



DICASTERY FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Culture Section

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Clementine Hall - 7 February 2013

Dear Friends,

I am truly pleased to meet you at the beginning of the work of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture in which you will be endeavouring — as your President said — to understand and examine in depth the “emerging youth cultures” from different perspectives.

I cordially greet Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President, and thank him for his courteous words to me on behalf of you all. I greet the Members, Consultors and all the Co-Workers of the Dicastery, wishing you fruitful work which will make a useful contribution to the Church's youth ministry. It is a complex and many-sided reality, as was said which can no longer be understood within a homogenous cultural universe but within a horizon that may be described as “multi-faceted”, in other words determined by a plurality of views, perspectives and policies. For this reason it is appropriate to speak of “youth cultures”, given that the elements which distinguish and differentiate phenomena and cultural environments prevail over those which, although present, they have in common.

Indeed, many factors contribute to highlighting an increasingly fragmented cultural panorama that is constantly and very rapidly evolving. Far from foreign to this panorama are the social media, the new means of communication that encourage and at times give rise to continuous and rapid changes in mindset, morality and behaviour.

Consequently a widespread atmosphere of instability is to be found whose effects are being felt in the cultural sphere and likewise in that of politics and the economy — the latter is also marked by the difficulty in finding employment that young people encounter. Above all, this instability has psychological and relational effects. The uncertainty and employment that many young people exhibit often drives them to marginalization, making them almost invisible and absent from the historical and cultural processes of society. And ever more frequently their frailty and the margins lead to drug dependence, deviance and violence.

The affective and emotional realm, the sphere of the sentiments, like that of corporeity, are deeply affected by this atmosphere and by the ensuing cultural climate. This is expressed, for example, by seemingly contradictory phenomena, such as making a public spectacle of private life or individualistic and narcissistic withdrawal into personal needs and concerns. The religious dimension, faith and membership in the Church are also frequently experienced in a private and emotionalistic perspective.

Nevertheless there are plenty of phenomena that are definitely positive. The generous and courageous impulses of so many young volunteers who devote their best energies to their needier brothers and sisters; the sincere and profound experiences of faith of so many of the young who joyfully witness to belonging to the Church; the efforts made in many parts of the world to build societies able to respect the freedom and dignity of all, starting with the smallest and weakest. All this comforts us and helps us to draw a more precise and objective picture of youth cultures. However, we cannot be content with interpreting the cultural phenomena of youth according to entrenched models, but which have now become common place, or with analysing them with methods that are no longer helpful, beginning with cultural categories that are out-dated and inappropriate.

Ultimately we find ourselves facing a particularly complex but at the same time fascinating situation which must be understood in-depth and loved with a great spirit of empathy. We are facing a reality we need to grasp with special attention to its basic trends and developments. For example, in looking at the young from many countries in the so-called “Third World”, we realize that with their cultures and their needs they represent a challenge to the globalized consumer society, the culture of consolidated privileges, from which a very restricted section of the population of the Western world benefits. Youth cultures, consequently, also become “emerging”, in the sense that they manifest a profound need, a cry for help or even a “provocation” that cannot be ignored or disregarded, either by civil society or by the ecclesial community.

On various occasions I have expressed, for example, my concern and that of the whole Church about the so-called “educational emergency”, which can certainly be grouped together with other “emergencies” that affect the different dimensions of individuals and their fundamental relationships, and to which an evasive or trivial response can be given. I am thinking, for example, of the growing difficulty in the field of labour and of the difficulty of staying faithful, as time passes, to the responsibilities assumed. An impoverishment for the future of the world and of the whole of humanity — not merely economic and social but above all human and spiritual — would result if young people were no longer to hope, no longer to make progress; if their energy, vitality, capacity for anticipating the future were not integrated into the dynamics of history we should be faced with a humanity, withdrawn into itself, without trust and without a positive view of the future.

Although we are aware of the many problematic situations that are also affecting the context of faith and of membership in the Church, let us renew our trust in young people, let us reaffirm that the Church looks to their condition, to their cultures, as to an essential and inevitable reference point for her pastoral action. For this reason I would like once again to take up certain significant passages of the Message the Second Vatican Council addressed to young people, so that it may provide food for thought and an incentive for the new generations.

In this Message the Council said first of all: “the Church looks to you with confidence and with love.... She possesses what constitutes the strength and charm of youth, that is to say the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew oneself and to set out again for new conquests”.

Venerable Paul VI therefore addressed this Appeal to the young people of the world: “it is in the name of this God and of his Son, Jesus, that we exhort you to open your hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget war and all their train of misery. Be generous, pure, respectful, and sincere, and build in enthusiasm a better world than your elders had”.

I too would like to reassert this forcefully: the Church trusts in young people, hopes in them and in their energies, she needs them and their vitality in order to continue to live with a fresh impetus the mission entrusted to her by Christ. I warmly hope, therefore, that the Year of Faith will also be an invaluable opportunity for the young generations, to rediscover and intensify friendship with Christ, from which to draw joy and enthusiasm to transform cultures and societies in depth.

Dear friends, as I thank you for the commitment that you generously devote to the service of the Church and for the special attention you pay to the young, I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you. Many thanks.