



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE
SPONSORED BY THE "ROMANO GUARDINI STIFTUNG"**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 13 November 2015*

[Multimedia]

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

I am very pleased to be able to greet you, members of the Romano Guardini Foundation, who have come to Rome to participate in the Conference organized by the Gregorian University on the occasion of the 130th anniversary of Guardini's birth. I thank Professor von Pufendorf for his kind words of greeting, and for having announced the imminent publication of an original text. I am certain that Guardini is a thinker who has much to say to the people of our time, and not only to Christians. You are carrying out this project with your foundation, bringing Guardini's thought into a polyphonic dialogue in the spheres of today's politics, culture and science. I earnestly hope for the success of this endeavour.

In his book *The Religious World of Dostoyevsky*, Guardini takes up, among other things, an episode from the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (*The Religious World of Dostoyevsky*, Morcelliana, Brescia, p. 24ff). It is the passage where the people go to the *starec* Zosima to present their concerns and difficulties to him, asking for his prayers and blessing. An emaciated peasant woman also approaches him to make her confession. In a soft whisper she says she has killed her husband who in the past had greatly mistreated her. The *starec* sees that the woman, desperately aware of her guilt, is completely closed in on herself, and that any reflection, consolation or advice would hit a brick wall. The woman is convinced she will be condemned, but the priest shows her a way out: her existence has meaning, because God receives her at the moment of her repentance. "Fear nothing and never be afraid; and don't fret" — says the *starec*. "If only your penitence fail not, God will forgive all. There is no sin, and there can be no sin on all the earth, which the Lord will not forgive to the truly repentant! Man cannot commit a sin so great as to exhaust the infinite love of God" (*ibid.*, p. 25). The woman is transformed by her confession and

her hope is revitalized.

In fact, the simplest persons understand what this is about. They are taken by the grandeur that shines in the *starec's* wisdom and the strength of his love. They understand what holiness means, namely a life lived in faith, capable of seeing that God is close to men, that he has their life in his hands. In this regard Guardini says that, by “humbly accepting existence from the hand of God, personal will transforms into divine will and in this way, without the creature ceasing to be only a creature and God truly God, their living unity is brought about” (*ibid.*, p. 32). This is Guardini’s profound vision. Perhaps it is grounded in his first metaphysical book *Der Gegensatz*.

For Guardini this “living unity” with God consists in the concrete relationships of individuals with the world and with those around them. The individual feels interwoven within a people, namely, in an “original union of men that by species, country and historical evolution in life and in their destinies are a unique whole” (*The Meaning of the Church*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2007, pp. 21-22). Guardini interprets the concept of “people” by distinguishing it clearly from an Enlightenment rationalism that considers real only what can be grasped through reason (cf. *The Religious World of Dostoyevsky*, p. 321) and from what tends to isolate man, tearing him away from vital natural relationships. Instead “people” signifies the compendium of what is genuine, profound, essential in man (*ibid.*, p. 12). We are able to recognize in the people, as in a mirror, the “force field of divine action”. The people — Guardini continues — “feel this operating in all places and perceive the mystery, the restless presence” (*ibid.*, p. 15). Therefore, I prefer to say — I am certain of it — that “people” is not a logical category, but a mystical category, for the reason that Guardini offers.

Perhaps we can apply Guardini’s reflections to our time, seeking to discover God’s hand in present-day events. Then, perhaps, we will be able to recognize that God in his wisdom, has sent to us in wealthy Europe, the hungry that we give them food, the thirsty that we give them drink, strangers that we welcome them and the naked that we clothe them. History will then demonstrate that, if we are a people, we will certainly welcome them as our brothers; if we are only a group of more or less organized individuals, we will be tempted to save our skin first of all, but we will not have continuity.

I thank you all once again for your presence. May your work with Guardini’s writings bring you to an ever greater understanding of the meaning and value of the Christian foundations of culture and society. I bless you wholeheartedly and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

[Blessing....]
