



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO BRESCIA AND CONCESIO

OFFICIAL CEREMONY FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW PREMISES AND FOR AWARDING THE SIXTH PAUL VI INTERNATIONAL PRIZE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vittorio Montini Auditorium, Paul VI Institute - Concesio

Sunday, 8 November 2009

(Video)

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Friends,*

I cordially thank you for inviting me to inaugurate the new premises of the Institute dedicated to [Paul VI](#), built next to the house in which he was born. I greet each one of you with affection, starting with the Cardinals, the Bishops, the Authorities and the important figures present. I extend a special greeting to the President, Giuseppe Camadini, with gratitude for his courteous words to me describing the Institute's origins, purpose and activities. I take part gladly in the solemn ceremony for the presentation of the "Paul VI International Prize", this year awarded to the French series "Sources Chrétiennes". This choice focuses on the educational context which, as has been clearly underlined, intends to highlight the commitment of this historical series founded in 1942 by Henri De Lubac and Jean Danilou to a rediscovery of ancient and medieval Christian sources. I thank the Director, Bernard Meunier, for the greeting he addressed to me. I welcome this opportunity to encourage you, dear friends, to shed ever more light on the personality and teaching of this great Pontiff, not so much from the hagiographical and celebrative viewpoint as rather and this was rightly stressed under the banner of scientific research to make a contribution to the knowledge of the truth and to the understanding of the history of the Church and the Pontiffs

in the 20th century. The better known he becomes, the more the Servant of God [Paul VI](#) will be appreciated and loved. I am united to the great Pope by a bond of affection and devotion since the years of the [Second Vatican Council](#). How could I fail to remember that in 1977 it was Paul VI himself who entrusted me with the pastoral care of the Diocese of Munich and created me a Cardinal? I feel I owe this great Pontiff deep gratitude for the esteem he showed me on various occasions.

I would like here to examine the different aspects of his personality but I shall limit my considerations to a single feature of his teaching which seems to me of great timeliness and in tune with the motivation of this year's Prize: his educational skill. We are living in times in which a real "educational emergency" is being felt. Training the young generations on whom the future depends has never been easy, but in this time of ours it seems to have become even more complicated. Parents, teachers, priests and those who hold direct educational responsibilities know this well. An atmosphere, a mindset, and a form of culture are spreading that cast doubt on the value of the person, the meaning of truth and good and ultimately the goodness of life. Yet a widespread thirst for certainties and values is strongly felt. Thus it is necessary to pass on something worthwhile to the generations to come, sound rules for behaviour, and to point out lofty objectives to which to direct decisively their existence. There is a growing demand for an education that can answer the expectations of youth; an education that is primarily a testimony and, for the Christian educator, a witness of faith.

In this regard I remember the incisive programmatic sentence of Giovanni Battista Montini which he wrote in 1931: "I want my life to be a testimony to truth". By testimony I mean the preservation, search for and profession of truth" (*Spiritus Veritatis*, in *Colloqui religiosi*, Brescia 1981, p. 81). This testimony Montini noted is made impelling by the realization that "in the secular field, men of thought, also and perhaps especially in Italy, think little of Christ. He is largely unknown, forgotten and absent to the contemporary culture" (*Introduzione allo studio di Cristo*, Rome 1933, p. 23). Montini the educator, student and priest, Bishop and Pope, always felt the need for a qualified Christian presence in the world of culture, art and social life, a presence rooted in the truth of Christ and at the same time attentive to the human being and his or her vital needs.

This explains why attention to the educational problem, to the formation of young people which Montini also drew from the atmosphere in his own family remained constant in his thought and action. He was born into one of the Catholic families of Brescia as they were then, committed and fervent in their actions, and grew up under the tutorship of his father Giorgio, a protagonist of important battles for the affirmation of the freedom of Catholics in education. In one of his first writings Giovanni Battista Montini remarked on the subject of the Italian school: "We ask no more than a little freedom to educate as we wish the young who come to Christianity attracted by the beauty of its faith and traditions" (*Per la nostra scuola: un libro del prof. Gentile*, in *Scritti giovanili*, Brescia 1979, p. 73). Montini was a priest with a profound faith and a broad culture, a director of souls, an acute investigator of the "drama of human existence". Generations of young university

students found in him, as Chaplain of FUCI [the Italian Catholic Federation of University Students,] a reference point, someone who could form consciences, create enthusiasm and recall the duty of being witnesses at every moment of life, making the beauty of the Christian experience shine out. His students those of that period say that on hearing him speak they noticed the inner fire that gave life to his words, in stark contrast with his seemingly frail body.

One of the basic aims of the formative role proposed by the university circles of FUCI of which he was in charge, consisted in striving for the spiritual unity of the personality of the young: "Not separate compartments in the soul", he said, with "culture on one side and faith on the other; school on one side, Church on the other. Doctrine, like life, is one" (cf. *Idee-Forze*, in *Studium* 24 [1928], p. 343). In other words full harmony and integration between the cultural and religious dimensions of formation were essential for Montini, with a special emphasis on the knowledge of Christian doctrine and the practical implications in life. For this reason, from the beginning of his activity in the Roman circle of FUCI, he promoted with a serious spiritual and intellectual commitment charitable initiatives for university students at the service of the poor, through the St Vincent conference. He never separated what he was subsequently to define as "intellectual charity" from a social presence, from meeting the needs of the lowliest. In this way students were taught to discover the continuity between the strict duty to study and practical missions among the slum dwellers. "We believe", he wrote, "that the Catholic is not someone beset by thousands of problems even of a spiritual order.... No! The Catholic is someone who possesses the fruitfulness of certainty. And it is in this way that, faithful to his faith, he can see the world not as an abyss of perdition but, rather, as a field for the harvest" (*La distanza del mondo* in *Azione Fucina*, 10 February 1929, p. 1).

Giovanni Battista Montini insisted on the formation of youth to enable them to form a relationship with modernity, a difficult and often critical relationship but always constructive and dialogical. He emphasized certain negative characteristics of modern culture, in the area both of knowledge and of action, such as subjectivism, individualism and the unlimited affirmation of the self. Yet at the same time he deemed dialogue necessary, but always based on a solid doctrinal formation whose unifying principle was faith in Christ; thus a mature Christian "conscience", capable of confronting everyone but without giving into the fashion of the time. As Pontiff, he was to say to the Rectors and Presidents of the Jesuit Universities that "blind imitation of others' doctrine or morals is far from the spirit of the Gospel". "Furthermore, those who do not share with us the stance of the Church", he added, "demand of us extreme clarity in expressing our viewpoint so as to be able to establish constructive and trustworthy dialogue". Therefore cultural pluralism and respect should "never make a Christian lose sight of his obligation to serve the truth in charity, to follow that truth of Christ which alone gives true freedom" (cf. *Address to Jesuit Rectors of universities*, 6 August 1975; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, [ORE] 21 August 1975, p. 3).

For Pope Montini the young person was to be educated to judge the atmosphere in which he lives and works, to consider himself a person and not just a number among the masses: in a word, he

must be helped to have a "strong conviction", able to "act strongly" to avoid the possible danger of putting action before thought and making experience the source of truth. He said on this topic: "Action cannot enlighten itself. For man not to succumb to thinking as he acts, he must be taught to act as he thinks. Even in the Christian world where love and charity have a supreme and decisive importance, one cannot set aside the light of the truth which submits its ends and reasons to love" (*Insegnamenti II*, [1964], 194).

Dear friends, those FUCI years remained impressed upon Paul VI's personality; they were difficult because of the political context in Italy but exciting because of the young people who recognized in the Servant of God a guide and teacher. In him, Archbishop of Milan then Successor of the Apostle Peter, the aspiration and concern for the subject of education never diminished. His numerous interventions dedicated to the young generations in turbulent and troubled times, like the year 1968, bear witness to this. He pointed out courageously the path to the encounter with Christ as a liberating educational experience and the one, true response to the yearning and aspirations of youth, fallen prey to ideology. "You youngsters of today", he said, "are caught in a conformism that could become habitual, a conformism which unconsciously subjects your freedom to the machine-like tyranny of other people's thinking, opinions, feelings, acts and fashions? So, then you are swept away by a 'crowd-spirit' which may make you feel strong, but once it has you in its grip, it drives you at times to group-revolt, often without your knowing why..... But if you once become aware of Christ, if you really get to know him and adhere to him... you will become free within yourselves... you will know the "why and wherefore" of life, and for whom you are living.... And at the same time you will feel a marvellous thing happening, an intelligent power of friendship, sociability and love coming to birth in you. You will not feel lonely" (cf. *Insegnamenti VI*, [1968], 117-118).

Paul VI described himself as "an old friend of the young". He was able to recognize and share in their anguish when they were discussing the desire to live, the need for certainty, the craving for love, the sense of bewilderment, the temptation to be sceptical, and the experience of disappointment. He had learned to understand their soul and remembered that the agnostic indifference of current thought, critical pessimism and the materialist ideology of social progress did not suffice for the spirit, open to very different horizons of truth and life (cf. *ORE*, 18 July 1974, p. 12). Today, as in his time, an unavoidable demand for meaning, a search for genuine human relationships, is emerging in the new generations. Paul VI said: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on Evangelization in the Modern World, n. 41). My venerable Predecessor was a teacher of life and a courageous witness of hope; he was not always understood and indeed was sometimes opposed and isolated by the cultural movements dominant at the time. Yet, firm despite his physical frailty, he guided the Church without hesitation. He never lost the trust of youth, renewing for them, and not only for them, the invitation to trust in Christ and to follow him on the path of the Gospel.

Dear friends, once again I thank you for giving me the opportunity to breathe here in the town of his birth and in these places full of his family and childhood memories the atmosphere in which the Servant of God Paul VI grew up, the Pope of the Second Vatican Council and of the post-conciliar period. Here everything speaks of the riches of his personality and of his extensive doctrine. Here there are also significant memories of other Pastors and protagonists of the Church's history in the last century, such as: Cardinal Bevilacqua, Bishop Carlo Manziana, Mons. Pasquale Macchi and his trusted personal secretary, Fr Paolo Caresana. I warmly hope that this Pope's love for young people, his constant encouragement to entrust themselves to Jesus Christ an invitation taken up by John Paul II and which I too desired to renew precisely at the beginning of my Pontificate may be perceived by the new generations. I assure you of my prayers for this as I bless all of you present here, your families, your work and the initiatives of the Paul VI Institute.

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