to be seen, understood, in their complex entirety, which is made up of dreams, of ideals, of drama, of suffering”.

Thirdly, the prefect commented that “the digital world is one of social and political engagement and active citizenship, and it can facilitate the circulation of independent information providing effective protection for the most vulnerable and publicizing violations of their rights. In many countries, internet and social networks already represent a firmly established forum for reaching and involving young people, not least in pastoral initiatives and activities’ (ChV 87) but it is also ‘one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, up to the extreme case of the dark web’ (ChV 88). ‘These closed circuits facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate. The proliferation of fake news is the expression of a culture that has lost its sense of truth and bends the facts to suit particular interests”.

“The Pope counters this with a different way of living not only the internet, but all languages. Also that of silence, of contemplation. Art, music, sport. Charity, social commitment. Politics. Turning perspective around. Reconnecting real and virtual”.

“Even in terms of abuse, the fourth issue I would like to talk about”, he said, “the Exhortation invites transparent and true communication. Complete, not partial. It asks us for gratitude towards those who have had and who have the courage to denounce the evil suffered, helping the Church to be aware and to react decisively. He reiterates the commitment for the adoption of rigorous prevention measures to impede the repetition of unacceptable crimes. He asks for young people to put into play their capacity to renew, to redeem, to demand consistency and witness”.

“The last thing I would like to underline is the Pope’s insistence, in the Exhortation, on intergenerational communication as the key to the renewal of the Church. It is with this awareness that Francis invites the young not to remain as observers, but to get involved, to get their hands dirty, to have faith and to dream; not to abstract themselves from reality, but to change it also through their capacity to communicate, to become popular

leaders. 'Do not leave it to others to be protagonists of change!'"
