

## WHAT DOES SOLIDARITY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REQUIRE?

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Children and young people do not constitute a mere anecdote in the historical framework in which this stage of their lives is set. They represent the nucleus on which the society of the future is to be constructed. Therefore one cannot reflect on youth without first considering the function it is called upon to carry out within our society.

This complexity of the vital stage comprised by childhood, and more particularly youth, is what makes the study of it all the more attractive. At the same time however it is also what necessitates a particularly rigorous commitment in terms of the analysis required to identify the parameters for improvement and the involvement of society as a whole in this task; a task which, through the challenge of youth, of all youth and any youth in particular; of each and every young person, must be accepted for the good of the entire human family.

As against other moments in the life of men, characterised by the visible presence of duties and responsibilities, the period of youth, whilst not bereft of these, given that they are abundant both in variety and intensity, is one in which said responsibilities are less obvious. Hence the risk of drifting through these responsibilities without understanding the call to each

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young person to play a leading role on the stage on which he, perhaps sub-consciously, finds himself.

From this it can be deduced that, unlike adult men or women who are conscious of the necessity to attend to their own self-development, that of their family, to their work and to the community to which they belong etc., it is not unusual for young people to live each day as an isolated unit, with objectives confined to twenty – four hour periods and therefore strangers to the fact that each moment is a link and an opportunity to develop a project spanning the entire lifetime of a person. The risk resulting from the inability to perceive duties and responsibilities leads, on occasion, to abandonment, an ephemeral lifestyle bereft of substance or permanence and ultimately to a negation of one's self.

It is here, in this absence of light produced by a diversity of circumstances, that the attitude of solidarity within those who observe reality from other perspectives, mainly, though not exclusively, adults, can help to dissipate the darkness and correct errors for the good of the young person and ultimately for the good of society as a whole.

But the desire to improve society through the improvement of our youth, which leads us to concentrate on the difficulties and problems of youth throughout these pages, must not, due to unintentional generalisation, cloud the fact that there are young people who do not fall into this troubled pattern.

It is clear, and let there be no doubt whatsoever on this point, that in the face of the risks we have outlined and the attitudes that can derive from them, there are young people who are well aware of their role in society and assume it courageously, even at times and in situations that are anything but easy. Young people who bravely lead their lives within a project of admirable greatness that deep inside them is perfected for the better service of others. Young people who create hope in the seed they sow and are called upon to provide great fruit for the good of humanity. Young people who represent a stimulus and a warning for the adult generation in the claim for solidarity for those who most need it.

### *Youth, Architect of the Future Society*

Although in their minds and in their actions *today* is very much present – and perhaps this is part of the natural order of things – to speak of youth is to speak of *tomorrow*, so much so that the society of the future is determined by the youth of today. Their values, their habits, their behaviour and their preferences will be the ones that will finally construct and profile the

*what* and the *how* of our future society. Hence the importance of a healthy human youth committed to the community to which they belong from the first moments of the development of the person: from babyhood.

Pope John Paul II, expressed it in these terms:

I wish to express the joy that we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family.<sup>1</sup>

The future society is none other than the result of the legacy that the youth of today is capable of administering and transmitting. Chance alone does not configure a fraternal society or a violent one, a cultured society or an ignorant community, a society of abundance or one of scarcity, a society in which man occupies the place of relevance that has always been reserved for him by Creation or, on the contrary, a society in which man lives within a framework of humiliation, enslaved by a material world which should serve him, but which, in a certain manner, obliges him to render service to it. It is certainly true that in the case of man, and also in the case that is of special interest to us here, that of youth, there is a confluence of two worlds, the material and the spiritual. This represents a fusion that should take place in an environment of harmony rather than one of confusion. In the same way that in the human person body and spirit co-exist in harmony, his needs and the goods necessary to satisfy them must also observe this harmonious order which tends towards self-fulfilment.

Therefore, the fondly remembered Pontiff observed that,

When we say that the future belongs to you, we are thinking in categories of human impermanence, which is always a journey towards the future. When we say that the future depends on you, we are thinking in ethical categories, according to the demands of moral responsibility, which requires us to attribute to man as a person-and to the communities and societies which are made up of persons-the fundamental value of human acts, resolves, undertaking and intentions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (Rome, 22 November 1981), n. 26.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of pope John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year (Rome, 31 March 1985), n. 1.

A sense of belonging of the results in the first case, as opposed to the demand for subjecting one's needs to the greater good of society in the second.

And when we observe the youth of today, we are simply contemplating the society of tomorrow. A youth that is, by nature, restless, longing, demanding, continually claiming greater justice in the world and greater solidarity amongst the peoples making up the integral components of a unique community: the human family.

Therefore, from the perspective of adults, one cannot speak of responsibility to the community if at the same time we fail to assume our responsibility to young people. In the same way, solidarity with youth achieves its fullest expression and ultimate aim in the form of solidarity with society. This essential union between the youth of today and the society of tomorrow is what drives us, in a sense of solidarity, to transmit all types of elements, spiritual and material, which provide young people with a solid grounding for their development within the community and for the task of social transformation in the interests of a better society.

We are ultimately speaking about those 'healthy principles' of which the Holy Father spoke in his Letter on the occasion of International Youth Year:

... it is my hope that your youth will provide you with a sturdy basis of sound principles, that your conscience will attain in these years of your youth that mature clear-sightedness that during your whole lives will enable each one of you to remain always a 'person of conscience', a 'person of principles', a 'person who inspires trust', in other words, a person who is credible. The moral personality formed in this way constitutes the most important contribution that you can make to life in the community, to the family, to society, to professional activity and also to cultural and political activity...<sup>3</sup>

this is the type of young person who can offer society what it expects of him: a project of reform in which the greatness of the human being is reaffirmed, in both his singular and community dimension, at the same time as the prevalence of spiritual things over material things.

To endow the youth with such a robust base and thereby enable them to better serve society is the task to which the adults of today must be committed, convinced that with the mature transparency of which the Pope spoke and with the help of God, it can be achieved with tenacity and

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of pope John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year (Rome, 31 March 1985), n. 7.

effort. An objective of such transcendence cannot be left to the spontaneous order of things.

Nobody can fail to be aware that youth is both heir and artifice at the same time. Heir to the legacy bequeathed by the previous generation and artifice of life itself and the life of future generations. This dual role is the source, within the young person, of a sense of responsibility, a responsibility that looks to the task that it must carry out as architect of future generations. In this task he must bear in mind the master's evaluation of the behaviour of his servants on returning from abroad. He should aspire to be the good and trustworthy servant<sup>4</sup> who diligently administers the 'talents' he has received, aware of their scarcity and the hopes placed in them by future generations, his own generation and by he himself.

Youth, considered in those terms, constitutes the hope for a better society, a society that begins to be constructed in childhood and of which the greatest fruits can be expected.

In you [young people] there is hope, for you belong to the future, just as the future belongs to you. For hope is always linked to the future; it is the expectation of 'future good things'. As a Christian virtue, it is linked to the expectation of those eternal good things which God has promised to man in Jesus Christ. And at the same time, this hope, as both a Christian and a human virtue, is the expectation of the good things which man will build, using the talents given him by Providence.<sup>5</sup>

This hope, inextricably linked to the responsibility to which we have alluded, takes shape in the objective of not merely transmitting to future generations a world in the same conditions in which it has been received but rather the placing of all their desire and wisdom in leaving a better world than that bequeathed to them. A better world in material terms but also a better world in immaterial and spiritual terms. A better world in terms of standard of living, welfare and sustainability but with the same demands for sociability, fraternity and solidarity with those most in need. The Pope himself expressed it for us with the greatest of clarity: '...humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations towards future

<sup>4</sup> *Vide Mt 25, 14-30*

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of pope John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year (Rome, 31 March 1985), n. 1. [What it is said into brackets corresponds to author].

generations'.<sup>6</sup> An appeal that might well be interpreted as a denouncement when we contemplate the disordered use of the resources that nature has placed at the disposition of mankind, of all mankind, without geographical or temporal limitations, be it from here or from there, the mankind of today or the mankind of always, for all mankind forms part of the single and unique human family.

Youth is the appropriate period for the achievement of these objectives. It is in this stage of life that one can best aspire to achieving such great objectives with optimum freshness of spirit and intensity of purpose. This applies even to those objectives that might appear to be out of reach. It is a period of great fertility which allied to the energy characteristic of youth, enables the greatest of harvests to be reaped both for the young person himself and for those who join with him in the quest to build a better society.

John Paul II, an expert in humanity, and even more so in young people, said:

There are however reasons-and they are also objective reasons-for thinking of youth as a special treasure that a person experiences at this particular period of his or her life. It is a period which is certainly distinguished from the period of childhood (it is precisely the time when one leaves the years of childhood), just as it is also distinguished from the period of full maturity. For the period of youth is the time of a particularly intense discovery of the human 'I' and of the properties and capacities connected with it. Before the inner gaze of the developing personality of the-young man or woman, there is gradually and successively revealed that specific and in a sense unique and unrepeatable potentiality of a concrete humanity, in which there is as it were inscribed the whole plan of future life. Life presents itself as the carrying-out of that plan: as 'self-fulfilment'.<sup>7</sup>

And it is within this project that he finds the perfect mechanism for the young person's work to create the future society.

### *The Definition of the Problem*

Before entering into the specific consideration of the purpose of this analysis, it is first necessary to lay down a basic principle, a condition essen-

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (Rome, 1 May 1991), n. 37.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of Pope John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year (Rome, 31 March 1985), n. 3.

tial to the reconciliation of what we have already said and the arguments we shall go on to outline hereinafter. This principle boils down to a conscious and firm acceptance of the fact that future society depends on the youth of the present and what they are capable of constructing within this society.

If we accept this as an irrefutable principle tantamount to saying that the historical development of a society is a product of neither luck nor forces external to its own dynamism, but rather that it finds in its own bosom the *raison d'être* of progress or decline, then the aims of this study are completely justified: the responsibility of the adult generation in the formation of the young, or what amounts to the same thing, how important is the virtue of the solidarity of the former with the latter.

As a starting point, it is worth reminding ourselves of one of the incontrovertible principles of law: '*nemo dat quae non habet*', i.e., '*nobody gives what he does not possess*'. This, applied to the object of our study, leads us to affirm that we cannot expect conduct or attitudes from our youth, on the road to this social construction or reform, if they have not received from the adult generation, be it directly or in the form of the opportunity to work them out for themselves, the parameters that are both significant and useful for the task they have undertaken as authors of the future society.

Even at the risk of being criticised for resorting to an economics type argumentation, it seems eloquent to me to take the matter, albeit in a somewhat contrived manner, to what can be learned from a production function. Naturally, we are in no sense suggesting an equivalence between the make up of man, the most sublime being in creation, the only being loved by God for himself, with all his unimaginable complexity and the production of goods and services, something extremely simple despite the complexity with which it is frequently presented.

What we are trying to say is that ultimately the social nature of man and his capacity to live within the human family is determined by diverse *inputs* of different types, which endow him with capabilities, which go to make up what is known as 'human capital' in the widest sense. These capabilities enable him to produce the output expected by the future society to which he regards himself as a creditor.

If we might be permitted to continue along the lines of this methodology, we would affirm that the expected social output, i.e., the construction, at least as an objective, of a better future society is a function of the youth of today, called upon to build it, their attributes, attitudes, knowledge, preferences and ultimately their capacities, abilities and commitment to this mission.

To express it in another way:

$$S_{t_n} = f \left( Y_{t_0 \rightarrow n}^{th} \right) \quad [1]$$

That is to say, that society in the year ( $n$ ), a random year in the future, expressed by ( $S_{t_n}$ ) is a function of the youth ( $Y^{th}$ ) that exists between the year of origin and the year ( $n$ ), ( $t_0 \rightarrow n$ ), the year in which they reach maturity and begin to see their influence in the social configuration of the society of which they are now adult members.

Of course it is not necessary to say that this youth ( $Y^{th}$ ) is not a simple corporeal object, nor merely an animated being. We are speaking of a human person, with the potential, the knowledge, the abilities, the will and the liberty inherent to his dignity to choose between the diverse ways of doing good and thereby improving society. Therefore we argue that ( $Y^{th}$ ), in [1] is the *input* on which the productive *output* depends, the future society ( $S_{t_n}$ ), the society which will be conformed by that youth in the year ( $n$ ).

The period of youth, which encompasses the time between the year zero and the year ( $n$ ), is a period of formation during which the young person develops his knowledge and aptitudes as well as the attitudes and behaviour which will give rise to his definitive contribution to the configuration of society. To this end, the young person avails of all at his disposal, of all that surrounds him, be it positive or negative and in the case of the latter distancing himself from the objective in which society had placed its hope.

Using the magisterial scheme designed by Carl Menger<sup>8</sup> to determine the value of manufactured goods, distinguishing between orders of goods according to their proximity to the end user, we could say that the young person, who is now in a position to configure the ultimate good, that of 'society', uses goods of a superior order with the object of endowing him with the attributes, ultimately the configuration of ( $Y^{th}$ ) in year ( $n$ ) to achieve their final aim, the contribution to ( $S$ ).

These new *inputs* which go to make up the process of the formation of ( $Y^{th}$ ) are very numerous and diverse in nature. There are inputs of an economic nature, and others of a social character. Some are static while others are dynamic in profile; some are easy to measure due to their quantitative

<sup>8</sup> *Vide* Carl Menger "Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre" (1871). There is a version in English language under the title of *Principles of Economics*, with an introduction of Frank H. Knight; Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950. Under the same title, there is another one with an introduction of F.A. Hayek (New Cork; New Cork University Press, 1981).



nature whereas others barely lend themselves to estimation due to their intangibility; some are unchangeable over time and in different social nuclei while others, due to their relationship with specific values are subordinate to the moral schemes within which a determined society lives or wishes to live.

Allow us to select those variables which we consider to be most significant for this proposed objective of formation and maturity of ( $Y^{th}$ ), over a time period ( $t_{0 \rightarrow n}$ ), which will enable the youth to have a decisive influence over the configuration of the future society ( $S_n$ ). We are, of course aware that these are but a few of those to be found on the stage upon which the young person finds himself throughout the formative period. In addition, some variables, though positive in principle can become negative in situations where they are surplus to needs and others while exemplary in certain situations become instruments of elusion in others.

Our selection leads us to:

$$Y_n^{th} = f [ PIB_{pc}, (\frac{U}{L_f})_{0 \rightarrow n}, (\frac{C}{PIB})_{0 \rightarrow n}, \delta Env_{0 \rightarrow n}, (\frac{Y^{th}}{T_p})_n, (F_S)_n, E_{0 \rightarrow n}, S_{B_n} ] \quad [2]$$

The youth in year ( $n$ ), is the result of a cumulative process ( $\pm$ ) of magnitudes and experiences of effective formation over the time period encompassing the years ( $0 \rightarrow n$ ), and this changes the conditions of origin, leading them to the moment of destiny for social reform. Let us look at the variables outlined, some of them the aggregate result of others, and their more than probable influence on the formation of young people to which we have been referring.

### *The Economic Situation of the Community*

The first variable in [2] refers to the Gross Domestic Product *per capita* of the country in which the person grows up and develops. This magnitude is not taken as static, at a given point in time. Rather, its final value and therefore its capacity to influence youth, is in accordance with the rate at which the economy grows, starting from the year ( $0$ ). Therefore, the variable under consideration ( $GDP$ ), would be that which corresponds to:

$$PIB_{pc_0} \left( 1 + \frac{\delta PIB_{pc}}{PIB_{pc}} \right)^n \quad [3]$$

The resources available in the economic scenario in which the youth is born and raised from the year of origin ( $0$ ) until the end of his formation process, year ( $n$ ); and this as a cumulative average rate for each annual period.

The effect of the variable, both in terms of its value at origin and in its annual growth, can be diverse according to the influence on the subject of variables that we shall examine presently. It seems obvious that precarious living conditions within a community awaken certain virtues such as: unselfishness, solidarity, the desire to share what little is available, whereas opulence can lead to selfishness and a failure to consider the necessities of those most in need.

Due to the scope of the study, restricted to western European countries, I will concentrate on these particular countries hereinafter. A high value at origin accompanied by a high growth rate, allows the population to be free of anxiety with respect to subsistence and even free of worries about the future. This might well leave a margin for the development of values essential to life in community or simply to the care of one's own character. Reality, however, demonstrates the relative predominance of the vices of wealth, a distancing from austerity, from the rational use of goods and disdain for those who seek help on a daily basis.

These are the words of Paul VI:

Today it is most important for people to understand and appreciate that the social question ties all men together, in every part of the world... The hungry nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance. And the Church, cut to the quick by this cry, asks each and every man to hear his brother's plea and answer it lovingly.<sup>9</sup>

In the same vein, John XXIII raised his voice to point out that

As we know from experience, men frequently differ widely in knowledge, virtue, intelligence and wealth... such men have a greater share in the common responsibility to help others to reach perfection by their mutual efforts.<sup>10</sup>

And what is said of individuals is also applicable to countries and continents.

It seems, therefore, that what should be an instrument of liberation from material worries, serving to offer space for the virtue of generosity, in fact acts as a stimulus for avarice and the accumulation of material goods where man fails to dominate but rather is dominated by those goods. He becomes enslaved and suffocated by the voracity of *having*, and forgets

<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio* (Rome, 26 March 1967), n. 3.

<sup>10</sup> John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris* (Rome, 11 April 1963), n. 87.

about the *being*. When man is worth more because of what he *is* than because of what he *has*.

It is hardly necessary to spend time demonstrating that the peoples of Western Europe do not suffer a precarious economic situation or that their most pressing needs are satisfied, at least in a macroeconomic dimension. Obviously, we cannot fail to recognise that in the opulent countries of Western Europe, there are spaces of poverty that only serve to denounce the insensitivity of abundance to necessity. It would be unfair, however, not to mention the fact that the lowest  $GDP_{pc}$  in the region (Malta, with 16.000€, and the second-lowest, Portugal with 16.600€) are fifty times greater than those of many of the countries of sub-saharan Africa and that the country with the highest income of the European economies (Luxembourg, with 53.900€), is approximately one hundred and sixty five times greater.<sup>11</sup>

Along with this, and apart from certain exceptions which generally coincide with lower income countries outside the scope of our study, Gross Domestic Product growth rates in real terms are more than sufficient, as can be seen from Table and Figure I, to continue guaranteeing indices of economic abundance that will permit Europeans to live without the anxiety created by uncertain economic horizons.

Therefore, it becomes unnecessary to mention the problems of poverty in Western Europe and even more so when we consider the millions who lack even the most basic goods in other regions of our world. In contrast, and precisely in those countries which apparently have everything at their disposal, it is important to point to the existence of, above all, though not exclusively, in the young population, a problem of no lesser importance: a life devoted to materialism, a kind of adoration of economic field, an aspiration focused on the joy of possession, the pleasure of accumulation, in the competitive emulation of he who has more and can do more...

For the Church's social doctrine, the economy 'is only one aspect and one dimension of the whole of human activity. If economic life is absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods become the centre of social life and society's only value, nor subject to any other value, the reason is to be found not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring

<sup>11</sup> The data of  $GDP_{pc}$  correspond to the forecast for 2005, expressed in terms of PPS (Purchasing Power Standards), in order to avoid the influence of price level differences between countries.

the ethical and religious dimension, has been weakened, and ends up limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone' (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, n. 39).<sup>12</sup>

It is in this ignorance of the ethical dimension where resides the problem affecting youth, and not only youth, in the countries with the highest economic levels, where situations of economic wealth are contrasted with those of great human poverty.

### *Work and Unemployment*

Work is a fundamental right and a good for mankind, a useful good, worthy of man because it is an appropriate way for him to give expression to and enhance his human dignity. The Church teaches the value of work not only because it is always something that belongs to the person but also because of its nature as something necessary. Work is needed to form and maintain a family, to have a right to property, to contribute to the common good of the human family.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, when the subject cannot exercise this fundamental right and lives within high unemployment levels, the consequences are grave. These consequences do not merely relate to the area of work but influence the entire configuration of the personality, significantly damaging self-esteem and casting a shadow on the role that corresponds to the person within society.

In effect, just as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church reminds us,

The high level of unemployment, the presence of obsolete educational systems and of persistent difficulties in gaining access to professional formation and the job market represent, specially for many young people, a huge obstacle on the road to human and professional fulfilment. In fact, those who are unemployed or underemployed suffer the profound negative consequences that such a situation creates in a personality and they run the risk of being marginalized within society, of becoming victims of social exclusion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2436).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Città del Vaticano, 2005), n. 375.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 287.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 289.

One of the greatest challenges facing humanity in recent decades, and also in the developed countries of Western Europe, is that of gearing economic activity to the creation, with ever-greater conviction and efficiency, of the employment opportunities to enable the youth and the future society to find, without difficulty, the way in which to be useful to society, the manner in which to channel their personal and professional qualities for the common good, the way in which they can participate in the work of the Creation and feel themselves a inseparable part of their community and of the entire human family.

The unemployment rates, as can be seen from Table and Figure II, are in the range of ten percent in most of the countries falling within the scope of this study. The fact that they have been higher in the not too distant past obliges some reflection on the causes of this social ill as well as the taking of measures to improve access to employment in future generations.

The education and formation of the young is, without doubt, one of the greatest assets in the development of their personal and social attributes. It enables them, in an autonomous way, to be capable of living in a changing economic frame with unpredictable future consequences. This can take the form of a scientific and technical education in accordance with the demands of the modern age but should not neglect the human formation to which they will need to have recourse in moments of difficulty.

This human formation is what enables the youth of today, perhaps faced by the difficulties of tomorrow, to contemplate his work as an essential expression of himself and see it as the feature which truly gives value to work, irrespective of the objective value of his present or potential productive participation. It is this subjectivity which distances and differentiates work from each and every other of the inputs of the production process. In other words, it is the inherent dignity of the person that lends dignity to human work, distinguishes it from all goods or commodities and prevents it from being an object of transaction in the same manner as occurs with goods and services of whatever kind.

For reasons of its enormous influence on the subject and the consequences it holds for him, the unemployment rate  $(\frac{U}{T})_{0 \rightarrow n}$ , as it appears in [2], is not a simple statistical detail for the purposes of contrasting the unemployed population with the working population. Behind that statistics lies dissatisfaction, difficulties in the creation of a family, difficulties in the satisfaction of needs, insecurity and lack of confidence with respect to the future.

As we have seen in times of high unemployment, the young person who lives within this horrendous social situation has a sceptical view of his own educational and formative processes. His scepticism leads to a positivism rooted in the staunchest materialism, and he forgets the subjective dimension and the transmission of dignity that the person gives to work irrespective of the economic value the market confers on the particular effort of the worker and its contribution to productive economic activity.

If it is indeed the case that a high unemployment rate in the life of a person called upon to fulfil a function in society, considered in terms of its aggregate influence, generates these undesirable effects in the formative processes of the young, by causing them to concentrate on the extremely short term – possibility of a job today but ephemeral – to renounce a more profound and wider formation with long term effects. The effects are even more devastating when unemployment is an integral part of the family life into which he is born and grows up.

About 16.5 percent of children under the age of eighteen in the United Kingdom live in households in which all the members are unemployed, while the figure for Germany and Belgium is 12.9%. In Ireland 12% of the young population live in these circumstances and even in Luxembourg, with the lowest levels of unemployment, 3% of children and young people under eighteen live in households where all the members are unemployed (see Table and Figure III). This presents a scenario in which the horror of unemployment starts to be experienced at a very early age, influencing, as is to be expected, the behaviour of young people, their expectations, their values and of course fostering within them the priority of satisfying the most immediate needs, renouncing formation and often leading them down the criminal path to total exclusion from society.

It seems unnecessary to refer here to the employment of minors, given that, at least in Western European countries, cases of this nature tend to be the exception. This phenomenon, apart from legal, political and economic considerations, also gives rise to problems of a moral nature. Moral problem at the individual level of the person who hires and at a social level when the entire community, national or international chooses to ignore it and allow matters to continue as they are. Not even the necessity that the family of these children and adolescents may have in economic terms serves to mitigate the gravity of the problem facing society when, on the one hand the work of a person under exploitation, a person not yet formed – not even physically – for the task to be carried out, and on the other hand this person is denied the opportunity for intellectual and human formation and

the obtaining of professional qualifications which would later allow him to be more useful to society.

These types of jobs are, as the Social Doctrine of the Church points out, a symbol of violence to which nobody can be indifferent.

Child labour, in its intolerable forms, constitutes a kind of violence that is less obvious than others but it is not for this reason any less terrible. This is a violence that, beyond all political, economic and legal implications, remains essentially a moral problem. Pope Leo XIII issued the warning: 'in regard to children, great care should be taken not to place them in workshops and factories until their bodies and minds are sufficiently developed. For, just as very rough weather destroys the buds of spring, so does too early an experience of life's hard toil blight the young promise of a child's faculties, and render any true education impossible' (Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum novarum*, n. 42). After more than a hundred years, the blight of child labour has not yet been overcome.<sup>15</sup>

Work, with the stamp of dignity lent to it by virtue of the fact that it is an act of the person, who in turn is vested with dignity because he has been created in the image and likeness of the Creator, unites two relevant elements. On the one hand, by working, man becomes a participant in the work of the Creation itself, forming a part of the order that the Father has invested in him and cooperating in its perpetuation. Moreover, through work, man has the opportunity to realise his vocation and exercise the natural right to form a family and through it render service to the community. This is why work has long been a matter of preoccupation for the Church in accordance with the message of the Gospel.

### *Consumption and its Corrupt Form, Consumerism*

In the strict sense, it is the act through which the subject satisfies his daily needs by means of perishable goods, including in this category those which are consumed in a single use at a given time and those others known as durable consumer goods, the use of which is over a reasonably long period of time.

Therefore, consumption is an act arising from necessity and it is this necessity which gives it legitimacy. This is what causes the subject to devote part of his income to the acquisition of those goods which, due to their util-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 296.

ity and compatibility with his necessities, are capable of giving him satisfaction in the most efficient manner possible.

In this sense, and in the most intimate scenario of the sentiments of the subject are to be found the explanations for the feelings of wellbeing or discomfort, of sacrifice or enjoyment, of complacency or indignation. There is a struggle for a balance between two antagonistic forces: on the one hand, the utility which the act of consumption gives to the subject and on the other, the sacrifice of the subject, also in terms of utility, resulting from having to pay with some of his disposable income in order to acquire the good he considers to be useful. This sacrifice is represented by the utility of the good that he has had to renounce in order to have access to the good he has chosen.

Hence, the subject is presented with a wide range of goods, all capable to a greater or lesser degree of offering utility. These goods are set against an infinite catalogue of needs, which is restricted by the means available to the subject in terms of his income. The subject attempts to find the perfect combination in terms of optimum utility, taking into account the needs he would prefer to satisfy and the real limitations imposed by his disposable income. This is the maximalist behaviour present in the conduct of all economic subjects and it is a consequence of the scarcity of resources at the origin, in nature itself.

Whether the goods are tangible or not is of no importance. Any good or service has some capacity to offer utility insofar as it is capable of satisfying a need, whether these needs be related to the subsistence of the individual in the biological sense or a reflection of cultural, artistic or even spiritual aspirations. And here we are restricting our analysis to what we might call legitimate needs, those which are compatible with the dignity of the person. There are also goods available in the market to satisfy illicit needs, those which humiliate the human being and enslave him.

In the words of L.v. Mises,

It is arbitrary to consider only the satisfaction of the body's physiological needs as 'natural' and therefore 'rational' and everything else as 'artificial' and therefore 'irrational'. It is the characteristic feature of human nature that man seeks not only food, shelter, and cohabitation like all other animals, but he aims also at other kinds of satisfaction. Man has specifically human desires and needs which we may call 'higher' than those which he has in common with the other mammals.<sup>16</sup>

From what we have said, it can be concluded that consumption is a

<sup>16</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action. A Treatise on Economics*, William Hodge and Company Limited (London-Edinburgh-Glasgow, 1949), pp. 19-20.



function of the disposable income of the subject. Therefore, at higher levels of income it is logical to expect higher levels of consumption, though it is true that the level of consumption does not increase in the same proportion to increases in income. Large increases in income levels give rise to lower increases in consumption, thereby allowing to the presence of savings which serve to finance investment goods or to provide for, inside of the consumption unit, unforeseen needs which might arise at any time, be it in present or future generations.

The economic subject constantly moves in this area of doubt, in this uncertainty. In the words of C. Menger,

The circumstance that it is uncertain whether a need for a good will be felt during the period of our plans does not, therefore, exclude the possibility that we will provide for its eventual satisfaction, and hence does not cause the reality of our requirements for goods necessary to satisfied such needs to be in question. On the contrary, men provide in advance, and as far as their means permit, for the eventual satisfaction of these needs also, and include the goods necessary for their satisfaction in their calculations whenever they determine their requirements as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

The Austrian author himself adds that,

But the further civilization advances, and the more men come to depend upon procuring the goods necessary for the satisfaction of their needs by a long process of production, the more compelling becomes the necessity of arranging in advance for the satisfaction of their needs – that is, of providing their requirements for future time periods.

Even an Australian savage does not postpone hunting until he actually experiences hunger. Nor does he postpone building his shelter until inclement weather has begun and he is already exposed to its harmful effects. But men in civilized societies alone among economizing individuals plan for the satisfaction of their needs, not for a short period only, but for much longer periods of time. Civilized men strive to ensure the satisfaction of their needs for many years to come, Indeed, they not only plan for their entire lives, but as a rule, extend their plans still further in their concern that even their descendants shall not lack means for the satisfaction of their needs.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Carl Menger, *Principles of Economics*, the Free Press (Glencoe, Illinois, 1950), p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

This goal to have savings to cover unforeseen needs or to alleviate scarcity in the next generation, is also viewed as a legitimate desire of the human person. It is true that this requires moderation in consumption, and the ordering of needs in order to satisfy the most pressing needs and postpone those of lesser relevance. At the end of the day, the creation of savings generates utility, in the way that it eliminates worry in the face of risk, making life more serene, both economically and from a social perspective.

Consumption, from an anthropological perspective, is not a mere biological fact. Nor is it a simple economic measurement. Although recognising the existence of doctrinal theories in conflict with this view, economic theory has adopted as a dominant opinion that which is known as 'the sovereignty of the consumer'. This opinion holds that the consumer has the capacity to decide the route taken by economic activity, both in terms of his primary choice with respect to the consumption/saving dilemma and in terms of the goods he chooses to consume. Let us not forget that no production process exists which does not have the act of consumption as its ultimate objective.

Purchasing power must be used in the context of the moral demands of justice and solidarity, and in that of precise social responsibilities. One must never forget 'the duty of charity ..., that is, the duty to give from one's "abundance", and sometimes even out of one's needs, in order to provide what is essential for the life of a poor person' (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, n. 36). This responsibility gives to consumers the possibility, thanks to the wider circulation of information, of directing the behaviour of producers, through preferences – individual and collective – given to the products of certain companies rather than to those of others, taking into account not only the price and quality of what is being purchased but also the presence of correct working conditions in the company as well as the level of protection of the natural environment in which it operates.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, moral discernment is required when faced with decisions about saving and consuming or with respect to what goods to consume. There is a growing tendency towards an atmosphere in which such discernment is not even established with respect to income. Often, families run up debts, not to cover basic needs but rather to enjoy goods and services of a

<sup>19</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Città del Vaticano, 2005), n. 359.

superfluous nature, thereby incurring hardship in order to pay back the loans entered into. Man finds himself on a helter-skelter of consumption, blinded by what goods can offer him and the degree to which they subordinate and debase him. A scenario of materialism before which the adult subject, and even more so the young person without orientation, succumbs to a consumerist ritual in which social emulation plays a substantial role.

The young person learns, within the family atmosphere itself, that one consumes not for the purpose of satisfying primary needs, but because others, neighbours and friends are consuming, albeit without reason, something to which he is attracted and unwilling to forego. In the act of consumption, the consumer exercises his mind and his rationality whereas in consumerism he finds himself bereft of discernment.

It is true that present-day trade, along with the noble function of adapting goods to needs, of connecting the production process to the consumer, also attempts to do a little more than simply this. In an attempt to awaken non-existent needs, to attract the weak of will to the consumption of superfluous goods, it develops, aided and abetted by modern technology, a multitude of advertising instruments which serve to eliminate reflection on the benefits and desirability of the good on offer.

People lacking in formation, especially but not exclusively young people, are irredeemably attracted to consumption and thus, their liberty and capacity to choose is eliminated. It is the culture of goods for the sake of goods, their unshackled accumulation, having more and more regardless of the need for the particular good and the suppression of the act of decision that characterises the discerning man.

The Social Doctrine of the Church offers light in the midst of all this obscurity.

The phenomenon of consumerism maintains a persistent orientation towards 'having' rather than 'being'. This confuses the 'criteria for correctly distinguishing new and higher forms of satisfying human needs from artificial new needs which hinder the formation of a mature personality' (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, n. 36). To counteract this phenomenon it is necessary to create 'life styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common growth are the factor which determine consumer choices, savings and investments' (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, n. 36). It is undeniable that ways of life are significantly influenced by different social contexts, for this reason the cultural challenge that consumerism

poses today must be met with greater resolve, above all in consideration of future generations, who risk having to live in a natural environment that has been pillaged by an excessive and disordered consumerism (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, n. 37).<sup>20</sup>

From Table and Figure IV, one can appreciate the high level of consumption in the majority of western European countries, that one that in [2] we define as  $(\frac{C}{GDP})_{0 \rightarrow n}$ . Obviously, at lower income levels the percentage of consumption is higher, as we pointed out earlier, but to observe high income countries with a volume of consumption that will soon exceed eighty percent, is indicative of societies immersed in high consumption and the lack of discernment in the decision to consume.

The problem does not end here, however. On the one hand, high consumption diminishes saving capacity and with it the practice of charity which is displaced by the triumph of materialistic and irrational hedonism. And on the other hand, producing in the quantities demanded by such high consumption leads to the consumption of the natural resources, many of them unrenowable, which the Creation places in our hands for the good of all humanity, present and future and irrespective of where the person is located.

John Paul II affirmed that

In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day... In all this, one notes first the poverty or narrowness of man's outlook, motivated as he is by a desire to possess things rather than to relate them to the truth, and lacking that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them. In this regard, humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations towards future generations.<sup>21</sup>

A responsibility that cannot be avoided, and from which different conduct must emanate, behaviour that is respectful of man and his attributes, of all humanity and the means given to us by God for the good of all, without exclusion. The great service that we can offer to future generations is to show them the correct path to take as consumers of goods and services.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 360.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (Rome, 1 May 1991), n. 37.

And what we have said with respect to excess consumption in relation to individuals and families is also applicable to the public sector. For a long period of its existence, the public sector has incurred expenses beyond its means and it has yet to liberate itself fully from this tendency. Frequently, these expenses have not come from productive investments which would serve to generate future income. On the contrary they are often consumerist expenses aimed at satisfying the electorate of the moment in a quest for votes and confidence.

This volume of spending, in excess of income, gave rise to large budget deficits which were initially financed by public debt, that would have to be paid by the future generations who were present when it fell due. In this way, the present generation enjoyed goods beyond the means available to it, whereas the future generation was obliged to make sacrifices in order to amortise the debt payable at a given time.<sup>22</sup> The Social Doctrine of the Church has clearly defined the illicitness of making future generations bear the burden of the excess consumption of the present generation. This can clearly be seen where it says:

Solidarity between generations requires that global planning take place according to the principle of the universal destination of goods, which makes it morally illicit and economically counterproductive to burden future generations with the costs involved: morally illicit because it would mean avoiding one's own responsibilities; economically counterproductive because correcting failures is more expensive than preventing them.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Environment at the Service of the Mankind*

When we employ the variable  $\delta Env_{0 \rightarrow n}$  in [2], we are aware that this alteration in the environment can be positive or negative depending on man's activity. Human life in itself, its subsistence and development, implies a negative effect on the environment, given that the consumption of goods by humanity brings with it, of necessity, the consumption of resources, some of

<sup>22</sup> Vide José T. Raga, 'A New Shape for the Welfare State', in: E. Malinvaud (ed.) *Intergenerational Solidarity*, Proceedings of the Eighth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 8-13 April, 2002, The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, (Vatican City, 2002), pp. 209-247 and the appendix of Tables and Figures, pp. X-XIV.

<sup>23</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Città del Vaticano, 2005), n. 367.

which are not renewable. On the other hand, this same human life, endowed as it is with intelligence and potential, is capable of inverting the order of asseveration, and of offering new horizons which serve to enrich the natural environment. In this way the negative effects of consumption are more than compensated for by the positive effects of man's contributions to the environment. And all this takes place in the course of the time period corresponding to the present generation, i.e., the period (0→n).

Let us remind ourselves of the fact that our objective is not simply to leave a world in the same condition as that in which we received it, but, in the same way as the generation which preceded us, to achieve for the future something better than that left to us. This objective, in term of the environment, requires rationality, moderation and effort in order to find the most suitable forms of solidarity with the human family. Far from an environmentalism without an anthropological base, in which man is subordinate to nature, we are conscious of the fact that nature is at the service of man. Man, is designated by the Creation to dominate and cultivate nature, but this, in no way authorises him to assume ownership of it, and deny its enjoyment to those who like himself are the beneficiaries of its fruits.

Each and every man is none other than an administrator of the goods entrusted to him by God. Hence the necessity for austerity in the use of natural resources and the avoidance of waste on the one hand, and on the other, the commitment to improve by means of new discoveries and new methods, resources which, although at the disposal of man in the past, were unknown in those times and which through the efforts of the present generation contribute to the future community.

### *A Community Framework for the Growth of the Youth*

In the same way that society is enriched by the complementary qualities of the sexes, – masculinity and femininity form a complementary unit that goes to make up the embryo of social growth – one can appreciate within the heart of society, the complementary nature of the relationship between generations. From the confluence of the generations, internal growth blossoms spontaneously in the form of experiences, transmission of values, and attitudes in the face of social situations. All in all, this represents an improvement in the capacity to live together and conform a true human community.

Therefore, the community as a whole is made up of a series of sub-groups, some according to age, which in turn intersect with other sub-

groups according to sex. Each sub-group has its own experiences of a horizontal nature, which in turn acquire new characteristics at every intersection, according to their determining characters. Young boys and girls have a horizontal relationship between them, apart from their differentiation, and both, at the same time, – the youth in general – have a vertical relationship with the sub-groups of adult and the older generation, again from the perspective of their differentiation by sex.

Life at the heart of each sub-group is enriched by the relationship between its members in the constant living, participating and cooperating for their common purpose. In the same way, each sub-group, in conjunction with the others, configures the community as a whole. Each sub-group is vital to the configuration of the community in the same way that each element of the sub-group is vital to the configuration of that sub-group as a body destined to form part of the entity known as society.

Each element, regardless of the sub-group under consideration, is significant to the social education of the group, whilst the sub-group, in the first instance, and the community, in the second, are essential to the education of each single element. What we are trying to say is that, one cannot imagine a sub-group of young people isolated from the sub-group of adults or senior citizens, and nor can one imagine young people isolated without the elements necessary for the creation of their corresponding sub-group. Young people isolated as single elements would configure an empty and worthless group in terms of creating the community as a whole. In the same way, a sub-group of young people with no relationship with adult and senior citizen sub-groups would constitute a disjointed sub-group and therefore be worthless in terms of the creation of a community.

In other words, everybody needs everybody and everyone is needed by everyone. A society without young people is inconceivable and so too is a young person without young people. Their lives would present shortcomings resulting in a lack of creative harmony in the social group itself.

Therefore, it is worth considering whether, at this point in time, in the countries of Western Europe, it is possible to assure this inter-relationship between the different sub-groups that we have described or even more importantly, if it is possible to guarantee the spontaneous configuration of a sub-group of young people which, as such, is destined to be the embryo of the future society.

John Paul II issued a warning on the occasion of the centenary of the *Rerum novarum*, which cannot be ignored:

In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment – we already referred to –, we must also mention the more

serious destruction of the *human environment*, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves. Although people are rightly worried... about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction... too little effort is made to *safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic 'human ecology'*. Not only has God given the earth to man... but man too is God's gift to man...

Man receives from God his essential dignity and with it the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness. But he is also conditioned by the social structure in which he lives, by the education he has received and by his environment. These elements can either help or hinder his living in accordance with the truth...<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, we shall rephrase the question: Do present-day society, the education received by the youth of today, the atmosphere in which the young person grows up, constitute the elements which will serve to facilitate living in truth and produce growth in the community? Furthermore, is the society of today sure of its future survival or is it in danger of extinction in the same way as some of the natural species?

In the function that appears in [2], a variable  $(\frac{Y^{th}}{T_p})_n$  is identified which configures the sub-group youth ( $Y^{th}$ ) in the community group ( $T_p$ ) – total population – in the year ( $n$ ), expressed in relative terms with respect to the community. Youth, considered in this manner, needs to have an entity and to carry weight in society for the purpose of two specific missions: the first being to ensure the survival of the community itself and the other being to guarantee that the sub-group as such is, and exists as, a truly young element, thereby ensuring the wealth of the horizontal interaction produced within the sub-group itself. If this were not to be the case it would signify youth in a vertical relationship with adult and senior citizen sub-groups, but with a gap in its formation that can only be filled by means of the conviviality within the specific social group to which it belongs.

In Table V and in its corresponding Figure of the appendix, one can observe the evolution of youth with respect to the total population for the different western European countries. The values contained therein cannot but remind us of the words that we have already quoted from John Paul II's

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (Rome, 1 May 1991), n. 38. The expression into dash, corresponds to the author of the paper.



encyclical *Centesimus annus*, in reference to human ecology. The data in the table might cast doubt on the capacity of youth to live as such, i.e., to live in an environment with other young people with whom they can exchange experiences, opinions and contribute to the cultural development of a society under construction.

In the last ten years, the period under consideration, in all Western European countries with the exception of Denmark, the percentage of young people with respect to the total population has diminished. In some cases, such as those of Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy, the decrease is alarming, even if Ireland is second only to Iceland as the country with the highest percentage of young people in the year 2004. Italy, in contrast, presents the lowest percentage of young people in the same year. Taking young people as those between the ages of zero and twenty four, the value is 24.8% of the total population. Given an average life expectancy of approximately eighty years, this figure should not be less than thirty five percent of the total population.

On breaking down the figure into two age sectors, the situation becomes even more worrying. The greatest decrease is to be observed in young people from zero to fourteen years old. This means that, unless there is a change in the fertility rate in the immediate future, or one of the other parameters that we shall examine below, the values of this table for the year 2015 or 2120, present us with an aged society in which one would have to cast doubt on the capacity of youth itself to be young. In other words, we would be approaching a situation which we have previously described as the empty sub-group, in which the elements would be non-existent, at least in the social sense.

This variable  $\left(\frac{Y^{\text{th}}}{T_p}\right)_n$  which acts as an independent variable in [2], is, in turn, a function of a series of variables, from which we have selected those which, in our opinion, are the most significant. Thus,

$$\left(\frac{Y^{\text{th}}}{T_p}\right)_n = f [ L_{ex}, (F_r, Cc_r, Im_r)_{0 \rightarrow n} ] \quad [4]$$

This is to say that the weight carried by youth in society at any given time depends upon, first of all, human life expectancy ( $L_{ex}$ ), given that, in *coeteris paribus* conditions, for a determined fertility, a prolongation of life expectancy – better health conditions, better diet, better environment, etc. – supposes a reduction in the ratio of young people to the total population, unless we change the temporal variable representing the concept of ‘youth’, which here we have taken to be  $(0 \rightarrow n)$ , with  $(n)$  being the age in which maturity is reached and adulthood begins.

It is hardly necessary to say that life expectancy in Western European countries is in accordance with its degree of development, i.e., very high and growing for the ten-year period under consideration, 1994 to 2004. Worthy of mention in the upper limit are the cases of France and Spain, with a life expectancy for women of 83.8 years, in 2004. The lowest life expectancy in the same year and for the same sex corresponds to Denmark, at 79.9. In men, for the same year, the highest life expectancy rate belongs to Iceland, at 79.2 and the lowest to Portugal at 74.2 years.

This data is good in itself and reflects a degree of health and physical wellbeing which could not be more encouraging. This is particularly so if we look at the depressing data to be found in the developing and clearly underdeveloped countries. However, for the purposes of our study, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the data we have just outlined with the data related to the arrival of new members to the nucleus of the society to which the life expectancy figures correspond.

This is why the second variable in [4], is the fertility rate  $(F_r)_{0 \rightarrow n}$ . By fertility rate, we understand the average number of live children born to a woman throughout her life, taking into account fertility rates by age, in a given year. The fertility rate is what allows us to endow a population with its youngest segment, with the arrival, each year, of those actually born in the period.

From what can be deduced from Table and Figure VII, and unless the growth observed in certain countries in the last five years continues and also occurs in the remaining countries under consideration, the future of young people in the countries of Western Europe could not be more uncertain. John Paul II, in reference to the demographic problems of the developing countries in the south, affirmed that,

... in the northern hemisphere the nature of this problem is reversed: here, the cause for concern is the drop in the birthrate, with repercussions on the aging of the population, unable even to renew itself biologically.<sup>25</sup>

Rates of 1.20 children per woman, such as that of Spain in 1999, cast doubt on the very survival of the population. It could be said that we worry about, and quite correctly so, the conservation of species in danger of extinction while we seem not to be worried about the decline in numbers undergone by the human race.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Rome, 30 December 1987), n. 25.

The rates are very low in general, but one can observe that in the course of the ten years under consideration, the situation has improved, albeit not very significantly, in some countries, with respect to the low rates of 1994 and the even lower ones of 1999. The fertility rate has increased in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands and Spain, while the negative trend has continued in the rest of the countries studied. Even so, in the year 2004, Greece is at the bottom of the table, with a rate of 1.29, followed by Spain at 1.32. The highest rate is that of Iceland at 2.03, followed by Ireland with a rate of 1.99.

In this way, we are configuring a society with few young people, living within a relatively large number of adults, old people and very old people. This reduces the degree of communication and horizontal learning which would be afforded by a young population, rich in diversity and capable of learning and being instructed in the ways and manners of conviviality and respect for such diversity.

It is worth addressing the question as to why there is such low fertility in Western European countries and indeed there are a number of reasons behind it. One of them, and perhaps the most significant is the planning of births or the desire to postpone and reduce the number of births in the family. The use of contraceptive methods, such as sterilisation, hormonal treatments, intrauterine devices, spermicides, condoms, etc. are indicative of how the selfishness of being human can act against humanity.

Worthy of our attention also is the fact that, in... the richer countries... excessive prosperity and the consumer mentality, paradoxically joined to a certain anguish and uncertainty about the future, deprive married couples of the generosity and courage needed for raising up new human life: thus life is often perceived not as a blessing, but as a danger from which to defend oneself.<sup>26</sup>

Although we do not have at our disposal homogeneous data for the same years in different countries, we have decided to show in Table and Figure VIII the rate of use of contraceptive methods in the years mentioned for the countries in the study. Here we are looking at the third variable in [4], i.e.,  $(Cc_r)_{0 \rightarrow n}$ . The rate as a percentage is calculated with respect to married women of between 15 and 45 years old, whether they themselves have used the contraceptive method or contraception has been practised by the men with whom they live.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (Rome, 22 November 1981), n. 6.

The highest rate is to be found in the United Kingdom, 81%, followed by Switzerland at 78% and the lowest rates correspond to Portugal and Italy, with rates of 33% and 39% respectively. It cannot be ignored that contraception signifies the voluntary restriction of the reproductive capacity of humanity itself, aside from the moral evaluation.

If both the life expectancy rate and the fertility rate contribute positively to the good of the community, and if the latter were high it would contribute decisively to the good of the youth in terms of its own process of youth formation, contraception deliberately restricts these possibilities in the same way that infant mortality does so involuntarily.

The latter, infant mortality ( $Im_r)_{0 \rightarrow n}$ , is the last of the variables we have studied in [4] as determinants of the weight carried by the youth within the community, given its importance in terms of the overall population. Table and Figure IX shows the infant mortality rates expressed as the number of children who die before reaching the age of one, per thousand live-born children. Obviously, as in the case with life expectancy, the rates are indicative of the degree to which countries are developed and their advances in the field of medical care.

The rates in all the countries improve during the course of the ten year period analysed, with Liechtenstein, at 2.7 per thousand having the lowest mortality rate, followed by Iceland, 2.8 per thousand. The highest mortality rates are to be found in Malta, with a rate of 5.9 per thousand, followed by the United Kingdom, 5.1 per thousand. All these figures correspond to the year 2004.

Up to this point, we have analysed the youth from the perspective of their presence in the community to which they belong. The importance of the youth, its participation in the global sphere of society in all its aspects and its capacity to enrich the community are elements of a social asset that cannot be ignored.

### *The Family, Pillar of the Youth*

The man, the young person, is born and develops that most privileged of environments, in terms of its capacity to offer affection, the family. From the moment he is born, he is not an isolated being, but rather he belongs to the human family, and more particularly to its most restricted and specific element, the family unit. Furthermore, conception itself, the moment at which his humanity begins, is not an isolated occurrence, but rather the product of love between a man and a woman who, in their matrimonial

union, form the initial cell of the family structure. Hence, the family, above all the cohesive and structured family, with its vocation of permanence and stability, is the pillar on which the young person leans during his growth and social apprenticeship.

Therefore, the family is vital to the sustaining of the community, which bases itself on its capacity for renewal through the young generations. With good reason, it been said that:

The first and fundamental structure for 'human ecology' is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the *family founded on marriage*, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny.<sup>27</sup>

This is why the variable  $(F_s)_{0 \rightarrow n}$  appears in [2] as a significant variable in the configuration of the youth; in both quantitative and, above all, qualitative terms. That family constitutes the foundation on which the youth shall be constructed, the youth whose mission it is to renew society. A youth aware of its uniqueness and of the responsibility that arises from it, set within the community of which it feels a part. A youth that will channel its efforts for the good of this community, the common good. As an ally, it will have that redoubtable instrument of communion called love.

But not all families can be considered equally capable of serving as a pillar for the growth of youth. Important differences exist between the structured family aspiring to permanence and based on conjugal love and matrimonial commitment and the ephemeral family, based on whimsical or fickle opportunity, in which the union entails no responsibility and even conditions that responsibility.

The right to matrimony and procreation is an inalienable right of the human person, with its roots in his very dignity. This is why,

... it is for parents to take a thorough look at the matter and decide upon the number of their children. This is an obligation they take upon themselves, before their children already born, and before the community to which they belong – following the dictates of their

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (Rome, 1 May 1991), n. 39.

own consciences informed by God's law authentically interpreted, and bolstered by their trust in Him.<sup>28</sup>

In this manner, the family we refer to, which appears as an independent variable in [2], is a family in which we can see the capacity to transmit a culture of love to its sons and descendents, a family with an aptitude for sociability and education in the service of its commitment to the community, a family that is an example of gratitude and unconditional striving. This family, in turn depends on a number of variables which sustain and condition it and these variables originate within the family itself. Some of these variables endow the new family with greatness and strength but there are of course those which serve to hinder and handicap it. In this respect, we venture to offer the following function:

$$(F_S)_{0 \rightarrow n} = f [(M_r)_{0 \rightarrow n}, (Ma_\alpha)_{0 \rightarrow n}, (D_r)_{0 \rightarrow n}] \quad [5]$$

To express it in other terms, the family must serve as the support for the building of the youth, i.e., the family that is active in terms of its pro-creational task and in the transmission of culture and values, is a function of a number of variables. In this case, the variables are deliberately limited owing to their importance to the institute of matrimony, and we circumscribe them to the marriage rate, age at the time of first marriage and the divorce rate. All this takes place in the period of learning of the youth which, in our opinion, continues until he reaches adulthood, though we are well aware that learning opportunities do not cease to present themselves until the last moment of life.

From its very beginning the history of humanity passes – and will do so until the end – through the family. A man enters the family through the birth which he owes to his parents, his father and mother, and at the right moment he leaves this first environment of life and love in order to pass to a new one. By 'leaving father and mother', each one of you at the same time, in a certain sense, bears them within you; you assume the manifold inheritance that has its direct beginning and source in them and in their family. In this way too, when you leave, each one of you remains: the inheritance that you receive links you permanently with those who passed it on to you

<sup>28</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio* (Rome, 26 March 1967), n. 37.

and to whom you owe so much. And the individual – he and she – will continue to pass on the same inheritance.<sup>29</sup>

This 'leaving father and mother', referred to by John Paul II in his letter to the youth, incarnates the symbol of the matrimonial option as the base on which to start the building of the family from which future generations will emerge. Therefore, the first variable we meet in [5] is the marriage rate, as a reflection of the social experience to which the young person looks in order to learn and take decisions in the future.

We cannot forget, as the Council observed, that:

Since the Creator of all things has established conjugal society as the beginning and basis of human society and, by His grace, has made it a great mystery in Christ and the Church (cf. *Eph.* 5:32), the apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society.

Christian husbands and wives are co-operators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life. They prudently help them in the choice of their vocation and carefully promote any sacred vocation which they may discern in them.<sup>30</sup>

Table and Figure X, shows the number of marriages per thousand persons and its evolution over the ten-year period from 1994 to 2004 for the different western European countries. What stands out, as a general rule, is the fall in the number of marriages during the period under consideration. This decrease, in many cases is, of two points or more, signifying a reduction of one third when compared to the rate in the year of origin (1994).

The Nordic countries offer a contrast to this trend. Denmark, in particular, has a very high rate with respect to the average as do Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The country with the lowest rate is Belgium with 4.10 marriages per thousand people, followed by Greece with 4.20. Countries with the highest rates are led by Cyprus with 7.20, followed by Denmark and Lichtenstein with 7.00, the figure for the latter country holding a lesser significance due to its population structure.

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of pope John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year (Rome, 31 March 1985), n. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the apostolate of the laity 'Apostolicam actuositatem'* (Rome, 18 November 1965), n. 11.

In the statistics, distinction is not made between second and subsequent marriages between separated partners, and those involving partners who have not been married in any previous period. For this reason, the data could lead us to the erroneous conclusion that there is a greater marital vocation in countries where the rate is higher than in those with lower rates. Consequently, it is worth using another set of data to complement those we have just seen. Amongst this complementary data is the age at which the first marriage is entered into, given that, the late age for the first marriage does not seem coherent, even when this age tends to get higher over time, if simultaneously the country in question presents a high marriage rate or indeed this rate is growing over the period considered. It is the variable that we have called  $(Ma_a)_{0 \rightarrow n}$  in [5].

Table and Figure XI give the data on the average age at the time of the first marriage in the nine-year period from 1994 to 2003: we have been unable to find data for the year 2004. Contrasting Table XI with the data in Table X, we can observe some interesting information. This is the case of Denmark, as we have mentioned previously. Remember that Denmark had the second-highest marriage rate with 7.00 per thousand people, while the average age for getting married is 30.10 for women, the second-highest, and 32.30 for men, the third-highest. The case of Sweden is similar. While the marriage rate shows an increase of almost one point, representing a rise of approximately 25%, the age at the time of entering into matrimony for the first time has gone from 30.82 years old in 1994 to 32.90 in 2003, in the case of men, and from 28.45 to 30.50 in the case of women in the same years.

From this, it can be deduced, without fear of error, that matrimony takes place at an ever later age amongst young people. This hinders, amongst other things, the birth of children, in that it reduces the period of fertility within marriage. Such a conclusion is consistent with what we found on analysing the data presented in Table VII, and again may represent a threat for the survival of humanity. Furthermore, it seems that, together with this delay in entering first time into matrimony, the first marriage is often followed by further marriages. This suggests a high level of marital failure, a fact that may be linked to marrying at a later age. Such marriages often enjoy a lesser degree of generosity and the life of the couple, already mature at the time of entering into matrimony, is dominated by an atmosphere of individualism in which sharing is considered to be unimportant.

The third variable, the number of divorces per thousand persons, a variable which complements the two previous ones and is therefore expressed as a magnitude equivalent to that of marriages, is represented in [5] as



$(D_r)_{0 \rightarrow n}$ . The quantitative data appears in Table XII – graphically represented in Figure XII – and is of special interest, in that it serves to confirm the argument we have been constructing in the case of Denmark. As might have been expected, Denmark has the second-highest divorce rate, at 2.9 per thousand persons, while it also has the second-highest marriage rate, the second-highest age for women entering into matrimony for the first time and the third-highest age for men.

The case of Belgium is particularly alarming. It has a marriage rate of 4.10, the lowest of all the countries studied, the divorce rate, at 3.0, is the highest while the average age for entering into matrimony for the first time is amongst the most appropriate, 27.10 years old for women and 29.20 for men.

A spontaneous question emerges from all this data. Were these young people, who now postpone entering into marriage until they are more than thirty two years old, listening to John Paul II in 1985? What significance do those words, addressed to them in a spirit of paternal benevolence, hold for them today?

To set out on the path of the married vocation means to *learn married love* day by day, year by year: love according to soul and body, love that ‘is patient, is kind, that *does not insist on its own way...* and does not rejoice at wrong’: love that ‘rejoices in the right’, love that ‘endures all things’.

It is precisely this love that you young people need if your married future is to ‘pass the test’ of the whole of life. And precisely this test is part of the very essence of the vocation which, through marriage, you intend to include in the plan of your life.<sup>31</sup>

Is this really the life project desired by the youth who were with the Pope in that International Youth Year? But these late marriages, rapid divorces, the alternating of successive divorces with successive marriages, represent a scenario in which love seems to be absent. Furthermore, the fact that all this occurs during the period  $(0 \rightarrow n)$ , in which the formative process of the future generation takes place, seems unlikely to give rise to a better society. The reality is that young people are growing up in this atmosphere, they have not familiarised themselves with good in a truly intense manner and they are incapable of appreciating its function in the future society.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti amici* of pope John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year (Rome, 31 March 1985), n. 10.

*Education, an Instrument for Human Enrichment*

Education, all education, be it that which is formally administered in educational institutions or the informal education provided by the social agents, the media and, above all, the family itself, constitutes the relevant incentive for the formation of the person, above all, as a person. In some cases it is programmed and subject to a plan designed for the purpose. In others, it comes about in a spontaneous manner through the capillarity of behaviours which reach the young person and provide the ingredient that enables he who voluntarily accepts them, to build a person of solid principles, open in character and cooperative in the mission demanded by a society that aspires to be better.

Education is represented in [2] as a process in time  $(E_{0 \rightarrow n})$ , a variable which, like others, is dependent on other variables. We have selected what we consider to be the most significant of those other variables. Hence:

$$E_{0 \rightarrow n} = f [(Fe)_{0 \rightarrow n}, (Se)_{0 \rightarrow n}, (Fe_{ex})_{0 \rightarrow n}, (Co_e)_{0 \rightarrow n}, (Pe_{ex})_{0 \rightarrow n}] \quad [6]$$

Amongst the variables under consideration, we begin with the one that seems most significant to us, education within the family environment  $(Fe)_{0 \rightarrow n}$ . These are the words of the Council:

The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children. The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account. Children should be so educated that as adults they can follow their vocation, including a religious one, with a mature sense of responsibility and can choose their state of life; if they marry, they can thereby establish their family in favourable moral, social and economic conditions.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (Rome, 7 December 1965), n. 52.

And furthermore,

The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. And the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.<sup>33</sup>

This educational task has its foundation in the vocation of the spouses. By engendering a new person who, by nature is called upon to grow in wisdom and kindness, they assume the commitment of cooperating in this destiny, of educating the child in those values which enable him to lead a fully human life and prepare him appropriately for the mission entrusted to him.

Even amid the difficulties of the work of education, difficulties which are often greater today, parents must trustingly and courageously train their children in the essential values of human life. Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple and austere life style and being fully convinced that 'man is more precious for what he is than for what he has' (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 35).<sup>34</sup>

Nothing impedes parents from demonstrating the experiences of love and mutual commitment as a testimony to what society needs from the children who will be called upon to practice justice and charity in the future society, sharing what they have and serving those who most need them. We are conscious that in a selfish world where only what is measurable appears to have value, the educational task, above all the transmission of spiritual values, is not easy. It is precisely because of this that it is all the more necessary and meritorious.

Alongside the family, with the family and not against it, appears the education in educational centres, in the school (*Se*)<sub>0→n</sub> en [6]. This is the

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (Rome, 22 November 1981), n. 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 37.

programmed education carried out in an institution chosen by the parents to enable the child to receive an education that is coherent with their criteria and aspirations and thereby ensures the optimum structure of the tripod defined as: family – school – society.

In the course of the educational process, two crucial moments stand out: the beginning and the end, and the end should be, at the very least, that which, in all the countries, corresponds to the finishing of secondary education. Table and Figure XIII shows the enrolment in schools of children at the age of four as a percentage of the total number of children of the same age. As against those countries with practically one hundred percent enrolment, one can observe others in which, principally because the system does not allow for such early induction into formal education, percentages that are in the region of forty to fifty percent.

Table and Figure XIV shows a different trend, with greater homogeneity in the data for different countries with respect to school attendance for young people of eighteen. We do observe disparities which range from the highest percentage, Sweden, with 94.5% in 2003 to the lowest, Cyprus, with 28.4% or Malta with 42.8%. Well justified efforts have clearly been made to enable more young people to have access to secondary education and finish it successfully. A more cultured population gives rise to a freer, more harmonious society with a greater capacity to adapt to the social and economic conditions at a given point in time. The alternative is rigidity, the segmentation of possibilities, inequality and ultimately, social conflict with its underlying proliferation of injustice and marginalisation.

Naturally, education means expense but such expense might better be defined as investment, given that it produces a yield for society that begins with the economic effect on the family itself: something that might be described as, family educational expenses. This expense starts with the relinquishing of the income that could be earned if children of a school-going age worked. We would define this as the opportunity cost of education. The situation is dramatic in poor countries, where they find themselves obliged to obtain a wage from children at a very early stage. The educational institution is abandoned at a tender age, in those cases where children actually start.

To this opportunity cost, one has to add the direct cost of the education, even in the case of subsidised education, which represents an important aid to the educational process in terms of the means available. It often contributes to a broadening of the framework of education to include activities and subjects not included in the curriculum. This, in all

probability, is very beneficial, in terms of the human formation of the child or youth, and in certain cases decisive for the professional, family and social future of the school-going child. It is true, for instance, in the case of language learning, so important in our global world and in the need to discover, encourage and cultivate specific abilities, which make the young person better qualified for a complex professional environment, both in terms of knowledge acquired and in capacity for self-development, etc. All this is represented in the variable  $(Fe_{ex})_{0 \rightarrow n}$ , in [6], as outlined in Table XV and its representation in Figure XV.

It is quite true that European countries, including those of Western Europe, have a long tradition of free education, subsidised by the public sector. However, the data from this table shows us children and young people educated free of charge, with a negligible effort on the part of the families. Observe that the data is related to households consumption expenses, rather than family income. Therefore, when it is said that expenditure on education amounts to 0.1% of domestic consumption expenses in Sweden, it means of necessity, that the parents make no other commitment in terms of education. The only sacrifices are those of choosing a school, with complete freedom one supposes since if this were not the case, things would be far worse, and voting for the representatives of the public bodies responsible for educational regulation.

We are convinced that any attention paid to the superfluous desires of the child or youth would result in a cost far superior to the 2.9% of domestic consumption expenses devoted to education in Cyprus, which is the highest percentage of family educational expenses with respect to total household consumption expenses amongst the countries analysed. It is surprising that while claims are constantly being made for greater public spending on education, something to which we do not object in the least, private spending is so restricted. Increased private spending would serve to complement public spending and both would be to the benefit of the school-going child.

Another source of education for the youth is society itself with its abundant information sources, the media and the great number of practices that require underlying criteria and behaviours in the face of day to day decisions. This is represented in [6], by the variable  $(Co_e)_{0 \rightarrow n}$ .

Society also has structures and institutions which, in a formal way, produces messages of a pro-cultural or anti-cultural nature. These messages are launched in such an efficient manner as to penetrate the child or young person with lasting effects, both beneficial and detrimental.

The media, the printed press, in its printed paper and online forms, the audiovisual media, radio and television, the latter two above all, capture the attention of young people in a very significant way, and their messages leave such an efficient influence that education in the family and at school finds it difficult to compensate.

In more than a few Western European countries, the media, instead of informing in a truthful way, which is the primary social function of any media, is subject to political ideologies or economic interests, thereby surrendering, albeit deliberately, its freedom and neglecting its duty. Facts are frequently altered to create interpretations that serve vested interests. These interpretations manipulate those who receive them and form a society driven by opinion and, even more so, by information.

The dividing line between opinion and information is ever more subtle or, we might even venture to say, more confusing. The former has invaded the clearly defined territory which should be the domain of the latter. Given these arguments, bearing in mind the hours that children and young people spend before television screens or tuned into the radio, and the attraction both hold for the youth, far greater than that of reading or constructive conversation, one can only point to the influential capacity of such media in the formation of new generations. A capacity which is growing all the while, thereby reducing the space which originally was the domain of school and family.

To this we must add, new communication and information technologies. Indiscriminate access to the resources of internet, which although extremely valuable on many occasions, offering necessary information in a convenient way, information which might otherwise be difficult or impossible to acquire, it can be an extremely dangerous weapon in terms of vice and perversion. To allege that the regulation of these areas is a restriction of liberty simply demonstrates how freedom can be misinterpreted.

We are not saying that the media of today has not signified a great advance in terms of acquiring information, information that, was restricted in times gone by, if only because of its cost. Our argument is that this media, totally bereft of control, can be detrimental for the society it aims to serve. It will be said, and rightly so, that the control of which we speak should be exercised by the family itself and that the family should decide what is and what is not desirable for the child. It is, however, no less true to make the observation that young people easily escape this control, be it because parents are more committed to other tasks than to education, or that they do not have sufficient knowledge at their disposal to make the control effective.

But if one defends the argument that education is a social good, if the future of society depends upon it, if that future is related to formation or the educational process of the youth of today, then it seems clear that society cannot close its eyes to these cultural inflows which are constantly inoculating cultural germs and moulding the personality of the youth.

In this cultural process, society is also the responsible for education. It is the social atmosphere; it is the concept of good and evil which must be socially demonstrated in the form of conformity or rejection; it is the entire set of values which must govern a harmonious and fraternal society, with a transcendental sense of the human being, of his dignity and within it, his freedom; it is the work of the institutions and those who govern them; it is, definitively, the action of relevant persons, of those who have the functions of government, representation, administration, etc., in both public and private sectors; all of these are mirrors into which the youth looks and assumes their behaviour as being in accordance with the common good, or at very least 'normal'.

It is this cultural humus, the configuration of which involves us all, that impregnates the youth, endowing it with a way of seeing the world, of understanding it, of finding a space for its peers, for its own family, of acting in accordance with an objective that might be fraternal, presided over by love or selfish, in which the space that corresponds to each person is disputed. The latter ultimately imposes its own law: that might is right. Therefore, when the culture provided by society itself is one of selfishness and destructive competition, protests about the violence of the strongest against the weakest are inadmissible, as are those about the violence of the economically powerful against those who lack even the most basic goods.

The voice of John Paul II leads us to the following reflection:

In a society shaken and split by tensions and conflicts caused by the violent clash of various kinds of individualism and selfishness, children must be enriched not only with a sense of true justice, which alone leads to respect for the personal dignity of each individual, but also and more powerfully by a sense of true love, understood as sincere solicitude and disinterested service with regard to others, especially the poorest and those in most need.<sup>35</sup>

These are the reasons why society must involve itself in the educational process and assume responsibility for the tasks implied by said involvement.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 37.

Society, far from phariseisms, should establish the axiology governing its own construction and as part of this, it should value what is of priority and relegate what is incidental or contingent. Only in this way, can a path of improvement be embarked upon, beginning with the youth. In recognition of the importance of the function of all educational processes, it is essential to devote all the resources necessary to the achievement of this aim.

This said, allow us to finish the analysis of this function of education, by making reference to the last one of the variables in [6] which refers to public spending in the education of students. We are, therefore speaking of what we call formal education in the school, i.e.,  $(Pe_{ex})_{0 \rightarrow n}$ . Thus the data is represented in Table and Figure XVI, and is expressed as a percentage of the expenditure per student, full time equivalent, with respect to gross domestic product per capita. The data here shows the expenditure per student in the educational system, including all types of institutions, as part of the gross domestic product which, ideally, should be attributed to said student.

From the table, a certain stability in the data can be observed in the sense that spending per student in absolute terms grows at the same rate as the gross domestic product per inhabitant, assuming that the total population and the student population are stable. Despite this trend, which would serve to demonstrate the rigidity of public spending in the different budgetary areas, one can highlight notable increases in a one-year period in Iceland, from 26.6% to 29.1%, Portugal, from 25.8% to 29.6, Belgium, 23.0% to 26.4% and, to a lesser degree, Sweden, from 26.0% to 28.1%.

The highest percentage devoted to education is in Cyprus, with 30.3%, followed by Portugal, with 29.8%, Austria, with 29.4%. The lowest percentages are to be found in Ireland, 17.3%, followed by Greece, 21.3%, and Malta, 22.1%.

### *The Family with Respect to the Public Sector*

From what we have said so far, it is obvious that the family is the essential nucleus in the configuration of society. This is true, both in terms of the sustenance and survival of society in the biological sense and in its role with respect to the achievement of a better society through the education of children and the implantation of values in the community. This fact, certifiable by any analyst or observer, cannot and must not go unnoticed by the public sector (the state and the public administration), whose legitimacy depends on the achievement of the common good for society. This is the attention that the public authorities should offer to families and the chil-



dren and young people who make up those families. This is what leads us to include the very last of the variables considered ( $S_B)_n$  in [2].

It is true that the family precedes the State and therefore cannot be constrained by it, but it is also true that the family serves the public task insofar as this serves the common good. Therefore, as John Paul II correctly pointed out,

...The family and society have complementary functions in defending and fostering the good of each and every human being. But society—more specifically the State—must recognize that “the family is a society in its own original right” (Second Vatican Council, Declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 5) and so society is under a grave obligation in its relations with the family to adhere to the principle of subsidiarity.<sup>36</sup>

This principle of subsidiarity implies the recognition of the family as master of its own development and it does not authorise the State to assume the functions of the family or to take ownership of the family itself. The State can only exercise this role in the absence of family activity. Therefore, the State, in recognition of this principle, should return to the family a part of the tax it pays, so that it can properly carry out its functions. Today, we are concerned particularly with subsidies aimed at the family in order to enable it to govern its own integrity and that of its children and attend to the necessities of the children in terms of the personal development required by society.

No less important is the situation when the youth population is no longer young and, transformed in an adult population (year  $n$ ), has to realise its vocation, a vocation which encompasses a model of life. The impediments to this, as a consequence of a family policy that ignores the importance of the family, in itself and in terms of the community, must be addressed by the State. It must change its policy to a pro-family policy so that the deeply rooted values to be found within the family are sown and take root in future generations.

Table an Figure XVII shows us the social benefits to family and children expressed as a percentage of the total social benefits. In our opinion, it represents the support that the public sector offers to the family, in terms of its constitution, and in terms of child support, so that, along with the joy of having children and thereby enriching humanity, the economic cost of rais-

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 45.

ing and developing them will not be a cause of their being less wanted in a family or a society that will find in them the key to its future.

The way in which this aid is awarded differs greatly from country to country. In some countries, direct aid in the form of monetary subsidies is prevalent, while in others, such subsidies are paid in kind through the provision of those goods directly related to the child or the youth in the family environment. In other countries, they are particularly aimed at aspects which favour the formation of new families, such as housing plans for those who decide to form a family. Lastly, in more than a few countries, these benefits are implemented through fiscal credits or deductions in personal taxation. This is carried out on the form diverse taxation policies with respect to the personal income tax, etc.

Though all this aid is important in the economic sense, it is perhaps even more important in social terms because it engenders a culture in the society with respect to what is of priority in terms of the society itself and its survival. On observing these declarations of principles, the youth, above all, gain a sense of what is good and what is preferential, and they are encouraged to follow this path themselves, inspired by the fact that the community also thinks in this way. What can never be considered as aid is any instrument used for the evasion of responsibilities or to provide the confidence that, without any effort, the public sector will provide the solution to problems. Much less, when the legislative bodies, either the Parliament or the Government, promote confusion, in their decisions, for the family institution. The Council declared that:

Family and social services, especially those that provide for culture and education, should be further promoted. When all these things are being organized, vigilance is necessary to prevent the citizens from being led into a certain inactivity *vis-a-vis* society or from rejecting the burden of taking up office or from refusing to serve.<sup>37</sup>

Going one step further, it is worth considering what weighting these social benefits should have with respect to total social spending. We are not unaware of the fact that there are unavoidable objectives which must be attended to with sufficient resources, but apart from these, one can hardly think of an objective more worthy of protection than that of aid to the family. The scant attention paid to these objectives in some of the countries we studied is sur-

<sup>37</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (Rome, 7 December 1965), n. 69.

prising. This is the case of Spain, the country that offers least aid to families, with a derisory 3.0%, followed by Italy with 4.1%. In third place comes the Netherlands with 4.9%. At the other end of the scale, Luxembourg offers greatest aid to the family, with 17.7% of total social benefits. Next comes Ireland with 16%, followed by Iceland in third place with 13.6%.

The enormous disparity of the data for the different countries shows the different degrees of sensibility with respect to the social functions entrusted as a duty to the public sector. If we also consider the visibility of the different subsidies, according to the method chosen for their implementation, and the different effects produced by them precisely because of their visibility, in addition to their amount, this sense of lack of protection that exists in some countries of Europe is not surprising. It materialises in an apparent disinterest in conjugal life, in the creation of the new family and in its enrichment through the presence of children.

### *The Solidarity Needed with Children and Young People*

It is obvious from what we have been saying, that the young people of western Europe, with the exception of the pockets of poverty that constitute this fourth world of which John Paul II spoke, are economically endowed with goods that go beyond the satisfaction of needs and can, therefore, often be placed in the category of superfluous.

Therefore, it seems that the youth of Europe do not require a solidarity expressed in economic terms but rather a solidarity that helps them to escape from the vacuum of their existence, giving human content to a life called to greatness but mis-spent on matters of lesser importance. We have before us, and it is not our wish to fall into sterile lamentations and foolish alarmism, such poor young people that the only thing they have is economic means, and economic means in abundance.

They are young people who constitute niches in society, young people who live in isolation, without the unifying elements of commitment and affection. They are extravagant elements in a society that fails to recognise them, that does not take them into account and is not taken into account by them. This leads to the question that the adult generations must ask themselves. What does solidarity with these young people demand of us? What model of solidarity is required? There is a peculiar element that has a bearing on these questions. The poor know that they are poor and are conscious of what they need, but most young people are not conscious of their emptiness, of their sterility in terms of life in community, of their

poverty in terms of the building of a better society. These shortcomings will only be appreciated when they reach adulthood, when it is already too late. To what degree are we responsible?

John Paul II said:

In order to overcome today's widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is *a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity*, beginning in the family with the mutual support of husband and wife and the care which the different generations give to one another. In this sense the family too can be called a community of... solidarity.<sup>38</sup>

So much so that if the principle of solidarity is already bankrupt within the family, we can hardly expect it to be applied by the community. It seems apparent, that those who close their eyes and hearts to those closest to them, will have greater reason to keep them closed to people not personally known to them. This is even truer when, as in this case, we do not speak of a solidarity that takes the form of providing material goods, but rather a social commitment which brings us nearer to others in order to eliminate the deficits they present as human persons, as social and, therefore, social beings, and as elements of a community. This solidarity is all-consuming, not in terms of our economy or the material goods we have at our disposal, but rather in our personal attitude, in our time, in our preoccupation, in our knowledge and in its transmission. This aspect of solidarity makes great demands in terms of dedication, generosity, sacrifice...

In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. One's neighbour is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One's neighbour must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her; and for that person's sake one must be ready for sacrifice, even the ultimate one: to lay down one's life for the brethren (cf. *1 Jn* 3:16 and *Jn* 15,13).<sup>39</sup>

And when we contemplate the community of men and women, ultimately when we feel the human family in its profoundest anthropological sense,

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (Rome, 1 May 1991), n. 49.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Rome, 30 December 1987), n. 40.

we are all committed to everybody and therefore, nobody can be indifferent to anybody.

This is the community of interdependency in terms of relationships of which the Social Doctrine of the Church speaks:

... It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a 'virtue', is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.<sup>40</sup>

The firm and enduring determination to commit oneself, is the attitude that characterises and emphasises, in the most privileged manner, the virtue of solidarity. This is the solidarity needed by young people in Europe today, at a time when, unlike in other eras, they are surrounded by an abundance of economic goods that results in an understandable scarcity of moral goods. At the end of the day, what is at stake is the common good that can only be achieved when we all truly assume responsibility for everyone. John Paul II has said, '... solidarity between generations was a natural family attitude; it also was a duty of the community'.<sup>41</sup> And let us not forget that this solidarity encompasses all that refers to the human person, everything that makes him more human, more social and enriches his sense of community. Because we concentrate on the need for food, clothing and entertainment, along with the still vainer need to accumulate wealth and power, and because we become obsessed with the ephemeral, we often forget spiritual needs and those of an immaterial order.

Adult society is also a prisoner of the obsession with quantifying and measuring. Hence, for the adults of today, or at least for the great majority of them, in the theoretical sphere, and an even greater majority in the practical sense, what cannot be weighed and measured, simply does not exist. The only balance sheet we show of our lives is that which responds to the *how much* and not to the *what*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 38.

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *Address of John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences* (Vatican, 11 April 2002), n. 3.

The youth of today is asking something different of us. We ourselves feel the need to escape from the world of contradiction in which we are immersed. When, in the preceding paragraph we distinguished between theoretical and practical plans, we were referring to the enormous contradiction of many people who, while in theory defending principles of a supra-natural order, lead their lives on a purely material plane, as if the immaterial and, even more, the spiritual, were nothing but a pipe dream or an illusion.

Pope Benedict XVI, could not have been more emphatic when he addressed the youth of the world:

In vast areas of the world today there is a strange forgetfulness of God. It seems as if everything would be just the same even without him. But at the same time there is a feeling of frustration, a sense of dissatisfaction with everyone and everything.

People tend to exclaim: 'This cannot be what life is about!'. Indeed not. And so, together with forgetfulness of God there is a kind of new explosion of religion. I have no wish to discredit all the manifestations of this phenomenon. There may be sincere joy in the discovery. But to tell the truth, religion often becomes almost a consumer product. People choose what they like, and some are even able to make a profit from it. But religion sought on a 'do-it-yourself' basis cannot ultimately help us. It may be comfortable, but at times of crisis we are left to ourselves. Help people to discover the true star which points out the way to us: Jesus Christ!<sup>42</sup>

This aim cannot leave us indifferent, and we suppose that the youth congregated in Cologne were not left indifferent by it either. It demands a response from us. We have to repeat in our homes and in all the places to which we have access through our respective functions in society, what some young people have heard time and time again in the Pontifical Messages. John Paul II told them:

There is a widespread culture of the ephemeral that only attaches value to whatever is pleasing or beautiful, and it would like us to believe that it is necessary to remove the cross in order to be happy. The ideal presented is one of instant success, a fast career, sexuality

<sup>42</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in the Eucharistic Celebration with the occasion of the XX World Youth Day (Cologne – Marienfeld, Sunday, 21 August 2005), paras. 5-7.

separated from any sense of responsibility, and ultimately, an existence centred on self affirmation, often bereft of respect for others. Open your eyes and observe well, my dear young people: this is not the road that leads to true life, but it is the path that sinks into death.<sup>43</sup>

It is the summary and the conclusion of what we have called frustration. A search from the path to nowhere. Four years later, Benedict XVI would say to them: 'Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism. It does not liberate man, but takes away his dignity and enslaves him'.<sup>44</sup> As adults, we have to direct all our efforts to this aspect of solidarity which commits us to helping young people to distinguish between the permanent and the transitory, the substantial and the incidental, the causes that ennoble and dignify and those that humiliate and denigrate. This is our pedagogical commitment, so that the youth can start out on the different roads of life, so that they contribute to the betterment of society, so that they lead a fuller life, with greater meaning and with the security that comes from looking steadfastly to the transcendental.

Throughout the different variables that we have been analysing, as the ingredients that go to shape the youth, we have been in a position to appreciate the mistake of applying value to those things that are worthless. We must return to the beginnings, which always leads to the same question: who serves who? We must show the young people, with examples and testimony, the real scope of what pertains to the economy and where its boundaries end. We must clearly show that the economy, however important it may seem, is nothing more than a means at the service of man and his legitimate needs. We must show that austerity is a virtue while excessive consumption and waste is a vice that humiliates and clouds the true meaning of human life. We must show that spiritual values enrich and ennoble and must therefore be spread tirelessly and enthusiastically, through education and testimony, to those who are close to us and also to those who are not.

Generosity and commitment are vital to the construction of a society based on fraternity and solidarity. On the contrary, aggression, competitiveness without limits, selfishness, and exploitation of what is ours and

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of the XVI World Youth Day (Vatican, 14 February 2001), n. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in the Youth Vigil on the occasion of the XX World Youth Day (Cologne – Marienfeld, Saturday, 20 August 2005), para. 21.

what belongs to others, generates a violent society that leaves no space for the human being. John Paul II told the youth that,

There is no place in your lives for selfishness or laziness. Now more than ever it is crucial that you be 'watchers of the dawn', the look-outs who announce the light of dawn and the new springtime of the Gospel of which the buds can already be seen. Humanity is in urgent need of the witness of free and courageous young people who dare to go against the tide and proclaim with vigour and enthusiasm their personal faith in God, Lord and Saviour.<sup>45</sup>

We already know that the world is full of offers leading to an easy life, a life without commitment, a life without a future and it is here that we have the greatest opportunity to affirm our true convictions. It is precisely in going against what is widely accepted, that companionship and testimony is of greatest importance to the youth. To go against the flow means that, in a world of comfort, moderation, both in terms of use and in terms of habit, is practiced in the family environment. It means, in an almost totally utilitarian world, defending an education based on selflessness and solidarity. It means that, in a world where education is limited to the statistical data on school attendance, we adults must question ourselves about education and defend to the last an education in spiritual values, an education in which every student, as an objective of the educational process, is enriched as a person and sees himself as the nucleus of the community to which he belongs, starting with the family.

As citizens, parents and adult members of a community, *ad intra* and *ad extra* we must be demanding in terms of what is just, of what is human and of what is good for the community. We must be demanding of ourselves and of society in terms of the search for good, the good of each and every person, the common good of the community, and ultimately the common good of humanity. While any person is in need, be it materially or spiritually, we must not lose hope. On the contrary we must sow the seed to provide abundance for all and especially for those most in need.

Because of our position, our experience of life and above all our vocation, we must recognise the preoccupation of youth which moves them towards the highest ideals. We must accept their lack of conformity with injustice, with ineffectiveness and with phariseisms and we must direct all

<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, Message of the Holy Father John Paul II for the 18th World Youth Day, 13 April 2003 (Vatican, 8 March 2003), n. 6.



that energy so that they can satiate their legitimate aspirations and achieve a better society through social reform.

We cannot be amongst those who disappoint. Instead, we must be amongst those who accept the preoccupation and have the strength to act. John Paul II expressed his thoughts on this matter in the following terms:

It is the nature of human beings, and especially youth, to seek the Absolute, the meaning and fullness of life. Dear young people, do not be content with anything less than the highest ideals! Do not let yourselves be dispirited by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and most authentic desires of their heart. You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and passing fads, and with aiming at too little in life. If you have an ardent desire for the Lord you will steer clear of the mediocrity and conformism so widespread in our society.<sup>46</sup>

This is the true understanding of youth and its potential. Our solidarity must be aimed in this direction. It must be a solidarity which awakens and not one which anaesthetises. It should open the path to knowledge of what is substantial. It should focus on the distinction between what is permanent and what is transitory, what is material and what is spiritual. It should be a solidarity that gives the youth security in its ideals and hope with respect to the final result of its aspirations.

### *Conclusions for a Task*

It is opportune to remind ourselves at this point of the words of His Holiness Pope Paul VI:

Human society is sorely ill. The cause is not so much the depletion of natural resources, nor their monopolistic control by a privileged few; it is rather the weakening of brotherly ties between individuals and nations.<sup>47</sup>

And our solidarity should be aimed precisely at curing this illness. What Paul VI says of the world is even more accentuated in the countries of Western Europe, countries where abundance has led to a selfishness unheard of at any other time in history. We have so much, that life is lived

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of the XVII World Youth Day, Toronto 18-28 July 2002 (Castel Gandolfo, 25 July 2001), n. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio* (Rome, 26 March 1969), n. 66.

as if others, even those closest to us, do not exist. Less consideration still is given to the poor and the marginalised.

In the words of John XXIII:

It pains Us, therefore, to observe the complete indifference to the true hierarchy of values shown by so many people in the economically developed countries. Spiritual values are ignored, forgotten or denied, while the progress of science, technology and economics is pursued for its own sake, as though material well-being were the be-all and end-all of life.<sup>48</sup>

When poverty is spoken of, responsibility is eluded with the argument that we pay our taxes and therefore, the responsibility of combating necessity lies with the State and the public administration. The eloquent text of John XXIII is forgotten:

In recent years the State and other agencies of public law have extended, and are continuing to extend... tragic situations and urgent problems of an intimate and personal nature are continually arising which the State with all its machinery is unable to remedy or assist. There will always remain, therefore, a vast field for the exercise of human sympathy and the Christian charity of individuals. We would observe, finally, that the efforts of individuals, or of groups of private citizens, are definitely more effective in promoting spiritual values than is the activity of public authority.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, when education is spoken of, and what kind of education, we consider ourselves to be exonerated by the fact that we are paying for a school, perhaps an expensive school, thereby abrogating a right that can only correspond to parents. However, when it comes to the selection of a vocation, it is the economic aspect that awakens the sense of paternity or maternity and leads to directing the young person towards those studies and vocations which offer greatest economic benefit. Humanistic studies are avoided and preference is given to those of a technical nature, economics or experimental science, thereby reducing to an alarming degree the horizons of the young person with respect to his future.

In this culture, a culture of convenience and productivity, rather than a culture of what is good, pleasure seems to be the unique destiny governing all action. The activity, the decision related to what to do and how to do it,

<sup>48</sup> John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et magistra* (Rome, 15 May 1961), n. 176.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 120.

is subordinated to short-term gain. Anything standing in the way of this objective is simply removed or marginalised. An alarming example of this attitude is the decision to abort in the face of unwanted pregnancy. The forty five million crimes committed every year in the world, in which the passive subject is an unborn child, show the negligible value that life holds for a large part of the population. Meanwhile, this same population incessantly seeks a more comfortable life, with a greater abundance of material luxuries and an almost total absence of spiritual goods. And all the while, young people are growing up with this education provided by the actions of the adults whose duty it is to educate them. Can we really expect a different society, given the propositions we are offering? What can the society of today and above all, the family, do to improve such a negative environment?

What do families think of the appeal of the Popes to the youth and the references they offer to the young? Let us analyse attentively the words of Pope Benedict XVI to the young people of the Netherlands:

Dear friends, as I said to you above, if you follow Jesus, you will never feel lonely because you are part of the Church, which is a great family in which you can grow in true friendship with so many brothers and sisters in the faith scattered in every part of the world. Jesus needs you to 'renew' contemporary society. Take care to grow in the knowledge of the faith in order to be its authentic witnesses... And truly impelled by his truth and love, you will be able, together with other young people who are seeking the true meaning of life, to build a better future for all.<sup>50</sup>

In this offering of the Church as a big family, is the Pope not highlighting the weakness of the families of so many young people who cannot find within them the companionship and the light necessary for confronting the challenge of authenticity that faces them in their lives?

The renewal of society is the great challenge facing the young and its roots can be found in the rejection of the present situation. Shortly afterwards, the Pope himself promised his proximity and his companionship on this path of ideals along which their faith in Christ leads them.

... I am close to you with my prayers. May you generously accept the call of the Lord, who holds up to you great ideals that can make your lives beautiful and full of joy. You can be certain of it: only by

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the First National Day of Young Catholics of the Netherlands (Vatican, 21 November 2005), paras. 12-14.

responding positively to his appeal, however demanding it may seem to you, is it possible to find happiness and peace of heart.<sup>51</sup>

Do our young people find similar companionship within their family environment? Companionship not only gives security but also prevents isolation and the anxiety that can occur in moments when succumbing to temptation seems the most acceptable solution.

This thirst for transformation is immanent in man but it is more open in the young person. It is a transformation which, because it is based on love, is capable of transforming desperation into hope, death into life, pain into satisfaction, violence into peace. Pope Benedict XVI, taking the crucifixion and its liberating capacities as a reference, addressed the young people gathered in Cologne in the following terms:

What on the outside is simply brutal violence – the Crucifixion – from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. *1 Cor* 15:28). In their hearts, people always and everywhere have somehow expected a change, a transformation of the world. Here now is the central act of transformation that alone can truly renew the world: violence is transformed into love, and death into life.

Since this act transmutes death into love, death as such is already conquered from within, the Resurrection is already present in it. Death is, so to speak, mortally wounded, so that it can no longer have the last word.<sup>52</sup>

This is the transformation that can satiate our young people and motivate them to act in the course of a pilgrimage which starts by looking at the task to be carried out. Without becoming discouraged, they firmly place their hope in the achievement of the proposed objective, with all the strength they can find in their hearts and their commitment to others.

This path of plenitude is scattered with obstacles which, owing to the social environment in which we live and the ephemeral values for which we live, often appear to be insurmountable. This is why the young person needs the adult, someone to hold on to, to find support in, and to show him

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in the Eucharistic Celebration with the occasion of the XX World Youth Day (Cologne – Marienfeld, Sunday, 21 August 2005), paras. 25-29.

the light, a light which is none other than the faith. He needs an adult in whom to confide, sure in the knowledge that he will not be failed and he also needs to receive companionship and understanding from that adult. It is a long road, the task is not an easy one but our solidarity with these young people can help to overcome any obstacle and ease the social burden which they will almost certainly have to carry.

Will the world of adults fix its gaze elsewhere, when the voice of youth is raised to plead for solidarity? Will we adopt the attitude of the priest and the Levite when the young person requires Samaritans?<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Vide Lk*, 10, 30-36.

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