



The Holy See

THE GUARDINI FOUNDATION'S CONGRESS ON
"THE SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF ROMANO GUARDINI"

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Clementine Hall

Friday, 29 October 2010

*Your Excellencies,
Mr President Prof. von Pufendorf,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

I rejoice to welcome to the Apostolic Palace all of you who have come to Rome for the Guardini Foundation's Congress on the theme: "The spiritual and intellectual legacy of Romano Guardini". I thank you in particular, dear Professor von Pufendorf, for your cordial words at the beginning of this meeting, in which you fully described the present-day "struggle" which links us to Guardini and, at the same time, requires us to carry on his life's work.

In his speech of thanks on the occasion of his 80th birthday in February 1965, at the "Ludwig-Maximilian" University in Munich, Guardini described his life's work, as he understood it, as a method of questioning himself in a continuous spiritual exchange on the meaning of the Christian *Weltanschauung* [vision of the world] (*Stationen und Rückblicke*, S. 41). For Guardini this vision, this comprehensive survey of the world, was not an external survey like a simple matter of research. Nor did he mean the perspective of the history of the spirit which examines and ponders what others have said or written on the religious form of an epoch. In Guardini's opinion all these points of view were insufficient.

In the notes on his life he affirmed, "what was of immediate interest to me was not the question of what someone had said about Christian truth, but of what was true" (*Berichte über mein Leben*, S.

24). And it was this line of his teaching that impressed us as young men, because we were not interested in witnessing a “firework display” of opinions to be found within Christianity or outside it. We wanted to know “what it is”. And here was a man who, fearlessly but at the same time with all the seriousness of critical thought, asked this question and helped us think together. Guardini did not want to know one thing or many things, he aspired to the truth of God and to the truth about man. For him the means of approaching this truth was the *Weltanschauung* — as it was then called — which is achieved in a living exchange with the world and with men. The specific Christian principle lies in the fact that man knows he stands in a relationship to God which precedes him, and from which he cannot withdraw.

The principle that establishes the yardstick is not our own thought but God who surpasses our units of measurement and cannot be reduced to any entity that we may create. God reveals himself as the truth, not an abstract truth but rather one to be found in the living and the concrete, ultimately in the form of Jesus Christ.

Anyone who desires to see Jesus, the truth, however, must “change course”, must leave behind the autonomy of arbitrary thought and move towards the willingness to listen, which accepts “what is”. And this journey backwards, which Guardini made during his conversion, shaped his whole thought and his whole life as a continuous departure from autonomy to turn toward listening, toward receiving. However, even in an authentic relationship with God man does not always comprehend what God says. He needs interpretation and this consists in an exchange with others that down the ages has found its most reliable form in the living Church which unites all people.

Guardini was a man of dialogue. His works, almost without exception, were born from dialogue, even if only an inner one. The lessons of the professor of the philosophy of religion and of Christian *Weltanschauung* at the University of Berlin in the 1920s represented above all meetings with great thinkers of the past. Guardini read the works of these authors, listened to them, learned from them how they saw the world and entered into dialogue in order to develop through dialogue with them what he, as a Catholic thinker, had to say to them regarding their thoughts. He pursued this habit in Munich and this was the particular style of his teaching — the fact that he was in dialogue with the thinkers.

His key words were: “you see...”, because he wanted to guide us to “seeing”, while he himself was in a common inner dialogue with his listeners. This was the innovation in comparison with the rhetoric of the old days: rather, that far from seeking rhetoric he talked to us in a totally simple way, and at the same time spoke of truth and led us to dialogue with the truth. And there was a broad spectrum of “dialogues” with authors such as Socrates, St Augustine and Pascal, Dante, Hölderlin, Mörike, Rilke and Dostoyevsky. He saw them as living mediators who reveal the present in a word from the past, allowing us to see and live it in a new way. They give us a strength that can lead us once again back to ourselves.

Guardini held that when we open ourselves to the truth an *ethos* follows, a basis for our moral behaviour to our neighbour, as a requirement of our existence. Since man can encounter God, he can also behave well. This primacy of ontology over *ethos* applies to him. Upright conduct therefore derives from the being, from the very being of God correctly understood and listened to. Guardini used to say: “authentic praxis, that is, correct behaviour, stems from the truth and it is necessary to fight for it” (*ibid.*, S. 111).

It was first and foremost among the young that Guardini noted this yearning for the truth, this reaching for what is primary and essential. In his dialogues with young people, particularly at Rothenfels Castle which, thanks to him, had by then become the centre of the Catholic Youth Movement, the priest and educator promoted the ideals of the youth movement such as self-determination, personal responsibility and an inner disposition for the truth; he purified and deepened these ideals. Freedom. Yes, but the only person who is really free, he used to tell us, is the one who is “completely what he should be, in accordance with his own nature.... Freedom is truth” (*Auf dem Wege*, S. 20). The truth of man, for Guardini, is essentiality and conformity to being. Man's journey leads to truth when he practices “the obedience of our being in relation to the being of God” (*ibid.*, S. 21). This takes place ultimately in worship, which Guardini considers belongs to the sphere of thought.

In guiding the young Guardini also discovered a new approach to the Liturgy. For him the rediscovery of the Liturgy was a rediscovery of the oneness of spirit and flesh in the totality of the single human being, since liturgical action is always at the same time both bodily and spiritual. Prayer is extended through physical and community action, hence the oneness of reality as a whole is revealed. The Liturgy is symbolic action. The symbol as the quintessence of the oneness of the spiritual and the material is lost when these separate, when the world is split in half, into spirit and flesh, into subject and object. Guardini was profoundly convinced that man is *spirit in flesh and flesh in spirit* and that the Liturgy and the symbol therefore lead him to the essence of himself and ultimately, through worship, to the truth.

Among Guardini's great themes of life the relationship between faith and the world is constantly in the forefront. Guardini saw the university above all as a place for seeking truth. The university, however, can only be such when it is free from all exploitation for political advantage or other ends. Today, in our globalised but fragmented world, it is more important than ever to fulfil this intention which the Guardini Foundation has very much at heart and for the realization of which the Guardini Chair was created.

I once again express to you all my cordial thanks to you for coming. May familiarity with Guardini's work sharpen our awareness of the Christian foundations of our culture and society. I gladly extend my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

© Copyright 2010 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana