

**1985:
INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH YEAR**

NUMEROUS AND VARIED

Convention dictates that persons between the ages of 15 and 24 be called "YOUTH". We all know, of course, that the young of mind and heart do not allow themselves to be confined between such narrow limits.

In 1981 the United Nations Organization declared 1985 "International Youth Year".

Demographers tell us that there are about 900 million young people in the world. In the past twenty years the increase in the number of young people was in the region of from 17 to 19%. This is quite considerable, but according to the forecasts of statisticians the actual numbers will vary little from now to the year 2000 A.D. They base their forecasts on the present birth rate but, up to now, short term demographic forecasts have proven rather unreliable.

The division of these 900 millions among countries and continents is far from equal. As everybody knows, the growth rate of the population varies considerably between industrialized countries and developing countries. In the latter the growth rate is double that of the former. It is, therefore, in Latin America, Africa and South East Asia that we can expect the most spectacular increase up to the year 2000 A.D.: In Africa the total number of young people is expected to double in the next twenty years. In China, on the other hand, the number is expected to fall by 10% due to the policy of birth control. There will still be 183 million young people there which is quite a lot for a single country.

FACED WITH MANY PROBLEMS

To these quantitative differences are added the differences in living conditions whether economic, social, cultural or spiritual.

- * For many there are the concrete problems of nutrition, hygiene, health and even survival. There are tens of millions who suffer from harsh climatic conditions, static economies and inadequate medical facilities.
- * For others there are cultural problems: some receive a normal education and can acquire a solid culture which enables them to meet life's problems while others are condemned to remain illiterate.
- * Some are born and grow up in united and caring families while others are abandoned or left to themselves without affection or support.
- * Some, forming part of a strong, closely-knit community feel secure and well integrated into a way of life but many others find themselves rejected, forgotten, marginalized, perhaps uprooted by war or by forced migration.
- * Happy are those who are healthy but far too numerous are those who suffer from illness or from physical or mental handicaps.
- * Some, at the end of their schooling, find employment or enter a stable and respectable profession while others experience the insecurity and frustration of unemployment and see their lives as without hope. Studies of the problem show that, in general, the rate of unemployment among the young is three times higher than that of the population as a whole.
- * Some grow up and live in a milieu which has clear and definitive values. Many, especially in industrialized countries, enjoy a high degree of material comfort but are faced with spiritual poverty.

The International Catholic Office for Youth at present concentrates its efforts on the theme: "The child faced with a spiritual void". Is this emptiness not often the cause of dangerous and sometimes fatal attempts to escape from the situation.

These few considerations are meant to underline the contrasts which characterise the situations of young people and are not just a catalogue of difficulties. They partly justify the description, by a contemporary sociologist, of modern youth as "a troubled generation".

YOUTH YEAR: AN APPEAL TO EDUCATORS

When proclaiming the International Youth Year, the United Nations Organization also indicated the principal lines of action to be taken. The theme centres on three words: "Participation, Development, Peace". This recalls the theme of the Lasallian World Congress in Mexico: "Faith, Solidarity, Service". I would suggest that the word "Faith" be added to the theme proposed by the United Nations Organization. We could then ask ourselves what we propose to do or what we could undertake under these four headings.

Participation:

- of the young people with whom we are in contact in the school or in youth groups or movements outside the school:
- * How do we plan to increase the participation of the young in the activities, decision and conduct of daily life?
 - * What place are we prepared to give to the initiatives of individuals and of groups?
 - * How is it possible to arouse and develop the creative spirit so as to help them to live a fuller life in a world of rapid and continual change?
 - * What attitudes and habits should be encouraged so that they may eventually be able to take control of their own lives?
 - * What can we do to prepare young people for changes of profession, of place of residence, of culture so that they can accept such changes in a positive and enriching manner and not as something to be unwillingly endured?

Development:

- * How to render, in daily life, the mutual service which is the preparation for a life of solidarity with others.
- * How to promote an open, generous and disinterested solidarity in the face of glaring inequality whether at home or far away?
- * What personal or group commitments do we propose for rendering mutual assistance and for providing help to young people less fortunate than ourselves?
- * What role are we prepared to play in welcoming, helping, integrating and sharing with new arrivals in our milieu: immigrants, refugees, itinerants, etc?
- * What have we done about Circular 412 on "The Educational Service of the poor and the Promotion of Justice"?

Peace:

- * Getting to know one another is a step towards understanding and agreement. What opportunities does our profession afford for improving our knowledge of others and practising mutual tolerance?
- * To build peace we must get together, we must meet. What animosities and misunderstandings can we dispel by organizing meetings?
- * This year invites us particularly to increase the number of exchanges among young people, to widen their scope and to diversify their nature, in regions countries and continents. What are we prepared to do in this matter?
- * Peace is experienced also in affective sharing, in treating people as equals and with respect. What goods, cultural heritage, values and beliefs do we wish to share?

Faith:

- * At its General Congress in 1982 the International Office for Catholic Education underlined four essential values that we could consider during this Youth Year: respect for the other person, responsible solidarity, creativity and interior life, understood and lived according to the inspiration of the Gospel.
- * To put before oneself and to live these essential values is to contribute to the meaning of life. Is it not a lived and committed faith which gives to life its fullest meaning?
- * In this year of 1985, have we planned to celebrate with young people the values and qualities which they possess: their friendship, their solidarity, their hope and their love of God?

In Conclusion:

To educate young people is to form the future, for youth is the future, theirs and ours. They must begin to build it, not just dream about it. It is our task to encourage and help them. The following quotation from the letter of Pope John Paul II to the Congress of the O.I.E.C. in February, 1982, could sum up and conclude this article:

"The youth of today, fascinated by the progress of modern science, is tempted to accord to science unlimited confidence and to regard it as the supreme value. It is essential, therefore, that the Catholic School show its pupils that the progress of humanity is not measured solely by scientific and technological progress. True progress lies in the priority given to spiritual values and to moral progress. The basically unjust conditions encountered in a materialistic society result in a situation where some live in abundance while others die of hunger. To remedy this evil a new world order is needed and, consequently, an education in the values of justice and love which are its foundation. In a secularized society which has lost the sense of the sacred and with it the sense of morality, there is an urgent need for an education in religious values, an education which enables its beneficiaries to discover the call of faith. It is the duty of the Catholic School to awaken the young to the interior life in such a way that they may be able to answer the call of faith with enthusiasm and generosity".
(Pope John Paul II - Letter to the O.I.E.C. - February, 1982).

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