

Headline: The youth should not be treated as saviors who will clean up past mistakes

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The recent COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, has been described as another crucial meeting. It has gathered praises from the little wins and the same-same carbon emitters using planes to fly and agree on nothing.

Back here at home, the unabated rise of commodity prices and the usual scandals hounding government agencies dominate the front page. I always look forward to the Inquirer's "A Page In History" section. The front pages of decades ago tell us that we have not changed so much. We read similar issues. The same problems plague us. Personalities changed, but the tunes have remained the same.

We were often told and conditioned that the youth is the saving grace of this country. At a young age, we were taught to line up early in the morning in front of the flagpole. We were taught to stare at the waving of hands, our right hand on our left chest, and sing "Lupang Hinirang" as the colors are hoisted. We mechanically recited "Panatang Makabayan" and "Panunumpa ng Katapatan sa Watawat" without knowing what the words meant. The faces of Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio, Luna, and other 19th-century heroes are in every classroom. Early in our education, we were told of heart-stomping nationalism and that picking up the garbage meant that we were the hope of the country. We were told we should one day give back and help our fellow Filipinos.

But guess what? All those were excuses for the sad and sorry state our country has become over the years. And yes, I blame the generations before us who placed the burden on the youth they so love to downplay. The generations that lived through wars, dictatorship, and the revolving door of administrations like to pin their hopes on the unborn while whining about the present state. All those while making sure that the stories of the "golden past" are shared, piling up one myth after the other that became the base for a well-oiled machinery that even made a presidential candidate win. We are the hope of the future, they say, while finger-pointing at how the youth are now "stuck to their gadgets" all day.

Those who came before us never even apologized and owned up to their mistakes, or take responsibility for the things they failed to accomplish. The culture of corruption they have tolerated. The persistence of fat and thin political dynasties that rule local and national fiefdoms. The grim state of the climate, the effects of which we are most affected. The slow erosion of our cultures and obsession with modernism take the essentials as collaterals on the sidelines with consumerism and capitalism at the forefront.

It is not to say that we do not owe them a debt of gratitude. But we cannot use gratitude as an excuse for leaving something behind worse than how it started. We cannot manipulate the next generation into thinking they should become their own messiahs. Passing the buck to those who will come after us is our own admission of the wrongs we did not correct.

Living the young adult life made me realize the enormous responsibility we need to face. But we need to be reminded that we cannot save everything. Yes, there will be hits and misses. We, too, will have our own lapses. We, too, will be blamed if all our efforts to become a better world collectively fail.

However, I am old enough to know the limits but still young to be too jaded. Those older than us like to pet us into becoming saviors. Some victories are yet to be won. Yes, we may see the dreams our parents never had. We may be the generation that will make a big leap in solving the climate crisis. We may one day eradicate plastic use. Our future energy needs may totally depend on renewable sources. Dictators, despots, plunderers, and mass murderers may cease to exist and be forever infamous.

But until then, we go back to being told we are what is left of the future.

We are not the saviors we were conditioned to become who will clean up the mistakes of the past.

It is time we break the chain that binds us into the vicious cycle.

Edward Joseph H.

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Maguindayao, University of the Philippines