Patriarch Kirill: For the youth it is important that Christianity is a religion of freedom, not a religion of bans

Speaking at the Bishops' Council on the peculiarities of church preaching, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill reminded the meeting that St. Paul every time considered the peculiarities of his audience, seeking to become all things to all people so that at least some may be saved (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22). In particular, the apostle taught that each age needs a special approach: 'Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity' (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

In this connection, the Patriarch pointed to the fact that among the younger generation are representatives of various social groups with various interests, including representatives of particular sub-cultures, students and schoolchildren, scientists and workers, etc. 'Different groups have their own authorities and guidelines, for this reason the methods of mission among the youth can hardly be unified', the Primate stressed.

'For the past years, much has been done. In many dioceses, diocesan youth councils have been organized and numerous youth events have been held. The youth volunteer movement is developing. In comparison with what we saw only a few years ago, it can be stated that serious positive changes have been made in church-wide, diocesan and parish work with the youth. But we should take a sober view of the situation. The result of the work carried out is only a small part of what has to be done.

'Our word reaches in the first place those who themselves come to churches. For a lot of young men and women the Church remains something unknown lying beyond their life and experience', His Holiness stated, 'Meanwhile, the youth is not indifferent, searching for the truth, seeking to perceive the truth. At the same time, characteristic of young minds is protest generated by the desire to make sense of their life on their own, to evaluate what they took for granted earlier when they heard it from their elders. It is for this reason that the apostle writes to Bishop Timothy that he should admonish younger ones as brothers, not look down on them.

'Church youth organizations, youth actions should not turn into something stereotyped, officious, moralizing and boring. Convincing preaching, especially when it is addressed to the youth, should be supported by deeds, should point to the eternal novelty of the gospel of Christ, demonstrate that a true protest lies in following Christ, rejecting stereotyped behavior imposed by the secular world', the

Patriarch said.

According to His Holiness, ‘For the youth, more than for any other age group, the idea is important that Christianity is a religion of freedom, not a religion of bans, except for the prohibition of sin, and that particular self-restrains proposed to a Christian are needed only because they help us to find the fullness of live and realize that there is true love that does not end with the end of physical life but passes on to eternity.

‘Taking care of the youth, we should also remember those who have been in the Church since their childhood. Many young people have grown up in the families of parents who have taken an active part in church life and experienced since early age the ascetical practice of strict fasting and long divine services, devotional and pilgrims’ feats. Have the children of church parents become Orthodox youth? Have the parishes helped such children and teenagers to find their place in the Church? A person whose religious choice was made by his parents will sooner or later become adult. He will face the need to embrace a world outlook on his own. And we should find the right words to address such young men and women’.

Bishops’ Council information service

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