

The world of youth today: who are they and what do they seek?

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Introduction

I have been asked to present, within a very short time, a profile of today's youth from a sociological and psychological point of view, and to point out how they can be affected by ideological movements and where they stand in relation to the Church. This is a vast and ambitious programme that I shall try to synthesize as much as possible.

I shall speak of youth by drawing on my experience of psychoanalysis and psychiatry in the Western world. One must always beware of making hasty generalisations when talking about young people, and you can confirm or add to my remarks according to your cultural backgrounds. However, we can identify common traits in the psychology and sociology of young people all over the world. The impact of the economic model presented by liberalism, that of globalization, of changes in marriage unions and families, of projections of sexuality, the impact of music, television, cinema and the internet, all influence and standardize juvenile mentality considerably in most countries.

These young people have weak points, but they are still receptive, ready to help and generous. They are not burdened by ideologies like previous generations were. They seek authentic relationships and are in search of truth. However, when they do not find it in reality, they hope to find it within themselves. This kind of attitude predisposes them to depend on feelings and on individualism and to put social ties and their sense of what is in the general interest at their service. The social context is not conducive to the development of a real spiritual dimension. However, they are ready to dedicate themselves to any demanding causes that may arise.

1 - Who are they?

The young people that concern us in this study are between the ages of 18 and the early thirties. They are at the post-adolescence stage and want to become psychologically autonomous by trying to affirm their self. More precisely, they all have a need to be themselves and to stand back in order to assess their education and social influences. These young people might be relatively integrated socially in their studies or professional life, whereas some of them might be in precarious professional and personal situations: unemployment, psychological instability, disruptive behaviour and numerous life problems. They often express a desire to become more confident in themselves, and they wish to free themselves of doubts regarding existence and to lose their fear of the idea of emotional commitment. They sometimes request help from their parents but they feel awkward about it. Most of them continue to live with their parents[1], and others who move away remain dependant on their families. They often feel the need for support when faced with reality so that they can accept themselves, accept life and set to work[2] in the real world.

They also search for reasons for living in order to construct their existence. Most of them are relatively detached from religious concerns and they often acknowledge that they have not been informed or educated in this respect. Nevertheless, they are affected by the phenomenon of sects, terrorism and war, and that gives them a troubled and conflictive outlook on religion, in particular on Islam. Religion is attractive, but at the same time it is a cause of concern when it is represented

as a source of conflict in the world. This, however, is an error in interpretation because these conflicts are of political and economic origin. We still have much to learn about living in harmony with others. In short, their knowledge of the Christian faith and of the Church remains at the level of clichés and the intellectual reconstructions going around in society in television dramas and in the cinema.

In a society that, for various reasons, fosters doubt and cynicism, fear and helplessness, immaturity and childishness, some young people tend to stay at the level of primary gratification. They find it hard to be grown-up and mature. Maturity usually defines personalities who have managed to put in place the basic functions of their psychological selves and who are able to differentiate between their inner lives and their surroundings. Many young people who remain psychologically immature often have trouble making this distinction. What they feel and imagine often takes the place of the facts and reality of the outer world. This state of affairs is amplified and fed by the media psychology that stirs the contemporary mind, and by the virtual world created by video games and the internet. These things predispose them to living in an imaginary and virtual world without having learned to be in contact with reality. Reality tends to disappoint and depress them. They have a "play" approach to life and a need to celebrate, especially at the weekend, without being sure of what they are celebrating. They seek out places where they can mix with others and have sensations that give them the feeling that they are really living. It remains to be seen if these experiences create true relationships and contribute to the emotional and intellectual improvement of their personalities. They are relatively ambivalent in this regard because they want to enter reality and yet escape from it.

Young people today are just like those of previous generations: they are capable of generosity, solidarity and loyalty when faced with causes that motivate them. However, they have fewer social references and a weaker sense of belonging than their elders had. They are individualistic and they want to make their own choices without holding to any system of values, ideas or common laws. They want to borrow references from all over the place and to experiment with them in their way of life. They easily adapt to egalitarianism and tolerance, and are steeped in discourses and fashions from the media which actually serve as norms on which they build their characters. They can easily conform to fashion like sponges that soak it all up, rather than build their freedom upon reasons for living and loving. This explains the emotional fragility and the self-doubt with which they struggle. Their emotional lives display numerous doubts beginning with identity, sexual and family doubts. They are often confused about their feelings and cannot yet distinguish between an attraction of friendship and a homosexual tendency. The coeducational system that they have experienced since their childhood can, at the post-adolescent stage, complicate the man-woman relationship. Moreover, the large number of divorces today does not help them to have trust in others or in the future.

These personalities are the result of an education, a schooling and sometimes a catechesis that does not adequately form their intelligence. They were trained to use their emotions and feelings to the detriment of reason which embraces knowledge, memory and reflection. They are close to all possible sensations just like those experienced through drugs. Instead of saying, "I think, therefore I am", they, through their behaviour, say, "I have feelings, therefore I am reassured".

When they come across adults who really are adults, who remain so in their behaviour and know how to transmit life values, as does Pope John Paul II, then they listen to what they are being told about Christian experience in the hope that they will receive insights from it.

2 - A social context that fosters psychological dependence

We are in a very paradoxical environment that penetrates most areas of culture. We try to make small children autonomous beginning from the crèche and pre-school, and at the same time we have adolescents, and particularly post-adolescents, who have trouble dealing psychologically with letting go, although, when listening to them, you realise that this is something they want to do. In

order to free themselves from this handicap, they look for support so that they can lean on psychological, social and spiritual resources.

2.1 - A society that infantilises

Contemporary education produces individuals who are too attached to people and things. Even though they deny it, they are dependant people. During childhood, their desires and expectations were given such importance to the detriment of external reality and objective needs, that they end up thinking that everything can be manipulated according to their own subjective interests. Then, at the onset of adolescence, if they lack sufficient resources and inner stability, they try to develop dependant relationships in their group or couple relationships. If I have invented the term "baby couples"[3], it is to describe their affective economy which does not always differentiate between infantile sexuality and objective sexuality. They pass from attachment to parents to sentimental attachment while maintaining the same affective economy.

Education, with its legitimate concern to attend to the quality of relationships with the child, has been too centred on emotional well-being sometimes to the detriment of facts, knowledge, cultural codes and moral values, and this does not help young people to build their characters. It is more of a narcissistic expansion than real personal development. It often produces personalities that are certainly amenable and congenial, but sometimes also superficial and even trivial and that do not always have a sense of limits and reality. They can be brazen and sometimes over familiar, confusing private codes with social codes, forgetting all sense of hierarchy, authority, the sacred, and the standards and rules of "correct discourse". Some of them have not learned the rules for living with others, beginning with the rules of the road and including the ritualisation of family and social life.

The adults who have always gone out of their way to make sure they lack nothing are the cause now of young people thinking that all their desires must be satisfied, confusing them with needs. Desires are not there to be fulfilled: they are a source of inspiration. As these individuals have not had the experience of doing without, a situation in which desires are formed, they are undecided and unsure. They also have difficulty in allowing themselves to be different and in detaching themselves from their early points of reference in order to make their own lives. Growing up implies psychological separation, leaving one's childhood and adolescence behind. But this separation is difficult for many because the psychological space between parents and children are confused.

This testimony from Laurent, twenty-eight years old, married, father of one, is significant:

"I am classified as an adult but I don't recognise myself as such and I don't feel any concern for the world of adults. I have difficulty in accepting this dimension. For me, adults are my parents. I am in contradiction with myself. In my mind I am like a child or adolescent with terrible anxieties, while at the same time, the outer me is an adult and considered as such in the workplace. There is nothing in society to help us become adults."

It is also true that in idealising childhood and adolescence, society leads us to understand that there is no pleasure in growing up and becoming adults. In this case, it is difficult to free oneself from childhood means of gratification in order to reach for higher levels of fulfilment.

2 - 2 Longer life expectancy

Longer life expectancy would lead one to suppose that an individual had time to prepare and engage in life. Life expectancy now, more than in the past, creates equitable conditions for the possibility of remaining young, understanding this as a time of indecision, and even as a time when there is no clear distinction between oneself, others and facts, and there is also an absence of sexual differentiation while believing that most possibilities are still open. This hazy concept of life is inherent in adolescence, and it is even more worrying when it continues in post-adolescents who are so unsure of their motivations that they have no self confidence. Some of them suffer as a result and are even afraid of a measure of depersonalisation in their relations with others. Many just put it off and live in a provisional way not knowing if they will be able to continue what they started in

different areas of their lives. Others continue to live their youth as an end in itself and as an enduring state.

In fact, the youth of today are engaged in processes of maturing that demand more time and that are characterised by a "moratorium" condition, that is, a suspension of deadlines and obligations connected to the passage into adulthood. Some are not particularly interested in becoming adults[4], and they do not live their youth as a propaedeutical or introductory period before adulthood, but rather as a time that has its own inherent value. In the past, on the other hand, youth was a period lived in function of the future and of an autonomous existence: youth was a time of preparation. Nowadays, such a long drawn-out youth brings about some uncertainty in making life choices. Some prefer to postpone final decisions, to delay their entry into adult life and decisive commitments. As they do not question their independence problems, they do not feel obliged to make important choices. Moreover, a strong tendency to experiment can be seen in many spheres of life. Thus young people can easily leave their families, but they return and settle in after a failure or a difficulty. The main difference between this and preceding generations (who made precise choices with priorities) is the tendency to live various aspects of life at the same time, sometimes contradictory, and without prioritising their own need and values. Some young people today are very dependant on the need to experiment because, as things have not been passed down to them, they think that nothing is known about life and that everything has to be discovered and invented. This is why they often seem to be susceptible and to bend to the many requests being made today, regardless of whether they are negative or enriching.

2 - 3 Childhood shortened to give a longer adolescence

One of the paradoxes, and not the least, of our western societies is that while children are made to grow up too quickly, at the same time they are being encouraged to remain adolescents as long as possible![5]

Children themselves are rushed into adolescent behaviour before they have the psychological ability to behave in this way. They become precocious - and that is not a source of maturity - by skipping over the "psychic tasks" of childhood. This can be a handicap to their future independence. The numerous states of depression among many young people is one of the symptoms.

Post-adolescents themselves complain of a lack of inner and social support, especially those who have completed their lengthy studies and have arrived with their diplomas into firms where they have to hold responsibilities. There are 26-35 year-olds with a succession of periods of existential depression because they lack role models in adult life with which to try to shape their lives in harmony with reality.

The period of youth has always been characterised by a certain amount of immaturity. This is not new. There was a time when this could be compensated by society which was placed more in the world of adults and encouraged youth to grow up and join the realities of life. Today, on the contrary, not only does it give less support and let each one find their own way, but it also lets one think that it is possible to remain permanently in the early stages of life without having to work them out and to have certain experiences too early. We should know how to tell an adolescent who is adopting certain types of behaviour prematurely that these acts are not suitable for their age group and thus place them within the historic perspective of evolution and growth in maturity. This is how they acquire the maturity suited to their age.

3 - "Psychic tasks" to be attained

Over the past number of years we have witnessed some shifts in the way the juvenile personality develops. Except for some exceptions, most adolescents[6] pass through puberty and adolescence itself fairly well without undergoing real difficulties. On the other hand, the situation for post-adolescents from 22 to 30 years of age is often more delicate, being subjectively conflictive and wrought by psychological confusion that was seen and confronted during the preceding period of adolescence (18-22 years of age). Inner conflict is added to this tension between self-image and life.

3 - 1 Self-confidence

The need to know oneself and to have self-confidence is expected at this stage in life. However, under the pressure of questions not answered and of failures, they can feel challenged, and they suddenly realise that they are weakened because they are no longer sure that they are capable of being coherent with their past. They try to be themselves and become very sensitive to the part of themselves that is not genuine.

Post-adolescence psychological development depends mainly on the link between the psychological life and the environment. The latter can provoke and reactivate anxieties and inhibitions sometimes connected to a feeling of powerlessness that is translated into fear of not being able to grasp reality and, because of this, to show aggression towards themselves or towards the parent figures out in the adult world. This can also give rise to an anti-institution or anti-social attitude and can also present the problem of the ability to gauge oneself (to esteem or undervalue oneself), and of the need to be recognised by one's parents, particularly by one's father. The person can also remain very centred on his/herself while external reality, at times badly or scarcely interiorised, is avoided. They dread being confronted with reality. When they come up against the limits of real life, there is a risk they will feel they have failed and will fritter away the time with depressing ideas without being able to identify objects of interest or love. One of these limits is time.

Catechesis can help them to learn to love life in the image of Christ who became incarnate in this world to reveal to us that we have been called by God to life and to love.

3 - 2 The relationship to time

Post-adolescents are often involved in a "psychic task" that will allow them to reach temporal maturity. However, this can also be a difficulty between the ages of 24 and 30. Sometimes, instead of linking their present existence with the past and future, some of them live in the here and now that endures. They go from instant to instant, episode to episode, from situations and choices decided at the last minute until the moment when they wonder if there is a connection between all these experiences, that is unless they split up their lives in such a way that it will be difficult to see any correlation.

Temporal immaturity does not always allow one to project into the future. The future can cause post-adolescents to be anxious, not because of social and economic uncertainty, but because psychologically, they do not know how to anticipate and evaluate projects and the consequences of their actions and gestures because they live only in the present. When certain post-adolescents have not yet reached temporal maturity, they have difficulty developing a historic mind. They do not know - or are scared to know - how to see their lives within a time scale, and so to have a sense of engagement in many domains. They live more easily at the contingency level and with the intensity of specific situations than in constancy and continuity of a life that develops over time. Ordinary time is seen as a period of waiting for special experiences instead of being the space given to them in which they are to engage their lives.

Learning the meaning of engagement is begun by developing solidarity and projects within the Christian community in the service of others. This apprenticeship in engagement as a way of entering into history can be stimulated by a discovery and a reflection of the story of salvation in Jesus Christ.

3 - 3 Filling their interior space

Many young people have difficulty in filling their psychological life and their interior space. They can feel uneasy about having different sensations that they cannot identify within themselves or, on the contrary, they search for them outside human relations and activities.

More and more, we come into contact with impulsive personalities, always in action, and in most cases not realising that action needs to be accompanied by reflection. As they do not have the inner and cultural resources and their minds do not work realistically, these young people often complain of a lack of concentration and of finding it hard to do intellectual work over a long period. They

betray inner poverty and poor intra-psychic exchange. Reflection disturbs them. They need to train their will as it risks becoming fickle and fragile.

They are dispirited when confronted with questions or problems that have to be dealt with, like the use of drugs with which they try to find stimulation, control or high-performance. They prefer to find refuge in action, and they repeatedly take the "passage to action", not in order to find some kind of pleasure, but to discharge their inner tension and come back to zero. In this way they no longer feel their inner tensions. It is a way of emptying themselves of all that goes on within, and also of the inner functioning itself.

Post-adolescents can often be seen to lack reliable valid objects of identification in order to develop mental materials with which to build their inner selves. Here we come up against the problem of transmission in the contemporary world: cultural, moral and religious. The lack of interior life brings about anxiety-provoking psychologies that are quicker at responding through primitive impulse than at engaging in working it out in their minds[7]. The large majority of them, if they search for anchors in their existence to nourish their inner selves, do so more from what they perceive subjectively than from the great religious and moral traditions from which they remain quite distant.

They think in a narcissistic way where each one must be self-sufficient and draw everything to oneself, which responds to the current fashion of the "psychological whole". This is the dominant idea nowadays and it leads us to believe that we can "make" ourselves by being inspired by our emotions and sensations rather than principles of reason, intelligible words like those of the Christian faith and life values. The least existential difficulty is coded in psychopathological terms and has to be helped out by psychotherapy. It is an error of perspective that filters into psycho-spiritual help or healing rituals. It is perverse, to say the least, to try to handle the two areas, psychology and religion from the point of view of psychotherapy. The concept of "resilience" is also a new illusion of narcissistic personalities. Besides, it is a confused notion that tends to explain the fact that certain individuals get by better than others, while Christianity has long shown that the individual is not confined by determinism. In a world in critical need of moral and religious values, "resilience" will soon be old-fashioned. In order to bounce back, you need a certain inner strength that cannot be built and sustained without help from outside. A person cannot establish an inner life without interaction with an objective dimension. It cannot be done alone face to face with oneself. Likewise, catechesis as religious education is in danger of being filled with the prevailing subjectivism, especially when it is claimed that there is no "objective revelation" of the word of God but that it can only be revealed through faith lived subjectively. In this context, Jesus is no more than a "prophet" or "sage" among others and thus removed from his role as mediator as the Son of God between his Father and humankind. Young people who are subjected to this immanent and subjective vision of God that is like a pagan divinity, may become involved in various school and university chaplaincies in interreligious dialogue (confused with ecumenism) without having a clear idea of their own Christian faith. They confuse all the ideas from the various confessions as if it were the same representation of God. As they have not absorbed their faith in the God of the Trinity, the All-Other, they invent a religious discourse based on the mechanics of fusion and call for tolerance, removal of dividing lines, egalitarianism so there will be no distinctions and a sensory means of expression. However, according to the religious confessions, all ideas on representations of God do not give the same meaning of man, life in society and faith.

Most western societies have stopped transmitting to the point of putting into doubt the foundations on which they were developed. The Christian dimension is often excluded even though it is part of the social bonds and the constitution of people's interior life. The crisis of contemporary interior life begins with this lack of initiation and gets bogged down in individualism and psychological subjectivism. The ideological psychologising of society causes it to be de-structured. Individuals spend their time describing and analysing themselves to the point of exhaustion. This kind of subjective thinking can be necessary in some cases, but it is not exclusive. They should also be able to build their existence by including another dimension besides themselves that will give light and

energy to each individual: a social, cultural, moral and religious dimension. One should be able to see one's life with all these realities and not enclose oneself in the only psychological approaches in fashion nowadays.

Catechesis, education in the meaning of prayer and liturgical and sacramental life have a role to play in helping young people to take control of their interior life, their mental space and their bodily space. Christian rites, symbols and signs can play a part in this work of inner construction and that is why they are accepted by young people to the surprise of their elders. The inner life thus relates to external realities and presence. The Word of God, transmitted by the Church, plays this role by relating youth to God who can be found through instances of human mediation, initiated by Christ, and that become signs of his presence. With the assurance of prayer, guided and led by the Church, a privileged relationship develops between God and those whom He calls to know Him. Prayer experience is the crucible of human interior life. WYDs have seen this many times. An educational effort in this direction should be continued.

4 - The emotional life of young people

4 - 1 The general state of emotions

Contemporary psychology is influenced by the portrayals in society that emphasise a volatile emotional and sexual life. The expression of emotions has to be immediate, like a telephone call or an internet connection, without having to wait for delays and the building up of relationships. Casual sexual expression that is fusional and instantaneous has an impact on the images in the media and cinema.

Young people can be equally strongly conditioned by the separation and divorce of their parents. They can be deeply affected psychologically and permanently marked by breakdown, lack of trust in the other and, at times, little faith in the future. Personalities today demand autonomy while at the same time they are incapable of separating themselves from their childhood points of reference. This problem falls on people with whom a relationship can be brought to an end at the first outbreak of a difficulty. Paradoxically, they are also afraid of being rejected and need to be reassured about the image of themselves as seen by others. This attitude is the result of the type of broken family life that is developing in the western world.

Finally, they are relatively influenced by the sexual exhibitionism that is rampant through pornography and the spread of an impulsive and anti-relational kind of sexuality. Recent studies have shown that 75% of films watched on cable television channels are pornographic in which the scenes are becoming more and more violent and aggressive. The percentage reaches 92% in hotels where clients are on trips away from home. The growth in sexual visual media demonstrates that we are in an erotic society that persistently provides sexual excitement for individuals and that influences the unfolding of juvenile sexuality. Many young people access pornographic websites. When they receive this kind of input, some of them become enclosed in an imaginary and violent sexuality where masturbation is an experience of failure due to the lack of a partner, and this can complicate the development of sexual drives. When masturbation continues to be practised, it is always a symptom of an emotional problem and a lack of sexual maturity. Conjugal life can then suffer in its sexual expression as a result of this dependance on a narcissistic sexuality.

Nevertheless, most young people want to hear about the meaning of human love, of married life and of family. This demonstrates the need to learn to love and to form relationships and bring life.

4 - 2 From coeducation to unisex relations

Youth have been raised with a form of coeducation that does not contribute as hoped to the development of equality and a better quality of relationships between men and women. On the contrary, it has brought about confusion in sexual identities and relational doubts. Here we feel the effects of the ideological influences of feminism that confuse equality of the sexes - a thing that does not exist - with the equality of people. Some kinds of feminism (North-American and Beauvoirian) have promoted a hatred of men and a rejection of procreation. This has encouraged a

kind of puritanism and new inhibitions by interpreting the slightest glance, word or gesture as an attempt at aggression and open harassment and even rape. In addition to these aberrations that are increasingly being written into laws in Europe, procreation has been presented as a handicap for women and a dimension that should not enter into the definition of femininity. Coeducation has been conditioned by this kind of feminism that has not prepared young people to learn to live a couple relationship between a man and a woman. It is a coeducation that alternates between unisexuality (sexual confusion) and the sidelining of individuals (bachelorhood and loneliness). Most post-adolescents have lived their childhood in a coeducational environment. It was foreseeable[8] that coeducation, that was never thought out in terms of differential psychology and educational methods, would be the source of new inhibitions between boys and girls and distortions in social ties. There is an effort now to try to understand the questions it raises and to escape from the moralism that gave rise to it. Coeducation is more suitable at certain ages than at others. Once again experience proves that it is restricting and stunts development of the intelligence, emotions and sexuality during adolescence. It often means going through movements of seduction and sexual aggression or, on the contrary, young people want to withdraw from there and tend towards staying with friends of the same sex. This change in direction corresponds to the need for assurance and confirmation of their respective identities, while coeducation confines them to the non-separation of the genders. Coeducation can cause relational doubts between men and women at the post-adolescent stage, celibacy and a kind of reactive homosexuality in order to, paradoxically, differentiate themselves from the other sex and to reassure themselves about their sexual identity. Children and adolescents need to work out their fusional tendencies, but coeducation closes them in and prevents them from attaining a sense of the difference between the sexes and relations between two individuals.

Thus there are also those who have sentimental attachments, dating relationships and even sexual experiences as soon as they reach adolescence. Their emotional-sexual awakening begins with sentimental attachments that usually do not continue for long or that continue in fraternal relationships without sexual expression. Then at post-adolescence when they can engage in emotional-sexual relations, the opposite happens. They feel the need to be with other "singles" and to have social companions of the same sex in order to share specific activities and pastimes. After having sentimental attachments that led nowhere but that came apart in an oedipal way, during post-adolescence they try to socialise their emotional lives and to keep a distance from the other sex. This is to make up for what they did not experience and accomplish during their adolescence. There are young adults, and also even younger, who are in the process of discovering the necessary separation of the sexes. For example, women who have a need to be with other women to converse, to go out or to share activities "with the girls" independently of their companion. Men do the same by going to specifically male places and activities. We find this phenomenon happening in the new situation of co-tenants where young professionals of between 25 and 35 years of age share rented apartments, boys together or girls together, but rarely mixed. It is important that both men and women establish their identities. Education should take care of this from childhood.

4 - 3 Fear of commitment

It is typical of juvenile couples to be uncertain and temporary when it depends solely on the need to be protected and reassured, and on instability of emotions without integrating them in a life project and on love.

Present day portrayals do not simplify the task for young people when break-down and divorce are presented as the norm when dealing with emotional and relational problems of couples. In France, the law on divorce by mutual consent of 1974 has only amplified and normalised divorce which now remains as a plague on society. A society that loses the meaning of commitment and conflict solving and of stages of development is a society that has no sense of future and continuity. Divorce has become one of the causes of emotional insecurity of individuals that has repercussions on social

ties and on the vision of a sense of commitment in all the domains of life that are transmitted to the young. By wanting to simplify divorce, the public authorities play with the symptoms but do not see the causes that need attention and even less the consequences of these laws that threaten social ties. Fear of emotional commitment controls the juvenile psychological make-up. They are doubtful, uncertain and sceptical about the meaning of lasting relationships. Young people feel they will be free if they do not commit themselves, but they are actually repudiating freedom. It is in commitment that one finds freedom and can act with freedom. Single people who are used to living alone and planning their own lives sometimes have difficulty sharing living space with others for a prolonged period. They feel anxious and sense a lack of freedom. They alternate times in their lives of being together with others with periods when they are more alone. They still think, at 35 years of age, that they are not ready for commitment and should wait a little longer. However, the more time passes, the less their minds will be prepared to share life with a person whom they otherwise think they love.

Yet surveys show that most young people want to marry and start a family. They do not yet know how to build up a relationship. They want it to be established immediately and all questions concerning the present and future be settled. They certainly need to learn to experience fidelity in daily life, a value supported by young people but not favoured in contemporary media. Fear of marriage and fear of conceiving children are the topics of social discourse. This hardly encourages self-confidence, and even less in a life that, according to this trend, should be limited to oneself and go no further.

In fact, society and laws do not favour continuity and commitment. On the contrary, they foster emotional uncertainty and fragile social ties and give no special support to marriage. Yet many young people need to be able to carry on in spite of a short and broken up concept of time.

We are in a society that sows doubt at the idea of commitment in the name of love. Young people long for it and should be helped to find ways for this kind of fidelity.

4 - 4 Psychological bisexuality

The post-adolescent also has to deal with psychological bisexuality which is the result of identification with the two sexes - not a case of being a man and a woman at the same time - so as to internalise their sexual identity and to move towards heterosexuality. Psychological bisexuality is the ability to relate with the opposite sex and to be consistent with one's sexual identity in one's emotional life and not only in one's social life. As we said above, post-adolescence is a time when one's psychological life begins to integrate with exterior reality. Modern society tends to confuse the only two sexual identities that exist, male and female, with sexual tendencies that are multiple, and sexual practices that are unconnected with drives. We should not confuse identity with sexual orientations, especially when they are in contradiction with sexual identity. In this context it is not easy to be at one with oneself and to be sexually consistent especially when homosexuality is valued and presented as an alternative to heterosexuality. The working out of psychological bisexuality could be compromising. As relations between men and women become complicated to the point of encouraging each one to remain single, the social model of homosexuality becomes commonplace.

Many adolescents and post-adolescents are too nervous and unsure of themselves to deal with psychological bisexuality. Young people sometimes encode their passing ambivalence, common during adolescence, in clichéd terms of homosexuality. They think they are homosexual although they do not want or desire it, and they sometimes take the "passage to action" that shakes them psychologically. Of course, all individuals have gone through an experience of homosexual identification in order to confront their sexual identity, beginning with the parent of the same sex. When these identifications suffer failure, they risk being eroticised and led into homosexuality. We must remember that the choice of homosexual object, which is inherent in the mind, is not to be confused with the homosexuality to which a person can possibly be oriented.

Homosexuality is not a "variant" of human sexuality that can be put on an equal footing with heterosexuality. It is the expression of unresolved conflictive tension in a tendency that is separate from sexual identity.

Education in the meaning of other and the differences between man and woman is at the heart of the discovery of the real meaning of otherness.

5 - Youth and new ideological influences

The collapse of political ideologies in favour of liberalism in market societies and the increase in individualism have fostered a decrease of trust in politics and the democratic system of representation. It is the subjective and sector-based demands that have taken the place of the major social challenges.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that politics are of less interest to younger generations when it no longer shows concern for the general interest. Respect for marriage, a family composed of a man and woman with their children, school and education, instruction in civics and the moral law, the social and professional insertion of the new generations, the quality of the ecological environment, the meaning of justice and peace are, among other things, the projects to promote in order to hold their interest in political life. We shall examine the influence of some movements of thought on youth.

5 - 1 The gender theory

As we have mentioned above, present societies are influenced by sexual confusion. The theory of gender leads us to understand that sexual differences, that is, the fact of being a man or a woman, is secondary in the setting up of social ties and the emotional bonds entered into in marriage and that consequently have a role in the forming of a family. It favours and recognises sexual gender that does not depend on the masculine or feminine gender but on that which each one builds subjectively and that orients towards heterosexuality, homosexuality, transsexuality, etc. In that way one could speak of heterosexual and homosexual couples and families. In other words, sexual difference is replaced by difference in sexualities.

The gender theory is largely diffused by the UN Populations Commission and by the European Parliament in order to oblige countries to modify their legislation and to recognise, for example, homosexual unions or "omoparenté" (same-sex parenthood) for the adoption of children. This new ideology actually represents semantic manipulation by applying the notion of couple and parenthood to homosexuality. Yet couple implies sexual dissymmetry and is based on no other relationship than that of man and woman. Besides, homosexuality cannot be at the origin of conjugality and parenthood. It has no social value. If homosexuality is a matter of an individual problem, it cannot be a social norm and be recognised as a value on which it is possible to educate children.

Education should be about renewal of a civilisation based on a couple formed between a man and a woman. It is not by chance that the Bible begins with the existence of a couple whose relationship is in the image of that of God with humanity. We are to enter into a culture of alliance and not into the intrigue of a power battle between the sexes.

5 - 2 The market society and liberalism

Most young people are subject to the norms of a market society. The immediate satisfaction of desires is largely encouraged by advertising. The political organisation of society depends on this market mentality that transforms a citizen into a consumer. The laws of economics take over from the moral laws. They make the law and impose their system of references and evaluation in every domain of existence with the consent of the political powers: education, teaching, health, work and aging are regulated in function of the norms of economics to the detriment of life values. It is not the person and the common good that are at the centre of this set-up, but cost and financial profit. The dictatorship of money and the economy uses advertising to create a vision of existence where a

thing has no right to exist if it is not profitable. This contributes to changing the meaning of the human person, social ties and the common good.

5 - 3 Secularism and exclusion of the religious

Christianity originated the idea of the separation of religious from temporal power. Throughout the course of history, there have been times of non-separation, and political power has often tried to rule over the Church and to interfere, for example, on the decisions of the councils. It is not so much religious power that wanted to extend its hold over temporal power, even if, sometimes in certain societies, the Church had to organise public life before returning this power to those who should exercise it, but it is the political powers who have been, many times, jealous of religious power. They had to control it, enclose it, contest it and sometimes neutralise it.

Secularism, when it bypasses the line that separates the powers, raises various problems and influences the concept of the religious dimension inherent in existence. In this way secularism developed against the role and influence of the Church. They wanted to exclude religion from the social field and to limit it to the status of a private affair that comes from the individual conscience. This is a way of mutilating it. It is a phenomenon that has been carried out by the secularisation of morality brought about by separating it from the universal principles discovered by reason in order to confuse it with democratically voted civil law. In this way the legal takes the place of the moral and confusion remains in the heart of many young people who think that whatever is legal has moral value. Yet civil law does not say what is moral. It organises the life of the population, but that organisation, or regulation by the rights and duties of the citizens, cannot but be based on principles that respect the dignity of the human person and the life values[9] that transcend all laws.

After having secularised society and then morality, it is the turn of religion to be secularised.

Spiritual life is confused with intellectual and poetic life, the Bible is translated by unbelievers or by writers from different schools of thought. Some also advocate a secular reading of the gospels. Pope John Paul II has often underscored the contradiction with which the Bible is approached:

"contemporary people, disappointed by so many unsatisfactory answers to the fundamental questions of life, seem to be opening themselves to the voice that comes from Transcendence and is expressed in the biblical message. However, at the same time, they are growing more and more intolerant of requests for behaviour that corresponds with the values the Church has always presented as based on the Gospel. So we are faced with the most varied attempts to separate biblical Revelation from the more binding proposals of life"[10]. According to some, we should restore the word of God to a "worldly discourse" that will be in harmony with moral standards and religious intelligence. These are presently secularised and reduced to their lowest common denominator in the name of "modernity" and a "moderate religion". It is a case of the fashionable standards in a society serving as regulators of religion and Christian faith in particular, with a vision that includes eliminating from the social field the religious dimension and its ensuing demands.

The refusal to recognise the religious and Christian heritage as being, among others, at the basis of the development of civilisation in Europe and the western world, as in other cultural areas, testifies to this rampant secularisation. Secularisation conceived in this way does not respect the religious dimension of human existence. Those who adhere to this way of thinking are ready to recognise freedom of belief, which they would consign simply to private life, but refuse to accept the religious reality, the right of religion, which implies a social and institutional dimension. At best, it is important that religious power as institution be represented in the ententes of Europe and of the nations for the service of the common good and interests beyond the human conscience. God cannot be absent from the social field.

The younger generations need to be educated in this social and institutional dimension of the Christian religion and not be made experience the Church simply as a closed and private group.

6 - Youth and the Church

6 - 1 Youth without religious roots

Most surveys on youth and religion confirm what we already know. Youth are the children of adults who were adolescents themselves from 1960-1970 and who, in their turn, chose not to always transmit what they had received from their education. They left their children to work things out for themselves at the moral and spiritual level and they had no other educational concern than to take care of their emotional development. At times this has produced lost souls left to find their own way. They wanted them to be happy, but they did not teach them the rules of social life, the customs that are the treasures of a people and the Christian life that has been the matrix for diverse civilisations. It is necessary to recognise that we owe to the message of Christ brought to us through the Church the meaning of the human person, the meaning of conscience, the meaning of freedom, the meaning of fellowship, the meaning of equality. These values have been trivialised, cut off from their source, and at the risk of no longer being transmitted when their origin is no longer known. In this anti-educational mentality, children have not been baptised or instructed in the faith. It was felt that a clean slate was needed to free us from tradition. That attitude has created cultural handicaps. They have little culture and even less religious culture. They are incapable of understanding entire sections of the history of our civilisation, even art, literature and music. They are not allergic to dogmas, that is, to the truths of Christian life, and they are not even against the Church. They do not know anything about it. That is why responses in larger surveys demonstrate this deficiency in the great majority of young people. They reveal ignorance, indifference and simply a lack of religious education. They are dependant on all the clichés and all the conventionalities that are diffused concerning the Christian faith. Briefly, they are distant from the Church because, for lack of education, they have not entered into this religious tradition.

6 - 2 Confusion between the religious and the paranormal

We must recognise that many young people are relative strangers to any religious dimension. Even so, this is just waiting to blossom forth. How can it be otherwise in this world that eliminates all that is religious? They confuse it with parapsychology, the irrational and magic. They are attracted by phenomena "at the far reaches of reality" that provoke emotional responses and make them feel that another dimension exists. However, in this case, they only find themselves, their feelings and their imagination. Fashionable spirituality is one without words, reflection or intellectual content. There are currents of philosophy and wisdom without God that have come from Asia and the East that are interesting as such, but they are not religions, and they are being put forward and distorted at the present time. Nevertheless, they do not represent a large movement. With this mentality, you have to be "cool", "zen" and quiet, that is, feel nothing and be in a muffled torpor. All kinds of mistakes are possible because there is no institutional or intellectual control. Anything at all can be put in the place of God. This attitude is light-years away from Christianity which is the religion of the Incarnation of the Son of God. It transmits a message of truth and love with which we can construct our lives and fight against all that spoils and destroys it. Young Christians feel that this presence of God and his message bring immense hope. It opens up paths of life for them. But when religious feeling, which is inherent in human psychology, is not educated and enriched by an authentic message, it remains simplistic and imprisoned by a superstitious and magical mentality. The lack of religious education fosters sects and false prophets who proclaim themselves in order to speak in the name of a divinity created in their own image. The human person has a need to be introduced to a dimension beyond oneself and which the Creator has inscribed in the heart of each one. In this way it is conveyed by God to others, to history and especially to a life project that brings self-knowledge and that humanises and enriches. This is the meaning of the Word of the Gospel transmitted by the Church.

6 - 3 The WYD youth are in search of the spiritual life

Most young people who come to WYD breathe well-being and "joie de vivre". They surprise all by their calm, smile, courtesy, kindness, cooperation and openness. There is no need to despair of these young people who prepare a silent spiritual revolution, but one that is very active. Like others of

their age they undoubtedly have their own problems. Some may have experimented with drugs or may not behave in ways that take Christian morality into account. They have had experiences and failures. However, they thirst for something else and are in search of hope. They are looking for an ideal for their lives and a spirituality that rests on someone, on God. European society is getting old, sceptical and without hope, and it is being shaken up by young people who believe in God and wish to live accordingly. Most of them have come from Christian communities that have invited young people who are searching. They know that life is not easy, but they have hope within and do not give up. Christians and non-Christians approach the Church to find answers to their immense spiritual need. Each country that holds WYD benefits from its influence. It overthrows simplistic images of youth, because every time they are spoken about it is to mention impulsive sexuality, drugs, delinquency, etc. If some of them live in this way it is because they have been left to themselves.

Society is childish with young people by making them serve as role models even though they themselves are in need of references. They are adulated by society, yet society does not love its children to judge by all the abdication of educational responsibility of which they are the victims. Local pastoral work is also responsible to the extent that educational tasks are sometimes relinquished and abandoned by religious orders and priests who had this vocation. We must, however, recognise that their work in a period of break-down (1960-1970) was not easy. Great numbers of youth rejected all religious thought. Nowadays they are ill-equipped in the religious sphere and they can come out with astonishing statements. Recently, one of them asked a priest, "Why do you mix Christmas up with religion?" He did not know that Christmas is the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus! Christmas is thus reduced to a commercial family celebration. Thanks to the success of WYD, this frame of mind can change when young people engage in a spiritual search and discover that an overall vision of humanity and whole sections of social life were fashioned by the message of the Church and generations of Christians.

6 - 4 Why does John Paul II attract all these young people when the Christian message is demanding, especially as regards sexual ethics?

The question is often asked and it answers itself. It is the message of Christ brought by the Church and has always been demanding. But it is also a source of joy. It is no easier to live it in the sexual domain than in other spheres of life. Nothing that is true, consistent and lasting is easily built. John Paul II shows the way to live a Christian life in the name of the love of God. This love is a way of searching for the good and for life for oneself and for others. We shall always be answerable to this love that is not just a feeling nor emotional well-being. Above all it is a desire to find in God that which gives life. Young people are sensitive to this language and to the person of John Paul II who calmly affirms this in spite of criticisms and sarcasm. He speaks to them of life. Others only speak to them of death by drugs and suicide, of failure in love that leads to divorce, of unemployment, but they never mention that society does not reach out to them.

John Paul II trusts them and gives them confidence in life. He tells them that to live and succeed in life is possible and he tells them how. The previous generation did not always transmit convictions, nor teach them how to live certain values except to repeat the boring ones of the consumer society. What do young people do? They turn to the very old to obtain what they did not receive. The elderly, with the Pope, are the ones who pass on history to them and a religious and cultural memory, over the heads of their parents. There is no break between the Pope and youth. When young people hear true words, they feel respected and appreciated: "at last, we are taken seriously; he confides in us".

They say that the Church is obsessed with sexual ethics. This topic occupies no more than 9% of the Pope's writings and discourses. However, the media only remember this aspect while they remain silent about the rest. The history of the condom^[11] is significant in this disinformation and in the manipulation of the Pope's speeches. What Pope John Paul II says is quite different. He stresses the Gospel and does not rely on those passing ideas that are now in fashion. He calls on a sense of love

and responsibility. He prefers to speak to the human conscience, like Christ, so that each one can question themselves on their behaviour so they will know if they have lived with authentic love, being loyal and honest to themselves and to others. He follows his mission. Reflection on sexuality cannot be reduced to a talk on health especially when this neglects the moral responsibility of people. Moral judgements also concern sexuality and not only social life if it is not to become perversely divided. Christians are invited to find inspiration in a clear evangelical conscience that will guide their behaviour.

Conclusion

Post-adolescents want to enter into life. In spite of a certain cultural, religious and moral uprooting, they try to find ways of passage because they have often worked things out for themselves with invasive narcissism and capriciousness.. The fragility of the self, a temporal vision reduced to the desires of the moment, to circumstances and to an inwardness limited to psychological vibes, confines them to individualism. That is why some of them are anxious about engagement and institutional relations in spite of wishing to marry and start a family. They prefer to maintain intimist and ludic relationships, seemingly with several individuals, avoiding social ties. Their psychological profile is one of the results of an education centred on the emotional, on immediate pleasures and on parental separation through divorce. Divorce is caused by emotional insecurity, self-doubt with respect to others and the understanding of commitment in our society. It is possible to promote a more realistic education that does not confine young people to remain in the psychological attitude and the narcissism of adolescence but stimulates their interest in becoming adults.

Young people of the present generation are conducting a silent but determined religious revolution. They question Christians and are not afraid to declare themselves as such. They do not want to allow themselves to be intimidated or obliged to be silent, and even less to be insulted. Young Christians from Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Far East live their faith as an emancipation and a freedom in God, sometimes in martyrdom, that should inspire the older Christian communities. Each WYD is always a stage in history for the young people who take part. We can no longer speak of religion in the same way as before. In fact, it can be clearly seen from the media coverage. Most broadcasters and political commentators, prisoners of a certain number of sociological categories and clichés, are unable to evaluate what is happening. For the past number of years Church gatherings of youth have had very significant numbers of participants. However, we hear very little about these young people on a spiritual quest. That does not take the number one spot on the television news. Could it be that gatherings of youth for religious reasons is a non-event for the media? The news is often on a different wavelength from life and from what goes on quietly in society, until the day comes when they wake up and ask "what's happening?". The young people's thirst for the ideal and the spiritual and the challenges that entails, are not taken seriously by society.

The Church is not dying as some claim. It encounters the same problems as all other institutions who are feeling the effects of individualism, subjectivism and a kind of "desocialisation". In a society where the individual sees him/herself as the victim of others, in a consumer mentality, in a time frame with a "this minute" rhythm, where life is presented in virtual and media terms, it has become urgent to let the meaning of reality be discovered, to develop places for socialisation and transmission between generations so as to acquire a sense of institution. The Christian spiritual experience involves this dimension. It is this that makes up the richness that unfolds in the various traditions throughout the ages.

It is up to the Church to ensure a follow-up to WYD and to put in a more active and renewed catechesis. The intellect of faith needs to be nourished. Pastoral action should take care to awaken families to the importance of religious education and particularly of the catechism. Families pose another question for a society emptied of the religious dimension of life as a result of direct policy. Secularisation, as we have said, is the separation of the political and religious powers and not the

exclusion of religion from the social field. In schools there should be time assigned to religious instruction. While each individual is free to decide whether to adhere to a religious faith, society cannot give religion a place of secondary importance limiting it to the hidden and private domain, due to the consideration that religion should not influence life and society. The religious dimension is a social fact that cannot be reduced to the private sphere. Besides, it is a source of social ties and remains inserted in the calendar. In answer to this privatisation of religious life, young people, through their attitude and actions at World Youth Day, have replied with an overwhelming "no!". Spiritual life is a human need that political powers should recognise, respect and honour because it belongs to each person and is also one of the essential components of social reality. In his message on the occasion of the 18th World Youth Day in 2003, the Holy Father reminds us of the role that young people can have: "Humanity is in urgent need of the witness of free and courageous young people who dare to go against the tide and proclaim with vigour and enthusiasm their personal faith in God, Lord and Saviour".

Notes:

[1] 65% of young Europeans continue to live with their parents, according to a report published by Datamonitor, a British market research company. *Quotidien du Médecin* (France), p. 17, N. 7302, Wednesday 26 March 2003.

[2] Mentoring of young professionals is something new. Those involved are between 25 and 40, and especially the single people in this age group that might be considered as "young". It responds to a need, but it sometimes holds them in a kind of affective infantilization.

[3] Op. cit.

[4] Op. cit.

[5] T. Anatrella, *Interminables adolescences, les 12/30 ans*, Paris, Cerf Cujus,

[6] Studies show that among the entire adolescent population, 10% of the 15-19 year-olds have psychological difficulties. Cf. Higher Committee for Public health, *La souffrance psychique des adolescents et des jeunes adultes* (Psychological suffering among adolescents and young adults), ENSP Publications, February 2000. The increasing number of radio and television programmes that deal with problems that affect some individuals, lead people to think that most adolescents have difficulties. This is not at all true. There is a tendency to make isolated cases sound like the general situation. On the other hand, there are questions dealing with education and post-adolescence that should be addressed in particular.

[7] Weakness in inner processes produces psychological make-ups that are more superficial and split, and that have difficulty using rational thinking. As for the language they use, it is too poor to grasp reality. The formulas used, like slogans, indicate panic and suffering at the thought of having to think. Some of their expressions imply that thinking produces migraine. They lack real intellectual training, and literature is one of the ways in which it is taught. Comprehension and reflection on works and authors is a default way of leading an intellectual life. The teachers in the schools should be aware of the subjectiveness of the pupils and teach them to learn from what they perceive. There is a constant increase in the number of those who complain of difficulties in concentrating their mind and in self-control. The concept of law is learned by first acquiring the language and rules of grammar. This is no longer the case where linguists have replaced grammarians in drawing up school curricula. These global methods that still reign in schools are the cause of illiteracy, dyslexia and a broken up view of reality.

[8] France Rollin, *La mixité à l'école*, ETVDES, Volume 367, n. 6 (3676), December 1987. Tony Anatrella, *Coeducation*, ETVDES, Volume 368, n. 6 (3686), June 1988. Cf. Tony Anatrella, *La différence interdite*, Flammarion.

[9] See John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995).

- [10] Address of John Paul II to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 29 April 2003
- [11] Tony Anatrella, *L'amour et le préservatif*, Paris, Flammarion, Republished under the title, *L'amour et l'Eglise*, Paris, Champ Flammarion.