

Letter to the People of God

We have been born into a world which for most people is not a place to live in. A large part of mankind is exploited by a minority enjoying intolerable privileges. Many police states exist to protect the powerful. Multi-national companies impose their own laws. Profit and money rule. Those in power almost never pay attention to those who are voiceless.

And the people of God? What way of liberation is it opening? It cannot avoid the question.

When the very first Christians found themselves faced with a question without a solution, when they were on the point of dividing, they decided to gather in council. We remembered them at Easter 1970, when we were seeking answers for our own age. And we opted not for a forum of ideas, not for conferences, but for a Council of Youth; that is to say, a reality that gathers together youth from every land, committing us unambiguously on account of Christ and the Gospel.

At the heart of the Council of Youth is the risen Christ. We celebrate him, present in the eucharist, alive in the Church, hidden in man our brother.

In the course of four and a half years of preparation, we have made unceasing visits to one another. We have crossed the world in every direction, even though the means at our disposal were slight. In certain localities, the political circumstances have led us through grave situations.

Gradually, a common awareness has emerged. It has been more particularly shaped by the voices of those among us who are living under subjection, and oppression, or who are reduced to silence.

And today we are sure: the risen Christ is preparing his people to become at one and the same time a contemplative people, thirsting for God; a people of justice, living the struggle of man and peoples exploited, a people of communion, where the non-believer also finds a creative place.

We are part and parcel involved with this people. This is why we are addressing it in this letter, so as to share the concerns which are ours, and the expectations which are con-



suming us.

Numerous Churches, in the southern hemisphere as in the northern, are spied on, interfered with, and even persecuted. Certain of them show that without any bonds with political powers, without means of power, without wealth, the Church can experience a new birth, can become a force of liberation for humanity and radiate God.

Another part of the people of God, in the northern hemisphere as in the southern, compromises with inequality. Christians as individuals and many Church institutions have capitalized their goods, accumulating vast wealth in money, land, buildings, investments. There are lands where the Churches remain connected to the political and financial structures. They draw on their superfluous wealth to give away large sums in development aid, but still make no changes in their own structures. Church institutions acquire highly efficient means of accomplishing their mission, of running their activities and bringing together their committees. But many discover that gradually life vanishes, leaving institutions to turn over empty. The Churches are more and more forsaken by people of our time. What they say is losing its credibility.

Whereas the Christians of the first period shared all that they had. They gathered day by day to pray together. They lived in joy and simplicity. So they were recognized.

During the last years of preparation for the Council of Youth, in the extreme diversity of suggestions made, these are the intui-

tions which stand out above all the rest and to which we shall consecrate the first period of the Council of Youth:

Church, what do you say of your future?

Are you going to give up the means of power, the compromises with political and financial power?

Are you going to surrender your privileges, stop capitalising? Are you at last going to become a "universal community of sharing" a community finally reconciled, a place of communion and friendship for the whole of humanity?

In each locality and over the whole world, are you in this way going to become the seeds of a society without class and where none have privileges, without domination of one person by another, of one people by another?

Church, what do you say of your future?

Are you going to become the "people of the beatitudes", having no security other than Christ, a people poor, contemplative, creating peace, bearing joy and a liberating festival for mankind, ready even to be persecuted for justice?

If we are actively involved in this, we know that we can demand nothing exacting of others unless we ourselves stake everything. What do we have to fear? Christ says "I came to kindle fire on the earth, and how I long for it to burn". We shall dare to live the Council of Youth as an anticipation of all

that we want. We shall dare to commit ourselves, together and to the point of no return, to living beyond hope, letting the spirit of the beatitudes come springing up in the people of God, being leaven of a society without class and where none have privileges.

We are addressing this first letter to the people of God, written on our hearts, so as to share what burns us.

Opening of the Council of Youth
Taize, 1 September 1974

About two years ago, in Taize France, the world Youth Council met to discuss social justice and social injustice. This conference included youth from all over the world, who felt a common concern for the world situation and the social maladies within it. It was at this conference that, the "Letter to the People of God" was written.

As a spin off from this giant conference, another was held on November 2 in northern New Brunswick. Nine of our university students attended that conference, at which they discussed the "letter" itself, as well as other topics of concern.

If you are interested, this letter, as well as other related topics will be discussed on Tuesday night at 8:30 in the Marion Hall Health Centre lounge. Everyone is welcome to come and share this get together.

signed,
Social Justice Youth Group