



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD CONGRESS ON YOUTH****

Because of the cooperation which the Holy See has built up with UNESCO over many years, I received the news of the World Youth Congress to be held in Barcelona from 8 to 15 July 1985 with feelings of joy and hope. As a result, and in response to the wish expressed by your Excellency, I am sending my message to the Congress.

I have taken up the cause of the young, most emphatically, on many occasions. I have spoken about it, first and foremost, with young people themselves, in the course of the enjoyable meetings I have had with them in various parts of the world. They play the leading parts in their own lives in the fascinating adventure of growing up and becoming men and women. It is only by inspiring them with confidence in themselves and in adults, by instilling in them a capacity for confident expectation, a sense of commitment and of responsibility, that we shall be able to point them towards a future which stimulates their creativity and arouses their enthusiasm. I have talked about this also with parents, educators, men of culture and governments. It is on them that the responsibility falls, for various reasons, for providing the family with cultural and structural conditions needed to produce a future built on justice, respect and the promotion of the rights and lives of all.

I have spoken of this joyful and sublime duty with particular and understandable insistence, to all those in the Church who are living out their faith in Jesus Christ. I recently proposed to my brothers in the priesthood that, in union with the young people of our own age, they should repeat the gesture so full of implicit humanity and apostolic zeal, made by Jesus to the young man in the Gospel: "He looked at him and loved him" (Mk. 10:21). I have often pointed out the reason for this duty, expressing a widespread and growing concern, touching all men of good will: "youth is a key stage in the life of every individual." It is in the young that the hope of mankind is to be found; and hope, in conjunction with the future, is the expectation of "good things to come". As a Christian

virtue it is linked to the active and committed expectation of those eternal good things promised to man through Jesus Christ by God Himself. And at the same time, as a human and Christian virtue, it is the expectation of those good things which man can obtain by making the talents he has received from Providence bear fruit.

But today, young people are under threat, precisely apropos of that destiny of theirs as the hope of mankind and of its future. This happens in different ways but the results are equally sad and worrying. A great many young people find themselves in situations of such despair that they even reach the point of ruling out any reasonable hope of a promising future. Others feel the fears felt by all mankind weighing them down in a tragic way: wars, extermination, famine, manipulation, violence, and aberrant injustices. In Western societies, many young people, disoriented by the unexpected and sometimes uncontrolled wealth of opportunities, of what are often conflicting opinions, are passing through a profound crisis both of identity and about the meaning of life. No reliable and reassuring answers to the fundamental questions about life are put forward. These questions are sometimes evaded by educators, too, giving rise to a depressing basic scepticism or to a restless way of life. An exasperated individualism, existing paradoxically with a high-density society, sometimes ends up by removing all consistency and interiority from the personal life of the individual, even going so far as to ruin his life or reduce it to a mediocre conformism. This dangerous crisis is imprisoning a great many young people in a present without prospects, or is forcing them to look for outlets which are nothing but retreats from life, prejudicial to mankind and frequently ending tragically in death.

Happily, however, there are also a great many positive reactions and hopeful signs. The many young people I have met during my apostolic journeys and the many also who came to Rome to celebrate the Holy Year of Reconciliation with me and also this present International Youth Year, sustain my hopes. They are many, and they are of fine quality, these young people who are involved at the present time in the reform of society, in building the "civilization of love", devoted to Jesus Christ to whom they have joyfully opened the already approaching. But I cannot contemplate these young people without thinking at the same time about all the others.

It is with these feelings in mind that I join UNESCO in expressing my satisfaction at the timely idea of organizing this World Congress, with the collaboration of devoted educators and distinguished experts. A further subject for satisfaction on my part concerns the themes included in the agenda. Education, work, cultural development, and international development are, undoubtedly, matters of fundamental concern in the lives of the young, and sensitive points in the process of social change. Many of the existing problems preoccupying those who value the young have their roots here. For example, how can these young people look to the future with hope when they see the possibility of earning their daily bread and building up a decent life by means of steady and satisfying work growing gradually fainter and fainter? Differences do not put obstacles in the way of collaboration, in which the barriers erected between different social groups or between nations, because of hatred, deep-seated discrimination, nationalistic distrust or hegemonic pretensions,

give way to a serene and constructive conviviality oriented towards the good and the integral human development of all. But alas, every day they come up against news and events of war, of absurd disputes, against power tactics which increase the distances between the rich countries and poor countries. Despair arises from deeper and more long-term causes which must be identified clearly and courageously. The study of these problems in all their essential dimensions could give everyone a more critical awareness, a well-founded realism, and at the same time open up new and enterprising prospects. It may happen that you reach the conclusion that difficulties exist which are beyond your strength and that we shall have to wait a long time before we see our hopes realized. The analysis of such important themes, solutions for which often lie outside the range of action available to the young, because they are the concern of higher authorities, could also provide a further reason for disillusion, for scepticism and even for a split between the generations. The Congress, showing great wisdom, has given special attention to education.

I should like here to point out that education is far more than just mere practical preparation; it cannot be reduced to the acquisition of a science or a technical training. True education certainly embraces science, culture and technology, but it is oriented towards the very noble objective of training the individual, in his integral human dimensions and from the point of view of his highest purposes. Consequently, education consists of both the propounding and the assimilation of "values" which are the basis of the identity, the dignity, the vocation and the responsibilities of man as an individual and as a member of society. Young people have every right to expect their educators to be genuine teachers able to orient them towards high ideals and to give them an example of these in their own lives. An attitude and climate of relativism and permissiveness, which have frequently grown into a loss or erosion of spiritual and ethical values, have certainly not produced good fruit and are of no help in the development of the true personality of the young.

I should like to say this to you: have the courage to propose high goals to the young people of today and also to ask them - while providing them with the motivations for so doing - to make the sacrifices needed to achieve those goals. In this way you will stimulate the forces often latent within young people, forces which are awaiting for convinced and expert educators to bring them to the surface and guide them in a creative manner. By this means, it will also be possible to regenerate ossified structures and ways of life and to develop the meaning - and the joy - of life and of work.

Your Excellency, in sending my heartfelt and most sincere good wishes to you and to all those attending this important Congress, I ask Almighty God to bless the efforts of all those who are working for the good of the young, whom we value so highly.

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