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THE SYNOD 'WITH' YOUNG PEOPLE (2018) PAVES THE WAY FOR THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY (2023)

The announcement of a Synod of Bishops devoted to the synodality of the Church has provoked various reactions. Some were delighted, if they were deeply aware of the urgency of rediscovering the richness of synodality in order to overcome the various crises that the Church must face (secularisation, abuses, de-institutionalisation, etc.). Others were more sceptical because of the method or the topic, which seemed to invite the Church to focus on itself rather than on the challenges of her mission.

In fact, what is interesting about the approach initiated by Pope Francis is that he decided to deal with synodality within the framework of the Synod of Bishops, which is an organ of episcopal collegiality. By doing so, he situates synodality in its articulation with primacy and collegiality, not alongside them. This is a will clearly assumed by the Pope who always states the structuring principles of the Church's synodality in his post-synodal exhortations. From *Amoris laetitia* (Pope Francis, 2016a) to *Querida Amazonia* (Pope Francis, 2020) and *Christus vivit* (Pope Francis, 2019), Pope Francis outlines the shape of a "synodal Church" and reminds us that synodality works in the Church at the heart of a network of relationships that is established among its members.

What we see in these post-synodal exhortations is consistent with the programme that the Pope entrusts to the Synod of Bishops in his address of 17 October

2015 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops. It is in this text that he establishes the programmatic principle that “a synodal Church is a listening Church” (Pope Francis, 2015), making it clear that this synodal nature of the Church implies that each element that structures the Church must be permanently connected “to the basis”, that is, to the whole people. In so doing, he invites the bishops gathered in Synod to think of themselves “with” the Christian people and not only “for” them.

It is then that the Synod of 2018, whose theme was “young people, faith and vocational discernment”, takes on a special significance: it makes a fundamental transition from a Church for young people to a Church with young people. In this way, it can be considered that this synod has a preponderant place in the reflection and even more in the implementation of the Pope’s programme on synodality. It then becomes possible to show the richness of the synodal process from a single question: how does the Church talk about young people?

I. THE 2018 SYNODAL PROCESS THROUGH ITS TEXTS

The synodal process of 2018 is punctuated by four texts that show very well how the passage from a reflection on mission “for” or among young people to a mission that can only be conceived “with” young people has taken place. According to our initial hypothesis, this transition becomes apparent when we look at the way in which each of the texts talks about young people.

1. Preparatory Document (2017 January 13th)

This first text shows that the main challenge of the synod is the ability to think of young people in the “we” of the Church in order to strengthen the capacity of the whole Church to be a subject of transformation of the world through the Gospel. In this sense, Pope Francis has assigned a clear objective to the synodal process he has initiated, in line with his programmatic apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, to take the Church out of its established pastoral patterns. To do this, it is a question of bringing into resonance and dialogue the capacity for renewal brought by young people and the capacity for renewal of the Gospel itself. In order to achieve this objective, the priority is to restore young people’s freedom of speech and action, as well as their capacity for initiative, so that they become subjects of change and allow the Church to experiment with new models of development.

However, the analysis of the Preparatory Document allows us to identify tensions between the prophetic character of the approach and the culture (inertia?) of the ecclesiastical institution. On the one hand, the document has a real breath of

fresh air in its willingness to recognise the way in which young people are actors in the Church, calling for a two-way exchange in which it is as much a question of “leading young people” as of “asking young people to help her [the Church]” (Synod of Bishops, 2017, introduction). In this sense, the document recognises the full capacity of young people for spiritual discernment so that, “By listening to young people, the Church will once again hear the Lord speaking in today’s world” (Synod of Bishops, 2017, introduction). Thus, young people are called to be “protagonists” (Synod of Bishops, 2017, III.1, III.2) and “having access to ever-new opportunities” (Synod of Bishops, 2017, I.3). There is thus a recognition in the text that young people are bearers of a faith experience that would be missing from the Church if it were not expressed. But on the other hand, these affirmations - which contain a real breath of fresh air - are as if undermined by the structure of a large number of proposals, whether it is a question of the Church listening to young people or of the Church learning from young people, it is a relationship of exteriority that is fundamentally maintained between “the Church” on the one hand and “young people” on the other. For example, at the beginning of the second chapter, it is not only a matter of “meeting” but also of “accompany and care for every young person”, stating: “We cannot and will not abandon them to the isolation and exclusion to which the world exposes them” (Synod of Bishops, 2017, II). Such paternalism influences the overall perspective: when the second chapter of the document speaks of the gift of faith to be transmitted to young people, it does so without leaving much room for the experience and witness of faith that these young people already bear. Such an external relationship partially sterilises the reflection. This is the case, for example, when the changes in the world are mentioned, as if the world described were only that of young people. However, if today’s adults have structured themselves in a more stable world, they are undoubtedly affected by the social, cultural and, more fundamentally, anthropological changes of contemporary societies.

This then seems to be the first challenge of the 2018 Synod: to invent a way of thinking and speaking about young people that goes beyond this relationship of exteriority, in a perspective that could be described as inclusive or cooperative. This is the condition for these young people, of whom the *Preparatory Document* speaks, to be able to benefit from the Church’s own dynamism and to make the Church benefit from their capacity for transformation.

From this observation, a major ecclesiological question arises, that of the participation of all the baptised in the life and mission of the Church. Indeed, the tension present in the preparatory document for the synod engages the reception of the Second Vatican Council when it presents the Church as the people of God, in which each member is a full participant in the life and mission which the Church

receives from Christ and in which each member of the faithful is recognised as a co-operator in this mission. The obstacle identified in the text is characteristic of a representation of the Church based on its ecclesiastical structure, qualified by Yves Congar as “hierarchiology” (Congar, 1964, p. 68), for which the clerical part of the Church concentrates on itself the responsibilities in favour of the rest of the people of God, qualified by its passivity. In the context of the Church’s mission, it is a question of an articulation between teachers and taught, celebrants and assistants, governors and governed, which in our case places the young people as the beneficiaries of the Church’s action and not as its actors. This is a fundamental question that affects not only young people, but also catechumens, laypeople, women... The interest in thinking about this question from the point of view of young people is that this category transcends the others, insofar as the term “young people” includes clerics as well as lay people, newcomers to the faith as well as people with a Catholic family tradition, men as well as women... Faced with the temptation to think of young people in terms of their passivity, it is appropriate to affirm the principle according to which all the gifts of the Spirit are found only in the Church as a whole, in which Christ spreads them through the sacraments, foremost among which are the sacraments of Christian initiation. Thus, the Church is incomplete if only one of its members is forgotten and, a fortiori, if the voice of all the young people within it is not taken into account. It will then be possible to recognise that taking into account the words of young people transforms the Church because these same young people are the subjects of an authentic experience of faith.

The issue is therefore ecclesiological, but it is above all in the articulation between theological development and pastoral action. It touches on the relationship between the gift of faith, charisms and the life of the Church. In this sense, we cannot act as if the gift of faith were first realised in favour of the Church as such and then transmitted to young people, and we cannot reduce the mission to a care of young people. It is therefore important to question the faith of young people and the way in which it is expressed in the Church and participates in the charismatic patrimony of the Church, even if, in the preparatory document, this only appears in the form of a pastoral device which shows its limits. This makes it possible to reformulate the challenges of the synod. First of all, it is a question of moving from a conception of young people as the future of the Church or of society to a conception of young people as the present of the Church and of society¹. In the same way, it is a question of the Church moving from the desire to speak to young people to

1 See Pope Francis’ insistence in his homily at the WYD in Panama (“you are not the future but God’s hour”) and in chapter 3 of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, which is entitled “You are the “now” of God”.

the recognition of its vulnerability, which means that it needs the young people who constitute it. To put it another way, it is necessary to leave the representation of young people as objects of the Church's solicitude and to recognise them as protagonists and subjects of the life and mission of the Church. Or, in pastoral terms, to move from a pastoral care of supervision to a pastoral care of commitment and participation.

Thus, to fail to speak about young people in the Church in an accurate and balanced way is to run the risk of not allowing fundamental ecclesial developments.

2. *Instrumentum laboris* (2018 May 8th)

In the working document of the synod fathers, we progressively witness the overcoming of the gap between young people on the one hand and the Church on the other. Of course, the divide persists, since we can still read: "Taking care of young people is not an optional task for the Church" (Synod of Bishops, 2018a, n° 1) or even "we are urged to listen to and look at young people in the real circumstances of their lives, and the actions of the Church towards them" (Synod of Bishops, 2018a, n° 4). In the same way, there are many expressions where young people "expect the Church" and "ask the Church", according to a linguistic structure that keeps young people at a distance from the Church.

However, a real change of culture can be perceived, especially in the vocabulary and grammatical structure itself. The Pope called for this, especially in 2016, when he received the Charlemagne Prize. At that time, Pope Francis spoke powerfully of the importance of young people for the future of Europe, recalling that "our young people have a critical role. They are not the future of our peoples; they are the present. Even now, with their dreams and their lives they are forging the spirit of Europe. We cannot look to the future without offering them the real possibility to be catalysts of change and transformation. We cannot envision Europe without letting them be participants and protagonists in this dream." (Pope Francis, 2016b). Such a discourse was already in contrast with the perspective of the division between young people and the Church, on the one hand because of its content, which emphasises the role of young people as subjects, agents of change and protagonists, with an insistence on the vocabulary of participation, and on the other hand because of the very structure of the proposals: "not the future" but "the present", or again: "they are the ones who are already [...] in the process of". Such a structure reduces the sense of exteriority and reinforces the full subject nature of these young people. This is what we see in the *instrumentum laboris*, remarkably in the form of quotes from the young people themselves: "We have been thrilled to be taken seriously by the hierarchy of the Church and we feel that this dialogue between the

young Church and the old Church is a vital and fruitful listening process” (Synod of Bishops, 2018a, n° 14)². In this kind of statement, it is never a question of young people on one side and the Church on the other, but always of young people in the Church, with others in the Church or of dialogue between members of the Church.

It is then confirmed that the challenge of the synod is a transformation of the ways of expressing oneself. This transformation is accessible. It could be enough to replace statements such as “With their presence and their words, young people can help rejuvenate the face of the Church” (Synod of Bishops, 2018a, n° 1) by “through their faith and participation in the life and mission of the Church, young people can help rejuvenate the face of the Church”. It would be enough to replace “Church” by “leaders in the Church” or “other members of the Church”... But in these apparently simple measures, a fundamental representation of the nature and structure of the Church, as well as of its mission, is at stake, and a profound transformation of the Church culture.

This transformation is urgent if we consider, for example, that in the second part of the *instrumentum laboris* on faith and vocational discernment there is no development on the faith of the young people themselves, which prevents us from considering that the faith of today’s young people constitutes an expression of the ecclesial faith adjusted to the contemporary conditions of belief. Thus, if the Church does not take into account the faith of young people, it condemns itself to a pastoral arrangement “for” young people. In the third part (“Paths of Pastoral and Missionary Conversion”), it is a question of the Church “fulfilling its mission to young people”. This is a departure from the previous two parts and a break in the structure of the text. One would rather expect a section on how to fulfil a mission “with young people” or how to take into account the specific evangelical dynamics of young people. Here, once again, young people are seen as beneficiaries and not as actors in the Church’s mission. However, it is not by renewing its youth ministry that the Church will open up a path of pastoral and missionary conversion, but by benefiting from the charisms of each member of the People of God, including young people.

This has an effect on the way the vocation to follow Jesus is presented in Part 3. The discourse relies on the articulation between the vocation of the Church and vocations in the Church, without taking into account the participation of all the baptised in the life and mission of the Church. The relationship between charismatic and hierarchical gifts is sketched out in No. 99, but the whole of Nos. 96-105 does not take this dimension into account. Basically, the question is not one of vocation as a personal call, but of the charismatic contribution to the life and mission of the

2 Here the *Instrumentum laboris* quotes a young person speaking during the preparatory meeting for the synod.

Church. To put it more simply, when a young person does not attend the Church, the problem is not that he or she is missing a vocation, but that something of the gift of the Spirit is missing from the Church. We find this, however, in no. 111, which defines discernment as a lifestyle: the question of vocation is then involved in each of the choices that a person makes in life, and not only in the choice of a state of life.

In the end, a reading of the *Instrumentum laboris* confirms the impressions of the preparatory document and gives an impression of stagnation, while hinting at the possibility of change.

3. Final document (2018 october 27)

The final document of the synod, that is the one that benefits most directly from the life of the synod as such, makes an impressive reversal. This is seen first of all in the awareness of the risk contained in the previous documents. Thus we read that “the passive role given to the young within the Christian community” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 53) is one of the reasons why young people are moving away³ or that “Young Catholics are not merely on the receiving end of pastoral activity: they are living members of the one ecclesial body, baptized persons in whom the Spirit of the Lord is alive and active. They help to enrich what the Church is and not only what she does. They are her present and not only her future...” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 54)⁴.

Moreover, the final document proposes a new way of talking about young people: “The Church knows from experience that their contribution is fundamental for renewal. Young people, in some respects, can be a step ahead of their pastors” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 66). And this commits us to a new way of speaking about the Church. Thus, in n° 92, it is the community, and not the Church, which is “the prime subject of accompaniment”. In this community perspective, members accompany each other⁵. Similarly, in n° 105, it is the “ecclesial community” which is the “milieu of discernment”. We know that, in the history of ecclesiology in the 20th century, the passage from “Church” to “community” under the pontificate of Pius XII is a fundamental ecclesiological marker which allows the passage from a hierarchical-centred ecclesiology to a Church which lives only by the active participation of all its members in its life and mission (Moog, 2006).

3 See in the same way in n° 54: “Sometimes the availability of the young meets with a certain authoritarianism and mistrust from older people and pastors, who do not sufficiently recognize their creativity and who struggle to share responsibility”

4 See *Christus vivit* n° 64.

5 Cf. Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 95 sq. sur “Community accompaniment, of groups and individuals”.

This is how the transition from “for” young people to “with” young people takes place, allowing them to be recognised as “living members of the Church” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 116). It then reads: “This is not about simply doing something ‘for them’, but living in communion ‘with them’, growing together in understanding of the Gospel and in the search for more authentic ways of living it and bearing witness to it. The responsible participation of young people in the life of the Church is not optional, but it is a demand of baptismal life and an essential element for the life of every community” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 116).

This fundamental change of perspective allows for a profound transformation of Christian communities through a greater recognition of the participation of the baptised in the life and mission of the Church⁶, which resounds as a call for a change of style: “The young ask the Church to offer a shining example of authenticity, exemplariness, competence, co-responsibility and cultural solidity. At times this request can seem like a criticism, but often it assumes the positive form of personal commitment to a fraternal, welcoming, joyful and committed community, prophetically combatting social injustice. Among the expectations of the young, one that stands out particularly is the desire for the Church to adopt a less paternalistic and more candid style of dialogue” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 57). And this is allowed by young people because “it is not about creating a new Church for the young, but rather rediscovering with them the youthfulness of the Church, opening ourselves to the grace of a new Pentecost.” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 60). This new perspective, which goes so far as to qualify - rather mysteriously - young people as “theological arenas in which the Lord tells us some of his expectations and challenges for building tomorrow” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 64), refers with insight to the figure of John, the young disciple who on Easter morning arrived first at the tomb, before Peter, to conclude: “in the Christian community youthful dynamism is a renewing energy for the Church, because it helps her to shake off anything weighing her down or holding her back, so as to be open to the Risen Lord” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 66)⁷.

In this new perspective, the Church is invited to rediscover its synodality through which it can “be and appear more clearly as the youth of the world” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 118). One should then read for themselves n°121 and n°122 on “the Synodal form of the Church” which emphasises the notion of listening: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than

6 Cf. Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n° 55.

7 It is important to note that it is a question of inviting the Church to open itself to the Risen One, and not to the world. Young people are not an access to cultural realities but to the kerygma!

simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit". It is clear, then, that the synodal form of the church is the end point of the synodal process.

4. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (2019 March 25th)

Logically, the apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit*, published by Pope Francis a few months after the ordinary general assembly of the synod, receives and confirms the perspective we have just outlined. This is evident from the beginning of the text, which indicates that it is addressed "to young people and to the entire people of God", and not to young people on the one hand and the people of God on the other. This is reflected in the Pope's desire to propose a words that "will echo the myriad voices of believers the world over who made their opinions known to the Synod" (Pope Francis, 2019, n° 4).

Generally speaking, the text is addressed to young people, but this does not invalidate the findings presented above. On the one hand, it is also addressed to all the people of God: "I am also addressing this message to the entire People of God" (Pope Francis, 2019, n° 3). On the other hand, the sections explicitly addressed to young people - which do not constitute the majority of the text - do not contain any exclusive formulation. When the Pope says "I constantly urge young people not to let themselves be robbed of hope" (Pope Francis, 2019, n° 15), It cannot be thought that this invitation does not in any way concern the other members of the people of God, not only as witnesses to hope, but also in the name of the responsibility of adults towards young people. In the same way, "the great Message for all Young People" which constitutes chapter 4 of the apostolic exhortation (111-133) : "God loves you" (112), "Christ, out of love, sacrificed himself completely in order to save you" (118) and « He is alive! » (124) is a message that is not specifically addressed to young people. The overall perspective of the text on this point is quite typical of the evolution permitted by the synodal process. For the Good News that young people are invited to hear for themselves within the people of God, so that their hearing may transform their lives (134sq), becomes a good for the whole Church. Moreover, the text repeatedly emphasises the responsibility of young people at the heart of the people of God: "Young people can offer the Church the beauty of youth by renewing her ability to "rejoice with new beginnings" (Pope Francis, 2019, n° 37). Thus, the Pope does not assign a specific mission to young people other than to stimulate the mission of the whole Church.

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation adds an interesting anthropological perspective from number 160 : "Adults, too, have to mature without losing the val-

ues of youth”. It appears here that the transition from youth to adulthood is not a complete break: “The experience of a youth well lived always remains in our heart. It continues to grow and bear fruit throughout adulthood” (Pope Francis, 2019, n° 160). In the name of the unity of people in history, both their own and that of the church community, youth cannot be separated from the rest of the people of God because the adult members of the church have not broken away from their own youth, which only wants to continue bearing fruit.

II. THE SYNODAL PROCESS THROUGH THE PROCESS

The texts elaborated in the framework of the synodal process outline a remarkable progression of ecclesiological awareness which will become matrix and open the way to the synod of synodality. It then becomes important to question what made this awareness possible by returning to the process itself.

1. Ecclesial listening practices

Three original practices have left their mark on the synodal process: a questionnaire widely sent to young people around the world in 2017; a pre-synodal meeting with young people from 19 to 24 March 2018, entitled “We talk together”, indicating that the fundamental issue at stake in the synod was the Church’s capacity to say “we”, to propose a “together” and to establish a dialogue; and finally, the participation of young people in the synod itself, as listeners.

These three practices have made it possible to develop a culture of listening which is reflected in the final document: the Church listens, it “allows the novelty of young people’s questions to emerge” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n°8). This statement is repeated in *Christus vivit* 38 with this imperative: “We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard”. It is the implementation of this capacity to listen that has favoured the passage from a Church “for” young people to a Church “with” young people.

Educators know that such a pedagogy of listening requires particular attention to how do young people do it? How they learn, how they feel, how they appropriate, how they elaborate, how they exchange...? But it is not so much a question of studying young people as of listening to them. This imperative of listening shows that dialogue is the facilitating framework for the relationship with young people. This framework is of fundamental importance for the Synod, because dialogue builds the right articulation of the relationship between the person (“I”) and the community or institution (“we”).

This is how we move from listening to dialogue, and then to exchange. Of course, this listening is costly, as Pope Francis already noted in *Evangelii gaudium* : “Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand” (Pope Francis, 2013, n° 105). But when one accepts to pay the price of this listening, as in the respect of the synodal processes⁸ or the invention of complementary listening practices, then “listening makes possible an exchange of gifts, in a context of empathy” (Synod of Bishops, 2018b, n°8).

In the end, the synodal experience allows us to understand that what is listened to is the faith as it is expressed. Thus, the specific participation of young people in the synodal process has allowed an original contribution to the expression of their faith and to the understanding of the synodality of the Church itself. This contribution is notably linked to the characteristic features of a generation designated by the prefix CO (generation of co-working, carpooling, co-tenants, co-construction,...) and which functions according to a logic of networks⁹. The CO generation stimulates and reawakens an ecclesiological patrimony that is under-represented in the practices and texts of previous generations. This favours a logic of companionship, which allows the final document of the Synod to define the road to Emmaus as a paradigm of the ecclesial mission in relation to young people, provided that the place of Christ remains his.

Thus, the participation of young people in the synodal process over a long period of time moved the synod from a logic of accompaniment to a logic of companionship. The quality of the dialogue then becomes a criterion for the search for truth¹⁰. This listening, if it takes place within a regulated framework that ensures the security and freedom of each person, can be a lever for emancipation. It allows space in the relationship for the unforeseen and in particular for the unforeseen in the word of the other. In a process of synodality, this listening is fruitful and transformative.

8 During the synod, a three-minute silence is imposed every three interventions. This silence allows for a process of discernment and not just analysis.

9 Cf. Jonard C., 2018, p.148-149 et Becquart, N., 2018, p. 153.

10 This is the meaning of the search for truth described in *Dignitatis humanae* 3 : “Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it”.

2. Ecclesial practices of transformation: initiating processes

The synodal process has made it possible to go beyond a logic according to which the Church must go to young people in order to make them come or return to the Church. This logic describes the contours of a pastoral accompaniment. On the contrary, the synod scrupulously followed the recommendation of *Evangelii Gaudium* that time is greater than space: “Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return. What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events” (Pope Francis, 2013, n° 223).

This passage forms the core of the section in *Evangelii gaudium* entitled “Time is greater than space”. Firstly, it is about considering the need to open up “a wider horizon” (Pope Francis, 2013, no. 222) and to “work for the long term” (Pope Francis, 2013, no. 223), and to do so without becoming intoxicated by the possession of space, i.e. “without being obsessed with immediate results” (Pope Francis, 2013, no. 223). It is therefore easier to understand the difference between a pastoral action for young people and a pastoral action with young people. Pastoral work for young people can be guided by the temptation to take possession of young people’s spaces and to “crystallise the processes” by focusing, for example, on the number of young people that this or that activity has succeeded in bringing together. Pastoral action with young people, on the other hand, initiates processes by recognising that these young people are subjects and actors, so as to allow new dynamics to be put in place¹¹. This pastoral action is clearly oriented towards “the building up of a people” (Pope Francis, 2013, no. 222.224.) and, more fundamentally, towards “human wholeness” (Pope Francis, 2013, no. 224), according to Guardini’s expression (Guardini, 1965, p. 31), which implies the full commitment of each of its actors.

11 See Routhier 2005 which makes it possible to understand that the structures of supervision - of possession of space, we would say following Pope Francis - do not engender faith. In such a framing perspective, it is those who have been initiated from childhood who persevere. What generates faith is mainly the encounter with credible figures of faith who make those they meet the subject and first protagonist of their faith, releasing the dynamisms of which the pope speaks in *Evangelii gaudium*.

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At the end of this rapid review of the texts that have marked the synodal process from 2017 to 2019, it is possible to confirm that the way in which the synod speaks of young people allows us to discover something of the Church and that, in the context of this process, to speak of young people is to speak of the whole Church.

The synod will have made it possible to verify that to speak of the participation of young people in the life and mission of the Church is to speak of the participation of everyone in the life and mission of the Church, based on the act of faith of each person, whether young or old, lay person or bishop, man or woman, etc.

With this Synod, Pope Francis is honouring the conditions for implementing his programmatic apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*. Indeed, it is by freeing the voice of young people in the Church that the themes of the Church “going out” or “missionary conversion” can be deployed. This is why we can consider that the 2018 Synod is not so much a consequence of *Evangelii gaudium* as a decisive step in its implementation.

The Synod of 2018 does not result in the promotion of a youth ministry, but allows the mission for and with young people to benefit from the synodal form of the whole Church: to walk together, in the name of the gifts that each one has received from the Spirit.

In this way, it becomes permanently established in the minds of believers that synodality is the shape of the Church and that “In this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multifaceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be” (Pope Francis, 2019, no. 207). In this sense, we can recognise that the 2018 synod is paving the way for a synod on synodality which is not a way for the Church to refocus on herself, but rather to rediscover who she is in God’s call and for the transformation of the world.

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THE SYNOD 'WITH' YOUNG PEOPLE (2018) PAVES THE WAY FOR THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY (2023)

SUMMARY

Pope Francis is very concerned to transform the Church through synodality. He has chosen the synod of bishops as the main tool for this reform. This paper shows how the functioning of the Synod of Bishops, which the pope has profoundly transformed, puts this project of a synodal Church into effect. From this point of view, the process of the 2018 synod on youth is an example of how synodality is transforming the Church. By taking the steps of this process step by step, the paper shows how the practice of synodality is deeply transforming the Church and how the synod of 2018 paves the way for the synod of 2023 on the synodality of the Church.

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