



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE JOHN PAUL II

TO students taking part in UNIV '97 Congress

Tuesday, 25 March 1997

Dear Young People,

1. I am pleased to offer a warm welcome to all of you who have gathered in Rome from more than 60 countries and 400 universities, for the traditional meeting of the International *UNIV* Congress, which is being held this year for the 30th time. I would like to express my satisfaction to the organizers of the meeting and to all those, as in the past, who have spared no effort to offer periods of cultural enrichment and integral formation to students and university professors from all over the world.

The conviction that the university is *a privileged place in which society's future is formed* spurs you courageously to study subjects which are decisive for humanity's destiny. You know that only personal commitment, inspired by Gospel values, can supply adequate answers to the great questions of the present time. Authentic culture, in fact, is primarily a call that echoes in the depths of conscience and obliges the individual to improve himself in order to improve society. The Christian knows that there *is an unbreakable connection between truth, ethics and responsibility*. He therefore feels accountable to the truth, and, to serve it, risks his own personal freedom.

2. The theme of your Congress: "*Multicultural society: competition and cooperation*", aims to disprove the theory which holds that once the myth of collectivism collapses, the free market is the only thing that remains. Actually the limitations of this theory are more and more apparent, since it paves the way to an "unbridled" economy that brings with it the serious phenomena of marginalization and unemployment, if not forms of intolerance and racism as well.

New ways *inspired by sound moral presuppositions* must be taken. The Church's social doctrine

teaches that *the dignity of the human person*, created in the image of God, must always be put at the root of political practice, juridical thought, economic programmes and social theories. The human being lives and develops in interaction with others: in family and in society. The heritage that comes to him from belonging to a group by virtue of his birth, culture and language must therefore be a factor of convergence and not of exclusion.

How much truer this is for those who have the faith! In the footsteps of his Master who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mt 20:28), the Christian makes service his ideal, in the conviction that the society of the future, if it is to improve, *must rest on the culture of solidarity*. The initiatives of volunteer work, which you have described in the Forum of your Congress, show that this is your choice. Hundreds of socially useful works in economically depressed areas and numerous programmes for social advancement and assistance are likewise signs of a commitment which is not occasional and aims to build a Gospel-inspired model of society.

3. In the [Message](#) for the preparation of the next World Youth Day, to which you are invited, I wanted to suggest to young people the words in John’s Gospel: “*Teacher, where are you staying?*’... ‘*Come and see*” (Jn 1:38-39). Among the “places” where the Christian meets Jesus, I pointed out human suffering: “You will meet Jesus where men and women are suffering.... Jesus’ dwelling is wherever a human person is suffering because rights are denied, hopes betrayed, anxieties ignored. There, in the midst of humankind, is the dwelling of Christ who asks you to dry every tear in his name” ([Message for the 12th World Youth Day, 1997](#), n. 4; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 28 August 1996, p. 2).

Following these indications, the social projects that you promote confirm your desire to build a new world based on Christ’s call.

In fact, he is the final goal of your commitment, which is not based on mere philanthropy. Do not be satisfied with meeting the material needs of the most deprived: try to bring them to Christ, for he alone can truly wipe all tears away and give salvation.

What an immense field of apostolate is open to you! Anyone who has met Christ feels he shares in his redemptive mission and is his co-worker in man’s salvation. This awareness kindles in one’s heart the need to know him better, in order to learn to turn his merciful gaze towards man. To all this, your meditation on the Word, your prayers, the sacrament of Reconciliation, the Eucharist and the other privileged means of encounter with the mystery of his Person will lead you.

4. In the title of your congress the word “competition” appears. For the Christian this is first and foremost an inner struggle to improve and to grow in virtue so as to be more like Christ. This is the way in which each one of you can make your service to others fruitful, as Blessed Josemaría Escrivá recalled: “Ask him to introduce his ideas and plans into our lives: not only into our heads but also into the depths of our heart, and into all our outward actions” (*Friends of God*, 249), since

humanity's salvation passes through each one's struggle to be holy.

Dear English-speaking young people, commit yourselves ever more fully to the Lord. Make him the centre of your lives and the inspiration of your apostolate. Reach out to other young people like yourselves, in order to engage them in the great task of building a more truthful, just and genuinely free society. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who stood at the foot of the Cross of Jesus, sustain you in all you do for the Church and for the world.

Dear French-speaking young people, I invite you to the 12th World Youth Day in Paris: there you will meet young people from many cultures, but who are all united in order to advance in life by following Christ who died and rose for the world's salvation. God bless you!

I greet all the Portuguese-speaking young people. In this year of preparation for the Jubilee of Redemption, the Pope asks you to be "credible witnesses" to your faith, "consistent with respect to what you are proclaiming so that the life-giving light of the Gospel may shine out in the family and in society". May God bless you!

5. Dear young people, thank you for your presence, thank you for your commitment! Bring to the world the joy that is born from being in communion with Christ. Be witnesses to the newness of the Gospel, in order to collaborate generously in building the civilization of love.

With this wish, which I offer you as Easter approaches, I entrust you to the motherly protection of Mary and affectionately impart my Blessing to you.

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