

Panel «Being Christian today- Church where to go?»

Zurich University, Fr 20.9.2019, 17 Uhr, Haldeliweg 2

Intervention by all speakers before the panel discussion.

Father General Arturo Sosa SJ: on secularism and young generation:

Being Christian Today – Where to Go as Church?

What is the place of faith in a highly secularized society? Does a church like the Catholic Church have a role beyond its ritual? At the University of Zurich Father General participated in a panel discussion on questions of this sort in front of an audience of people who were pondering the cultural role of religion and the element of stability it can bring to a society. Fr. Arturo Sosa offered the following remarks.

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What does it mean to be a Christian today? Where is our Church heading? How do we find God in these increasingly secular times? Can our faith speak once again to the young? Where do we find hope? To approach such questions, we need not just knowledge, but WISDOM.

In the book of Wisdom in the Bible we read, *For she [Wisdom] is a reflection of **eternal light**, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and **an image of God's goodness**. Although **she is but one**, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.*

We are invited to read the “Signs of the Times”, and then to ask, “What could be a Life of Faith in a Secular Age?” Our times are marked by an ever growing secularization. Seeking only the “old ways” may be seen as a response to a threat. We may fear secularization as a diminishment. We may mourn the loss of the shared rhythms of a common faith. We may despair that our Christian life still has meaning.

But Wisdom calls us to engage secularization, not fear it. It is a chance to be present in a NEW way: to ask how God is at work here and now. It is an opportunity to choose in a free and decisive way to live our faith. This enriches all of secular society—even those who follow a different path. Not all people are artists, yet all are enriched by the beauty they produce. Likewise, not all people have faith, yet all can be enriched by our life in the Spirit. In every society, there is a need for transcendence, for something larger than oneself, for worship. There is a need for values that enlarge self-interest and foster magnanimity, a need for the self-giving and for the hope that come from the crucified and risen Lord. A need for action that supports a Common Good.

Reading the Signs of the Times invites us also to initiate a “Time for Prayer and Action.” We must face the challenges in front of us: the growing nationalism and populism, the widening economic disparity, the increasing political instability, the growing disregard for the common good, the neglect of the most vulnerable and immigrants, the number of

families displaced by war, those suffering at the margins, the worsening environmental degradation.

What can we do from the inspiration of Wisdom? We Jesuits are finding some pathways to answers that bring together prayer and action.

*We can make ourselves more and more companions of Jesus from our *closeness to the Poor*.

*We can work with them for social justice and for a *change* in economic, political and social policies and causes.

*We can understand better *the processes that generate injustice* and help develop alternative models.

*We can propose a globalisation process that is based on *interculturality*.

*We can *take care of migrants*, those displaced, and those who are trafficked.

*We can strengthen *democracy* by forming citizens and promoting vocations to public service and policies to nurture the Common Good.

We realize that, growing up in our rapidly changing world, many young people are questioning what can give their lives value and meaning. Many feel lost or without hope. Yet at the same time they carry within themselves the seeds of a new vision and a new way of living our faith. The question for us is: how can we walk with them into this hope-filled future? So we must accompany young people in their situations.

These are crucial places from which the Church seeks to perceive and discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in and through these moments in human history. We need to allow ourselves be helped by young people so that we understand better the epochal shift that is taking place today and the new hope that it brings.

We are accordingly invited to create spaces in our apostolic works, the Church, and civil society so that young people may be leaders; so that they may grow in discernment and their commitment.

Finally, but very importantly, to answer the signs of the times with wisdom, we must live *lives of integrity*, deeply spiritual and open to sharing who we are and what motivates our lives.