

FAITH AND ART

Here is the wonder we have been looking for – life of Pope Paul VI

Third conference on Paul VI's heritage by the De La Salle Brothers in Rome



Presentation of the book *La carità come motore di tutto il processo sociale* (ed. by Patrizia Moretti)

Alessandra Pompili

Whereas it is probably an exaggeration to state that the teaching of Paul VI has been only dusted off in the aftermath of his recent canonisation (2018), it is however true that its importance has not always been given the prominence it deserves.

Whilst some may attribute this state of affairs to the many debates that spurred from the Pope's positions about controversial issues (which earned him unflattering nicknames such as "Hamlet Pope" or "Sad Paul"), there may be other reasons underpinning it.

A relatively basic one is to recognise, plainly and simply, that Pope Paul wrote and said a lot, and he did it in an age of unprecedented change that touched the social, ethical and economic sphere of the Western world.

It is in recognition of such vast output, that the De La Salle Brothers in Italy are promoting a series of conferences aimed at investigating Paul VI's teachings and its many ramifications in today's society.

Is Paul VI's heritage still relevant to the men and women of our age? If yes, what is the best way to share it and make it known to the public at large?

The relationship between the De La Salle Brothers and the future Paul VI started when the barely 30-years-old Don Giovanni Battista Montini was living in Via delle Terme Deciane, on the Aventine hill. Nearby was a school of the Brothers, the Istituto Pio IX: here between 1928 and 1932 Don Montini often celebrated Mass and heard the students' confessions, living as a full member the life of the school and its inhabitants.

Montini's skills were soon spotted in high places though, and after a couple of sporadic appointments that brought him far from the Brothers' school, he spent the troublesome war years working in the Secretariat of State in close contact with Pius XII. In 1954 he was appointed Archbishop of Milan and four years later, under John XXIII, became Cardinal.

When he finally returned to "his" old school in Rome, the Istituto Pio IX, he had been proclaimed Pope less than two years before.

This visit, which took place on 3rd of March 1965, was recorded with a Super-8 film camera. It is a remarkable document showing the Pope visiting the school's workshops (the then Pio IX was a boys' only Technical School) and delivering an impromptu speech to Brothers, students and their parents.

Pope Paul is sincerely interested in the students' life: in the video he is shown asking them to explain the function of the various machines and how they work, talking to young and adult boys alike.

His speech is a masterpiece of encouragement and a programme of Christian teaching at the same time: in particular, the Pope calls for a more fruitful relationship between schools and parents and asks the students to keep their eyes open in order to embody a fuller Christian vocation in their everyday life.

It has been the re-discovery of this video that prompted, 50 years after that historical visit, a conference day devoted to Paul VI's contribution

to the development of Catholic education – and the publication of the day's proceedings in a book edited by Patrizia Moretti and entitled, from Paul's words to the students, *Se avete gli occhi aperti, avete anche il cuore aperto?* (If your eyes are open, is your heart open as well?).

Two years later, in 2017, corresponding with the 50 years of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, a second convention was held at the Istituto Pio IX with the aim of investigating the relationship between Paul VI and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

A host of international speakers debated themes that nowadays have become pressing even in doctrinal context such as sustainability, environmental awareness, economic impact and globalisation.

Paul VI's view that market and profit should not be demonised as long as they work towards the improvement of the person is probably the Pope's most prophetic warning on the perils awaiting those who displace man from his place within

the economic process. The centrality of the person should never be questioned if we wish to emancipate ourselves from the tyranny of profit and from the risk of reducing man to a mere instrument of the economic process rather than its objective.

The proceedings from this convention day (*La carità come motore di tutto il processo sociale*) had not even been published, before Patrizia Moretti began organising for the forthcoming conference which is going to take place at the same Istituto Pio IX on 15th November. The title of the meeting, Here is the wonder we have been looking for, is taken from Paul VI's speech at the inauguration of the collection of contemporary religious art of the Vatican Museums.

Paul's love for the arts is well known and his sentiments can probably be best understood from reading the homily he gave at the artists' Mass – one of his most famous – when he hoped for an improved cooperation between the Church and these "dear sons".

Once again the participants will be international experts in the field, and there is an expectation – as for the previous meetings – for a large attendance.

Fr Gabriele di Giovanni, Visitatore della Provincia Italia, is the force behind these conventions, which he sees as steps towards the creation of a centre devoted to continuing Christian learning for both youngsters and adults or, to put it in his words, to a renewed bond between matter and Spirit.

As a project, it is ambitious and exciting at the same time – and one that probably Paul VI would have looked upon very favourably.



(Top): Paul VI visits the Istituto Pio IX, and (above) the speech of Paul VI on the 25th anniversary of FAO.

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Ecco la meraviglia che andavamo cercando! Paolo VI tra arte contemporanea ed educazione.

Istituto La Salle-Aventino (former Pio IX-Aventino)
Via di Santa Prisca, 8 Roma

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