



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO CUBA (JANUARY 21-26, 1998)

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER

JOHN PAUL II

TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF CUBA

Camagüey, 23 January 1998

*Dear Young People of Cuba,*¹ "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10:21). This is how the Gospel describes the meeting between Jesus and the rich young man. And this is how the Lord looks upon each of us. His eyes, full of affection, are fixed today on the young people of Cuba. And I, in his name, embrace you, for I see in you the living hope of the Church and of Cuba. I want to pass on to you the heartfelt greetings and genuine affection of all the young Christians of the different countries and continents which I have been able to visit in the exercise of my ministry as the Successor of Peter. Like you, they are moving towards the future amid joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties, as the Second Vatican Council puts it. I have come to Cuba as a messenger of truth and life, to bring you the Good News, to proclaim to you *"the love of God made known in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 8:39). This love alone can light up the night of human loneliness; this love alone can strengthen the hope of all who search for happiness. Christ has told us that *"no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.... I have called you friends"* (Jn 15:13-15). Christ offers you his friendship. He gave his life so that those who wish to answer his call can indeed become his friends. His is a friendship which is deep, genuine, loyal and total, as all true friendship must be. This is how young people ought to relate to one other, for *youth without friendship is impoverished and diminished*. Friendship is nourished by sacrifice for the sake of serving one's friends and truly loving them. And *without such sacrifice there can be no real friendship, no truly healthy youth, no future for one's country, no genuine religion*. Listen, then, to the voice of Christ! In your lives, Christ is drawing near and saying to you: "Follow me". Do not close yourselves off from his love. Do not turn away. Heed his message. Each of you has received a call from him. He knows each of you by name. Let yourselves be guided by Christ as you seek that which can help you to achieve your full potential. *Open the doors of your heart and your life to Jesus,* "the true hero, humble and wise, the prophet of truth and

love, the companion and friend of young people" (*Message of the Second Vatican Council to Young People*).² I am well aware of *the values which distinguish the young people of Cuba*: you are honest in your relationships, authentic in your aspirations, hospitable towards everyone and committed to freedom. I know that, as children of this exuberant Caribbean land, you are renowned for your artistic and creative abilities, for your joyful and enterprising spirit which is ever ready to embark on great and noble undertakings for the prosperity of the country, for your healthy enthusiasm for the things which stir your interest, and for the ease with which you overcome setbacks and limitations. These values flourish when they are given profound motivations and the freedom to develop. I have in fact been impressed by *the fidelity which many of you have shown to the faith handed down from your forebears*, a faith often learned on the knee of your mothers and grandmothers during the last few decades when the Church's voice seemed silenced. Today, however, the growing crisis of values being felt throughout the world is also casting its shadow over the young people of this bright island. A *dangerous crisis of identity* is spreading, causing young people to live in meaninglessness, without direction or plans for the future, suffocated by immediate concerns. There is a growing relativism, together with religious indifference and the lack of a clear moral sense. At the same time, people are tempted to worship the idols of the consumer society, enticed by their fleeting allure. And anything from outside the country seems more attractive. In the face of all this, the public agencies responsible for education, art, literature and the humanities and for scientific and technological research, as well as the increasing numbers of schools and teachers, have recently been trying to encourage greater concern for *the pursuit of truth, the defence of beauty and the protection of what is good*. But this has led many of you to ask: "Why are all these resources and institutions not sufficient to achieve the desired result?". The answer is not to be sought only in structures, resources and institutions, in the political system, or the effects of economic embargoes, which are always deplorable because they hurt the most needy. These are all part of the answer, but they do not touch the heart of the problem.³ What can I say to you, the young people of Cuba, who live in material conditions which are sometimes difficult, who are sometimes frustrated in your legitimate aspirations and are even sometimes deprived of hope itself? Guided by the Spirit and in the power of the risen Christ, resist every kind of temptation to flee from the world and from society. Do not succumb to the lack of vision which leads to destroying one's personality through alcoholism, drugs, sexual irresponsibility and prostitution, the constant pursuit of new experiences. Do not take refuge in sects, alienating spiritualist cults or groups which are completely foreign to the culture and tradition of your country. "*Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous. Let all that you do be done in love*" (1 Cor 16:13-14). But what does it mean to be courageous? It means to overcome evil in all its forms. The worst evil is sin, which causes all sorts of suffering and can even lurk within us, negatively affecting our behaviour. And so, while it is right to be committed to the struggle against evil in its public and social manifestations, the first duty of believers is to fight against *sin, the root of all the forms of evil* which can take root in the human heart, and to resist its enticements with God's help. Be assured that God does not hinder or waste your youth, nor does he disturb your happiness. On the contrary! Far from imposing limitations, God's power gradually brings about the growth of the whole person in body, mind and heart, a deepening of faith and the expansion of your love for yourselves, for your neighbour and for all earthly and spiritual realities. If you learn to be open to God's initiative, you will experience the power of the "one who is fully alive, Christ eternally young" (*Message of the Second Vatican Council to Young People*). Jesus wants you to have life, and to have it in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). The life which is revealed to us in God, while it may at times appear difficult, provides direction and deep meaning along the path of human development. The Church's traditions, the sacramental life and a constant recourse to prayer are not just duties or rites to be performed. Rather, they are unfathomable sources of grace which can enliven your youth and help it to grow in virtue, apostolic zeal and true hope.⁴ Virtue is that inner strength which leads to self-sacrifice for love of what is good, and which enables people not only to do good deeds but also to give the very best of themselves. Virtuous

young people are what makes a country great. Cuba's future depends on you, on how you build your character and on how you translate into action your commitment to transform the world. And so I say to you: with fortitude and temperance, with justice and prudence, face the great challenges of the present moment; *return to your Cuban and Christian roots*, and do all that you can *to build a future of ever greater dignity and freedom!* Do not forget that freedom involves responsibility. A person is defined above all by his responsible behaviour towards others and before history (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 55). No one should avoid the challenges of the time in which he lives. Take your proper place in the great family of the peoples of this continent and of the world, not as inferiors seeking acceptance, but as men and women possessing a great and rich tradition, the origins of which are found in Christianity. I also wish to speak to you about commitment. Commitment is the courageous response of people who do not want to let life pass them by but rather seek to shape their own personal history and the history of the society around them. I encourage you to make a concrete commitment, however humble and simple, but one which, if carried out with perseverance, will be the best proof of your love and the best path to personal holiness. Make a responsible commitment to your families, to the life of your communities, to civil society and, when the time comes, to the future direction of the nation. You cannot be truly committed to your country unless you carry out your duties and meet your obligations in the family, at the university, in the workplace, in the world of culture and sports, in all the different settings in which the nation becomes a reality and civil society brings together the unrivalled creativity of the human person. Nor can you be committed to the Church without being actively and resolutely present in all the areas of society in which Christ and the Church become incarnate. By the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, Christians need to pass from mere presence to a deep and active involvement in all these areas. The best legacy you can leave to future generations will be to pass on the higher values of the Spirit. It is not a matter of merely preserving some of these, but rather of promoting an ethical and civic training which will help people to accept new values and to reshape their own character and the heart of society on the basis of an education for freedom, social justice and responsibility. The Church, as an "expert in humanity", seeks to accompany young people along this path, helping them to choose, in freedom and maturity, the direction of their own lives and offering them whatever help they need to *open their hearts and souls to the transcendent*. Openness to the mystery of the supernatural will lead them to discover infinite goodness, incomparable beauty, supreme truth — in a word, the image of God, which he has traced in the heart of every human being.⁵ I would now like to speak of a matter vital for the future. The Church in your country desires to be of service not only to Catholics but to the whole Cuban people. To offer this service more effectively she urgently needs priests who belong to this people, priests who will follow in the footsteps of the Apostles by proclaiming the Gospel and enabling their brothers and sisters to share in the fruits of the Redemption. She also needs men and women who, through the consecration of their lives to Christ, will grow daily and with generous devotion in the charitable service of others. She needs contemplative souls who will obtain from God grace and mercy for his people. Everyone has the duty to respond each day to Jesus' gentle yet insistent invitation to implore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest (cf. *Mt 9:38*). And those who are called have the duty to respond in freedom and in a profound spirit of self-sacrifice to the humble and challenging voice of Christ who says, today, as yesterday, as always: Come, follow me! Dear young people of Cuba: when Jesus took flesh in the home of Mary and Joseph, he revealed and consecrated *the family as the sanctuary of life and the basic unit of society*. He sanctifies the family with the sacrament of Marriage and makes it "the centre and heart of the civilization of love" (Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, n. 13). The majority of you are called to form a family. How much personal and social unrest has its roots in problems, crises and breakdowns within families! Prepare yourselves to be future builders of healthy and peaceful homes filled with the harmony which comes from sincere dialogue and mutual understanding. Divorce is never a solution but a failure to be avoided. So promote everything which fosters the sanctity, unity and stability of the family, founded upon the indissoluble

union of marriage and generously open to the precious gift of life. *"Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"* (1 Cor 13:4-7). Genuine love, to which the Apostle Paul devoted a hymn in his First Letter to the Corinthians, is demanding. But its beauty lies precisely in the demands it makes. Only those able to make demands on themselves in the name of love can then demand love from others. Young people of today need to discover this love, because it is the true and solid foundation of the family. Forcefully reject any of its false substitutes, such as "free love". How many families have been destroyed because of this! Never forget that blindly following the impulse of our emotions often means becoming a slave to our passions.⁶ Finally, let me speak to you also about Mary, the young woman who most completely accepted the will of God and thus became the model of the highest Christian perfection. Mary trusted God: *"Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord!"* (Lk 1:45). Strengthened by the word which she kept in her heart (cf. Lk 2:51), she overcame selfishness and defeated evil. Love trained her to be of humble and practical service to her neighbour. Today too the Church turns to Mary and constantly invokes her as a helper and a model of generous charity. The young people of Cuba look to her. In her we discover an example of defence and promotion of life, an example of caring love, courage in suffering, purity of life and wholesome joy. Entrust your hearts to Mary, dear young men and women, you who are the future of these Christian communities which have been so tried through the years. Never be parted from Mary; walk always with her at your side. Thus you too will be holy; imitating her and being strengthened by her help, you will accept God's word and promise, you will treasure it deep within you and you will become heralds of a new evangelization for a society which is also new: the Cuba of reconciliation and love. Dear young people, *the Church trusts in you and she is counting on you*. Inspired by the lives of the saints and other witnesses to the Gospel, and guided by the pastoral concern of your Bishops, help one another to grow stronger in faith and to be *apostles of the Year 2000*. Show the world that Christ is inviting us to share his joy, and that true happiness lies in giving ourselves in love to our brothers and sisters. May the Lord continue to bestow his abundant gifts of peace and enthusiasm upon all the young sons and daughters of the beloved Cuban nation. This is the Pope's great hope and desire for you. I cordially bless you all. *Camagüey, 23 January 1998.* **IOANNES**

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