

ABP. CHAPUT'S COUNTERCULTURAL MESSAGE

Archbishop Charles Chaput possesses both the brilliance to astutely analyze the content of the dominant culture, and the courage to challenge us to think more clearly about it. His recent remarks before the Youth Synod in Rome, which were refreshingly countercultural, are a case in point.

Chaput takes issue with Chapter IV, paragraphs 51-63, of the Vatican Youth Synod document. For example, the document refers to young people as the “watchmen and seismographs of every age,” something which Chaput rightly labels as “false flattery.” Young people, he says, are “*too often products of the age*” and today this means they are strongly affected “by a culture that is both deeply appealing and essentially atheist.”

Chaput's observation makes eminently good sense. Young people need to be tutored in the wisdom of Catholic teachings, not left to themselves to negotiate a morally debased culture. Furthermore, there is no virtue in sentimentalism: young people deserve an honest response. They are not now, and never were, the “watchmen and seismographs” of the culture. It would be more accurate to say they are a barometer of the culture, a reflection of its norms and values.

Leaders in and out of the Church have too often failed young people, Chaput says, abdicating their responsibilities “out of a combination of ignorance, cowardice and laziness in forming young people to carry the faith into the future.” Those three attributes—ignorance, cowardice, and laziness—have sadly taken the place of wisdom, fortitude, and diligence, virtues that have served the Catholic community well in the past.

The critics of Chaput's remarks focus heavily on his

contention that there is no such thing as an “LGBTQ Catholic,” or a “transgender Catholic,” or a “heterosexual Catholic.” He is adamant in his conviction that “‘LGBTQ’ and similar language should not be used in Church documents, because it suggests that these are real, autonomous groups, and the Church simply doesn’t categorize people that way.”

Francis DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry, who heads a dissident group that stands outside the Catholic Church, takes Chaput to task saying there is no difference between being an LGBTQ Catholic and an Italian Catholic. He even says that those who describe themselves as LGBTQ do not consider their sexual orientation to be “the dominant marker of themselves,” comparing them again to Italian Catholics.

Unfortunately, DeBernardo is flatly wrong. Catholics who are Italian may also be New Yorkers, Democrats, and the like. Chances are they are also heterosexual. But their sexual orientation would never be their master status, any more than their being left-handed might be. But to many of those who identify as LGBTQ—which is not a monolithic entity—their master status is their sexual orientation. It is they who tribalize their sexuality, not others.

Identity politics is perverse and un-American, to say nothing of violating every tenet of our Judeo-Christian heritage. It makes individuals invisible, reducing every human being to some ascribed group status, thus depriving them of their God-given dignity. Moreover, America treasures individual rights, not group identities.

Archbishop Chaput is one of the great princes of the Catholic Church in the United States. He proved that once again with his seminal commentary at the Youth Synod.