

THE EVANGELISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY



What Benedict XVI has to say on the subject

Pontifical Council for the Laity
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COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION IS A PRIORITY IN THE CHURCH

The great attention given to young people by the pope

Today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen. (Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate, 24 April 2005)

For me it is a joy to be with them, to pray with them and to celebrate the Eucharist with them. World Youth Day fills me with confidence for the future of the Church and the future of our world. (Welcoming ceremony at Government House in Sydney, 17 July 2008)

My greatest concern is for young people. Some of them are struggling to find the right direction, or are suffering from a loss of connection with their families. Still others are experiencing the limits of religious communitarianism. Sometimes on the margins and often left to themselves, they are vulnerable and must come to terms on their own with a reality that often overwhelms them. It is necessary to offer them a sound educational environment and to encourage them to respect and assist others if they are to develop serenely towards the age of responsibility. The Church can offer her own specific contribution in this area. (Meeting with authorities of State at the Elysée Palace in Paris, 12 September 2008)

Young people who suffer

How is it possible not to think especially of the children and young people who are our future? Every time that the news reports episodes of violence perpetrated by youth, every time that the press covers road accidents in which many young people are killed, I remember the issue of the educational emergency which today demands the broadest possible collaboration. Especially among young people the natural and Christian values that give meaning to daily life and teach people to have a view of life that is open to hope are being eroded. Transient wishes and short-lived expectations surface that in the end breed boredom and failure. The negative outcome of all this is the affirmation of tendencies to trivialize the value of life itself, to seek refuge in transgression, drugs or alcohol, which for some people have even become a regular weekend rite. Even love risks

being reduced to a “mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold”, indeed “man himself becomes a commodity” (*Deus caritas est*, n. 5). In the face of the nihilism that increasingly pervades the world of youth, the Church asks everyone to devote themselves to young people seriously and not to leave them at their own mercy, exposed to the school of “bad teachers”, but rather to involve them in serious initiatives that enable them to understand the value of life in a stable family founded on marriage. Only in this way are they given the possibility to plan their future with trust. As for the ecclesial community, it should make itself even more available to help the new generations of Rome and Lazio to plan their future responsibly. Above all, it introduces them to the love of Christ, the only love that can provide fulfilling answers to the deepest questions of our hearts. (Address to administrators of Rome and Lazio, 12 January 2009)

An educational emergency

Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priests and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great “educational emergency”, confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning. (Letter to the Diocese of Rome on the urgent task of educating young people, 21 January 2008)

As I have had the opportunity to say on several occasions, this is a constitutive and ongoing requirement in the Church’s life, which today is tending to acquire a character of urgency and even emergency. (Address to the General Assembly of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, 28 May 2009)

I

THE GIFT OF GOD

An eclipse of the sense of God

The great problem of the West is forgetfulness of God. This forgetfulness is spreading. In short, all the individual problems can be traced back to this question, I am sure of it. (Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2006)

By ridding himself of God and not expecting salvation from him, man believes he can do as he pleases and that he can make himself the sole judge of himself and his actions. However, when man eliminates God from his horizon, declares God “dead”, is he really happy? Does he really become freer? When men proclaim themselves the absolute proprietors of themselves and the sole masters of creation, can they truly build a society where freedom, justice and peace prevail? Does it not happen instead - as the daily news amply illustrates - that arbitrary power, selfish interests, injustice and exploitation and violence in all its forms are extended? In the end, man reaches the point of finding himself lonelier and society is more divided and bewildered. (Homily at the opening of the synod on the Word of God, 5 October 2008)

God is life, and that is why every creature reaches out towards life. Because human beings are made in the image of God, we do this in a unique and special way. We reach out for love, joy and peace. So we can see how absurd it is to think that we can truly live by removing God from the picture! God is the source of life. To set God aside is to separate ourselves from that source and, inevitably, to deprive ourselves of fulfilment and joy: “without the Creator, the creature fades into nothingness” (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 36). In some parts of the world, particularly in the West, today’s culture tends to exclude God, and to consider faith a purely private issue with no relevance for the life of society. Even though the set of values underpinning society comes from the Gospel – values like the sense of the dignity of the person, of solidarity, of work and of the family –, we see a certain “eclipse of God” taking place, a kind of amnesia which, albeit not an outright rejection of Christianity, is nonetheless a denial of the treasure of our faith, a denial that could lead to the loss of our deepest identity.(...)

You are “*planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith*” (cf. Col 2:7). The Letter from which these words are taken was written by Saint Paul

in order to respond to a specific need of the Christians in the city of Colossae. That community was threatened by the influence of certain cultural trends that were turning the faithful away from the Gospel. Our own cultural context, dear young people, is not unlike that of the ancient Colossians. Indeed, there is a strong current of secularist thought that aims to make God marginal in the lives of people and society by proposing and attempting to create a “paradise” without him. Yet experience tells us that a world without God becomes a “hell”: filled with selfishness, broken families, hatred between individuals and nations, and a great deficit of love, joy and hope. On the other hand, wherever individuals and nations accept God’s presence, worship him in truth and listen to his voice, then the civilization of love is being built, a civilization in which the dignity of all is respected, and communion increases, with all its benefits. Yet some Christians allow themselves to be seduced by secularism or attracted by religious currents that draw them away from faith in Jesus Christ. There are others who, while not yielding to these enticements, have simply allowed their faith to grow cold, with inevitable negative effects on their moral lives. (World Youth Day Message, 2011, 1.3)

Make God’s face known - Christ

A priest asked him which major topics should be discussed with young people. I would say that it is important to know God. The subject “God” is essential. St Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians: “Remember that you were at that time... having no hope and without God.... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near” (Eph 2: 12-13).(...) It is therefore necessary to return to God the Creator, to the God who is creative reason, and then to find Christ, who is the living Face of God. Let us say that here there is a reciprocity. On the one hand, we have the encounter with Jesus, with this human, historical and real figure; little by little, he helps me to become acquainted with God; and on the other, knowing God helps me understand the grandeur of Christ’s Mystery which is the Face of God. Only if we manage to grasp that Jesus is not a great prophet or a world religious figure but that he is the Face of God, that he is God, have we discovered Christ’s greatness and found out who God is. God is not only a distant shadow, the “primary Cause”, but he has a Face. His is the Face of mercy, the Face of pardon and love, the Face of the encounter with us. As a result, these two topics penetrate each other and must always go together. (Meeting with the clergy of Rome, 22 February 2007)

Christ is God's answer to us

To seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is today no less necessary than in former times. (Address at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris, 12 September 2008)

The primary contribution that the Church offers to the development of mankind and peoples does not consist merely in material means or technical solutions. Rather, it involves the proclamation of the truth of Christ, Who educates consciences and teaches the authentic dignity of the person and of work; it means the promotion of a culture that truly responds to all the questions of humanity. (...) He who does not give God gives too little; as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta frequently observed, "the worst poverty is not to know Christ". (Lenten message 2006)

Today, more than in the past, the education and formation of the person are influenced by the messages and general climate spread by the great means of communication and which are inspired by a mindset and culture marked by relativism, consumerism and a false and destructive exaltation, or rather, profanation, of the body and of sexuality. Therefore, precisely because of the great "yes" that as believers in Christ we say to the man loved by God, we certainly cannot fail to take interest in the overall orientation of the society to which we belong, in the trends that motivate it and in the positive or negative influence that it exercises on the formation of the new generations. (Address at the Diocesan Convention in Rome, 11 June 2007)

Evangelisation through dialogue with modern culture

So, the disciples of Christ recognize and gladly welcome the authentic values of the culture of our time, such as scientific knowledge and technological advancement, human rights, religious freedom, democracy. They do not overlook or undervalue, however, that dangerous fragility of human nature which is a threat for man's advancement in every historical context; in particular, they do not neglect the interior tensions and contradictions of our age. Therefore, the work of evangelization is never a simple adaptation to culture, but it is always also a purification, a courageous break that leads to maturation and healing, an openness that brings to birth that "new creation" (II Cor 5: 17: Gal 6: 15) which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. (...)

At the origin of the Christian being - and therefore at the origin of our witness as believers - there is no ethical decision or great idea, but the encounter with the

Person of Jesus Christ, “which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus caritas est*, n. 1). The fruitfulness of this encounter is also manifest in a peculiar and creative manner in the actual human and cultural context, above all in relation to reason which has given life to modern science and to the related technologies.

A fundamental characteristic of the latter is, in fact, the systematic employment of mathematical instruments to be able to work with nature to harness its immense energies for our service. Mathematics, as such, is a creation of our intelligence: the correspondence between its structures and the real structures of the universe - which is the presupposition of all modern scientific and technological developments, already expressly formulated by Galileo Galilei with the famous affirmation that the book of nature is written in mathematical language - arouses our admiration and raises a big question. It implies, in fact, that the universe itself is structured in an intelligent manner, such that a profound correspondence exists between our subjective reason and the objective reason in nature. It then becomes inevitable to ask oneself if there might not be a single original intelligence that is the common font of them both. Thus, precisely the reflection on the development of science brings us towards the creator *Logos*. (...) Upon these bases it again becomes possible to enlarge the area of our rationality, to reopen it to the larger questions of the truth and the good, to link theology, philosophy and science between them in full respect for the methods proper to them and of their reciprocal autonomy, but also in the awareness of the intrinsic unity that holds them together. This is the task that is before us, a fascinating adventure that is worth our effort, to give a new thrust to the culture of our time and to restore the Christian faith to full citizenship in it. (To the participants at the Fourth National Convention of the Church in Italy, 19 October 2006)

II

THE CHURCH IS A TRUSTWORTHY COMPANION

How can we transmit the joy of faith to young people? A young priest addressed this question to the pope at a meeting with priests in Rome. The pope answered by quoting from the autobiography of Saint Cyprian : “I lived in this world of ours”, he says, “totally cut off from God because the divinities were dead and God was not visible. And in seeing Christians I thought: it is an impossible life, this cannot be done in our world! Then, however, meeting some of them, joining their company and letting myself be guided in the catechumenate, in this process of conversion to God, I gradually understood: it is possible! And now I am happy at having found life”. The pope went on to say: It seems to me to be very important that the young find people - both of their own age and older - in whom they can see that Christian life today is possible, and also reasonable and feasible. (Meeting with the clergy of Rome, 22 February 2007)

Experience the certainty of being loved by God

Dear brothers and sisters, this certitude and this joy of being loved by God must be conveyed in some palpable and practical way to each one of us, and especially to the young generations who are entering the world of faith. In other words: Jesus said he was the “Way” that leads to the Father, as well as the “Truth” and the “Life” (cf. Jn 14: 5-7). Thus, the question is: how can our children and young people, practically and existentially, find in him this path of salvation and joy? This is precisely the great mission for which the Church exists - as the family of God and the company of friends into which we are already integrated with Baptism as tiny children -, in which our faith and joy and the certainty of being loved by the Lord must grow. It is therefore indispensable - and this is the task entrusted to Christian families, priests, catechists and educators, to young people themselves among their peers and to our parishes, associations and movements, and lastly to the entire diocesan community - that the new generations experience the Church as a company of friends who are truly dependable and close in all life’s moments and circumstances, whether joyful and gratifying or arduous and obscure; as a company that will never fail us, not even in death, for it carries within it the promise of eternity. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 5 June 2006)

III WITNESSING TO HOPE

The crisis today is a crisis of hope

How can I attain happiness? Why is there suffering, illness and death? What lies beyond death? These are questions that become insistent when we are faced with obstacles that sometimes seem insurmountable: difficulties with studies, unemployment, family arguments, crises in friendships or in building good loving relationships, illness or disability, lack of adequate resources as a result of the present widespread economic and social crisis. (...)

The crisis of hope is more likely to affect the younger generations. In socio-cultural environments with few certainties, values or firm points of reference, they find themselves facing difficulties that seem beyond their strength. My dear young friends, I have in mind so many of your contemporaries who have been wounded by life. They often suffer from personal immaturity caused by dysfunctional family situations, by permissive and libertarian elements in their education, and by difficult and traumatic experience. For some – unfortunately a significant number – the almost unavoidable way out involves an alienating escape into dangerous and violent behaviour, dependence on drugs and alcohol, and many other such traps for the unwary. (World Youth Day Message, 2009).

Tell them that real hope is to be found in Christ

For [saint] Paul, hope is not simply an ideal or sentiment, but a living person: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Profoundly imbued with this certainty, he could write to Timothy: “We have set our hope on the living God” (*1 Tim* 4:10). The “living God” is the Risen Christ present in our world. He is the true hope: the Christ who lives with us and in us and who calls us to share in his eternal life. If we are not alone, if he is with us, even more, if he is our present and our future, why be afraid? (World Youth Day Message, 2009)

IV

BE PREPARED TO SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

At a time when relativism and nihilism are prevalent

In a society, in a culture, which all too often make relativism its creed - relativism has become a sort of dogma - in such a society the light of truth is missing; indeed, it is considered dangerous and “authoritarian” to speak of truth, and the end result is doubt about the goodness of life - is it good to be a person? is it good to be alive? - and in the validity of the relationships and commitments in which it consists. So how would it be possible to suggest to children and to pass on from generation to generation something sound and dependable, rules of life, an authentic meaning and convincing objectives for human existence both as an individual and as a community? For this reason, education tends to be broadly reduced to the transmission of specific abilities or capacities for doing, while people endeavour to satisfy the desire for happiness of the new generations by showering them with consumer goods and transitory gratification. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 11 June 2007)

Examples abound, as you yourselves know. Among the more prevalent are alcohol and drug abuse, and the exaltation of violence and sexual degradation, often presented through television and the internet as entertainment. I ask myself, could anyone standing face to face with people who actually do suffer violence and sexual exploitation “explain” that these tragedies, portrayed in virtual form, are considered merely “entertainment”? There is also something sinister which stems from the fact that freedom and tolerance are so often separated from truth. This is fuelled by the notion, widely held today, that there are no absolute truths to guide our lives. Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made “experience” all-important. Yet, experiences, detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair. (Celebration of Welcome at Barangaroo, WYD in Sydney, 17 July 2008)

In writing to the Ephesians, St Paul reminds them that before embracing faith in Christ, they had “no hope and [were] without God in the world” (2: 12). This appears an especially apt description for the paganism of our day: in particular, we might compare it with the contemporary nihilism that corrodes the hope

in man's heart, inducing him to think that within and around him nothingness prevails: nothing before birth and nothing after death. In fact, if God is lacking, hope is lacking. Everything loses its "substance". (Homily, 1 December 2007)

Pastoral care of the mind

Dear young people of Rome, press forward, therefore, with trust and courage on the way of the search for the truth. And you, dear priests and educators, do not hesitate to promote a true and proper "pastoral care of the mind" - and more widely, of the person - that takes young peoples' questions seriously, both existential questions and those that arise from comparison with the forms of rationality widespread today, in order to help them find valid and pertinent Christian answers, and lastly, to make their own that decisive response which is Christ the Lord. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 5 June 2006)

Open up the books of creation, revelation and history

I see the other root of the educational emergency [*the first one being the mistaken understanding of human autonomy*] in scepticism and relativism or, in simpler, clearer words, the exclusion of the two sources that orient the human journey. The first source would be nature according to Revelation. But today Nature is considered as a purely mechanical thing, which therefore does not contain any moral imperative in itself, any value orientation: it is purely a mechanical thing and orientation comes from being itself. Revelation is considered either as a moment in historical development, therefore relative like all historical and cultural development, or it is said perhaps there is Revelation but it does not contain content, only motivations. And if these two sources are silent, Nature and Revelation then, the third source, history, no longer speaks, because history too becomes only a conglomeration of occasional, arbitrary cultural decisions which have no value for the present nor for the future. It is fundamental to recover a true concept of Nature as the Creation of God that speaks to us; the Creator, through the book of Creation speaks to us and shows us the true values. And thus finding Revelation: recognizing that the book of Creation, in which God gives us the fundamental orientation, is deciphered in Revelation, is applied and becomes itself in cultural and religious history, not without mistakes, but in a substantially valid manner, to be further developed and purified anew. Thus, in this "concert" so to speak between Creation deciphered in Revelation, concretized in cultural history that moves ever forward and in which we always increasingly find the language of God, the indications for education also open, that are not an

imposition but are really openness to the “I” to the “you”, to the “we” and to the “You” of God. (Address to the Italian Bishops’ Conference, 27 May 2010)

Humble seekers of the truth

To university teachers: We realize that we are a link in that chain of men and women committed to teaching the faith and making it credible to human reason. And we do this not simply by our teaching, but by the way we live our faith and embody it, just as the Word took flesh and dwelt among us. Young people need authentic teachers: persons open to the fullness of truth in the various branches of knowledge, persons who listen to and experience in own hearts that interdisciplinary dialogue; persons who, above all, are convinced of our human capacity to advance along the path of truth. Youth is a privileged time for seeking and encountering truth. As Plato said: “Seek truth while you are young, for if you do not, it will later escape your grasp” (*Parmenides*, 135d). This lofty aspiration is the most precious gift which you can give to your students, personally and by example. It is more important than mere technical know-how, or cold and purely functional data.

I urge you, then, never to lose that sense of enthusiasm and concern for truth. Always remember that teaching is not just about communicating content, but about forming young people. You need to understand and love them, to awaken their innate thirst for truth and their yearning for transcendence. Be for them a source of encouragement and strength. (Meeting with young university teachers, El Escorial, Spain, 19 August 2011)

Offer words of truth: Sacred Scripture and the Catechism

Young people are already active members of the Church and they represent its future. Often we encounter in them a spontaneous openness to hearing the word of God and a *sincere desire to know Jesus*. Youth is a time when genuine and irrepressible *questions* arise about the meaning of life and the direction our own lives should take. Only God can give the true answer to these questions. Concern for young people calls for courage and clarity in the message we proclaim; we need to help young people to gain confidence and familiarity with sacred Scripture so it can become a compass pointing out the path to follow. Young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers. (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 104)

You [*bishops*] are rightly convinced that, if every baptized person is to grow in desire for God and in understanding of life's meaning, catechesis is of fundamental importance. The two principal instruments at your disposal – the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Catechism of the Bishops of France – are like precious jewels. They offer a harmonious synthesis of the Catholic faith and they ensure that the preaching of the Gospel is truly faithful to the riches that it contains. Catechesis is not first and foremost a question of method, but of content, as the name itself indicates: it is about an organic presentation (*katechein*) of the whole of Christian revelation, in such a way as to make available to minds and hearts the word of him who gave his life for us. In this way, catechesis causes to resound within the heart of every human being a unique call that is ceaselessly renewed: “Follow me” (*Mt 9:9*). (Meeting with the French Bishops' Conference, Lourdes, 14 September 2008)

Education in how to live in truth

[To live as a follower of Christ entails] an interior change of life. It requires me no longer to be withdrawn into myself, considering my own fulfilment the main reason for my life. It requires me to give myself freely to Another - for truth, for love, for God who, in Jesus Christ, goes before me and shows me the way. It is a question of the fundamental decision no longer to consider usefulness and gain, my career and success as the ultimate goals of my life, but instead to recognize truth and love as authentic criteria. It is a question of choosing between living only for myself or giving myself - for what is greater. And let us understand properly that truth and love are not abstract values; in Jesus Christ they have become a person. By following him, I enter into the service of truth and love. By losing myself I find myself. (Palm Sunday homily, World Youth Day, 1 April 2007)

V

SHOW THE WAY OF TRUE LOVE

In the world of today

We must take into account the obstacles posed by relativism, by a culture that puts God in parentheses and that discourages every really committed choice and especially definitive choices, to privilege instead, in the various milieus of life, the affirmation of self and immediate satisfactions. (Address to the Italian Bishops' Conference, 29 May 2008)

Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own "ego". With such a relativistic horizon, therefore, real education is not possible without the light of the truth; sooner or later, every person is in fact condemned to doubting in the goodness of his or her own life and the relationships of which it consists, the validity of his or her commitment to build with others something in common. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 6 June 2005)

Education for true freedom

God gives us the Commandments because he wants to teach us true freedom. He wants to build a Kingdom of love, justice and peace together with us. When we listen to the Commandments and put them into practice, it does not mean that we become estranged from ourselves, but that we find the way to freedom and authentic love. The commandments do not place limits on happiness, but rather show us how to find it. At the beginning of the conversation with the rich young man, Jesus reminds him that the law which God gives is itself good, because "God is good". (World Youth Day Message, 2010)

The freedom of the "yes", therefore, reveals itself to be freedom capable of assuming what is definitive: the greatest expression of freedom is not the search for pleasure without ever coming to a real decision; this apparent, permanent openness seems to be the realization of freedom, but it is not true. The true expression of freedom is the capacity to choose a definitive gift in which freedom, in being given, is fully rediscovered. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 6 June 2005)

So do not be afraid to make definitive decisions. You do not lack generosity – that I know! But the idea of risking a lifelong commitment, whether in marriage or in a life of special consecration, can be daunting. You might think: “The world is in constant flux and life is full of possibilities. Can I make a life-long commitment now, without knowing what unforeseen events lie in store for me? By making a definitive decision, would I not be risking my freedom and tying my own hands?” These are the doubts you feel, and today’s individualistic and hedonist culture aggravates them. Yet when young people avoid decisions, there is a risk of never attaining to full maturity! (Address to the youth of Angola, 21 March 2009)

The dignity of the human body

Today, the various forms of the erosion of marriage, such as free unions and “trial marriage”, and even pseudo-marriages between people of the same sex, are instead an expression of anarchic freedom that are wrongly made to pass as true human liberation. This pseudo-freedom is based on a trivialization of the body, which inevitably entails the trivialization of the person. Its premise is that the human being can do to himself or herself whatever he or she likes: thus, the body becomes a secondary thing that can be manipulated, from the human point of view, and used as one likes. Licentiousness, which passes for the discovery of the body and its value, is actually a dualism that makes the body despicable, placing it, so to speak, outside the person’s authentic being and dignity. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 6 June 2005)

Witness to love in all its beauty

A true education must awaken the courage to make definitive decisions, which today are considered a mortifying bind to our freedom. In reality, they are indispensable for growth and in order to achieve something great in life, in particular, to cause love to mature in all its beauty: therefore, to give consistency and meaning to freedom itself. When they feel that their freedom is respected and taken seriously, adolescents and young people, despite their changeability and frailty, are not in fact unwilling to let themselves be challenged by demanding proposals: indeed, they often feel attracted and fascinated by them. They also wish to show their generosity in adhering to the great, perennial values that constitute life’s foundations. (Address to the diocesan convention in Rome, 11 June 2007)

Encourage volunteering and solidarity

Significantly, our time has also seen the growth and spread of different kinds of volunteer work, which assume responsibility for providing a variety of services. (...) For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves. The anti-culture of death, which finds expression for example in drug use, is thus countered by an unselfish love which shows itself to be a culture of life by the very willingness to “lose itself” (cf. *Lk 17:33 et passim*) for others. (Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 30)

If we wish to combat poverty, we must invest first and foremost in the young, setting before them an ideal of authentic fraternity. (Address to the diplomatic corps, 8 January 2009)

Learn to integrate suffering

Suffering is also part of the truth of our life. So, by seeking to shield the youngest from every difficulty and experience of suffering, we risk raising brittle and ungenerous people, despite our good intentions: indeed, the capacity for loving corresponds to the capacity for suffering and for suffering together. (Letter to the diocese of Rome on the urgent need to educate the younger generations, 21 January 2008)

The Cross is a positive response

Rightly, the Cross causes us fear, as it provoked fear and anguish in Jesus Christ (cf. *Mk 14: 33-36*); but it is not a negation of life, of which in order to be happy it is necessary to rid oneself. It is rather the extreme “yes” of God to man, the supreme expression of his love and the source of full and perfect life. It therefore contains the most convincing invitation to follow Christ on the way of gift of self. (Address at the 4th national convention of the Italian Church, Verona, 19 October 2006)

When we touch the Cross, or rather, when we carry it, we touch the mystery of God, the mystery of Jesus Christ. The mystery that God so loved the world – us – that he gave his only-begotten Son for us (cf. *Jn 3:16*). We touch the marvellous mystery of God’s love, the only genuinely redemptive truth. But we also touch the fundamental law, the constitutive norm of our lives, namely the fact that without this “yes” to the Cross, without walking in communion with Christ day

by day, life cannot succeed. The more we can make some sacrifice, out of love for the great truth and the great love, out of love for the truth and for God's love, the greater and richer life becomes. Anyone who wants to keep his life for himself loses it. Anyone who gives his life – day by day in small acts, which form part of the great decision – that person finds it. This is the challenging, but also profoundly beautiful and liberating truth that we wish to enter into, step by step. (Palm Sunday homily, World Youth Day, 5 April 2009)

Take responsibility

Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. What will *you* leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the “power” which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make? (Homily at the final Mass, WYD in Sydney, 20 July 2008)

The call to holiness is the real revolution

Only from the saints, only from God does true revolution come, the definitive way to change the world.

In the last century we experienced revolutions with a common programme - expecting nothing more from God, they assumed total responsibility for the cause of the world in order to change it. And this, as we saw, meant that a human and partial point of view was always taken as an absolute guiding principle. Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism. It does not liberate man, but takes away his dignity and enslaves him. It is not ideologies that save the world, but only a return to the living God, our Creator, the guarantor of our freedom, the guarantor of what is really good and true. True revolution consists in simply turning to God who is the measure of what is right and who at the same time is everlasting love. And what could ever save us apart from love? (Address at the Vigil of WYD in Cologne, 20 August 2005)

Teach people to be missionaries

Bearing an active witness to Christ does not, therefore, concern only priests, women religious and lay people who as formation teachers have tasks in our communities, but children and young people themselves, and all who are educated in the faith. Therefore, the awareness of being called to become witnesses of Christ is not a corollary, a consequence somehow external to Christian formation, such as, unfortunately, has often been thought and today too people continue to think. On the contrary, it is an intrinsic and essential dimension of education in the faith and discipleship, just as the Church is missionary by her very nature (cf. *Ad Gentes*, n. 2).

If children, through a gradual process from the beginning of their formation, are to achieve permanent formation as Christian adults, the desire to be and the conviction of being sharers in the Church's missionary vocation in all the situations and circumstances of life must take root in the believers' soul. Indeed, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy of the faith. We must spread it and pass it on, and thereby also strengthen it in our own hearts.

If faith is truly the joy of having discovered truth and love, we inevitably feel the desire to transmit it, to communicate it to others. The new evangelization to which our beloved Pope John Paul II called us passes mainly through this process. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 11 June 2007)

The total gift of self

To the WYD volunteers in Madrid : As you now go back to your everyday lives, I ask you to treasure this joy-filled experience in your hearts and to grow each day in giving yourselves to God and to others. Perhaps many of you felt a very simple question forming in your hearts, faintly or forcefully as the case may be: What is God asking me to do? What is his plan for my life? Is Christ asking me to follow him more closely? Should I not spend my whole life in the mission to proclaim to the world the greatness of his love through the priesthood, or the consecrated life, or marriage? If this question has surfaced, let the Lord be your guide and become volunteers in the service of the One who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (*Mk* 10:45). Your life will achieve fulfilment in ways you cannot imagine. (...) After all, Peter, in his First Letter, reminds Christians that they were ransomed at a great price: that of the blood of Christ (cf. *1 Pet* 1:18-19). Those who look at their lives from this perspective know that Christ's love can only be met with love. That is what

the Pope is asking you to do in this farewell: to respond in love to the One who for love gave himself up for us. (Address to the WYD volunteers in Madrid, 21 August 2011)

VI

SHOW THEM THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

In the places where they are wounded and hurt

My dear young friends, I have in mind so many of your contemporaries who have been wounded by life. They often suffer from personal immaturity caused by dysfunctional family situations, by permissive and libertarian elements in their education, and by difficult and traumatic experience. For some – unfortunately a significant number – the almost unavoidable way out involves an alienating escape into dangerous and violent behaviour, dependence on drugs and alcohol, and many other such traps for the unwary. Yet, even for those who find themselves in difficult situations, having been led astray by bad role models, the desire for true love and authentic happiness is not extinguished. But how can we speak of this hope to those young people? We know that it is in God alone that a human person finds true fulfilment. The main task for us all is that of a new evangelization aimed at helping younger generations to rediscover the true face of God, who is Love. (World Youth Day Message, 2009)

Tell them of the hope to be found in Christ

We firmly believe that Jesus Christ offered himself on the Cross in order to give us his love. In his passion, he bore our sufferings, took upon himself our sins, obtained forgiveness for us and reconciled us with God the Father, opening for us the way to eternal life. Thus we were freed from the thing that most encumbers our lives: the slavery of sin. We can love everyone, even our enemies, and we can share this love with the poorest of our brothers and sisters and all those in difficulty. (World Youth Day Message, 2011)

Education in the faith and in relating with Jesus Christ

Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. (Mass for the inauguration of the pontificate, 24 April 2005)

It is in this very situation that all of us, and especially our children, adolescents and young people, need to live faith as joy and to savour that profound tranquillity to which the encounter with the Lord gives rise. (...) The source of Christian joy is the certainty of being loved by God, loved personally by our Creator, by the One who holds the entire universe in his hands and loves each one of us and the whole great human family with a passionate and faithful love, a love greater than our infidelities and sins, a love which forgives. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 5 June 2006)

Teach them to pray

We have spoken of faith as an encounter with the One who is Truth and Love. We have also seen that this is an encounter which is both communitarian and personal, and must take place in all the dimensions of our lives through the exercise of our intelligence, the choices of freedom, the service of love. A privileged place exists, however, where this encounter takes place more directly. Here it is reinforced and deepened and thus can truly permeate and mark the whole of life: this space is prayer. Dear young people, I am sure that many of you were present at the World Youth Day in Cologne. There, together, we prayed to the Lord, we adored him present in the Eucharist, we offered his Holy Sacrifice. We meditated on that decisive act of love with which Jesus at the Last Supper anticipated his own death, accepted it in his inmost depths and transformed it into an action of love, into that unique revolution which can truly renew the world and liberate humanity, overcoming the power of sin and death. I ask you young people and all of you who are here, dear brothers and sisters, (...) to be assiduous in prayer, spiritually united with Mary our Mother, to worship Christ alive in the Eucharist, to fall ever more deeply in love with him. He is our brother and our true friend, the Church's Bridegroom, the faithful and merciful God who loved us first. (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 5 June 2006)

VII

WYD IS A SPECIAL TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD AND THE JOY OF FAITH

As you know, [World Youth Day in Madrid] was a stirring ecclesial event; (...) an overwhelming experience of brotherhood, of encounter with the Lord, of sharing and of growth in faith: a true cascade of light. (Audience, 24 August 2011)

A further remedy against faith fatigue was the wonderful experience of World Youth Day in Madrid. This was new evangelization put into practice. Again and again at World Youth Days, a new, more youthful form of Christianity can be seen, something I would describe under five headings.

1. Firstly, there is a new experience of catholicity, of the Church's universality. This is what struck the young people and all the participants quite directly: we come from every continent, but although we have never met one another, we know one another. We speak different languages, we have different ways of life and different cultural backgrounds, yet we are immediately united as one great family. Outward separation and difference is relativized. We are all moved by the one Lord Jesus Christ, in whom true humanity and at the same time the face of God himself is revealed to us. We pray in the same way. The same inner encounter with Jesus Christ has stamped us deep within with the same structure of intellect, will and heart. And finally, our common liturgy speaks to our hearts and unites us in a vast family. In this setting, to say that all humanity are brothers and sisters is not merely an idea: it becomes a real shared experience, generating joy. And so we have also understood quite concretely: despite all trials and times of darkness, it is a wonderful thing to belong to the worldwide Church, to the Catholic Church, that the Lord has given to us.
2. From this derives a new way of living our humanity, our Christianity. For me, one of the most important experiences of those days was the meeting with the World Youth Day volunteers: about 20,000 young people, all of whom devoted weeks or months of their lives to working on the technical, organizational and material preparations for World Youth Day, and thus made it possible for the whole event to run smoothly. Those who give their time always give a part of their lives. At the end of the day, these young

people were visibly and tangibly filled with a great sense of happiness: the time that they gave up had meaning; in giving of their time and labour, they had found time, they had found life. And here something fundamental became clear to me: these young people had given a part of their lives in faith, not because it was asked of them, not in order to attain Heaven, nor in order to escape the danger of Hell. They did not do it in order to find fulfilment. They were not looking round for themselves. There came into my mind the image of Lot's wife, who by looking round was turned into a pillar of salt. How often the life of Christians is determined by the fact that first and foremost they look out for themselves, they do good, so to speak, for themselves. And how great is the temptation of all people to be concerned primarily for themselves; to look round for themselves and in the process to become inwardly empty, to become "pillars of salt". But here it was not a matter of seeking fulfilment or wanting to live one's life for oneself. These young people did good, even at a cost, even if it demanded sacrifice, simply because it is a wonderful thing to do good, to be there for others. All it needs is the courage to make the leap. Prior to all of this is the encounter with Jesus Christ, inflaming us with love for God and for others, and freeing us from seeking our own ego. In the words of a prayer attributed to Saint Francis Xavier: I do good, not that I may come to Heaven thereby and not because otherwise you could cast me into Hell. I do it because of you, my King and my Lord. (...) This is the genuinely Christian attitude. Equally unforgettable for me was the encounter with handicapped young people in the Saint Joseph Centre in Madrid, where I encountered the same readiness to put oneself at the disposal of others – a readiness to give oneself that is ultimately derived from encounter with Christ, who gave himself for us.

3. A third element, that has an increasingly natural and central place in World Youth Days and in the spirituality that arises from them, is adoration. (...) God is indeed ever-present. But again, the physical presence of the risen Christ is something different, something new. The risen Lord enters into our midst. And then we can do no other than say, with Saint Thomas: my Lord and my God! Adoration is primarily an act of faith – the act of faith as such. God is not just some possible or impossible hypothesis concerning the origin of all things. He is present. And if he is present, then I bow down before him. Then my intellect and will and heart open up towards him and from him. In the risen Christ, the incarnate God is present, who suffered for

us because he loves us. We enter this certainty of God's tangible love for us with love in our own hearts. This is adoration, and this then determines my life. Only thus can I celebrate the Eucharist correctly and receive the body of the Lord rightly.

4. A further important element of the World Youth Days is the sacrament of Confession, which is increasingly coming to be seen as an integral part of the experience. Here we recognize that we need forgiveness over and over again, and that forgiveness brings responsibility. Openness to love is present in man, implanted in him by the Creator, together with the capacity to respond to God in faith. But also present, in consequence of man's sinful history (Church teaching speaks of original sin) is the tendency that is opposed to love – the tendency towards selfishness, towards becoming closed in on oneself, in fact towards evil. Again and again my soul is tarnished by this downward gravitational pull that is present within me. Therefore we need the humility that constantly asks God for forgiveness, that seeks purification and awakens in us the counterforce, the positive force of the Creator, to draw us upwards.
5. Finally, I would like to speak of one last feature, not to be overlooked, of the spirituality of World Youth Days, namely joy. Where does it come from? How is it to be explained? Certainly, there are many factors at work here. But in my view, the crucial one is this certainty, based on faith: I am wanted; I have a task in history; I am accepted, I am loved. (...) Man can only accept himself if he is accepted by another. He needs the other's presence, saying to him, with more than words: it is good that you exist. Only from the You can the I come into itself. Only if it is accepted, can it accept itself. Those who are unloved cannot even love themselves. This sense of being accepted comes in the first instance from other human beings. But all human acceptance is fragile. Ultimately we need a sense of being accepted unconditionally. Only if God accepts me, and I become convinced of this, do I know definitively: it is good that I exist. It is good to be a human being. If ever man's sense of being accepted and loved by God is lost, then there is no longer any answer to the question whether to be a human being is good at all. Doubt concerning human existence becomes more and more insurmountable. Where doubt over God becomes prevalent, then doubt over humanity follows inevitably. We see today how widely this doubt is spreading. We see it in the joylessness, in the inner sadness,

that can be read on so many human faces today. Only faith gives me the conviction: it is good that I exist. It is good to be a human being, even in hard times. Faith makes one happy from deep within. That is one of the wonderful experiences of World Youth Days. (Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2011)

VIII

JESUS AS A ROLE MODEL FOR MENTORS

Be witnesses

The central figure in the work of educating, and especially in education in the faith, which is the summit of the person's formation and is his or her most appropriate horizon, is specifically the form of witness. This witness becomes a proper reference point to the extent that the person can account for the hope that nourishes his life (cf. I Pt 3: 15) and is personally involved in the truth that he proposes. On the other hand, the witness never refers to himself but to something, or rather, to Someone greater than he, whom he has encountered and whose dependable goodness he has sampled. Thus, every educator and witness finds an unequalled model in Jesus Christ, the Father's great witness, who said nothing about himself but spoke as the Father had taught him (cf. Jn 8: 28). (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 6 June 2005)

Trust and generosity in education

It is education and especially Christian education which shapes life based on God who is love (cf. I Jn 4: 8, 16), and has need of that closeness which is proper to love. Especially today, when isolation and loneliness are a widespread condition to which noise and group conformity is no real remedy, personal guidance becomes essential, giving those who are growing up the assurance that they are loved, understood and listened to. In practice, this guidance must make tangible the fact that our faith is not something of the past, that it can be lived today and that in living it we really find our good. Thus, boys and girls and young people may be helped to free themselves from common prejudices and will realize that the Christian way of life is possible and reasonable, indeed, is by far the most reasonable. Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 11 June 2007)

To make my considerations more meaningful, it might be useful to identify several common requirements of an authentic education. It needs first of all that closeness and trust which are born from love: I am thinking of the first and fundamental experience of love which children have, or at least should have, from their parents. Yet every true teacher knows that if he is to educate he must give a part of himself, and that it is only in this way that he can help his pupils

overcome selfishness and become in their turn capable of authentic love. (Letter to the diocese of Rome on the urgent need to educate the younger generations, 2008)

The moral authority of credibility

Education cannot, therefore, dispense with that authoritativeness which makes the exercise of authority possible. It is the fruit of experience and competence, but is acquired above all with the coherence of one's own life and personal involvement, an expression of true love. The educator is thus a witness of truth and goodness. He too, of course, is fragile and can be mistaken, but he will constantly endeavour to be in tune with his mission. (Letter to the diocese of Rome on the urgent need to educate the younger generations, 2008)

Educators who accept their failures

God does not fail. He “fails” continuously, but for this very reason he does not fail, because through this he finds new opportunities for far greater mercy and his imagination is inexhaustible. He does not fail because he finds ever new ways to reach people and to open wider his great house so that it is completely filled. He does not fail because he does not shrink from the prospect of asking people to come and sit at his table, to eat the food of the poor in which the precious gift is offered, God himself. God does not fail, not even today. Even if we come up against many “noes”, we can be sure of it. From the whole of this history of God, starting with Adam, we can conclude: God never fails. Today too, he will find new ways to call men, and he wants to have us with him as his messengers and servants. (Homily at the mass with the Swiss bishops, 7 November 2006)

The seed sown in silence bears fruit

On the flight to Madrid, when asked about the long-term benefits of WYD, Benedict XVI replied that “God always sows in silence” and that this escapes all statistics. The same can be said of WYD: “we cannot say straight away that there will be an immense growth of the Church tomorrow. God does not act in this way. However, the Church grows in silence and vigorously. I know from other World Youth Days that a great many friendships were born, friendships for life; a great many experiences that God exists. And let us place trust in this silent growth, and we may be certain, even if the statistics do not tell us much, that the Lord's seed really grows and will be for very many people the beginning of a

friendship with God and with others, of a universality of thought, of a common responsibility which really shows us that these days do bear fruit.” (Meeting with journalist, flight to Madrid for WYD, 18 August 2011)

The Holy Spirit and prayer are essential in education

Dear brothers and sisters, we must always be aware that we cannot carry out such a task with our own strength but only with the power of the Spirit. We need enlightenment and grace that come from God and act within hearts and consciences. For education and Christian formation, therefore, it is above all prayer and our personal friendship with Jesus that are crucial: only those who know and love Jesus Christ can introduce their brothers and sisters into a living relationship with him. (...) Let us never forget the words of Jesus: “I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15: 15-16). (Address at the diocesan convention in Rome, 11 June 2007)

The main documents in which Benedict XVI speaks about the education of youth

- Address at the 4th National Convention of the Church in Italy, Verona, 19 October 2006.
- 3 addresses to diocesan conventions in Rome: 6 June 2005, 5 June 2006, 11 June 2007.
- The letter to the diocese of Rome on the urgent task of educating young people, 21 January 2008 (and its presentation at the audience on 23 February 2008)
- 3 addresses to the Italian Bishops’ Conference: 29 May 2008, 28 May 2009, 27 May 2010.

(all available on the website www.vatican.va)

TETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE AND CITY OF ROME
ON THE URGENT TASK OF EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE

Dear Faithful of Rome,

I thought of addressing this Letter to you in order to speak to you about a problem of which you yourselves are aware and to which the various members of our Church are applying themselves: the problem of education. We all have at heart the good of the people we love, especially our children, adolescents and young people. Indeed, we know that it is on them that the future of our City depends. Therefore, it is impossible not to be concerned about the formation of the new generations, about their ability to give their lives a direction and to discern good from evil, and about their health, not only physical but also moral.

Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priests and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great “educational emergency”, confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning. Thus, it is natural to think of laying the blame on the new generations, as though children born today were different from those born in the past. There is also talk of a “generation gap” which certainly exists and is making itself felt, but is the effect rather than the cause of the failure to transmit certainties and values.

Must we therefore blame today’s adults for no longer being able to educate? There is certainly a strong temptation among both parents and teachers as well as educators in general to give up, since they run the risk of not even understanding what their role or rather the mission entrusted to them is. In fact, it is not only the personal responsibilities of adults or young people, which nonetheless exist and must not be concealed, that are called into question but also a widespread atmosphere, a mindset and form of culture which induce one to have doubt about the value of the human person, about the very meaning of truth and good, and ultimately about the goodness of life. It then becomes difficult to pass on from one generation to the next something that is valid and certain, rules of conduct, credible objectives around which to build life itself.

Dear brothers and sisters of Rome, at this point I would like to say some very simple words to you: Do not be afraid! In fact, none of these difficulties is insurmountable. They are, as it were, the other side of the coin of that great and precious gift which is our freedom, with the responsibility that rightly goes with it. As opposed to what happens in the technical or financial fields, where today's advances can be added to those of the past, no similar accumulation is possible in the area of people's formation and moral growth, because the person's freedom is ever new. As a result, each person and each generation must make his own decision anew, alone. Not even the greatest values of the past can be simply inherited; they must be claimed by us and renewed through an often anguishing personal option.

When the foundations are shaken, however, and essential certainties are lacking, the impelling need for those values once again makes itself felt: thus today, the request for an education which is truly such is in fact increasing. Parents, anxious and often anguished about the future of their children, are asking for it; a great many teachers going through the sorrowful experience of their schools' deterioration are asking for it; society overall, seeing doubts cast on the very foundations of coexistence, is asking for it; children and young people themselves who do not want to be left to face life's challenges on their own are also asking for it in their inmost being. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, moreover, have a further and stronger reason for not being afraid: they know in fact that God does not abandon us, that his love reaches us wherever we are and just as we are, in our wretchedness and weakness, in order to offer us a new possibility of good.

Dear brothers and sisters, to make my considerations more meaningful, it might be useful to identify several common requirements of an authentic education. It needs first of all that closeness and trust which are born from love: I am thinking of the first and fundamental experience of love which children have, or at least should have, from their parents. Yet every true teacher knows that if he is to educate he must give a part of himself, and that it is only in this way that he can help his pupils overcome selfishness and become in their turn capable of authentic love.

In a small child there is already a strong desire to know and to understand, which is expressed in his stream of questions and constant demands for explanations. Therefore, an education would be most impoverished if it were limited to providing notions and information and neglected the important question about the truth, especially that truth which can be a guide in life.

Suffering is also part of the truth of our life. So, by seeking to shield the youngest from every difficulty and experience of suffering, we risk raising brittle and ungenerous people, despite our good intentions: indeed, the capacity for loving corresponds to the capacity for suffering and for suffering together.

We thus arrive, dear friends of Rome, at what is perhaps the most delicate point in the task of education: finding the right balance between freedom and discipline. If no standard of behaviour and rule of life is applied even in small daily matters, the character is not formed and the person will not be ready to face the trials that will come in the future. The educational relationship, however, is first of all the encounter of two kinds of freedom, and successful education means teaching the correct use of freedom. As the child gradually grows up, he becomes an adolescent and then a young person; we must therefore accept the risk of freedom and be constantly attentive in order to help him to correct wrong ideas and choices. However, what we must never do is to support him when he errs, to pretend we do not see the errors or worse, that we share them as if they were the new boundaries of human progress.

Education cannot, therefore, dispense with that authoritativeness which makes the exercise of authority possible. It is the fruit of experience and competence, but is acquired above all with the coherence of one's own life and personal involvement, an expression of true love. The educator is thus a witness of truth and goodness. He too, of course, is fragile and can be mistaken, but he will constantly endeavour to be in tune with his mission.

Dear faithful of Rome, from these simple observations it becomes clear that in education a sense of responsibility is crucial: the responsibility of the educator, of course, but also, as he grows up, the responsibility of the child, the student, the young person who enters the world of work. Those who can measure up to themselves and to others are responsible. Those who believe seek further; indeed, they seek to respond to God who loved them first.

Responsibility is in the first place personal, but there is also a responsibility which we share as citizens in the same city and of one nation, as members of the human family and, if we are believers, as children of the one God and members of the Church. Indeed, ideas, lifestyles, laws, the orientations in general of the society in which we live and the image it has of itself through the mass media exercise a great influence on the formation of the new generations, for good but often also for evil. However, society is not an abstraction; in the end we are ourselves all together, with the orientations, rules and representatives we give

one another, although the roles and responsibilities of each person are different. Thus, the contribution of each one of us, of each person, family or social group, is necessary if society, starting with our City of Rome, is to become a more favourable context for education.

Lastly, I would like to offer you a thought which I developed in my recent Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* on Christian hope: the soul of education, as of the whole of life, can only be a dependable hope. Today, our hope is threatened on many sides and we even risk becoming, like the ancient pagans, people “having no hope and without God in the world”, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Ephesus (Eph 2: 12). What may be the deepest difficulty for a true educational endeavour consists precisely in this: the fact that at the root of the crisis of education lies a crisis of trust in life.

I cannot finish this Letter, therefore, without a warm invitation to place our hope in God. He alone is the hope that withstands every disappointment; his love alone cannot be destroyed by death; his justice and mercy alone can heal injustices and recompense the suffering experienced. Hope that is addressed to God is never hope for oneself alone, it is always also hope for others; it does not isolate us but renders us supportive in goodness and encourages us to educate one another in truth and in love.

I express my affection for you and assure you of my special remembrance in prayer, as I impart my Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 21 January 2008

Benedictus PP XVI

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