

Per simultaneous translation of video

Rocca di Papa, October 15, 1980

Inauguration of the Marian University

Today is the feast of St. Theresa of Avila, a Doctor of the Church.

We chose this date for today's meeting last summer; a special period in which the Lord further clarified one of the aspects of our life: studies. He made us feel an urgent need to found a popular university that would serve all the focolarini and members, at least the directors, of the Movement, as provided for in our Statutes; and he gave new suggestions for what we have always called the "Marian School."

The feast day of St. Theresa has come and we have here the persons who are responsible for the Movement all over the world, and we see in this a particular plan of God.

We are here with the Coordinating Council, with the school of married focolarini, and with those focolarini, focolarine, priests and religious who in our Movement are dedicating, or will dedicate themselves to studying and teaching.

Therefore, let us inaugurate today our university and put it under the special protection of St. Theresa of Avila.

For this school to be in conformity with God's plan for us, it will be useful at this time to review the place that studies have in our Movement - the place which God wants them to have and the Church has approved.

By doing this, we will not fall short of the expectations of God and of the Church as we embark on this new enterprise.

In order to understand God's will for us in this new field, we must look back at the history of our Movement.

There was an early indication of his will in 1944, at the dawn of the Movement. Jesus asked me to abandon my studies and to "put all my books in the attic."

Even though the outward reason for this decision was the initial development of the Movement and its need for my undivided attention, there was also another more profound reason for it. Desirous as I was for the truth, I had understood how absurd it would be to seek it in the study of philosophy when I could find it in Jesus, the Incarnate Truth. So I gave up studying in order to follow Jesus.

The Lord didn't have me stop studying in order to have only supernatural understandings, for example, but in order to possess the fullness of life in following Christ. I would find a new light in this life, because the Gospel says that God will manifest himself to those who love him.

That episode was a prelude to what would come about, in time, within the Movement itself. The light we found, however, was to become the soul of a way of life. And if we were to speak of a school within the Work of Mary, the day would come when the Movement (which we had seen in various ways as the Work of Mary, the family of Mary, the city of Mary, and the Kingdom of Mary) would be seen also as the "School of Mary."

After having given up my studies, or better, after making the choice that God had asked of me, there was truly an abundance of light. It enlightened us about the spirituality which God wanted for us, and day after day, it shaped the Movement which was developing rapidly.

We called this light "wisdom," and I think that, through the grace of God, this has been Christian wisdom, because it gave order to a Work of God which is recognized as such by the Church. And we understood that wisdom was to be the essence of our new studies, the studies for all the members of the Work of Mary.

In fact, over the years we have come to understand that all the aspects of our life contain both a factor which comes "from above," and one that comes "from below," so to say. We can see this in our apostolate, for example. The witness which we give is, in a sense, the more divine aspect. (It is God, present in our midst, who bears witness to himself.) The organization of day gatherings, of Mariapolises, temporary or permanent, etc., is in a way the more human aspect.

But what would our day gatherings be without the witness we give, or if the "apostles" lacked light, and were not leaven and salt?

Thus, in a manner of speaking, the spirituality is the more divine part of our formation; the courses and places where people meet are the more human part. And what would all the meetings and the houses be without the spirituality?

The same holds true for our studies. The factor which comes "from above" is wisdom; the one which comes "from below" is the effort which we put into learning. What use could we, who have been called by God to work for his kingdom, have for a knowledge that is not enlightened by wisdom?

Wisdom! To possess wisdom! “And how should we go about it? Many focolarini or other members of the Movement might ask themselves. How can we acquire this wisdom which the Church expects of us as the will of God?”

Here I must repeat the answer which we have always given in every phase of our brief history: to possess wisdom we must live with Jesus in our midst. He is wisdom. Therefore, we must enlarge our hearts on the dimension of the whole Work of Mary; we must be in perfect unity with the Church (that is to say, with whoever represents the Church within and outside of our Movement); and we ourselves must be united with one another. Then Jesus will be with us, and with his presence, wisdom will be present.

The chapter of our Statutes which deals with studies affirms: “In order to reach the goals of the Work of Mary, the focolarini (and the other members) will seek to possess true Christian wisdom....” And then it continues (this is the part which indicates that studying is the will of God for us): “Christian wisdom accompanied not only with adequate knowledge of religion, but also with whatever secular knowledge might contribute to those goals as well.”

Wisdom, therefore, together with studies; but that which we ordinarily refer to as studies has a precise purpose: to accompany wisdom.

Since knowledge can inflate one’s ego and stifle the spirit, our Statutes add, “The focolarini (and others) will dedicate themselves to studies, in such a way that they do not become an impediment to the spirit of God....” And since well-formulated studies can be of use to the kingdom of God, it adds, “but on the contrary, they might become a useful means of loving both God and one’s neighbor.”

In spite of the fact that I gave up my studies in 1943-1944, I felt it necessary in 1950, to take up my books once more in order to study theology. I felt the need to find a secure foundation on which to base the many things that we were understanding at that time. During that year, in a meeting with Father Foresi,¹ I understood and I told him: “I must study, but in you.” It was at that time, in that moment, that our studies, seen as an accompaniment to wisdom, actually began. It was then that focolarini, focolarine, and others began to attend different theological schools.

It was through the contribution of Father Foresi and these other persons, that we established, years later, a school of higher education at Loppiano. Bearing the name of the “Mystical Body Institute,” its purpose is to instruct those who are preparing themselves to enter the Focolare, and to prepare subject matter for the Volunteers, the Gen, and other members of the Movement.

From the very beginning – and this is stated in our Statutes – it was understood that this wealth of studies which was to adorn wisdom would comprise two fields: secular and religious.

The times in which we live make secular studies a necessity for the focolarini and others in the Movement. Furthermore, we had to undertake these studies in depth because we wanted to imitate Jesus who was not only *the* priest, but also the whole Man, he worked as a carpenter for thirty years, and he did his job perfectly.

¹ Father Pasquale Foresi was the first focolarino to be ordained a priest in 1954.

Regarding secular formation, it was clear that the focolarini, and likewise the others had to acquire the knowledge needed in their professions and to perfect this knowledge in different ways throughout their lives.

Regarding the religious aspect, which interests us today, since the “Magna Charta” of the Movement is the priestly prayer of Jesus, from which the spirituality is also derived, the goal of these studies would have to be that of going deeper into the truths concerning the Mystical Body of Christ, the total Christ.

We know that the Movement has been called to contribute to the unity of the Church, torn apart by divisions throughout the centuries, and to make its beauty and unity shine forth much more, even during these times in which it has been banned in some places. Therefore it is necessary for us to have a deep knowledge of these truths regarding the Mystical Body so that also through our witness, God can offer a remedy for existing errors.

Our Statutes affirm: “The focolarini will make a special effort to learn the doctrine of the Mystical Body very well. Both in their regular programs and in the further pursuit of secular, as well as theological studies, they will put particular emphasis on everything which might contribute to better accomplishing the goals of the Work of Mary.”

Aside from a thorough knowledge of catechism, this course of study should include advanced studies in religious education and the establishment of a school.

What we don’t have yet is a school, or better we didn’t because today we are inaugurating one. Those who will speak after me will explain the spirit with which we will study in this school, they will explain in detail how the idea came, to whom it is entrusted and the programs it will follow.

Since the future professors of this school are present here along with the directors of the entire Movement, I think it might be useful to say something about what we have always called a “Marian School.” Ever since the Movement began, we have often thought that a doctrine would emerge one day from this work of God that was coming to life. We saw it coming forth almost as an act of love, just as the Father generates the Word out of love. If, in fact, a spirituality does generate life, then that life contains within itself a doctrine.

In this regard, we will examine some writings and consider the indications that God has occasionally given to us throughout the life of the Movement.

In 1955 (twenty-five years ago – some of you weren’t born yet), in 1955 we were already saying, “Our ideal carries within itself a doctrine.... But we present it as a mystic, so to speak, as a life of union with God and with others. However, a doctrine can be drawn forth from it....”

In a writing from 1964 which summarizes the place of studies in our life, one can find these ideas: “We hope that the whole Work of Mary, through Christian wisdom accompanied by theology and secular knowledge, will be able to develop that doctrine of the Mystical Body which has Mary as its incomparable teacher. She, in fact, is the mother of the members of the Mystical Body. She is the Mother of the Church. Mary is the prototype of the “social person” because she gave life to Christ and, therefore, to his Mystical Body. For

this reason, we have always referred to the doctrine of the Mystical Body, which will be elaborated by members of the Work of Mary, as a "Marian doctrine."

If we do this will of God, if Jesus in us maintains the correct disposition with regard to studies and knowledge, we hope that as a consequence several schools will be established, schools in which this doctrine can be taught and learned. The doctrine will have to take into account the results of all the theological endeavors which have already taken place within the Church, and it must add to these our own contribution, the fruit of studies carried out with Jesus in the midst.

One thing which it seems important to stress is that the teachers and students in this school will need to live all the virtues, especially humility, in an excellent way, so that they can learn from the various other schools, and produce - God willing - a Marian synthesis. (Applause)

The active participation of members of religious communities who are spiritually bound to the Work of Mary will be a great help to this school. Through them, we will have a more dynamic contact with the sons and daughters of St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, and so on. They will tell us the thought of their own schools, and thus, by putting Jesus' words about unity into practice all together, we will be better able to serve the Mystical Body of Christ today, also through doctrine.

Furthermore, we have the impression that this school will not remain solely theoretical. What the Lord is developing within the Work of Mary is not just a doctrine; it is a doctrine which is being incarnated in the most diverse ways of life, and these various ways of life will act as testing grounds. They themselves will become part of the school as well.

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical problems linked with education, it will be necessary for us to go and see those schools in which our spirituality is now lived. Likewise, in order to study the other spiritualities well, we will have to visit the convents or monasteries where the spirit of the founder is lived and, has been focused on through contact with the spirituality of the Movement.

Thus the entire Work of Mary can be seen as a testing ground for this doctrine, while at the same time giving life to it.

This Marian School will not look on Mariology as just one branch of theology. Rather it will view all of theology in the light of Mary. (Applause)

These are a few ideas that came to us in past years.

What do we think of this Marian School now? Today we can see with greater clarity and certainty that the spirituality of the Movement, and the reality of the Work of Mary, contain a doctrine. It rests on two pillars which are both mysteries: Unity and Jesus forsaken. Unity is, as Paul VI has said (and as we have always thought), the synthesis of Christ's teaching, the summary of all that he taught us. Jesus forsaken is (as the saints and theologians affirm) the culmination of Christ's passion and, therefore, in a certain sense, almost a synthesis of his sufferings. This is one of our thoughts.

We are certain of something else as well. In the religious of the Movement we see the possible co-existence in unity of two spiritualities, theirs and ours; and the Holy Father John Paul II has blessed and approved this. It is also true that our spirituality gathers together in deep unity persons who have already been called by God to follow different paths. This shows that the doctrine of unity and Jesus forsaken not only does not conflict with the others already existing within the Church, but is perhaps called to accomplish a particular synthesis with them, one which I would like to call a Marian synthesis. (Applause)

Further evidence of the fact that we are moving towards the development of a new doctrine lies in the fact that Father Foresi has felt called to dedicate himself to an in-depth study of the charism which God has given to the Movement. He has already undertaken this work. (Applause)

But today St. Theresa (and I say this without wanting to make any comparisons, which would be absurd) gives us a great consolation. She is a Doctor of the Church not because of how much has been studied about her, but as a result of her own spiritual experience which was fully hers and fully of the Church. (Applause) Her doctrine lies in the understandings she had and in the inspirations that God gave her.

Our doctrine, therefore, already exists in all the aspects of the Work of Mary which came from God. (Applause) All that remains to do is to document it and elaborate it. And this will come about – in our generation or in the next, but it will come about. It will come about if we do not study on our own, or isolated from one another; but only if our every effort is verified by Jesus among us. He is our “Doctor” he who can live between a Franciscan and a Jesuit, between a Dominican and a Benedictine, among all of them and the focolarini. And if he can live among them he can also enlighten them.

We want to declare to him now with all our heart that he and he alone will be our Teacher, presiding over the Marian School, with Mary at his side. (Applause)