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Youth and Experience of Living Faith The Essential Aspects of the Path to Christian Maturity

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Introduction

At the beginning it is worth asking a few quite provocative questions: Is there any other Christianity than the authentic one? Is there another faith than the living one? Or is it rather that you have a choice to either be authentic in your Christian faith, or not be a Christian at all? The foregoing questions seem to be a pure rhetorical exercise in the face of the essence of Christianity. Otherwise, they are not unfounded. In 1970s Rev. Franciszek Blachnicki upon diagnosing the condition of the self-proclaimed Christians, he called them the “skeletons of lifeless Christians.” In one of his homilies he said: “If we try to renew the catechumenate among baptized, confirmed Christians who are attending the Eucharist, it is because we are terrified of the spiritual desert all around us. The desert full of skeletons of lifeless Christians who do not do what they preach. We are searching for the way out of this situation, we are looking for a key to this mystery, a key to the source of life.”¹ It seems that this assessment is still relevant nowadays. Today we may also ask the question: How to deal with this spiritual deadness? Or even more essential one: What is

¹ F. BLACHNICKI: *Myśli, wyznania, testament*. Lublin 2002, p. 62.

then the secret of authentic, living Christian faith? This question is very compelling since at the first glance, we can observe an alarming regress of interest in Christianity among the European youth, especially in Western Europe. The regress in question is also noticeable in Poland. According to Bogdan Biela, “without any further research we can see that youth participation in the life of Polish parishes is dwindling: the number of young people regularly attending the Sunday Mass is falling, also youth’s commitment in Church organizations and movements is decreasing, young people’s beliefs and value systems are not coherent/reconcilable with rules provided by the Church.”² Answer to the question concerning the essence of authentic, current, and feasible Christianity nowadays become the key challenging issue in matters of culture and civilization. Moreover, it seems that the answer oscillates around the issue which is fundamental to Christianity — faith.

Faith and sign

It is about faith. Why is that? It seem that it is caused by the fact that Christianity, in its nature, cannot be strictly classified as one of the religions. Referring to Benedict XVI’s words, we can say that Christianity is something more than merely a religion, it is the event of faith. Faith which “not only means acceptance of a definite set of truths concerning mysteries of God, human, life and death, as well as the coming events. Faith is deep, personal relation with God based on, one’s who loves us as a first, love.”³ It can be also rephrased in the following way; as Józef Tischner writes in the introduction to the Polish translation of St. Augustin’s *De Trinitate*: God is the Absolute Event of Love,⁴ adequate receiving of this event, which is granted to people — receiving which takes place before the answer of love — can transpire only in a form of faith. It results from the faith’s own nature, or more precisely, it results from its cognitive aspect. If in man’s answer of love given to God is hidden an element of voluntary longing, it is possible only thanks to previously acquired intel-

² B. BIELA: *Pastoralne nawrócenie w teorii i praktyce*. Katowice 2014, p. 56.

³ BENEDYKT XVI: “Homilia wygłoszona podczas Mszy św. na placu Piłsudskiego w Warszawie 26 maja 2006 roku.” *Gość Niedzielny*. *Trwajcie mocni w wierze*, 4 June 2006, p. 7.

⁴ See J. TISCHNER, “O Bogu, który jest blisko. Wprowadzenie do lektury *O Trójcy Świętej* św. Augustyna.” In: ŚW. AUGUSTYN: *O Trójcy Świętej*. Trans. M. STOKOWSKA. Kraków 1996, p. 13.

lectual knowledge. Particular knowledge acquisition which takes place only in faith. Saint John of the Cross wrote significantly and extremely perceptively on this matter: “Mind — Mystical Doctor emphasizes — [...] to be prepared for this Divine union, [...] must be [...] leaning upon faith, which alone is the proximate and proportionate means whereby the soul is united with God; for such is the likeness between itself and God that there is no other difference, save that which exists between seeing God and believing in Him. For, even as God is infinite, so faith sets Him before us as infinite; and, as He is Three and One, it sets Him before us as Three and One; and, as God is darkness to our understanding, even so does faith likewise blind and dazzle our understanding. And thus, by this means alone, God manifests Himself to the soul in Divine light, which passes all understanding. And therefore, the greater is the faith of the soul, the more closely is it united with God. [...] ‘He that will be united with God must believe’ (Hebrews 11, 6). That is, he must walk by faith as he journeys to Him, the understanding being blind and in darkness, walking in faith alone; for beneath this darkness the understanding is united with God, and beneath it God is hidden.”⁵

In the above excerpt absolutely crucial fact is that St. John of the Cross depicts faith as a relation, on the basis of proportion, as the only one proportionally the most adequate means of soul Divine union. Faith understood in this way, for Mystical Doctor, is not restricted to narrow circle of mystics. Quite the contrary, it is a means of achieving Divine union. The path for a young beginner in spiritual life as well as for an experienced, saintly old man. It is thanks to the proportion in faith noticed by St. John of the Cross, concerning similarity, and non-similarity at the same time, between the contents about God (assuming life experience and acquired knowledge — the more extensive the better) and God Himself. These are two separate orders, but they are proportion between this two paths of exploring of the Triune God. Saint John of the Cross emphasizes this very clearly when he says that God is infinite and faith sets Him as He is, as He is Three and One, faith depicts God as Three in unity. Faith is not depicting knowledge about God, but God Himself. Faith is not providing something about God, but God Himself. Faith does not intermediate, does not confront with the contents of the faith to which it secondarily refers. Faith is a transparent mean, it is God’s own directness, who wants to give Himself to the man’s experience, regardless of the man’s age, but in a manner that is the most appropriate for a certain age. In the way of acquiring knowledge, not in the subject of acquired knowledge, lies the

⁵ SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS: *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, The Second Book. Trans. E. A. PEERS, Dover Publications 2008, chapter IX, point 1.

difference between faith in God in the earthly life and seeing God in eternity. What is the origin? Saint John of the Cross proposes that similarity between God and faith is like similarity between God seen in clear seeing, which means clear understanding (because seeing clearly is the highest, the clearest way of acquiring knowledge on God) and God comprehended by faith. In other words, it is the similarity between direct, certain, and evident understanding of God, which is clearly seeing, and direct, certain, but not obvious understanding of God — understanding in faith. It means that the man in faith commune with the very same God as in seeing, which is more in the way that is equally direct and evident; the only difference is in a degree of obviousness. This difference is especially intense in young man's faith, which is probably caused by the fact that young people due to their age are unable to discern properly in their thinking.⁶ What is the reason of the difference? The fact that faith is a way of understanding God during one's earthly life, it is the attempt at understanding God by the man who remains in the (human) body. It means that in seeing clearly, being revealed in His godly light, God comes across the mind torn off its sensual correlates — that is, the mind free from earthly way of cognitive contents reception; it is the mind which is thwarted in its cognitive rise to God's light by itself, but the brain which is fully susceptible to this ennoblement. Thus, mind is not able to receive cognitive contents by itself, but it is well capable to receive contents beyond its natural operation, no longer disturbing mind. Mind explores clearly. In faith, where His godly light is being revealed, God comes across in the mind which is cooperating with senses, it means that mind, naturally approaches in its operation another type of objects. For this reason alone, the mind receives in faith what is provided, but cannot satisfyingly distinguish the contents, and thus, obscure or obfuscated state; mind does not eventually acquire the knowledge. This darkness does not result from any deficiency, but rather from excess. In faith mind is obscured because it is blinded — it unites with God shared and exposed to man by faith, but at the same time the human mind is not able to fully acquire Him. God who, given in faith to our understanding (in truths of faith), is a mystery

⁶ It is emphasized by developmental psychologists that “adolescents are characterized by understanding uncertainty caused by reflection. When a young child gives his or her opinions with certainty and promptly, an adolescent keeps ponder over and hesitates. It is caused by the fact that during the growing up there occurs awareness that not every situation is simple and not every problem is solvable. Hesitation and skepticism are so strong that simple situations transform into very complicated ones. Although mental abilities of adolescents are developing rapidly, it may, at the same time, seem as if ‘they lost their intellectual foundation’” (*Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, t. 2: *Charakterystyka okresów życia człowieka*. Eds. B. HARWAS-NAPIERAŁA, J. TREMPAŁA. Warsaw 2000, p. 173).

too noble to encompass because of mind's orientation towards empirical cognition. This is a very harsh reality especially for a young person whose mind is turned towards empiricism to a greater extent; mind's operation is shaped and developed by intense sensual stimulation — stimuli coming from sphere of perception and from sensations. "It is connected with the fact that adolescents' observations are more exact, multifaceted and more directed [...]. It is connected, among others, with the highest sensual sensitivity in the entire course of a lifetime."⁷ Regardless of that the foregoing, the darkness of faith as understood by St. John of the Cross, is in fact the darkness connected with God's light granted, by virtue of the faith, to human mind, the mind still remaining in the body. Despite this darkness surrounding Divinity, it does not come from God, or even from faith, but rather from the faith situation — it comes from the fact that faith provides the God's light to mind in earthly life. That is why St. John of the Cross writes: "Faith, at the ending and breaking of this mortal life, will allow the glory and light of the Divinity, which was contained in it, to appear."⁸ Is a young person able to experience his or her darkness of faith in this particular perspective?

Faith as experience

Careful reading of *Ascent of Mount Carmel* allows to fathom that faith per se is not obscuring, yet enlightening, does not cover, but rather allows Divine union with God in a hidden way. At the end of our life faith terminates and turns into seeing; it ceases to be obfuscated. Faith in its essence is approaching the clear understanding, it is aiming to know God, to experience Him. What is more, faith is experienced as such also at the onset of life, which is the conscious stage of living with God — often it can take place even in early youth. Faith as experience is initiated at the moment when the mind, which is in the body — while taking for granted what is not, in fact, obvious — agrees to build up young person's life on the basis of this certainty. What is the basic, fundamental certainty in the structure of faith, which is understood this way? It is God. Actualization of God's presence — not theoretical realization, but compelling and engaging one's entire life — is the origin of first experiences

⁷ *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, t. 2: *Charakterystyka okresów życia człowieka*, chap. quoted, p. 173.

⁸ SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Mount of Ascent Carmel...*, Chapter 9, point 3.

of God's closeness. It is not about the immature emotional expression or shallow exultation, but about the entire structure of more or less subtle internal touches, which are build on realized truth of faith (for example: *God loves me, I am a sinner, Jesus is my Salvation*), internal touches which are results of confronting certain truth of faith with young person's life, which leads him or her to understanding and experiencing truth about his or her life; to understand and experience God's closeness full of love, which is given to man in certain truth of his or her life. This way of experiencing faith results in conversion (transformation of way of acting and thinking) and in consequence — not only stable bond with God, which is a crucial characteristic of mature faith, but also (during the mind's gradual release from shackles of sensuality) — a deep sense of God's reality. The mystique ensues here. Faith understood this way is complementing intentionally the man's cognitive deficiencies, it is the beginning of what is mystical. In fact the Christian mystique originates at the very beginnings of faith, when the man starts to realize God's presence. Even a young person, at the moment of their performing an authentic act of faith, does not affirm their agreement to any particular truth about God, but they affirm the fundamental attitude towards God being the contents of faith. One may say that through the said act of faith a boy or girl updates their awareness of God's everlasting presence near to them and for them, along with associated truths concerning Salvation. What becomes paramount is, as Alojzy Drożdż puts it, the "thought of attachment to God, by whom man is won, when man accepts and receives God's goodness devoted to man and enters into the covenant with God."⁹ This is the origin of initial experiences in the field of faith — experiences, which get deeper and deeper if faith develops with all its reshaping (from awareness of God's presence, through stable bond and experience of reality, to witnessing the essence of God). Unfortunately, the problem is that many young Christians nowadays do not aim at experiencing and understanding God, do not experience Him. Why is that? That is because their Christianity is dead, their faith is reduced to affirmation of contents about God without any commitment to faith in their life. That is, one may say, isolated affirmation; it consists in separating contents, truths from its correlates and acquiring these correlates. This generates faith which is satisfied with minimal knowledge about God without any aiming to God Himself. Is that still the faith? For sure it is not in the St. John of the Cross's understanding. That is rather quasi-faith, faith which is not authentic — mediated and unstable. Faith without relations

⁹ A. DRÓŻDŹ: *Wiara — nadzieja — miłość. Teologia moralna szczegółowa*. Tarnów 1994, p. 20.

— without bonds. Faith which is dead. The question is: How to awaken faith in a young person? In accordance with the foregoing analysis of the faith phenomenon, it can be assumed that the living faith has to combine, at its origin, the realization of God's presence with decision to build up and organize one's entire life according to this truth. The living faith is the one "the deeds of which are signs of the participation in compelling grace, simultaneously faith is acting of love."¹⁰ Thus, man's faith has to be established on the basis of some understanding and experiencing oneself in the relation to God — the relation which is not only theoretical, but far more practical, existential, and therefore, alive. It is about the relation which gradually reshapes in reference to bond, as far as realization of God's presence becomes grasping the ever stronger sense of God's realism, which takes place in faith. Also, the question arises: How to commence this bond with God? How to initiate it in the young person's experience? It seems that the answer to these questions is connected strongly with the kerygmatic aspect of faith.

The kerygmatic aspect of faith

Living faith is not given to Christians, let alone the young disciples of Christ, all at once, with the entire fullness of its nuances. On the contrary, faith's vivid and life-giving character increases and deepens according to progression in bond with God, that is, according to the growth in Christian maturity. This maturity is an accomplishment of some kind of steadiness in spiritual, intellectual, and moral life growth, on the basis of organized forms of deepened faith, as well as individual care for building personal bond with God. Christian maturity assumes in-depth awareness of oneself as a Christian — a Christ's disciple; it assumes bond with the Church community, ability to establish one's place in the Church, ability to serve and even ability to sacrifice one's life for Christ. Due to this, as the Second Synod of the Archdiocese of Katowice emphasized, "priesthood oriented towards the realization of true Church's aim will require Christian maturity, *kerygma* proclamation and mystagogic initiation of personal bond with God in praying, God's word, sacraments and fraternal community."¹¹ It is important to emphasize that the *kerygma* proclama-

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 21.

¹¹ W. SKWORC: *Wstuchani w Ducha. Uchwały II Synodu Archidiecezji Katowickiej*. Katowice 2016, p. 9.

tion and initiation of personal bond with God are not additive values to Christian maturity, they are its vital emanation — the way of expressing it. They are not possible without some kind of experience of God, which is connected with the fact that faith is not limited only to the scope of conventional religious behaviours, but it is expressed in awareness of real God's presence in the Church and in the world. Understood this way, living faith looks for the God's presence especially in liturgy (first of all during the Holy Mass), in individual prayers, in God's word and in community, while a young person comes up gradually to this experiencing. At this point we can say about the way consisting of several defined stages — particular periods of spiritual life. On the basis of *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum* (OICA) — the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults — we can distinguish: period of evangelization, period of pre-catechumenate, period of catechumenate (more precisely, deuterocatechumenate), period of Christian initiation (*ritus electionis* — period of enlightenment and purification with its rites) and period of mystagogy,¹² and the period of diacony. In each of these periods of growing in Christian maturity, the faith should progress, remaining in relation with theological virtues (hope and love), cardinal virtues and to gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Understood this way the living faith cannot be proclaimed, it has to be skillfully initiated in one's experience, and next, its growth is to be stimulated and its deepening assisted. This initiation takes place mainly thanks to evangelization, which should be priority of a young person's priesthood — especially in case of the New Evangelization. It has been emphasized that “the responsibility for one's sisters and brothers, who lost their sense and taste of faith due to different reasons, pushes [...] ‘to proclaim Gospel which is always new and always carrying novelty; evangelization, which has to be lead with diligence, always using novel methods and devices.’”¹³ An example of the foregoing can be *Przystanek Jezus* (The Jesus Stop) — the evangelization initiative which is targeted at young people where “evangelizers try to approach attendees of an event by using their language, using movies, images, music, and by speaking directly in an approachable way. *Przystanek Jezus* is a fight for the young man. It also allows young generation to speak out their point of view, reveal their pains, and what is

¹² See A. ŻĄDŁO: “Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych jako źródło inspiracji dla współczesnego duszpasterstwa.” *Kieleckie Studia Teologiczne*, 2003, no. 2, pp. 389—391.

¹³ W. SKWORC, “Wysłuchani w Ducha. Uchwały II Synodu Archidiecezji Katowickiej,” ch. quoted, p. 9; see also: JAN PAWEŁ II: *Encyklika Veritatis splendor*, point 106. In: *Encykliki Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*. Vol. 2. Editorial board lead by S. MAŁYSIAK. Kraków 1996, p. 623.

beyond reason for them, and what they are fighting for.”¹⁴ Emphasis put on new diligence, new methods and devices is important because understood in this way novelty does not use cheap entertainment or makes truths of faith more attractive, but rather aims at expressing one’s inner self; it has to support experience. Also upon transitioning from evangelization and catechumenate to mystagogic methods and devices used in this way is not only well appreciated, it is necessary; it becomes the element of deepening young people’s formation which should be carefully investigated, as a part of parish priesthood, small groups gathering young people who receive proclaimed Gospel in awareness. As a consequence, the vision of path to maturity in faith strongly accentuates comprehensive, based on experience formation of young people. Its core is deuterocatechumenal communities of Christian grown initiated in parishes, their fruit — conscious service (diacony) undertaken by young people in two aspects, by commitment into earthly world’s issues (to build the Kingdom of God on the earth) and by involvement into Church issues (to evangelize and shape people who started their path of conversion) especially on the level of parish. “Deeper involvement into and commitment to parish’s life — as Bogdan Biela emphasizes — also expressed by participation in different movements, groups, and associations in the church. They are opportunities to deepen spiritual life, but also to assume greater, shared responsibility for life of a parish.”¹⁵ In consequence young people who were evangelized at the former stage of their life and thanks to this are compelled to faith, at subsequent stages can — by attending a group in the parish — share their experience and, as a consequence, gain other disciples. In this way, thanks to their testimony and proclamation of Gospel, also young people can initiate their peers to experience of living faith. This *initium*, as realizing experience of God’s close presence, is mainly original stage of faith development — evangelization stage which can be performed in three forms: pre-evangelization, individual evangelization, and evangelization retreat. Each of these forms, as a dynamic attempt to reach young people’s hearts with the Good News about Jesus, should carry experience of God’s presence — according to fundamental principle that life gives birth to another life. After all, the Bond which is alive cannot be originated by lifeless beginning. But how to attain it, when St. Paul emphasizes that “faith comes from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ”? (Romans 10, 17). How to listen to Jesus’ word so that experience of Jesus’ presence accompanies this and unites living faith? How

¹⁴ T. MADZIA: “Przystanek Jezus.” In: B. BIELA: *Pastoralne nawrócenie w teorii i praktyce*. Katowice 2014, pp. 216—217.

¹⁵ B. BIELA: *Pastoralne nawrócenie w teorii i praktyce*, ch. quoted, p. 57.

should young people listen? Well, it seems that this question is asked in a wrong way. The manner of listening is strongly dependent on the way of uttering. Saint Paul asks: “And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard of Him?” (Romans 10, 14b). Peter Hocken reminds us that “for Christian, faith does not originate from reflection alone, but it is an answer to proclamation of God’s words and deeds.”¹⁶ That is not first of all about how to listen but how to proclaim to facilitate the listening by young people so they can hear and strengthen their faith in God.

An example of proclaiming Gospel which initiates faith is without doubt St. Philip the Evangelist, whose activity in the field of evangelization is described in the Acts of the Apostles in the following way: “The people unanimously welcomed the message Philip preached, because they had heard of the miracles he worked and because they saw them for themselves. For unclean spirits came shrieking out of many who were possessed, and several paralytics and cripples were cured” (Acts 8, 6—7). Answer which Philip gives to Christians nowadays is simple: You have to proclaim Christ with power, because signs full of power accompanying proclamation confirm truth of the words proclaimed. “Word is accompanying — as Rino Fisichella claims — by sign, which gives to words the exact dimension. Gospel proclamation needs to be accompanied by signs, which give it visibility.”¹⁷ At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives certain recommendation himself: “ ‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.’” Deacon Philip does nothing more than this. He is obedient to his Lord’s will and that is why he is effective. The evidence that Jesus’ will is this way of pedagogy of proclamation are the final words of Jesus from the Gospel of Mark: “[...] while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16, 20). The quoted fragment prompts many questions about signs full of power: Isn’t it just an example of biblical hyperbole, symbolic overinterpretation of obscure historical background or result of later editing of the divinely inspired text? It is not the time to adjudicate in this matter, while generally it has to be done to avoid a situation where numerous reservations are an anesthetic

¹⁶ P. HOCKEN: *Kościół, który nadchodzi*. Trans. A. SIOŃEK. Katowice 2009, p. 112.

¹⁷ R. FISICHELLA: “Nowa Ewangelizacja wczoraj i dziś: Od dokumentów Soboru watykańskiego II do *Evangelii Gaudium* papieża Franciszka.” *Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne*, 2015, no. 48/2, p. 280.

and panacea for the weak faith. That is to not allow doubts to become, for Christians nowadays, a means of self-justification covering lacks in faith, even a faith as small as a grain of mustard seed. After all, one who has faith as a grain of mustard seed could — according to Jesus' words — say to a “mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea” and it would obey them. Even if, eventually, this radical way of understanding faith has only metaphorical sense, it does not change the fact that weakness in faith of many Jesus' disciples nowadays is majorly connected with lacks in trust and with anxiety about proclaiming the Gospel bravely and powerfully. At first, this is about the mistrust towards New Evangelization caused by the fact that in particular cases parish priesthood until now — shaped by different challenges — was not concentrated on searching for and attracting “ones who are apart”¹⁸ — Christians, who wane in their experiencing and practicing of faith or abandoned faith entirely. Often actions undertaken within the scope of the New Evangelization are taken tongue-in-cheek or even with hostility or as an oddity, clutter spreading, or cheap entertainment. Often it is connected with some reluctance towards new communities and Church-renewal movements, which in some parishes are — speaking openly — unwelcomed or treated as an element of local parish colour. Potential hidden in these communities remains undiscovered and unused; it even happens sometimes that the laity organizing in a given community — mainly young people — are left to their own means. There is nothing strange in the fact that the latest works devoted to the New Evangelization, priesthood, and proclaiming the word of God, more often stress the requirement of pastoral conversion that is a “change in thinking of priests, animators of movements and communities and also the laity who are formatted in traditional priesthood.”¹⁹ Pope Francis emphasized this by writing in *Evangelii gaudium*: “I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.”²⁰ It is connected with the necessity of discarding the criteria alike “it was always done this way,”²¹ and assuming the requirement to transform into “the Church which ‘goes forth’, is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.”²² It is not simple. There can occur temptations that traditional priesthood — which needs to be emphasize — will

¹⁸ W. SKWORC: *Wsluchani w Ducha. Uchwały II Synodu Archidiecezji Katowickiej*, ch. quoted, p. 94.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ FRANCISZEK: *Adhortacja apostolska Evangelii gaudium*, point 25.

²¹ W. SKWORC: *Wsluchani w Ducha....*, page 15.

²² Ibidem; see also: FRANCISZEK: *Adhortacja apostolska Evangelii gaudium*, point 24.

remain in many Polish parishes a basis of functioning for a long time come, treated as the only legitimate form of pastoral activity — because it is easier, more safer, and often not attracting any attention. There still remains the question if that what proclaiming Gospel in power really is? If we attempt to point out, among Christ's disciples nowadays, a group which is the most sensitized to the lack of power, it would undoubtedly be youth. While an average person, alike Doubting Thomas, in order to believe often needs powerful signs which support the man's faith, a young person who is lost in the modern world, needs this signs even more. In this context St. Paul's words from the Epistle to Timothy should become a caution to all Christians who believe in Christ: "You may be quite sure that in the last days there will be some difficult times. People will be self-centered and avaricious, boastful, arrogant and rude; disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious; heartless and intractable; they will be slanderers, profligates, savages and enemies of everything that is good; they will be treacherous and reckless and demented by pride, preferring their own pleasure to God. They will keep up the outward appearance of religion but will have rejected the inner power of it. Keep away from people like that" (2 Timothy 3, 1—5).

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Youth and Experience of Living Faith The Essential Aspects of the Path to Christian Maturity

Summary

Is there any other Christianity than the authentic one? Is there another faith than the living one? Or is it rather that you have a choice to either be authentic in your Christian faith, or not being a Christian at all? This question seems very compelling for at first glance we can notice alarming, increasing regress of the interest in Christianity among European youth — especially in Western Europe. How to restore Christianity to its brilliance for the modern youth? What is the secret of authentic Christianity and how to bring young people to experience it so that the religion is not associated by them with something archaic and long outdated? The foregoing questions especially are answered by this article.

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Les jeunes gens et l'expérience de la foi vivante, ou sur les aspects importants du chemin vers la maturité chrétienne

Résumé

Peut-il exister un autre christianisme que celui étant authentique et une autre foi que celle vivante? N'est-il pas qu'un chrétien soit vit sa foi authentiquement, soit il n'est pas du tout chrétien? Ces questions semblent d'autant plus absorbantes que c'est déjà au premier coup d'œil que l'on voit la régression — inquiétante et systématiquement s'approfondissant — de l'intérêt pour le christianisme parmi les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui, notamment sur le territoire de l'Europe occidentale. Que faire pour que le christianisme regagne son éclat aux yeux des jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui? Où, à vrai dire, réside le

secret d'un christianisme authentique et comment amener les jeunes à l'expérimenter de manière qu'ils n'associent pas la religion avec quelque chose d'archaïque et d'inactuel depuis longtemps? Dans le présent article, on essaie de répondre à ces questions ainsi qu'à d'autres.

Mots clés: foi, christianisme, maturité, jeunes gens, évangélisation

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I giovani e l'esperienza della fede viva ossia degli aspetti essenziali del cammino verso la maturità cristiana

Sommario

Ci possono essere un altro cristianesimo se non quello autentico e un'altra fede se non quella viva? Non è forse che il cristiano o vive autenticamente la sua fede oppure non è affatto cristiano? Tali domande sembrano essere talmente impegnative che già a prima vista si scorge il regresso inquietante, che si aggrava sistematicamente, del cristianesimo tra i giovani contemporanei — specie dell'area dell'Europa occidentale. Che fare perché il cristianesimo riacquisti il suo splendore agli occhi dei giovani contemporanei? In che cosa consiste veramente il segreto dell'autentico cristianesimo e come guidare i giovani a farne esperienza — in modo che la religione non venga associata a qualcosa di arcaico e da molto tempo superato? Il presente articolo intende rispondere a queste ed a domande simili.

Parole chiave: fede, cristianesimo, maturità, giovani, evangelizzazione