

## **Ninth Pastoral Letter**

### **Letter to Young People**

#### **Young people of today, Church of tomorrow**

**“We have written unto you, young people, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you...” (1 John 2:14)**

**Christmas 2006**

### **INTRODUCTION**

To all our children, the young men and women in our Eastern Churches:

*“Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts.” (2 Corinthians 3: 2)*

1. We are writing to you *“young people, because ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you.”* (1 John 2: 14) We are addressing this Pastoral Letter to you, in order to express to you our love as fathers and to tell you that we see in you, in your courage and sincerity, the life and future of our Churches. We have confidence in you. We have confidence in the constructive role that you are playing under the guidance of your venerable bishops and all your pastors. You are the witnesses of the Kingdom of God in our Churches and in our countries, a region which needs committed and courageous believers to affirm truth, love justice, peace and reconciliation.

While we are writing this letter to you, in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq, the human person, image of God, is still on trial. It is being treated, according to pre-determined political plans, as though it had no longer any value. We are writing to you to tell you, in these difficult circumstances, that you and we will together remain witnesses of love and truth which seem impossible in our region in the eyes of many powerful ones in this world.

This letter is the token of our decision to walk with you in these circumstances that are besetting the East, in order to continue, amidst death and ruins, thirst for power and vengeance, to give witness to Christ and to the abundant life that he came to bring to everyone. We are writing to you to tell you with Saint Paul, *“Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts.”* (2 Corinthians 3: 2)

#### **Jesus and the Holy Family of Nazareth**

2. We live in a region which always has an urgent and pressing need of truth, love and peace, and the virtues which Jesus came to teach us. We see in your faces the face of the young Jesus of Nazareth, Mary, his mother, and Joseph the workman who had to struggle to earn his living. We recognize in you a desire for heroism and a capacity for imitating them and, following Jesus and the example of Mary and Joseph, being apostles of the Church and heralds of the Kingdom. We believe that you can be real *“ambassadors for Christ.”* (cf. 2 Corinthians 5: 20)

You and we are the Church, the people of God and the people of the baptized, one single Body of Christ, a single community, with each in his situation or circumstances in which he finds himself, and the talents and gifts he received for the growth of the whole Body. We want to talk to you about the vocation and mission that you yourselves

want to get to know and carry out in the Arab world. This is a great responsibility that Christ, Head of the Body, entrusted to you when he filled you with his Holy Spirit, on the day of your baptism and confirmation, for you to proclaim the Kingdom to your brothers and sisters and to help them find happiness and give meaning to their lives.

You are our collaborators and we think that you are quite able to carry out your responsibility in the family, homeland, Church and world. You have the desired qualities and readiness to serve. Above all, you young people, are able to invent, understand, act, accomplish and give of yourselves. We are addressing this letter to you to assure you of our profound desire to have a direct, sincere dialogue with you, in which we consider you real partners. We want to listen to you in order to discern the operation of the Spirit in you, and you, for your part, will listen to us in order better to understand our mission and responsibility. So, together, we shall be able to make fruitful the talents that the Lord has entrusted to us.

### **You can love and transform your society**

3. You have, deep within yourselves, great energies for love and for the pursuit of great ambitions, if you know how to put them to good use. You ask us to understand you, to understand your needs and ambitions, to trust you and respect your role and responsibilities, by which you can enrich the Church and the world in their progress towards the Father, as Pope John Paul II said: “*Many young people are ready to commit themselves in the Church and in the world, if only they are offered real responsibility and an integral Christian formation.*”<sup>1</sup> You are awaiting a new dawn, a better world, as John Paul II also said, when he celebrated the Millennium with you: “*Dear young people, it is up to you to be the watchmen of the morning (cf. Isaiah 21:11-12) who announce the coming of the sun who is the Risen Christ!*”<sup>2</sup>

The world is hungry for spiritual bread, the Word of God, and for life-restoring love. Many young men and women are heading for destruction, misled by the seductions of this world, towards a civilisation that Pope John Paul II called a *civilisation of death*. They are waiting for rescuers to pull them from shipwreck and bring them back to life. To you young people, with your generosity in love, sacrifice and self-giving, we entrust this task of saving your peers, in our societies and our Eastern Churches. We think that with the grace of the Lord Jesus, you will be able to do so. And remember this saying, “A Church without young people is a Church without a future, and young people without a Church are young people without a future.”

### **Outline of the Letter**

4. It has become a tradition to address to our faithful, each year, a pastoral letter to assure them of our prayers and concern, and to send them guidance on various matters that concern our life together, the challenges that we encounter, the demands of the faith and the attitudes that derive from it. This year, we decided to speak to you, dear young men and women, who are the source of our joy and hope.

We shall talk in an initial chapter about the foundation of your vocation and mission: Christ, your model, and the Church, whose living members you are. In a second chapter, we shall speak of the witness that you have to bear in the parish and society, in our countries of the Middle East. In a third chapter, we shall talk to you about

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<sup>1</sup> *Pastores Gregis*, 53

<sup>2</sup> *Message of Pope John Paul II To the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the XVII World Youth Day (Toronto 18-28 July 2002)*

Christian mission, the new evangelisation, dialogue among the Churches, between religions and with our Arab world. Finally we shall talk to you about the main themes relating to life in society and your responsibilities for its edification: the family, the poor, the homeland, emigration, culture, sport, means of communication and involvement in the political and social domain.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

*“[The Word] was the true light... As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”* (John 1: 9, 12)

#### I - CHRIST, OUR PATTERN

##### Jesus is the way, the truth and the life

5. Young people seek truth and happiness. They are looking for a role-model. Some at times make a mistaken choice; others make do with mediocre lives and role-models, while others still manage to do wonders. Numerous are the models and heroes who attract the young and not so young. But, for 2000 years, there has been no-one comparable with Jesus, in his person, life and teaching. He is the pattern and ideal for everyone, in the truth he brings, in his love, courage, power, gentleness, purity, in the peace he gives, especially in his sharing and solidarity with the weak, sinful and suffering.

Everyone who has encountered Jesus and known him has seen in him the face of holy God. In him they have seen the brother, master and physician. They have become enamoured of his love, unless they were full of themselves and enslaved to earthly things. *“The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe, and of history.”*<sup>3</sup> *“Christ, true God and true man, the Lord of the cosmos, is also the Lord of history, of which he is ‘the Alpha and the Omega’* (Revelation 1: 8; 21: 6), *‘the beginning and the end’* (Revelation 21: 6).”<sup>4</sup>

During his childhood, as in his youth, Jesus was faithful to his little family in Nazareth, and to the big family formed by the whole village, with all the social and spiritual implications comprised by that. The Gospel says, *“He was subject to them... and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.”* (Luke 2: 51-52) He lived among people and like them, *except for sin*. Like them, he bore the difficulties and cares of everyday life. His birth took place in difficult circumstances, followed by the flight into Egypt. Back in Nazareth, he worked at a humble job. (cf. Luke 2: 52) When he grew up and started to preach and teach, he showed himself full of piety, sincerity, friendship, love, compassion and attentiveness.

He commiserated with people’s sufferings. He responded to their needs. He lavished on them sublime teaching which drew them to the Father. He ceaselessly repeated that his food was to do the will of God and that he had come for that.

Jesus is *“the way, the truth and the life.”* (John 14: 6) He is *“the light of the world.”* (John 9 : 5) He *“came unto the world...[to] bear witness unto the truth.”* (John

<sup>3</sup> *Redemptor Hominis, 1*

<sup>4</sup> *Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 1:5*

**Comment [MSOffice1]:** The phrase “*et de l’Eglise*” =“and of the Church” does not appear in *Redemptor Hominis 1*. See <http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0218/P2.HTM>. If that phrase is wished, as per the French text, it must be placed outside quotation marks.

**Comment [MSOffice2]:** The reference here is to *Tertio Millennio Adveniente 1,5*, not to *Tertio Millenio* (sic) *Ineunte, 4.10* as per the French.

**Comment [MSOffice3]:** Not just Luke 2:52, as per French.

**Comment [MSOffice4]:** Not John 12:46, where Jesus says, “I am come a light into the world.” In John 9:5 he says, “I am the light of the world,” which is the passage alluded to here.

18: 37) and to give people «*life...more abundantly.*» (John 10: 10) Through his Incarnation our life has acquired a new dignity, for he assumed our nature. He freed it, purified and raised it to the point of granting it genuine divine adoption, and through it sanctifying the universe.

**Comment [MSOffice5]:** Not John 18: 33, as per French.

He spoke about the Kingdom of God in various parables. He described the glorious things which are prepared for us in heaven, of which Saint Paul says, “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9)

**Comment [MSOffice6]:** Saint Paul speaks in the plural, not the singular, as per the French, so I have adapted the first phrase to fit the following quotation.

A rich young man came one day to Jesus. Since his youth he had studied the commandments. He came to Jesus to learn more about eternal life. Jesus looked at him and loved him. He said: Keeping the commandments is not enough. There is something greater than that for the one who is looking for perfection: one must love as far as absolute renunciation. Love is the road to perfection. That is perfection itself, for “*God is love.*” (1 John 4: 8) That is why, Jesus directed him towards love for his brothers, the poor, and asked him to share with them what he possessed. But the young man went away sad, as his heart was too attached to the great fortune that he possessed. (cf. Mark 10: 17-22)

Jesus’ love for young people and for everyone expresses the Father’s love for them. He invites them to share in it, because their happiness consists in living this communion of love. God invites everyone, especially the young, to share in his love and its benefits, and everyone, as children and offspring of the same Father, receives the love of God and shares in its benefits with joy and gratitude.

## A new vision of life

6. Jesus brought a new vision to life and the Kingdom, for Jews and for the world. He contradicted the doctors of the Law in their misconceptions about the love of God and neighbours. They considered the Law as a dead letter, and set great store by human devotions and non-essential traditions, while neglecting “*judgment, mercy and faith.*” (Matthew 23: 23) He reminded them that God wants “*mercy and not sacrifice,*” (Matthew 12: 7) that the holy things are for the service of man, and that “*the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.*” (Mark 2: 27) In the Sermon on the Mount, he said to them, “*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*” (Matthew 5: 43-45)

He neither despised nor judged the little ones, women, the sick, the possessed, sinners and foreigners. On the contrary, he restored to them their freedom, healing, health of body and soul and gave them renewed dignity. For him, all men and women are called to be sons and daughters of God, and to be, with him as Lord and Redeemer, partners in the work of saving humanity.

Jesus taught us to pray. He exhorted his disciples and the whole people “*always to pray and not to faint.*” (Luke 18: 1 and cf. Luke 21: 36) And, “*when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are... When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do...*” (Matthew 6: 5, 7) And when one day his disciples came to him and asked him to teach them how to pray, he taught them the prayer that the whole Church still says today and which we call the Lord’s Prayer, “*Our Father, which art in heaven,*

**Comment [MSOffice7]:** Since the phrase is a direct quotation from Luke 18: 1, cf. should precede the second reference and not be placed before the first, as per the French.

*hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come...*” (cf. Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:9-13) This prayer fills us with joy, as it assures us that God is our Father, is calling us to his Kingdom and asking us to prepare for its coming and to be holy. It also gives us the joy of forgiveness, teaching us to forgive others so that God may forgive us.

He has borne our sins and sufferings. Since he loved the Father, and loved us, he accepted death to redeem us from slavery to sin and its consequences and to bring us to the Resurrection of eternal life and glory.

He came to bear witness to the truth, and to grant men abundant life and glory, here and hereafter. He taught us that our life is God-given, and that we should endeavour to be worthy of it through our efforts and personal contribution. That is why, in the parable of the talents, he showed us the need for making what he gives us fruitful.

So that his presence among us and his saving action should remain permanently and efficaciously in us until the end of the ages, Jesus summoned disciples whom he chose and sent as apostles to proclaim the Gospel and become a community of love. He asked them to be his witnesses, the light of the world and the leaven that transforms the face of the earth. Those who saw them believed in their message and their divine Master and glorified the heavenly Father. They, like him, became the sacrament and sign of the Father. They constituted an ecclesial community, enlightened by their preaching and living by the sacraments, which gave divine life to all who received them, uniting them to Christ and with each other.

## II. THE CHURCH AND LAY-PEOPLE

### **The Church is the Body of Christ**

7. Christ is the high priest, the only mediator between God and men, since he unites both human and divine natures in himself. He is the prophet, teacher and priest who brought to the world the light of whole truth about God, man and creation. He is the king, i.e. the shepherd, governor and servant who loved his sheep, served them, washed their feet, healed their sicknesses, pitied the poor, forgave sins... and gave himself for them, unto death.

But the sole mediator did not wish to act alone. He wanted to engage people in working out their own salvation. That is why, he called disciples and co-workers and founded a community of believers, so that they could co-operate with him in the work of saving the world.

The Church, Body and partner of Christ, continues the presence of Christ and his action across time and space. By its nature and mission, it takes on Christ's three functions as priest, prophet and king. It fulfils these functions above all in the person of its bishops and priests, but also in the person of all its children, monks, nuns, consecrated people and lay-people. The Church is well aware of the rights and duties of every baptized person and rejoices when lay-people fulfil their mission alongside pastors and with their supervision.

### **Identity and mission of lay-people**

8. Vatican II well defined the identity and mission of lay-people in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. It says, “*The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own*

way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world. What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. ... But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.<sup>5</sup>”

The vocation of lay-people is based on their complete membership of the Church. They are the people of God. In their way they share in the triple function of Christ. Their mission is derived from the particular character of their vocation, which is to establish God’s Kingdom among temporal matters, in order to sanctify the human race and make it fruitful through the Spirit of the Gospel. That is why they are called to fulfil their mission, to be holy, as Jesus tells them: “*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*” (Matthew 5: 48)

### **The role of lay-people in the Church**

9. Since the beginning of the Church, lay-people have had their role. Today, pastors appreciate their place and mission in the one mystical Body. They well know that lay-people are also called to share in animating this Body through the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is true that at a certain period in Church history, that role was limited and reduced, as the clergy had taken it over in an increasingly exclusive way. Yet the Church was always aware of its importance and necessity, and of the need for promoting it and recovering what had been lost. That came to pass during the Second Vatican Council, and even before and afterwards, thanks to pioneers in the lay apostolate.

Giving witness to Christ is not just for clergy and consecrated persons. Lay-people are living and active members in the Body of Christ. They are responsible for living out their faith, witnessing to it and communicating it. Their place is in the front row in society, in all areas: work, commerce, industry, education, health, science, culture, politics, means of communication, etc. They have the responsibility for evangelising and sanctifying all sectors, even if they are sometimes difficult or even hostile to faith and the Gospel. Faithful lay-persons, being also envoys and apostles, must remain faithful to their mission, despite difficulties and sacrifices. They must be bold in the fight and constant, in facing various opposing forces.

For witnessing to Christ, the Lord’s grace is necessary. Christians obtain it through prayer, the liturgy and the sacraments. They also need an ongoing and complete religious education.

### **The royal priesthood of all the baptized**

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<sup>5</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 31

**Comment [MSOffice8]:** The scriptural phrase of 1 Peter 2: 9 is “royal priesthood” not “common” so I have preferred it for the title, as although “common” can mean joint or shared, it also means inferior, while the scriptural phrase suggests just the contrary. See *Lumen Gentium* 10: “The ministerial priest... makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their **royal** priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist.”

**10.** In the Church there are two realities which form a single Body, the mystical Body of Christ. These two realities are: the apostles and all the pastors, to whom the Lord gave the power of the ministerial order, and the faithful, who fulfil their vocation and mission in the various situations and conditions of their existence. The two realities complement each other; neither can subsist without the other. The consecrated pastors are chosen by God from among the lay-people. They are appointed for their spiritual service with all its concomitant implications in the temporal order. They have the sacrament of ministerial priesthood, while the lay-people have the common priesthood that baptism bestows on them, in order to answer to their calling, and to witness to the Gospel under the leadership of bishops and priests.

The mission of lay-people in the Church and the world takes as its model Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man. It is rooted in his action and teaching, i.e. in his Gospel, and it is fulfilled in unity with all the members of his Body, which is the Church.

### **Progress towards perfection requires effort**

**11.** Young people, be aware that progress towards perfection requires of you an effort to detach yourselves from everything mean or bad, so as to go beyond it and reach what is better. You know that a good many young people these days have no power to act, to be detached or to commit themselves. There are many reasons for that: the media that do not tell you the truth, corruption in high places, tendencies in society to prioritise gain, power and aggressive individualism. They encourage immorality and corruption and stamp a negative character on our civilisation which, like a torrent, carries a huge number of young people with it. Therefore, in order not to let yourselves be carried away by the torrent, and not be divided in yourselves, and not let yourselves go sadly along your life's paths, we ask you to remain strong and unafraid of difficulties. Jesus is present among you and for you. He is looking at you with great love. He calls you to the heights, to heroic acts. Don't let yourselves be drowned in stagnant pools. Rather reach for the well-spring of living water.

The world is bewildered and perplexed in search of its salvation and happiness. Society and the Church are waiting for generous, strong, brave young people, full of love, to go to their rescue. Don't hesitate, don't remain isolated, withdrawn into yourselves. Don't run away, abandoning your responsibilities. Don't let yourselves be stopped by difficulties, shame or easy gain. The Church and society are counting on you.

Christians know very well that "*narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.*" (cf. Matthew 7: 14) They know that those who want the glory of the resurrection must first take up their cross, as the Lord did before them. (cf. Luke 24: 26) Are not young people the first to defy difficulties, taking up the cross and persevering to the heights? Yes, dear young people, you are capable of carrying the cross and making the one Saviour known to young people and to society, believers and non-believers alike. Young people, you are apostles. So be strong and generous and give your life for others.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CHRISTIAN WITNESS

*“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5: 16)*

#### I. HOW TO WITNESS?

##### **The Word of God**

**12.** Young people, you accepted Christ and believed in him. In baptism you put him on and in him, the only Son, you became children of God. You need constantly to deepen knowledge of your faith and its requirements, in order to live according to the dignity of your calling, and to witness, in every circumstance, to the Risen Lord.

Baptism is a new birth. Through it, we put on the Son and through it we become children of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It sows in us the seed of grace which enables us to live, grow and bear fruit. That seed needs nourishment and care and the Lord has given us, through the Church, the requisite means for that.

The first medium is the life-giving Word of God, which is preserved by the Church and offered by it to the faithful. Holy Scripture is the story of an experience lived by man with God; it is the announcement of salvation and the glorious destiny of humanity. It is a love letter written by God to humanity. It is *“light, truth and life.”* Man lives by it, and not by bread alone. (cf. Matthew 4: 4) Thanks to that we know God, the economy of salvation down the centuries, the Incarnation of the Word and Redemption. Thanks to that too, we know the nature, calling and destiny of man, and the commandments given by God, so that man may overcome outward and inward evil, and be resurrected for glory and eternal life.

Many of our children have allowed themselves to be beguiled, heart and soul, by fallacious principles, theories and philosophies that are incapable of giving them true life. They let themselves be drawn by a semblance of life that leads them to death. They remain far from the word and example of Him who, alone, can give them life, because He alone is life.

Even those who have received light remain in ignorance, if they do not make daily progress in knowing better the mystery of Christ and loving him better and remaining united to him. The word of God is like the grain of wheat that lives and bears fruit when it falls onto good ground, provided that it receives the necessary care as well as sunlight and rainwater.

Christians looking for life must accept Scripture from the Church’s hands, meditate on it and live with it. They must get to know it and discover in it the mystery of God, his will, the secrets of Creation, of mankind and life. They must also try to live faithfully according to Scripture, the Word of God.

##### **Sacraments and rites**

**13.** The Lord knows man and his needs. Just as he has provided natural means for bodily life, so he willed to give him a means for sustaining spiritual life. That is why he instituted sacraments in the Church, as means based on nature, which, through consecration, become divine means for divine life. Water, oil, wine, bread, etc., are in

themselves for the life of the body, but through the will of Christ they have become means for spiritual life.

We meet numerous Christians among our faithful who do not know the meaning of the rites, the nature of the sacraments, the need to approach them and the way of taking part in them. Some even venture to despise them. The Lord Jesus clearly affirmed the need for the sacraments. Of baptism he said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16: 16) Of the Eucharist he said, *“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”* (John 6: 53) Whoever wishes to reach the goal should take the means.

Comment [MSOffice9]: Not 6: 52, as per French.

The value of the sacraments and rites is in their meaning and effectiveness. They make present the foundational event fulfilled by Christ for the salvation of the world. They renew the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, in all its phases. They make it present and actual, here and now, so that the faithful live it today as they lived it in those days. So the sacraments become divine, effectual and sanctifying means.

In the rites and sacraments, we use the things of this world and sanctify them. They sanctify us in their turn and raise us to the holiness of God and his glory. It is therefore not suitable to lower the value of holy things to the level of those of the earth, as a number of Christians do with respect to feasts and sacraments: instead of seeing them as a source of grace, they turn them into worldly festivities and traditions.

### Reason and faith

14. Everyone, in general, and young people in particular, have a constant desire to know the truth, about the existence of man, his origin and destiny. Man has an insistent desire to know God and be united to him. His intelligence is the great gift that distinguishes him from other creatures. Through it, he knows the universe, himself and God. From the beginning of his existence, man has tried to discover this mystery. Philosophies, religions and arts express this profound desire to know God and be united to him.

But human understanding, hindered by sin, cannot by itself know the whole truth. So, Truth came to man, came to meet him and was transfigured before him. That is what we call Revelation. God, through his Word, revealed himself to mankind by showing himself to those whom he chose and who became inspired witnesses. And *“when the fullness of the time was come,”* (Galatians 4: 4) he appeared in the Son, the Incarnate Word.

Comment [MSOffice10]: Not just “to men,” as per the French. Christ had women disciples and his Mother. (Women, including Mary Magdalene, Equal to the Apostles, are the first to see the risen Lord and to tell the disbelieving male apostles.)

The intellect is then the means by which man knows God, but he cannot know him as he should unless faith comes to his aid. So reason and faith do not contradict each other, but work together, perfecting each other and supporting man in his progress towards his goal, which is God.

Human knowledge cannot go beyond the limits of matter, space, time and measure... Faith grasps, on the basis of the sensory world, what lies beyond and above matter, time and space. Reason in science seeks to know about the how of things, man and the cosmos, but in philosophy and faith, it wonders about the why of the whole of existence.

Some philosophical theories maintain that there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, science and reason, and on the other, the demands of faith; or, at least, they seek to impose separation between the two domains, and we meet young people who, in

their sincere quest for truth, can fall victim to those theories that reject faith as a way leading man to grow and arrive at his supreme goal.

Pope John Paul II said, “*It is [the Church’s] duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a quite special kind: the diakonia of the truth.*”<sup>6</sup> One of the primary duties of the Church is then to unveil to the world its truth and that of God and to introduce it to its Saviour, who is “*the way, the truth and the life.*” (John 14: 6) Christ, light of the nations, shines upon the face of the Church, which he sends to every creature. (Mark 16: 15) “*Hence the Church, as the People of God among the nations, while attentive to the new challenges of history and to mankind’s efforts to discover the meaning of life, offers to everyone the answer which comes from the truth about Jesus Christ and his Gospel.*”<sup>7</sup>

Comment [MSOffice11]: The reference is to Veritatis Splendor 2 (not to Splendor Veritatis 1)

### **The doctrine and teaching of the Church**

**15.** Christ entrusted to his Church the responsibility for teaching and explaining the truths of faith, and for clarifying, in the light of those truths, the rules to do with human behaviours and relationships, so that individuals and groups could reach true happiness and perfection.

The Church’s aim in accurately defining Christian doctrine, is to let it be a guide and light for Christians’ and everyone’s faith and action, and a safeguard against straying into error.

The social and moral teaching of the Church is an authentic and legitimate commentary on Holy Scripture and a basis for practical application in the present life, in response to human and social changes.

The advance of the sciences and their influence on human life, nature, action and relations, expose people today to new challenges to faith and knowledge about the principles of their existence and destiny. The very many theories and numerous deviations, and confusion as to the very concept of culture, lead people to a culture of death, made up of ignorance, exploitation and oppression.

That is why, the Church, “*Mother and teacher,*” watches over the faith and destiny of her children, on the way of truth, love and human virtues. The Church discerns the signs of the times and, basing itself on the word of God, which can neither err nor deceive, and who “*came to bear witness to the truth,*” (John 18: 37) gives to people the true light for their life and eternal destiny.

To ensure a genuine Christian formation for the faithful, it adopts various means. Besides catechesis in the liturgy and sacraments, it emphasises the Word of God, in churches and schools, in preaching and spiritual direction. It uses modern means of communication, meetings around the Gospel. It helps families in children’s education, with transmitting the faith to them and encouraging them to become involved in the Church. It encourages apostolic movements, confraternities and ecclesial groups that accompany the faithful, especially young people and children, and make up whatever is lacking in their general Christian formation.

## **II. LIVING AND WITNESSING FAITH**

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<sup>6</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, 2

<sup>7</sup> *Veritatis Splendor*, 2; cf. also *Lumen Gentium*, 1

### **Light, salt, leaven**

16. Earth is always exposed to dissolution and destruction, its dough and salt are exposed to corruption, and its light to extinction. The teaching of the Church can be equally exposed to deformation and hostility. Many complain, blame poverty and corruption and shift responsibility onto others. But the accusers don't do anything either to bring about change in themselves first before undertaking to change the world. Who then should take the initiative?

The Lord entrusted to us, his disciples, and to the community of the baptized, responsibility for ensuring the salvation of the world and ceaselessly working, without becoming discouraged, to create better situations. He says to us, "*Ye are the light of the world, ... the leaven in the lump, ... and the salt of the earth...*" (cf. Matthew 5: 13-14, 33)

Every baptized person has taken a commitment to be faithful to Christ and give witness to him. We know that the transmission of the Gospel occurs through speaking and listening, and that that cannot be done in all circumstances and at all times. But it can also be done through the witness of life and that it is then a duty at every time and in every circumstance. Christians live their faith, not only in the liturgy and sacraments, but in the world, homeland, society, home and parish. The liturgy and sacraments provide them precisely with the necessary preparation and exhort them to live their faith, with all its demands, in the world.

Corruption on earth is widespread. God needs every human being to spread his grace; just as they need God to be able to bear their responsibilities. Christians believe and have committed themselves to remaining loyal to their faith. They obey God, are brave, loving, carrying their cross joyfully, following the example of their Master. They represent him and work with him for the salvation of the world.

Christians live in peace and joy, because they carry in themselves the hope of resurrection, and because they are no longer internally divided, or separated from God and other people, and because God's presence fills their being and raises them to holiness and divine glory.

The German philosopher, Nietzsche, said that salvation is not reflected on Christians' faces. He was speaking of Christians he had known. Christians who live the Redemption of Christ, his salvation and resurrection, in their souls and bodies, cannot but live in divine joy and peace.

### **Young militants for a worthy Christian life**

17. Young believers have visions, ambitions, ideals and values. They have the courage and energy to cope with various difficulties with strength of mind and perseverance. They know how to show solidarity and collaborate for the highest public good.

Young men and women, we know and understand the struggle you are waging, together with your comrades, in your countries, in order to cope with the challenges and difficulties of life in your society. We know the great pressures that weigh on your personal, family, social and religious life, in cities and rural areas, and are the causes of unemployment, poverty, emigration, marginalisation, wars, and fear for the future... That has all, perhaps, weakened the faith of some of you. That is why they have emigrated or withdrawn from public life, or have shut themselves off in frustration or resentment... We appreciate the steadfastness of most of you, your perseverance in the life of faith and hope in God, your loyalty to your countries, your love for your brothers

and sisters, your constant working for a better society, even if it costs you to fall, like the grain of wheat onto the ground, in order to bear much fruit.

In your struggle, don't give up prayer and the sacramental life, especially active participation in the Liturgy and communion in the Body of Christ, which is the food and strength of every believer. Prayer and the sacraments are your weapons and your way towards God and man. You are not alone in your fight. Christ Jesus is present among you. He supports you. Without him, you will not be able to do the good you want to do nor to bear the fruit that you expect, thanks to your struggle, for your countries and Churches.

### **Self-love or gift of self?**

**18.** Everyone talks about love, describing it, requiring it and singing of it. But not everyone understands and has it as the Creator wills. In Christianity, in our concepts, doctrines, behaviours and relations, we begin with God's love for us. We always have to refer back to that love in order to understand the truth of love and its greatness among human beings, especially the love between man and woman.

Among earthly realities there can be false love, or a love which contradicts love, because self-love at others' expense exists. It is natural and even a duty to love oneself, to proclaim one's identity, defend it and affirm it. But this love for oneself becomes harmful to the individual and his relations with others if it does not open up into love of others. True love, which is open to others, builds up humanity and the universe, while introverted love demolishes them.

Between love of others and love of self, there is a subtle difference which is not evident for many young people, still lacking in experience. This is why there are many transgressors and victims as well. In life, we take to give, and then our life grows; it is happy and fruitful. When we take without giving, our life is stifled and dies. That is the law of life and nature: the earth gives, the sun gives, trees bear fruit, rain stimulates growth, and the grain of wheat multiples... In giving and loving, people find their own happiness and that of others.

God is essentially loving and self-giving. Within the Godhead, the Father gives himself to the Son, the Son gives himself completely to the Father and the Spirit also participates in this mutual giving. And it is through love that God created the universe and mankind.

### **Learning to love**

**19.** In the beginning, when God created man and woman, the relationship between them was pure and natural. After the transgression, the relationship and notion of love were troubled and evil entered the universe. But, despite sin, God began again to teach love to mankind, through the prophets, apostles and saints, until the only Son was manifest. He lived among men, and, through his teaching and life, revealed love to them in its most sublime forms. He himself attained the greatest love, when he obeyed unto death on the cross, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15: 13) Love is an act of will for the salvation of others and for their happiness, even if that is costly and requires us to sacrifice ourselves for them, since sacrifice for others is the authentic sign of the gift of self and of love. It is enough to consider parents who love their children, how they give everything they have, even themselves, for the life and happiness of their children.

We learn love first in the family: there we are born, live, grow and grow up. Love is the principal agent through which man grows and develops. That is what Christ meant

**Comment [MSOffice12]:** I suggest this expression, as "the heart of God" is a misleading expression in English and does not indicate the Trinity.

**Comment [MSOffice13]:** I have not translated the French literally here, as its phrasing does not adequately express the Eastern tradition of Trinitarian theology, in which the Spirit is not merely a link of love between the other two divine persons. I hope that the English here is closer to the meaning of the original Arabic.

by saying, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” (Matthew 4: 4), and the Word of God is primarily absolute love.

### III - PARTICIPATION IN PASTORAL LIFE

#### **The Church is counting on young people**

20. Pope John Paul II says in his Exhortation, *A New Hope for Lebanon*, “*The Church is counting on young people to give a new thrust to ecclesial and social life. Christian communities are therefore invited to integrate them more into all their activities, so that they can be agents of the ‘new evangelisation,’ sowers of the Word amidst other young people, bringing their peculiar dynamism to Church renewal. Similarly, they are called to be full partners in building up society. For that, they should be given a solid intellectual and spiritual training, which responds well to their thirst for absolute truth. Wherever they are involved, they ought to be able to find the spiritual accompaniment they need.*”<sup>8</sup>

In another place, the Pope says, “*The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favourable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations, and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society.*”<sup>9</sup>

#### **Commitment to serving the Church**

21. Some young people are careless, advocating minimal effort. Others are inclined to material pleasures, ignoring spiritual matters. Others indeed find their satisfaction in hobbies: sport, art or other, finding their relaxation in them rather than in Church work. There are those who are involved in various groups or parties, and find they no longer have time for other, less useful or significant sectors or commitments. Others are afraid of taking on some commitment which might restrict their use of time or their freedom. There are also young people who don’t like religious leaders, describing them as authoritarian and distancing themselves from them and the Church.

But a significant and continuously growing number of young men and women today play an active role in Church, participating in its activities and institutions. They do so in all sincerity, driven by their faith in God, their love of the Church and the service of humanity. They are the Church’s spring-time, hope and glory.

Given the commitment of young people in the Church, some priests – a minority – argue that responsibility in the Church belongs only to the clergy and that any formal role of lay-people in pastoral affairs just limits their own role. They continue to consider lay-people as untrained minors. But the majority of our Churches’ priests understand the importance of lay-people’s role, their participation and action in the body of the one Christ, as the holy Apostle Paul tells us. (cf. 1 Corinthians 12) They know how to get close to young people, listening to them, learning about their problems, sharing their joys, their troubles and the difficulties they encounter. They help them to acquire training, in meetings of friendship and solidarity, in an atmosphere of respect, joy and spiritual and human enrichment. It is thanks to this understanding and concern that young people come to know their vocation and mission.

Pastors well know that young people have potential and great capacity for action and self-giving. There are things that only young people know how to do for the

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<sup>8</sup> *A new hope for Lebanon*, 51

<sup>9</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, 46

Kingdom, beyond all expectation, and better than they could do themselves. They understand the importance of their participation in all apostolic, pastoral or social activity. Young people, for their part, when they know they are respected and appreciated in their Church, are capable of responding to various needs and doing their duty with generosity and joy<sup>10</sup>, for the service of the Kingdom of God. However, if young people do not find enough understanding or requisite attention, they should tell themselves that their service is after all for the one Lord, who is Christ Jesus: the One who searches hearts and rewards each according to his deeds. That is why, whatever the lack of understanding that they encounter, they ought not to move away from the Church or give up their commitment to it.

### **Parish councils and pastoral councils at the eparchial level**

**22.** Areas where young people carry out their mission and share in pastoral life fall along the following lines: parish councils, pastoral councils at eparchial level and apostolic movements.

Collaboration between pastors and lay-people in the Church needs an organisation that ensures its smooth running and structures that allow it to grow and to act. For that, the Church recommends the creation of parish councils and pastoral councils at eparchial level. The purpose of these councils is to reflect on every pastoral issue or activity, to look for solutions, in parish and eparchial life through everyone's collaboration, under the priest's and bishop's keen vigilance.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult for some priests to set up councils, as they consider that collaboration with lay-people is difficult and that pastoral organisations are liable to divisions, biases and self-seeking by individuals or groups, which paralyses the parish and causes loss of charity. So they prefer to collaborate with methods that don't tie their hands or commit them to anything.

It also happens that, in some parishes and eparchies, the apostolic movements and groups act without any link with the parish or eparchy, the parish preferring to stay away from those initiatives. So it is not surprising that such a situation leads to the formation of confraternities and societies in a haphazard and disconnected way.

We recommend to our faithful laity, especially to the young people among them, to appear disinterested and charitable in the exercise of their parish activities, in order to consolidate parish and eparchial unity, under the watchful gaze of the responsible authorities. For that is the goal of the councils' creation and every activity. Here, we recommend for there to be youth representatives on these councils.

### **The importance of the parish**

**23.** *"A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful ... the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop,<sup>12</sup>"* gathered around the Eucharist and the Word of God. The Second Vatican Council urges lay-people to show their membership of the local Church by their participation in pastoral activities, and at the same time to increase in themselves a catholic, universal spirit. It recommended the creation of parish and pastoral councils in eparchies, with the participation of lay faithful. Pope John Paul II adds on this topic: *"The ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most*

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Mystery of the Church*, 59

<sup>11</sup> *Code of Canons of Oriental Churches*, canons 272, 295; cf. also *Christifideles Laici*, 27

<sup>12</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2179

*immediate and visible expression in the parish. It is there that the Church is seen locally.*<sup>13</sup>”

Pope Paul VI, declared at the beginning of his pontificate: *“We simply believe that this ancient and venerable structure of the parish has an indispensable mission of great relevance, for it is responsible for creating the primary community of Christian people, and for initiating and gathering the people in the normal expression of liturgical life; for preserving and reviving faith in people today; for providing the school of Christ’s saving doctrine; for practising with feeling and indeed the humble charity of brotherly good works.*<sup>14</sup>”

*“There are many other places and forms of association through which the Church can be present and at work. All are necessary to carry out the word and grace of the Gospel and to correspond to the various circumstances of life in which people find themselves today. In a similar way there exist in the areas of culture, society, education, professions, etc. many other ways for spreading the faith and other settings for the apostolate which cannot have the parish as their center and origin. Nevertheless, in our day the parish still enjoys a new and promising season.*<sup>15</sup>”

#### **Apostolic movements and pastoral work**

**24.** All Christians are labourers in the same vineyard, members of a single body, flowers in the same field of the Lord, players and singers in the same choir. Their gifts, roles and ministries are diversified. The spirituality of each can have specific characteristics that are differentiated according to the circumstances of their state in life, as groups and individuals. But all collaborate and find their fulfilment in one mission, that of salvation.<sup>16</sup>

Some movements, instead of consolidating the involvement of their members in the parish, and instead of sharing their vocation and mission with the faithful in their own milieu, incite their members to a kind of independence and thus become a Church within the Church, separate from the parish. The movement thus produces an effect contrary to its own aims, by becoming a cause of separation and division in the parish, though all Christians, and all movements, have as their primary vocation the consolidation of the life of the communion in all its parish manifestations, especially in the Eucharist. A single parish, a single Eucharist: that is the basic criterion on which all the movements in the parish should be founded.

While remaining faithful to the specific charisma of various movements, the leaders ought to obey the directives of the Holy See and the bishops and remain in harmony with the work being done in the parish. They should collaborate with the priest and the faithful in order to contribute to real, healthy growth. Indeed everyone is called to enrich, through his or her own charisma, and collaboration with the whole community, the spiritual and apostolic life of the parish.

The Church takes care of these movements with their different charismata. It sees in them a valid and effective instrument for serving the Church’s mission. That is why it accompanies them and offers them necessary guidance to fulfil their mission. But it also sees that they can only fulfil that mission in a spirit of collaboration between all the movements and with the competent ecclesiastical authorities. That is why, for the

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<sup>13</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, 26

<sup>14</sup> Paul VI, address to the clergy of the city of Rome, June 24 1963, (in Italian)  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/speeches/1963/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19630624\\_clergy-rome\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19630624_clergy-rome_it.html)

<sup>15</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, 26

<sup>16</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, 55, 56

apostolic movements to be Church movements, the Church must officially recognize them and their statutes, spirituality and aims, bless their activities and remain constantly informed about their situation and proper functioning.

Every bishop performs this task in his eparchy. He is directly in charge of every mission and activity in his eparchy. At the level of the Churches, there are, in every one of our countries, Assemblies of Patriarchs and Bishops, which include the pastors responsible for the various Catholic Churches. These Assemblies, through the competent episcopal commissions, supervise the apostolic movements and all the pastoral activities in general.

Sometimes there are disputes between apostolic movements working in the parish. They ought all to realise that they are there to work as a single body for the common good. So they should help one another, and pursue a complementary activity in the service of the parish and its general flourishing. None should exclude the other or become a cause of division in the parish, where the priest is the father and shepherd of everyone.

### **Chaplains**

**25.** We know that many movements, confraternities and apostolic groups in our countries need chaplains to accompany them. They are asking the authorities in charge to find them for them and to give them the requisite mandate. Chaplains are indeed necessary to help with the Christian, apostolic training of members. They explain the Word of God and the teaching of the Church. They guide decisions and activities, helping movements find their place in the Church's pastoral work and ensuring co-ordination between all the movements in the same parish or region. We invite our brother Bishops and priests to give this issue the importance it deserves. We also invite the episcopal commissions for apostolate to address this issue seriously, and respond to the legitimate demand of the movements. *"The role of religious advisers, in the movements and on university campuses, be they priests, deacons, monks, nuns or laypersons, is of great importance for their growth and human and spiritual maturation, in order to help them discern their vocation and find their place in society."*<sup>17</sup> So they can fulfil their role better, we encourage the work and the formation of chaplains in every field, human, spiritual and pastoral.

### **Pastoral work in the Churches of the Middle East**

**26.** Besides communion between parish and eparchy, the local and universal Churches, having regard to the plurality of our Churches in the Middle East, we must also emphasise communion between our various local Churches.

During the synodal Assembly for the Church in Lebanon, in 1995, *"several speeches drew attention to the vocation and mission of the Catholic Church in Lebanon, and to the need to establish and strengthen brotherly relations with Christians in the Near and Middle East, and particularly with those who remain sometimes ignored... In this spirit, the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs (CECP), called to strengthen its structures, will manifest effectively the catholicity of the Church in the region and its mission of salvation for all its inhabitants."*<sup>18</sup>

That is why we created, in the framework of the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs, a Secretariat General of Young People of the Middle East, composed of

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<sup>17</sup> *A new hope for Lebanon*, 51

<sup>18</sup> *A new hope for Lebanon*, 82

young men and women, their chaplains and pastors, from all the Catholic Churches in the various countries of the region.

### **Priestly and religious vocations**

27. We have been talking about the vocation of lay-people in the Church and their role in building the Kingdom of God on earth, in perfect and complementary communion with all the members of the mystical Body of Christ. We must, before finishing this chapter, talk about priestly and religious vocations born in the movements of lay-people's apostolate.

All human persons have their vocation in life. God calls them to contribute, for their part, according to their calling, to the building up of the whole of society. That is why young men and women must discern the vocation to which God is calling them, whether it be in the family or in the consecrated life for the priesthood or religious life. All are called to carry out a particular task in the Church and in society. When young people have discerned and recognized their vocation in life, they will try to acquire the necessary training in each field, science, prayer, human behaviour, in order to be able to carry out their duty in the common edification.

It is also clear that society needs all its members for the edifice to be built. It also needs above all those who dedicate themselves to God and detach themselves for the service of all, without distinction, in a life of renunciation, prayer, study and love. Society needs priests, monks, nuns and consecrated persons, who take their place in the necessary sacrifices to ensure the uprightness and stability of the whole edifice.

Among our priests, as among monks, nuns, and consecrated persons, there are many who first lived their Christian vocation and mission as young people committed to various movements, in confraternities or groups of spirituality, before committing themselves to priestly or religious consecration. Their choice is the fruit of reflection, prayer, and maturity in faith. In general theirs are stable, active and persevering vocations. Their self-giving as lay-people enabled them to taste the joy of the apostolate, and instilled in them the desire for perfection in a more formal commitment and a more complete consecration.

Through these vocations, the Church renews its youth and preserves its youth and retains its vitality. Despite the sins of its children, the Church remains young, enlivened by the Spirit of Christ. The Lord called us all to holiness when he said, "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*" (Matthew 5: 48). And why be afraid of holiness? There are many saintly lay-people. Great saints have lived in our Eastern Churches, and the universal Church presents them today as a model and blessing for the whole world.

Mary and Jesus grew up on our land, as did the first apostles and disciples. Our land is the cradle of Christianity and it must again find its influence, vocation to holiness and role in witness and mission. You young people are called to contribute through your generosity to this return to holiness and faith in our various countries. Meditate on examples of saints who have lived in the East: the Church Fathers in olden times, and, in modern times, St Sharbel Makhoul, St Rafqa Ar-Rayès, St Nimatullah Kassab al-Hardini of Lebanon, St Josephine Bakhita of Sudan, Blessed Marie of Jesus Crucified of Palestine, Blessed Ignatius Maloyan of the Armenian Church.

**Comment [MSOffice14]:** This is the more common transliteration from the Arabic. The following saints' names are taken from the Vatican's website.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

## CHRISTIAN MISSION

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16: 15)

Comment [MSOffice15]: Misquoted in the French, which reads “to all the nations/peoples.”

### I – PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

#### Go into all the world

28. When Christ founded the Church he sent it out into all the world. He said to his apostles, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16: 15) The disciples understood their mission and the Master’s commandment. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on them and filled them with his gifts. They then went off to all the different continents to proclaim the Gospel of salvation brought by Jesus Christ. They announced to the world, dwelling in darkness and hungry for truth, the word of truth and life. “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following...” (Mark 16: 20)

Comment [MSOffice16]: Ditto

They gave witness to it with love. Indifferent to difficulties, oppositions, persecution and death, they gave their life and everything they had in order to make known the Kingdom of God. Their blood became the seed of life for the Church. Saint Paul well expressed their feelings when he said: “For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel... Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds.” (cf. 1 Corinthians 9: 16 and 2 Timothy 2: 9)

#### The announcement and mission of the Church

29. Heralding the Gospel is the mission of the Church. That is a duty and responsibility that it bears for human salvation by order of its Master and Lord. Pope Paul VI said: “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.”<sup>19</sup> The Church’s mission is, as Christ so willed, to be “as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”<sup>20</sup>

#### Young people are apostles of the Gospel

30. People, especially young people who are looking for the meaning, value, destiny and role of their life in creation, and all those who live a life that is torn, divided and tormented, are all awaiting salvation. They are waiting for someone to bring them the joy of hope and salvation. The Church knows that it is sent and empowered to bear this responsibility. That is why, down the centuries, generous, single-minded young people have devoted themselves to evangelising nations in faraway, foreign, difficult countries. They accepted difficulties even unto death, through love of their Master and their brethren, whom their Master told them to love. These apostles are the saints who bore new nations and communities for Christ and the Church.

The needs are huge, the harvest is great, and Christ asks us to pray that the Father may send labourers to his harvest. Who then will say like Isaiah: “Here am I, send me.”? (Isaiah 6: 8)

<sup>19</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14

<sup>20</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 1

Taking the message to those near and far requires sacrifices, sincerity, love and prayer. Only the strong and generous can respond. Who can do that more than young people, especially those who are committed to their faith and Church? Who more than they would be ready for self-giving, adventure and proclamation? May the Lord who loved you and called you to the service of the Kingdom bless you, dear young people!

Lay-people are not only catechumens, receiving the Word of God from priests and consecrated persons. They are also, as we already said, full members of the Body of Christ and living branches on the vine. They too have the duty of being fruitful. They cannot keep the grace received for themselves alone; they have to make it bear fruit. They must invest the talents received, make gains and give account to the Lord of the vineyard. In baptism, they put on Christ and received the Holy Spirit, not in order to put its light under a bushel, but to witness to the Kingdom before the whole world. In both sacraments of baptism and confirmation, they became apostles of the Incarnate Word and his Gospel, the Gospel of life and salvation. We meet, right from the beginning of the Church's history lay-people, mentioned in the Epistles of Saint Paul, such as Aquila and his wife Priscilla. (cf. Acts 18 and Romans 16: 3)

Lay-people, with priests, monks and nuns, down the centuries, have carried the Gospel to different backgrounds, sectors and nations. Their activities fill us with joy today. Indeed, a growing number of lay-people, especially young folk, in associations, confraternities and apostolic councils or movements, continue to become involved in the action of the Church. That is proof that they are aware of their role and are ready to make the Church grow and fulfil their mission there.

This fact attracted the attention of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. That is why they affirmed that *"their pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church."*<sup>21</sup>

### **New evangelisation**

**31.** The new evangelisation nowadays is addressed not only to the non-baptised, but also to Christian believers themselves, already baptized but who have lost the ardour of faith, or even all their faith, for various reasons: religious indifference, principles opposed to the Gospel, secularism, atheism, enslavement to money, consumption, instinct and power. Other reasons also shake the faith of our faithful: poverty, wretchedness, sickness, oppression, disasters and wars... Faced with this decline of faith, Pope John Paul II called for new evangelisation, in order to restore the Gospel to the children of the Gospel who had abandoned it. He also invited the adoption of new methods for this.

### **Open your doors to Christ**

**32.** This new evangelisation presents to the baptized and the non-baptized, on the one hand, the values whereby humanity finds salvation and life, and on the other, the person of Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

Certainly, the Church, composed of human beings, consecrated to God's glory, exists essentially for humans and for their service. The Son of God became man in order to give humanity the glory of divinity. The Lord Christ, perfect true and model man, *"by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear."*<sup>22</sup> So the Church is called to serve

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<sup>21</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 30

<sup>22</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22

humanity on the basis of its evangelising mission, rooted primarily in the admirable and incomprehensible fact of the Incarnation, through which “*the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man.*”<sup>23</sup>

Pope John Paul II, in the first homily of his pontificate, on 22 October 1978, addressed this call to all the children of this century, “*Do not be afraid! Open, indeed, open wide the doors to Christ! Open to His saving power the confines of states and political and economic systems, as well as the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows 'what is inside a person.'* (cf. John 2: 25) *Only He knows! Today too often people do not know what they carry inside, in the deepest recesses of their soul, in their heart. Too often people are uncertain about the meaning of life on earth. Invaded by doubts they are led into despair. Therefore--with humility and trust I beg and implore you--allow Christ to speak to the person in you. Only He has the words of life, yes, eternal life.*”<sup>24</sup> Those words are addressed to you, still today, dear young men and women.

## II – WITNESSING IN ALL AREAS OF CHURCH LIFE

### **Confessional and interreligious pluralism**

**33.** Catholic Churches in the Middle East live in pluralist societies, several Churches and several religions. The Christian East indeed has had ideological conflicts and doctrinal quarrels which gave birth to numerous diverse or even separate Churches, for religious, national or linguistic reasons. These Churches still exist today and we are members of them.

In the East were born the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of them has a venerable history in the region, and well-known places of worship, which commemorate their birth and development down the centuries. The faithful of these religions live together today. They live in peace but they also know tensions, since they have not yet reached the right balance in their relations. In the past too, they knew great tensions and even bloody conflicts, perpetrated in the name of religion, and often fed by regional or global politics.

The situation of our region is very sensitive. On the geographical and historical side, it is considered as the meeting point of three continents, and a land and sea crossing for traders, conquerors and pilgrims. From the religious point of view, it is the cradle of great monotheistic religions, as we have already said. From the cultural point of view, it is the crossroads of cultures and civilisations which have interacted and given this region’s inhabitants, throughout history, an ecumenical dimension and immense culture. From the point of view of natural resources, it has great wealth envied by the world’s great powers which challenge its freedom and deny it the use of its own riches.

### **Progress towards unity**

**34.** We profess in our Creed one, universal or catholic Church (this term derived from Greek has the same meaning: universal). The Churches, as we have already said, became divided over the centuries and have remained so until today.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, Homily at the beginning of his ministry as Supreme Shepherd of the Church (Oct. 22, 1978): AAS 70 (1978), 947, and cited in English in *Christifideles Laici*, 34

Up until barely fifty years ago, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestants were distant from one another and hardly had any contact with each other. After Vatican II, in the 60's of the last century, a new breath of openness and rapprochement appeared in all Churches. There then began a serious journey of prayer, dialogue and action for Christian unity, which prepared the theological dialogue after that of charity.

The criteria for progress towards unity are: 1. Obedience to Christ who founded one single Church and prayed that *“that [his disciples] may all be one”* after the example of the Trinity. 2. Sincerity in witness. The Lord indeed willed that unity be a sign *“that the world may believe.”* (John 17: 21) 3. All baptized persons are members of the Body of Christ; they bear the name of Christian and are brothers and sisters in the Lord of all other baptized persons.

Dear children, we are glad to have taken great strides towards unity in the East. Yet difficulties remain that must be overcome in truth and love, by the Lord's grace, through our sacrifices and our respect for whatever **is essential** in faith. For what unites us is much greater than what divides us, as Pope John Paul II said.

We hail and encourage all the sincere efforts that are being made for the Unity of all Christians in the East.

We welcome especially lay or consecrated young people in all Churches, members of different movements or associations, who live their faith in exemplary love, and are in the vanguard of those who are progressing towards unity. We advise them to keep their hearts open to their brothers and sisters in Christ and to practise charity, which is the broadest and most effective way to bring about unity. We hail their love, sincerity and efforts and assure them of our efforts in the same direction towards unity, the subject of Christ's prayer and of our ardent desire. We ask them to pray with us for God to remove obstacles and teach us all to love as he loves in order to reach all together through the grace of that love, the truth that unites us.

**Comment [v17]:** The French has: “notre respect pour tout ce qui n'est pas essentiel.” I suppose that the opposite is intended.

## Dialogue

**35.** In a wise and sincere dialogue there is no fear for the identity of those engaged in it, since dialogue invites no-one to abandon cherished truths. On the contrary, it confirms everyone in faith, putting them in contact with others' faith, in order to reach a better understanding of themselves and others, and be able to proceed towards a better balance in the relations of everyday life in our pluralist society. The absence of dialogue, on the other hand, sustains prejudices and mutual ignorance, feeds fanaticism, and fanaticism, in turn, can provoke acts of violence and create tensions and crises in society. In our second Pastoral Letter, we already said, *“The believer and the fanatic are poles apart. The believer is in the service of God; the fanatic puts God at his service. The believer worships God; the fanatic himself, imagining that he is worshipping God. The believer hears the word of God; the fanatic adulterates it. The believer rises to the level of God and his love; the fanatic brings God down to his own level.”*<sup>25</sup>

That is why we invite our young people to take the paths of dialogue and leave aside all fanaticism and violence. We invite them to incarnate in their life the teachings of the Gospel that calls them to peace, respect for others, action, self-reliance and imitating Christ who was never violent or weak, but strong and full of love in his teaching and behaviour with people.

At a time when the quarrel between cultures and religions is increasing, fed by extremist dogmas and by the interests of the great powers of this world which exploit poor States, the Church understands that it has a particular mission at this moment of

<sup>25</sup> *Christian Presence*, 47

history. It must witness before all, through its teachings but also through the behaviour of its children, to the presence of God among its children. It must show everyone that the essence of any religion is the love of God and of all God's children.

*“Throughout the world today the Church lives among people of various religions... All the Faithful, especially the lay faithful who live among the people of other religions, whether living in their native region or in lands as migrants, ought to be for all a sign of the Lord and his Church, in a way adapted to the actual living situation of each place. Dialogue among religions has a preeminent part, for it leads to love and mutual respect, and takes away, or at least diminishes, prejudices among the followers of various religions and promotes unity and friendship among peoples.”<sup>26</sup>*

### **Living in the Arab world**

**36.** Our Churches are living in a Muslim and Christian Arab society. Some would confuse Arabism and Islam. The Arab Christian presence denies this confusion by showing that the homeland embraces all its citizens, Christians and Muslims, and all its citizens build it together. *“The Christians of the East are an inseparable part of the cultural identity of Muslims. In the same way, the Muslims in the East are an inseparable part of the cultural identity of Christians.”<sup>27</sup>*

With Muslims, we bear a common heritage which has known moments of glory and great culture, but also wars and deadly quarrels at home and abroad. Together too, we have experienced periods of external oppression and colonisation, the effects of which persist in many of our countries.

Currently, because of the geopolitical situation of the Arab world, with its natural wealth, its cultural and religious pluralism, Muslim and Christian Arabs are facing regional and global pressures of a political, economic and moral nature. On the political level, some of our countries are subject to foreign occupation. On the moral level, the phenomenon of globalisation, besides its positive aspects, makes inroads into the religious, moral and traditional values of our society. We should mention too the extremist manifestations inside our countries which threaten, in the name of religion, our societies and the whole world with a wave of irrational terrorism. That is why we are invited to adopt common positions, according to the vocation and teaching of each religion, to be bold, wise and firm in the face of external political and economic oppression, and the attack on values, just as with regard to internal extremism. Together, we have to fight to keep our values, such as respect for life, family, dignity of the human person, readiness for and perseverance in constructive dialogue, and true concepts of peace and justice based on the equal dignity of individuals and nations.

Young people have an active role to play in the progress and destiny of their countries. Young Christians have their responsibilities too. For that they must know and live their faith. They ought also to be acquainted with the religion of other citizens in order to be able to collaborate with them. They must live Gospel values and give evidence of their being an effective contribution to building up and freeing our societies.

### **Building the civilisation of peace and love**

**37.** Today some would support the principle of the clash of civilisations and incite confrontation between religions. In fact, religious extremism and terrorism in the name of God are on the increase. Others, on the contrary, condemn and fight terrorism head-on. But there are many who accuse the world order, built on the primacy of national

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<sup>26</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, 35

<sup>27</sup> *Christian Presence*, 48

interests, the exploitation of some nations' wealth and the military occupation imposed on other countries, of being one of the direct causes of terrorism.

Christians in the Arab East have a unique role in re-establishing peace and reconciliation between civilisations and religions, especially between East and West. This requires an awareness of their own vocation and mission. In our third pastoral letter, in 1994, we already said: "*On the level of encounter between Muslims and Christians, at global level, Arab Christians define their position very clearly. They belong, with Arab Muslims, to the same Arab culture, with all its elements. They are at the same time Christian and with all Christians of the world, they believe in Jesus Christ, the Word of eternal God. On that basis, they see that they have to play a role in bringing the Christian and Muslim worlds together, by changing their opposition into positive collaboration on the basis of mutual respect.*

*They tell the West that Islam is not the enemy, but the partner in an indispensable dialogue for the construction of the new human civilisation. They say the same thing to the Islamic East: Christianity in the West is not the enemy, but the basic partner in the indispensable dialogue for building a new world.*

*Christians in the Arab world wish to be bridges for dialogue and understanding between these two worlds confronting each other. The cultural relationship which unites them to the Islamic East, and the communion of faith with Christianity everywhere, eminently qualifies them to fulfil this cultural role.*"<sup>28</sup>

The forces that are confronting each other in the world are enormous. It is not easy to oppose them or to persuade them to change positions. We believe however that we can build the civilisation of peace and love and that the Kingdom of God can be established among men. That is what we ask for, every day in our prayer *Our Father*. Still, there are in our Churches, and especially among young people, brave believers capable of building peace.

### **Dialogue between Christians and Jews**

**38.** We live in the region with Jewish believers. In the spirit of the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate* and other documents that followed it, we are in dialogue with them. Our dialogue concerns the reality lived today by all believers, Jews, Christians and Muslims, in the region and in the Holy Land, where God has willed, down the ages, to gather them together. With Judaism, we talk about the fate of the human person, victim of the ongoing political conflict between the Arab world and the State of Israel. It is true that conflict is a political fact, but it is also and above all a human fact, in which human dignity is continually violated, in the person of all believers, Jews, Christians or Muslims. That is why, in that regard, all true believers in God must know that they carry the responsibility for this conflict. So we invite believers to engage in dialogue and sincere reflection on the fact of the Israeli military occupation and on all the ensuing injustices and violence for all parties. Together, before God, what does our faith in God tell us to enable us to put an end to the political fact of the occupation and the resultant ill that crushes believers of the three religions? What does our faith tell us if we wish to create societies where peace and security are equal for all, where all mutually recognize and respect each other? To put an end to every expression of injustice and violence, we must begin by admitting, with sincerity and courage, the equality of individuals and nations. A sincere faith in God and a presence together before him ought to lead us to

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<sup>28</sup> *Together before God*, 40

the dialogue required by the difficult human situation that we are all living through today in this region.

### III. WITNESSING IN ALL AREAS OF SOCIETY'S LIFE

#### **The Family**

**39.** God created man as a social being. He wanted the family to be the first cell and basis of every society. He wanted it as a small, united community knowing how to work together and love, finding its life in mutual and fecund giving, capable of bearing fruit, sons and daughters living on this earth and building there the Kingdom of God.

The virtuous family, in which God dwells, and which lives in love, sharing, respect and mutual service, can give the best service to society and contribute to its construction. Through the family are transmitted from one generation to the next good or bad ideas, traditions, actions, and attitudes: egoism, rancour, spirit of vengeance or giving and loving. We believe that great care given to the family, for it to be truly Christian, is a real contribution to the edification of a virtuous society, rich in values and virtues.

The family is founded on marriage, which is, according to the will of God, an alliance, an engagement and a mutual gift between a single man and a single woman, a perfect, indivisible and irreversible gift. Husband and wife collaborate in it, in love, in everything to do with the business of life.

The Church considers the family as a *domestic church* and does its best for it to be such. In the committed Christian family flourish the virtues and various gifts for the service of the Church and society. It thus becomes also a source of priestly and religious vocations and a way to holiness, even if its members must carry their cross and face many difficulties in life. Moreover, that is why Christian marriage is a sacrament, i.e. a sure sign of the presence of God and his working in the hearts of the spouses and the family.

Our dear young people, see how great your vocation is! God calls you to participate in his greatest love, and to become creators with him. That is why your love for one another ought to be divinely pure. In societies where love is so fragile, let every one of you take care of soul and body. Care for each other, that you may always be worthy of being the children of your heavenly Father and Jesus' brothers and sisters. Then you will shine with the light of the Holy Spirit like the stars in the sky.

#### **Dangers that threaten the family**

**40.** We know the situation of Eastern families, their values and virtues. They generally live according to the requirements of morality and religion. They are united, and continue to be a safe shelter for all their members. Nevertheless, at the same time they are exposed to serious dangers and great difficulties. We mentioned some of them in our previous letter on the Family.<sup>29</sup> Some of them are of an economic, others of a moral nature— some deviations, some television programmes, advertisements —, or of a scientific kind—ignorance of religion in general and of the life sciences in particular. That can all influence the family and contribute to destroying family ties. We proposed a plan of action for pastoral care for the family, with suggestions for solutions and means for applying this pastoral care.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. *The Family, responsibility of Church and State, chapters 3 and 4*

We invite you, dear young men and women, to become aware of the importance of the family, to defend it and ensure its unity and purity. Above all keep your souls and bodies from the widespread immorality, presented by some as a new culture, but which is nothing but the culture of death. Live authentic love in the family. Discern your vocation and build new families to be dwelling-places of God, cause of joy for people and effectual leaven among them; or dedicate yourself to the Church, the big family, to serve love, the proclamation of the Gospel and mission.

### **Poor people**

**41.** The Church, like its Master, considers itself the servant of humanity. Among his disciples, he was the servant who came, as he said, to serve and not to be served. (cf. Mark 10: 45) He washed their feet. Finally he gave his life for the Redemption of the world. The Church, like the good Samaritan, wants to practise mercy, compassion and charity for the poor, sick, handicapped, oppressed, marginalised and sinful.

It is the servant of humanity at its most destitute, as it tries to live out and put into practice the teaching of its Master about its life and mission. In the parable of the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31), Jesus shows us the way to be followed. When he said, *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,”* (Matthew 25: 40) and *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,”* (Matthew 5: 7) he was thinking of everyone, and especially of the poor and little ones.

The Church does not consider itself a stranger to or distant from every human concern or preoccupation. Its social and temporal mission in no way diminishes its spiritual mission. Both mutually perfect each other in the service of God and neighbour. *“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”*<sup>30</sup>

That is why it has practised, from its origins, in some communities, a common life in which the faithful shared what they had. (cf. Acts 2: 42-47) All down its history, it has given a lot to the poor. It created associations, confraternities and religious communities to serve the needy of every sort. It asks the rich to sympathise with the poor. It invites people to practise social justice.<sup>31</sup> It stands with the oppressed. Its aim is to ensure respect and furtherance of the dignity of every human person, who is in the image of God. It wants to support people in their progress towards their Creator, for God is glorified insofar as man enjoys abundance of life, as St Irenaeus said.<sup>32</sup> The Church, by proclaiming the Gospel and through its multiple services, promotes human dignity, for it enables people to participate on earth in the life of God and prepares them for eternal life. We encourage young men and women to become generously involved in the Church’s mission to the poor. They can very simply take part in various welfare societies or instead give some period of their life to voluntary work.

### **Economic development**

**42.** People seek happiness through accumulation of money, possessions, and every means of obtaining pleasure and leisure. Yet the Lord alerted us and warned us that abundance of fortune is no guarantee of happiness: *“...Beware of covetousness: for a*

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<sup>30</sup> *Gaudium et Spes, 1*

<sup>31</sup> *Cf. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

<sup>32</sup> *Contra Haereses*

*man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" (Luke 12: 15)

Working at economic development, to obtain a worthy life for every human person and to guarantee jobs is a duty of individuals, societies and States. Unfortunately, it so happens that individuals, societies and States work to accumulate property in the hands of a limited number of individuals, and don't concern themselves with finding a remedy for wretchedness and poverty.

We find a large gap between people at the economic and cultural level. The poor and needy are very numerous at the material, social, cultural, moral and religious level. On the other hand, a small number of wealthy "haves," enriched at the expense of the "have-nots," remain indifferent to the fate of the poor.

Genuine human development, which is due to each and everyone, as the Church understands and teaches, does not consist only in wealth of acquisitions but above all in wealth of being. *"For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has."*<sup>33</sup>

In the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II says: *"Of course, the difference between 'being' and 'having,' the danger inherent in a mere multiplication or replacement of things possessed compared to the value of 'being,' need not turn into a contradiction. One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many. It is the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all.*

*This then is the picture: there are some people - the few who possess much - who do not really succeed in 'being' because, through a reversal of the hierarchy of values, they are hindered by the cult of 'having;' and there are others - the many who have little or nothing - who do not succeed in realizing their basic human vocation because they are deprived of essential goods.*

*The evil does not consist in 'having' as such, but in possessing without regard for the quality and the ordered hierarchy of the goods one has...[which] arise from the subordination of goods ... to man's 'being'...*<sup>34</sup>

Comment [v18]: The French citation is truncated, as I have indicated here.

### **Confronting under-development**

43. Serious economic under-development in our countries and in the world, causes human under-development among many people, which can only be remedied by individual service, as this kind of service is significant and vital. It requires the collaboration of everyone, especially people with property and power, in order to create organisations and co-operatives, to help them overcome difficulties, and acquire the virtues of sharing, love, and the joy of collaborating and giving. Several social tragedies are insoluble, without the international collaboration of wealthy States in particular, which need to be aware of their responsibility for much of the world's economic and

<sup>33</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 35; cf. *Speech of Paul VI to the Diplomatic Corps*, AAS 57 (January 7, 1965), p. 232 and [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/speeches/1965/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19650107\\_diplomatic-corps\\_fr.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19650107_diplomatic-corps_fr.html)

<sup>34</sup> *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28

human under-development, a phenomenon that affects entire nations, especially in the southern hemisphere.

The Church expresses its love for everyone and its desire to bring the requisite aid to all, by committing itself to live out social justice, by requiring it from all parties and by defending those who are deprived of it. If we re-read the teachings of the councils and the popes' letters, we realise the compassion and care that the Church invests in obtaining social justice in the various areas of life at home and abroad.

All the Church's children, individuals, associations or States, have not always understood the imperative duty of imitating the divine Master, of having, like him, a spirit of poverty and compassion and of practising the great virtue of charity. Some have deviated from the straight way and behaved with regard to the poor as the rich man did to Lazarus in the Gospel parable: they have paid them no attention. However, many saints have traced, through their lives, the real face of Christ's Church, and have shown how it has tried to resemble him.

Indeed, civil societies, in general, once developed, have subsequently imitated the Church in this field. They have created welfare institutions. They have promulgated laws to defend the oppressed, strengthen justice, serve the handicapped, sick, prisoners, even criminals and opponents. Many States and nations have adopted this line of conduct.

In its social action, the Church relies a lot on its young people, who, once committed, devote themselves with courage and fidelity, love and generosity, and are not afraid of difficulties and dangers in the fight. We find in our apostolic movements, in our welfare societies, in our institutions for education, health and social work, young people exemplary in their service of the needy, weak, handicapped, elderly and children, and in their witness given to the effectual love of Christ and the Church. To them we express our gratitude, esteem and love.

### **The homeland**

**44.** The homeland is more than a land and a nation inhabiting it. It is a community of men and women, in a given country, who are aware of having roots, a common history and traditions, and, united under the authority of a government, have as an aim to build a better future for their homeland and for every one of the citizens. The homeland is the place where persons are born, grow up, find protection for themselves and their interests, and where they learn solidarity and action for the growth of the individual and society, through service to the public good.

Christians understand their role in society and in the homeland. They perform their duties to the best of their ability, in order to realise the construction of human communities, according to the spirit of the Gospel which announces salvation and life to all. They believe in basic equality among citizens, as among all people, all being each others' brothers and sisters and children of the same Father. They should be distinguished by their virtues that they put at the service of the common good.

In an ancient text concerning Christians it says, "*Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. ... With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in ... Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law.*"<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> From a Letter to Diognetus: The Christian in the World  
[http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit\\_20010522\\_diogneto\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20010522_diogneto_en.html)

The faithful lay-people are like all the citizens in their homelands. They have the same rights and the same duties. What should distinguish them is the way in which they fulfil their duties in the light of the Gospel, for they are the leaven in the lump. *“A vast field for the apostolate has opened up on the national and international levels where the laity especially assist with their Christian wisdom. In loyalty to their country and in faithful fulfilment of their civic obligations, Catholics should feel themselves obliged to promote the true common good.”*<sup>36</sup>

They have the duty of participating in society’s public life, especially in elections through which they choose their representatives for the exercise of authority. It is their duty to choose those who are the best. They have the duty then of engaging in dialogue with those they have elected, of holding them accountable and demanding from them the promulgation of laws in conformity with morality, human dignity and the common good. So they become real participants in the exercise of authority and collaborate with all citizens to establish law, justice, peace and all the requisite virtues.

It should be said that young people, in these fields, have a great responsibility, because they can, more so than others, bring about changes in themselves and in their societies, thanks to their ambitions, their self-confidence, their activity, and their looking to a better future. They can oppose under-development, corruption, wastage of effort and social divides, especially in countries and societies that have, besides privileged classes, multitudes of marginalised or indigent people.

### **Knowing and serving the country**

**45.** Young people should know their country, its potential, history and culture, in order to know how to serve and develop it. They also ought to have better knowledge of organisations, political systems and international activities, everything happening in the world and the influence that that could have on their country and society, for their countries and their problems are becoming increasingly dependent upon each other.

Therefore, we must create a climate that encourages collaboration between nations, in the fields of economy, health and culture, etc., to counter divisions and the exploitation of the little and weak by the big and strong. Christian apostolic action must centre its attention on brotherhood between nations, groups and individuals, especially through institutions and societies that have an international influence, and through inter-State relations.

John Paul II, in his 1997 Apostolic Exhortation to the Lebanese, said, *“I invite all Lebanese to pay particular attention to young people, who are their country’s greatest treasure and who, for that reason, should receive professional training and a quality human, moral and spiritual education. It is also important that they should take their part in decisions involving the nation, that they feel welcome and supported in their professional and social employment and that they can benefit from training that allows them to envisage calmly their personal future and founding a family. But structural changes are linked to a change of heart, so that everyone has the desire to participate in communal life, respecting social justice ...”*<sup>37</sup>

### **Political action**

**46.** Politics is the art of serving individuals and society. Its goal is to ensure, protect and develop the common good and establish social justice. It defends freedoms and makes them respond, in law and love, to an innate tendency in man to seek fulfilment

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<sup>36</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 14 (erroneously numbered 10 on the Vatican website)

<sup>37</sup> *A new hope for Lebanon*, 96

and perfection, while ensuring the welfare of society. Political activity, understood in this sense, is a worthy human activity that elevates people. Becoming involved in politics is not only praiseworthy but also a duty.

Politics takes on, often and in several places, another meaning. It deviates from its goal of serving others to become self-serving. It becomes the pursuit of selfish interests and the abandonment of the common good. It is normal in this case that some should distance themselves from it and lose their esteem for those engaged in it.

Young people are invited to get involved in the political domain for the service of the common good. The Gospel invites them to that, as it invites them to service and love. Corruption, fear of dirtying one's hands, ought not to be a pretext for disdaining this necessary service and leaving it to others. If there is corruption, if there is a void to be filled, there must be reformers suitable for the requisite service. Christians are always invited to witness to truth and love. Lay-persons fulfil this mission for every human being and for the whole society. They are the leaven that does not stand alone. They are the leaven in the lump of the temporal system to make it rise through the spirit of the Gospel.

Political action cannot but be common and joint. That is why political groups or parties are created.

Political views and activities are many and varied. That is why an authority is needed to co-ordinate them, one that respects freedoms and knows how to co-ordinate everything for the common good. Relations between people or political parties ought not obligatorily to be combative, hindering the achievement of the public good. Rather they should be relations that compete in serving and achieving all citizens' well-being.

Authority is a service. Anyone who wants to exercise it must not, in order to reach or retain it, use wrong or illegal means, since the end does not justify the means. The means is an integral part of the end to be reached; it cannot be separated from it. And Jesus said that he is the end and the means, when he said that he is the truth and the life, and that he is also the way to be taken to reach the truth and the life.

Lay-persons, witnesses of Christ and the Church, who want to engage in politics and exercise authority with the mind of the Gospel, bear responsibility for their behaviour, without committing the Church. The Church embraces all its children in any group or party. It itself is not a political party and cannot allow itself to be limited by any party. But it wants to be, for Christians engaging in politics or exercising authority, a conscience that attracts their attention and guides it to the virtues and values that ought to govern their behaviour and responsibilities.

It is good and necessary to create political associations or parties. Every lay-person is called to become involved or to support them by appropriate means.

Politics is an art and responsibility. Anyone who is taking it up, needs prior training to be able to launch into it. We exhort our young men and women to prepare for it by acquiring the necessary training. They must remain alert to changing national and international events in order to learn and better understand situations before commenting or expressing judgments about persons or events. They will have to be ready as well to take on, in due course, their political responsibilities when duty calls, in order to serve society and homeland.

## **Defending freedom and land**

**47.** Young people wonder about their duty in difficult times, for example, when facing the military occupation imposed on them, and about the duty of defending their freedom and land.

The chief model for the Christian life is Jesus Christ and his teaching. Christians can encounter difficult situations in which they wonder how they can live according to the spirit of the Gospel, while they are subject to oppression and to various political injustices.

Christians should accept Christian principles governing the relations between individuals and nations, in every circumstance of peace, war or occupation. The spirit of gentleness and peace is the distinctive sign of a Christian. But that does not mean surrendering any of their rights. They must find appropriate means that allow them to make the connection between the mind of Christ, his gentleness and peace, and recovery of rights, especially if it concerns community rights, such as national laws, freedom and land.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount remains the guide in all circumstances, even the most difficult. (cf. Matthew 5: 3-9)

With this mindset, Christians also comply with international and natural moral law.<sup>38</sup>

All have the duty of resisting evil imposed on them, including occupation. They cannot accept anyone else depriving them of their freedom, for two very clear reasons: firstly, their liberty is an integral part of the whole nation's freedom. If they abandon their freedom, they weaken the whole nation in its claim for its lost freedom. Secondly, their freedom is a gift from God, they have to preserve and defend it and do everything possible to recover it if they are deprived of it.

Resistance is a duty incumbent upon the whole nation. No-one has the right to remain a simple spectator. Everyone must be active and ready for all sacrifices, but each according to his place in society: some through direct political action, others by carrying out their daily duty for the continuity of life in a society under occupation, and others through their conscious and accepted participation, without complaint or remonstrance, in the difficulties arising from the occupation.

Christians adopt the path of organised and persistent non-violent resistance, in order to reach the desired goal, i.e. to put an end to the occupation and eliminate all oppression imposed on the people. Unfortunately the use of violence is today the act of the oppressor and the oppressed, of the strong and the weak alike. And God's commandment says to all alike: thou shalt not kill. Humanity must begin a new phase of its history and leave aside violence. It could if it so wished. This naturally requires training and education of citizens and leaders alike. This education and training starts in the home, at school and in means of communication, and especially in religious education, so that faith remains in the hearts of men and women an agent of peace, justice and reconciliation. So everyone will preserve their own dignity and that of their brothers and sisters, and will acquire all the rights for themselves and their brothers and sisters.

### **Emigration**

**48.** Some of our young people have left their country or are thinking of emigrating. They go to other countries in search of knowledge, fortune, freedom and happiness,

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<sup>38</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2263-2267 (on legitimate defence) and 2302-2317 (on peace and on avoiding war)*

since they do not see a future in their country, which, according to them, does not offer them that for which they are aiming.

It is painful for us to see that our Churches and countries are losing young people capable of contributing effectively to protecting them, building them up, developing them and raising living standards there.

We understand the seriousness of the reasons that are driving our young people to emigrate. With all our heart we wish them a better future and better positions in society. We wish them to be able to realise their ambitions, which we respect and approve. For we also know that many of them, or at any rate some, once they have left their country, can be apostles where they are, and can continue to serve their country from abroad. But at the same time in the depth of our hearts, we feel for the situation of our countries and Churches, when we see them gradually being emptied of their youth. A society that loses its young people is a sick society.

Given these circumstances, we ask our young people not to take the decision to leave in haste, and not to leave except for very serious reasons, not for slight difficulties, or simply through the spirit of adventure in the hope of making their fortune. If, however, the reasons are really serious, let them take the decision to return as soon as the causes that drove them to leave disappear. They can serve their country and their Church here better than abroad. Their country and their Church have rights over them, for, here, they were born and, here, they grew up and their country and their Church gave them all they are and now possess.

## **Culture**

**49.** Young people, your countries need a cultivated and committed youth to help them rise and take their place among the countries of the world, in order to be able to act, with them for the good of all, and to contribute to humanity's march towards progress, happiness and peace.

Culture doesn't consist merely in the acquisition of science and many kinds of knowledge, nor in the skill of managing the business of life to acquire earthly goods and enjoy them, nor in the skill of communicating with others by modern means, such as mobile phone, Internet and computer... It is not in great buildings, modern clubs, grand hotels or other such institutions. All that is necessary and good, but true civilisation, to which you have to contribute, is that which enables you to build. It is the cultivation of reason, of the heart, and of humanity with all its energies and gifts, culture that marks life, inspires ideas and actions, develops talents, and makes people capable of participating, with their companions, in building up an ever more perfect common culture, for the service, not of the self, but of society and all humanity.

Faced with invasive globalisation, we recommend to you, dear young people, to know how to take what is good and constructive from all the world's cultures, while remaining faithful to the values of our Eastern culture. Don't go down the path of facile imitation which does not discriminate between good and evil: different life-styles sometimes imply genuine progress, but sometime also a decline of morality and destruction of values.

Culture is genuine to the extent that it is founded on truth and the ability to accept it, and on sincere openness to the cosmos, humanity and other cultures, and to oneself and God. Any culture or civilisation which is not based on the will and plan of God cannot last. A thinker said one day: "*We could build a godless world; but it would lack humanity.*" You know what God asks of you, through his Word who abides in you. Take your inspiration from the Gospel to allow your culture to evolve. Let it illumine your

ideas, feelings, desires, projects and actions. So you will be what Jesus asked you to be, “*the light of the world and the salt of the earth.*”

### **Sport**

**50.** Sport, such as the Olympic Games, for example, among the ancient Greeks, is an ancient practice among nations. Nowadays, thanks to means of communication, its importance has grown in all human societies. World competitions have become occasions for meeting and keen fellowship that the whole world lives during days and months. So sport has become a way of uniting nations beyond all differences of traditions, cultures and religions. It acquires especially an importance in the life of young people who are the first to love and encourage the heroes and stars who assert themselves in various competitions and attach themselves to them.

Sport is a useful exercise and a good method of maintaining the health of body and soul, as the saying goes: “*Mens sana in corpore sano.*” It gives vitality to those who practise it, and more availability for serving and assuming the responsibilities of life. St Francis of Assisi said: “*I must take care of my body, so that it can be ready for difficult service, the service of souls.*”

When team sport is practised, it creates a spirit of discipline, collaboration and common work. It helps to form a spirit of solidarity and responsibility. Success or failure is always that of the team, and not of an isolated individual. The team spirit produces positive effects in the life of individuals and their relations in society.

Young people must be given a good sporting and ethical training, so that sport can remain a source of entertainment and moral and physical benefit, for among sportspeople too there can be deviations. Success can be obtained by circuitous or corrupt routes, which undermines the cause of sport and sportspeople. That is why these practices must be rectified.

Pope John Paul II also loved sport. He created a new structure that was concerned with young people and sport. This new organisation promoted sport and showed its beneficial role for young people and for human societies. John Paul II spoke of humane, Christian values, to create a sporting culture with the aim of promoting the training of the human person for the service of peace and the brotherhood of peoples. Similarly he also mentioned deviations and scandals that occurred in this field, such as doping or violence and suggested it be remedied.

The Pope wished this council called “*Church and sport*” to be a reference point in the Church for all national and international sporting associations. This gave rise to a pastoral care for sport in the world. Some of our Eastern Churches answered this call. We wish for their success in encouraging our young people to practise this humane activity according to humane, Christian values.

### **Means of communication and advertising**

**51.** No-one can deny the influence of means of communication and advertising nowadays, especially on young people and children. Knowing this sector, its role, its methods and how to profit from it, is a duty for young people and for everyone.

Means of communication can build or destroy, according to their content or the means used. Their role is to proclaim the truth, to promote humanity and society with a view to the common good. It is not enough for the content to be good. The means used to attain the end must also be good, not contrary to moral law. Human persons, their bodies and dignity must not be exploited for advertising, trade and profit.

Dear young people, many offers can be made to you, claiming to be a means of growth and happiness for you. Be vigilant and able to distinguish right from wrong. You are no longer children, with someone thinking for you or taking the decision instead of you. Your capacity for discernment in a world in which fraud and exploitation are on the increase, in a consumer society, your ability to make correct, healthy judgments, are what distinguish your life from that of young people who give up and let themselves be drawn into societies whose destiny is destruction and death. You find in the Gospel and the teaching of the Church, healthy principles that can guide your judgments. So you will protect yourselves and your societies from corruption, and you will raise them to the level of a life worthy of human beings.

Take care not to let yourselves be led astray by ideologically driven information that distorts truth. We invite you to behave with understanding and wisdom when you are listening to news. Keep your enquiring mind and critical faculties, before bringing in judgments. We invite you, moreover, to become involved in the field of information, since it is vitally important in guiding societies and building them up.

In the East, the Church's means of communication have their place and significance. They exercise a steady, healthy influence on our faithful. A number of non-Christians benefit from them too. We commend those institutions which have managed to be heard. We make special mention of "*Noursat*<sup>39</sup>" and "*Voice of Charity*."<sup>40</sup> We exhort all our faithful, especially young people, to follow them in order to benefit from them and increase their knowledge, conduct, faith and devotion. We also exhort them to help them materially as much as possible so they can continue their mission for the service of believers and of every human person in the East.

## **Conclusion**

**52.** Dear young people, we are addressing this letter to you, because you are the future of the Church and of society. Our countries are in a state of political and economic maturation and going through numerous crises. The right balance between citizens and religions in the internal organisation of society is not yet fully achieved. The practice of freedom still remains a goal to be reached. Freedom, and especially that of young people, frightens rulers and leaders. It has to be said too, individuals and groups still need to learn better how to use their freedom so as not to undermine that of others.

And we, Churches and faithful, are naturally aware of the weaknesses of our societies and feel them in our lives. Our Churches and our faith are the place from which we draw life and spiritual energy that helps us to contribute, with everyone, to face this historical period with the aim of preparing a better future. Building up society is a common action carried out by all citizens. And Christians, as such, have an obligation in this duty that is incumbent upon all. God has granted them gifts that they must ensure bear fruit. There can be certainly no question of confessional, or still less, fanatical behaviour. But quite simply, we have the obligation to share the spiritual energy given us by our faith and vision of life based on love and *abundant life* for all, and to enable our society to benefit from it.

We began our letter by presenting to you the person of Christ and the new vision that he brought to humanity. The world and our societies also need that new vision today. And it is up to you, dear young people, to carry out this mission. You will fulfil it

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.noursat.tv/noursatgrid.php> Some programmes available free online

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.radiocharity.org/aboutus.html> Now broadcasting continuously online

insofar as you take your faith seriously and to the extent that your life is consistent with your faith.

We also talked to you about the apostolate of lay-people or the mission of young people in the Church, both in various Church activities and in social activities too. Your communion in the life of the Church, and more particularly, in the life of the parish, helps you to share better in the life of society. True worship puts you first before God, but then sends you out of your parish and Church to the whole of society. In the world, you are witnesses firstly through your life, a life filled with God's grace and his presence among humans. So you will be the leaven in the lump. It is your ability to communicate this divine life that makes your contribution to the common edifice stand out. God has given you his grace, and that is why you are sent. Those who receive a gift from God, accept it for themselves and others. In all the areas already mentioned in our letter, you are envoys: family, emigration, means of communication, sport, politics, economy, peace and war, justice. Everywhere you take life with God, and human values that derive from that, in order to overcome individualism, egoism, and national and international imbalance. And, just as important, while difficulties last, as the ripening period in our history continues, exposing us to crises, your mission consists in maintaining hope and preventing discouragement, so that no-one breaks ranks and abandons the community in its progress and struggle. Saint Peter tells us in his First Epistle, "*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.*" (1 Peter 3: 15)

We conclude by raising our eyes to the Virgin Mary, to make her the object of our meditation. She is the model for women and for every human person who lives with God and with the society of men and women. She is "*full of grace.*" She is full of the abundant life that God granted her to accompany Jesus, the Eternal Word Incarnate. She is Jesus' Mother and our Mother. Contemplate grace in her. Imitate her purity, holiness and righteous life. Ask her intercession. And while you contemplate her holiness, remember the commandment that the Young People's Pope, John Paul II, left you: "*Do not be afraid to strive for holiness. You are all called to be saints.*" With the Virgin Mary, you will have the courage to continue this path to holiness, in your personal life and in your contribution to building up your Churches and societies.

At the intercession of the Virgin Mary, we give you our fatherly blessing, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one and only God. Amen.

+ ***Antonios Naguib***

Patriarch of Alexandria for Coptic Catholics

+ ***Nasrallah Cardinal Boutros Sfeir***

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for Maronites

+ ***Gregorios III Laham***

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria  
and of Jerusalem, for Melkite Greek Catholics

+ ***Ignace Pierre VIII Abdel-Ahad***

Patriarch of Antioch for Syrian Catholics

+ ***Emmanuel III Delly***

Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans

+ ***Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni***

Catholicos Patriarch of Cilicia for Armenian Catholics  
+ *Michel Sabbah*,  
Patriarch of Jerusalem for Latins  
*Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs*

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**Comment [MSOffice19]:** “*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Lettre apostolique, Jean-Paul II, 6.1.2001,” referred to here – and mis-spelled - has not been quoted in this letter. See my reference, number 2, above. Therefore, I supply the correct letter in this bibliography.

**Comment [MSOffice20]:** I have added this reference, as the Catechism is quoted in the body of the text.

COUNCIL OF EASTERN CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS

Christmas 2006