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## **SETTING OFF AGAIN ON NEW CONQUESTS**

Every year, on October 12, we celebrate the Day of the Race and commemorate the first time Spanish navigators, led by Christopher Columbus, arrived on the American continent. Generally and popularly, this date is also known as the discovery of America.

Beyond the different points of view and the many discussions that this historical event generates today, from those who see this “discovery” as very positive for the American continent and those who emphasize all the negative effects that this “meeting” wrought for the inhabitants and original cultures of these lands, I share today some reflections on the profile, lifestyle, primary convictions and desires that drive people today, especially young people: the present, hope, and future of our race, societies and all humanity.

We live in the historical conjuncture that anthropologists, historians, philosophers, and sociologists call the “transition from modernity to postmodernity.” Like every stage of human history, this one we live in has its lights and shadows.

There is consensus that the 1960s marked a rupture and novelty compared to past decades and those in which we now live. We have persevered through two world wars and many other international and local wars, failures of democracy and the capitalist economic system, the failure of science and technology to solve the great problems of human beings and all humanity, the growing situation of injustice, inequality, violence, migration and death of large masses of people in all corners of the planet, etc. These have shattered the unshakable faith of our modern ancestors in the unlimited progress of humanity through science and technology, which – at the time – once produced the Industrial Revolution.

For the generation of the 60s and their famous youth and student protests, their hope for a better world fell apart, and the idea of progress that their grandparents believed in became a story of history without a future or meaning, lacking direction.

In its totality, this formed societies that no longer produced but consumed, where everything can be negotiable, where “having” trumps being. This formed men and communities that, faced with the prospect of no future, live with no interest in work and effort, in advancing and overcoming. Instead, they seek

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the easy and fast, the disposable and perishable, the “deconstruction,” the “light” and disengaged.

The rejection of everything institutional and hierarchical in all areas of life in society (political, religious, etc.), since these institutions once controlled and sustained the ideal of progress, now failed, produces a retreat to the sanctuary of the individual, the personal and private, to the detriment of the interest in everything collective and in the search for the common good. We follow characters, individualities, sects, therapies, or small groups, where individuals can feel like people and not amorphous masses.

We thus arrive at anarchy, a world without dogmas and lacking unique, absolute, or universal truths. We inhabit a world of subjectivism and “moral” relativism, according to which everyone elaborates “à la carte” their own truths and life projects. It is a world without certainties, a world of fragmented beings seeking what serves them, a world where “having” and pleasure form the foundation of happiness. We live in times of rapid change, uncertainty, crisis, nonsense, stories, and precarious knowledge, in which aesthetics prevail over ethics, feeling over reason, in a world of entertainment.

We inhabit pansexualist and hedonistic societies, living without the perspective of transcendence. We seek enjoyment in the here and now. We seek to achieve maximum luxury, comfort, and waste with the least possible sacrifice, commitment, and effort. The end justifies the means in this mad and frantic race for pleasure and happiness.

This all leads to sexuality, also light, in which the pleasure of physical contact prevails without fidelity. This human dimension is reduced to genitality because the authentic is forbidden.

In the realm of religion, the human beings of our times, our young people, inherited F. Nietzsche’s premise that “God is dead” because if we have science and technology, we can do without God. “The superman” emerges. All of this causes secularism and the decline of everything religious.

Postmodern man believes, but does so within a “religious market” and “à la carte.” A thousand ideas, sects, therapies, and pseudo-religious movements proliferate due to the need to find meaning in existence and a solution to the serious problems of humanity that have not yet been resolved. But this “return” or need for the religious and transcendent is also “light,” without



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strong convictions and always utilitarian, amidst an overload of media and information in which nothing is worth and every subject is worth the same.

Young people today, in line with everything I have said here, believe but not in the way of institutions. They believe, but without affiliations, labels, or memberships of religious institutions. They believe but without institutional religious practices. They believe without belonging to any religious institution, rejecting imposed and traditional religious practices. They believe, but they do so heterogeneously and eclectically.

They are interested in ideas and movements of spirituality but reject all membership in official religions. They live and seek some kind of spiritual experience that does not have the regulation of religious institutions.

This brief review of the main features of the person, society, and culture of our time, even in the face of modernity, portrays ways of being and acting of today's person amidst a human and social crisis, and at the same time, invites us to opportunities to make changes.

The emphases of today's culture and man are usable and salvageable. We must applaud, for example, the achievements in respect for the rights of individuals and minority groups in the world, but without forgetting the need always to seek and find ways that ensure the good of the great majority, the common good.

Young people are the treasure of our race and the present and future of our hope. They are the ones who must build, with the best of the heritage of their parents and grandparents, a society that respects "the dignity, the liberty, and the rights of individuals" without being tempted to "yield to the seductions of egoistic or hedonistic philosophies or to those of despair and annihilation" affirming "faith in life and what gives meaning to it, that is to say, the certitude of the existence of a just and good God."

Enlarging "hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget wars and all their train of miseries."

The world urgently needs young people who are "generous, pure, respectful, and sincere," who "build in enthusiasm a better world than [their] elders had with "the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly,



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to renew oneself and to set out again for new conquests.” (Phrases in quotation marks are excerpts of the MESSAGE OF THE II VATICAN COUNCIL TO YOUTH).

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