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YOUTH + MISSION = A FUTURE OF HOPE

The Synod on Youth

— Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment —

The world of youth has always been a world that has provoked as much as it has fascinated me. Today it continues to be an attractive, urgent, unsatisfactory and at times an embarrassing world for the Church as well as for all the other areas of our history and of existence. So it was with joy and not a little curiosity that I came to Rome to attend the Seminar on “Youth and Mission”. The event was my very first experience of SEDOS and I may say that it greatly exceeded my expectations.

Although I belong to Y Generation (those born between 1980 and 2000), I sometimes felt a little "out of date" as I listened to the Speakers talk about the youth of today. Technology, science, perception of time and even questions concerning the faith, life, morals, basic values — which are all constantly being re-evaluated in today's frenetic time of radical change. Every possible and impossible avenue is explored, as the first Speaker, Emilia Palladino, Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University, presented the world of young people today, on the theme: “Contemporary Youth Culture — between law and the lack of it”.

Bruna Zaltron, SCM, Professor at the Claretianum, showed us the beauty and despair of the young generations from the psychological angle, in her talk: “Generated by Life to Correspond to Love”. Our young people are at the centre of a society living out an “anthropological crisis”, in the unreal delirium of man's omnipotence. Humanity has simply forgotten the importance of generational relationships in which others help one to become what one could not have become on one's own.

That day the working groups concentrated on our own frailty, our limitations and our inability to change. Indeed, it is not only the young people who must grow up, mature, and "deflate", as one likes to say.

The next day opened with a rather uncomfortable topic. Paul Raj, Assistant General of the Congregation of Montfort Brothers of Saint Gabriel, spoke to us about: “The Role and Challenges of Evangelization for the Youth in the Multicultural and Pluralistic World of Today”. *“Our responsibility for evangelization has changed: it's no longer talking, but listening. It is no longer speaking about what I have read or what the Church says, it is talking about my beliefs, my convictions, and personal experience of God. What if I have none?”*.

Michael Papenkorcht, Institute for World Evangelization, (ICPE, Germany), took us a step further. With contagious enthusiasm he spoke about the role of lay missionaries today, stating clearly that only "the evangelized will be able to evangelize". It was marvellous but, at the same time, terrifying to hear that to spread the Gospel today, we do not need to be an excellent theologian, but need to have an ardent heart and that, before changing our structures, it would be better to change ourselves.

Towards the end of our stay in Ariccia we received a real gift from a group of young religious missionaries whom we had invited to join the round table on: “My Fascination to be a Missionary Today?”. They shared with us their enthusiasm for the mission today. They reminded us of the

importance of taking time to discover and to get to know young people. And they rightly stressed that to be a Formator, also means to let oneself be changed and challenged by the young, to move about and be constantly called into question.

As Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, our Guest Speaker, said: "We must develop a different mentality and believe in the future. Yes, one must keep the past in mind, but we must also dare to be creative in the future and let life flow naturally (circulate, advance, ebb). This is the only pathway to fulfil what God said to his people in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you are,... plans for your welfare and not for evil, to give you a FUTURE and a HOPE" (Chapter 29:11).

May this excellent Seminar help us all to learn to pause, to listen to God more carefully in our young people and to go on mission with them, for a better world and a future full of hope.