

2011

Synod Theme: “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth”  
Ecc.12:1a.

Our approach will be to first define the two key words i.e. Creator and Youth.

**CREATOR** – Creator is a noun of the verb ‘to create’ Creator is one who creates. To create is to cause something to exist or to make something new or original e.g. God created the world. To create is to give rise to or to produce.

It is important to know that the word ‘Creator’ is one of the attributes of God. Other attributes are: God is unique, He is immortal, He is Omnipotent, He is Omniscient, He is King and Judge, He is transcendent and He is holy.

**YOUTH:**

The term, ‘Youth’ is hard to define. The Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines a youth as “one who is young”. It is especially the phase “before a child becomes an adult”. This may mean a period between ages fifteen and twenty-five years, and it also includes young adults from twenty-five to thirty-five years. According to the free encyclopedia Wikipedia, “youth” is the period between childhood and adulthood, described as the period of physical and psychological development from the onset of puberty to maturity and early adulthood.

The United Nations Organization (UNO) defines a youth as someone who by and large would fall within the age range of between 15 and 25 years. However, there seems to be an overlapping to some extent in age and nomenclature in various contexts. The specific age range that constitutes youth varies from one culture or society to the other. The United Nations legal standards consider individuals under 18 as children; meanwhile, youth is usually understood as a much ‘looser’ concept, generally encompassing the age group 15 to 24. Whereas, individuals aged 15 to 18 as earlier noted are also included in the legal definition of children. In Britain for instance, the term “juveniles” is usually applied to children aged 10 to 17 years, while that of “young adults” is applied to those aged 17 to 20 years. In the Nigerian context the term youth may include young people whose ages fall between 15 and 35 years.

The Western definitions of youth do not align with non-Western definitions. In traditional African societies for instance, youth includes younger ages such as 12, and older ages up to 35. Attaining adulthood for males can mean the ability to support a household,

or the capacity to fight in local or tribal wars. Girls are also considered adult after they reach sexual maturity. According to Bilal al-Naaim, the deputy head of the Lebanon-based Shia Muslim armed group, Hezbollah, involving young people in military activities is not wrong, in Islam, a 15-year-old is considered a responsible adult. Some United Nations bodies, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNpf), HAVE DEFINE "Youth" as individuals who are aged 10 – to 19 years-old.

For the Jews, as the transition from season to season is marked by special observances, so also is the milestones in human life. Every age group has its specific importance and duty. At five years – the child is ready for the study of the scripture:

At ten – ready to study the Mishnah

At thirteen – ready to study the Talmud

At eighteen – the youth is ready for marriage

At twenty – mature for the pursuit of a livelihood

At thirty – man reaches strength

At forty – he has full understanding

At fifty – the ability to provide counsel

At sixty – he enters his senior years

At seventy – he attains old age

At eighty – his survival reflects strength

At ninety – bent in anticipation of the grave

At one hundred – he is as dead as past, withdrawn from the world. Mishnah Abot 5:24.

In Africa, we talk of five critical moments or stages in the life of any man as he goes through the rite of passage. These are:

- Childhood,
- Youth (adolescence),
- Adulthood (manhood and womanhood),
- Old age, and
- Death.

The first two stages which are relevant to our discussion will be highlighted here:

- ✓ The first critical period of life is childhood. It is the period of unlimited possibilities. It is the period of life when the future is unpredictable. It is the period of innocence. It is the period when parents learn new lessons from children. The mistakes made by children at this stage are made in good faith and honesty. Their mistakes are unlike the ones made by adults, which are often characterized by deliberate action, precision and calculative motives.
- ✓ The second critical stage in a man's life is that of youth or adolescence. Youthful stage is a rosy period of life. It is a time of opportunities. It is a time which demands

immediate action to snatch every good opportunity that comes one's way before old age sets in and the strength of earlier years is gone. It is in youth that man lays the foundation for the future strength and character.

Youthful stage is a rosy period of life. It is a time of opportunities. It is a time which demands immediate action to snatch every good opportunity that comes one's way before old age sets in and the strength of earlier years is gone. The youth are full of energy. In this period of life, their instincts and emotions come to their full strength, and clamour for expression and satisfaction. The second critical stage in a man's life is that of youth or adolescence. It is in youth that man lays the foundation for the future strength and character. Some youth would have wished to be with us today, but like the title of the song made popular by Andy Williams of the USA "...They have gone with the wind". Others are today languishing and suffering because they laid the wrong foundation in their earlier years through heavy drinking, smoking of Indian hemp/week, addiction to hard drugs, stealing, various other vices and loose sex life. Those who refuse to succumb or are lucky to retract their steps in a good time before destruction sets in are usually able to plan for their future and attain to great height in life. The life of a youth can be compared to a metal being melted in red fire. It can be bent or twisted into any form or shape; however, if the melted metal cools off, it cannot be worked into anything again. Such is the youthful life, it can be directed into good or negative directions, and if the opportunity to do well eludes one, it may not come again.

All things being equal, it is expected that an individual ought to have completed his/her secondary and tertiary education by the age of twenty-five years. However, it is not always the case, considering the Nigeria-situation, Megbalayin has opined that the age definition for youth be pushed higher since often times, many Nigerians still struggle to obtain Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or the National Certificate in Education (NCE) in their late twenties, and consequently still depend on their parents for their upkeep. Thus, any Nigerian within the age bracket of 15-35 should still be considered a youth. For Tony Marinho however, it is unbecoming to address persons between age 18 and 35 years as youths. According to him, the war in Afghanistan is returning 18 year olds in coffins to their distraught families in the name of national service and ultimate sacrifice. Though they are young, they are considered men, not youth. He advised that Nigeria should encourage her young adults to move forward and remove the title of "youth" as a cover for condoning irresponsibility or postponing participation as equal adults in the "adult playing fields of life". For Marinho, an eighteen year old is a man legally, medically, intellectually and by responsibility.

Megbalayin saw the need to extend the age definition of youth to include age 15 to 35 years because of the delay in academic pursuit among Nigerians, whereas, Marinho sees

this as an indulgence which condones irresponsibility among this age group, and thus, does not think age 18 and above should be included in the age definition for youth. In reality, it will be more appropriate in our situation in Nigeria to include all our young people from age 15 to 35 since people in this age group ;are the ones who are most vulnerable and responsible in all the activities that involve the youth.

The above age definitions for “youth” in whichever stance it is viewed, all connote a period of natural endowment of raw energy. Thus, youth are seen bubbling in spirit, with high hope, large dreams, aspirations and ideas of what their tomorrow will be. They naturally not stay still or quiet, especially when they anticipate or see their future on a totally collapsing socio-economic landscape. They work for the basic needs of life to be met. Therefore, in this context, they would naturally be restive within an acceptable limit in a continuum, in order to lay a solid foundation for the actualization of their dreams and aspirations.

The youth of any nation or society represents the vibrant energy of the people. Their abundant talent, potentials, and strength are depositories of the nation’s resources in skill and manpower. Youths remain one of the greatest assets that any community can possess. Potentially, they are the greatest investments for a society’s sustainability, development, productivity and posterity. Enthusiasm, energy and physical strength are significant qualities of youths truly (Prov.20:29), but for these natural endowments to be harnessed for productive purposes, they must be steered in the right course. This is why it is universally acclaimed that positive, fundamental and meaningful changes across cultural settings are usually engineered, fostered and maintained by the generation of youths in that society (howbeit, this occurs only if directed in the right way). Thus, any society or culture, whether macro or micro that allows a good percentage of her youth to be misdirected or neglected, risks her future cultural viability, potentiality and survival.

If adequate attention is given to the proper upbringing, formation, empowerment, human-resources development and training of the youth in a desirable direction, and conducive environment especially if done at an early stage, it is expected that this will bring about a lasting positive impact on their lives, ethical values, thinking pattern, ideology, orientation and general outlook on life. The modus operandi guiding their day-to-day activities will take its root on these principles, becoming their guide even in adulthood. Nevertheless, training becomes more meaningful when the environment of training provides credence to what is being taught. Only then can a positive response to training be induced and actualized in the trained.

Indeed, the most obvious fact about today's youth is that, they are the next generation's leaders at the national levels, state, and the local society or the religious community; however, it is unfortunate that in some parts of the world, the examples and experiences available for most youth in their various environments only serve to promote vices and debase ethical values originally upheld in the society. In the present day Nigeria, vices are fast replacing values, and the young ones are there, keenly observing or perhaps under-studying the game work.

### **How to profit from youthful days**

'Remember your creator in the days of your 'youth' Ecc.12:1a. Having examined the definitions of creator and youth, we shall now examine the relevance of our theme to the present day youth.

In our theme, Solomon moves us to the most important object of our worship and life. He opines that a life without God can produce a bitter, lonely and hopeless old age. A life centered around God is fulfilling. It will make the "days of trouble" when disabilities, sickness and handicaps cause barriers to enjoying life – satisfying because of the hope of eternal life.

Being young is exciting as mentioned in the definition above. But the excitement of youth can become a barrier to closeness with God if it makes young people focus on passing pleasures instead of eternal values. Youths should make their strength available to God when the strength is still there during youthful years. The strength must not be wasted on evil or meaningless activities that become bad habits and make one callous. What you do when you are young does matter. Young people should spend the best of their time to seek God.

### **Role of the Church**

The great problem facing the Church today is the problem of leadership. Many enterprises and movements which have made marks on the world made it through the inspiration of leaders. Great things are in store for youth in our present day. Youth is ready for action but needs leaders who have caught the vision and are prepared to show the way. Youth organizations like the Boy's Brigade, Girls' Guides, Girls' Guild, Scout Troop, Youth Fellowship, ASF Anglican Students Fellowship etc, will never be able to take their share in the great adventure apart from the inspiration of leadership. The Church therefore needs people who have special gifts of leadership, people who will realize the need for self preparation before they embark on leading others. We need people with a vision like that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus was filled with a passion to extend His Kingdom to the uttermost parts of the earth, but to attain this end, he realized the paramount importance of leadership. He spent the three precious years of His earthly ministry training a small band of men and women that they might be efficient leaders. The means Jesus used most effectively in training His followers was real friendship. In Him they found a friend whom they could trust implicitly. In dealing with the youth, the leader is confronted with different types of people each having his own peculiar traits of character and widely differing temperaments. The leader does not need to restrain these characteristics or produce a rigid uniformity of character. Rather the youth should be helped to express their character in the best and highest way. A leader who attempts to suppress the characteristics of his followers is in danger of ruining all that is most worthy of development in those he seeks to lead.

The leader notices in the youth that when their instincts and emotions come to their full strength they clamour for expression and satisfaction. The instincts are the raw material out of which our lives and characters are built. There are three main categories:

- The self instinct, which has to do with the preservation of the individual
- The sex instinct, which is concerned with the preservation of the race
- The social instinct, which makes for the preservation of society.

These three with the instinctive emotions must be developed along the right line. There is need for a harmonious expression of all the instincts. When this is done the youth becomes balanced and ready to fulfill his call in the mission of the Church.

The Church must harness all the potentialities in the youth to her service so that the task of setting up the Kingdom, begun so long ago, may be furthered in our own time and generation. Youth in all nations is conscious of a mission, to bring about a change in the social, political and religious orders. The daily occurrences in many parts of the world are evidence of this. Schools, Colleges, Universities and other educational institutions have become restive as a result of world awareness. The world today is in a muddle, Young educated men and women are co-operating in their own countries, with a completeness never before seen in trying to put things right. But in most cases, they are misguided. Take for example, the 1966 unrest in Western Nigeria. I witnessed some operations when shops were looted, houses burnt and cars smashed. The news papers of Monday, April 18, Tuesday, April 19 and Wednesday, April 20, 2011 particularly Nigeria Tribune reported the fall out of the recent presidential election as follows – 43 killed, 4,500 displaced as violence spread from Kano, Kaduna to Zamfara and Taraba States. Youths were on rampage. They destroyed shops and vandalized churches. These operations were carried out by young school leavers who

had no jobs. They were led by few party touts. Had these young fellows been adequately groomed in the teaching of the Church they could not have behaved so. The leaders of the various Christian organizations have an overwhelming responsibility for placing the ideal of claiming the world as Christ's Kingdom before those who are still young, so that they may be able to give themselves to this high cause. A celebrated statesman has said, "Whatever ideas you wish to dominate a nation must first be planted in the minds of growing boys" – in the youth. Therefore whatever ideas you wish to dominate the church, plant it in the minds of the youth.

The idea of a powerful God who is mighty to save was planted in the mind of Gideon. He was able to conquer the Midianites with only three hundred men (Judges Chapter 7). The trust on a powerful God and a deliverer which was planted in the mind of David encouraged him to face Goliath and conquered him. This resulted in delivering the Israelites from the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam.17). Having been brought up and nurtured in the fear of the Lord, Samuel founded the schools of prophets upon which depended the social, political and religious life of Israel during his time. (1 Sam.10).

The Church must be wide awake to its responsibility in training leaders for the youth. Such leaders must be men and women with a vision ready for self-preparation and zealous for bringing the youth to God. The Church as a body of men and women who strive after the holiness of God, in response to her call and mission to bring about God's Kingdom among all should be conscious of the frail nature of her body, members who live in a changing world. Mortal man subject to change and decay finds himself resuscitated and re-vitalised in its progeny. In order to maintain a sound transmission of her mission and function from generation to generation, the youth, the main-force of the Church's existence, should be afforded full participation in her mission.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

Prepare a Youth Agenda

The efforts of the church at youth development has not had the desired impact. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the church to organize a national workshop in which all stake holders in youth development will discuss youth related issues and develop youth development objectives and implementation strategies for the proposed youth programmes. The proposed Youth Development Blueprint will serve as working document for successive administrators in charge of youths.

### **Intensify Education of Youth**

The earlier inconsistencies in government's policy on education weakened the effort of the church to educate youth. Unfortunately, government's monopoly on education has

resulted in the high cost of education and disillusion about its usefulness. Now that several private schools have taken up the business, these factors have resulted in a drastic drop in youth enrolment. Even for those in schools, the quality of education has fallen! There is need for the church to reinvigorate the education sector in order to improve the content and quality of education of youths to improve their prospects for gainful employment and positive interaction with their environment.

The religious organizations should therefore promote and organize vocational and technical education for out of school youth and apprentices. The establishment of alternative education classes such as Saturday schools, evening classes, agricultural education for rural communities, provision for free books and learning materials on traditional and modern arts and crafts will be the impressive contribution of the church and other religious bodies to enhance the employment opportunity, moral and civic responsibility of youths.

### **Provide Adequate Funds and Materials**

Inadequate funding and resource materials will inhibit the reach and quality of youth development services. Concerted effort must be made to fund and develop quality resources materials for youth of IEC materials, vocation/self employment manuals, moral and spiritual training films/video, radio jingles are needed to support youth education, and constructive civic engagement in their locations.

### **Create Youth Employment Opportunities**

Apart from providing education, youth also need jobs. The government of Nigeria can afford to develop and operate a massive youth employment programme, for a start in agriculture, small scale industries or provision of services. The youth can also be supported with government financed loans. This will enhance access to credit and assure financial support for self employment initiatives of youth. The society could also establish small scale industries, with the support of agencies such as Federal Agriculture Coordinating Unit (F.A.C.U), I.L.O., U.N.E.S.C.O., Local NGO's, etc.

### **Need for Dialogue**

There is a general lack of communication between those in authority, parents, church leaders and other adults on the one hand and youth on the other. Dialogue is strongly recommended so that adults may hear from and appreciate youth views and aspirations. Youth, in or out of institutions should have a collective framework for the articulation of their common concerns. In dealing with the youth, leaders are confronted with different types of people each having his peculiar traits of character and widely differing temperaments. Leaders need not restrain these characteristics or



produce a right uniformity of character. Rather the youth should be helped to express their character in the best and highest way.

### **Capacity Building and Empowerment**

There is an urgent need for those in authority and other stakeholders, particularly, the church to engage in capacity building and youth empowerment by training experienced youth workers and the youths. Government should also endeavour to support them with takeoff grant after the completion of their programmes. This will effectively keep the youth off the street.

### **Recreation Facilities**

Government at all levels; philanthropists and the religious organizations should provide recreation facilities for the youth. This will go a long way in saving the youth from idleness. There is a dearth of such facilities. Rather than seek solace in night clubs, hotels, and gambling casinos. Regular recreation activities and provision of necessary equipments under the supervision of a qualified youth worker should be made available, these include: Sewing, knitting, weaving, flower arrangements, etc, are activities that will be of interest to male and female youths.

### **CONCLUSION**

The above shows, that the Government, the Church, and the Community have very important duties in order to help the youths to find meaning for life. The environment of godly characters will surely encourage the youths to remember their Creator. The above mentioned roles of the Church and the Government will help the youths to be productive and responsible instruments in God's own world in our generation.

Finally, the church cannot afford to ignore the problems facing the youth in Nigeria. It must be actively involved in the welfare of its parishioners. The exigency of Nigerian life requires that the church must be ready to intervene in the welfare of youth – social, economic and political development. I like to conclude by quoting the words of Apostle Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12, "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." Youths must spend the best of their time in the service of God. The time to invest in the service of God is now, for only the best of our time is good for our Creator.

Your Bishop and Friend,  
**+Olubayo Ilesa.**