

Educating Young People in Justice and Peace



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(VIS) - In the Holy See Press Office at midday today, a press conference took place to present Benedict XVI's Message for the World Day of Peace 2012, due to be celebrated on 1 January. The theme of this year's message is: "Educating Young People in Justice and Peace". The conference was presented by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson and Bishop Mario Toso, S.D.B., respectively president and secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Extracts of the English-language version of the Pope's Message are given below.

The beginning of a new year, God's gift to humanity, prompts me to extend to all, with great confidence and affection, my heartfelt good wishes that this time now before us may be marked concretely by justice and peace.

It is true that the year now ending has been marked by a rising sense of frustration at the crisis looming over society, the world of labour and the economy, a crisis whose roots are primarily cultural and anthropological.

I would like therefore to devote this message for the forty-fifth World Day of Peace to the theme of education: "Educating Young People in Justice and Peace", in the conviction that the young, with their enthusiasm and idealism, can offer new hope to the world.

My Message is also addressed to parents, families and all those involved in the area of education and formation, as well as to leaders in the various spheres of religious, social, political, economic and cultural life and in the media.

Education ... calls for responsibility on the part of the learners, who must be open to being led to the knowledge of reality, and on the part of educators, who must be ready to give of themselves. For this reason, today more than ever we need authentic witnesses, and not simply people who parcel out rules and facts. ... A witness is someone who first lives the life that he proposes to others.

Where does true education in peace and justice take place? First of all, in the family, since parents are the first educators. ... It is in the family that children learn the human and Christian values which enable them to have a constructive and peaceful coexistence. It is in the family that they learn solidarity between the generations, respect for rules, forgiveness and how to welcome others. The family is the first school in which we are trained in justice and peace.

We are living in a world where families, and life itself, are constantly threatened and not infrequently fragmented. Working conditions which are often incompatible with family responsibilities, worries about the future, the frenetic pace of life, the need to move frequently to ensure an adequate livelihood, to say nothing of mere survival - all this makes it hard to ensure that children receive one of the most precious of treasures: the presence of their parents. ... I would urge parents not to grow disheartened! May they encourage children by the example of their lives to put their hope before all else in God, the one source of authentic justice and peace.

I would also like to address a word to those in charge of educational institutions: with a great sense of responsibility may they ensure that the dignity of each person is always respected and appreciated.

Every educational setting can be a place of openness to the transcendent and to others; a place of dialogue, cohesiveness and attentive listening, where young people feel appreciated for their personal abilities and inner riches, and can learn to esteem their brothers and sisters.

I ask political leaders to offer concrete assistance to families and educational institutions in the exercise of their right and duty to educate. Adequate support should never be lacking to parents in their task. ... Let them give young people a transparent image of politics as a genuine service to the good of all.

In today's society the mass media have a particular role: they not only inform but also form the minds of their

audiences, and so they can make a significant contribution to the education of young people.

Education, indeed, is concerned with the integral formation of the person, including the moral and spiritual dimension, focused upon man's final end and the good of the society to which he belongs. Therefore, in order to educate in truth, it is necessary first and foremost to know who the human person is, to know human nature. ... Man is a being who bears within his heart a thirst for the infinite, a thirst for truth - a truth which is not partial but capable of explaining life's meaning - since he was created in the image and likeness of God. ... Hence the first step in education is learning to recognise the Creator's image in man, and consequently learning to have a profound respect for every human being.

Only in relation to God does man come to understand also the meaning of human freedom. It is the task of education to form people in authentic freedom.

Freedom is a precious value, but a fragile one; it can be misunderstood and misused.

Deep within his conscience, man discovers a law that he did not lay upon himself, but which he must obey. Its voice calls him to love and to do what is good, to avoid evil and to take responsibility for the good he does and the evil he commits. Thus, the exercise of freedom is intimately linked to the natural moral law, which is universal in character, expresses the dignity of every person and forms the basis of fundamental human rights and duties: consequently, in the final analysis, it forms the basis for just and peaceful coexistence. The right use of freedom, then, is central to the promotion of justice and peace, which require respect for oneself and others.

It is important not to detach the concept of justice from its transcendent roots. Justice, indeed, is not simply a human convention, since what is just is ultimately determined not by positive law, but by the profound identity of the human being. It is the integral vision of man that saves us from falling into a contractual conception of justice and enables us to locate justice within the horizon of solidarity and love.

The "earthly city" is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion.

Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity.

Peace, however, is not merely a gift to be received: it is also a task to be undertaken. In order to be true peacemakers, we must educate ourselves in compassion, solidarity, working together, fraternity, in being active within the community.

Peace for all is the fruit of justice for all, and no one can shirk this essential task of promoting justice, according to one's particular areas of competence and responsibility. To the young, who have such a strong attachment to ideals, I extend a particular invitation to be patient and persevering in seeking justice and peace, in cultivating the taste for what is just and true, even when it involves sacrifice and swimming against the tide.

Dear young people, you are a precious gift for society. Do not yield to discouragement in the face of difficulties and do not abandon yourselves to false solutions which often seem the easiest way to overcome problems. Do not be afraid to make a commitment, to face hard work and sacrifice, to choose the paths that demand fidelity and constancy, humility and dedication.

Realise that you yourselves are an example and an inspiration to adults, even more so to the extent that you seek to overcome injustice and corruption and strive to build a better future. Be aware of your potential; never become self-centred but work for a brighter future for all. You are never alone. The Church has confidence in you, follows you, encourages you and wishes to offer you the most precious gift she has: the opportunity to raise your eyes to God, to encounter Jesus Christ, Who is Himself justice and peace.

Let us look with greater hope to the future; let us encourage one another on our journey; let us work together to give our world a more humane and fraternal face; and let us feel a common responsibility towards present and future generations, especially in the task of training them to be people of peace and builders of peace.

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Pope Benedict XVI