



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 28 February 2014*

Good morning! I thank Cardinal Ouellet for his words and all of you for the work you have done in these recent days.

Transmission of the Faith, educational emergency. We repeatedly hear the phrase: *transmission of the Faith*; the expression is not so surprising. We know that nowadays it is a real must; how is the faith to be transmitted, this was the theme of the previous Synod on evangelization.

Educational emergency is an expression which you recently adopted together with those who have prepared this work. And I like it, because it makes room for anthropology, an anthropological vision of evangelization, an anthropological foundation for it. If there is an educational emergency with regard to the transmission of the faith, it is how to address the issue of catechizing young people from the perspective — we might say — of fundamental theology. In other words, what are the anthropological presuppositions present today in the transmission of the faith that have led to this educational emergency for the youth of Latin America. For this, I believe we need to reiterate and return to the great criteria of education.

And the first criterion of education is that it is — we said it once during the Commission — not only about imparting knowledge and transmitting content. It involves multiple dimensions: the transmission of *content*, *habits* and a *sense of values* — these three things together.

Transmitting the faith requires forming habits of behaviour; one must create the proper conditions for young people to receive the values that will prepare them, and enable these habits to grow; and then one needs to provide basic content. Were we to transmit the faith by content alone, its

reception would be merely superficial or ideological and without roots. Transmission of faith must be about content and values, together with a sense of values and habits, habits of behaviour. The old suggestions that our confessors made when we were boys: “So this week do this, this and this...” were meant to instill in us a habit of behaviour; not only content, but also values. The transmission of the the faith should be framed in this way. Three pillars.

Another important thing that should be imparted to youth, to children as well, but especially to adolescents, is *the ability to manage their dreams, their ‘utopia’, well*. We in Latin America have experienced a rather unbalanced approach to utopia. In some places — in some places but not in all — and in some periods, it overwhelmed us. At least in Argentina, we can say that many young people in Catholic Action, because of bad formation in their understanding of this utopia, ended up entangled in the guerilla warfare of the 70s. Knowing how to manage the idea of utopia, in other words, knowing how to guide — “manage” is an unpleasant word — knowing how to guide and enable a young person in their idea of utopia is a treasure. A young person without ideals is a person who has grown old before his or her time. What can I do to ensure that this young man’s desire, that this utopia leads him to encounter with Jesus Christ? There is a path that needs to be followed.

Allow me to suggest the following. Utopia grows in a healthy way in a young person when it is accompanied by *memory* and *discernment*. Utopia looks to the future, memory looks to the past, and one discerns the present. A young person needs to receive memories and in those memories plant, root, his utopia; discerning in the present this utopia — the signs of the times — allows this utopia to grow, but it must be firmly rooted in memory and the history he has received. Masters of discernment discerned the present — they needed to for the sake of the youth — and in doing so they were already looking to the future.

Thus, the educational emergency already has a riverbed on which to move, beginning with what belongs most to the young, i.e., their utopia.

Hence the insistence — that they hear me talk about here and there — *on the encounter between the elderly and the youth...* the icon of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Young people coming together with their grandparents is key. Several bishops from countries in a state of crisis, where the unemployment rate among young people is high, were telling me part of the solution for young people lies in the fact that their grandparents are supporting them. They re-encounter their grandparents, who have a pension, and so leave their retirement homes and return to the family; what is more, they bring back with them their memory, that encounter.

I remember a film I saw some 25 years ago, by the famous Japanese director, Kurosawa. It was very simple: a family, two children, a father and a mother. The father and mother travel to the United States, leaving the children with their grandmother. Japanese children, Coca Cola, hot dogs ... this sort of culture. And the film tells the story of how these children, little by little, begin to

listen to what their grandmother tells them about the historical memory of their people. When the parents return, it is the parents who are disoriented: they are far from that memory the children received from their grandmother.

This phenomenon of children and young people spending time with their grandparents preserved the faith in the countries of the East during the Communist era because the parents were not able to go to Church. Some were telling me — perhaps I am getting confused... in recent days, I don't know who, the Bulgarian Bishops or those from Albania — they were telling me that their churches are filled with the elderly and with young people: the parents don't go, because they have never encountered Jesus. This in parentheses ... children and young people spending time with their grandparents is crucial for receiving the memory of their people and for discerning the present: to become teachers of discernment, spiritual advisors. And here, we see its importance with regard to transmitting the faith to young people, a “one on one” apostolate. One cannot discern the present without a good confessor, a good spiritual director who has the patience to listen to young people for hours on end. Remembrance of the past, discernment of the present, and a utopia for the future: this is the path along which a young person's faith grows.

Third. I would say that the educational emergency in the transmission of the faith, and also of culture, is a problem involving the *throw-away culture*. Nowadays, through the economy that has taken root in the world, which has at its centre the god of money and not the human person, everything is ordered to this centre and whatever does not fit according to this logic is discarded. ‘Left-over’ babies, babies who are bothersome or whose arrival is inconvenient, are simply thrown away. The Spanish bishops were recently talking to me about the quantity of abortions, the number; I was speechless. They keep track of this The old, too, are discarded, they tend to discard them, and in some countries of Latin America there is hidden euthanasia, hidden euthanasia! Because social services pay only up to a certain point, and no more, so the poor old people make do as they can. I remember visiting a retirement home for the elderly in Buenos Aires, which belonged to the State. The beds were all occupied; so there were putting mattresses on the floor, and the elderly just lay there. A country cannot buy a bed? This is indicative of something else, is it not? They are like waste material. Soiled sheets, with every sort of filth; without a napkin and the poor old people were eating there, they were wiping their mouths with the sheet.... I saw this with my own eyes, no one told me about it. They are treated like trash; and this worries us... here I return to the issue of the young.

Today, the number of young people in need of work are a great burden on this global system; the unemployment rates among young people are so high. We have a generation of young people who have not yet experienced their own dignity. It isn't that they don't have anything to eat, because their grandparents feed them, or the parish, or state-run social assistance, or the Salvation Army, or their local club.... They have bread to eat, but not the dignity of having earned their bread to take home! Today young people have become part of this gamut of waste material.

And so, in the throw away culture, we find young people who need us more than ever; not only to help them with their dreams — because in a young person without work the sense of utopia is anaesthetized, or he is on the verge of losing it altogether. It is urgent to transmit the faith to young people who are looked upon today like waste material. And on the subject of waste material, drugs are spreading among these young people. It is not just a problem of vice, there are many forms of addiction. As in all times of epic change, strange phenomena exist such as the proliferation of dependencies: compulsive gambling has reached extremely high levels ... and drugs are an instrument of death for young people. There is a global arming of drugs that is destroying this generation of young people, who are destined to be thrown away!

This is what I wanted to say and share. First, regarding the educational framework, to transmit content, behaviour and a sense of values. Second, concerning the utopia of the young, to place them in relation and harmonize them with memory and discernment. Third, the throw-away culture as one of the most serious phenomena that our youth are undergoing, especially through drug use, which can and is destroying these young people. We are throwing away our young people! Where does our future lie? In duty: the *traditio fidei* is also a *traditio spei*, and we must give it!

The final question I wish to leave you with is: when dreams or ideals fall into disenchantment, what can we do? The utopia of an enthusiastic young person slips into disenchantment. Disenchanted youth need faith and hope.

I thank you with all my heart for your work during these days to address this educational emergency; proceed forward! We have to help each other in this. By your conclusions and all that we can possibly do. Thank you very much