

## H.H. Paul VI: the educational factor of sport

*On 24th February. H.H. Pope Paul VI received the Presidents of the Italian sports federations, led by Mr. Giulio Onesti, President of the CONI.*

*Opening the audience (see our photograph) Mr. Onesti addressed the following words to His Holiness :*

“Through the disinterested work of over 60,000 clubs, more than 6 million young people in Italy devote themselves to the practice of sport and the complete education of their personalities. But first and foremost, they accept with discipline and conviction the severe rules of behaviour and play. Even in the most fiercely disputed stages of their various sports, they reject violence, brutality and deceit.

Some 200,000 officials who direct the sports activity of the CONI, the federations and clubs therefore teach young people the norms of respect, brotherhood and equality which are the basic principles of the Olympic movement and which a Catholic, Pierre de Coubertin, decided to include in the IOC Rules.

The unmistakable warnings of alarm and grief which Your Holiness transmitted to the world through your message of 1st January 1978 on peace, which contained a specific appeal to young people to deplore the spreading of violence and uncontrolled hatred afflicting present-day society, have hit the sports movement. The latter, represented here by its foremost leaders, accordingly intends to profess to you its support for a campaign of peace and truce between men. Sport alone cannot solve the enormous problems of a society overturned by ideological conflicts, social injustice, anguish and fear, but it wishes to participate in the fight of the good and the wise for a return to reason, balance and love.

Sport has all-important teachings to impart and spread. On behalf of the Presidents of

our federations, clubs and sports enthusiasts, allow me on this occasion to convey the desire expressed by sport to be useful, with that humility which very often reveals a hidden strength.”

*In response, the Pope then made a speech as follows :*

“First of all we wish to thank Mr. Giulio Onesti for the noble words, addressed to us here, which appropriately interpret the feelings of those he represents in his capacity as President of the Italian National Olympic Committee.

We extend our cordial greetings to him and to all of you, Presidents of the Italian national sports federations, who are generously committed in such an important, and at the same time delicate sector for the entire education of the young generations. In fact, sports activity, by developing and perfecting man's physical and psychic potential, contributes to a more complete maturation of his personality.

You are well aware of the warm feeling with which, for this same reason, the Church follows those who devote themselves intelligently and with foresight to the promotion of sports practice ; and you equally know the care we have taken on repeated occasions to urge both leaders and athletes in the various sports to seek in methodical physical exercise not only a reinforcement of bodily strength, appearance and agility, but also the harmonious development of the energies of the spirit, required to orient towards the right goals the display of instincts and passions which are otherwise prejudicial to the balanced development of personal and social living.

We are pleased to stress once more on this occasion our sincere appreciation for the unique possibilities which a well-run sports apprenticeship implies : the young may and should find therein a highly efficient school of loyalty, self-control, courage, constant

dedication, brotherly collaboration and—in a word—those values which, while exquisitely human, constitute the indispensable basis of the spiritual values which Christianity exalts and enhances.

Today we wish particularly to emphasise, among the educational factors of sport, its capacity for opening up young people's souls to relations of cordial friendship and mutual respect, introducing them to forms of

conflict. It is necessary and urgent that the responsible members of society mobilise to prevent the spreading of this phenomenon of violence which, complicated by drugs, eroticism and the various forms of juvenile delinquency, risks submerging an increasingly large number of young human lives.

We are firmly convinced that the serious practice of sports activities and competitions, carried out in the spirit of the



loyal confrontation and generous emulation, far removed from any surrender to the temptations of recourse to violence and abuse of power. In this connection, we noted with extreme gratification the reference made by the President to our special address to young people in this year's "Peace Day" message, and to the concern which we expressed therein for their greater vulnerability in the face of the fatal suggestions of armed struggle and violent

universally recognised ethical principles, will constitute a valid contribution to stemming that process of dehumanisation in social living, the alarming signs of which are by now only too clear to all far-sighted spirits. In fact, does not athletic commitment perhaps provide an effective antidote to the idleness, laxity and soft living which usually constitute the most fertile ground for the sad proliferation of all sorts of vice? And in sports competitions, correctly conceived and

organised, are we not perhaps educated to that noble and magnanimous confrontation where, more than the result, what count are the virtues of reality, good conduct and mutual respect, in the absence of which athletic prowess does not win applause but reproof ? What better school than this, then, to ensure that young people understand the suggestion put forward in our message, namely that "it is harmful vanity to wish to seem strong against other brothers and comrades by means of disputes, blows, rage and vengeance", since man's truest strength is demonstrated by the nobility of his soul, his capacity to control his own behaviour and the generosity of his pardon.

Accordingly you will understand with what hope we are following your work and with what favour we consider your commitment to contribute not only to healthy sports practice in this country for the improved education of the population, especially as regards young people, but also the intensification of contacts with sports enthusiasts of other countries in order to strengthen friendly relations between peoples. Indeed, in the desire to testify to our paternal encouragement of such noble efforts with a concrete gesture, we have arranged for the awarding of a special prize to the city of Bari, which is due to organise the finals of the 10th Youth Games this year. We express the hope that the millions of boys and girls who each year take part in these joyful meetings with their counterparts, with whom they feel growing solidarity in the spirit of the finest sports competition, will be able to consolidate those bonds of confident open-mindedness and serene friendship, so congenial to their young souls. In this way they will prepare to put into effect those profound changes in the present-day way of thinking which are—to quote from our message—"necessary to transform society into a better and more honest community based on greater solidarity."

