

FIRST THINGS

FROM THE HEART OF A YOUNG FATHER

by
Charles J. Chaput

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Bishops get a lot of unsolicited mail from strangers, some of it pleasant, some of it much less so. It goes with the job. But every once in a while a letter comes in that's worth sharing with a wider audience.

Last month, in preparation for the October 2018 synod, roughly 300 young adults from around the world gathered in Rome to discuss their views of faith and the Church. The result was a valuable experience of dialogue and learning—so valuable that I think that continuing the process of listening to a wide range of young adult experiences is important. In that spirit, I offer a letter below, which I received just *after* the March pre-synod gathering. It was unsolicited and from a stranger—but hardly the first such letter to come my way. Though I've removed the author's name and other identifiers, the content is unchanged and used with his permission. It deserves consideration as we seek a fuller understanding of the pastoral challenges facing young adults in a changing world.

I am 26 years old, a father of three young children, and I wish to offer my perspective, shared by many of my peers, on Rome's upcoming synod [on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment"].

Though the Church's growing focus on evangelization of the "Nones" is encouraging, there have been recent discussions emanating from several prominent figures in Rome and throughout Church leadership regarding a so-called "paradigm shift" relative to doctrine, the supremacy of individual conscience, and pastoral accommodation. My wife and I find these developments disturbing and potentially disastrous for the evangelization of the young

and the fallen-away.

We young people crave the truth and clarity of good teaching. On a secular level this is evidenced by the meteoric rise in popularity of Jordan Peterson. We crave the truth, no matter how blunt or difficult it is for us to swallow or for the shepherds of our flock to teach.

Our culture is roiled in confusion concerning the basic tenets of human nature: From a very young age, we're deluged with propaganda that distorts basic scientific truths about gender, paints virtue and chivalry as "toxic masculinity," denigrates the family, and desecrates the nature of sex and its fruits, especially the unborn child.

We urgently need the Church's clarity and authoritative guidance on issues like abortion, homosexuality, gender dysphoria, the indissolubility of matrimony, the four last things, and the consequences of contraception (moral, anthropological, and abortifacient). My generation has never, or rarely, heard these truths winsomely taught in the parishes. Instead, we hear most forcefully and frequently from our bishops' conference and our dioceses regarding the federal budget, border policy, net neutrality, gun control, and the environment.

Increasingly, we have noticed an appeasement of modern culture under the broad cloak of pastoral sensitivity, including cases of some high-profile clergy who deliberately blur the Church's teaching regarding homosexuality and transgenderism in the name of "building bridges." The dubia remain unanswered. Discussions of beauty in the liturgy and reverent reception of the Eucharist are mocked. Heads are scratched at decreasing Mass attendance, yet young people who look to tradition to recover our bearings are chided as "rigid."

This shift away from clarity is demoralizing for young faithful Catholics, particularly those with a heart for the New Evangelization and my friends raising children against an ever-

stronger cultural tide. Peers of mine who are converts or reverts have specifically cited teachings like *Humanae Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio*, and *Veritatis Splendor* as beacons that set the Church and her wisdom apart from the world and other faiths. Now they're hearing from some in the highest levels of the Church that these liberating teachings are unrealistic ideals, and that "conscience" should be the arbiter of truth.

Young Catholics crave the beauty that guided and inspired previous generations for nearly two millennia. Many of my generation received their upbringing surrounded by bland, ugly, and often downright counter-mystical modern church architecture, hidden tabernacles, and banal modern liturgical music more suitable to failed off-Broadway theater. The disastrous effect that Beige Catholicism (as Bishop Robert Barron aptly describes it) has had on my generation can't be overstated. In a world of soulless modern vulgarity, we're frustrated by the iconoclasm of the past 60 years.

In sum, many of us feel that we're the rightful heirs of thousands of years of rich teaching, tradition, art, architecture, and music. We young Catholics increasingly recognize that these riches will be crucial for evangelizing our peers and passing on a thriving Church to our children. If the Church abandons her traditions of beauty and truth, she abandons us.

I offer these observations without bitterness or insult, but with love for my brothers and sisters who have not received the blessing, love, and formation God mysteriously granted to me and my friends. I am not alone. Though deeply troubled by the current state of affairs, we remain hopeful; and rooted in that confidence, we're raising large families who will inherit the future of the Church. I sincerely hope this can be conveyed emphatically at the upcoming synod, and I thank every pastor and bishop who stands as a role model for evangelizing, preaching the truth, and promoting the beauty and richness our faith has to offer.

I can add little to that kind of witness. I'll merely suggest the obvious: The future of the Catholic faith belongs to those who create it with their fidelity, their self-sacrifice, their commitment to bringing new life into the world and raising their children in truth, and their determination to walk Christ's "narrow way" with joy. May God grant the 2018 synod fathers the grace and courage to lead young people on that path.

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