

From the Editor

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:26-27)

I am frequently stunned by how consistently we ignore or take these two verses for granted. In equal measure, we should be dumbstruck with awe—silent before the mystery and enflamed with passionate care for each other. Indeed, chapter 53 of the Rule of Saint Benedict teaches “Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ” and “in the reception of the poor and of pilgrims the greatest care and solicitude should be shown, because it is especially in them that Christ is received.”¹ *We are made in the image of God.*

“Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment,” the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, took place October 3–28, 2018. I write, however, in advance of the synod, wondering what will happen there. What will the bishops learn? What will young people require of the bishops? Will sustainable plans be enacted to effect the changes needed for “young people” who are the church *now*, not just the proverbial “future of the church”? Will the synod encourage us to meditate on each child, each youth, as the image of God?

The synod’s *Instrumentum Laboris* notes that Pope Francis has connected the synod to the *Message of the II Vatican Council to Youth*.² The council proclaimed, “Lastly, it is to you, young men and women of the world, that the Council wishes to address its final message. For it is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history.”³ The storied optimism of the council has taken a severe beating in the twenty-first century. Devastating climate change, record numbers of displaced people across the globe, rising nationalistic ideologies, wars, genocides, and a seemingly default attitude of fear and exclusion in the face of the perceived other certainly bode ill for the “gigantic transformations”

¹ *Rule of Saint Benedict 1980*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).

² *Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod 2018, Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, §1, <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/en/fede-discernimento-vocazione/instrumentum-laboris-for-the-synod-2018--young-people--the-faith.html>.

³ *Message of the Second Vatican Council to Youth*, December 7, 1965, http://www.vatican.va/gmg/documents/gmg-2002_ii-vat-council_message-youth_19651207_en.html.

that we bequeath to our children and young people. Can we change this inheritance if we act as if being made in the image of God truly mattered?

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God (Matt 5:9). *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matt 18:3). *Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs* (Matt 19:14). Of course I could be accused of proof-texting, but these verses make me wonder if children have a privileged perspective for recognizing the image of God. One young person responded to the questionnaire distributed in preparation for the synod that, “in our contemporary world, time dedicated to listening is never wasted.”⁴ What can we learn theologically about the image of God in the other from listening to our young people?

In the United States, the summer of 2018 seared into our memories the image of multiple hundreds, perhaps thousands, of children separated from their parents at the US-Mexico border. Where was the recognition of Christ in the guest, of the image of God in the defenseless child or youth?

Also over the summer, Pope Francis changed the Catechism of the Catholic Church to read, “The death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person.”⁵ Even in those from whom we might reasonably recoil in fear, those who have acted against the image of God in murderous ways, we must contemplate the image of God that remains.

During a virtual town hall in advance of his apostolic visit to the United States in 2015, Valerie Herrera, a seventeen-year-old with vitiligo, asked Pope Francis about his expectations of young people and for advice about what young people should do. His response is as apt for the rest of us as it is for children and youth:

What I hope for from youth is for you all not to walk alone in life....Life is very difficult. It's difficult to walk alone. You get lost. You get confused. You can find the wrong path or you can be walking around in circles, in a maze, or worst, you can stop because you get tired of walking in life. Always walk hand-in-hand with someone who loves you, someone who gives you tenderness.⁶

⁴ *Instrumentum Laboris*, §65. Note that the synod seems to be defining “young people” as those between ages sixteen and twenty-nine (§6), while I am including younger people, children, in my remarks as well.

⁵ Inés San Martín, “Pope Francis Changes Teaching on Death Penalty, It’s ‘Inadmissible,’” *Crux: Taking the Catholic Pulse*, August 2, 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2018/08/02/pope-francis-changes-teaching-on-death-penalty-its-inadmissible/>.

⁶ Lauren Effron, “Pope Francis Tells Americans ‘Be Courageous’ during ABC News Virtual Audience,” ABC News, September 4, 2015, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/pope-francis-tells-americans-courageous-abc-news-virtual/story?id=33490392>.

I hope that the image of God in the young people who participated in preparations for the synod and who attended the synod will challenge us to a deeper understanding of the *imago Dei*, to a theology that sings of accompaniment for all people at every moment.

We are made in the image and likeness of God. We are not alone.

The term of book review editor Christopher McMahon, Saint Vincent College, comes to a close with this issue. I extend my deep gratitude to Professor McMahon for his careful stewardship of the book review section for volumes 42 through 45, his enthusiastic approach to finding the best books for our readers, and his diligence in recruiting the most skillful and appropriate reviewers. As always, I thank our authors for sharing their scholarship with our readers, and I thank all of the members of the *Horizons* editorial team for their inspiring creativity, diligent work, and unwavering commitment to excellent scholarship.