

## A NEW APOLOGETICS: BISHOP BARRON'S YOUTH SYNOD INTERVENTION

Jesus' encounter with two erstwhile disciples on the road to Emmaus provides a beautiful template for the Church's work of accompaniment across the ages. The Lord walks with the couple, even as they move away from Jerusalem, which is to say, spiritually speaking, in the wrong direction. He does not commence with a word of judgment, but rather with attention and quiet encouragement. Jesus continues to listen, even as they recount, accurately enough, all the data having to do with him. But then, knowing that they lack the interpretive pattern that will make sense of the data, he upbraids them ("Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!"), and then he lays out the form ("beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures."). He listens with love, and he speaks with force and clarity.

Innumerable surveys and studies over the past ten years have confirmed that young people frequently cite intellectual reasons when asked what has prompted them to leave the Church or lose confidence in it. Chief among these are the convictions that religion is opposed to science or that it cannot stand up to rational scrutiny, that its beliefs are outmoded, a holdover from a primitive time, that the Bible is unreliable, that religious belief gives rise to violence, and that God is a threat to human freedom. I can verify, on the basis of twenty years of ministry in the field of online evangelization, that these concerns are crucial stumbling blocks to the acceptance of the faith among young people.

What is vitally needed today, as an aspect of the accompaniment of the young, is a renewed apologetics and catechesis. I realize that in some circles within the Church, the term apologetics is suspect, since it seems to indicate something rationalistic, aggressive, condescending. I hope it is clear that arrogant proselytizing has no place in our pastoral outreach, but I hope it is equally clear that an intelligent, respectful, and culturally-sensitive explication of the faith ("giving a reason for the hope that is within us") is certainly a desideratum. There is a consensus among pastoral people that, at least in the West, we have experienced a crisis in catechesis these last fifty years. That the faith has not been effectively communicated was verified by the [most recent Religious Landscape Study](#), from the Pew Research Center in America. It indicated that, among the major religions, Catholicism was second to last in passing on its traditions. Why has it been the case, over the past several decades, that young people in our own Catholic secondary schools have read Shakespeare in literature class, Homer in Latin class, Einstein in physics class, but, far too often, superficial texts in religion? The army of our young who claim that religion is irrational is a bitter fruit of this failure in education.

Therefore, what would a new apologetics look like? First, it would arise from the questions that young people spontaneously ask. It would not be imposed from above but would rather emerge organically from below, a response to the yearning of the mind and the heart. Here it would take a cue from the method of St. Thomas Aquinas. The austere texts of the great theological master in point of fact emerged from the lively give-and-take of the *quaestiones disputatae* that

stood at the heart of the educational process in the medieval university. Thomas was deeply interested in what young people were really asking. So should we.

Secondly, a new apologetics should look deep and long into the question of the relationship between religion and science. For many people today, scientific and rational are simply equivalent or co-extensive terms. And therefore, since religion is obviously not science, it must be irrational. Without for a moment denigrating the sciences, we have to show that there are non-scientific and yet eminently rational paths that conduce toward knowledge of the real. Literature, drama, philosophy, the fine arts—all close cousins of religion—not only entertain and delight; they also bear truths that are unavailable in any other way. A renewed apologetics ought to cultivate these approaches.

Thirdly, our apologetics and catechesis should walk the *via pulchritudinis*, as Pope Francis characterized it in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Especially in our postmodern cultural context, commencing with the true and the good—what to believe and how to behave—is often counter-indicated, since the ideology of self-invention is so firmly established. However, the third transcendental, the beautiful, often proves a more winsome, less threatening, path. And part of the genius of Catholicism is that we have so consistently embraced the beautiful—in song, poetry, architecture, painting, sculpture, and liturgy. All of this provides a powerful matrix for evangelization. And as Hans Urs von Balthasar argued, the most compelling beauty of all is that of the saints. I have found a good deal of evangelical traction in presenting the lives of these great friends of God, somewhat in the manner of a baseball coach who draws young adepts into the game by showing them the play of some of its greatest practitioners.

When Jesus explained himself to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, their hearts began to burn within them. The Church must walk with young people, listen to them with attention and love, and then be ready intelligently to give a reason for the hope that is within us. This, I trust, will set the hearts of the young on fire.

## **BISHOP MARK EDWARDS'S YOUTH SYNOD INTERVENTION**

Holy Father, sisters and brothers,

We are, as Pope Francis suggested to the Italian Bishops in 2015, entering a new era. I would like to suggest an image for intergenerational encounter and the spirituality and values of this new age in western culture. There is a monument outside of Ars in France. My French is very limited but the story it told, as I understood it, was that this marked the spot where St John Vianney met the shepherd who was to take him to Ars. The newly appointed Parish Priest, or Cure, of Ars had set out perhaps from Lyons, with his few possessions on his back and could not find the town. He convinced the shepherd to take him to Ars with the promise: "If you show me the way to Ars, I will show you the way to heaven."

We stand at the edge of a new era. We knew how to be Church in the past, how to pass on the faith and how to be effective missionaries. At least some of what we did isn't effective anymore. How we are to be Church, how we are to be missionary and pass on the Good News in the new era is not clear to us. We don't know how to enter in.

Young people are closer to being natives in this new era than we are. They more instinctively grasp the lay of this land with its values of equality, inclusion, respect, authenticity and the integration of multiple aspects of life such as body and soul.

My suggestion is that fertile intergenerational encounter, in my country at least, might involve us saying to our young people: "You show us the lay of this land, the way to the place where you dwell, and we will show you the way to God."

Just as St John Vianney really lived in Ars and didn't just treat it as a version of the previous parish where he had worked, so we are to inhabit this new age. This is the country God has given us to dwell in.

This epoch, God's gift to us, has its tension and makes compromises. For example, being authentic for some people might look like being powerful or wealthy which is in conflict, potentially at least, with the desire for equality and inclusion.

Being Church, then, is to accompany the young in this new place and to lead them to and to support them to places where they can encounter Jesus. When they meet Jesus, he will change their hearts. And this will enable them to discover appropriate ways to live fruitfully and really humanly and as effective Church in the tensions of this new age.

There is much more that could be said but this one more thing for now.

St John Vianney, pray for us.

## **JONATHAN LEWIS'S YOUTH SYNOD INTERVENTION**

Dear Holy Father, Synod Fathers, and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I would like to begin with a question: how many young people do you know by name?

When I was in University there was a priest who knew everyone by name. My freshman year he learned my name and invited me to begin spiritual direction. We would meet in the evenings and spend an hour walking together. Like a modern day Road to Emmaus, Christ was made known to me in those late-night conversations.

This priest was one of many religious and lay mentors who knew me by name and empowered me to be a missionary disciple. Each one of us had spiritual mentors when we were young. Yet most young Catholics today do not.

Young people are leaving the Church for different reasons but the absence of spiritual friendships and mentors in our families, schools, and parishes lies at the heart of this crisis of faith.

Some young people, like my friend Sarah, leave the Church because they no longer trust the Church. This summer, the United States has again been scandalized by the sexual abuse of Church leaders. Young people are asking for mentors, not who scandalize the Church with sin, but who scandalize the world with holiness.

Some, like my friend Matthew, leave the Church because they have serious questions that have never been answered. Young people are asking for mentors who listen to their questions and provide serious answers that offer a coherent Christian worldview.

Others, like my friend Adam, leave the Church because they find the Church irrelevant. The Church does not speak about their interests and experience. Young people are asking for mentors to befriend them and inculcate the faith into their lives.

Spiritual friends and mentors are urgently needed today since young people trust personal relationships more than institutions. "Modern man [still] listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if it does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses" (Pope Saint Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41).

Young people are not asking for a new event or 'program' but a relationship with "a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, I).

This is why our first task is to offer to young people an encounter with Jesus Christ through the witness of each baptized Christian. We must re-propose the pedagogy of Christ, calling young people by name, sharing the kerygma, and accompanying them on a journey of lifelong missionary discipleship in a spiritual family.

Our Church history shows this pedagogy in action. In every generation Christ raises up saints who make more saints. Paul helped Timothy, Ignatius helped Francis Xavier, and Louis and Zélie

helped Therese. Still today, the missionary formation of young people must be built on a long-term apprenticeship in Christian living that no textbook or technology can replace.

Spiritual mentorship was the method of Jesus, the method of the saints, and should be our method today.

Investing in spiritual mentorship will renew our Church because in mentoring relationships, both mentor and apprentice grow together and learn from the gifts of the other.

I urge this Synod to propose practical ways for local churches to implement the call of Pope Francis to “initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this ‘art of accompaniment’” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169).

Churches often ask parishioners about how they are being good stewards of their ‘time, talent, and treasure’. Local churches, too, must start with this examination of conscience:

- How many hours do clergy and laity spend each week mentoring young people?
- Do our Sacramental preparation programs provide long-term spiritual mentorship?
- Do we invest financially in the formation of lay mentors?
- How many young people do I know by name?

Saint Oscar Romero said: “you say you love the poor, name them”. I ask you today: “you say you love young people, name them”.